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The Role of Innovative Design in Creating City Identity and Tourist Attraction: Investigating Sheikh-Zahed Monument as a Case Study

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Abstract

This paper addresses the investigation of the elements that make a landmark long-lasting, shape the city identity and attract tourists. First, a vast literature review was carried out on monuments, their geometric structure, Islamic architecture concepts, tourists' attraction and land policy. Therefore, Sheikh-Zahed dome, a significant landmark near Lahijan city in the north of Iran, was selected as a case study for this paper. This monument was studied using three different methods. Firstly, a traditional method, used in Islamic architecture, was chosen to analyze the geometric structure and color scheme of the dome. Then a comparative study was conducted in order to analyze the differences in geometry, form and color between Sheikh-Zahed and three other famous domes. Finally, to gather information about land value, city identity and tourists' attraction, five real state agencies were interviewed. The results showed that the association of factors such as climate, culture, structure and hidden meanings in this monument attracts visitors. The comparison of Sheikh-Zahed with three other monuments revealed that it is a unique architectural symbol due to several aspects such as complex geometry, the dome's form, climate adaptation, its placement and being surrounded by nature. Furthermore, this landmark has an impact on land value and tourist attraction. It was concluded that the design, based on comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the user, climate, cultural and spiritual aspects, regional material and structure, has led to it being a significant urban landmark. Therefore, understanding the common factors between landmarks will give designers a clearer vision.

Keywords

Landmark, Sheikh-Zahed, City Identity, Tourist Attractions, Design Thinking.

Introduction

Landmarks, cultural land, and historical monuments influence the city's identity (Borer, 2006). Societies are affected and developed with cultural spaces due to a sense of belonging (Gospodini, 2004). A historical landscape acts as an expression of the culture and history of a nation (Ramos et al., 2016). The landscape and its characteristics could affect social identity and belonging. Due to people's desire for identity, they often identify themselves with their social connections and surrounding environment (Greider & Garkovich, 1994). By relating themselves to valuable things, they can describe and classify themselves as *us* with common features (Smith et al., 2007). Identity can be influenced through technical factors like quality of space and psychological factors such as status of belief, familiarity and attachment to a place as well as positive impact on the spatial creation. There is a mutual reciprocity between people and environment. People interact with buildings and gradually turn them into an identifying symbol of their community. The identity and culture of individuals would also inspire the form of the buildings (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Residents make certain places into a symbolic element of their land over time (Crede et al., 2020; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). The relationship between humans and environment grows stronger as locations play a significant role in people's daily lives (Preece, 2020).

The design of historical buildings as a part of human identity could be an example for designers (Razzouk & Shute, 2012; Rowe, 1987). Sheikh-Zahed monument was chosen for this paper since it encompasses all the aspects of climate, placement, uniqueness, symbolization, color and shape.

The fundamental questions of this study were as follows;
1. How does design affect society and shape social identity?
2. Which factors affect the building to be long-lasting?
3. What can be learned from this cultural design as an information source?
4. What are the insights, ideas, and innovations in the design language?
5. What makes this building a symbol, an identity and a proper incorporation for different aspects affecting design?

1. *Monuments*

Due to people's belief in life after death, tombs have always been one of the most important buildings of ancient architecture. In addition, the oldest domes belonged to the Parthian and Sassanid dynasties, who used semi-circular and semi-elliptical domes in Zoroastrian monuments such as the Anahita Temple in Sarvestan (Smith, 1950). The architectural heritage has continued in later periods. The main features of the Sassanid Era, such as domes, evolved in the early Islamic era and gradually developed (Anisi, 2007). During the Islamic era, Muslims used various domes to symbolize certain meanings (Smith, 1950). Initially, tombs with shades were constructed to create a shadow over the grave and to symbolize the blessing of heaven. Gradually, altars were added to emphasize and dignify the tombs (Kiani, 2015). The tombs then became a place where people could visit and venerate the elders (Pirnia, 2017). As the rituals of lamentation evolved, expensive monuments were required. Therefore, tombs turned into enormous buildings, important politically, socially, and economically (Kiani, 2015). Patterns, geometric structures and colors were used to develop symbolic monuments (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 2000). The role of domes in Islamic architecture is recognizable by observing the number of those constructed in the vast realm of different eras, various in size and values (Garbar, 2014).

In terms of form, domes are divided into three categories: bulbous, conical and pointed. Generally, domes are made of materials like stone and brick. Brittle ceramics are used to decorate the external shell and prevent any damage from rain and snow (Ashkan & Ahmad, 2010). Rok domes are one of the conical dome types shaped by pyramid rotation in various forms (Figure 1) and also differs widely in material and composition (Ashkan & Ahmad, 2010). This type of sloping dome is appropriate for areas with a high volume of rain and snow (Khodadadi et al., 2012).

Due to the unique shape of Rok domes, taller towers could be constructedand thus made visible from far distances, which resulted to be used as a sign for directing people (Memarian, 2013). Five important components in the structure and appearance of Rok domes include the shell, drum, transitional tier, structure and load-bearing system (Ashkan & Ahmad, 2010).

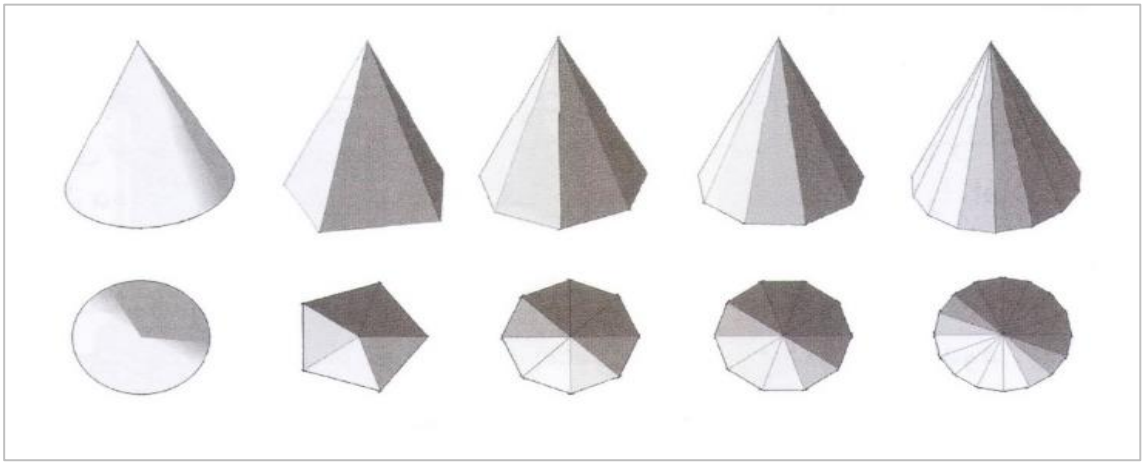


Figure 1: *Various Shapes of Conical Dome (Memarian, 2013).*

2. *Meaning of Design in Islamic Architecture*

In the 7th century AD, Islamic architecture influenced Iranian architecture and new building styles were formed considering the regional climate. In Iranian architecture, every detail was designed for a specific purpose, such as structural and conceptual reasons. In Iranian Islamic architecture, the buildings were designed as a perfect place for the worship of God in a flawless and functional space (Hosseini & Karimi, 2012).

Symbolic forms and symmetrical geometry made a connection between hidden concepts and buildings' appearances, expressing the principle of unity (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 2000). These buildings' geometry was the result of combining practical mathematics, geometric concepts and architectural expression to induce peace, balance and unity (Michell, 1995). Applying spiritual principles resulted in an eternal and meaningful buildings. In addition, the climate and regional traditions affected the buildings' design (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 2000).

The religious architectures differ based on climate conditions. Gilan's architecture differs from other parts of Iran due to its rainy and humid climate (Eslah Arabani, 2001). The coasts of the Caspian Sea as the rainiest and greenest area of Iran, experience rainfall in all seasons. High humidity and extensive green area are other features of this region, which influence the choice of material and design. Therefore, buildings are constructed with sloping roofs, porches around them and without basements (Ghobadian, 1998). Religious buildings in Gilan are simple and mainly shaped like a square with balconies around them (Eslah Arabani, 2001). In order to protect the wall from the rain, roofs are extended above the porch area (Ghobadian, 1998). The direction of the sea breeze also plays a crucial role in the buildings' orientation and location (Kasmai & Ahmadinezhad, 2003).

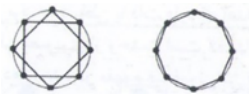
3. *Geometry analysis in Islamic Architecture*

Based on studies of ancient Islamic architecture, mysticism and hidden meanings had a special place in design (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 2000). Also, technical principles, climatic conditions and community culture played a key role in architectural design.

In Iranian architecture, tombs offer a sacred expression to the place (Petruccioli & Pirnia, 2013). Symbols were used in tombs' design to narrate a meaning (Kiani, 2015). Each of these architectural elements transfers a hidden meaning (Pirnia, 2017).

The dome is used as a sign of a place valued by people (Memarian, 2013). The ceiling of the dome symbolizes the sky. Domes provide maximum potential for expanding by moving in different directions and axes (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 2000). They were known as an element of connection between the universe and heaven. Also, they were positioned on four supporting points, symbolizing the four pillars of the universe. The center of the dome with a pivotal point shows the center of being (Memarian, 2013). Mathematics, geometry and the order of visual forms were used as a sign of wisdom and quiddity (Table 1). This system leads to an aesthetic structure, which is understandable to the public through its harmony, geometry and proportion (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 2000).

Table 1: *Interpretation of Numbers and Geometry (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 2000).*

Number	Geometry	Spiritual World	Material World	Features
1		The Creator	The Creator	Eternal, Everlasting, Unitary
3		Spirit	The animal character	Intellectual, Animalistic, Extreme and Moderate.
4		Substance	Animal nature	Original, Physical, Universal, Artificial.
7		Universe	Active forces	Seven visible planets and seven days a week.
8		Traits	Traits	Cold, Dry / Cold, Wet / Warm, Wet / Warm, Dry.
12		Zodiac	Twelve valves of the body	The Superior Number.

4. *Colors Concept in Islamic Architecture*

Color is a significant factor in architecture that completes the design and carries various meanings. These meanings are diverse in different cultures. In Islamic architecture colors have special meanings that some of them are explained as follows (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 2000);

1. Light brown indicates soil, human being and earth
2. Blue stands for the coldness and earth
3. Black symbolizes the need for integration
4. White describes purity, pure light and unity
5. Yellow is the symbol of youth and air.

At the center of most domes, yellow is used to define the sunlight illuminating the whole world (Memarian, 2013).

5. *Introducing Sheikh-Zahed Gilani's Tomb*

Sheikh-Zahed Gilani's monument is located on a hillside in the north of Iran, outside of the Lahijan city. A special feature of this building is the roof, which is a rectangular pyramid, symbolizing Dervish hat (Figure 2). As Sheikh-Zahed was a Dervish, the dome was built in this form. The monument is mostly visited by Dervishes, Sufis and mystics (Eslah Arabani, 2001; Sharbatian, 2015).

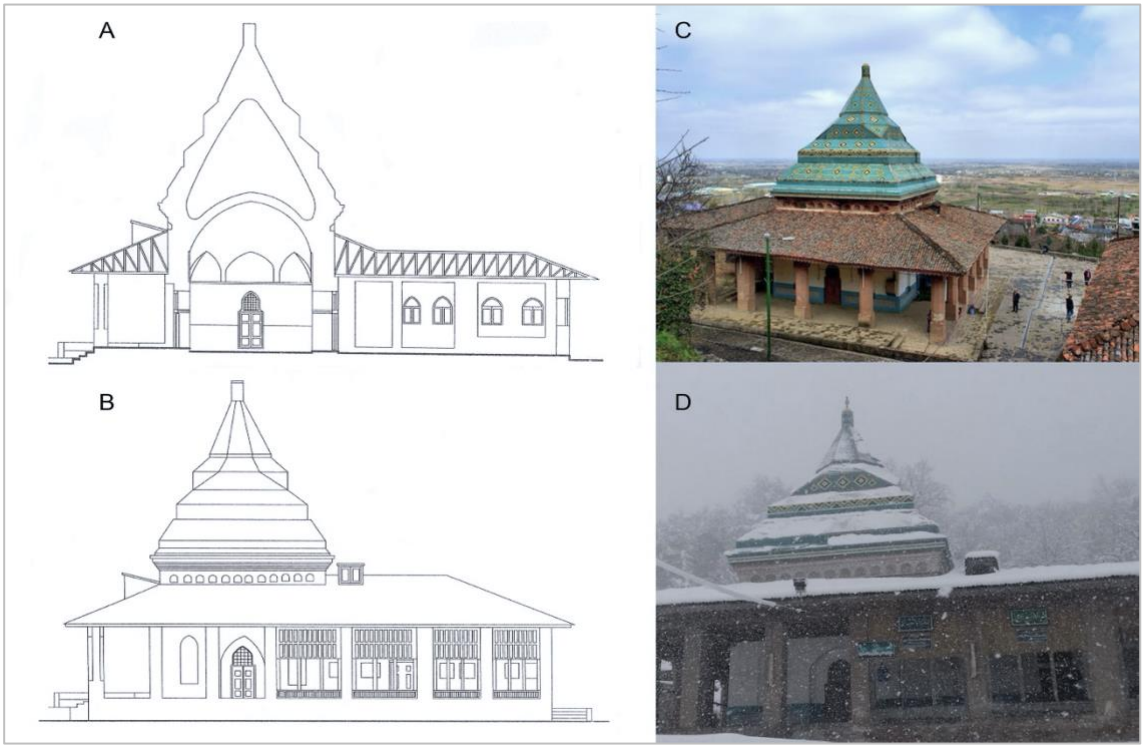


Figure 2: ***A.*** *Section of Sheikh-Zahed,* ***B.*** *Tomb's Facade (Source: Cultural Heritage of Iran, Building Code: 824),* ***C., & D.*** *Pictures of the monument (Source: Google Map).*

6. *Introducing Gonbad-e Qabus Tower, Radkan Tower Mausoleum and Baba Rokneddin Monument*

Gonbad-e Qabus — constructed in 10th century AD— (Figure 4) is one of the highest towers of its own era, 57 meters high. It has become an exemplar for later buildings (Ashkan & Ahmad, 2009). It is an integrated brick building acting as a guide tower, constructed on the highest hill in the city. As a symbol of the city, it was used for guiding people (Pirnia, 2017). The dome of this tower is simple and monochromic. On its cylindrical facade, ten triangular shapes extend from the bottom to the roof, not only as decorative elements but also as structural elements of the building (Anisi, 2007).

Radkan Towers were built in some open plains as a guide for travelers and a watchtower. The Radkan tower of Chenaran in the northeast of Iran was built in the 13th century AD (Figure 4). It is a monochromic tower made of brick with 36 half-columns at regular intervals, contributing to its formation (Kiani, 2015). The height of the tower is 25 meters (Memarian, 2013).

Baba Rokneddin is located in Isfahan (Figure 4). It was built in the 16th century and is distinguished among the other domes due to its shape and color. The dome's base is a pentagon, and on top of it, a 12-sided Rok turquoise dome is located. The numbers 5 and 12 used in the dome's design have symbolic value in Islamic architecture (Memarian, 2013). The conical Rok was decorated with tiles. There are patterns with blue, black and white colors on the dome's turquoise blue background.

7. *Tourism Attraction and Land Policy*

Studies have shown that there are problems with land and urban policies. To understand these problems, one must consider the interaction between policies and users (Qu et al., 2020). Land adjacent to historical and natural spaces has more regional value due to economic, environmental and comfort benefits. The protection policy of local and historical areas leads to the preservation and enhancement of the environment (Cao et al., 2021). Paying attention to tourists and creating suitable spaces without preserving the environment's historical values will cause irreparable damage to the history, culture and region identity (Pena-Alonso et al., 2018).

Nowadays, due to the anxiety of living in cities, tourists are eager to visit the natural green environment with the historical sites. Tourism could help preserve and spread the culture, tradition and identity of the region (Cocola-Gant & Lopez-Gay, 2020; Sharbatian, 2015). According to the policies of sustainable development in rural areas and environmental protection, it is possible to help promote tourism industry and the region's economy by considering the infrastructure, strengthening the region's economic and commercial factors, the welfare of the residents and also the required services (Cooper & Morpeth, 1998; Khairabadi et al., 2020; Osman et al., 2018). Understanding the processes and factors that cause a building to become a landmark can help find out the reasons behind a building's permanence. This awareness can help in creating appropriate policies for lands and attracting tourists. Designers could also use history and these influential factors in creative thinking and the design process. Therefore, the factors which made the Sheikh-Zahed a landmark and urban identity that attracts tourists were investigated.

Methodology

The methods used in this study were mix-method with the combination of narrative review, case-study, descriptive analysis and interviews (Caspari et al., 2011; Lawless & Heymann, 2010; Whiting, 2008; Winchester & Salij, 2016). A literature review was conducted to investigate eight factors that have affected the design and also to find out how the combination of these factors made the monuments long-lasting. Based on the literature, a historical approach was found and the monument was analyzed to discover the meanings of the design and symbols. Then, three other famous monument domes were selected for comparison with Sheikh-Zahed's Tomb, based on geometry, shape and color. The Radkan Tower and Gonbad-e Qabus dome, mostly mentioned in researches as the famous Rok Domes, and the Baba Rokneddin were chosen for this study to complete the variety of Rok Dome types. Finally, a qualitative study by semi-structured interview was conducted with real state agencies to find out about the effects of the landmark on land value, tourism and policymaking.

A semi-structured interview was designed, but it was preferred to let the interviewees speak freely. Three main questions were defined. The first one was the effect of the Sheikh-Zahed monument on the land value. This question was used to identify the most valuable properties in the area and to find out the monument's impact on the land value. Another question was regarding the tourism's effect on the lands surrounding the monument. The third question was related to the investment potential based on local perspectives. The interviews were carried out based on the interviewee's conditions in the local language (Persian) and lasted between 25-40 minutes. The study continued until researchers reached saturation, where a clearer understanding of the experience could not be obtained in subsequent conversations with participants. Data analysis was performed based on the data collected through questions. The records were transformed into written text and the sentences and phrases that indicated people's understanding were identified. Then the key phrases were categorized to find the meanings leading to the achievement of the sub-themes. Eventually, the themes were covered in a wider range called domains. To interpret and analyze the data the Collaizi method was used (Colaizzi, 1978; Edward & Welch, 2011).

Result and Discussion

Analysis of Geometry and Color to Find the Hidden Meaning

The hidden meaning of Sheikh-Zahed architectural design could be defined through its specific geometry on both horizontal and vertical surfaces as well as their combinations. The common form of the Rok domes is usually the result of a cone's rotation around a vertical axis, which is named a conical dome. However, Sheikh-Zahed's dome is different. It is formed by variant shapes, forms, geometries and colors, creatively used to express the spiritual meanings. The means of wisdom appear in this dome through order, proportion, geometry and color as well as attract' one's senses and curiosity for finding the hidden meanings.

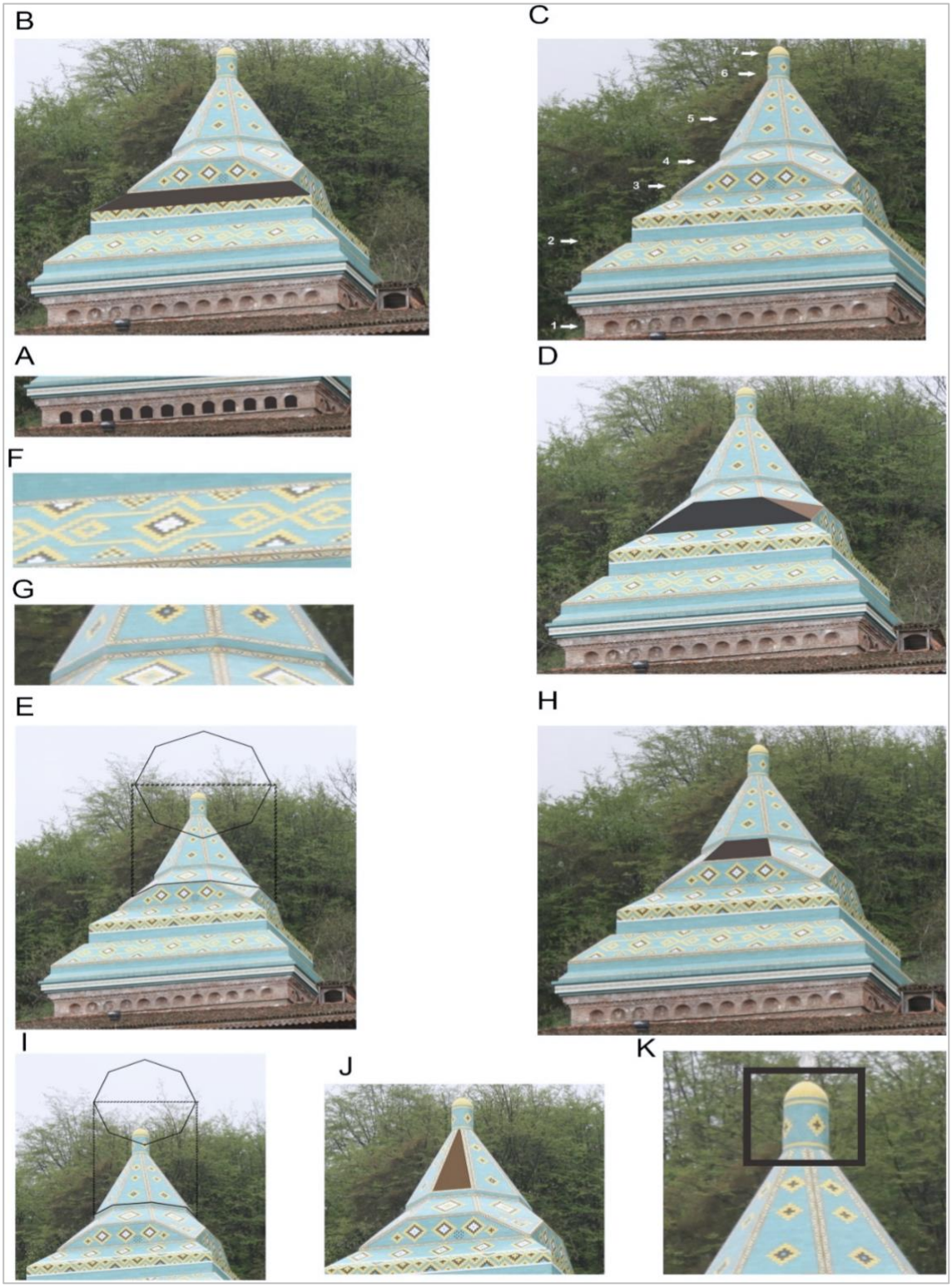


Figure 3: ***A.*** *Twelve Arches,* ***B.*** *Square plan,* ***C.*** *The seven steps,* ***D.*** *The quadrilateral on the perpendicular surface and the triangle on the inclined surface,* ***E.****, &* ***I.*** *The octagonal plan,* ***F.*** *Motifs in yellow, black and white,* ***G.*** *Background color in blue,* ***H****. Quadrilateral shape,* ***J.*** *Triangle surface,* ***K.*** *The cylindrical shape with the yellow half sphere at the top (Source: Authors).*

The dome consists of seven different parts (Figure 3). The number seven is significant in most cultures and has a considerable role in Iranian Islamic architecture. It is the symbol of purity and overcoming wickedness. In ancient times people believed that there were seven skies and seven stages for spiritual evolution.

Since the dome symbolizes the sky in the building, the use of the number seven in this monument's dome is related to the hidden meanings mentioned above. It seems that the architect has tried to illustrate a metaphor of the seven stages of human spiritual evolution in this building. At the beginning of the spiritual journey, people prepare themselves through liberation from the body, the world and the soil. Then by awakening and becoming aware of the distractions, one tries to correct himself/herself in all aspects of the soul. After that, introspection starts on the path of reaching human perfection. Once a person finds the truth of his/her essence and cleanses himself/herself from illusion, they could find qualities of perfection. Finally, the integration with pure truth will happen and obtain inner peace. These stages are manifested in the different parts of the dome. The analysis of the geometry and color of these parts will be explained as follows;

The first part of the dome is located on a square base with twelve arches on each side (Figure 3). The base color is a light brown that indicates earth and human. Number twelve, which is considered a superior number in Islamic architecture, represents the twelve valves of the body and number four means body and its substances. Also, it indicates four quarters of the world, four directions and four seasons. The shapes represent the number four such as square, the trapezoid and the rectangle were frequently used in the design of this dome and can be mostly seen in different parts like the second one (Figure 3). In the third part, the plan is still square and every few movements in the sloping surface creates a new shape in the dome's geometry. The ascending surface consists of trapezoidal and triangular surfaces. The triangular surfaces represent number three, describing the spirit, transitional phase, and connection between the earth and sky in Iranian Islamic architecture (Figure 3). This change in the surface leads to an octagonal plan in the next part (Figure 3). The number eight symbolizes the eight paradises that were frequently used in the buildings and is a recognizable number in Iranian architecture. The fifth part is an octagonal pyramid (Figure 3). The sixth part is a cylindrical volume, a symbol of unity and eternality. The final part is a yellow half-sphere, which indicates pure light as well as the Creator (Figure 3).

Regarding the color, except the first part of the dome which is monochromic, the rest of the dome is colorful with symbolic patterns. The color mostly used is blue as the sign of the earth (Figure 3). The motifs that have been used in the design of the dome are yellow, black, and white. Yellow symbolizes the air, sun and light that brightens the world. Black, stands as a sign of overcoming wickedness and white represents purity and pure light (Figure 3). Complementary to geometry, the color and ornamentation of the dome have an emphasis on soul evolution, unity and integration that lead to purity and harmony with pure light.

Comparing Sheikh-Zahed with Three Other Domes

The Sheikh-Zahed Dome was compared with the Gonbad-e Qabus tower, Radkan Tower mausoleum and Baba Rokneddin monument based on domes' geometry and colors.

In terms of geometry and form, both Radkan Tower and Gonbad-e Qabus dome are described as symbols of Rok domes in researches and have simple and conical geometries. On the other hand, the Sheikh-Zahed monument dome has a complex geometry with different geometrical shapes on the horizon, perpendicular, and inclined surfaces. Regarding color, both Radkan and Gonbad-e Qabus domes are monochromatic with a brick façade, whereas Sheikh-Zahed is colorful. In this monument, meanings and color combinations have been used to convey meaningful concepts mentioned above. Later with the development of various Rok dome types, a new geometry was achieved. Baba Rokneddin is one of these Rok domes with a twelve-sided conical dome and turquoise color. Nevertheless, geometrically and structurally, it represents a simpler concept than Sheikh-Zahed. The Sheikh-Zahed tomb dome is a distinguished monument due to its geometrical movement on different axes as well as color (Figure 4).

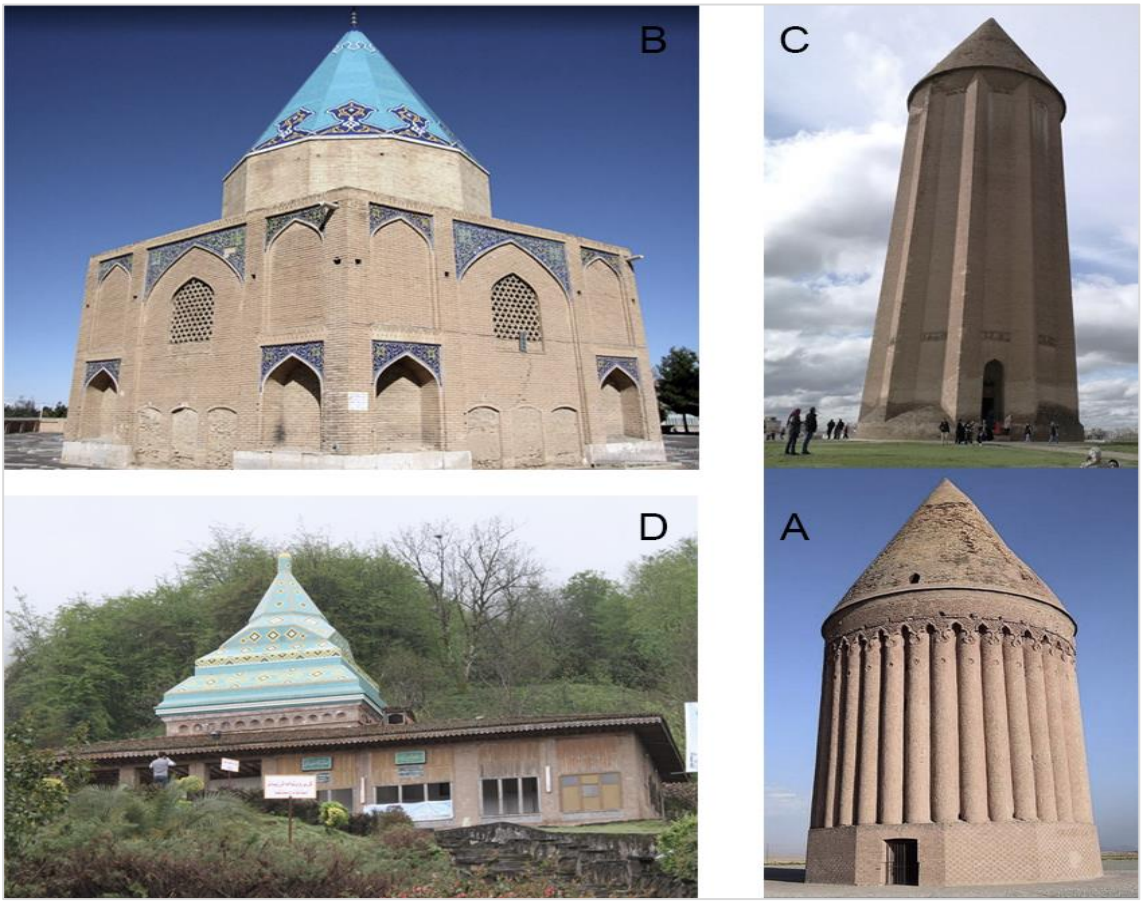


Figure 4: ***A.*** *Radkan Tower,* ***B.*** *Baba Rokneddin,* ***C.*** *Gonbad-e Qabus,* ***D.*** *Sheikh-Zahed Monument (Source: Google Map).*

Findings of Interviews

The results of interviews emphasized Sheikh-Zahed monument as the symbol of the city, which plays an important role in tourist attraction and land policy. During interviews with real state agencies, different main categories were recognized as follows;

1. *The Placement of Sheikh-Zahed*

Sheikh-Zahed is located on a hill, upper than residential and commercial areas. In this regard one of the interviewees mentioned, *Sheikh-Zahed is in our everyday lives, we see the monument during walking or driving. When I see the monument from far away, I feel that I have arrived at my city* (Figure 5 and 6). Another participant said, *every time I raise my head, I expect to see the monument*. Another participant mentioned, *the green nature and mountains in the background of the tomb remind me of a beautiful painting, which gives me a great pleasure*. Most of the participants emphasized that seeing the monument is the symbol of arriving at Lahijan.

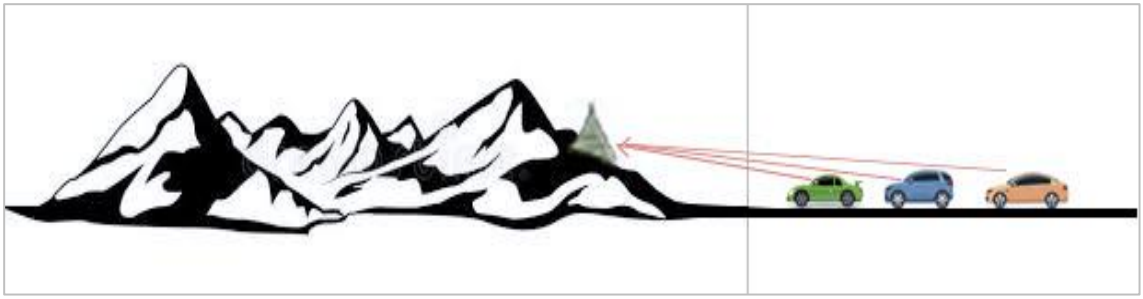


Figure 5: *The view of monument from the road.*

Figure 6: *The view of monument from the footpath.*

2. *Land Value*

Sheikh-Zahed is defined as a factor affecting land price. Most of the participants emphasized that land value near the monument is high as a result of people's preference of living in an area that is well-known and nostalgic. One of the participants mentioned, *everyone would like to live in the area that when asked where they lived, could proclaim proudly*. However, there are some advantages and disadvantages of living in a well-known area. A participant described, *it is a double-edged sword. The land price is high near the monument and people with very high incomes live there. Although the request for living in this area is high due to several advantages, it has some disadvantages due to high volume of visitors*.

3. *Tourists*

There was a common agreement between the interviewees that the monument's complex and colorful design matched with nature and the beautiful scenery attracted tourists. One participant mentioned, *tourists like to stay and enjoy the environment more than just sightseeing*. Another participant declared, *I always watch the tourists and see that they stop for a moment at the beginning of the footpath to enjoy the view for the first time.*

They all emphasized the advantages of the tourists on the economy. However, they said that the noise and crowd of the tourists disturb the peace and quietness of residents, especially during holidays.

4. *Prospective Land Use Policy*

While most people emphasized the local condition preservation of the region, they had many interests and ideas for developing solutions in land use policy. A participant said, *lack of appropriate local accommodation for tourists and travelers is noted. Also, there is a need for public spaces in the green area with the view of Sheikh-Zahed*.

Another participant mentioned, *people need governors to pay more attention to the local shops, which are selling handicrafts and souvenirs. That will make more people travel to this area and help the economy*.

Although people had a strong desire to preserve the local environment, they agreed that road transport conditions, road widths and vehicle parking conditions in the village are not appropriate for the increased number of visitors.

Conclusion

Based on the investigation, the architectural design of the Sheikh-Zahed monument is well-matched with climate, regional and Islamic architecture. In addition, the proper placement and the character of Sheikh-Zahed's building have turned it into a city symbol. Due to the comparison of this monument with three other domes, it was concluded that the geometric complexity, color and concept of Sheikh-Zahed's tomb are significantly different from the other Rok domes. Therefore, it is worthwhile to introduce this monument as a prominent symbol of Rok Domes.

As mentioned before, city identity is formed over time by landmarks, interactions and familiarity. This study showed that six factors have affected the shape of Sheikh-Zahed's tomb and made it a monumental building, which is remained in the people's lives and transformed into a city identity;

1. The location of the building: The building is in the viewpoint of a car road and a dirt road. So, it is a symbol of getting near the city.

2. Adaptation to climate: A sloping roof, which is a part of the regional architecture for coping with the high volume of rain and snow, has been used in different directions to enhance climate adaptability.

3. Compatibility of materials and colors with nature: Building harmony with nature makes it a part of the natural background.

4. Symbolic concepts based on Islamic Architecture: Mysterious concepts that show the meaning behind the design are a part of the culture that brings curiosity to the viewer.

5. Complex geometry and color: These factors prevent the monument from getting unremarkable even in the eyes of the residents.

6. Being distinctive from other buildings: Tourists are attracted to the distinguished architectural design and visit this monument.

Based on the result of the interviews, the monument has a significant impact on the land value. It attracts tourists to the area, helping the economy. This monument has an important role in strengthening the sense of belonging and the city's identity.

Studies in this realm, by investigating landmarks and gathering information regarding the factors that make them long-lasting, could provide an appropriate database for the architectures. Such a database will help architects consider factors that affect their design process. Paying more attention to landmarks and monumental buildings as a cultural value would affect the policies for land and urban spaces. Besides, considering the tourism industry in the famous areas is an important criterion in land valuation and policies that can help the local economy.

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