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### Original Research Article

## Union of Beauty with the Triad of Form, Function, and Meaning A Phenomenological Interpretation of the Esthetic Experience of Attending Isfahan's Khaju Bridge\*

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### Abstract

**Problem statement:** The beauty of Iranian ancient architecture is still an essential question, which has invited numerous investigations. This requires even further contemplation in the milieu of present esthetic crisis in contemporary architecture and the associated vacancy of theory, particularly when our contemporary architecture is lacking any relevance to categorical beauty from the viewpoint of Iranian thought and architecture. Many studies inherent in the religious literature and the textual works by Islamic thinkers have attempted to deal with and explain this question. However, the only authentic sources to elicit and reveal the hidden layers of beauty are undoubtedly the remaining artistic works.

**Research objectives:** This study of Khaju Bridge, an authentic work remaining from the Safavid era, attempts to elicit the ontological foundations of beauty in this artwork and reveal how beauty has found its embodiment and form in the architecture of this building.

**Research method:** The phenomenological approach was adopted to disclose the nature of beauty and the lived experiences of four groups attending the bridge were studied under the influence of Max van Manen.

**Conclusion:** The findings suggest that contemporary architecture is no longer able to create beautiful and exhilarating spaces due to its lateralization towards form, function, or meaning. Indeed, architecture is beautiful when it can properly respond to the triad of form, function, and meaning. Moreover, seven components, i.e. vividness, selflessness, originality-authenticity, artistic richness, logicity, poetry, and thought-wonder, were identified as the ontological constructs of beauty in Khaju Bridge, to be used to create beautiful spaces in the process of their transformations into various structures.

**Keywords:** *Phenomenology, Beauty, Khaju Bridge, Esthetic experience.*

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## Problem statement

During the colorful phases of our intellectual history, the concept of beauty has witnessed various changes, which have in turn influenced the arts, including architecture. Although our architecture once enjoyed beautiful and meaningful spaces, we are nowadays faced with unbeautiful architectural forms<sup>1</sup>, which have no relevance to the conceptual beauty, particularly in the realm of the governing thought and views throughout the Iranian present architecture<sup>2</sup>. It is thus necessary to investigate our traditional architecture and try to understand what the essence of beauty was in the architecture of our past buildings and how it was translated into the key architectural elements. We all are now faced with the question of why the ancient architecture is still beautiful and exhilarating to us while our present architecture lacks both these qualities. What is inherent in those old buildings that makes us feel relaxed and joyful? Still, another equally important question concerns our approach to the problem since the results we will obtain will rely upon our methodology and, consequently, upon our philosophical approach. Our views of beauty are now radically changed in the light of the modern thought and the esthetic theory<sup>3</sup>. The theory was proposed in the early nineteenth century and transformed our views of the beauty and the beautiful so profoundly that the beauty was reduced to just some sensory affairs. With allocating a central position to man in the modern thought, beauty was transformed into the subjects' views of the beauty, with no clear definition and no definitive criteria to discern it. Therefore, in the era when we live under the dominance of the modern thought, we are unlikely to understand the beauty directly and immediately as our ancestors of those past days used to understand while thinking in terms of the traditional thought. Towards our aim in this study, we adopted the phenomenological approach, which, with the critical views of

its outstanding thinkers like Heidegger<sup>4</sup> and Gadamer, paves our path to answer the question what beauty is with reference and regard to the architectural work itself. Adopting this approach, we are to understand the components of beauty in our traditional architecture, of which we selected Khaju Bridge, a beautiful building of the Safavid era, an era whose buildings we can consider the most beautiful remaining works from our past (refer to Pope, 2008, 1378; Flandin, 2014, 134; Stierlin, 1998, 46; Nadimi, 2007, 52). To understand the ontological constructs of beauty in Khaju Bridge, we were influenced by Max van Manen, a methodologist who, in turn under the influence of Heidegger, has proposed operational steps for a hermeneutic phenomenological investigation. Accordingly, four groups of lived experiences (interviewed experiences, collected experiences, descriptive experiences, and fictional experiences) are interpreted in this study.

## Research background

Investigators into the beauty of the Iranian ancient architecture have explained the various aspects of beauty mainly by examining the religious literature and the theories of Islamic scholars and philosophers (Noqrekar, 2015). Such investigations have less dealt with the artworks themselves<sup>5</sup> and have less interpreted beauty from phenomenological viewpoints, but, rather, have more conceptualized it through examining the opinions and theories of others and their understandings of them. One may easily say that the beauty of Safavid art and architecture has thus far been looked at only from the viewpoints of Iranian culture, mystic attitude, and spiritual truth<sup>6</sup>. The power of imagination and the world of ideas are also included by scholars among the most important theoretical foundations of Islamic art (Bolkhari, 2011, 81). Adopting a concrete approach, this study tries to disclose the nature of beauty in Khaju Bridge by referring to the artwork itself as the only authentic source

remaining from that glorious architecture. It also endeavors to contemplate the relationship between architecture and beauty, which has been considered as one of the entities in the triad regarding architecture since Vitruvius<sup>7</sup>.

### Theoretical foundations

#### • Beauty and the difference between its meanings in the realms of modern and tradition

In the pre-modern era, it was seemingly a dominant view among philosophers to think that beauty was of some existential and epistemological significance,<sup>8</sup> it was common to realize beauty as an objective, external entity. Such views, which have profoundly influenced Islamic and Iranian mysticism (Ahmadi, 2008, 69), have considered beauty as some ultimate value comparable to truth and good. Beauty as such is then one of the three values that account for our rational inclinations (Scruton, 2012, 16). This attitude is also endorsed by the traditionalist scholars, as they recognize the ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty as closely connected (Oldmeadow, 2010, 246).

During the eighteenth century AD and under Descartes, who had an influential effect on modern esthetics (Beardsley & Hospers, 2012, 91), these views underwent drastic transformations. Since then and along with the emerging humanistic views, the concept of beauty found a psychological aspect; preference, feeling, and perception opened their ways into esthetics; and, once again, the concept of beauty adopted a subjective dimension<sup>9</sup> (Grutter, 2004, 94 & 101). This attitude, which is born out of subjectivism and, at the same time, feeds it (Thomson, 2016, 39), is the primary difference regarding the concept of beauty between the modern and pre-modern systems of thought. Again, the attitude has been criticized by numerous thinkers; Heidegger, for instance, considered modern esthetics as the omission of morals from art

and beauty (Young, 2005, 24), contrasting all past viewpoints where art was never defined without some reference to the good and the moral (Oldmeadow, 2010, 254). The significant difference between the meanings of beauty in traditional and modern thoughts makes all our attempts very difficult in exploring the hidden semantic layers and translating them into today's language. To face the concept of beauty in the traditional architecture, it is, therefore, crucial to decide an appropriate approach.

#### Revealing (understanding) beauty in traditional architecture through the window of esthetics

This study aims at recognizing the components of beauty during exploring a building of our traditional architecture through applying an approach arising from the modern thought, though its critic. With regards to the fundamental differences in the meaning of beauty between the traditional and modern systems of thought, an important question concerning studies of this kind is whether, or not, viewing and understanding the beauty of traditional eras through the window of the western thought will lead us to a proper stance, whether we can recognize our traditional art and architecture by using the foreign concepts. The question appears fairly pertinent where any traditional form of art stands face to face to the western thought, but, following Heidegger, we will have to walk down this way (Heidegger, 2013, 7)<sup>10</sup>. When our tradition and the language employed to explain it are stagnant and unable to revive themselves, we seemingly have no other choice. Now that different principles govern the world, viewpoints at art and beauty are changed, and the language of architecture along with its associated meanings and concepts are transformed; it is tremendously difficult to understand the lost realm of architecture of those old days. Consequently, the traditional art and architecture will be

understandable only when they are explainable in today's conceptual language.

Transmuted, our present thought is under the dominance of the Western thought, which has been forcefully radiating its power worldwide. As a consequence, any attitude we may gain towards our own tradition is inevitably realized through the modern thought. We must view our art and the beauty in it through the window of esthetics and present them to others by using an esthetical language. Despite all our interests and concerns, our traditional art and architecture are very less known to the world of today. So, if we are really concerned with the recognition and appreciation of the art and the beauty of those old eras, we should know that we will necessarily have to walk down this way to rescue that art and revive it, which will in the first place be to rescue ourselves and to revive our own historical identity, though we acknowledge that in this attempt there is a great danger, which has already been pointed out by Heidegger in understanding the traditional language through the window of the modern (*ibid.*)<sup>11</sup> that is, the incapability of the Western esthetics in perceiving and understanding most of the fundamental components of beauty in our traditional architecture, i.e. the danger of losing those supreme concepts.

### **Esthetic experience from the phenomenological point of view and its quality in architecture**

Esthetics sees the work of art as its object, the object of sensory perception in a broader sense. Such a perception we call an experience (*Young, 2005, 24*). Despite various interpretations of the esthetic experience, the common denominator is the subject of the experience, the impression induced in the audience (*Ramin, 2011*). That is why in speaking of the esthetic experience many philosophers emphasize the experience of the viewer. Of these thinkers, Mikel Dufrenne, whose *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* is

the most outstanding and most comprehensive work concerning phenomenological esthetics (*Casey, 2010*), considers the viewer's experience more significant and believes that this experience is less affected by the psychological determinants of the artwork creator (*Spiegelberg, 2013, 882*). When beauty is perceived, the feeling constitutes the object for esthetics. Feelings are therefore necessary to the esthetical object and, in a sense, to the appearing artwork. Indeed, the feeling is an undeniably solid component in art and the nature of the esthetical object (*Benvidi, 2016, 3 & 4*).

In this study, the esthetical experience is interpreted based on the impressions and perceptions of the audience. Esthetical experience, in this context, means the immediate impressions and perceptions created in us by the phenomena. The feelings created during the establishment of some relationship between us and the phenomena are, in fact, our esthetical experiences. Rather than exploring the conceptual beauty in the mind(s) of the audience, this study is therefore to extract the concept of beauty from the within of the beautiful entity. Our spatial experience has to be a physical, substantial, material experience through all our senses, and this is what is sought after by a phenomenological investigation. Peter Zumthor, the Swiss phenomenologist architect, thinks that to experience is to explore thoroughly by the entire bodily faculties; is to touch, to see, to hear, and to smell the object (*Zumthor, 2015, 83*). Although the definition is not limited to the visual realms, phenomenology is defined as the study of the appearances (of the phenomena, of those which appear). It requires the acceptance of the full ontological potential of the human experience and, consequently, the utmost receptivity of all human senses. In the views of phenomenologists, the architectural space is not neutral or abstract; it is a space replete with lived experiences (*Leach Neil, 2005, 80*). In other words, our experiences of spaces are dynamic in the sense that we speak of our presence in space by

our movements in that space and by all our senses functioning concurrently. As Pallasmaa says, it is in relationship to our bodies that we approach the buildings, face them, move through and in them, and utilize them. Architecture leads the actions, the impressions, and the thoughts; scales them down or up; and, frames them (Shirazi quotes, 2010, 127). Accordingly, esthetic experiences in architecture depend upon our sensory perceptions of the spaces, perceptions accomplished through all our senses, and not merely through our eyes. And, somewhere, the senses of smell, hearing, and touch are considerably more important than the sense of sight. The architectural experience is available to those who are capable of employing all their senses (Von Mays, 2012, 24).

### Research method

Our approach in this study is phenomenological, one which helps us reveal the truths of things by “returning to the things in themselves”, as the principal guideline in the realm of phenomenology. So, to reveal the nature of beauty we are required to go back to the artworks in themselves. As van Manen puts it, phenomenology is concurrently both a philosophy and a methodology, which studies the nature of the essence of phenomena, examining and exploring what makes things whatever they are (Mohammad Pour quotes, 2013, 261).

Phenomenology is a qualitative methodology in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experience regarding a phenomenon as the experience is described by the participant(s) in the study. By establishing a close relationship, the researcher tries to determine the patterns and semantic relations (Cresswell, 2015, 41). The descriptions are studied to identify the similarities and discern the fundamental patterns (Seamon & K.Gill, 2016). Generally speaking, phenomenology consists of describing and interpreting an individual’s lived experience and studying the ways through which the things

are revealed to us in such experiences (Seamon, 2013, 143). This approach is a resolute effort to enrich the galaxy of our experiences by revealing certain aspects that have previously been ignored or overlooked (Spiegelberg, 2013, 1028). Scrutinizing the term historically, Gadamer teaches us that lived experience stems from living; lived experience<sup>12</sup> means experiencing through living, which, unlike what is learned from others, is first-hand, direct, and immediate (non-mediated) (Taheri, 2020).

### The methodology of phenomenological research after Max van Manen

This study follows Max van Manen’s methodology. In his *Researching Lived Experience*, van Manen enumerates the practical steps in hermeneutic phenomenological research: resorting to the nature of the lived experience, examining the experience as we have lived it, reflecting hermeneutically and phenomenologically, maintaining the directed purposeful relation, and preserving the inner balance throughout the research content by observing the whole and the particulars concurrently (Manen, 1997). The lived experiences of the study may be either those of the researcher or those of others. Some ways to collect the lived experiences according to van Manen’s methodology are presented in Table 1. It should be noted that the lived experience is not the experience that has occurred once only; to be considered a lived one, the experience has to have been repeated historically, formed in continuous connection with the phenomenon, and described accordingly.

To augment validity and reliability, the present study employed various categories of lived experiences and multiple sources of information and, in the end, four groups of esthetic experiences of the audiences (Table 2) were interpreted to provide fairly rich coverage of the findings.

Table 1. Our methods of collecting data as to the lived experience(s) according to van Manen’s methodology. Source: adopted from Manen, 1997.

| (lived Experiences)   | Explanation of lived experience (s)  |
|---|--|
| Employing one’s own experience                              | The researcher tries to give a direct and immediate description of his own experience regarding the object as is.                        |
| Employing others’ experiential descriptions                 |  |
| Employing interviewed experiences.                          |  |
| Employing observational experiences.                        |  |
| Employing experiential descriptions found in the literature | Literary works, including poems, novels, fiction, short stories, biographies, are valuable sources of rich and vivid experiences in life |
| Employing the lived experiences represented in artworks     | Works of art in general (paintings, statues, musical pieces, and so on) are rich sources of lived experiences.                           |

Table 2. Esthetic experiences of the audience in our study according to van Manen’s method. Source: authors.

| lived Experience(s)   | Collection and interpretation method   |
|---|--|
| Descriptive Experiences                                       | To this end, the researcher has written the personal experiences and feelings following multiple attendings in the place. To interpret the actual “words” of the building, care has been taken to evaluate the descriptions of different times.  |
| Inquired Experiences (Experiences Inquired during Interviews) | Participants of the interviews were chosen from the pool of the regular attendants who out of their interest frequently visit the bridge at least two times a week. Of the interviewees, 14 were selected who have managed to build a better relationship with the building. To obtain their lived experiences, a semi-open interview method was employed to gather the descriptions.  |
| Collected Experiences   | Students of architecture were asked to write their own experiences and feelings following their multiple attendings in the place. Of 120 students of Islamic architecture during three semesters, 25 ( 10 male and 15 female) were selected who have managed to build a better relationship with the building and their reports were evaluated.  |
| Experiential Descriptions Found in Literature                 | Understanding the fundamental layers of beauty requires our vast and profound studies in many disciplines, especially including history, culture, and language. Here we consulted the remaining written documents dealing with this artwork and interpreted the descriptive and experiential reports of eight tourists (three from the Safavid era, two from the Qajar era, and three from the Pahlavi era), who had visited the bridge. |

### Khaju Bridge: Object of Our Study

The Khaju Bridge (aka the Baba-Roknad-Din Bridge, the Shiraz Bridge, the Bridge of Zoroastrians, and the Hasan-Abad Bridge) is one of the historical bridges on Zayanderud River and has been described as the city’s finest bridge. The nomenclature is due to its proximity to Khaju Quarter, the quarter of Zoroastrians, in Isfahan (Hedayat, 1998). It is 166 feet long and 24 feet wide, with two stone walls on either side. As the river bed is narrower under this

bridge, the length of the bridge is shorter than that of Si-o-se-pol (aka The Allahverdi Khan Bridge) (Chardin, 1983, 180)(Fig 1). Besides being a communication pathway across the Zayanderud, the bridge is an efficient vantage point for relaxing as well as various gatherings.

On either side of the passway of the bridge, there are arches and porticoes. The two-story archways are decorated with colorful tilework and there are octagonal pavilions in the center and the two

ends of the bridge (Stierlin, 1998, 72). The central structure of the bridge is a particular building with a few rooms decorated with paintings and ornaments remaining (Hanarfar, 1967, 142) (Fig 2). As well as the outlook and serenity of the river, locational proximity to the quarter of Zoroastrians, Mahalle-ye Gabr-ha, was among the factors which encouraged Shah Abbas to order the construction, since a bridge built there could facilitate their transportation (Tavernier, 1984, 398).

### Interpretation of the research data

This study endeavors to interpret the data according to van Manen methodology and with hermeneutic phenomenological contemplation. In

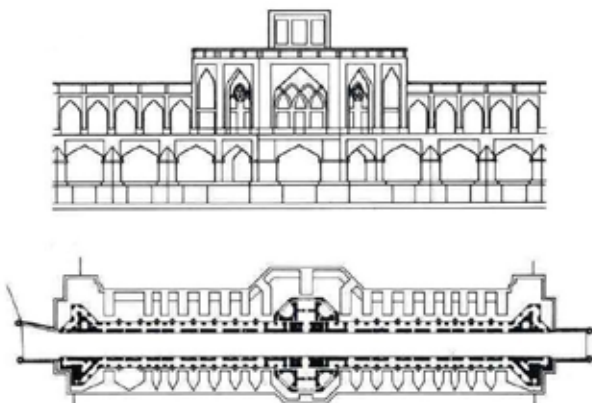


Fig 1. Plan of Khaju Bridge. Source: Stierlin, 1998.



Fig 2. Khaju Bridge. Source: Blunt, 1966.

the first phase, the researcher had to decide the units to be studied and to identify the concepts, the ideas, and the components, a procedure like what is usual in qualitative content analysis, or coding and analyzing in other qualitative methodologies (Mansourian, 2015). To elucidate the fundamental meanings by qualitative content analysis, therefore, attempts were made to extract both explicit and implicit patterns and themes out of the descriptions gathered during the research. As the conceptual categories stem from the data, the researcher surfed them to attain an innovative understanding through analyzing the data which were read over and over again (Iman & Noshadi, 2011).

### Research findings

In the second phase, after continuously exploring the descriptions gathered from the tourists and the students and the interviewees as well as the descriptive reports of the researchers themselves, the significant and key sentences were identified and the main themes were accordingly extracted. Summaries of the principal utterances are presented in the following figures (Fig 3- 6). Repetitive, similar descriptions are excluded in most cases, and the main themes are categorized into three formal, functional, and semantic components.

### Discussion: Union of Beauty with the Triad of Form, Function, and Meaning<sup>13</sup>

Our interpretation of the data gathered during the extraction of the fundamental concepts and the components of beauty in the artwork of our study suggested that all the three categories of form, function<sup>14</sup>, and meaning could be found in the esthetic experiences that we were studying. This means that each and every element of the triad is not separable from the others in the process of interpreting the beauty. We cannot respect one with dissociating the others as is observed in the history of architecture wherever form is

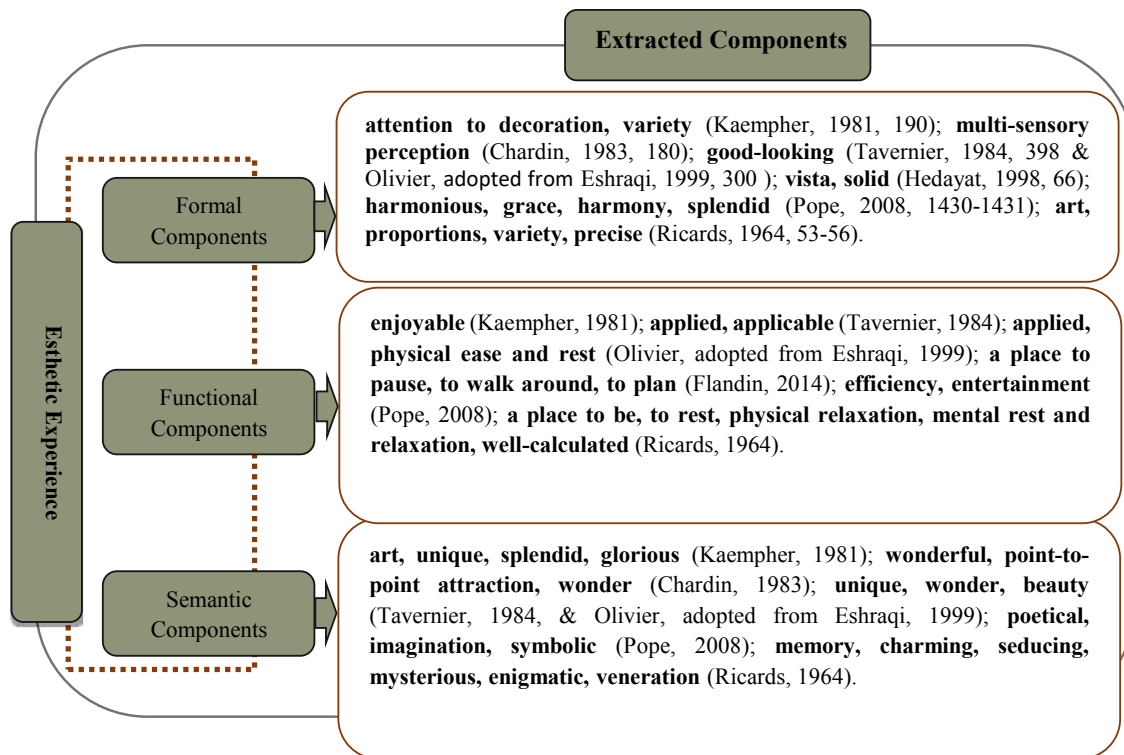


Fig 3. Beauty Themes in the Khaju Bridge from the viewpoint of the tourists. Source: authors.

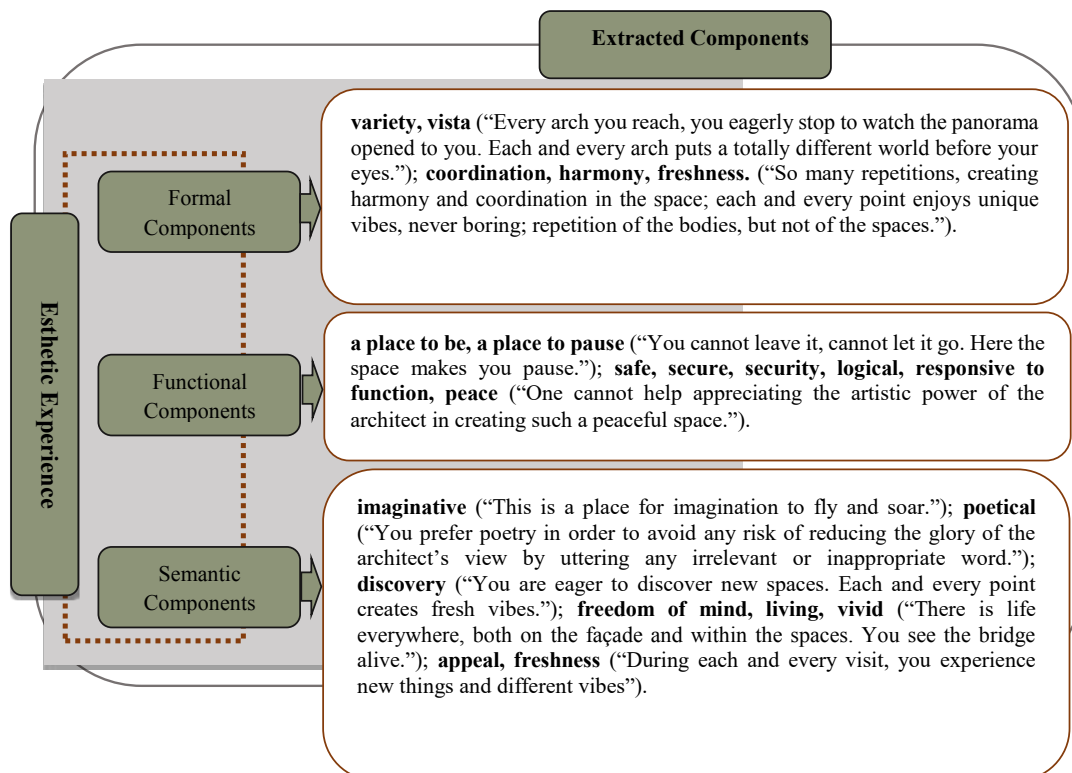


Fig 4. Beauty Themes in Khaju Bridge from the viewpoint of the researchers. Source: authors .



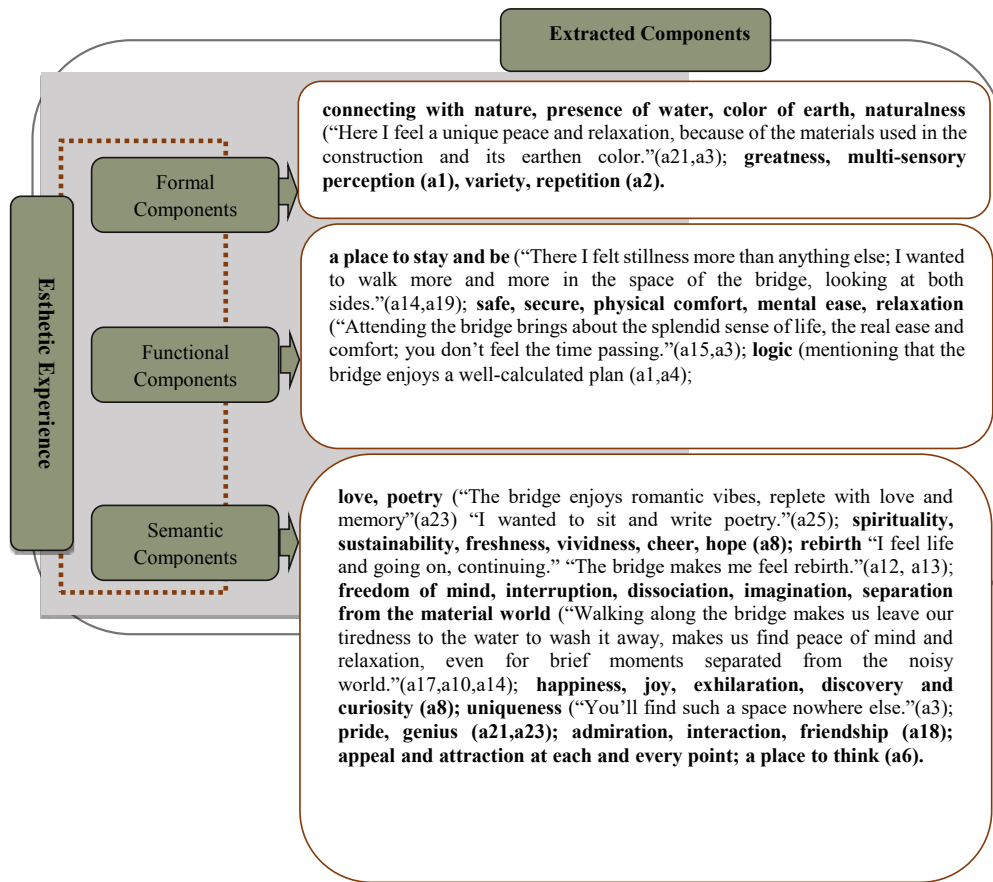


Fig 5. Beauty Themes in Khaju Bridge from the viewpoint of the students. Source: authors.

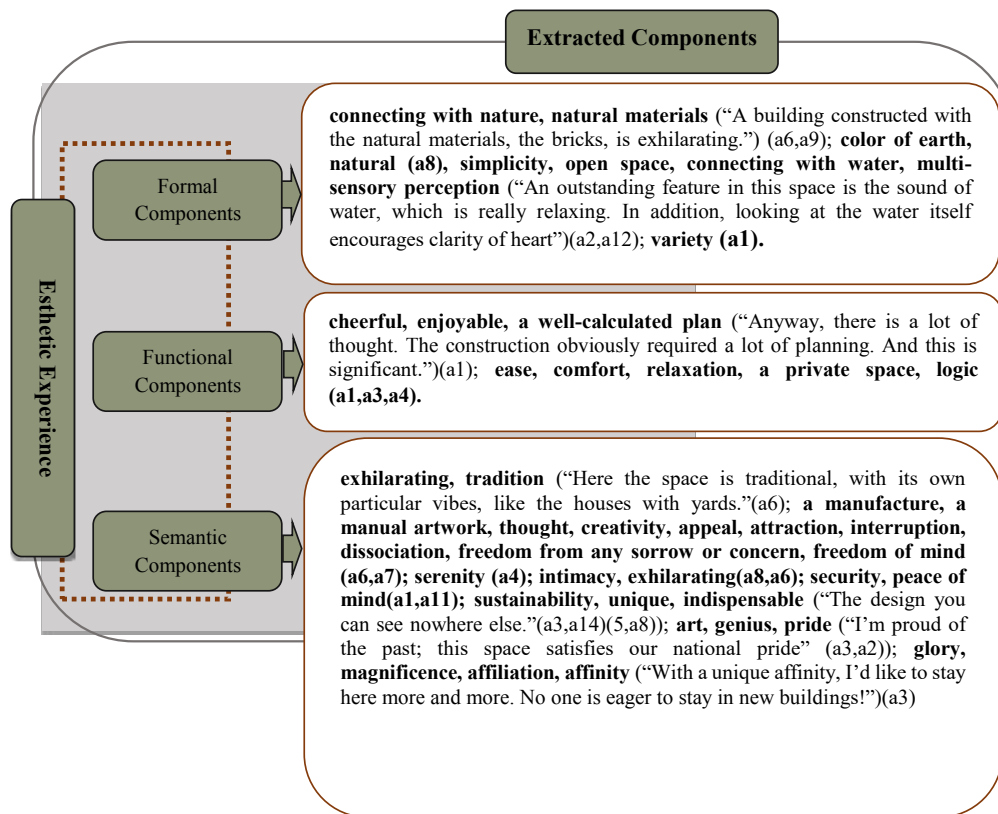


Fig 6. Beauty Themes in Khaju Bridge from the viewpoint of the interviewees. Source: authors.

regarded in contrast to meaning,<sup>15</sup> an approach that has resulted in formalistic, functionalistic, and semanticalistic viewpoints in architecture which believe in superiority of one category to the others. These are obviously contrary to the viewpoints of our traditional architects, who regarded the three categories as closely interconnected, for, in the religious art, neglecting the form has been tantamount to ignoring the meaning and the truth of the art (Binaye Motlaq, 2010, 36).

Our interpretation of the esthetic experiences clearly illustrates the association between beauty and meaning, suggesting that in the meaning<sup>16</sup> and in the nature of the architecture beauty must be looked for within the artwork, and that beauty cannot be found in the superficial and quantitative features of the architecture, as seems different to today's people, who merely define beauty in terms of the superficial manifestations. "In architecture, the meaning has to be connected to the features and the qualities of the architectural work and has to stem from its within. This does not mean that the meaning is bound to be restricted at this level, but that it has to be connected fundamentally to the artwork." (Mozayyeni, 2001, 13).

The findings of our research indicate that architecture is beautiful when it not only stimulates our senses to provide perceptions and look beautiful but also is capable of responding to the architectural function. The function here is not restricted to a physical one; rather, functionality should be considered in response to the context of the artwork, that is, how the building is rendered in our understanding, how it can define a universe that can be proportionate to the expected functionality, and how it contains a meaning that can be grasped by reason.

The connection between beauty and the triad of form, meaning, and function suggests that the beauty in our traditional architecture was an ontological feature, implying that the architecture is beautiful because it is architecture and possesses the beauty ontologically, not that the architecture

is just a building with a feature called beauty that can be attached or detached as we wish. The relationship between beauty and architecture was not conventional but existential in the past. Therefore, when we are to think about beauty, we should pay our attention to the architecture itself. Today we look at beauty differently because we look at architecture differently. So, to refind those beautiful spaces we will have to revive that mode of thinking (Fig. 7).

### Ontological Constructs of Beauty in Khaju Bridge

In our traditional architecture, beauty was inseparable from the architectural work. It was an obvious and tangible entity to our ancestors, but we now have define beauty and recognize its components. Indeed, the concept of beauty has lost its obviousness and that is why it is questioned. Interpreting the esthetic experiences of the audience groups, we extracted the keywords in this study. Interpretative exploration of the components presented in tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 reveals the esthetic experiences which were common among the audiences attending the building. During the study, our profound reexaminations of the data gathered from the lived experiences and their associated interpretations, presented in Table 3, led us to seven fundamental components:

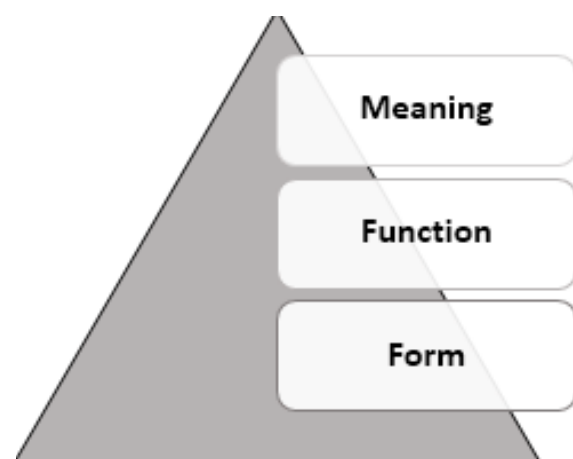


Fig 7. The triad related to beauty. Source: authors.

Table 3. Ontological constructs of beauty in Khaju Bridge. Source:

| Constructs of beauty     | Interpretation of components  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Vividness                | <p>The combination of three words <i>living</i>, <i>exhilarating</i>, and <i>relaxing</i> led us to the word <i>vividness</i>. Such words like <i>life</i>, <i>living</i>, and <i>alive</i> were quite frequent in the utterances of the audiences. Saying that the building was alive and was “speaking” to them was indicative of uniquely different experiences. Where there is life, there is also vividness. The descriptions by the audiences were indicative of quite different experiences in life, suggesting what we are now experiencing in our spaces either involves a different meaning of life or is not vivid at all.<sup>17</sup> This implies a uniquely particular approach to life by our ancestors, who were successful in creating a vivid and sustainable building. Our ancient architecture was creating vivid, living, cheerful, and exhilarating spaces and this suggests that life was of significance to the peoples of those times. <i>Relaxation</i> constitute yet another conceptual category, which is observed only in very rare spaces. The audiences were speaking of the abundance of real relaxation in this monumental space as if the meaning of relaxation is totally different today. Their intended relaxation is attainable in close unconcerned connection with the Nature, in attending a safe and secure place which is capable of relieving our inner concerns.</p> |
| Poetry <sup>18</sup>     | <p>Throughout the collected descriptions, the enigmatic space of the bridge and its poetical vibes were noticeable elements affirmed by the audiences. This may suggest that those who built such buildings were poets indeed, in the sense that they were of more authentic understanding. The buildings which are more poetical are more sustainable. This may imply that an important aspect of our past architecture is its poetry, and now, as our language has lost its poetical and enigmatic dimension, today’s art and architecture have lost their poetical dimension too.</p>  |
| Selflessness             | <p>Some spiritual selflessness, some inebriation, a state of departing from the material world, could be explored throughout the descriptions. In travelling into the “other” world, the relaxation gained from losing the self can be a source of cheer and pleasure as if one’s spirit no longer belongs to this world and one’s departure brings about relaxation. This is a spiritual selflessness, not a sort of material ecstasy which is sought after nowadays in various material stimuli and stimulants. This inebriation is a positive emotion which is attained through interruption, pause, silence, freedom of mind, and dissociation from the world and its discontents. And, in such a dissociation and departure from the worldly belongings, one gains such a state of inebriation, cheerfulness, and delight that one never intends to leave it by exiting the space. This state is possible when the architect lets our imagination<sup>19</sup> move and fly, when the architect lets us soar whenever we desire to relieve ourselves.</p>  |
| Logicity                 | <p>4. The esthetic experiences of the audiences indicate that the building of our study is well-calculated, constructed based on a logical plan. The architect had a comprehensive, thorough, all-inclusive approach. There is no single element in this artwork that can be considered devoid of some planned thoughtfulness. Unlike most modern buildings,<sup>20</sup> The architecture of the bridge is quite responsive to the intended function. This responsiveness augments the function efficiently. No element in this architecture has been considered insignificant by the architect.</p>   |
| Artistic Richness        | <p>A notable finding in the descriptions is that the building of the bridge is always fresh in the eyes of the audiences and each and every visit reveals some new points to the visitor. This is indicative of the profundity of the meaning embedded in the building, and the more profound the discourse, the more abundant the untold. That the bridge is always new to the observers and whenever they attend they experience new findings is indicative of the textual richness of the artwork.</p>   |
| Thought-Wonder           | <p>The descriptions suggest that the building of the bridge is a place to think, to ponder, and to contemplate. Seeing the bridge ignites a sense of wonder which is only a prelude to many many questions in the mind. How is it built? By whom? With which thought? With which devices? The bridge is a unique place that opens many windows to beyond for its audience. The visitors will never consider the architecture finished; rather, they are always faced with a vast horizon. Indeed a main function of any work of art is to encourage its audience to think.</p>  |
| Originality-Authenticity | <p>Originality and authenticity were found throughout the descriptions in such concepts as <i>tradition</i>, <i>sacredness</i>, <i>nature</i>, and <i>identity</i>. Tradition, here, is viewed not as a historical past but as a source or origin, from which everything comes from. The ancient architect reached the traditional roots to attain a deeper understanding and perception to “write” the beautiful poetry of architecture. Sacredness was observed in the cleanness, purity, clarity, spirituality, and sincerity of the space. The sincerity comes from the people who did their best in employing their genius and capabilities and potentials to build the building with their pure and godly intentions. Again, originality can be found in the relationship between this building and the nature. Being authentic is a source of pleasure, peace, and relaxation for those who experience the milieu of the bridge, and this is an experience which is by no means artificial whereas in today’s architecture everything is unreal and artificial. The visitors’ descriptions were replete with the elements of truth, originality, and authenticity.</p>   |

vividness, selflessness, originality/authenticity, artistic richness, logicity, poetry, and thought/wonder (Fig. 8). Although it seems reasonably impossible to adopt a single umbrella word, or even a bunch of them, in order to name the nature of beauty and thereby distill all its constituents, it is difficult to claim that the beauty of this architectural work can be conceived by a combination of these seven words. Such works of architecture are in fact beyond words of any kind. Notwithstanding our deep conviction that the beauty of such architectural masterpieces is a secret, a mystery, that cannot be explained in our concept-centered language, the present study has done its best to explain the conceptual components in the language of modern architecture. A detailed explanation of these componential keywords is presented in Table 3.

### Conclusion

This study was an attempt to understand the concept of beauty in a traditional artwork, Khaju Bridge, based upon the esthetic experiences of four groups of audiences. The main aim during the study was to revive the concepts that were once extant in our past architecture but are now gone, almost totally. Yes, the world of traditional architecture and its language are now gone, and modern thought is now overwhelmingly dominant in all dimensions including the conceptual beauty, and now everything is even unintentionally being viewed and realized from this viewpoint. So, any attempt to recall the fundamental concepts concerning beauty requires us to look at our traditional architecture through the window of modern thought. The findings of study suggest that the

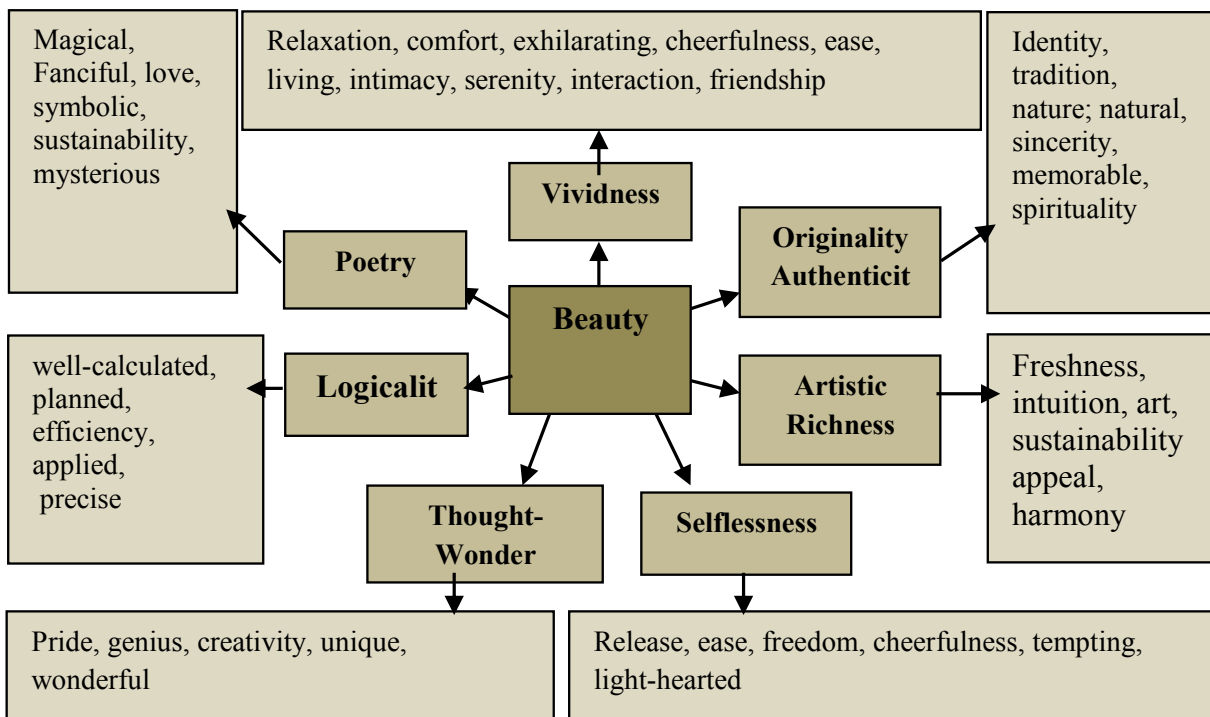


Fig 8. Keywords leading to the ontological constructs of beauty in the Khaju Bridge. Source: authors.

interpretations of the lived experiences of all four groups and their criteria in recognizing the beauty are very close to one another. From the standpoints of its audiences, Khaju Bridge has been observed as a relaxing, serene, friendly<sup>21</sup>, exhilarating, memorable<sup>22</sup>, vivid, proud, well-calculated, and natural<sup>23</sup> space. Interpreting the data gathered during the study, we can enumerate the keywords vividness, selflessness, originality-authenticity, artistic richness, logicity, poetry, and thought-wonder as the ontological constructs of beauty from the viewpoints of the audiences and through the window of their lived experiences. The keywords suggest that the elements affecting the feelings of the audience groups and giving them cheerful joy are authentically connected with the form, the function, and the meaning of the building.

Finally, it is worth considering that spaces are created by the intermediacy of our experiences; it is important how the beauty is experienced and how the experiences are rendered as line drawings. Therefore, to attend and to experience a beautiful space is a prerequisite to create an equally beautiful one. Of course, it should be accepted that either today's architecture is unbeautiful<sup>24</sup> in the eyes of the audience or today's technological world has created new sensory and esthetic values and a totally different meaning for beauty. Although the modern perspective seems to be appealing, the modern esthetics is nothing but a fad, a shell devoid of meaning<sup>25</sup>, and will soon be boring because it ignores human life and human needs. Beauty cannot be restricted to just apparently beautiful superficialities; it must be found in within<sup>26</sup>. Today's beauty is something visual, only directed towards our eyes; it is not sustainable. Sustainability depends upon hidden inner layers, upon the meaning, the world which is formed in connection to the name and the function of the building and which will be

revealed by the architectural work itself. And it is concurrent attention to the triadic categories of form and function and meaning that is the secret to the sustainable beauty of our past architecture.

## Endnotes

1. For the crisis of aesthetics of contemporary architecture, see (falamaki, 2010; Noqrekar, 2015, 56; Haeri Mazandarani, 1995).
2. "A considerable portion of the identity in Iranian architecture comes from the esthetic systems governing the various worldwide styles and schools. Obviously, incompatibility between their foundations and those of our ontology and epistemology leads to a serious crisis." (Noqrekar, 2008, 170).
3. "The crisis developed gradually during the recent centuries is most reflected in the artistic activities of our society and is clearly characterized by a general weakness in design ability, imitations lacking creative content, disturbance, and lack of identity." (Nadimi, 2007 SH, 142).
4. For Heidegger and Hegel, the totality of art after the middle Ages is, inferior to the great art, at best (Young, 2005, 23).
5. A study of this kind is "Padidarshenasi-ye Tajrobe-ye Zibayishenasi-ye Makan: Nemune-ye Moredi-ye Meydan-e Naghsh-e Jahan" ("Phenomenology of the Esthetic Experience of the Place: A Case Study of Naqsh-e Jahan Square") by Panjtani et al (2017).
6. Examples include the doctoral dissertations by Vida Taghavi (2006) ("Bazkhani-ye Marateb-e Vojoudi-ye Me'mari ba Roju' be Hendesh va Zibayi"), Farzaneh Farshid-Nik (2015) (Baztab-e Hekmat-e Irani-Eslami bar Zibashenasi-ye Honar-e Iran: Motale-eye Moredi-ye Me'mari-ye Asr-e Safavi), and Shervin Mir-Shahzadeh (2012) (Bazshenasi-ye Engare-ye Zibayi dar Me'mari-ye Irani bemanzur-e Tajdid-e Hayat-e Zehni dar Me'mari-ye Emruz).
7. In the third chapter of the 'Ten Books on Architecture', Vitruvius states: All buildings must be built according to durability, comfort and beauty (Vitruvius, 2009, 25). *David Capon's* detailed study of architectural categories in ancient Greece shows several triads, which is often in line with Vitruvius's trilogy (Qaribpour, 2013, 58) 8. Conclusions of this kind may be found in the works of Iranian thinkers. See (Pazouki, 2014; Zeimaran, 2014).
9. Anyone who has spoken of beauty, in the modern world, has sought to find the states of the human mind (Newton, 1964, 7).
10. In the dialogue between Eastern man and Western thinker, Heidegger believes that to understand Eastern art, relying on aesthetics is necessary (Heidegger, 2013, 7).
11. Heidegger argued that differences between Eastern and Western languages are not accidental. Therefore, it is impossible to translate these languages into each other (Heidegger, 2013, 26).
12. specific criteria for evaluating the relative validity of qualitative studies: Demonstrating sensitivity and empathy, whereby the study illustrates convincingly that its descriptive and conceptual patterns, structures, and meanings have accurately emerged from the real world and are not cerebrally contrived or arbitrarily imposed. 2- Making use of triangulation, whereby the researcher draws on multiple data sources, methods, evaluators, and conceptual approaches as a means to identify different lived perspectives and to corroborate evidence from different data sources. 3- incorporating negative case analysis (Seamon & K.Gill, 2016).
13. Speaking of meaning requires a theoretical basis and a theory of meaning. In fact, without them, we can only say that seeking anything beyond the appearance of architecture is seeking meaning (Qayoumi Bidhendi, 2015, 10).
14. The architectural design depends on both functional considerations and artistic criteria. The construction of architecture

is related to the nature of architecture and forms the basis of the meaning of architecture (Mozayyeni, 2001, 14).

15. In the metaphysical approach, the form is as important as the meaning. Without a form, meaning cannot emerge (Binaye Motlaq, 2010, 34).

16. The ultimate meaning of any building lies beyond its architecture. This meaning redirects our consciousness to the world and gives direction to our existence and understanding of ourselves (Pallasma, 2009, 22).

17. If we want to have good architecture, We need to have a better and more accurate picture of life (Hojjat, 2011, 205)

18. The essence of art is poetry (Rikhtegaran, 2009a, 13).

19. The fancy offers an emotional and rational combination in a moment of time. Only such a fancy can give us a sense of sudden freedom (Pallasma, 2016, 16).

20. Well- designed buildings support and enhance particular worlds- for example, schools sustain a world of teaching and learning , dwellings, a world offering privacy, at- homeness, and familial intimacy. Though critical histories of architecture demonstrate that buildings too often undermine the worlds they are meant for (Seamon, 2017, 1).

21. Heidegger in Sein und Zeit use the “Mitsein”. In the explanation of this word can be said , Man is not a living, individual, our Being is basically being with others, Our essence and our nature are not separate from each other (Heidegger, 2015).

22. A necessary condition for the use of place, in the true sense of the word, is memory. A place that lacks formal and visual signs will have a faint identity. And unity with it will be impossible (Norberg- Schulz, 2014, 49).

23. The use of materials to define and communicate the architectural space, are fundamentally an essential part of the way we perceive architecture, where the natural materials share an authenticity that cannot be reached with the machine-made materials of today (Mogensen & Partner, 2014, 4).

24. for unbeautiful components in Iranian Architecture, see. (Falamaki, 2006, 16; Noqrekar, 2015, 71-8; Nadimi, 2007, 142).

25. The world has changed into a playful visual journey devoid of meaning (Pallasma, 2009, 33). Instead of producing artworks merely replete with visual persuasion, architecture must establish meanings (Ibid, 31).

26. In the Islamic civilization, art is an inner sense and virtue, a quality pertaining to human heart (Rikhtegaran, 2009b, 162).

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