

Professional scientific sessions for art, architecture and urban planning Thursday evenings

Held in: Conference hall of Herampey Consulting Engineers

Date: 16.11.2017

Title: An instant of Od Lajan.

Speakers and panel members: Mrs. S. Ranjkeshan, Mr. S. Siroos and Mr. V. Doushan.

The first speaker of the session was Mrs. Ranjkeshan who presented a short history of Tehran from its formation. In the beginning the inhabitants of Tehran lived in very small underground habitations, because of insecurity and several attacks that they have to counter continuously. She talked about the process that gradually transformed Tehran as a small village to center that step by step became a city. Initially the combination of twelve quarters formed the principal nucleus of Tehran as a city. Four of them that are the main quarters are as follows: the quarters of Sanglaj, Bazar, Chaleh Meydan and Od Lajan. From the formation time, the quarter of Od Lajan because of the presence of religious sites grows fast and when during the kingdom of Aqa Mohammad Khan the city is declared as the capital of Iran, the population concentrated inside the protective walls of rises to about 160.000.

Mrs. Ranjkeshan explained that because of fast growing population, in 19th century during the Kingdom of Nasser-elddin Shah, he ordered the enlargement of the city, demolishing the old walls, replacing them with new fortifications, copying the example of Paris that experienced huge transformations in the same years. This is period that the quarter of Od Lajan is formed as an urban area, with its religious, economic and educational centers, hosting different ethnic and religious groups. The area becomes one of the city's "high" quarters, because of its nearness to the royal court. She explained also how some of the quarters and streets of communication were named after persons or ethnic groups that had a role in the formation of that area.

Mrs. Ranjkeshan presented the following transformations occurred during the kingdom of Reza and Mohammad Reza, that brought the quarter as the situation and conditions that today we see.

Talking about the actual problems that the quarter suffers, harming the social and consequently the architectural structure. She said that unfortunately the quarter has not been able to keep in with the rhythm of transformations, becoming a nearly uninhabited area, serving as a warehouse to the needs of the Grand Bazar. The consequent problem of this situation is the invasion of emigrants and poor people, that accept to live in dire conditions because of their social and economic condition. In the quarter there are numerous homeless people that use the quarter as a nocturne dormitory, creating the conditions of danger and social insecurity.

After the inhabitants of the quarter the problems that affect the area, are the limitations to build new habitations, the improvement of the infrastructures and mainly the security of the quarter in order to permit its revitalization. To solve this problem the urban and programming planners should concentrate on the texture of the quarter, focusing on the above mentioned problems. One of the goals of the planners is to create the conditions to be able to present the quarter to local

and foreign visitors as a touristic attraction that in case of success can rapidly transform the structure and the spirit of the area, both socially and economically.

As a proposal of solution to the problems Mrs. Ranjkeshan explained that the planners should focus on the valuable elements of the area, improve and encourage the social interactions ensured by a stable physical and spiritual security, creating new and more appropriate routes of communication, keeping at the same time the precious historical elements that identify the area as a historical attraction.

The second speaker was Mr. S. Siroos. He said that he was there to present paintings that he realized in the quarter of Od Lajan.

Talking about Paris Mr. Siroos said that the city has many characteristics. Many call it a beautiful or the city of the lovers and one of its most highlighted characteristics is that is considered the city of memories. The people living in Paris believe that if somebody fifty years ago had a coffee in a coffee shop, after fifty years can easily find the place, living similar experience and memories. Talking about the Iranian society he said that unfortunately we are not interested to have memories. We don't know who we were, where did we come from and where we lived. He posed the question if it is necessary to have memories. The way that we can keep alive a phenomenon is that we put it on a cultural platform. For example we have a clear idea of the Japanese garden, but regarding the Iranian garden we see that achievements of the Iranian garden have not been introduced firmly in our culture. We don't have many books, pictures or movies from Iranian garden, music or painting, that can help us to live them as our heritage of memories and this means that we have lost part of our history and culture. Mr. Siroos said that may be painting part of the quarter Od Lajan is an attempt to reintroduce it in our culture, enjoying once again its beauties and memories.

Mr. Siroos said that talking about beauty it means that a phenomenon must have strong links with the history, roots and culture of the specific country. He said that it is very easy to have a spiritual relationship with the Iranian artistic, literary and architectural heritage, because each of them are rich deep roots in our existence. He said that one of the problems that make difficult our relationship with our cultural heritage is that they are not classified, so sometimes it's difficult to feel and live the historical continuation of the Iranian cultural heritage, meanwhile each of their expression is part and a particular expression of our entity, history and way of life, presenting our collective identity as a nation.

Mr. Siroos concluded his speech saying that even different types and expressions of art can seem different but finally they are part of a unique entity, that has the mission to unify and create the conditions to enjoy their deep layers.

The third speaker was Mr. Doushan. Beginning his speech he presented the history of the Od Lajan quarter from the Safavid era to our days. According his presentation the quarter is one of the oldest in Tehran and actually is a central quarter near the area of the Grand Bazar. Talking

about the actual situation Mr. Doushan explained, through a chart, that meanwhile during the last ten years the population all the quarters of Tehran have registered an increase, in the quarter of Od Lajan, where the some of the habitable spaces have been transformed to warehouses or abandoned area.

Talking about the reasons that people left the area, Mr. Doushan reported different arguments, like the high rents for commercial uses, the insecurity by the presence of addicted persons, poor quality of life, difficulty to renovate the old buildings, and lack of belonging feeling to the historic area of Od Lajan. He explained that the quarter during the years experienced considerable transformations regarding the use of the ex-habitable areas to warehouses or commercial activities. These are some of the reasons that pushed the people to leave the area. The consequence of this depopulation is that about %80 of the buildings have unstable and subject to renovation.

Considering the actual conditions Mr. Doushan expressed the idea that the quarter is not suitable for living conditions, it's unsafe, the urban services are insufficient and in case of a large scale disaster the necessary infrastructures are absent. Talking about the potentials first of all he mentioned the historical precious texture, the presence of historical buildings that can be interesting touristic attractions, not only for the potential tourists but also for people that are looking for a traditional lifestyle.

Concluding his speech Mr. Doushan focused and stressed the importance of the revitalization of the area to create the necessary conditions for touristic attractions and activities, that in his opinion are the base for the successful renovation of the area, in order to be reintroduced in the active cycle of the urban life beside other quarters of Tehran. He also presented a list of the monuments, buildings and religious sites that if renovated can play an important role in the revitalization of the quarter in an urban context.