

# Collective memory and urban regeneration in urban spaces: Reproducing memories in Baharestan Square, city of Tehran, Iran

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## ABSTRACT

Baharestan Square as the most memorable square in Tehran, has many historical and cultural monuments. This square as the historic public space, faces urban decay and dilution of social belonging due to urban transformations which are eroding the collective memory of not only its meaning but also its physical environment. This research aims to propose a theoretical model for continuing and reproducing features of collective memory in historic urban spaces. Qualitative research is applied via field study and in-depth interviews with 20 residents and users aged 25–65 years. The respondents were known as local residents in Baharestan neighbourhood in Tehran. The observations, interviews, and related documents and texts were analyzed with qualitative content analysis. The data gathering was continued up to theoretical saturation.

This study indicates that collective memory is composed of objective and subjective dimensions, including place, events/activities, history, and personal values/images. This framework can be applied through the culture-led regeneration of historic urban spaces with the help of interventions in relation to the needs and attitudes of social groups, local users, and residents.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, rapid urban development—especially in metropolises—has led to considerable transformations in terms of physical environments, activities, and place experiences. Consequently, there has been a transformation of meaning and collective memory. As Gehl and Gemzøe (2000) mentioned in their book *New City Spaces*, public spaces of cities as places of people's precious memories, now have turned into abandoned and invaded spaces just for cars without memory and meaning. Today's public spaces are not construed as citizens' destinations and are not places where citizens can spend their free time. Invaded public spaces without social interactions are now a locus for traveling exchange: this is a consequence of urban transformations of citizens' images and memories caused by changes in places' physical characteristics and meanings (Gehl & Gemzøe, 2000) (UĞUZ, 2008).

Baharestan Square, the focus of this study, is one of the most historic and memorable urban spaces of Tehran. It suffers neglect in urban life, and giving priority to cars instead of pedestrians has made it pale into insignificance. It has actually become merely a place to pass by, regardless of its nostalgic values and meanings. This Square is now a sheer passage linking other parts of the city. It faces physical decay and environmental pollution, has lost its local residents and place attachment and has lost its primary memory, usage, and social interaction

(Mehan, 2017) (Zahiri & Jomepour, 2016). This calls for a deep exploration of the salient features of this historic urban space which embodies its collective memory.

In Iranian contemporary history, Baharestan Square is home to significant monuments owing their glory days to the years of the National Consultative Parliament (the Majlis). Different events happened in this place from 1905 to 1978: from the 1908 bombardment of the Majlis during the Minor Tyranny to the years of the nationalization of the Iran oil industry movement to all the events concerning the 1953 Iranian coup d'état. During this period, the Square served as a civic space for people to aggregate for protest and demonstration. Recently, the presence of some bookstores around the square and the group of surrounding streets is a symbol of the modernization of Tehran (Mehan, 2017). However, many surrounding historical buildings are stranded, current activities are quite non-homogeneous with the historical-cultural ambiance of the place. The visual disorder of the surrounding building facades, physical decay, abandoned monuments, and decreasing urban life has also exacerbated the lost identity of this precious historic urban space (Zahiri & Jomepour, 2016).

"Urban Regeneration" is claimed as an approach to assist urban designers as people who are responsible for creating places, meaning, and memory in the cities (Jahanbakhsh, Hosseini Komoleh, & Sotoudeh Alambaz, 2015). Besides, cultural geographers—who attempt to

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represent the role of memory in social life and political culture—have called attention to various struggles over remembering and forgetting the past. Hence, the imagining of alternative futures helps the revalorization of individual and collective memory at a time when historical amnesia appears to be at an all-time high (Rose-Redwood, Alderman, & Azaryahu, 2008). As the main approach to urban restoration in contemporary urban areas, and also as an interventionist approach, urban regeneration can have a holistic view of the past (memory and history) without eroding the historic identities belonging to different eras. This, thus, creates a brand new identity which conforms to people's current living conditions (Hwang, 2014). Considering the historic nature of Baharestan Square, a culture-led regeneration can promote the challenging condition of this site with emphasis on the improvement of such historical spaces' identity in order to create a sense of belonging to the urban spaces, forming a kind of social solidarity, and improving a sense of place and citizens' participation (UĞUZ, 2008).

This article focuses on the way in which features of collective memory are preserved and reproduced through places by considering the people's images to remember place history and memory. It can be applied as a means to explain the principles of regeneration in historic public spaces especially Baharestan Square (given its importance in history). Based on prior studies on collective memory, this paper specifically explores those features of place which can allow collective memory to be reproduced in the future in the context of urban transformation in historic public places. It also tries to highlight how collective memory can be reproduced so as to remember the past of places.

To accomplish this aim, this paper considers in detail the features of the collective memory of Baharestan Square by focusing on people's experiences of the place. The paper is primarily qualitative research, wherein we conducted interviews with 20 people from Baharestan Square and noted their understanding of places' history and memory. Therefore, this research presents the experiences of people as shopkeepers and local residents who have lived and worked there for more than 10 years. Drawing on interviews with people as the empirical point of departure, this study discusses how these people describe and interpret the memory of the place, and which features of place make them remember the past and memories associated with it.

This approach allows researchers to illuminate those features of places which enable conceptualization of memory in places. Notions such as place, places' history, activities, and personal values and their relationships to each other allow thematic analyses of the stories and personal narratives of peoples in Baharestan Square.

This paper proceeds in five sections. First, it engages with the literature on cultural-led regeneration and collective memory with concepts of placemaking. Second, it introduces the case study. Third, it explains the method-of the study to show the process of firm recruitment of interviewees. Fourth, it unveils the process of analyzing data. Finally, it concludes with a brief reflection on the features of place which allow reproduction of collective memory into a complex relationship between place, activities, history, and personal values involved in urban regeneration.

## 2. Cultural-led regeneration and collective memory

In order to provide empirical evidence, this research studies the concepts such as culture-led regeneration and collective memory, and their components to propose a conceptual framework of the features of collective memory in public places to achieve theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978) in this research.

The concept of urban regeneration is complicated, dynamic, and multi-dimensional (Rubin & Taylor, 2008). There are generally four main focal points concerning an urban regeneration program: physical obsolescence and property requirements, economic efficiency and social equity, citizen mobilization and involvement, and environmental problems (Roberts & Sykes, 2000) (Singhal, Berry, & Mcgreal, 2009).

The new direction toward urban regeneration is in such a way that both arts and cultural activities go hand in hand in order to create a sustainable community that is called "culture-led regeneration." In fact, this concept means exploiting cultural activities to regenerate a ruined area and, in such projects, the focus is on the preservation and nourishment of social and cultural capital.

During the 1990s, the studies of Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993 (Bianchini & Parkinson, Cultural policy and urban regeneration: The west european experience, 1993) and Bianchini and Landry, 1994a,b (Bianchini & Landry, A methodology for assessing urban Viability and vitality, the creative city3: Indicators of a creative city, 1994) (Bianchini & Landry, The Creative City: A methodology for assessing urban vitality and viability, 1994) supported the use of art and cultural activities to make regeneration happen in deprived urban places. In order to promote the target area as a vibrant and attractive one with the aim of place marketing, techniques such as placemaking were utilized for urban planning and design (Carmona, Heath, Oc, & Tiesdell, 2003). Moreover, the strategies mentioned for culture-led regeneration are as follows (Evans & Shaw, 2004) (England, 2007) (Vickery, 2007): (Pratt, 2010 Creative cities: Tensions within and between social, cultural and economic development. A critical reading of the UK experience, 2010) (Pratt, 2009 Urban Regeneration: From the Arts 'Feel Good' Factor to the Cultural Economy: A Case Study of Hoxton, London, 2009).

1. "Flagship" cultural facilities, such as signature-style kind of architecture, or modern cultural buildings and monuments.
2. Landmark status or public art installations, or preserving monuments for enhancing the level of collective social movement.
3. Memory, social values, and heritage conservation, unique performances and events or festivals—particularly collective memory.
4. Developing artistic and innovative industrial hubs.

In this regard, it is often assumed that the integration of "memory," "identity," and regeneration operate in a linear way. Memory becomes a collective entity, which binds people together under a shared identity which is usually kept alive through group interactions and acts of remembrance focused on collective memory in place (Othman, Nishimura, & Kubota, 2013).

Collective memory has been used in a number of studies, from various kinds of "Nationalism" in history or political science, ritualization, and commemoration in anthropology and sociology. All these approaches remake collective memory beyond individual memory: its nature is a kind of social heritage (Wilson, 2005).

Besides being the pivotal core of everyday life, a city is the locus of collective memory (Rossi, 1966). Collective memory is a representation of the past shared by members of a group, such as a generation or people of a country. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, the father of this concept, stated in 1925 that "... remembering is shaped by participation in collective life and that different groups generate different accounts of the past" (Halbwachs, 1980).

It might be concluded that memory cannot be built up separately from space. Collective memory comes parallel to people's lifetime. Moreover, it is grounded in the idea that the past is never really "past" and, thus, it extends to the present and informs the future. "Recollections, memorialization, and commemorations" (Griffin & Thompson, 2002) of what happened in the past act as cultural resources creating personal, group, and national identities. As for identity, collective memory does not play any role as a cognitive device since memory allows us merely to know the past. However, memory is considered an individual capacity while collective memory is social in nature. Collective recollection is able to socially connect members of a special group to each other. As Halbwachs discusses in 1950, collective memory always belongs to group memories, it is always the negotiated and selective recollection of a specific group: thus, collective memory is somehow similar to myth. From his perspective, collective memory is pivotal to a group's notion of itself and must continually adjust itself to

historical circumstances (Halbwachs, 1980).

He also argues that urban space is the structure of collective memory: “the space a group occupies is not like a blackboard, where one may write and erase the figures at will” (Halbwachs, 1980). Firmness and stability of a city and its landmarks are powerful social structures. He further discusses the importance of renowned physical locations or built environments to which each group of individuals assigns a symbolic meaning.

Based on Halbwachs' theory, Aldo Rossi (1966) reintroduced the topic in *The Architecture of the City* (Rossi, 1966), and Christine Boyer continued the discussion in her *City of Collective Memory* (Boyer, 1996). Rossi argued that “the soul of the city” becomes its history and memory: one can claim that a city itself serves as a collective memory for its people and that it is related to buildings and places very much like memory. The city is the core of collective memory and the relationship between the core and the citizenry becomes the city's leading image: certain artifacts become part of its memory, and new ones appear. In this entirely positive sense, great ideas run all over the history of the city and inform it (Rossi, 1966).

According to what Rossi said, the preservation of an old urban fabric is like preserving memories and monuments in the human mind. Thirty years after Rossi's work, Christine Boyer wrote about the city of collective memory. According to Boyer, a city is a collective expression of architecture and it bears traces of memory of primary architectural shapes, city plans, and public monuments. Even though the name of that city might never change, its physical expression is always in the process of transformation, deformation, or is forgotten and modified to suit other needs or destroyed for other purposes. “The demands and pressures of social reality constantly affect the material order of the city” (Boyer, 1996) the collective forms and private parts of our memory inform the changes taking place; they help us distinguish this city from others. Our memories are transmitted to the present via physical artifacts, including the city's streets, monuments, and architectural forms, and traces (Boyer, 1996).

Relevant notions concerning history and memory are found in the French historian Pierre Nora's volumes on places of memory. He argues that we spend so much time thinking about our past because there is so little of it left: “... even if references to memory are always available in the present world, it is paradoxical since we are currently living in a historical society where memory serves as a mere historical clue that is able to simply be a restorative form of the past. In pre-modern societies act and memory through traditions where present and past exist simultaneously in one packed space in which act and meaning get mingled, then the historical world of the present is one that symbolizes historical consciousness and disembodied memories. Creation of memory locales occurs because real environments of memory have been disappeared. Therefore, the projection of a memory zone signifies memory's disappearance and society's need to represent what apparently no longer exists” (Nora, 1996). For Nora's postmodern history, collective memory does not exist anymore: rather, sites of memory exist.

The main focus of many studies regarding collective memory and urban spaces has been on monumental landscapes, as monuments, memorials, and museums have been proven to pave the ground for investigating places of memory (Till, 2003) (Jordan, 2006) (Henneberg & Clara, 2004) (Forest & Johnson, 2002) (Johnson, 2002) (Withers, 1996). Stangl (2008) takes an alternative route by considering the relationship between local architecture and cultural memory. He argues that the local or vernacular and monumental architectures are mixed in urban space and the borderline between these two is somehow blurred. The distinction is significant in the analysis of how “some local places become memorialized and some monumental places become vernacularized or localized” (Stangl, 2008).

Some important consequences of collective memory in urban regeneration approach have been mentioned as creating a connection between memories and places, providing a clear image of the past,

developing a sense of place and belonging to places by improving meanings and identity. People, place, and human experiences and activities require people to interact more with each other. More importantly, the use of the collective memory in the regeneration of an urban space develops place belonging, identity, and, consequently a sense of community and participation (UĞUZ, 2008).

In the Iranian context, scholars use these terms in the process of placemaking as Iran is known by its complex and unique geography and place value or “local culture” –politics, race, caste, religion, rituals, and urban texture. There have been some limited efforts in using collective memory for facilitating urban regeneration projects or representing collective memory in architectural spaces or public places (Jahanbakhsh et al., 2015).

In addition, some scholars believe that our encounter with objects and places from the past can create a clear sense of the past and cause the formation of a personal identity and place identity (Golkar, 1999). Mass connectivity with time is one of the factors that lead to a sense of place (Pakzad & Bozorg, 2012). Therefore, in preserving and recreating collective memory in urban spaces, the emphasis on the physical environment alone cannot lead to memorizing and reproducing collective memory. In addition, diverse activities and functions with a variety of scales in space get prioritized in comparison to the form. Preserving the physical environment of space as a container of memory formation plays an important role in reproducing collective memory in public space (Azad & Partovi, 2012).

Fig. 1 demonstrates the conceptual schema of collective memory's dimensions as Place, Activities/Events, and History. It shows that collective memory develops through some intermingled connections. Such interrelations start with people acting as users in their physical environment. These users interact with their environments via their activities on a common history. The use of space through particular activities elevates human experiences to the next level and revives some new memories.

### 3. Methods and materials

#### 3.1. Baharestan Square's history

Tehran is a 200-year-old capital city of Iran and most of its primary squares were built during the Modern period. It is known for its omnipresent tension between “deep-seated tradition and wild modernity” (Bayat, 2010) (Bagheri, 2014). During the twentieth century, the urban squares of Tehran have been frequently used as spaces of political contest. While the kings used them to display their power, the

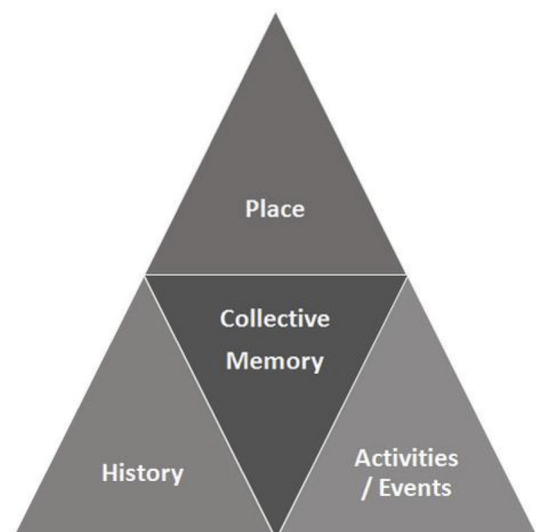


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework Source: The authors.





Fig. 2. Baharestan Neighborhood and Baharestan Square Source: Google map, edited by the authors.

revolutionary masses used them as their meeting points to challenge the authorities. In this sense, there was a close link between social movements and public spaces of the city (Mehan, 2017).

Besides, at present, the main problem of urban spaces in Tehran is overcoming of functional importance and the domination of business functions. These have caused the decline of cultural and social functions of Tehran's urban space in the transition from a traditional city to a modern city (Rahnamaei & Abbaszadeh, 2011).

Located in front of the Majlis, Baharestan Square (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, Fig. 4) has witnessed countless political meetings, demonstrations, political, national, and religious celebrations, and other related events. The Square is of such paramount importance that it can be called the square of rebellion, conflict, revolution, and slaughter. Important political events which have played a decisive role in the modern history of Tehran as an emblem of the ruling power. Analyzing the spatial and physical changes of Baharestan Square based on historic manuscripts, western travelers' diaries, historical images, and maps, it has been found that the traditional elements of the Square, its form, and function have undergone considerable transformation from its formation outside of the city in the Qajar period (1826) to the Islamic Revolution (1978). In order to have a good understanding of this space and its physical, functional, and spatial characteristics, five chronological categories

(Mehan, 2017) are studied in this paper.

### 3.1.1. Forecourt of the Negarestan Garden (from 1826 to 1896)

The Negarestan octagonal garden was built in 1807 by the Qajar king as one of the summer palaces of the Qajar Dynasty outside the city of Tehran. Gradually, with the development of gardens around Tehran during this era, the forecourt of Negarestan got surrounded by different gardens such as Sardar Garden, Nezamieh Garden, and Negarestan Garden from three sides. In the wake of the development of Tehran in 1868, Negarestan Garden became a part of the city and lost much of its importance as a recreational garden and turned into a legal court and governmental offices.

### 3.1.2. The emergence of political square for urban life (from 1896 to 1925)

Many schools were founded during this period in the Negarestan Garden, including a School of Agriculture, and a School of Fine Arts and Religious School. Also, the Sepahsalar Mosque became an important place for holding religious events. Changing the elements of the Square's surrounding and physical spaces of the Baharestan mansion was only enough to build the first Iranian National Parliament there. It was at this period that Baharestan Garden turned into a special place for foreign ambassadors and also to hold various state celebrations. The



Fig. 3. South Façade of Baharestan square.





Fig. 4. East Façade of Baharestan Square Source: The authors.

Sepahsalar Mosque was part of key political events, including the 1908 bombardment of The Majlis, the violence and terror of 1907, and the social demonstrations of 1924. This led to a change in the role of the Square from a recreational square to the first political square in Iran.

3.1.3. Autocratic modernization of urban square (from 1925 to 1941)

During this period, the development of commercial, educational, and recreational elements in the Square gave new functions to it. Moreover, thanks to the construction of a new transportation network, Baharestan Square changed into a focal point, a place that now was able to connect new and old parts of the city. In a bid to beautify the Square between 1925 and 1931, trees were planted, lighting was installed, sidewalks constructed, flower designs installed, and footpaths were distinguished from roads. In addition, the location of the King's Statue in the middle of the Square was designed to look very much like civic European squares. However, during this era, Square was not regarded as an active political space.

3.1.4. A dual place for people and government (from 1941 to 1955)

Throughout the 1940s, new buildings were established on the northern side of the Square in a modern style by Iranian architects who had graduated from western universities. In such critical years, Baharestan Square was considered as an important place for political gatherings and was a locus of demonstration to support the nationalization of oil. Additionally, because there were a lot of cafes, theatres, offices of political parties, and bookshops in the surrounding of the Square, its political, social, recreational, and cultural functions were heightened. Baharestan Square had a dual position during these years: first, it was a representation of stability of the whole country and an emblem of modernity in Tehran as the capital; second, it was the main meeting point for the public and for voicing the political demands of the people. Fig. 5 shows the public demonstrations of 1953 in Baharestan Square.

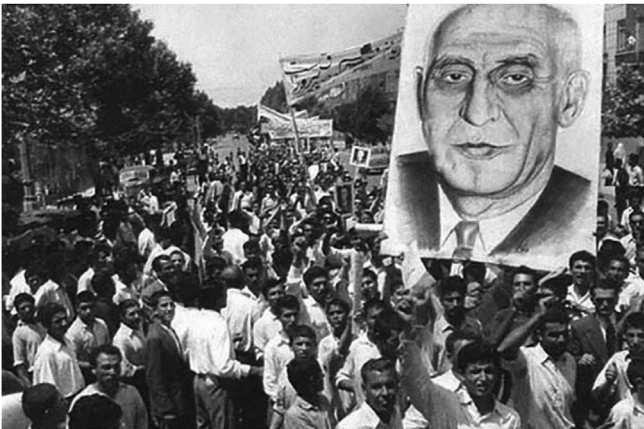


Fig. 5. Protest in Baharestan square in 1951 source: <http://flickrhivemind.net/Tags/baharestan/Interesting>.

3.1.5. Change in the square's urban functions (from 1955 to 1978)

When Tehran experienced a big change and grew exponentially during the 1950s, the upper classes of the society moved to the north of Tehran and the royal family's residence changed. Hence, the city's upper classes left the neighborhood of Baharestan. Therefore, Baharestan Square's previous educational and recreational functions faded. From the 1960s and 1970s, the existing mixture of facades was changed into an international architectural style: this ruined the previous harmony of the Square's skyline. In 1955, the middle part of the Square was rebuilt and some new sculptures were mounted at the focal point. After 1963, this Square lost much of its main importance as a place for public revolutionary gatherings because the Iranian Consultative Assembly was no longer effective.

4. Methods

This study employs a qualitative method to explore the dimensions of the collective memory of the Square according to the research participants' experiences. Data gathering is conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a desk study is conducted by undertaking a literature review of collective memory, mixed with studies on the historic areas of the site and analysis of internet resources, related documents, texts, and documents. The result was a series of open-ended questions for the interview:

- 1 "What are the most reminiscent features of Square's past memory?"
- 2 "What would Baharestan Square bring to your mind?"
- 3 "Recalling this Square, what kind of memories and symbols get freshened up?"
- 4 "Which memories are being reproduced through built environment and place names?"

Research participants were local residents and shopkeepers who had lived long or had worked for more than 10 years in Baharestan Square area. They were in the range of 20–65 years old and were selected on the basis of accidental sampling (Table 1). All of the participants were active in the civic house of Baharestan and attended cultural and recreational activities. Face to face in-depth interviews were conducted, asking them the aforementioned questions. Additionally, they were asked to explain the Square's memories (past and present).

Data saturation was continued up to a sample size of 20, selected by simple random sampling. As Morse (1994) suggests, when the goal of qualitative research is to understand the essence of an experience,

Table 1  
Interview participants' characteristics (Authors).

Age	Men	Women	Total(No.)	(%)
20–35	4	3	7	35
35–50	3	3	6	30
50–65	5	2	7	35

Total number of participants: 20 people.

researchers should use at least five participants (Morse, 1994). All data were collected in the summer of 2016. Table 1 shows participants' characteristics in brief. Each of the respondents answered all the three open-ended and semi-structured questions; each interview lasted for 20–30 min to explore people background, their memory of the place, how they remember Baharestan Square's past and present, their experiences as the place's users, and their views about the meaning and memory of the Square.

All participants were asked if the interview could be recorded and subsequently transcribed. They were also given a written, informed consent paper to guarantee that they will not be recognized in the future.

For data analysis, qualitative content analysis was used. The importance of key concepts and themes by reading the interview transcripts several times and taking note of phrases and concepts was discussed. Research notes were initially written down by researchers personally in order to identify vast thematic factors and separate meaning segments for coding targets.

Words, phrases, sentences, or even paragraphs were read all over again in the transcript text during the process of analyzing the transcripts. Researchers discussed their personal understandings of the discrete meaning sections so that they could then refine the concepts into broad logical classifications with more specific subcategories and conceptual model of the study.

Finally, general thematic sections and their subcategories were evolved and provided altogether by some general categories along with main subjects. To ensure trustworthiness of research, researchers employed "prolonged engagement" between the investigator and the participants in order for the former to gain an adequate understanding of the organization and to establish a relationship of trust between the parties (Shenton, 2004) by sending emails and messages via mobile phone.

## 5. Findings

Research participants in Baharestan Square presented different features of collective memory in their interviews about the Square. Therefore, qualitative content analysis of the transcript interviews was used to extract major categories related to the proposed conceptual model of collective memory's features in the form of four broad themes, including place, activities/events, history, and personal images/values.

During the second phase of the study, the extraction of concepts was conducted within contexts such as buildings/monuments, functions, land uses/activities, and a visual survey of the streetscape in the site appraisal process. Physical features, involving land use, the age of the building and the architectural style, were all determined. In addition to accessibility and route network around the Square, all the significant buildings and gardens were appraised. Furthermore, the social and economic states of all households were also determined (Table 2).

### 5.1. Baharestan memories rooted in "place"

The physical environment of Baharestan Square was the most important concept for the participants of the study. The built environment of the Square, including the monuments, streetscape of the Square—composed of such elements as Majlis (Parliament)—the National Consultative Assembly, Sepahsalar Mosque, and the National Art Museum) were full of significant concepts. These valuable frontages, along with the historic architectural styles, are concepts that require ample attention by themselves.

*"The old building of The Majlis, the refined version of it, and the mosque are all remnants of those days. These buildings have embraced lots of memories. Protest and law" (a 50-year-old male resident).*

Given the participants' answers, it can be asserted that, for them, the presence of a garden means a great deal. By "gardens," we mean

buildings such as Negarestan Garden or that of Masoudieh Building and, of course, Majlis' yard—in which certain elements are observed, including a basin and plane trees. These provide a complete example of the Persian garden for the respondents.

*The trees and the basin at the middle of the square, Negarestan and Masoudieh Garden, and the Garden of Guidance Office show that this Square has been constructed according to the real pattern of the Persian garden, with lots of stories behind it. (a 60-year-old salesman).*

In addition to the physical aspect of the square, many of the participants referred to some hidden meanings, including Moddares Building Complex (the former Masjed Shah): they pointed out the role of Moddares in Iran's contemporary history. Retaining the names of the buildings and the streets is one of the reasons why the meaning of Baharestan Square still seems familiar to the respondents. This becomes much more important when we know the fact that the name of many streets and urban areas of Iran were changed after the Islamic Revolution (in 1978).

*Baharestan Square's name has long been the same as now. It seems as if the name has been embedded in the events happening there. (a 65-year-old male resident).*

### 5.2. "Activities/events" as reminders of memories

Interviews with the residents and shopkeepers in Baharestan neighbourhood showed that current activities help to revive memories of the Square in people's minds. Local residents and shopkeepers believe that, in addition to meeting their daily needs, people engage in other activities in the Square. The most important of these is perhaps the possibility of meeting the representatives of Majlis (parliament members). Other activities around Baharestan Square include daily cultural activities, tourist visits to the monuments and historic gardens, temples, the recital of prayers, visits to Sepahsalar Mosque, and the purchasing of wedding cards or musical instruments: all of these have their own place in this space. Some of the participants have pointed out social activities associated with protesting and gathering in front of Majlis. Various groups, at specific times of the year, occupy certain places for different purposes.

*I always come here for buying shoes, and, each time I've come, there is a political event happening that has drawn my attention. One day, [there was] a public demonstration right in front of Majlis Building, and, the other day, we [saw] the martyrs [being] carried around here, or you maybe come upon the celebration of the Islamic Republic of Iran. (a 40-year-old female resident).*

### 5.3. "History" highlighted in the location

All the participants considered Baharestan Square to be a historical place in which the most important events of the contemporary history of Iran have occurred, including those that have brought the country into the modern world. For example, the constitutional government and the formation of the National Council have facilitated the development of democracy in the country. The nationalization of Iran oil industry movement and the presence of Mosadegh in Majlis are other historical events on which all the respondents agreed to its recorded chaos in the Square. Some of the participants also referred to the 1908 bombardment of Majlis and Mosadegh's refuge in the Square during the unrest. What is of paramount importance here is that each moment of Iran's contemporary history, especially the political aspects, was in the respondents' minds.

*Baharestan Square has always been introduced in the course of contemporary history, whether at school or high school, as a place where the most decisive events happened, the ones that have shaken the whole*

**Table 2**  
General thematic themes (The authors).

Items	Concepts	Sub- Themes	Themes
Plane trees—Pool & water, fountain, basin Iranian Garden—Negarestan Garden	Natural environment	Physical	Place
Parliament Building—Masoudieh Building Sepahsalar Mosque—Negarestan Garden & Museum National Arts Museum—Deteriorated building (need reconstruction)	Built environment (monuments)		
The Majlis as a refuge Slaughter for freedom Persian garden Different architectural styles	Connotative Meaning	Meaning	
Parliament building as a monumental element Parliament building façade (brickworks) Sepahsalar Mosque and its architecture Modarress statue	Signs/Symbols & Public Art		
Parliament building Baharestan reminder of three garden names: Negarestan, Baharestan, Nezamiyeh	Street Names		
Seminary of Sepahsalar Mosque/Negarestan Garden Museum and Masoudieh Building Buying musical instruments		Cultural/Religious activities Political activities	Activities/Events
Legislation in the National Consultative, The Majlis (Parliament) Holding protests and public gatherings to protest against representatives of the people in front of the Majlis building (Parliament)			
Meeting with representatives Purchase and daily needs 22 Bahman ceremonies		Social activities Routines Events	
The nationalization of the Iran oil industry movement in 1951 Formation of the first National Assembly during the reign of Muzaffar al-Din Shah 1908 bombardment of Majlis during the reign of Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar Majlis as a refuge for Mosaddegh and a public demonstration in defense of him against the government. Besides, street protests in Masoudieh Mansion square and seeking for refuge by some of the constitutionalists			History
Political value Reminders of modern democracy, oil and independence Blood for freedom and civil rights Freedom along with music (the forbidden element of Iran's culture) Buying wedding cards (the joy)			Personal image/ Symbol/Values

*country and foreshadowed the emergence of the Islamic Republic and the public's urge for having a republic. (a 35-year-old male).*

#### 5.4. "Individual values/personal images," and how they have been affected by the value of memories

Considering the socio-demographic status of the participants, the viewpoints of different groups varied. Highly educated participants, especially men, believed that Square was an emblem of freedom and a symbol of democracy or a place of shedding blood for the sake of freedom. Meanwhile, middle-aged women typically regarded Square as a space suitable for daily needs and shopping. Some others also remarked on the issue of selling musical instruments, along with the concept of freedom (as music was somehow forbidden in Islam).

*If you ask me because I am a household woman, Baharestan Square does not make any sense to me, but, in my husband's case – [he] is educated – the place is very respectful since he believes the Square is a platform for freedom. He feels so attached to this neighbourhood that he doesn't even want to move from here. (a 35-year-old female resident).*

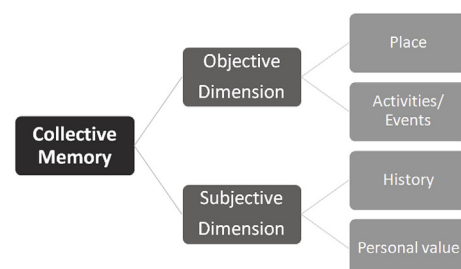
## 6. Discussion and conclusion

This study attempts to explore the features which reproduce collective memory to assist urban regeneration policies in Baharestan Square in Tehran. The study indicates that people remember the Squares' past history through place, activities, and history and personal values. Dimensions of collective memory were expressed in various ways, by the participants of this study as extensions of various kinds of group experiences and events through residents' images. In this regard, influential elements in shaping and reproducing collective memory

must be investigated via both subjective and objective aspects.

The findings indicate that factors such as place, activities/events (in terms of objective aspects) and history and values (in terms of subjective aspects) are very important in relation to the formation and reproduction of collective memory and in its persistence (Fig. 6). This approach supports the prior studies which reveal that the concept of "place" involves a spatial space embracing the occurrence of events, meaning, and the formation and persistence of memory (Halbwachs, 1980) (Boyer, 1996) (Nora, 1996).

This research has revealed that one of the most important features for reproduction and continuation of collective memory in urban spaces is the theme of the "place". Firstly, Place as the most substantial feature of reproducing collective memory consists of the attributes of "environment" and "meaning". According to environmental dimension, spatial aspects of the physical environment and its elements also facilitate the reproduction of collective memory: these include monuments and historic buildings, as many early researchers, such as Rossi and Boyer, have mentioned (Rossi, 1966) (Boyer, 1996). Besides, being different from the historical context in which they stand,



**Fig. 6.** Collective memory dimensions.



monuments—especially when having a cultural function, such as a museum or a gallery—also have an impact on the continuity of collective memory. Such historic structures are often called “urban reminders” (Lewicka, 2008), and it should be noted here that the participants believed that the valuable historical buildings in Baharestan Square are some of the most memorable elements of the place, for instance, signs/symbols and street names. In this regard, Aldo Rossi (1966) contends that, as long as monuments exist, they can create the concept of collective memory and that this can serve as a reminder of all that has happened in the area across different periods of time (Rossi, 1966). Referring to the concept of “the sense of time” Lynch believed that historical buildings can be representative of various eras in one city (Lynch, 1972).

Natural environment as the other aspect of “environment” includes local planting, in terms of having a relationship with the historicity of the locale, has been one of the critical elements of the historical context. It is also associated with the reproduction and persistence of collective memory. Plane trees are a historic form of vegetation in Tehran's history, and the presence of water and a basin, especially in the pattern of a Persian garden, with its own archetypes and monuments, has a significant impact on the public's memory. According to Pierre Nora, the concept of landscape plays a vital role in the formation of collective memory (Nora, 1996).

The participants believed that another attribute contributing to the reproduction and continuation of the Square's collective memory is the “meanings” associated with the stories, narratives, and important urban events in citizens' minds. Due to its historical identity and the role, it has in the contemporary history of Iran, Baharestan Square's urban space is strongly associated with the concepts of freedom, democracy, justice, and protest in the citizens' consciousness. The building of the National Consultative Assembly, Majlis, and the elements related to institutions of democracy in Iran have also been of great significance in this regard. In addition to the physical dimensions of a place, semantic features based on public art like a famous statue, also serve to preserve an urban space and its memories. Meanwhile, the names of the streets are very important, and, since Baharestan Square kept its old name, it continues to provoke nostalgia for both older people and the younger generations. For Lewicka, street names are one of the elements functioning as a “place reminder”: they could be very influential in providing a sense of belonging to the place, especially in the case of historical location (Lewicka, 2008).

Along with street names, “public art” features such as statues are significant too because they refer to the Square's history and to the events that have happened there. The statue in the middle of the Square depicts one of the Iranian Constitutionalist leaders, and it emphasizes the political role of this place (being positioned next to the National Consultative Assembly, Majlis).

Secondly, the other vital theme is “history.” Important historical events from each age have found their own way into the minds of citizens, especially in relation to contemporary history, which is repeated orally or in textual form. The memories of the birth of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, with annual celebrations of it, along with the commemoration of Majlis (Parliament), official holidays relating to the nationalisation of the oil industry and printed pictures of the Square in the school books of Iranian kids are all non-physical aspects leading to the repetition of the contemporary collective memory that is associated with such an urban space. The constant exposure of the residents to contemporary history and reminders of the physical features themselves could have an impact on the stability of the collective history and persistence of social memory here. Experimental studies have shown that collective memory lingers more in the minds of the people if it is associated with contemporary history and is related to political revolutions (transitions), especially when these are accompanied by public protests and strikes (Lewicka, 2008).

Next, according to activities and events, the results attempt to define the concept of collective memory in the context of events in urban

spaces. Various activities, including political, social, cultural, religious, and even daily ones, when they are associated with the meaning of urban space, can affect citizens' images of the place. The presence of Majlis (Parliament) and its related political and social activities, such as legislation, meetings with representatives, and even public protests are elements highlighting the importance of the democratic role of this Square. Activities such as protests over matters of justice create symbolic actions in the Square that somehow relate its past history and the democratic events of those days to contemporary events related to justice and equality. The historical elements of the Square have also served as an attraction in terms of cultural tourism to the Persian Garden (Negarestan Garden) as the “city museum”. Besides, different cultural activities like the music shops and musical sounds enhance the cultural spirit of the local. These findings suggest that the connotative meaning of the public space, besides the varied activities and events would bring new meaning to public places. Previous studies have also agreed on this outcome, suggesting that the presence of real events could help to perpetuate the memories of a place (Neill & Schwedler, 2001) (Hebbert, 2005).

Finally, considering the analysis of the participants' interviews, other aspects that can influence the process of maintenance of the collective memory of the urban space are the “personal/mental image and the individual values”. People with different socio-demographic statuses might have their own distinct values and norms. Those obsessed with democratic issues and the notion of nationalism are likely to consider the identity of a space to be related to its political values, especially, in this case, in relation to the nationalisation of Iran oil industry movement, which they refer to as “the turning point in the contemporary history of Iran.” Meanwhile, housewives have perceived the entity of urban space in parallel to its political meaning, all in relation to serving daily life. Respectively, Lewicka asserts, despite the prevalent role that communal attribute plays in shaping the contents of a place's memories, there are some variables that may contribute to individual differences in how much people know about the past of their city and how accurate this knowledge is (Lewicka, 2008).

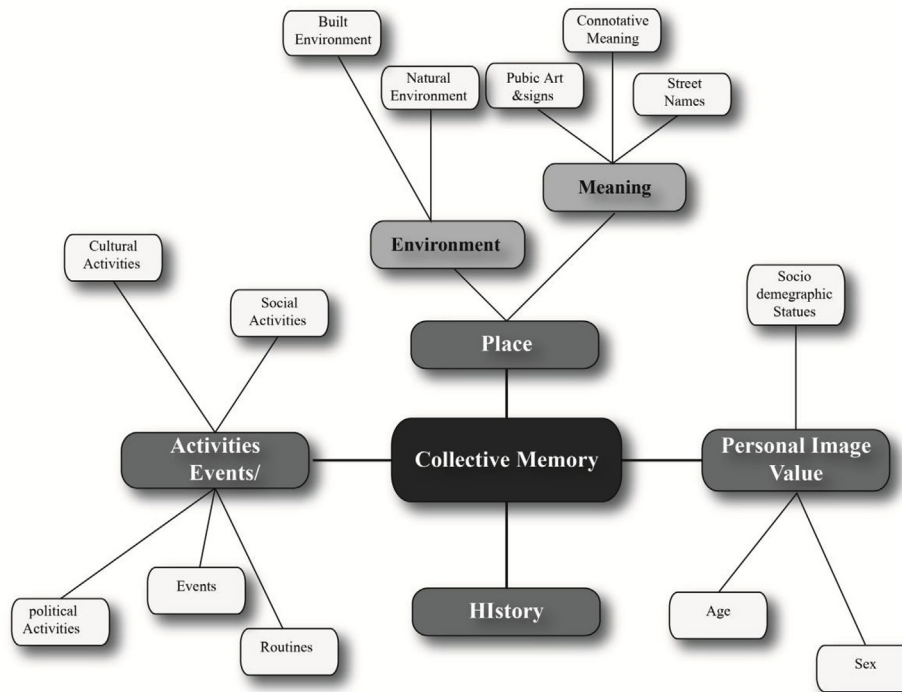
To sum up, the practical result of the study is to shape a theoretical model for not only the cultural geographers but also city administrators, planners, and urban designers to retain collective memories in urban regeneration projects (Fig. 7).

This paper explored a practical approach to understand how reproducing collective memory contributes to assisting urban regeneration projects by determining a conceptual framework framework. However, the findings of this study have potential implications. For instance, In Baharestan Square, concepts and elements of collective memory are provided in a rational process, and the priorities for planning in terms of urban management have been identified in its vision so that current memories can be preserved and reproduced in residents' minds. Moreover, to reproduce and preserve the collective memory of this historic public space, it should be transformed into a vital-historical urban space full of cultural events related to its history.

Although rituals have become elements of the Square's identity and its collective memory helps to promote social life as the role of memory for urban planners and designers, it should be noted that the presence of Majlis has a great impact on the persistence of such memories associated with urban life. Therefore, the square must be recognized as a cultural space for social gatherings, and all of its details must represent the history of the place and the constitutional events that took place there. This should be applied through designing new facades for the surrounding buildings, landscaping of the Square and also using various features of public art. For example, creating murals on the walls and erecting related statues help to remind the past memory of the Square according to reshape the geographies of memory and oblivion in places (Rose-Redwood et al., 2008).

The proposed framework is only a starting point for future studies aiming to evaluate place quality in historical districts. Our prospective studies will focus on testing and applying the framework to expand on





**Fig. 7.** The theoretical model for reproducing collective memory.

the ideas of this study by developing the present theoretical model. They could seek this as a basis for exploring collective memory's features in other historic urban spaces. The persistence and reproduction of collective memory can encourage social life and even public participation in the management of urban spaces. This appears the necessity for urban regeneration projects to be successful in Iran's historic urban spaces. In this respect, city administrators, planners, urban designers can achieve a great deal in improving the quality of urban social life of the forgotten public spaces.

## Ethical approval

All procedures involving human participants were performed in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee, and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

## Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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### Conflicts of interest

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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