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## **A study of citizens' perception of urban landscapes in multicultural cities (The case of Baam-e Karaj, Iran)**

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### **Introduction**

During the past few decades, environmental and economic crises have significantly increased the rate of migration from small towns and villages to metropolitan areas. As a result, a large part of the population of metropolises all around the globe are now immigrants with diverse socioeconomic characteristics. This transformation of cities from monoethnic entities with a single common identity to multiethnic areas has challenged the works of urban managers and planners and has created problems for urban experts. Given the significance of the context and the unique characteristics of each city and due to the shortage of studies on how citizens perceive multicultural urban environments, urban designers, planners, and policymakers are trying to find out how to provide a program that can respond well to all different cultural and ethnic characteristics. Accordingly, this study was conducted with the aim of finding out how citizens perceive natural cityscapes in multiethnic metropolises.

### **Methodology**

First, a set of criteria and indicators were identified via a review of the literature of landscape perception. Then, a questionnaire was developed in two parts: a section containing questions related to personal information and a section containing multiple-choice questions for measuring citizens' perceptions. The questionnaire contained a total of 72 items. Using the results of the 30 questionnaires distributed in the pilot phase and Cochran's formula, the size of the sample was measured to be 160. However, 168 questionnaires were distributed to increase the validity of the findings. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity of social distancing, the questionnaires were distributed digitally on social networks. On the other hand, due to the significance of field survey in this study, a number of questionnaires were filled out during interviews with different groups in terms of age and gender at different times using the "participative survey" method. In this type of interview, the participants are interviewed on-site while walking around in an area with which they are familiar so that their experience, perception, and interpretation in the real environment and while moving around can be evaluated.

The qualitative content analysis method was used to analyze the data collected via the interviews. The recorded audio file of each interview was transcribed and the semantic segments were extracted and transferred to the online questionnaire. Finally, the information about the interviewees' perceptual differences collected from all questionnaires was compared using the ANOVA method and was analyzed using the SPSS software.

## Results and Discussion

As it was mentioned before, the aim of this study was to investigate the differences in citizens' perceptions of urban landscapes based on their ethnic and cultural characteristics. To this end, a structured questionnaire was developed based on the variables of landscape perception using the 5-point Likert scale. A study of the individual characteristics of the participants revealed no significant variance and diversity between them. This seems to have controlled the intervening variables to the extent possible. Therefore, comparative tests were decided to be used for analysis of the collected data. The one-way analysis of variance test proved to be the most compatible test with the requirements of this study. The obtained value for the Cronbach's alpha showed that this study has good reliability. The four factors of "place of birth", "duration of residence", "level of education" and "ethnic characteristics" were evaluated due to the significant differences in the perception of urban landscapes.

## Conclusion

In general, the background of citizens is very influential in how they perceive their city and urban landscapes. Newcomers to a city are confronted with a new image that may vastly differ from their mental images. How people perceive and relate to this new image depends on many factors, including urban design and organization. The reason is that cities and their components shape the pattern of citizen's interaction with urban environments and other urban residents. In addition, citizens' perception of and relationship with their city and urban landscapes can change over time. In most cases, this change is positive and strengthens the bond between the two. Urban design can improve citizens' experience of their presence in urban environments, creating a positive mental image and establishing effective communication.

The emergence of new demands from and expectations of cities and urban landscapes among citizens can also affect their perception. Higher levels of education, intercity and overseas travels as well as increased awareness and knowledge can positively affect the process of changes in urban landscapes because the more citizens care about urban environments and landscapes, the more demands are made from policymakers and officials and this can have a positive impact on urban designs and plans.

**Keyword:** multiethnicity, landscape perception, perceptual differences, urban planning, Karaj landscape

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