Cultural Identity in Conservation of the Cultural Landscape values in Uraman Takht Village- Iran

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Abstract: Identity is the basis and foundation of the cultural landscape. Despite the emphasis of international documents and charters on its various aspects and necessity, today, the cultural landscape is threatened by extinction due to changes of many parameters. Accordingly, it is crucial to find an approach that can sustain cultural identity and its values in the changing world of the twenty-first century. Given the qualitative and the changing nature of cultural identity, achieving an approach which can lead to its continuation is not straightforward. By reviewing and analyzing international conventions and documents, on the one hand, and expert opinions, on the other hand, the present study, therefore, aimed to find out how the approach of cultural landscape values conservation can lead to the continuation of cultural identity in the natural and cultural heritage of Uraman Takht. This paper employed qualitative research methods as a basis for data collection and analysis, which primarily involved the use of content analysis along with field observations and interviews with stakeholders and indigenous residents.

Keywords: Cultural identity; Conservation; Cultural landscape; value; Uraman Takht.

1. Introduction

One of the main advances in recent decades is conservation of ethnographic landscapes and the identity of locations for indigenous communities. Cultural and natural values form the identity and personality of cultural landscapes [1]. Rossler asserts that the cultural landscapes indicate an interwoven network of natural and cultural values whose identity are the identity and culture of individuals [2]. Cultural identity includes the ways people communicate with cultural landscapes. This communication is achieved due to awareness of natural and cultural values. Moreover, the values create a distinct identity which is the result of communication between people and landscapes [3]. Cultural identity is the basis of cultural heritage and values of cultural landscapes are the basis of cultural identity. The local and native people who are the constructor and keepers of cultural landscape, consider location values as the inseparable part of their cultural identity. Indigenous people live in the landscape and consider the identity, history and nature as the values of cultural
landscape which they have maintained from past to present [4]. From Taylor and Mitchell approach (2016), the landscape reflects the identity. The aim of conservation of cultural landscape is transfer of international prominent values to the next generation. The transfer of these values leads to continuation of the cultural identity of human beings [5]. Therefore, the main research question is what approach could make the cultural identity persistent in natural and cultural heritage? The main aim of this study is to realize the cultural identity and prominent values of the cultural landscape in various communities and finding the appropriate approach for their continuation with emphasis on Uraman Takht historical village. Thus, based on review and investigation of international documents and conventions and analysis of the viewpoints of theorists and their explanation in Uraman Takht case study, it tried to achieve this objective and then investigate the role of local people in the protection and continuation of the cultural identity of Uraman. Thus, this study is considered qualitative in terms of research question and achievement of objective and in order to investigate the related literature to prominent international values in the cultural landscape, documentary study and content analysis are used. In the next phase, in order to realize the prominent values of the cultural landscape of the Uraman Takht city and the role of local people, three different methods have been used for data the collection, including 1) participatory observation, photography and daily note; 2) Documentary and descriptive study and observation and 3) structured and semi-structured interview.

2. Literature review

With the aim of recognizing the prominent international value of cultural landscapes based on this definition that the landscape is the result of joint interaction between man and nature, the theorists of this field have addressed recognition of the value according to two important criteria of man and nature. Mitchell is one of the pioneers in offering a new classification of values based on the cultural landscape. He classifies value in cultural landscapes into six main categories: 1) environmental values, 2) cultural values, 3) spiritual values, 4) educational values, 5) scientific values and 6) recreational values. Brown et al consider landscape protection approach in linking nature conservation and culture and promotion of participation with local inhabitants of that landscape and believe that this approach protects the cultural landscape based on the relationship between people and nature over time. Traditional land use patterns that have shaped many cultural landscapes in the world contribute to biodiversity [6]. Accordingly, Brown and Mitchell first pay attention to simultaneous consideration of natural and cultural values in the protection of cultural perspective; then, referring to the preservation of traditional patterns of sustainable use of land by local people emphasizes on preservation of intangible values and introduce intangible heritage as guarantee of preservation of natural values. Mitchell and Buggy consider the cultural landscape as including material and immaterial, natural, spiritual, and cultural factors [7].

In addition, Rossler considers cultural landscape as the interrelationship between culture and nature, tangible and intangible heritage, biodiversity and culture and points out that these components represent a strong link between the essence of culture and human identity [8]. Moreover, Stovel classifies cultural landscape values into three categories: historical-documentary values, artistic value, creativity and cultural values [9]. One of the most important issues that most theorists point out in terms of values in cultural landscape is intangible values.
Gustave Aroaz, based on the provisions of St. Antonio Statement, introduces value in relation to a cultural perspective, including value of identity, historical value, material value, social value and economic value [10]. Taylor agrees with Mitchell on preservation of cultural landscape values and states that a successful approach to protection of cultural, urban and rural landscape is consideration of natural values to the same extent as cultural values, maintaining traditional communication with the location and participation of people in protection of places where they live and work [11].

Francesco Bandarin also emphasizes on intangible values in cultural landscape protection and assets that the domain of cultural heritage is not limited to monuments, archaeological sites and objects rather it includes traditions and lifestyles inherited from our ancestors such as oral tradition, performing arts, social activities, celebrations, natural and universal knowledge and the knowledge of production of local products are generally defined as intangible values [12]. As claimed by Fidlen and Yokilehtot state: "Today’s tendency is towards a wider perception of cultural heritage as a concept that brings all the signs of human achievements over time" [13]. In this case, Convention 1972 of the UNESCO World Heritage Center could be mentioned, which deals with protection of natural and cultural heritage values of the world and in particular its transformation in 1992 and consideration of the concept of cultural landscape by defining the common work of man and nature and paying attention to the cultural landscape values including local people, biodiversity and cultural diversity [14].

UNESCO World Heritage Center classifies cultural landscape into three categories: 1) openly defined perspectives: designed and constructed on purpose by human being where gardens and artificial landscapes which are usually associated with religious buildings or memorials are placed, 2) evolved organic: this kind of landscape has been achieved from social, economic, administrative and religious obligations and its present form has evolved in association with its natural environment and in response to it, and 3) associative cultural landscape: this category includes that kind of perspective on the World Heritage List which is justified by religious and ethnic superiority, artistic or cultural elements of the natural element rather than material cultural evidence that may not be that much prominent or even absent [15]. By reviewing the content categorized by the UNESCO World Heritage Center, it can be concluded that values are in four main categories: cultural value, natural value, tangible value and intangible value. All these values are formed and sustained in connection of man and his environment and sustained. The World Heritage Center considers the aim of protecting cultural landscapes as the preservation of its prominent values which in addition to protection of cultural values considers protection of natural values and intangible value important.

After approval of the cultural landscape in World Heritage Convention in 1992, various specialized meetings and conventions were dealing with conservation in cultural perspectives. In this regard, it is possible to refer to Florence declaration 2014 on heritage and landscape as human values. This declaration focuses on cultural diversity, heritage and landscape values. The statement considers landscape as an integral part of the heritage and states that the perspective has tangible and intangible values. Florence statement considers biodiversity as a value which should be preserved. This statement has introduced utilization of local knowledge in relation with modern knowledge as one
of the landscape protection approaches [16]. According to the studies, the basis of the identity in a cultural perspective are natural and cultural values which have two dimensions of tangible and intangible. Figure 1 represents values in a cultural landscape which constitute the foundation of identity.

Figure 1: cultural landscape identity

3. Materials and Methods

The research approach is qualitative and the main strategies of study include qualitative strategy for recognition of the status quo, historical interpretative strategy for recognition of the phenomenon and the studied sample is in the past and the logical argumentative strategy is in development of conceptual framework of the study. For this study first for review of the literature related to prominent international values in the cultural landscape, documentary method and content analysis have been used. In the next stage, in order to recognize the prominent values of the cultural landscape of Uraman Takht, three different methods have been used for data collection: 1) participatory observation, photography and daily note; 2) Documentary and descriptive study and observation and 3) structured and semi-structured interview. Part of the collected data is related to the researcher’s presence in the field of research and recording data through photography, note taking and participatory observation. The total obtained data from this section is descriptive and used to support the information obtained from interviews. In this section, the researcher has collected and recorded the required information through filed study.

The method of study and documentary and descriptive observation include collection of data and published and not published documents about the case study; these resources include qualitative-analytical and quantitative- descriptive information published by researchers, government agencies, consulting engineers, private institutions and companies.

The obtained information in this way is useful in becoming aware of physical, historical, cultural, social, economic and proposed plans and projects around the studied area. In addition, data collection through deep interview tool for sharing views and opinions of “executives”, “professionals” and “local residents” is another major strategy of this research. For this purpose, interviews were conducted in three phases: the first interviewed community includes “executive directors” at the provincial level of the Government, Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism departments of Kurdistan,
Municipality and City Council in Uraman area. In the second phase, “experts, including designers, planners, project executives and researchers” are interviewed who were active in relevant agencies and organizations at the provincial level and non-native specialists such as university professors. In the third stage, “local residents of Uraman area” were interviewed. It is noteworthy that the questions of interviews for each group were prepared individually based on the main objectives.

The interview with managers and experts was done in deep and semi-structured way with certain questions; Moreover, the interview with local residents Uraman was also in deep and semi-structured way and it tried to make no limitation for audiences in responding and to make the mentality of the interviewer not directly influential. Deep interview indicates the face to face contract of interviewer and respondent. The range of interview varies from structured status or a thread of planned questions to informal and unstructured conversation about the intended subject of interviewing [17]. The interview is a kind of exploratory research that is used to explain the information obtained from participatory observation and has a supportive and supporting role for descriptive data. The methodology of this research in review of the views of local residents of the Uraman area of Kurdistan is qualitative ethnographic approach. In the studied sample, more than 100 interviews were conducted with native inhabitants of the Uraman region from 2013 to 2016. The method of data collection in this section was based on a deep semi-structured interview and participatory observation.

4. Results

4.1. Outstanding values of Uraman Takht’s cultural landscape

Recognizing Uraman Takht’s Cultural Landscape Uraman Takht is a village in the Oraman region of Kurdistan province, locate in the west of Iran. Uraman Takht’s cultural landscape can be introduced as a small part of the Oraman Cultural Region. Oraman is a cultural district where the age of living comes to thousands of years [18]. Indigenous peoples in this mountainous area have, over time, being very creative with their natural environment, and this creative process has continued in many respects to this day. Indigenous knowledge of the construction of stone houses on the slope of the mountain, the management of spring water and its division into gardens inherited from their ancestors, unique handicrafts, the ritual ceremony of Piran Shaliar, which has become a symbol of the cultural identity of Uraman Takht, and the most important intangible heritage of the area, and the distinctive gardens in the form of terraces on the slope of mountains are all among the exceptional values of Uraman Takht’s cultural landscape (Fakohi, 2016). This intertwined structure of tangible and intangible values reminisce the past and the experience of the ancestors, as well as the identity and lifestyle of the Uraman people.

Figure2: Uraman Takht’s Cultural Landscape
As a result of researches, field studies and interview with indigenous people, the values of the cultural landscape of Uraman through which it is possible to maintain and continue cultural identity are introduced in two groups of natural and cultural values. These values include tangible and intangible dimensions.

4.1.1. Natural values:

In this area, 117 bird species, 23 species of mammals, 17 reptile species and 242 plant varieties have been identified. The most important vegetation in this area is oak and Pistacia Atlantica (wild pistachio) forests. Its animal species include caracal, goat, brown bears, leopard, vulture, osprey and golden eagles and Partridge [19]. This richness of biodiversity is a reflection of the unique natural geography of Uraman region. Local people of Uraman use most herbs for pharmaceutical purposes [20]. Due to being located in a mountainous and impassable area, Uraman region is less exposed to pollution and has a clean climate, which led to the cultivation of organic fruits in this area that will have many economic benefits. The mountains, oak forests and the wilderness nature and amazing valleys of Uraman are very attractive [21]. Many natural elements bring different meanings when combined with beliefs of people. In Uraman, Sirvan River and Shahou Mountain and Kosalan are mythic symbols that play important role in ancient poetry and literature. Another important natural element is Pistacia Atlantica (wild pistachio) which due to various medicinal uses is considered a sacred tree and planted on graves of big people [22].

4.1.2. Cultural values:

One of the cultural values is documentary and historical value. Uraman village has an old texture with its habitat dating to thousands of years. One of its symptoms has been a discovery of property transaction documents in Uraman related to the time of the Parthians [23]. There are two historic monuments of the tomb and house of Pir Shaliyar which are historical and important. In the northern part of Uraman village and on a hill overlooking the village, there are traces of walls and pillars indicating its oldness and being ancient. According to the inhabitants, the oldest texture of village was located on the north side of the village next to the abyss called "Tanoure Dave" and near "Hanoudga" spring [24]. Another cultural landscape values is its architectural value. The architectural value in cultural landscape includes the creativity of human interaction with nature for living and its related technologies. For example "Uraman Takht village which is located at the end of Uraman valley and on its steep slope of this valley in west-east direction in front of northern side of the Takht mountain" [25] have stone and dry stone architecture. The roofs are made with the trees in the same area and are blended in a new way with the bedrock. Sometimes the cliff is part of the wall of house, foundation or other components such as stairs.

The artistic values play an important role in the cultural landscape of Uraman. The Uraman cultural landscape is an evolved organic landscape whose artistic beauty is intrinsic to nature, including the artistic combination of settlements with rocks; artistic Stoning inspired the natural forms of stone arrangement. The men's clothing, part of women's clothing, shoes, socks, gloves, hats, agricultural tools, all kinds of baskets, all kinds of woven fabrics (cloth, waves, Glim, Jajim), felt, spindle and Tasbih are handmade products of this village which are all made using natural fibers from animal hair to wood and other natural materials in that area are in a creative and artistic way [26].
Identity of people in Uraman and in interviews, almost all respondents referred to. The existence of holy people, places and rituals associated with them is one of the most important spiritual values in Uraman Takht. Pir Shaliyar is one of the holy and mythical personalities in the Uraman whose house, tomb and prayer house are considered as holy places of Uraman Takht. The rites and traditions related to ceremony of Pir Saliyar have continued from the past to present. This ceremony is held with the participation of local peoples every year like many religious ceremonies in the world. The existence of holy trees which are mostly wild pistachios represents a deep link between the spiritual beliefs of people and nature [27].

Figure 3: Local productions in the uraman takht

Figure 4: Pire Shalyar ceremony in the uraman takht
The cultural landscape has been formed over the years from past to present with the continuation of positive interaction of human with nature. Protection of cultural perspectives as an achievement of experience and lifestyle of people has a significant role in survival of values and their transmission to the next generation. The traditional knowledge beside new knowledge, paying attention to local languages, different foods, and native management system along with modern management and updating handicrafts will preserve values and promote identity where native people play a very important role. Cultural landscape values are part of its identity; thus, it is possible to expect the survival of cultural landscapes while preserving values.

4.2. The Role of Indigenous People in the Conservation of Cultural Landscape and Continuity of Cultural Identity in Uraman Takht

The cultural landscape is an ideology in which the earth is a spiritual concept, rather than material, and in that human being is an integral part of the earth. Oral traditions, traditional practices, and deep relationship between humans and living and non-living components of the environment are the fundamental values of the landscape which reveal the role of the human in the cultural landscape [28]. Andrew and Buggey consider human and human culture as an integral and interconnected component of the earth, which has created the cultural landscape. Further, they believe that this all-encompassing connection of human with the nature and the creation of intangible values are the key factors in the life of the cultural landscape. Francesco Bandarin highlights the role of indigenous communities in preserving the cultural landscape, which includes the traditions and lifestyle inherited from ancestors, such as oral tradition, performing arts, social activities, rituals, celebrations, natural and global knowledge and knowledge of creating indigenous products, which are generally defined as intangible values. This intangible heritage is protected by indigenous people through their knowledge and skills, often passing on during rituals, celebrations and other social activities [29].

The viewpoint of Uraman’s indigenous inhabitants in preserving cultural landscapes and its identity is the basis for decision making. Local communities and indigenous people have understood the meaning of positive and peaceful interaction with the nature over the years and have demonstrated this understanding in their behaviors. They do not set free the opportunity of manipulating the cultural landscape and guarantee the conservation of their heritage for the future generations. Hence, if the decisions made for the Uraman pass through the filter of its people, it will restore the path to development which is the product of the comprehensive recognition of various generations of the ecosystem. As a result, first nature is essential in shaping Uraman’s cultural landscape and lifestyle of indigenous people, and then the local community plays a critical role in the continuity of life and the preservation of its landscape and identity.

5. Conclusions

The studies show that cultural landscape includes natural and cultural values which have tangible and intangible dimensions. These values indicate the basis of cultural identity and their
maintenance and conservation leads to the maintenance of cultural identity. In this paper, in addition to introducing natural and cultural values in Uraman Takht, it was shown that these values define an identity for local communities. The study and recognition of the cultural landscape display how the indigenous people have shaped their cultural identity in accordance with their nature, and have been preserving it for many years, continuing to this day. Today, with the rapid changes and globalization and the new management practices in which indigenous people have no role, the cultural landscape and the root of it, i.e. the cultural identity, are in decline. The conservation of the cultural landscape is an approach that, by utilizing the participation of indigenous people, we can bring the knowledge of indigenous people, which has been gradually completed over many historic periods, to the present. Relying on the worldview of these peoples, and in light of the changes in today’s world, they will regain their identity and sustain it. The cultural identity developed in Uraman village has been and continues to be based on the social participation in line with the nature. Therefore, conservation of Uraman’s cultural landscape as a process of engaging people in conjunction with nature and working together will not only enhance their cultural identity, but also prolongs their life.

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