From Imitation to Authenticity of Space: A Theoretical Analysis of the Placelessness Phenomenon in Iranian Residential Interior Design

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Abstract

This study investigates the pervasive crisis of "placelessness" within contemporary Iranian residential interior design, a phenomenon precipitated by the indiscriminate emulation of Western paradigms. This trend has engendered a marked cultural divergence, resulting in living environments devoid of identity. To empirically substantiate this premise, a quantitative visual content analysis of 44 contemporary residential projects was conducted, confirming the statistical dominance of the imitative trend (77.27%). Anchored in the foundational theories of Rapoport, Lefebvre, Bourdieu, and Norberg-Schulz, this research interrogates the sociological underpinnings of this approach. The theoretical analysis elucidates three critical challenges: the destabilisation of the traditional equilibrium between privacy and social interaction; acute spatial alienation stemming from the erosion of Genius Loci; and functional inefficiencies arising from a misalignment with indigenous cultural practices. To operationalise these findings, the study utilises two archetypal case studies: Case Study A exemplifies the discord inherent in imitation, while Case Study B demonstrates the efficacy of the proposed alternative. Consequently, the article advances "Intelligent Localisation" as a forward-looking paradigm. This approach advocates for a rigorous, analytical reinterpretation of cultural concepts to generate novel, contextually resonant spatial forms. It champions a culturally user-centred design process, augmented by tools such as Space Syntax, to reconcile the schism between abstract design logic and the authentic "lived space" of inhabitants, ultimately reinstating a vital sense of belonging.

Keywords

Iranian Interior Design, Placelessness, Cultural Identity, Intelligent Localisation, Genius Loci.

Introduction

The pervasive sense of "placelessness" in contemporary Iranian residential design poses a fundamental challenge to the architectural discipline. In recent decades, the built environment has witnessed a marked cultural divergence, characterised by the uncritical emulation of Western paradigms rather than the adoption of an intelligent, localised approach. This phenomenon transcends mere aesthetic shifts; it has precipitated a gradual erosion of cultural identity, resulting in living spaces that, while physically extant, fail to convey a sense of rootedness or belonging to their inhabitants (Afshar et al., 2016). Recent scholarship highlights that this disconnect fosters a profound ambiguity between globalist aspirations and localist values within contemporary Iranian architecture (Ghanbari Far, 2025).

The proposition that the built environment acts not merely as infrastructure but as a physical manifestation of a society's culture, values, and history remains a foundational principle in modern architectural theory (Rapoport, 1969). Nonetheless, Iranian residential design has faced a critical disjuncture: a schism between spatial form and indigenous culture. This misalignment, often manifesting as the superficial replication of Western patterns without deep engagement with the local context, results in what has been termed "symbolic and visual pollution" (Afshar et al., 2016). Neglecting these cultural principles in facade and interior design contributes significantly to the visual disturbance of the urban landscape and a diminishing sense of community in modern metropolitan contexts (Fadaei, 2025).

This trend has reduced traditional Iranian architecture to a mimetic practice, undermining its foundational heritage. Such imitation remains largely superficial, prioritising formal aspects while detaching from the socio-economic and cultural realities of the context (Mousavi et al., 2022).

This article employs a comprehensive theoretical framework to elucidate this challenge. Drawing on seminal theories of culture and space, specifically the perspectives of Amos Rapoport, Henri Lefebvre, Pierre Bourdieu, and Christian Norberg-Schulz. This study analyses the sociological and psychological roots of imitation. It subsequently investigates the practical consequences of this approach, identifying critical challenges such as privacy imbalance and functional misalignment with daily habits. Ultimately, this research aims not only to critique the phenomenon of imitation but to advocate for "Intelligent Localisation" as the sole viable strategy for creating spaces that leverage modern amenities while preserving cultural roots and restoring a vital sense of belonging.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Understanding the tension between imitation and identity in interior design necessitates a rigorous examination of the theoretical foundations governing the culture–space relationship. This relationship is not unidirectional but a dynamic, reciprocal process: culture imbues space with meaning, identity, and memory, and in turn, space reproduces and reinforces cultural values. Theorists in this field posit that built environments are not merely physical settings but tangible reflections of a society's beliefs, habits, and traditions. Recent studies further emphasise that neglecting these socio-cultural dimensions compromises social sustainability, as space must foster solidarity and participation to be truly meaningful (Rahimi et al., 2024). Furthermore, disregarding these cultural principles in facade and interior design leads to "visual pollution" and a diminishing sense of community in modern metropolitan contexts (Fadaei, 2025).

Amos Rapoport, employing an anthropological approach, proposed that house form is primarily a product of culture rather than merely a response to physical constraints. He argues that culture is the principal determinant in shaping vernacular space, while factors such as climate and materials merely play a moderating role. Thus, Rapoport views space as a mirror of culture, manifesting a community's beliefs and customs in architectural form. He constructed this theory by challenging the technological and environmental determinism that dominated architectural thought, demonstrating that communities in

similar climatic regions often construct homes with entirely different spatial organisations due to distinct value systems and social norms (Rapoport, 1969).

Henri Lefebvre, a Marxist philosopher, advanced this relationship with his theory of "the production of space," positing that space is not a passive container but a social product continuously produced and reproduced by social relations, particularly power dynamics (Lefebvre, 1974). Lefebvre's triad - perceived space, conceived space, and lived space -illustrates how the abstract logic of planners and capitalists (conceived space) can dominate residents' meaningful experiences (lived space), leading to alienation.

Lefebvre's dialectical triad defines three inseparables yet distinct dimensions of space:

- Spatial practice (perceived space): the physical, everyday reality of space as experienced through routines, networks, infrastructures, and movement patterns that ensure social cohesion.
- Representations of space (conceived space): the abstract, conceptual realm of professional architects, planners, engineers, developers, and governments, embodied in maps, codes, zoning laws, and plans, which Lefebvre argues is the dominant dimension, deeply entwined with power and production relations.
- Representational spaces (lived space): the space as directly inhabited, suffused with symbols, memories, meanings, and imaginations. Space is the realm of art, resistance, and everyday life. Lived space is always subject to the dominance of conceived space but never completely erased by it (Lefebvre, 1974).
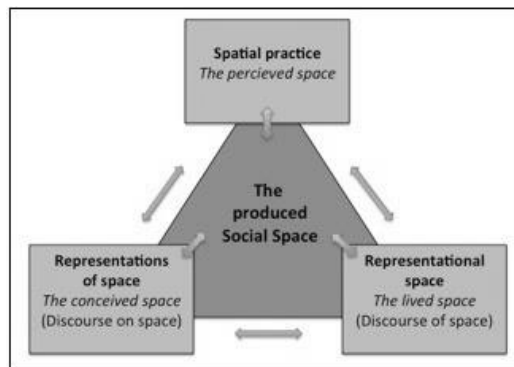

Figure 1: *Lefebvre's dialectical triad (Briercliffe, 2024)*

Pierre Bourdieu bridged macrostructures and individual micro-actions through his concepts of habitus and field. He demonstrated how spatial preferences and interior design taste express habitus, a system of durable, transposable dispositions, and serve as a field for reproducing social structures. In this view, the built environment becomes a physical manifestation of class relations where social distinctions are legitimised through taste (Bourdieu, 1984). Finally, Christian Norberg-Schulz, adopting a phenomenological stance, emphasises lived experience and the concept of Genius Loci (the spirit of place). Like Rapoport, he fiercely criticises placelessness in modern architecture, arguing that modernism's neglect of the spirit of place deprives human beings of true dwelling. He asserts that a successful building must understand and embody Genius Loci to evoke belonging. However, his theory has been critiqued for potential romanticism, as his focus on historically rooted places may oversimplify the dynamic nature of place-making in multicultural worlds (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Together, these theoretical frameworks provide complementary lenses for understanding the complex interplay between the built environment and society. This profound understanding enables a rigorous analysis of the challenges arising from imitation in Iranian interior design, as visualised in the conceptual model below.
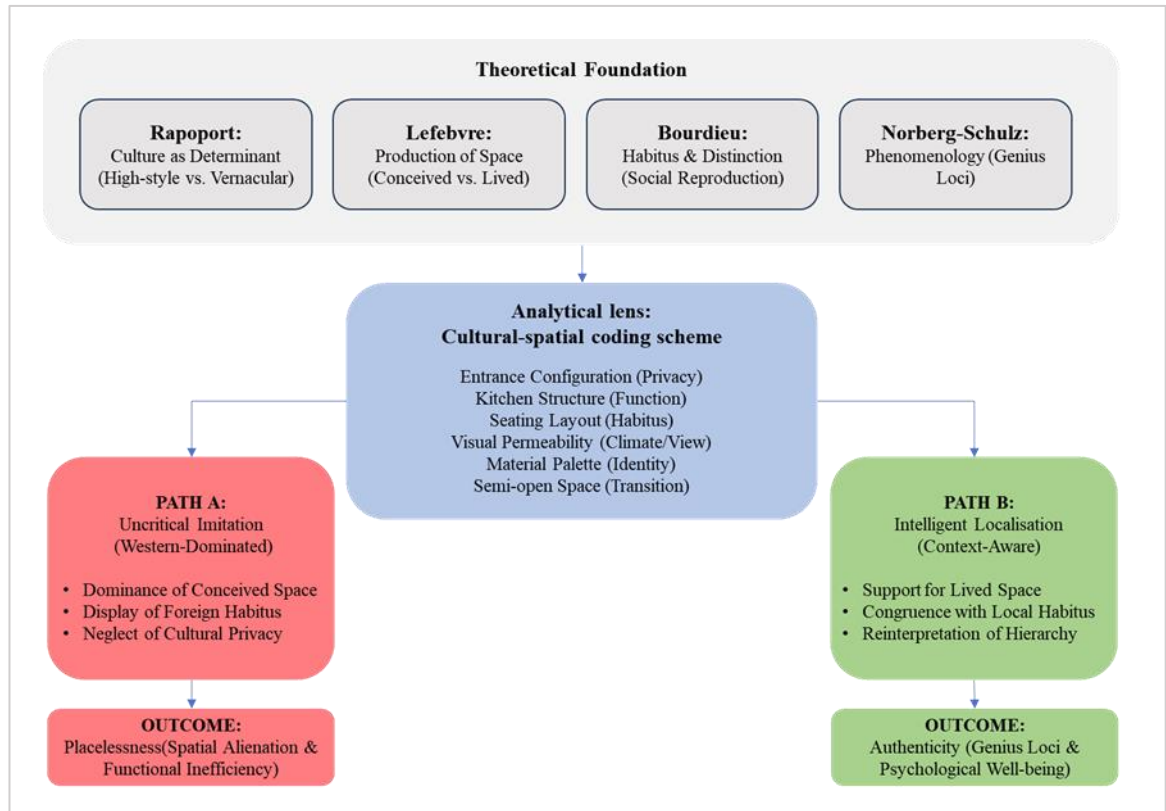
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Figure 2: *Conceptual Model of Research, (Hosseinpourshiraz, Dastranj, 2025)*

Analysis of the Current Situation: Placelessness in Contemporary Iranian Interior Design

Examining the imitation of Western design patterns in Iranian residential interiors reveals that this approach has created spaces alienated from their cultural context and social ecology. This has given rise to three major challenges, which are analysed below through the lenses of Amos Rapoport, Henri Lefebvre, Pierre Bourdieu, and Christian Norberg-Schulz.

1. *Imbalance in Privacy and Social Interaction:*

One of the most fundamental challenges is the disruption of the traditional spatial system that maintained a delicate balance between privacy and social interaction. This aligns with recent findings emphasising that disregarding social sustainability parameters like participation and solidarity in spatial design directly weakens social interactions (Rahimi & Shahamat, 2024). This can be particularly analysed through Rapoport's view that culture is the principal determinant of house form. In Iranian vernacular architecture, elements such as central courtyards, hierarchical entrances, and the separation of Andaruni and Biruni spaces reflected cultural values of privacy, intimacy, and hospitality (Mousavi et al., 2022). However, imitation of Western "open-plan" models ignores these concepts. While such layouts may work in other cultures, they conflict with the Iranian social context, where a clear division between guest and family areas is essential. This clash between imported forms and indigenous needs produces spaces in which comfort and control over personal boundaries - especially during traditional gatherings - are weakened (Afshar et al., 2016).

2. *Spatial Alienation and Loss of Identity:*

Blind imitation of Western models leads to spatial alienation, a phenomenon that is described as placelessness, spaces devoid of Genius Loci, the spirit of place (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). According to his phenomenological approach, a home must embody a unique identity emerging from interaction with the natural and cultural features of its site. Imitative designs, by neglecting this spirit, create placeless environments that could exist anywhere and convey no sense of rootedness to inhabitants, gradually producing a feeling of un-homeliness (Gillespie, 2019). Bourdieu's concept of habitus further explains this phenomenon: our spatial choices reflect dispositions formed through lived experience within a particular social class. Imitating forms that clash with the local habitus results not in reinforced identity but in confusion and inner conflict, producing spaces designed more for display than for living.

Figure 3: *Mollabashi House, (Unknown, 2025)*

Figure 4: *Recent designed apartment in Iran (Seyfi, 2022)*

3. *Functional Inefficiency and Misalignment with Daily Habits:*

This structural and functional imitation generates tangible daily-life challenges that Lefebvre's production of space theory helps illuminate. Lefebvre distinguishes between conceived space (the abstract logic of designers) and lived space (residents' meaningful experience). Often, imitative designs reflect conceived spaces originated elsewhere, ignoring the lived space and daily habits of the target group, resulting in functional inadequacy (Farhadi, 2023). In many Eastern cultures, including Iran, floor-seating traditions for meals, family gatherings, and rest remain deeply rooted. Western interior design typically centres on raised furniture (tables, chairs, sofas) and does not accommodate flexible spaces for floor seating. Consequently, spaces become unsuitable for spreading floor-seating arrangements or creating an intimate setting for family gatherings, reducing both comfort and opportunities for close social interaction (Mortazavi et al., 2022). Western-style kitchens are designed for convenience and small-scale meal preparation rather than the extensive food processing common in Iranian households. Iranian cooking requires larger preparation areas, sufficient washing zones, and specialised storage for spices and traditional food items. Imitating Western kitchen layouts can result in insufficient workspace, poor equipment arrangement, and difficulty carrying out routine Iranian cooking tasks, leading to dissatisfaction and reduced kitchen efficiency. Every culture has specific storage needs. In Iran, items such as guest bedding, special-occasion serving dishes, and traditional objects require dedicated storage spaces. Western-inspired designs often omit these needs, resulting in cluttered homes and reduced functional and visual quality (Shayegani & Joklová, 2023).

Figure 5: *Seating on floor for dining in Persian culture, (Taylor, 2013)*

Quantitative Content Analysis:
Establishing the Prevalence of Imitation through Cultural Coding

To move beyond subjective observation and empirically substantiate the prevalence of the imitative trend, a systematic Quantitative Visual Content Analysis was conducted. This step addresses the methodological necessity for a rigorous, data-driven evaluation of contemporary design outputs. The study examined a sample of 44 contemporary residential apartment projects (built between 2011 and 2025) published on the Iranian Contemporary Architects Office website (https://www.caoi.ir), a leading repository for national architectural projects. Methodology and Coding Scheme: To avoid arbitrary categorisation, a specific Cultural-Spatial Coding Scheme was developed, grounded in the study's theoretical framework (specifically Lefebvre's dialectical triad and Bourdieu's concept of Habitus). This scheme evaluates each project against six distinct analytical criteria, identifying whether the design logic aligns with "Western-Dominated Imitation" (Code 1) or "Intelligent Localisation" (Code 0).

Table 1: *The Cultural-Spatial Coding Scheme*

Analytical Criteria	Code 1: Western-Dominated	Code 0: Intelligent Localisation
1. Entrance Configuration	Immediate Entry: Direct opening into the primary living area; elimination of the transitional filter.	Hierarchical Entry: Presence of a defined vestibule (modern *Hashti*) to control sightlines and privacy.
2. Kitchen Structure	Showcase/Open Kitchen: Fully integrated island layout focused on visual aesthetics; lacks heavy-duty workspace.	Hybrid Model: Functional separation (Clean/Dirty kitchen) or flexible partitioning suited for indigenous culinary practices.
3. Seating Layout	Rigid Furniture-Based: Space designed exclusively for raised furniture; prohibits traditional floor-seating patterns.	Flexible Arrangement: Inclusion of platforms or open zones accommodating both furniture and traditional floor-based gathering (*Neshiman*).
4. Visual Permeability	Absolute Transparency: Extensive curtain walls forcing reliance on heavy curtains; disregards climatic/privacy filters.	Filtered Light: Use of modern lattice screens, louvres, or brick patterns (reinterpreting *Mashrabiya*) to modulate light and view.
5. Material Palette	Alien & Polished: Predominance of polished stone, composites, or non-contextual classical ornamentation.	Textural & Vernacular: Use of brick, wood, or textured cement reflecting the local *Genius Loci*.
6. Semi-open Space	Decorative/Absent: Narrow, non-functional balconies or total elimination to maximize indoor area.	liveable Extension: Deep, functional terraces serving as an extension of the "lived space" (vertical courtyard).

Data Analysis and Findings: Each of the 44 projects was analysed visually based on its plans and interior photographs. A project was categorized as "Imitative/Placeless" if it exhibited "Code 1" features in four or more of the six criteria.

The quantitative results revealed a significant statistical dominance of the imitative trend:

- Prevalence of Imitation: 34 projects out of 44 (77.27%) were categorized as structurally imitative, failing to integrate local architectural logic in the majority of the analysed criteria.
- Intelligent Localisation: Conversely, only 10 projects out of 44 (22.73%) demonstrated a consistent adherence to the principles of Intelligent Localisation.

This data provides robust empirical evidence that the "placelessness" critique presented in this study is not merely theoretical but reflects the prevailing reality of the market. It confirms that the dominance of "conceived space" (Lefebvre) and the adoption of a globalised "Habitus" (Bourdieu) are systematically embedded in the majority of contemporary production.

Archetypal Case Study Analysis (A):
The Embodiment of Imitation and Placelessness:

To empirically ground the theoretical challenges discussed, this section analyses an archetypal case study: "Project A," a contemporary luxury apartment in Tehran. This archetype represents a prevalent trend in Iranian residential design, characterised by an eclectic mix of Neoclassical (manifested in wall mouldings and details) and Minimalist (evident in furniture and colour palette) styles.

Description of the Case Study:

Project A features a design driven entirely by global aesthetic trends, resulting in a fully "Open-Concept" plan. The main entrance opens directly into the primary living and kitchen space, eliminating any transitional zone or hierarchical entrance sequence. A critical element in traditional Iranian architecture for mediating public and private realms. The kitchen is designed as a minimalist "showcase" island, fully integrated into the living area. While visually aligned with Western trends, its layout lacks the functional workspace and storage required for the extensive preparation central to Iranian culinary habits. The living space is furnished with large, low-profile Western-style sofas, orienting the entire space around media consumption and formal seating, with no provision for the deep-rooted cultural practice of floor-seating. The material and colour palettes are aggressively neutral (whites, greys, beiges), severing any connection to local materials or regional aesthetic sensibilities.
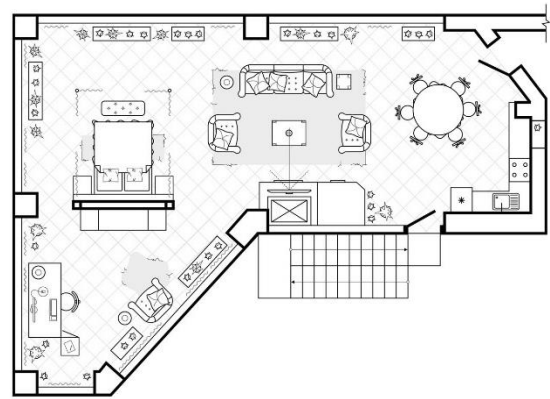

Figure 6: *Typical Residential Open plan (Hamilton, 2024)*

Analysis through the Theoretical Framework (Project A):

1. *Amos Rapoport (Culture as Determinant):*

Rapoport's seminal thesis posits that house form is a direct reflection of cultural values. Project A, however, stands as a direct antithesis to this principle; its form is not determined by indigenous culture but actively negates it. The elimination of hierarchical entrances and the Andaruni/Biruni distinction evidences a disregard for the cultural imperatives of privacy and hospitality. Consequently, the spatial organisation does not reflect the "choices" of the local culture as Rapoport would argue but rather the imposition of an external cultural morphology, rendering the space culturally illegible to its inhabitants.

2. *Henri Lefebvre (The Production of Space):*

Lefebvre's dialectical triad, specifically the tension between "Conceived" and "Lived" space, is critical to this analysis. Project A represents a quintessential example of the dominance of Conceived Space over Lived Space. The design emerges from an abstract, logic driven by global trends, market demands for 'luxury', and the developer's imperative for a commodified, replicable product. This logic effectively obliterates the Lived Space of the Iranian family; daily habits of cooking, rituals of floor-seating, and the nuanced social interactions of hospitality are sacrificed. Thus, the space is produced not as a home, but as a homogenous, abstract 'product' for consumption.

3. *Pierre Bourdieu (Habitus and Distinction):*

Bourdieu's theory elucidates the sociological drivers behind this imitation. The adoption of Neoclassical or Minimalist styles is not a functional choice but a social act of Distinction. It represents an attempt to display a specific Habitus that signifies global mobility, modernity, and elevated class status, distinguishing the

owner from those possessing a 'traditional' habitus. As Bourdieu argues, "taste" classifies the classifier. In this context, the space is designed for display, sacrificing the functional comfort of the local habitus (e.g., cooking, floor-seating) for the symbolic capital gained by aligning with a perceived superior, global aesthetic.

4. *Christian Norberg-Schulz (Genius Loci and Placelessness):*

This case study serves as a stark illustration of Placelessness, the core crisis identified by Norberg-Schulz in modern architecture. The space is intentionally disconnected from its specific locus (Tehran, Iran) which is the climate, light, and cultural history. By adopting a neutral, international style, the design eradicates any semblance of Genius Loci (the spirit of place), resulting in an abstract, non-contextual environment. Consequently, as Norberg-Schulz warns, this deprives inhabitants of the possibility of true Dwelling, fostering a profound sense of alienation and a lack of existential foothold.

Archetypal Case Study Analysis (B):
The Embodiment of Intelligent Localisation

To provide a constructive counter-narrative to Project A, Project B is introduced as an archetypal case study representing the principles of "Intelligent Localisation". This hypothetical project exemplifies a contemporary Iranian residence that consciously eschews imitation in favour of a rigorous, analytical reinterpretation of cultural spatial concepts.

Description of the Case Study:

Project B is a modern apartment that prioritises cultural functionality and identity. The plan is semi-open. Instead of an abrupt entry, it features a defined entrance, Hashti, a small transitional space that filters direct sightlines into the main living area, thus respecting the cultural value of privacy. The living area is subtly divided. It features a modern, formal seating area, but also a flexible Neshiman designed to accommodate both sofas and the cultural practice of floor-seating, perhaps through a slightly raised platform or flexible, open-floor planning. The design acknowledges the realities of Iranian culinary practices. It features a hybrid model: a minimalist clean kitchen or island open to the living area for simple tasks, but also a semi-enclosed, well-ventilated Matbakh designed for heavy-duty cooking, thus managing smells and mess without sacrificing the social aspect of a modern kitchen. The project thoughtfully employs local materials (e.g., brickwork, wood) and a controlled use of light. Large windows are filtered by modern interpretations of the Mashrabiya style, which reduces harsh sunlight and creates nuanced light and shadow patterns, a hallmark of traditional Iranian architecture.

Analysis through the Theoretical Framework (Project B):

1. *Amos Rapoport (Culture as Determinant):*

Project B stands as a validation of Rapoport's thesis. Here, the form is explicitly determined by culture rather than external aesthetics. The reinstatement of the entrance vestibule and the functional demarcation between public and private domains are direct spatial responses to the cultural imperatives of privacy and hospitality. Furthermore, the flexibility of the Neshiman acknowledges and accommodates indigenous somatic habits (such as floor-seating), proving that the form is chosen from within the cultural framework, not imposed upon it.

2. *Henri Lefebvre (The Production of Space):*

This project demonstrates a successful reconciliation between Conceived Space and Lived Space. The Conceived Space (the modern, semi-open plan) does not subjugate the Lived Space (the actual daily rituals of Iranian residents). The hybrid kitchen serves as the prime exemplar: it respects the Lived Space requirements of heavy cooking while simultaneously engaging with the Conceived desire for a modern,

social kitchen interface. This is not the abstract, commodified space Lefebvre critiques; rather, it is a socially produced space that prioritises and dignifies the inhabitants' authentic experience.

3. *Pierre Bourdieu (Habitus and Distinction):*

Project B manifests a distinct, more confident form of Distinction. Rather than seeking symbolic capital by mimicking a foreign Habitus (as seen in Project A), the designer and owner display distinction through cultural capital, a profound understanding and valorisation of their own heritage. The symbolic narrative of this space is not "I am modern like the West," but rather "I am modern and authentically Iranian." The Habitus reflected here is one of cultural confidence, where "taste" is defined by authenticity and critical reinterpretation rather than colonial mimicry.

4. *Christian Norberg-Schulz (Genius Loci and Placelessness):*

This project acts as a direct antidote to Placelessness, actively embodying the Genius Loci. By employing filtered light patterns reminiscent of traditional architecture, utilizing local materials, and organising space around specific cultural practices, the design is deeply rooted in its context. It is not an abstract object dropped into a site; it creates a rich, textured environment that, in Norberg-Schulz's terms, facilitates true Dwelling by providing an existential foothold and reinforcing the inhabitants' sense of belonging and identity.
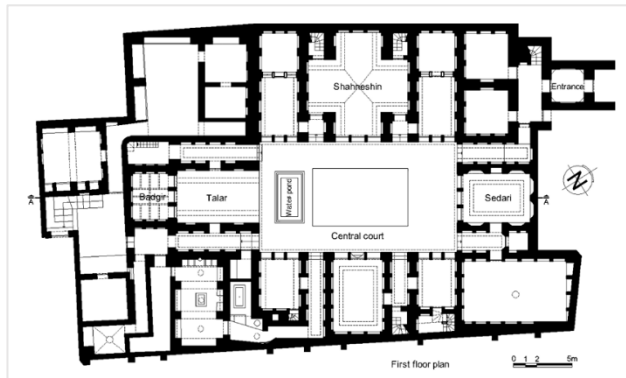

Figure 7: *First floor plan, Tehraniha house, Yazd (Hajighassemi, 2005)*

Figure 8: *Dehkadeh Iwan Villa (Hamzehlouei, 2023)*

Towards Intelligent Localisation: Strategies and Potentials

Following the analysis of the challenges arising from indiscriminate imitation, this study posits that the most effective remedy for reinstating identity and functionality in Iranian residential design is the adoption of "Intelligent Localisation". This approach transcends mere aesthetic remediation to establish itself as a theoretical and practical paradigm aimed at generating spaces that concurrently address contemporary exigencies while preserving their cultural roots (Gillespie, 2019).

Definition and Elaboration of Intelligent Localisation:

Intelligent localisation must be distinguished from the superficial application of traditional decorative elements such as kilims or antiques within a modern shell; a tokenistic approach that fails to address the structural depth of placelessness. Instead, it constitutes a rigorous process commencing with the analysis and reinterpretation of socio-cultural concepts, culminating in the generation of novel spatial forms and functions (Gillespie, 2019).

This approach is articulated through the theoretical lenses previously established:

- *In response to Rapoport*:
  Intelligent localisation reasserts the axiom that culture is the primary determinant of house form. Rather than mimicking Western typologies, design must investigate Iranian cultural exigencies, values, and rituals, generating forms that organically evolve from these insights.

- ▪ *In response to Lefebvre:*
  It serves as an act of resistance, offering a creative counter-narrative to the Conceived Space of global capitalism, which produces homogenised, commodified environments. By resuscitating the Lived Space, it enables inhabitants to forge meaningful connections with their surroundings, thereby mitigating spatial alienation.

- ▪ *In response to Bourdieu:*
  Rather than appropriating an external Habitus to accrue symbolic capital, this approach seeks to design spaces resonant with the indigenous Habitus of Iranian residents. The objective is to curate environments aesthetically and functionally tailored to authentic social practices, rather than mere performative display.

- ▪ *In response to Norberg-Schulz:*
  Intelligent localisation endeavours to reinstate Genius Loci within contemporary design. By synthesising vernacular attributes, such as natural light modulation, indigenous materials, and cultural patterns with modern forms, it fosters environments imbued with identity, rootedness, and a genuine sense of dwelling.

Implementation Strategies and Practical Measures:

Achieving intelligent localisation requires a multifaceted approach that rethinks the design process and leverages modern analytical tools.

1. *Creative Reinterpretation of Traditional Spatial Elements*

Rather than engaging in the uncritical mimicry of Western typologies, designers are encouraged to revisit the foundational roots of Iranian architecture to reinterpret key spatial elements through a contemporary, functional lens. This approach engenders spaces that retain their cultural identity while responding effectively to contemporary exigencies. Key elements include:

- ▪ *Light and Shadow:* In the traditional Iranian architectural canon, light transcended its role as mere illumination to become an active spatial agent capable of sculpting environments, evoking moods, and conveying metaphysical meaning. The strategic application of Mashrabiya screens, clerestory apertures, and stained glass historically generated subtle interplays of light that imbued spaces with aesthetic depth. In a modern reinterpretation, designers may utilise laser-cut metal screens, patterned wooden panels, or textured glass layers to modulate sunlight and cast intricate shadow patterns. Such interventions directly contribute to the revival of Norberg-Schulz's Genius Loci, endowing contemporary spaces with character and a profound sense of belonging (Fakharany, 2024).

- ▪ *Water and Vegetation:* The integration of water manifested centrally as a Howz and vegetation in traditional dwellings epitomised life and respite within arid climates. These elements functioned not merely as aesthetic additions but as passive cooling mechanisms creating microclimates, while simultaneously bolstering cultural symbolism (Sedighi & Mollazehi, 2017). Contemporary residential design can reinterpret this paradigm through the inclusion of internal courtyards, vertical green walls, or minimalist water features, thereby sustaining the inhabitants' vital connection to both nature and their architectural heritage.

- ▪ *Spatial Hierarchy:* Vernacular Iranian architecture codified privacy through a rigorous spatial hierarchy, transitioning from the fully public to the fully private domains. In modern residential contexts, where space is often constrained, this principle can be reconstituted by designing transitional vestibules that allow for pause and psychological decompression. Furthermore, the distinction between public and private zones can be achieved through the use of kinetic partitions or the subtle manipulation of floor and ceiling datums, rather than relying solely on rigid wall placements (Aznab et al., 2022).

2. *Utilising Analytical Tools*

To mitigate the reliance on subjective design judgements, architects must leverage scientific tools to rigorously investigate spatial and cultural requirements. These instruments facilitate a quantitative analysis of the interplay between spatial configuration and human behaviour, enabling designers to derive inspiration from latent socio-cultural logics rather than engaging in the superficial mimicry of forms. This analytical rigour is particularly pertinent when addressing complex sociological concepts such as Habitus, allowing the design process to transcend personal predilection.

Space Syntax stands as a paramount tool in this domain, offering the capacity to quantitatively analyse spatial relationships within both traditional and contemporary Iranian residences. It reveals how configurational properties such as visibility, connectivity, and accessibility—directly influence behavioural patterns (Hamzehnejad et al., 2022). By interrogating empirical data derived from traditional environments, designers can formulate precise guidelines for modern spaces that uphold appropriate levels of privacy and social interaction. This methodology reorients the design focus towards fundamental cultural logics rather than visual pastiche (Hillier & Hanson, 1984).

Complementing this, Behavioural Mapping provides an empirical framework for observing and recording the longitudinal patterns of inhabitant occupancy and movement. For instance, within an Iranian household, this method might expose a persistent preference for informal seating arrangements or floor-based dining, irrespective of the provision of formal Western-style furniture. Such objective data empowers designers to generate adaptable spaces that are attuned to indigenous cultural practices, rather than imposing hegemonic spatial models.

By synthesising the quantitative structural data from Space Syntax with the qualitative insights of Behavioural Mapping, designers can construct a robust scientific model that accurately articulates the Lived Space and Habitus of Iranian households. This comprehensive methodological approach establishes a solid empirical foundation for design. Furthermore, integrating principles of age-friendly and inclusive design is crucial for enhancing social sustainability in these environments (Fathollolumi & Mohseni, 2023).

3. *Culturally User-Centred Design*

Intelligent localisation necessitates a paradigm shift towards a design methodology that situates the authentic habits and lifestyles of Iranian users at the very centre of the process. Rather than prescribing a stylistic dogma, this approach endeavours to uncover and creatively address the specific exigencies of residents. It serves as a direct operational response to Henri Lefebvre's theoretical critique regarding the schism between Conceived Space (the abstract logic of the architect) and Lived Space (the inhabitants' actual experience). To bridge this divide, architectural practice must transition from a subjective artistic endeavour to a rigorous, research-driven process.

4. *Ethnographic Research:*

Prior to the commencement of design, it is imperative for architects to acquire a profound, empirical understanding of users' actual lifestyles, eschewing reliance on assumptions. This entails the application of qualitative methodologies such as direct observation, in-depth interviews, and behavioural mapping. Direct observation enables designers to document how inhabitants actually occupy space over time, revealing latent behavioural patterns that often differ from reported behaviour. Complementary interviews can elucidate underlying cultural values, familial customs (such as gathering rituals), and specific privacy requirements. Furthermore, mapping spatial usage recording trajectories, dwelling points, and activities provides a visual diagnostic of current spatial performance and identifies areas of friction.

5. *Participatory and Co-Creative Design:*

This strategy transforms users from passive consumers into active collaborators within the design ecosystem. Facilitating co-design workshops where family members engage with physical models or

accessible software allows for the direct integration of their Habitus into the spatial configuration, thereby enhancing their ability to envision and appropriate their future environment (Aminzadeh, 2012).

6. *Responding to Specific Cultural Needs:*

A culturally attuned, user-centred approach empowers designers to devise bespoke solutions tailored to indigenous practices, rather than imposing alien typologies. To accommodate the tradition of floor-seating, interiors can feature multi-purpose zones equipped with modular furniture or elevated platforms that support both formal seating and informal, floor-based gatherings. In the kitchen domain, rather than replicating Western models, workspaces can be expanded, sinks deepened, and storage specialised for local culinary requirements. Furthermore, the integration of smart, concealed storage solutions for items such as guest bedding and ceremonial tableware facilitates organisation and prevents the cluttering of primary living areas (Afsharpour & Kermani, 2025).

Conclusion: From Conflict to Convergence in Residential Spaces

This study, predicated on a theoretical examination of the phenomenon of placelessness in Iranian residential interior design, demonstrates that the indiscriminate emulation of Western design patterns has precipitated a profound cultural and identity crisis, extending far beyond a mere aesthetic shift. Leveraging the theoretical frameworks of Lefebvre, Bourdieu, and Norberg-Schulz, the analysis elucidates that this imitation manifests as a cultural divergence between imported forms and the indigenous context. By investigating three critical challenges - imbalance in privacy, spatial alienation, and functional inefficiency - the research establishes that Iranian residential spaces, due to the neglect of "Lived Space" and the local "Habitus," have devolved into environments alienated from the Genius Loci.

As Henri Lefebvre warns, when Conceived Space (the abstract rationale of designers) dominates Lived Space (the actual experience of residents), the resulting environments are rendered inefficient and unfamiliar. This is empirically evidenced in kitchens ill-suited to Iranian culinary exigencies and open-plan configurations that conflict with traditions of hospitality and privacy. From Bourdieu's perspective, such imitation represents an attempt to accrue social prestige by displaying a foreign Habitus, resulting in spaces where residents lose their sense of belonging and rootedness. Ultimately, this trajectory stands in opposition to the fundamental human need for the "spirit of place," a concept that Norberg-Schulz regards as existentially necessary, thereby leading to placelessness.

This article postulates that the sole viable remedy for this crisis is the advancement toward Intelligent Localisation. This approach does not advocate a regression to the past, but rather an innovative and analytical synthesis, one in which tradition serves as a rich conceptual repository for generating future spaces. By employing scientific tools and acquiring a profound understanding of residents' actual lifestyles, designers can curate environments that address modern exigencies while preserving cultural identity. This paradigm not only supports cultural sustainability but also significantly enhances the psychological and social quality of life for residents.

Suggestions for the Future:

Based on the findings of this study, which highlight the critical divergence between imported Western forms and the indigenous context in Iranian residential design, offering practical recommendations for the future is imperative. These suggestions, grounded in the principles of intelligent localisation, aim to delineate a pathway for creating spaces that preserve cultural identity and restore a sense of belonging, while benefiting from modern amenities. Beyond superficial modification, they emphasise the need for a fundamental transformation in design education and practice.

1. *Development of Culture-based Design Guidelines:*

A significant lacuna in contemporary interior design is the absence of a structured theoretical and practical reference for reinterpreting cultural principles within modern contexts. This void has compelled designers to rely on alien typologies rather than the rich lineage of Iranian architecture. Consequently, the formulation of a comprehensive set of culture-based design guidelines is a prerequisite. These guidelines should assist designers in revisiting the foundational principles of indigenous architecture and applying them innovatively. Specifically, instructions are required for key cultural concepts:

- *Principles of Inwardness and Privacy:*
  Traditional Iranian architecture is structured around inwardness and spatial hierarchy, reflecting cultural values of privacy as described by Amos Rapoport. Guidelines can facilitate the reinterpretation of these principles in modern apartments, for instance, by designing entrance vestibules for pause, and intelligently demarcating public (reception), semi-private (family living), and private (bedroom) zones using kinetic partitions or varying floor levels.

- *Symbolic and Active Elements:*
  In indigenous architecture, elements such as light, water, vegetation, and local materials play symbolic and active roles. Guidelines should suggest methods to reproduce these concepts contemporaneously: targeted layered lighting for subtle effects, green walls or minimalist water features to recreate the ambience of central courtyards, and the use of vernacular materials to evoke cultural memory.

- *Local and Climatic Contexts:*
  Guidelines must instruct designers on respecting *Genius Loci* as theorised by Norberg-Schulz. This entails a deep understanding of the climatic and cultural specificities of each region (e.g., desert sunlight versus northern humidity) and the deployment of appropriate materials and design strategies.

2. *Utilising Analytical Tools*

Currently, design decisions frequently rely on subjective personal judgements, which, according to Pierre Bourdieu, reflect the designer's Habitus and may not necessarily align with the actual exigencies of the target community. To mitigate this subjectivity, the integration of scientific and analytical tools into both design education and professional practice is vital.

- *Space Syntax in Academic Education:*
  Universities should introduce specialised modules within architecture and interior design curricula dedicated to the quantitative analysis of spatial relationships. By utilising tools such as Space Syntax, students can empirically analyse traditional versus modern plans, demonstrating how configurational properties like visibility, connectivity, and accessibility influence behavioural patterns such as privacy and social interaction. This pedagogical shift empowers students to derive inspiration from latent cultural and functional logics rather than relying on formal mimicry.

- *Application in Professional Practice:*
  Architectural firms can employ these analytical tools during the pre-design phase to rigorously evaluate design options based on cultural criteria. For instance, by analysing "integration levels," designers can empirically demonstrate to clients how an open-plan configuration might compromise privacy compared to a traditional layout. This approach transforms design from a subjective artistic endeavour into a data-driven, logical process.

3. *Advocacy for Culturally Situated User-Centred Design:*

Henri Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space reveals how Conceived Space (the abstract logic of the designer) can conflict with Lived Space (the resident's actual experience). To bridge this divide, a user-centred design approach must be culturally situated.

- *Ethnographic Studies:*
  Prior to design initiation, architects must conduct ethnographic research into the lifestyles and daily habits of Iranian families. These studies should extend beyond standard interviews to include direct observation of spatial usage, gathering rituals, culinary practices, and somatic patterns such as floor-seating.

- *Co-Design Workshops:*
  Engaging clients in co-design workshops facilitates their active participation in the spatial creation process. This involvement enables residents to articulate their genuine needs directly, ensuring the final design aligns fully with their indigenous Habitus.

- *Responding to Specific Functional Needs:*
  Design must explicitly address specific cultural functional requirements, such as providing adequate storage for guest bedding or configuring kitchens that are compatible with the heavy-duty nature of Iranian cooking habits.

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