

Retranslating Golvani Motifs in the Conceptual Design of Urban Elements and Furniture: An Exploratory Study of Architecture Students' Works

Afsaneh Nargesi khorramabad ^{1*}

Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, National University of Skills (NUS), Tehran, Iran

* nargesi.afsaneh@bertinamail.com

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Detailed abstract

Introduction

One of the distinctive characteristics of ethnic groups in Iran is their clothing. The components of both women's and men's clothing in Lorestan serve as signifying elements for understanding their identity. The clothing of Lur men and women is part of a cultural system that defines stages from birth to death, religious status, and the people's connection with supernatural forces. Clothing can embody cultural and semantic values and convey concepts through signs and symbols. In addition to its function of covering, clothing is also regarded as an indicator of individual and social identity. In recent years, despite some positive aspects of urban management in utilizing the existing potential related to urban identity in Khorramabad, many shortcomings are evident. Some squares in Khorramabad are adorned with elements that are neither Iranian-Islamic nor Lurish, but rather Westernized—a fact that questions urban art and planning. The primary reason for selecting this topic is to provide strategies and patterns to resolve such issues in Khorramabad. The central question this research seeks to answer concerns how Golvani motifs are reinterpreted within students' conceptual designs. Golvani is a type of headscarf, referring to a colorful silk fabric. In the past, a type of artistic silk fabric called "Golbadan," whose surface consisted of only two colors (e.g., saffron yellow and black), was imported from India to Iran. Over time, among the Lurs, the term Golvani came to refer not only to saffron-colored fabrics but to all colored headscarves (excluding black). The traditional colors of Golvani are black, red, and white. The cypress tree motif is the most frequently used pattern among other motifs and tree designs in the batik printing of Golvani headscarves. Space in its existing concept does not present any special characteristics; but as soon as a human group presents an activity in space, the symbolic meaning of space becomes phenomenal. From now on, space becomes a platform for the expression of human activity and behavior; it is a place for imagination and reality. As a component of the physical-functional infrastructure of public spaces, urban furniture plays a pivotal role in enhancing environmental quality and facilitating citizens' daily activities. On one hand, by structuring user behavior and creating opportunities for pausing, sitting, and social interaction, these elements boost spatial efficiency and enrich the experiential quality of urban realms—such as streets, parks, and squares. On the other hand, by fostering a sense of security, place attachment, and physiological comfort, they contribute to the subjective and objective well-being of residents, encouraging them to engage in a sustained and enjoyable presence within their surroundings. Today, in major, advanced cities—including those in

Europe and the United States—many experts focus on this subject, attaching great importance to the details of the urban landscape and appearance; indeed, they often place a special premium on street furniture and the city's visual character, regarding them as highly significant—sometimes on par with comprehensive and detailed urban plans.

Method

Based on the research objectives and the components under investigation, this study employed an applied research approach and an exploratory method centered on student-led design within a design studio setting; the study population consisted of 21 associate-degree architecture students. Additionally, the input of five urban planning and urban design experts was utilized to develop the designs; for this purpose, three primary motifs (*Boteh-Jegheh*, floral patterns, and the cypress tree) were documented from the traditional *Golvani* headscarf. Following a 30-minute briefing session, students were administered a questionnaire comprising both closed-ended questions (regarding motif selection, urban element type, and self-assessment of feasibility and creativity) and open-ended questions (concerning the rationale for motif selection and design explanation). Each student was required to submit a hand-drawn sketch of their proposed urban element. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean), while qualitative data were analyzed via conventional content analysis using Excel software. From among the 21 designs, the top three were selected based on creativity and feasibility, and follow-up interviews were conducted with their designers. The study's primary limitations were the students' lack of professional experience and their tendency toward inflated self-assessment. The present study employed a design-based exploratory methodology, in which the very process of drawing and creating the work by students served as the primary catalyst for uncovering the hidden layers of their tacit knowledge. To establish the validity of the instruments, an expert-based content validity method was employed; specifically, the sketching task and all questionnaire items were submitted to five design experts for evaluation regarding their alignment with the study's exploratory objective, the clarity of the wording, and the necessity of each item. In the quantitative phase, the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated using Lawshe's table, and items failing to meet the critical score threshold were eliminated; additionally, face validity was confirmed through a pilot test conducted with a group of five students representative of the target population. Regarding reliability, further measures were taken: a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.99 was obtained for the closed-ended questionnaire items, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. For qualitative data (open-ended questions and sketch analysis), an inter-coder agreement method was employed; specifically, 30% of the responses and drawings were independently re-coded by a supervising researcher (external to the research team). The resulting agreement rates were 87% and 84%, respectively—both exceeding the acceptable threshold of 80%—thereby confirming the reliability of the qualitative analysis process. Collectively, these measures facilitate the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data and ensure the scientific validity of the findings derived from the design-based exploratory approach.

Findings: Frequency of Motifs

Motif	Frequency	Percentage
Boteh-Jegheh (Paisley)	7	33.33
Gol (Flower)	2	9.51
Sarv (Cypress)	5	23.82
Combination of two motifs	6	28.54
Combination of all three motifs	1	4.8
Total	21	100%

According to the table, the dominant motif is the "Paisley" (*Boteh-jegheh*), which appears with the highest frequency at 33.33%. The second most common motif is the "combination of two designs," ranking next at 28%. The third is the "Cypress" motif at 23.82%, indicating a lower preference for simultaneously combining multiple motifs. The majority of designers (approximately 70.5%) lean towards single, traditional motifs.

Discussion and conclusion

1. Relationship Between Dominant Motif and Design Approach

The Boteh-Jegheh motif, with ۳۳,۳۳% frequency, is visually abstract and form-oriented. Meanwhile, the form-based approach accounts for 57.8% of the dominant design approaches among students. This alignment indicates that motif selection and design approach move in the same direction—designers naturally tend toward motifs with high formal and compositional capabilities.

2. Main Challenge and Its Relation to Form

The greatest reported challenge was "transforming a three-dimensional design into two dimensions" (۴۷,۶%). Given that most designers adopt a form-based approach, this finding is logical. Complex forms (such as Boteh-Jegheh and Sarv) require high technical skill when simplified and depicted on a two-dimensional surface. Thus, the primary challenge mainly affects form-oriented designers.

3. The Position of the Meaning-Based Approach

Although the meaning-based approach ranks second (9.54%), no motif with a clear semantic burden (such as ritual or narrative symbols) appears among the top three motifs. This gap suggests that meaning-oriented designers likely used motif combinations or marginal details to convey concepts rather than relying on a single specific motif. Furthermore, the challenge of "selecting the design and subject" (27.5%) is most relevant to this group.

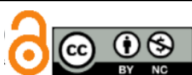
The findings revealed that students, having gained a deep understanding of the meaning and form of these motifs, were able to translate them into feasible urban elements such as benches, vertical lighting fixtures, and retractable canopies. The *Boteh Jegheh* motif was the most frequently selected (33.33%), primarily due to the symbolic meaning it conveys—resilience in the face of adversity and complexity—whereas the Cypress motif was chosen for its upright stance and potential for modular repetition, and the Flower motif was selected largely for its aesthetic form. more than half of the students (61.9%) engaged in a "functional translation" approach—meaning they modified the form to suit an urban function while preserving its original meaning.

However, the most significant challenge facing the students was transforming the two-dimensional form of the garment into a three-dimensional architectural volume; 47.6% of them explicitly cited this difficulty. This indicates that inter-media translation (from clothing to architecture) requires specific design skills that may be underemphasized in conventional architectural education. Students demonstrated that these motifs have the potential to become elements with a strong cultural identity, provided the designer moves beyond mere imitation to intelligently translate meaning and form within a new scale and context.

Declarations

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Keywords : Golvani motifs .Architecture and city image. Traditional motifs. Urban furniture. Urban Elements.



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