

# From Grand Bazaar to Grandiose Shopping Malls: Image, Dream and Space in the North of Tehran

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## Abstract

This paper offers a critical perspective on the growing tendency towards luxury in the North of Tehran. Consumption, as the terminal act of 21<sup>st</sup> century, has created the demand for spaces of leisure. The ideology of consumption emerges at its socio-spatial terms within malls. A relationship between concepts of space, image, and dream can be demonstrated in the shopping mall. Luxury as a concept that stimulates feelings of exclusivity creates dream worlds filled with images of abundance. In this paper, ‘from grand to grandiose’ represents a shift in the socio-cultural dynamics and spatial production in the city of Tehran. With the present situation and the growing urge towards luxury, Tehran is seeking a new image. Citizens of Tehran are becoming tourists in their own city; that is the contradictory nature of producing spaces as mediators of consumer culture in North Tehran and its impact on the City as a whole.

## Introduction

Consumption is a sustaining part of the human condition; like a living organism ingesting, digesting and excreting. Raw materials of social life are provided by the core activities of this organism: production, distribution and disposal (Dalglish, 2014). Consumption, known as an ideological act, conditions the social life through spaces as other mediators. The social and spatial networks of consumption let the development of contemporary cities, which commonly engage with favorable images and dreams of people. In that sense, the city of Tehran, as an eastern globe city, strikingly experiences the act of consumption and its consequential reflections onto the spatial organizations and social practices. Since the beginning of the 1920s, Tehran has been under the impacts of Modern capitalism and increasing consumption, which have been infused into everyday practices of its citizens. Many people are motivated to become consumers in *fantasy* as well as in reality; spatial productions and social practice have moved towards production of spaces that serve consumption as the dominant act of the contemporary society.

Tehran, with its nearly 500 years of history, was originally formed according to the spatial organization of Grand Bazaar. Transformation of Tehran, to its contemporary form, has started by the time of modernization of the country in the first Pahlavi period. ‘First Pahlavi’ (1920s- 1940s) Tehran was a city with monuments and public buildings representing the nation state and demonstrating power. Thus dynamism of the nation was political in that time. Growing desire towards modern lifestyle in Tehran has led to transformations in the urban image and types of social activities; and these changes have been results of Iran entering a capitalist phase. Thus, dynamism of the society has changed by the domination of the act of consumption since the mid-twentieth century. The 21<sup>st</sup> century Tehran is dominated by buildings such as shopping malls, entertainment centers and public parks, which evidently show that the dynamism of the nation has changed to commercial. By the expansion of the city, Tehran has turned into a network of programmed leisure.

The process of modernization, development and population of the city has caused a dramatic transformation

of Tehran during the recent 100 years. As Amirhamadi and Kianfar (1993) explained, as a third world city, Tehran's dramatic transformation was characterized with two parallel tendencies:

A rapid complex socio-cultural and economic development;

An extensive and cumulative uneven distribution of profit among social classes and neighborhoods.

Thus, the rapid development and outgrowing contradictions in Tehran reflect the city's transformation process in which a pre-capitalist setting during a period between 18<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries became a transitional capitalist city between 1920s and 1950s; and changed into a capitalist city during the 1950s (Figures 1&2).



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**Figure 1.** Image of Tehran during the 19th century MIT Collection (Source: <https://urbanismwarehouse.wordpress.com/tag/tehran/>)

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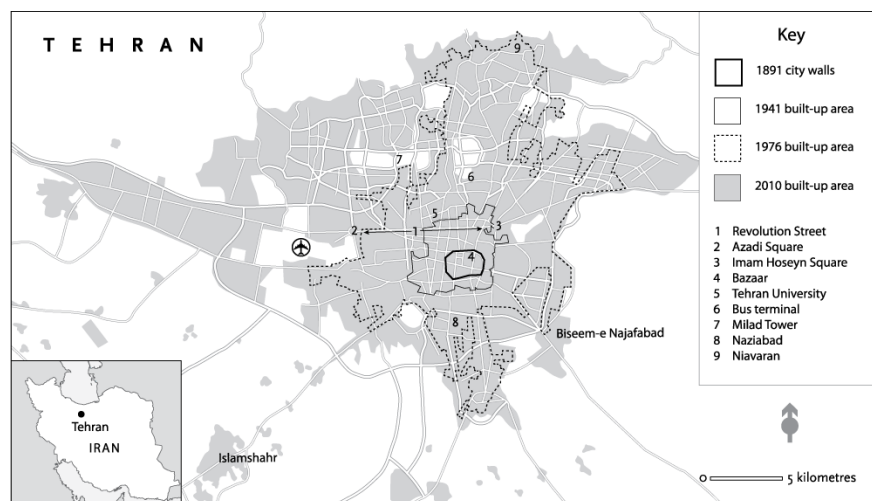
**Figure 2.** Contemporary Tehran (Source: [www.irancitytour.com](http://www.irancitytour.com))

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Modernization of the country has led to a transformational shift in the structure of Tehran in different courses of time that was based on the expansion of commercial streets and centers. Starting from Grand Bazaar as the traditional center for mercantile activities and also the center for cultural, religious and communal exchanges; this transformation was formed by creation of new commercial zones within three different periods:

1. First Pahlavi (1925- 1941): in this period commercial extension grew detached from Grand Bazaar while the inner structure of Bazaar continued developing. Thus dissemination of commercial extensions appeared.
2. Second Pahlavi (1941- 1979): in this period evolution of commercial functions occurred in three main phases, which continued after the revolution of 1979. In the first phase by the beginning of transformation of Grand Bazaar and its appearance partially changes following the conjunction of production sectors and older extensions. In the second phase Pahlavi Street starts acting as the backbone for commercial and bureaucratic distributions. This development moved through Pahlavi Street towards north, passed Valiahd (current Valiasr) Square and continued to Vanak and Tajrish Squares. In the third phase, after 1979, following the urban growth and the urge for creating new commercial hubs, the pattern of growth for commercial functions became denser in a greater scale.
3. Post- revolution (1979 – present): in this period commercial functions expanded in Tehran regarding the major urban structure and inside the boundaries of this structure based on means of accessibility and distribution of users' population; and both circumstances are almost the same as the previous era (Pourjafar et al, 2014).

Generally, there has always been a tendency to move towards north because of the geographical setting of Tehran. Such growth has been constant up to present day; and although a partial reason has been to access clean water and fresh air, in the 1960s this spatial south-north axis took a sociological dimension and impacted the politics of the country's class struggle. South of Tehran, including the cemetery of Rey, continuing towards Grand Bazaar and poor Qajar residential districts was in contrast with the wealthy north, which included modern villas and mini markets, enjoying fresh air and clean water. Although this vertical axis was initiated due to historic and geographic needs, the following spatial segregation was embodied in this northward urban expansion during the last two decades pre- revolution (Adams, 1973). As Grigg (2016) mentioned, by the moving of the ruling monarch to the northernmost of Tehran, in 1959, historical urban development was empowered socially and symbolically. Thus, they intensified the impact of this south-north axis of social promotion.



**Figure 3 .** Map of the expansion of Tehran from Early 1891 to 2010.

Source: Asef Bayat, Battle Field Tehran. New Left Review 66, November-December 2010.

<https://newleftreview.org/II/66/asef-bayat-tehran-paradox-city>

For a society that continues to function upon the act of consumption, spaces such as shopping malls are suitable examples to demonstrate the relationships between social actions and urban locations. Necessity of production of such spaces increases as societies show more willingness to consume. This willingness forms a flow of the society of consumers in the urban context and interior spaces.

Considering consumption as the dominant act of the contemporary societies, architecture becomes a representative of this act; and a good example of it, in such context, is shopping mall. Odabaşı (1999) indicates that ideology of today's world is what the concept of consumption indicates. It is an ideology based on a wealthier life that occurs as a consequence of more production and more consumption. Dovey (1999) points to the mall as the collective dream world for the mass culture; captivating and inverting the urban. Thus mall is a zone of shelter and safety with order; it is predictable and is detached from the city in terms of both structure and meaning. As the mall captures sites for free play of meaning following the fragmentation and displacement of particular features of time and space; and it becomes the places within which people learn to consume. It seeks enduring festivity; it is a carnival without community and economic surplus without behavioral abandon; it is an illusion of civic life.

Considering shopping mall as successful and most popular building type of the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, as he claims, it is an *embodiment of spatial practice in the societies*. From the urban scale to the interior of malls, the flow of consumers is guided through spaces within which they act upon the dominant ideology of today's world. In a city that is home to several shopping malls, the network of these buildings create a network of images. In such context, luxury, as a contemporary tendency in north Tehran, can evoke the dream world of consumption in its unique terms.

This paper seeks a better understanding of the recent tendency, luxury, in production of shopping malls in North Tehran. It addresses these issues at two levels; one is a selective theoretical background of the ideology of consumption and its related key concepts, shopping malls, and luxury. The other group provides an architectural background about Tehran and discusses its transformations due to the responses to the world of consumption. These provide grounds for a discussion about the exclusivity of the term luxury in the context of shopping malls in North Tehran, how it emerges in these spaces, and which effects 'luxury' has in this context.

During the study, ideas and theoretical discourses of scholars such as Henri Lefebvre on the production of space, Guy Debord on the society of spectacle, Fredric Jameson and Mike Featherstone on consumerism and consumer culture, Manfredo Tafuri on architecture, Kim Dovey on shopping malls and others have been adapted in order to create a theoretical ground for the argumentation about shopping malls as social productions in the contemporary city with a consumerist culture; and the rise of luxury as the new tendency in north Tehran via exploring the shopping malls of north Tehran.

### **The Ideology of Consumption and Consumerism**

Consumption, as based on an ideological ground, is argued in various disciplines in the contemporary time. It is an ideology penetrating most of the social mechanisms in 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to Odabaşı (1999), *ideology of today's world* is what the concept of consumption indicates. It is an ideology based on a wealthier life; as a consequence of more production and more consumption. Thus taking consumption as the preliminary trait and occupation of individuals, consumerism is an attribute of the society<sup>1</sup>. Bocock (1993) indicates that consumption is an active ideology within which life finds different meanings; an ideology spread over modern capitalism. This ideology serves the legitimization of capitalism and also everyday lives of many people; motivating them to be consumers in both *fantasy* and *reality*.

Concepts such as *meaning of life* are in a tight relationship with *culture*. In other words, culture is a medium through which social groups bond in their everyday life and find connection and social identity where meaning of life can be found. Jameson (1979) considers culture as the very element of consumer society; indicating

that societies have never been saturated with signs and images as this society. In his writings on postmodern culture he suggests to expand the culture prodigiously through the social realm instead of keeping the semi-autonomous cultural sphere, so that everything can be addressed to as cultural (Jameson, 1984a). As the wealthier life becomes vital for the culture or the ideology of consumption, image becomes fundamental in portraying wealth among individuals and groups. The ideology of consumption, becoming a tool for accumulation of the capital, conducts societies towards a cycle of production- consumption. Yet, Daniel Bell (1976) argues that production comes with discipline and hard work, while consumption generates an act of *irresponsibly pursuing pleasure*.

A wealthier life that exists in both reality and imagination, or fantasy, is occupying the consumer's view of the world. This world includes both physical and mental realms<sup>2</sup>. The mental dream world of the consumer society will need to be realized as a vision towards a 'being in the world'<sup>3</sup>. Thus, there are different sides to the relations between the consumers, ideology, culture and the world. Following Jameson's earlier mentioned statement, as everything becomes cultural in the contemporary society, the act of consumption becomes cultural. Featherstone in his book 'Consumer culture and postmodernism' (2007) brings three main perspectives on consumer culture:

1. Expansion of capitalist mode of production created the consumer culture, which has led to an immense accumulation of material culture, mediated by consumer commodities and sites for purchase and consumption. As a result, leisure and consumption activities have grown prominently in Western societies.
2. A more sociological view that focuses on various ways in which people use commodities to get socially close or distinct; with the idea that there is a relationship between the satisfaction derived from goods and their socially structured descending game. Thus, satisfaction and status depend on exhibiting and sustaining the differences within conditions of increase.
3. A view including questions of consumption's *emotional pleasures*, *dreams* and *desires*. Features that are celebrated in consumer cultural imagery and specific consumption sites, which diversely generate straight physical *excitements* and *aesthetic pleasures*.

The ideology of consumption works with those who afford goods and those who dream of them; it opens the 'dream world' to the whole society. Consumerism enters the practice of everyday life through advertisements, media and so on; and to the social practice through the production of spaces. It creates culture and habits or lifestyle; it provides this lifestyle with spaces within which consumption occurs due to giving pleasure to the consumers. Spaces are qualified for the contemporary use by making images and creating sites for leisure. This combination becomes reality in the contemporary urban practice and production of spaces. Thus, producing spaces as mediums through which the act of consumption can sustain turns into an ultimate goal for the consumer society<sup>4</sup>.

Creating such mediums reflects in the city. Urban practice in the society of consumers becomes partially a constant production of images that activate the ideology of consumption in a greater scale. Exposition of social space is more about the outlook rather than its content; and accordingly urban practice, taken as social production, comes parallel to making of images.

### Image Making as Urban Practice

Considering the city as the network within which social life exists and flows; its image is created through the social actions and the production of physical environment. People's means of interaction and communication have been changed from words to images (Postman, 1985). In such a society, urban growth and image making become simultaneous. Stephens (1998), on the other hand, considers word as the predominant means of mental transport that was replaced with image. As McGowan (2004) interprets a shift in the emphasis on the symbolic order towards the imaginary that occurs in correspondence with the alternation of primacy from word to image. By this emphasis on the image, architecture had faced transformations. As Tafuri indicates in his book 'Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development', "the proposals of the new urban ideology may be summed up as follows: architectural and super technological *utopianism* ; ...

prophecies of "aesthetic societies"; and invitations to institute a championship of the imagination" (Tafuri, 1976: 139). As the imaginary and empowerment of the image become fundamental in consumer culture, contemporary architecture becomes formal and more about aesthetics. In other words, architecture becomes a player in the process of image making within urban context; as seen in many contemporary metropolises. Cunningham (2005) draws on Tafuri by growing what he saw as the irretrievable descend in its socially transformative desires towards a 'form without utopia to that of sublime uselessness'; and such uselessness has been massively in ideological use by the contemporary essentials of capital accumulation. Cunningham continues by calling the current drama of architecture as one of '*spectacle and brand image*'. Architecture cannot prevail over such relationships, but it can endorse a coherent consciousness of their conditions and promote a new understanding of what they produce as new forms of *subjective experience*.

The making of image is essential to sustaining the spectacle. However, production of space takes the form of image. Looking into Lefebvre, capitalist mode of production preserves itself through the production of space while urbanization is the primary extension of capitalism (Lefebvre, 1991). Thus, the image making by means of production of spaces in an urban scale becomes an urban practice to sustain the spectacle. As Debord (1992) describes, this is a society that is fundamentally based on the spectacle, which is the endless and perfect image of the dominant economic order; spectacle's only purpose is to develop *itself*. On the other hand, he declares that spectacle is a social relationship between people, rather than being a collection of images; but this relationship is mediated by images. Thus, spatial logic of contemporary representations of the world incorporates with production of image; the new mediators and means of communication. So, mediation of those images through production of spaces presents a form of spectacle. The importance of spatial production in the contemporary time makes the spatial changes significant in the course of transformation in the image of the city. As Jameson (1984b) discusses, modern social formation is radically transformed and it has manifested the epochal transference from temporal to spatial. This transference is the cause of a new spatial logic of the world. Thus the urban practice becomes a cycle within which image is produced and spectacle is preserved. This indicates that contemporary society utilizes spaces in the city as mediators to experience spectacle. Cities like Dubai, London, Sydney and many other metropolises promoted spaces embodying festivity, leisure and entertainment as a part of the spectacle.

### Space as the site for pleasure

Space embodies a vast variety of concepts. Spaces conduct the activities and daily life and are transformed by the change in the lifestyle and dominant daily activities in the society. Space in the public realm has become an asset to the accumulation of the dominant ideology. Henri Lefebvre in his book 'production of space', 1991, suggests spaces as social productions, representing the dominant ideological group of the society. Also, in the second volume of 'the critique of everyday' life he describes space as a relatively compact fabric of networks and channels, which is integrated into everyday life (Lefebvre, 2002). Accordingly, production of space is not a new thing; but the *new* is the 'global and total' production of social space (Lefebvre, 2003). As in Lefebvre's opinion, the space produced works as a tool for both thought and action. This space is a means of production and control, and therefore a means of domination and power; but it still detaches itself from those who make use of it (Lefebvre, 1991).

In a globalized community, then, space becomes defined within fixated boundaries; while it is expected to serve the purposes that fit in every local place in the world. Capital's ultimate tool for spreading its power is space- or to be more specific, the urban space- and its powerful feature is the ideology of consumption. Contemporary social space is the space that is being alienated by the ideology of consumption; alienated in a sense that it becomes capable of accommodating the flows of consumption and conducting them without grasping a specific meaning or spatial identity.

Lefebvre (1992) continues by arguing that social actions develop and debase and are buried in spaces; and this is how the production of space integrates with individual or collective social actions. Thus, repetition and regeneration of social acts are essential for keeping the social space active and regenerated. In another point of view, a tool for social analysis is the social space and its concept. Thus accepting this aspect of social space necessitates the *elimination of simplistic models of punctual relationship between social actions*

*and social locations; and between spatial functions and spatial forms* .

Conceptually, spaces in the public realm turn into sites for pleasure in the sense of serving consumers and keeping them entertained; so there will be a network of entertainment and pleasure in the urban scale. Such network is a collective site, including individual spaces of pleasure. Thus in the form of a network, the flow of consumption expands in the city. This expansion will help sustaining the ideology of consumption.

According to Stanek (2017), aiming to re-think urbanization in terms of transgression, expenditure and excess, Lefebvre introduced the idea of collective luxury in the 1970s; and he believed that it was one thing from which no one could be excluded. He showed that spaces of leisure were created in order to functionalize capitalism in different scales and also in urban scale. However, he added that spaces of leisure do not only reflect on fetishism and spectacle. 'Needs' are being replaced by 'desires' while Lefebvre is rethinking urbanization considering what such spaces offer. Lefebvre wrote in 'The production of space' that, unlike specific needs that are met with specific objects, desire has no precise object; and the only particular element that is related with it is a space of full play. It is a place of festivity; the space of the dream (1992: 362). Thus, luxury emerges as a possible concept in a space where makes dreaming possible.

### **Dream, the invisible world of 'being'**

A collective society that seeks pleasure and entertainment as the result of its dominant act (consumption), circulates in spaces to create the image and fulfill the dream. The term spectacle proposes definitions to the relationships that are based on image.

As Debord (1992) argues, as long as the realm of necessity remains a social dream, dreaming will remain a social necessity. Hence the contemporary society necessitates dreaming for sustaining in the present time. There is a tight relationship between image, dream and everyday life in this era. In a society in which spectacle is the chief product, transformation of the image of the city is a matter of the work of a network of social spaces through which everyday life flows. Therefore transformation of such image inevitably happens as the spectacle reproduces itself constantly. The spectacle, understood in its totality, is not an addition to the real world or an additional decoration to it. It is the core of the unrealism of the real society. In all its explicit forms, as information or propaganda, advertisement or straight consumption of entertainments, the spectacle is the existing model of socially dominant life (Debord, 1992).

Direct consumption of entertainment raises as spectacle thrives in spaces such as shopping malls. Mall is a space within which existing model of socially dominant lifestyle is present by constant act of consumption. Dovey in his book 'framing places' claims that, as Walter Benjamin viewed, urban experience offered an aesthetic territory, which resisted the lack of the 'aura' that exemplifies twentieth century art. Contrasting the fine arts, *the urban spectacle is experienced in distraction that gives it an extra potential to trigger dreams and memories* (Dovey, 1999).

While polarizing the city; mall offers a site of 'artificial pleasure without danger' in an urban background that increasingly offers 'the danger without the pleasure'<sup>5</sup>. Hence, mall turns into a space for constant pleasure seeking, creating the imaginary dream world that represents spectacle in form of consumption of products and consumption of images.

### **Malls and the Flow of Consumption: Ultimate Spaces of Imaginary Dream World**

A combination of the words consumption, enjoyment, leisure and space is found in the concept of shopping mall. Enters a shopping mall the image of wealth, reflected by exhibition of commodities together with bright surfaces and shop windows, will capture imagination. This is a way to put the crowds in the dream world; the creation of spectacle.

The spectacle continues lasting in arenas within which images of wealth and wealthy life seem to be essential to exist. These spaces are capable of demonstrating the collective luxury that Lefebvre describes which no one can be excluded from<sup>6</sup>. Buck-Morss (1989) claims malls as 'dream worlds', which anchorage a utopian request for a perfect model of a society of 'harmony and abundance'. Network of shopping malls, embodying

the flow of consumers, is not much about creating a wide ranging and united identity architectural wise. What this network gives to the society is a plural site for consumption. Just as what it does to the communities; just as consumers within shopping spaces turn into pseudo-communities that spend time next to each other, this system is also created within urban context: separate buildings, located within the city network and function as focal destinations for consumers<sup>7</sup>. Considering ‘spaces as the site for pleasure’, shopping malls can be called as spaces of consumption. De polysemic et al (1998,) describe space of consumption as an organized space of culture and economy, which is marked by practices.

Shopping mall also represents aesthetics and ethical issues. Space is constantly produced through a range of human actions and undertakings; there is no facticity of space whatsoever (Lefebvre, 1977). Production of space is not an independent occurrence. Consumption is a spatial practice and spaces of consumption are physical assemblages formed by material artifacts, signs and symbols; and are strictly monitored and supervised (Styhre and Engberg, 2003).

Speaking with the vocabulary of marketing, spaces of consumption are elusively fabricated domains that aim to attract desire, attention and action. Walter Benjamin’s arcade is classic example of space of consumption; it is designed to empower spatial practices demonstrated in consumption. Contemporary spaces of consumption on the margins have become the main spatial arrangement. In this case, shopping mall comes in its utmost generic form, which is a pure space of consumption, designed to bias consumers and enabled for spatial practice (Styhre & Engberg, 2003).

In his seminar related to his collaborative research with Harvard school of Architecture, about shopping malls, Koolhaas points out ‘shopping’ as the *terminal activity of the human race in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* ; and the final phase of modernization. “Its pervasiveness erodes what we used to call civilization, shifts parameters; and smoothly and silently establishes an inescapable paradigm. Universe of both systematic over saturation and undernourishment; this combination explains our ambiguity”. In other words shopping and its related activities have become a part of *human culture* . Accordingly spaces go through transformations; and those transformations are under the impact of cultural changes. Or, more specifically, there is a constant status change in terms of socio-economic, cultural and political conditions and they lead to spatial transformations or changes.

Spaces of consumption are commodified and contribute to the act of consumption. On the other hand, consumption has become a spatial act and a cultural attribute of the contemporary society. Shopping malls are advancing experiences of modern capitalist spaces; they turn into a medium for representation of the dominant ideology of the society and, at the same time, a victim of the same ideology (Spivak, 1999).

Modernization of Tehran has led to experiencing the act of consumption in a cultural context. As the other third world cities, growth of the urban structure has created needs for different social spaces; and ideology of consumption necessitated production of spaces of consumption. Growing detached from Grand Bazaar, known as the main socio-cultural structure of the traditional city, sprawl of shopping malls has created a network of imaginary within the reality of contemporary Tehran.

### **From Grand Bazaar to the Sprawl of Shopping malls in Tehran**

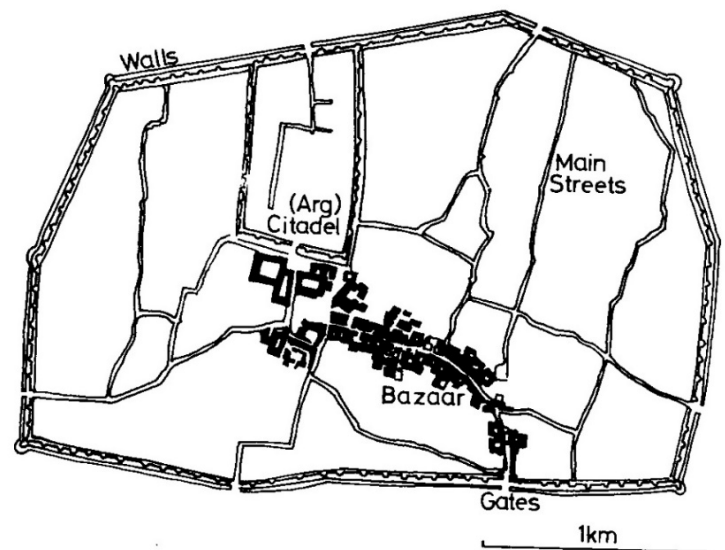
Focusing on the transformation of Tehran, from the perspective of the expansion of mercantile zones, brings attention to both Grand Bazaar and Shopping malls. Bazaar has been the backbone of Tehran’s urban structure, while it has also been the center for social and cultural interactions. On the other hand, shopping mall is the phenomenon of the contemporary urban leisure; shopping mall is the dream world of the consumer.

Bazaar is one of the main structures in the spatial organization of Iranian traditional city; defining the main body of it. In many of these cities, transportation roots are established according to the location of ‘Bazaar’s main Rasteh’; and Bazaar is integrated into the main layout of traditional Iranian city (Pourjafar et al., 2013). Bazaar is a structured social space inherited from the pre-capitalist Iranian City. It is usually formed in a linear axis upon which public and socio- cultural spaces are arrayed. In other words, Bazaar used to be the linear distributor of culture and status while generating the urban pattern. In the social



and economic context, as Ashraf (1989) argues, merchants stood on top of the social groups in Bazaar; they impacted the traditional society highly, regarding their religious tendencies and economic support of religious leaders.

By the 1930s and 1940s, a number of commercial zones appeared along the new streets, creating shopping sub-centers. These centers challenged the vitality of bazaar (Amirhamadi & Kianfar, 1993). This was the beginning of the time of de-monopolization of Bazaar. Due to transformation of the city into a more modernized and facilitated urban setting, culture eventually started to transform.

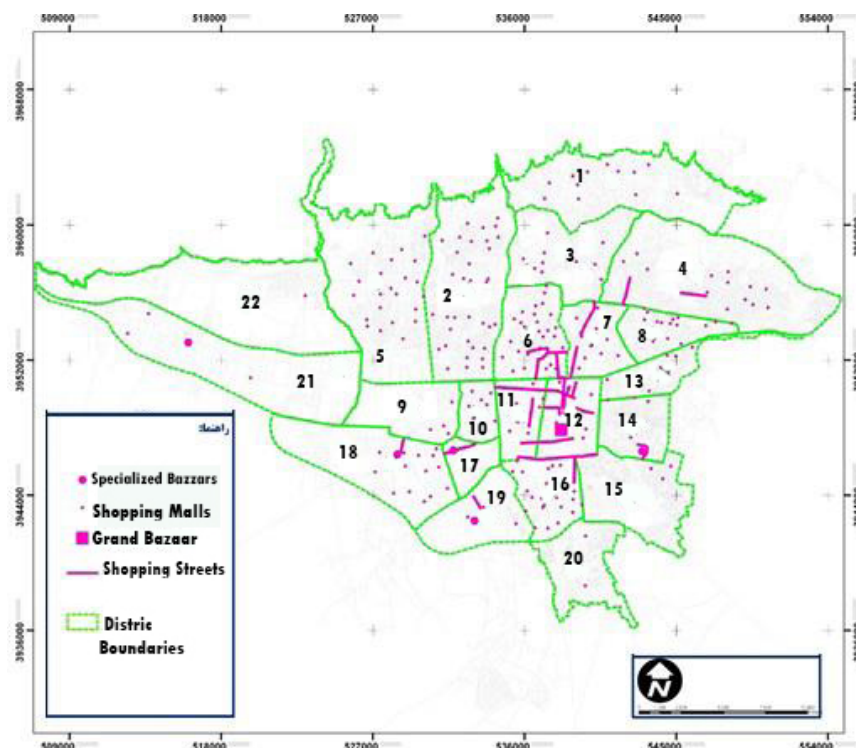


**Figure 4.** Map of Tehran in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, courtesy of Madanipour

<https://urbanismwarehouse.wordpress.com/tag/tehran/>

Sprawl of shopping malls is a recent phenomenon in the history of Tehran. Roots of shopping mall in Tehran dates back to the 1930s. There have been various types of shopping facilities established in Tehran after the Grand Bazaar, including passages, Modern Bazaars, shopping streets, shopping malls and recently built shopping/ entertainment complexes<sup>10</sup>.

Modernization of Tehran has been parallel to decentralization of bazaar. According to Habibi & Mahmoudi (2017), the sprawl of shopping centers has begun with a single core of Grand Bazaar; and continued by the growing of shopping streets in central districts of Tehran. As (Hamidi, 1997) mentioned, due to economic boom in the late 60s and raise of demands for more commercial space in Bazaar, residential neighborhood surrounding Bazaar were destroyed and mercantile streets started to grow rapidly. This phenomenon is a result of the formation of the economic middle class and its consequent new consumer needs and demands, which led to establishment of first shopping streets in Tehran. The focus of this sprawl has mostly been towards north, including districts 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6. However, it is evident that formation of these spaces in contemporary time follows the growth of the wealthy consumer society mostly towards the same direction (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Map of the sprawl of shopping malls in Tehran, (Habibi & Mahmoudi 2017)

Sprawl of shopping malls in the north Tehran is turning this area into a simulacrum of luxury lifestyle. Creating images of *luxury* is the key to popularization of the malls in wealthy areas of the city.

### Making Luxurious Images as new Urban Practices in North Tehran

As Bauer et al. (2011) claim in the contemporary discourse luxury entails a fluid meaning that gives an authority to the consumers to assign their personal meanings to create what should be viewed as luxury. Nature of luxury is possessive and emotional; it does not just relate to the social reflection of status, wealth and exclusiveness, which is controlled by the market and brands (Wiedmann et al., 2007). Therefore luxury is not necessarily an artifact of the financial status anymore. In many cases, luxury is able to stimulate *feelings of exclusivity* and *being special* (Phau and Prendergast, 2000) and capable of giving access to a new world of *deep emotion and desire*.

Considering new concepts of luxury in the contemporary world, the range of desirable activities that citizens seek are included within experiences that mainly occur in shopping malls or spaces of consumption per se. In North of Tehran, as Roper et al. (2013) claim luxury consumers emphasize on doing or being as the experiential nature of their luxury consumption, rather than having or owning that indicate material ownership (having/owning). Significance of shopping malls comes from the prioritization of citizens while choosing spaces within which they spend time and do activities; and subsequently own the image and dream of luxury lifestyle.

Promotion of wealthy lifestyle in North Tehran has been a sign of the significant class difference in the society throughout the contemporary history of this city. Also, the significance of this class difference is visible among the lifestyles of the citizens in this area; luxury is becoming an essential term in the lifestyle of Northern inhabitants, while it has also become a key factor for the other citizens from different classes for them to experience the dream of living the luxury life. Such circumstances make luxury a more sophisticated term while discussing contemporary everyday life in Tehran. There, spectacle is formed based on the relations of

citizens with themes that define luxury by using images and spatial productions that create real environments for such social practice either physically or mentally. Increasing desire towards luxury lifestyle in this case is representative of important issues about contemporary Tehran whereas shopping malls, or spaces of consumption, have created a network of consumption for the majority of the citizens; operating with images and dreams. According to the categorization of shopping malls by Shopping Center Definitions (ICSC), published by International Council of Shopping Centers, “Fashion/Specialty Center is a type of shopping mall that is defined as a center that mainly includes expensive apparel shops, boutiques and craft shops with selected fashion or unique merchandise of high quality and price”. These centers are sophisticatedly designed and emphasize a rich décor including high quality landscaping. These settings are usually established in trade zones of high income groups of the society (ICSC, 2016). The increasing number of this type of shopping mall in the North Tehran is an indicator of the promotion of luxury life style. Luxury has become one of the mostly used terms by citizens, private administrations and local businesses in Tehran. Hence luxury shopping malls are turning into one of the most visited spaces. Recently, these malls are attempting to create unique offers for their customers with lifestyle tips and ideas. These suggestions are either made subtly or by means of advertisement and publicity. For instance below statement is made on the official website of one of the mentioned shopping malls ‘Queen Center’:

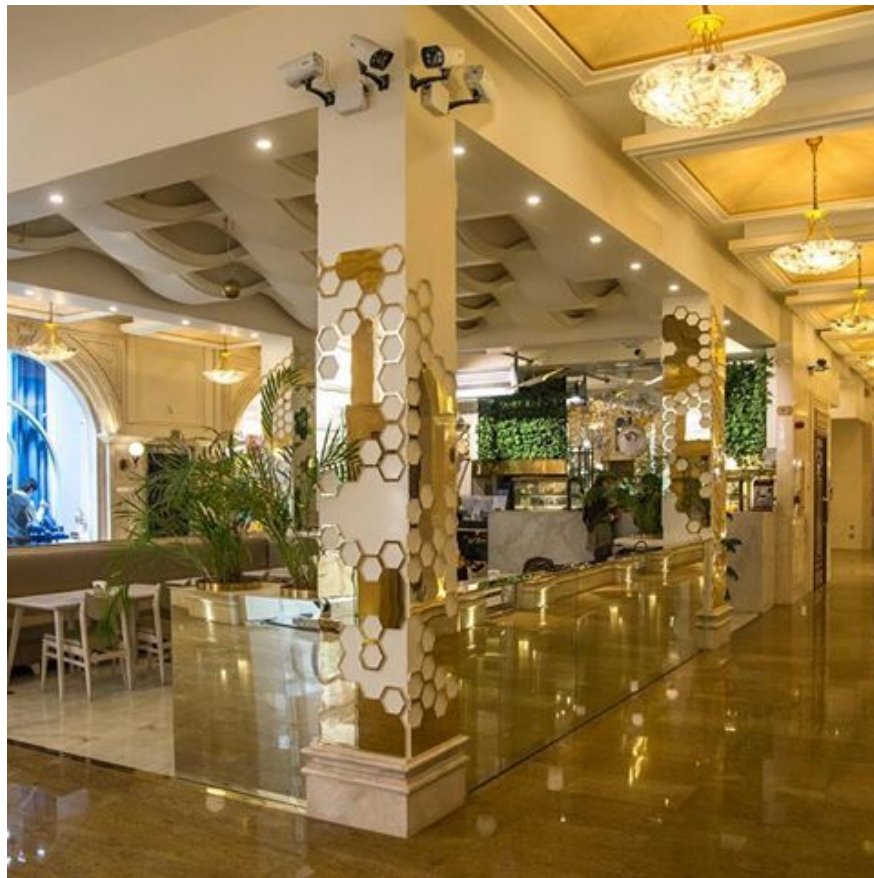
“What is the elite life style? Or Luxury?

Have you ever thought about it? You lead a luxury life, if you use the devices, entertainment, leisure, etc. that are not essential but make you enjoy your life more. These elements are highly priced or out of reach for the public; and of course we all know the popular concept of luxury, wealthy people spend a great deal of money for purchasing special goods and services such as clothing and jewelry, food and cars and even private jets and others. . . If you are willing to have a luxury lifestyle, then you, at least, need to become one of these wealthy people. We, here, introduce this lifestyle; so that if you want to become one of them you will know what you can do. . .”



**Figure 6 .** Queen Center, Tehran, District 1

<https://ibbi.ir>







**Figures 7, 8 & 9 .** Interior views of Queen Center as an example of Luxury trending in North of Tehran  
<https://ibbi.ir>

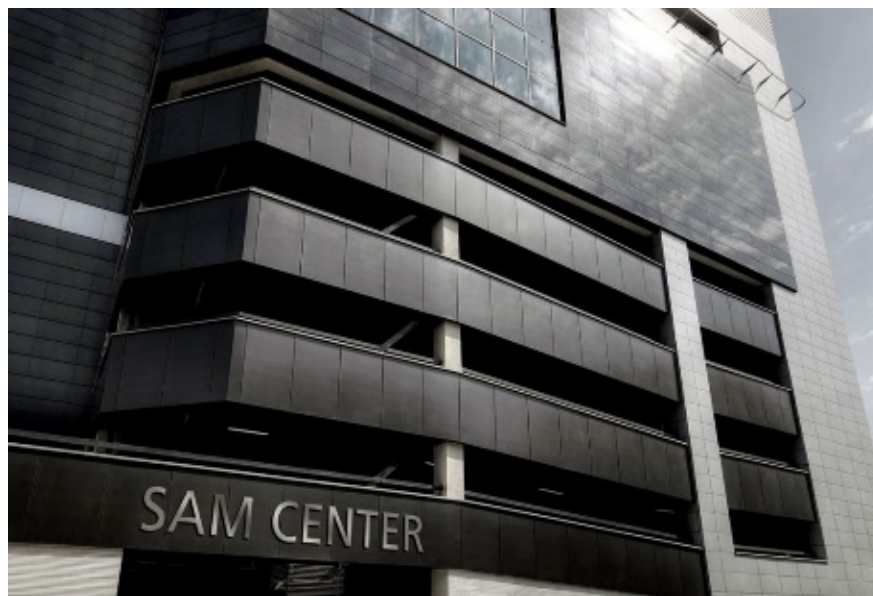
This mall is an example of many fashion/specialty malls in the north Tehran. The emphasis on *luxury*, both in physical features of spaces and the selection of commodity types, creates a strong tendency towards it (Figures 6-9).

#### **Luxurious sites for pleasure and the New Socio-spatial Representation in North Tehran**

Luxurious shopping spaces are turning into dream worlds of all social classes by fulfilling their desire for being special. Shopping and window shopping in luxury spaces create emotionally satisfying images for them to feel accepted and credited<sup>11</sup>. This type of shopping mall exists in the north of Tehran, mostly in district1 and district2, considered as the most expensive districts of Tehran. Grandiose and lavish shopping malls of North Tehran represent the image of Luxury by using shiny surfaces, expensive materials and grand displays of brands. Observing the most luxurious shopping malls in Tehran, these spaces are designed to raise aesthetic pleasure and to emotionally motivate citizens to repeat their visits.



















**Figure 10.** A number of shopping malls located in the North of Tehran

Grandiose shopping malls are extravagantly decorated with heavy ornamentations and expensive materials that represent a type of design that belongs to the wealthy. Extravagancy of the spatial arrangements in these malls also appears in the extreme use of artificial lighting and reflective surfaces. Large shop windows that display expensive objects give a message of exclusivity and importance of owning such items as a sign of greatness. Sprawl of grandiose shopping malls in this region creates an urban network for consumption that activates the flow of consumers from the whole city towards north.

Image has become a tool for imposing abundance in and by grandiose shopping malls; produced by smooth and shiny surfaces, reflecting artificial lights and images of people; creating compositions of people and commodities both on the inside and outside. Existence of many inverted urban spaces within the City context creates homogeneity in flow of consumption in social spaces. Urban growth towards the north of Tehran has given priorities to this area of the city in terms of status; and sprawl of grandiose shopping malls are functionalizing capitalism in the north of Tehran, which consequently grows in the whole city, giving a new socio- spatial representation of the present Tehran (Figure 10).

### From ‘Grand’ Realities to ‘Grandiose’ Fantasies

Shopping mall, in the north of Tehran, is the space of fantasy more than of reality. Pursuing pleasure, consumption of images has become preliminary act in the mall. Both mental world and real world are embodied in shopping malls that have become as cultural as Grand Bazaar in Tehran. Consumer culture invites citizens to celebrate their emotional pleasure and happiness within the cultural imagery of shopping mall. Thus satisfaction has been gained by the exhibition of excess and increase. In this context, luxury has become the answer to all necessities that are asked for in order to be accepted and thrive in the north of Tehran; and shopping malls are the sites within which fantasy meets reality; and luxury engages social practice.

Moving from an active socio-cultural lifestyle towards an inactive image dominated pseudo-communal lifestyle; cultural transformations in Tehran are reflected in spatial transformations. In the context of this paper, spatial dynamics of Bazaar are replaced by spatial representations of shopping malls. Aesthetic society of contemporary Tehran pursues image making to expand the dream world. Space of consumption engages people with the terminal act, consumption; puts them inside the dream world of wealth; and creates an experience of luxury each time a person takes a trip to the grandiose mall. Being present in these spaces is the essential to create an image of luxury. It is the luxury consumption itself, being rather than doing, which indicate a type of everyday practice in the north of Tehran.

Mediation of images through production of malls presents a form of spectacle in the North of Tehran. Sprawl of shopping malls in the north of Tehran is indicative of the fact that social actions that lead to promotion of brand image and spectacle sustain within spaces of collective luxury. Such transformation in relationships is as same as the transformation of the dynamism of the society.

‘*From grand to grandiose*’ represents the transformation of a conceptual approach to social practice leading to transformation of social spaces. In literary definition, grand, used in the name of a place or a building, indicates that it is large and beautiful and *deserves to be admired*. While the word Grandiose indicates extravagantly or pretentiously imposing in *appearance* or style; it means trying to *seem very important*. Thus, ‘from grand to grandiose’ refers to the change in both ‘social value system (in everyday life)’ and ‘spatial productions and spatial representations’. Bazaar created a unique urban integrated space that brought communities into variety of activities in the traditional city; while shopping malls have become agents of the ideology of consumption in the form of generic spaces in an urban sprawl in contemporary Tehran. Despite Grand Bazaar, spatial and social relationships of diversity are not the essentials for the significance of shopping malls, but in the society of spectacle making the image is essential for the citizens to create dream worlds inside these spaces.

Traditional costumers of Grand Bazaar used to be nurtured by common value exchange, while in grandiose shopping malls citizens are enriched by the image of luxury. For the bazaar, to stay vibrant it was essential to be diversely related to several social, cultural, political and economic matters. However, contemporary shopping malls of Tehran have dismissed most of those considerations and have enough chance of sustaining by adopting a single phenomenon, which is consumption.

Privatization of these malls and selection of their outlook create a sense of exclusiveness in costumers. But, Grand Bazaar presented traditional citizens with a public space, which offered them multi-dimensional services related to their lives; its *grandness* came from the way it offered spaces to diverse groups of the society to be an active sector in the traditional city; different groups were entitled to different types and sizes of spaces. Grand Bazaar is not a privatized setting within the traditional city.

Concentration on providing an image of luxury in the North of Tehran might cause a false reading of the reality of Tehran, since the appearance of luxury draws focus and attention to the north of Tehran, which is not a proper representative of the city in general. Either in terms of the social status or in terms of the spatial production, luxury is not the main concentration of the society, but as long as the citizens are able to imagine accessibility to luxury by being present within grandiose shopping malls, luxury is an accessible image for most of the citizens regardless of their status.

## Concluding Remarks

Shopping malls in the contemporary Tehran generate images of wealthy life that advertise luxurious lifestyle. Prioritizing the ‘wants’ over the ‘needs’ means to create dream worlds where grandiose malls create a sense of ‘being’ rather than ‘having’ as a form of luxury. At this point these malls capture imaginations of people by bringing them close to the reality of luxurious commodities without creating the necessity of the ownership.

Considering the contemporary dynamism of the society, co-existence of Grand Bazaar and grandiose shopping malls in contemporary Tehran indicates transformations in the society’s demands. Apart from the economic significance of bazaar for the mercantile sector, Grand Bazaar has become another site for entertainment in Tehran. For the consumer society of Tehran, Bazaar, as a spatial organization, is more a historical site for visit; the image of nostalgia. In other words, for the citizens of the North of Tehran, visits to the Grand Bazaar are turning into a type of luxury activities rather than necessities for the daily consumption; an excessive activity to create feelings of being special. In such conditions, Bazaar is not producing culture but is approached from a new cultural perspective that thrives within shopping malls. Consumer culture in the North of Tehran, being fed from the sprawl of shopping malls, is shifting relationships between social actions and social locations in the city.

With the present situation and the growing urge towards luxury, Tehran is seeking a new identity as a

contemporary city filled with images; and a growing fracture between social classes. Such fracture will create even more urge for reaching the dream world of luxury. The utopian picture for the citizens of Tehran will be an image created by the dream of wealth. Thus this city of spectacle is heading towards becoming an urban setting for display of festivity, leisure and expenditure. Citizens of Tehran are becoming tourists in their own city; and that is the contradictory nature of producing spaces as mediators of consumer culture in North Tehran and its impact on the City as a whole.

## Notes

1. In his book 'Consuming life', Zygmunt Bauman (2007) explains that for a society to obtain that attribute, it needs to detach the rigorously individual capacity for wanting, desiring and longing from individuals; and recycle/reify them into an subsidiary force to put 'consumer society' in motion and keep it on stream as a particular form of socializing, while creating special parameters of effective strategies for individual life.
2. As Bocoock (1993) in his book 'Consumption' claims that improvement of the ideology of consumption made its symbols dominant, so that mental activities of people and stimulate them towards more consumption. Thus, modern consumer is physically passive but mentally very active.
3. Considering John Berger's (1972) writing on art, it might be said that consumption is a way through which people see and perceive the world.
4. (Firat et al, 2013) in an article titled 'Consumption, consumer culture and consumer society' claim that: one of the defining characteristics of consumer society is that consumption became the ultimate goal and not a means to fulfil the needs.
5. For the concept of inverted city see Kim Dovey's book 'framing places', Part III.
6. Lukasz Stanek in his Article 'Collective Luxury' (the journal of Architecture, 22:3, 2017) points out that: "In Lefebvre's reading, collective luxury conveys less a particular type of experience ... the object is not destroyed by use ('consumed') but rather, whose use value is enhanced by use".
7. See Dovey, (1999: 133).
8. Polysemic: having more than one meaning; having multiple meanings (Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon).
9. Heteroglot: Involving or containing multiple languages, dialects, or idiolects. Or on the other hand, culturally diverse; involving multiple points of view. Here, heteroglot conceptually points to the multiplicity and diversity.
10. A number of very first passages and shopping centers in Tehran are built during the second Pahlavi period. Naderi Passage (1937), Shirvani passage (1942), Plasco Building (1951) are some of the important names.
11. New luxuries involve more with meaningful objects and activities that are experienced by consumers as luxury for fulfilling both psychological and emotional needs (Kapferer, 1997; William and Atwal, 2013).

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