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A new housing group for sub-residential area in Samarkand: a morphological comparison

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In this study, information related to housing in Samarkand is provided and the spatial organisation of Samarkand houses is analysed by using the gamma analysis method in order to establish and define their patterning. After examining the existing housing pattern, a proposal is offered for the housing group where families can engage in guest-housing activity; this has been designed by using the data obtained from the surveys and interviews conducted in situ, and has been evaluated by using the same space syntax method. Finally, the similarities and differences between the traditional housing and the proposed housing are pointed out. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Gamma analysis, Traditional houses in Samarkand, Proposed houses, Morphological comparison

Introduction

The project making up the main subject of this paper has been prepared within the framework of research titled "A Plan for the Central Area of Samarkand: Strategies and Proposals for the New Century", which the Aga Khan Trust included in the Programme for Supporting Historical Cities, carried out with the participation of the Uzbek National Planning Institute, the Uzbek National Restoration Institute, the Samarkand Municipality, the Samarkand School of Architecture, and a number of international experts. The Yildiz Technical University Faculty of Architecture has contributed to the project, within the framework of the protocol signed between the Aga Khan Trust and the Samarkand School of Architecture. The author has carried out the project, which makes up the main topic of this paper, according to the said protocol.

The preliminary report for the work related with the planning of Samarkand, which had been initiated by the Trust in 1995, was completed in 1996, and the final report was completed in 2000 (Anonymous, 1996, 2000). In this report, the planning policies applied and the results obtained in the city are discussed, the targets are adapted in the Gur-i Emir Area, and by taking into consideration the recent urban renovation policies applied, some proposals for the Central Area of Samarkand are put forward.

The research project "A New Housing Group For Sub-residential Areas in Samarkand" has been carried out by keeping the targets clearly in view and by considering the proposal that the area should be used for tourism. In this project, the existing industrial zone in Gur-i Emir has been redesigned in order to meet such basic requirements for tourism as "bed and breakfast" provision within the spaces provided by private houses. The project has been prepared by carrying out such work as theoretical studies related with the housing, analysis of the existing pattern, examining some examples of housing syntactically and by conducting surveys to collect economic and social data. In this research, the data obtained from the existing physical environment have been evaluated and interpreted by taking into consideration the demands of the users.

While there are numerous studies done on the monumental buildings in Samarkand, both in terms of tourism and for academic purposes, there is still a lack of studies and documentation on the vernacular housing pattern. The latter is, however, unique: narrow, dead-end streets have one- or two-storey adobe houses lined along them, leaning against each other. These buildings have a very humble appearance, although their interiors are colourful and adorned. These good-quality buildings are on the verge of being lost, due to the fact that they cannot stand against the wear and tear of time and the forces of

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nature. We believe that this research project, which analyses the housing areas and proposes that continuity should be maintained, will contribute to the conservation of the housing pattern in Samarkand.

This paper consists of four main parts: in the first part, information related to the housing in Samarkand has been provided. In the second part, the spatial organisation of houses has been analysed, by using the gamma analysis method in order to establish and define their patterning. And in the third part, the proposal is presented for a housing group where 8 families can engage in guest-housing activity, designed by using the data obtained from the surveys and interviews conducted in situ; these have been evaluated by using the same space syntax method, and the last part, the similarities and differences between the traditional housing and the proposed housing are pointed out.

The housing pattern in Samarkand

The existing housing pattern in Samarkand creates a humble-looking physical environment, far from looking luxurious. Narrow, dead-end streets cause the formation of an intricate housing pattern. The housing areas are divided into neighbourhoods, according to the ethnic or vocational groups of the users. There are 58 neighbourhoods (mahallas) in the existing housing areas in Samarkand. Each neighbourhood can be defined as a closed system with houses, a masjid and its common room, which are used for such social events such as weddings and funerals. At present, the people living in this housing area are experiencing difficulties because of economic problems and the lack of means and opportunities. The houses are old and they need to be renovated. The renovation work carried out in recent years has caused the existing pattern to be changed unconsciously and even irresponsibly by owners. In addition, this area suffers from some infrastructure problems, the sewage system being foremost among them.

Main criteria in the formation of Samarkand housing

Climate

It can be said that climate is the most important factor in the formation of these houses. The long, hot summer days and the short, cold winter days dictate the specific shape of this intricate urban pattern. In choosing the location of the houses and in positioning the main entrance door, the direction of the prevailing wind has always been taken into account.

Privacy

Another factor in the organisation of the Samarkand houses around a courtyard is privacy. The ground floors of the houses face the inner courtyard; generally, each space opens onto the courtyard. Depending on the size of the plot owned, some houses might have two courtyards. The first courtyard is meant to serve mainly guests and male users; the second courtyard is more specific and more private.

Main spaces in traditional Samarkand houses

The courtyard

The courtyard both provides circulation and serves as the place where the family comes together. In the eiwan, which opens onto the courtyard, all kinds of daily activities, including sleeping on summer nights, take place. The covered spaces of the house are built around the courtyard in time, as required by the family members. The plants in the courtyard contribute to a balanced climate to be maintained in the building (Photograph 1).

Photo 1

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