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## Original Research Article

# An Analysis of the Concept of Authenticity in Architecture Based on the Levels of Perception from Mulla Sadra's Perspective\*

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## Abstract

**Problem statement:** Understanding authenticity in architecture is a significant and challenging topic. Nowadays, this subject has been primarily explored in the fields of restoration and cultural heritage. Discussions regarding the authenticity of a heritage building frequently arise in architectural discourse. However, due to divergent opinions, the vast scope of the subject, and the lack of precise criteria to address the issues related to the authenticity of architectural works, this important topic has often been overlooked by experts. Consequently, many related studies reflect mutual influence and repetition of general ideas.

**Research objective:** From the perspective of this study, one of the most important areas that can assist researchers in understanding the nature of authenticity is philosophy. The concept of perception in architecture is one of the key issues in this field, and a precise understanding of it plays a significant role in re-evaluating the process of authenticity in architectural works. Research question of this article is What dimensions does the concept of authenticity in architecture possess based on the levels of perception in Mulla Sadra's theory?

**Research method:** This study adopts Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Theosophy as its theoretical foundation, employing a descriptive-analytical method to define the levels of human perception and to identify the process of actualizing the degrees of authenticity. Logical reasoning was used to illustrate the relationship between the concepts of authenticity and perception in architecture.

**Conclusion:** Accordingly, corresponding to the three degrees of sensory, imaginative, and intellectual perceptions according to Mulla Sadra, three degrees of authenticity are defined in terms of form, concept, and meaning.

**Keywords:** *Authenticity, Mulla Sadra, Levels of Perception, Architecture.*

## Introduction

Evaluating and recognizing the authenticity of works is complex due to the ambiguous nature of the material and spiritual concepts embedded within them. Discussions on authenticity in architecture

within the Iranian academic community tend to be a translation of foreign works, and the results of applying these concepts can be observed in specific buildings in Iran. In these structures, authenticity refers to the essence or manner of architectural

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appearance. The solution to returning to authenticity is often seen as restoring the facade of architecture to predetermined or historical forms through the implementation of traditional appearances. However, this issue has not been fundamentally addressed in alignment with our country's intellectual foundations and cultural roots.

Understanding authenticity in architecture, in its semantic and conceptual sense, can provide a correct interpretation for architects and the audience of the work. In contemporary times, experts in the field of architecture have shown attention to understanding the degrees of human perception and its role in the process of comprehending architectural works. Human perception, defined as the awareness and understanding of the external world and the inner self, has led scholars and philosophers to articulate various dimensions of human perception (Irvani & Khodapanahi, 2004). Some types of perception have been attributed to three realms: physical, psychological, and spiritual (Damyar, 2014). Among these, theorists like Juhani Pallasmaa emphasize all sensory perceptions (both external and internal) in the creation of architectural works (Taghdir, 2017, 49). Architectural experts criticize the modern perspective that focuses solely on the sensory level of perception (particularly visual perception), asserting the necessity of considering all levels of human perception in creating architectural works (ibid.).

Examining various criteria for the authenticity of historical works reveals a tendency of each criterion to focus on a limited number of the building's characteristics, neglecting the work as a unified whole. Consequently, a comprehensive approach to understanding the work in its entirety is essential (Pedram et al., 2011, 7). Van Balen (2008, 43 & 44), aiming to operationalize the concept of authenticity, has presented a framework that emphasizes recognizing the dimensions and aspects of the cultural heritage values of a work.

In this study, the concept of authenticity is elucidated with an emphasis on Mulla Sadra's theory of levels of

perception, and the examination of this perspective on the understanding of authenticity in architecture<sup>1</sup> is a novel topic.

## Research Questions

- What dimensions does the concept of authenticity in architecture possess based on the levels of perception in Mulla Sadra's theory?
- How is the concept of authenticity related to the levels of perception in Mulla Sadra's theory?

## Research Method

This study employs qualitative research grounded in interpretation and logical reasoning. It addresses the research questions by defining authenticity within various intellectual realms, specifically from the perspective of Mulla Sadra's philosophy of perception, which is a dominant philosophical movement in Islamic thought in Iran.

Based on this, the study elaborated on and interpreted Mulla Sadra's views regarding the levels of perception in Transcendent Theosophy. Through philosophical deduction, the concept of authenticity was examined from the viewpoints of theorists on this topic.

Furthermore, considering the deep connections between architecture, restoration, and urban planning, sources that discuss authenticity in the context of restoration, urban planning, and historical fabrics were analyzed. By scrutinizing and refining definitions, and exploring them within the theoretical realms of authenticity and perception, the concept of authenticity was identified based on the levels of perception in architecture (Fig.1).

## Background Research

To find and categorize perspectives related to the concept of authenticity, it is essential to review the research background. Since the 1970s, when MacCannell introduced the concept of authenticity in sociological studies, researchers have engaged in various discussions on topics such as genuine authenticity, symbolic authenticity, and the authenticity of historical areas (Nejad Ebrahimi et al., 2022, 93).

Authenticity has been a topic of discussion in various conventions related to architecture and cultural heritage since the 1960s and 1970s in the West. Although authenticity has garnered a vast literature globally, it remains largely unknown in Iran, and those familiar with it often lack a precise understanding of its theoretical foundations (Soleimani et al., 2012, 69). In many published articles in Iran, this topic has been approached based on findings from Western thinkers in the fields of cultural heritage and urban design. Therefore, before delving into the theoretical literature of this study, it is necessary to review previous studies and research on this subject. According to Table 1, studies addressing the concept of authenticity in the fields of architecture and cultural heritage in Iran can be divided into two categories. The majority of the studies focus on authenticity in the preservation of cultural heritage and present authenticity-enhancing components for heritage buildings based on international charters and conventions. Fadaei Nezhad & Eshrati (2015) have thoroughly examined authenticity in international conventions, and the findings from their article have served as a reference for other published articles.

Another set of studies addresses the topic of authenticity in architecture from the perspectives of theorists such as Corbin, Shayegan, and others, although these are relatively few in number. In his studies, Foroughmand Araabi &

Arzhmand (2022a, 2022b, 2022c) discusses the topic of authenticity in architecture, emphasizing the views of Corbin, Brandi, and Shayegan, extracting the concept of authenticity based on their theories. The reviews conducted indicate that most research on authenticity has focused on cultural heritage and the restoration of historical buildings, with fewer studies dedicated to this topic within the field of architecture. Thus, there is a pressing need for a more comprehensive examination of this concept in architecture, and this study seeks to explore the essence of the concept of authenticity in architecture.

### Theoretical Foundations

#### • Linguistic examination of authenticity and its concept

The term “authenticity” in the field of preservation and restoration is “authenticity,” which, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is derived from the Latin word “Authenticus,” the Old French “Authentique,” and the Greek “Authentikos,” meaning original (Principal Originality) and first-hand. In English, it encompasses meanings related to credibility, accuracy, and validity. Thus, the term signifies the quality of an object in alignment with what is claimed for it, thereby rendering the object real and pure (Klein, 1971). In the Amid Dictionary, it is defined as being original, having origins, being rooted, and being of noble lineage (Amid, 1983, 165). The Moin Dictionary

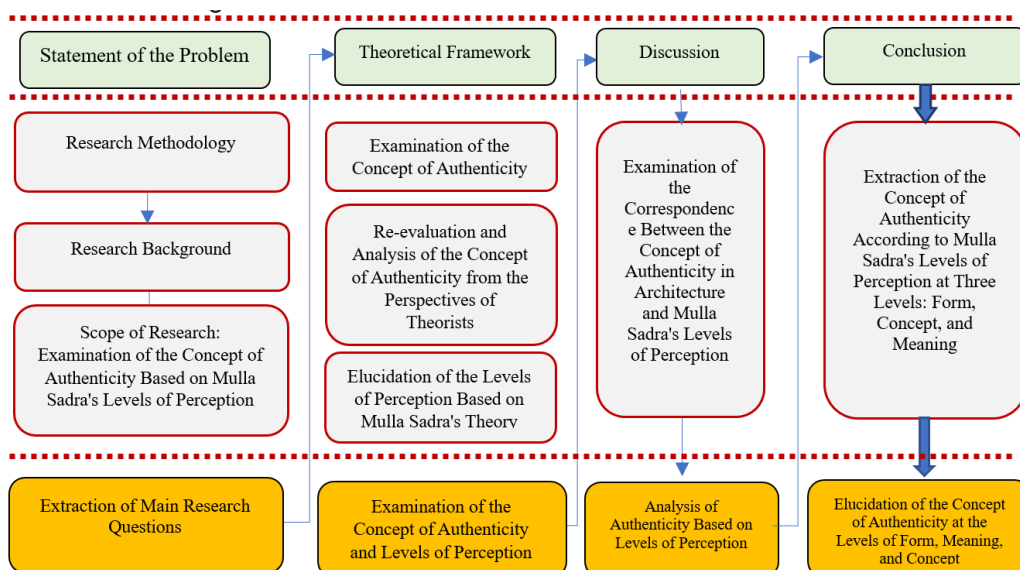


Fig. 1. Research Process for Defining Authenticity Based on Mulla Sadra's Levels of Perception. Source: Authors.

Table 1. Background of Research Conducted on the Concept of Authenticity in the Field of Architecture and Cultural Heritage. Source: Authors.

Title	Author(s)	Conclusion
Analysis of the Elements of Recognizing Authenticity in Cultural Heritage Protection	Fadaei Nezhad & Eshrati (2015)	Two dimensions—tangible and intangible—and three aspects: stability, continuity, and change serve as the foundational pillars of the conceptual framework of authenticity from the perspectives of international documents, conventions, and theorists.
The Role of Authenticity in the Restoration of Contexts	Masoud et al. (2013)	Enhancing the sense of belonging and sense of place by attributing authenticity to space will be effective in the field of psychology, and its qualitative impact will lead to an improved perception of beauty.
Examination and Evaluation of the Authenticity of Urban Development Plans in Historical Contexts (Revival Plan of Imam Ali (AS) Square in Isfahan)	Zebardast & Emami (2012)	The three main criteria for authenticity are: preserving and strengthening the sense of identity and uniqueness of a place, avoiding anti-authentic approaches, and adhering to authentic urban planning strategies.
Comparative Study of Uniqueness in Industrial Designs and Its Comparison with Authenticity Requirements	Shobeiri Zanjani & Dehghani (2015)	The perspective on industrial design authenticity in the legal system has distanced itself from the conventional meaning of authenticity in various legal systems, approaching a separate substantial criterion with an incomplete interpretation of the requirement for uniqueness.
Evaluation of the Concept of Authenticity in the Interaction of Nature and Indigenous Architecture through the Lens of Brandi's Theory: Case Study of Kashan City	Foroughmand Araabi & Arzhamand (2022a)	Naturalism is regarded as the "essence of indigenous architecture," emphasizing complete harmony and alignment of architecture with the surrounding nature.
The Essence of Authenticity and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Iranian Architecture Based on the Thoughts of Dariush Shayegan	Foroughmand Araabi & Arzhamand (2022b)	Contemporary Iranian architecture has developed a new identity to preserve its Iranian authenticity and, as a result, to achieve co-existence and reconciliation between Western and Iranian cultures.
Elucidation of the Concept of Authenticity in Architecture with Emphasis on Henry Corbin's Views	Foroughmand Araabi & Arzhamand (2022c)	In Corbin's thought, art and architecture are seen as the missing link in the current theoretical foundations for understanding the past and providing a suitable perspective for its explanation.
An Existential Approach to Authenticity of Urban Form Identity	Kasravi et al. (2020)	The solutions regarding the approach of existential authenticity versus the approach of substantial authenticity are non-corporeal and, in fact, epistemic. From this perspective, physical planning projects that seek to restore and replicate past forms, materials, and colors based on identity justification lack a solid foundation.
Influential Indicators of Authenticity in the Revitalization of the Sedghiani House in Tabriz	Nejad Ebrahimi et al. (2022)	Any form of re-creation should be based on a strategy of minimal intervention to preserve the authenticity of the work in its components and the authenticity of the community's culture as a whole.
Evaluation of Authenticity in the Process of Protecting Historical Works in Iran: The Necessity of Attention to the Continuity of Indigenous Cultural Creation	Pedram et al. (2011)	Attention to the tangible manifestations of the concept of "continuity of indigenous cultural creation" will lead to a greater alignment of the conservation process with local values and enrich the perception of authenticity at the international level.
Criteria for Authenticity and Credibility of Contemporary Architectural Works (Case Study: Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art)	Esmaily Gheshlaghi & Bemanian (2022)	An "original" design possesses innovative characteristics that have not been previously observed. By embodying the features of modeling elements or ideas, it can present creativity and innovation through composition, connection, and impact on the context and society, thus being regarded as "authentic."
The Challenge of Authenticity of the Work and Its Surroundings in Open Space Museums (Rural Heritage Museum of Guilan)	Khakban et al. (2020)	Based on a holistic approach derived from the theory of the existence of authenticity, the continuous movement of a unified existence toward perfection is pursued.
An Introduction to the Effects of Authenticity in Revitalizing Dilapidated Areas of Tehran (Case Study: Yaftabad Neighborhood)	Soleimani et al. (2012)	Revitalizing dilapidated urban areas using the theory of authenticity may resolve the issues of any decayed area of the city; however, the dispersal of the impoverished population could lead to the reproduction of similar spaces in other regions.
Recognizing Authenticity in the Protection and Restoration of Historical-Cultural Works Based on the Views of Thinkers in the 19th and 20th Centuries	Nezaratizadeh & Vatan Doost (2022)	Authenticity can be categorized into three approaches, independent of its historical progression: 1. Acknowledging fixed elements in the work as authentic/ 2. Linking authenticity to the historical context of the work, which can be referred to as a process of authenticity/ 3. A viewer-centered approach that prioritizes the observer in the understanding and evaluation of the work, rather than emphasizing the historical artifact itself.

Rest of Table 1.

Title	Author(s)	Conclusion
Architectural Heritage Conservation in China from View of Authenticity.	Ruan & Li (2008)	The search for authenticity has taken on a dynamic and diverse form through local economic, social, and cultural development. The convergence of various value systems in heritage conservation, within the processes of globalization and modernization in China, frequently leads to diverse Chinese methodologies.
Authenticity and the Reconstruction of Memory in Japanese Monumental Architecture	Masatsugu et al. (2007)	The Kyoto Imperial Palace illustrates how the Japanese concept of memorial architecture transcends the limitations of place, time, and even function. It floats above eras and locations, connecting with its original pattern, which is embodied in its form, even when represented as a newer building.

defines 'Esalat' (Persian term for authenticity) as follows: 1. Being of noble lineage, being authentic/ 2. Having nobility (Moin, 2004, 5258). The first meaning of "authentic" is synonymous with "original" or "first edition," indicating a continuous connection with a historical existence. The second meaning equates "authentic" with "genuine," which stands in contrast to "fake" or "forged." When something is called authentic, it implies that it originated from the source it claims to (Bialystok, 2009, 18 & 19).

#### • Reevaluation and analysis of the concept of authenticity from theorists' perspectives

Plato considers authenticity as fidelity to tradition (Binay Motlaq, 2006, 71) and as a combination of form and content (Rahil Ghavami, 2012). According to Platonic thought, if a form is separated from content, the space loses its authenticity, becoming merely a superficial or inauthentic form (Masoud et al., 2013, 274). In Iranian thought, authenticity pertains to that which is timeless, enduring, and stable in infinite time (Zorvan Akranah) (Talebian, 2005, 56-58). Being authentic implies an autonomous function, possessing credibility and authority, as well as being original, unique, precise, real, and true; however, in relation to time, one must state that the authenticity of an artwork reflects its true unity of essence, creative process, physical manifestation, and the impact of its message throughout its historical timeline (Jokilehto & Stovel, 1995, 6). Jokilehto, within the framework of World Heritage, relates the concept of authenticity to notions of continuity, change, and truth (Jokilehto, 1999). Authenticity, more than anything related to place, is about people

and cultures (Andrew & Buggey, 2008, 61). In phenomenological discussions within architecture, authenticity is regarded as an inherent quality of being and belonging (Norberg-Schulz, 1991). Rossler also illustrates the concept of authenticity in the realm of cultural heritage, emphasizing the dual role of tangible and intangible components (Rossler, 2008, 48). Nejadebrahimi and colleagues express authenticity as a multifaceted concept, noting that the criteria for authenticity differ across cultures (Nejad Ebrahimi et al., 2022, 92).

Zancheti et al. (2009, 166) examine the concept of authenticity from three main aspects: the material and physical dimension, the structural dimension, and the expressive dimension. Araoz categorizes the concept of authenticity from two perspectives: tangible and intangible in cultural heritage works (Araoz, 2008, 37). According to Brandi, there is always a correspondence between the parts and the whole of a work (Zancheti et al., 2009, 166); thus, the performance of the parts is not considered independently, but the entirety of the work must be comprehensible (Brandi, 1963). Alexander (2002, 145) views authenticity as a primary concern for the survival of contemporary structures for current and future generations, considering what he perceives as authentic to be in harmony with its "inner nature". In bourgeois thought, authenticity relies on the differentiation of space based on the identity-forming "utility" that each space has for its owner (Nari Ghomi & Abbaszadeh, 2014).

According to Naqi Zadeh, authenticity arises from qualities that form a space within an environment (Naghizade & Aminzadeh, 2003, 99). Authenticity, unlike mere originality, does not solely derive from

the object but must be proven through a specific scientific cognitive process (Mitchell, 2008). Van Balen (2008, 39) attributes the neglect of certain aspects of authenticity to the layered and relative nature of this concept.

Indeed, “each culture and institution understands authenticity in a different sense, a meaning that changes over time” (Mitchell, 2008, 26). Thus, based on the concepts presented by theorists (Table 2), this study will explore the concept of authenticity in architecture according to Mulla Sadra’s Transcendent Theosophy.

• **The authenticity of existence in transcendent theosophy**

The foundations of Mulla Sadra’s Transcendent Theosophy concerning the issue of ontology and the analysis of the existence of phenomena are critical discussions in the realm of philosophy. The elucidation of “the authenticity of existence” in contrast to “the authenticity of essence” represents a significant innovation among Islamic philosophers (Motahhari, 1990). According to the authenticity of existence, what constitutes the real world is existence itself, and all diverse effects are attributed to it; in other words, existence is what is authentic. Essence also exists in the external world, but its being is dependent and secondary to existence. Thus, in possible beings, essence and existence are unified; however, existence

is self-sufficient, while essence is contingent upon existence (Sadruddin Shirazi, 1981a).

The principle of “the authenticity of existence” is the most important contribution of Transcendent Theosophy, accompanied by certain derivatives such as the gradational unity of existence, substantial motion, and the unity of knowledge, knower, and known, which can play a significant role in elucidating authenticity (Balanian, 2023, 11).

Here, Mulla Sadra’s specific theory regarding the nature of knowledge and perception, which itself branches from the principle of the authenticity of existence, opens pathways for this study. The existential reality of each human being is constructed from the perceptual and cognitive data acquired throughout their lives, shaping their world. The existence of three realms (the realm of matter and senses, the realm of ideas, and the realm of intellect) indicates that there are three primary modes of perception, corresponding directly to the three worlds (Table 3) that represent different levels of existence (ibid., 12).

From the perspective of realist philosophers, the process of “knowing” through perception occurs solely through the nature of existence and the essence of things, and the authentic aspects of each object or structure are not directly perceivable. Therefore, by linking these philosophical concepts to authenticity,

Table 2. Concept of Authenticity from the Perspective of Theorists. Source: Authors.

Theorist	Concept of Authenticity	Source
Plato	Authenticity as fidelity to tradition	Binay Motlaq (2006)
	The totality of form and content	Rahil Ghavami (2012)
Jokilehto	Relates authenticity to the concepts of continuity, change, and truth	Jokilehto (1999)
Norberg-Schulz	Authenticity as an innate quality of being confined within	Norberg-Schulz (1991)
Gustavo Araoz	Classifies the concept of authenticity from two primary aspects: tangible and intangible in cultural heritage works	Araoz (2008)
Zancheti et al.	Presents authenticity from three aspects: material and physical, structural, and expressive.	Zancheti et al. (2009)
Alexander	Compatibility with one’s “inner nature” is called authenticity.	Alexander (2002)
Cesare Brandi	He mentions the correspondence between the parts and the whole of the work.	Zancheti et al. (2009)
	The performance of parts is not independent; the entirety must be comprehensible.	Brandi (1963)
Naghizade & Aminzadeh	Authenticity is not born from quantitative factors but includes the qualities of space in the environment.	Naghizade & Aminzadeh (2003)
Van Balen	Authenticity is a layered and relative concept.	Van Balen (2008)
Mitchell	Authenticity is proven through a process of scientific understanding.	Mitchell (2008)

Table 3. Gradation of Existence in the World and Its Perceptions According to Mulla Sadra. Source: Authors.

Levels of Existence	Levels of the World	Levels of Perception
- Necessary Existence - Intelligence	World of Intellects (Abstract from matter and its properties)	Intellectual Perceptions
- Souls	World of Ideas (World of Quantitative Forms)	Imaginative Perceptions
- Matter (Hyle)	World of Sensibles (World of the Material World)	Sensory Perceptions

we will arrive at a new definition for the “authenticity” of a work (Talebian, 2005).

• **Human perception and its stages from Mulla Sadra’s perspective**

The issue of perception has always been one of the most contentious philosophical matters in the field of design, particularly in architecture. Architects create architectural works by understanding the universe and drawing inspiration from it, while the audience of the structure uses their perceptual faculties to discover and comprehend the architectural space. Thus, examining and understanding the levels of perception is essential, given its role in reinterpreting and understanding the concepts of authenticity in architectural works.

The issue of perception concerns the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived. In philosophy, levels of perception are divided into two categories: acquired (perceptions derived from the five senses) and immediate (direct and unmediated perception through the senses, also known as intuition). In another classification, perceptions can be divided into internal (including common sense, imagination, illusion, memory, and Motesarefeh) and external (the five senses). Mulla Sadra confirms the four-part division of human perception by other philosophers (sensory, imaginative, rational, and illusory) in a three-part categorization (sensory, imaginative, rational), corresponding to the three realms of existence (the realm of the senses, the realm of ideas, and the realm of intellects) (Sadruddin Shirazi, 1282, Vol. 8, 243) (Fig. 2).

According to Sadra, the soul undergoes different stages of existence to achieve universal understanding, transitioning from the material world to the imaginal world and the intellects world.

Thus, the tangible perceptual forms, accompanied by the soul’s evolution and ascent from the material realm to the imaginal realm, can transform into imaginative forms. If the soul continues its intrinsic ascent and transcends the imaginative realm, its perceptual forms will convert into intelligible forms (Rezazade Jodi, 2013, 3). Therefore, based on substantial motion, he posits a progression of perceptual levels from the material to the immaterial, moving from the sensory world to the intelligible world through imagination, viewing these perceptions as interconnected.

In his view, the human soul unites with its specific state at each level of perception; when perceiving sensory objects, the soul becomes identical to the senses and the material state, while in the perception of imaginative objects, it unites with the imaginative state, and during the perception of intellects, it merges with the intelligible and the state of separate intelligences (Sadruddin Shirazi, 1981b, Vol. 8, 234). In this sense, Mulla Sadra’s levels of perception (sensory, imaginative, and intellectual) emerge from substantial motion, facilitated by the powers of the soul (senses, imagination, and intellect).

In this study, the levels of perception and the stages of their realization will be examined from the perspective of Mulla Sadra’s Transcendent Theosophy, and

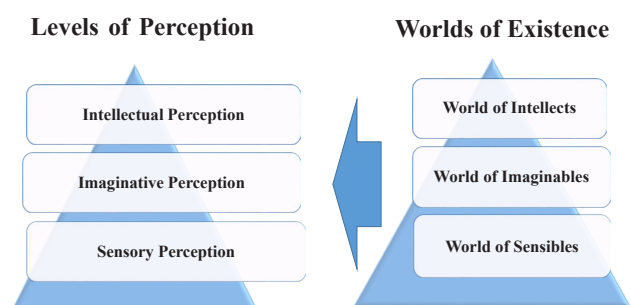


Fig. 2. Correspondence of Worlds of Existence and Human Levels of Perception According to Mulla Sadra’s Theory. Source: Authors.

corresponding concepts of authenticity in architecture will be extracted.

**- Level of Sensory Perception**

Sensory perception is the first stage of perception’s emergence. In this level, the perceived form<sup>2</sup> exists in matter, and the perceiver apprehends this form through the specific qualities of the sensed objects. External senses and internal senses are the faculties of sensory perception of the soul. According to Mulla Sadra, external senses are the faculties that perceive external realities, and the perception of sensory objects by the soul occurs in this level, which includes vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. In fact, both external and internal senses (Fig. 3) common sense, imagination, illusion, memory, and Motesarefeh) serve as the groundwork for sensory perception (Taghdir, 2017, 48). The acquisition of knowledge in the human mind begins with sensory experiences, and after the mind attains a number of sensory data, it becomes active, producing intuitive knowledge. Once the mind acquires this knowledge, the process of thought begins, enabling humans to engage in new ideas by employing intuitive concepts and affirmations.

Mulla Sadra believes that the human soul can be a flexible entity that becomes identical to each of the senses when perceiving sensory objects. When perceiving sensory objects, it descends into the elemental realm, reaching the level of nature and each of the senses. He defines the stages of sensory perception as follows: the first stage involves the reflection of external realities through the five senses, akin to the effect and reflection of an image on a photographic film. In the second stage, the human soul gains knowledge from these images and symbols, and the next crucial stage occurs when the soul, after focusing and gaining immediate knowledge of the products of its senses and being aware of the imprinted forms in those senses, creatively reconstructs the mental image of the external object (Arshad Rīyāhī & Wāsi‘ī, 2011, 13). Common sense, one of the internal senses, perceives the forms that external senses apprehend. Thus, “common sense” serves as the container for the

perceptions of the external senses, akin to a reservoir through which these five streams flow. What is perceived through the external senses regarding the color, shape, taste, smell, and flavor of an object reaches common sense, which then comprehensively understands all aspects of the object (Fig. 4).

**- Level of Imaginative Perception**

The perception of imaginative forms by the soul occurs at this level. Imagination is one of the internal perceptions, and the internal senses provide the groundwork for this perception. “Imagination” serves as the treasury of forms and preserves them. At this level, the human mind, after sensing and

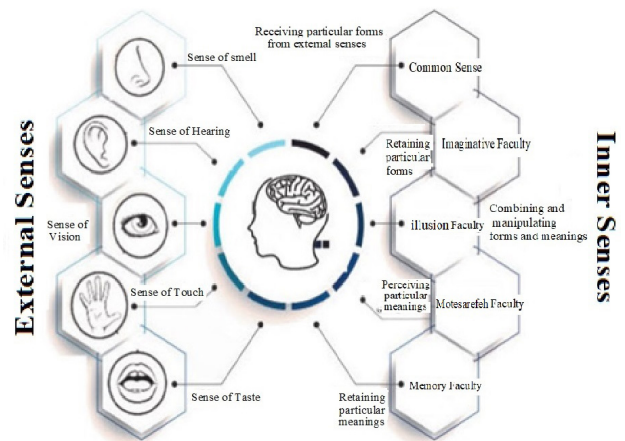


Fig. 3. Levels of external and internal perception-senses. Source: Rahimimehr & Mehrbani, 2023.

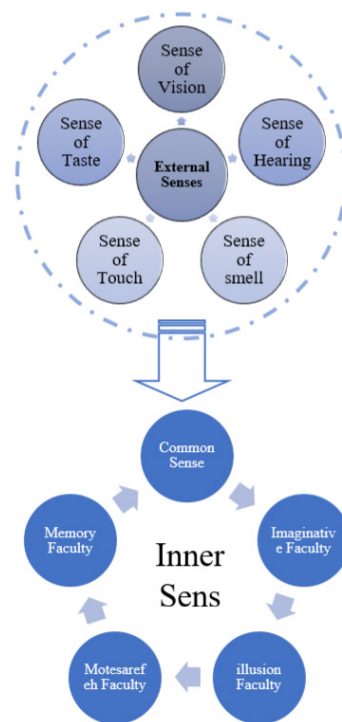


Fig. 4. Relationship Between Levels of Perception—External and Internal. Senses Source: Authors.

establishing sensory contact, retains a form of this sensation. This form remains in the mind even after the sensory relationship with the object has ended. In fact, imagination consists of sensory forms derived from perceptible objects and material things, which are stored in the mind after the sensory connection with them is severed. The soul, by focusing on these forms, creates their imaginal counterparts, meaning this type of form is generated by the soul itself (Sadruddin Shirazi, 1981b, 287). This level possesses all the characteristics of the perceptible object except for its matter (Araki, 2004). Mulla Sadra defines this kind of perception as the perception of an object with the same characteristics and qualities as sensory perception, with the distinction that the matter of the object is not present for the external senses; in fact, imagination is the form that remains in the soul after the perceptible object has become concealed (Arshad Rīyāhī & Wāsi'ī, 2011, 18). Therefore, in imaginative perception, the human soul, using forms derived from physical matters or forms received from the realm of ideas, generates imaginative images in an emanative manner (Taghdir, 2017, 57). According to his view, the realm of ideas, by virtue of its pure actuality, is governed by stability and is not subject to change, thus bearing similarity to the realm of intellect. However, because it, like the material world, is veiled by forms, one aspect of it faces the material world and nature (Sadruddin Shirazi, 1996, 448).

#### - Level of Intellectual Perception

Among the levels of human perception, intellectual perception is presented as the most significant aspect. According to Mulla Sadra's theory, the rational soul of a human, after passing through the vegetative and animal souls, reaches a stage of perception where it can comprehend universal concepts and intellectual truths (Akbarzadeh, 2012, 12). Intellectual perception is the understanding of an object concerning its essence and nature, without the need for the presence of the material object or any means of perception (Sadruddin Shirazi, 1981b, Vol. 1, 362-360). Thus, when perceiving universal intellects, the soul observes luminous essences and intellectual beings, which

are immaterial, through the soul's transition from the sensory world to the imaginative world and from the imaginative world to the intellectual world (*ibid.*, 289).

In fact, at every level of perception, the soul is present and becomes united with the phenomena of that level. For this reason, sensory and imaginative perceptions, according to Sadra, are also considered to be immediate perceptions (*ibid.*, 308). Regarding intellectual perceptions, the presence of luminous intellectual objects leads to immediate knowledge, as the soul, by advancing to the intellectual realm, finds itself present there, and intellectual beings become manifest to it. Knowledge, in this context, is the presence and manifestation of the perceived for the perceiver, but it should be noted that this immediate knowledge occurs only for a select few (*ibid.*, Vol. 5, 266). This means it is attained by those who have experienced the transition from the ideas realm to the intellectual realm along the path of the soul's essential development (Rezazade Jodi, 2013, 7). However, for those who have not reached this level, intellectual perception will appear in an ambiguous form.

Mulla Sadra does not consider this perception, unlike the other two levels, to arise from the activity and creativity of the soul; rather, he asserts: "The soul [in intellectual perception] has attained a degree of intuition such that its perception is not of the nature of sensory or imaginative perception, but rather it engages in the observation of pure luminous truths" (Ashtiani, 1993, 182 & 183 & 191) (Fig. 5).

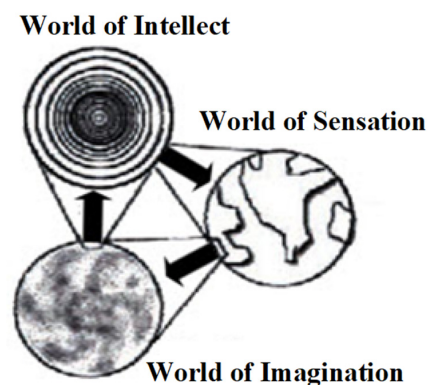


Fig. 5. Interconnection Between Various Perceptions and Their Transferability. Source: Taghvaei, 2010, 77.

In his view, intellectual perception occurs as a result of the intensification of the soul's existence and its union with the Active Intellect. The realization of this perception happens through the observation of intellectual forms. Mulla Sadra supports the theory of reflection and articulates it in terms of two kinds of knowledge: acquired and immediate.

In cases where the soul's development leads it to higher stages of existence, obstacles and veils are removed, and the soul becomes a manifestation of intellectual truths, observing them through immediate knowledge. However, if the soul remains at lower stages, engulfed by material attachments, the vision of intellectual forms will be acquired, ambiguous, general, and common (Rezazade Jodi, 2013, 11-26). He states that the truths of things are only revealed to those whose hearts are illuminated by the light of truth (Hasanzadeh Amoli, 2006, 367 & 368).

### **Model of Correspondence of Authenticity with Levels of Perception in the Environment Based on Mulla Sadra's Theory**

According to Mulla Sadra, the essence of being either an external or mental owner of perceptual forms is that humans perceive a representation of the same world in which they exist through their perceptual faculties. The foundation of all human perceptions begins with sensory understanding of the environment and culminates in self-awareness and connection with the surroundings (Jafari Valani, 2015). In fact, the world provides the context for human perceptions, and individuals engage in perception and action within this environment by utilizing rational thought, the natural world, their own values, and emotions. However, the fundamental issue is that humans experience a degree of perception and action at the sensory to intellectual stages, organizing and choosing their actions based on the knowledge gained from that level (Afshoon & Afsharkermani, 2018).

What serves as the basis for human action in the environment can stem from desire, under sensory perception; will, under imaginative perception; and purpose, under intellectual perception. The

world that humans interact with plays a crucial role in transmitting desired forms and meanings to them (Elmi Sola & Barekati, 2016). Additionally, the existential and perceptual level of humans defines their interaction with existence; the higher this level, the richer the treasury of meanings and forms within their psyche, which in turn enhances the quality of created architectural works (Taghdir & Samimifar, 2022, 10). Therefore, cognitive perfection in humans is realized through sensation, visualization, and reasoning in the environment, influenced by environmental elements and levels of human awareness. Given that architecture holds a primary position among the arts that shape human environments, it significantly contributes to the evolutionary journey and attention of humans toward higher existential levels. The model of human interaction with existence (surrounding environment - structure) and its correspondence with authenticity in architecture is illustrated in Fig. 6. Thus, the level of human engagement with architecture and understanding of the authenticity of works is determined by their perception of the environment:

1. Minimal connections among humans, the environment, and architecture: Perceiving the physical form of architecture by a potential human surrounded by the Alam al-Mulk (World of Dominion/ the natural world).
2. Moderate connections among humans, the environment, and architecture: Perceiving architectural concepts by a human being evolving in relation to both nature and imagination.
3. Maximum connections among humans, the environment, and architecture: Perceiving meaning in architecture by Al-Insān al-Kāmil (the complete human) interacting with all realms of existence.

According to Nasr (1989), the external environment that humans create reflects their inner state; in essence, the external is a mirror of the internal. Each individual establishes a level of interaction with realms of existence based on their existential state, thereby storing a collection of meanings and forms within themselves through their perceptual faculties. In this context, humans, according to their level of

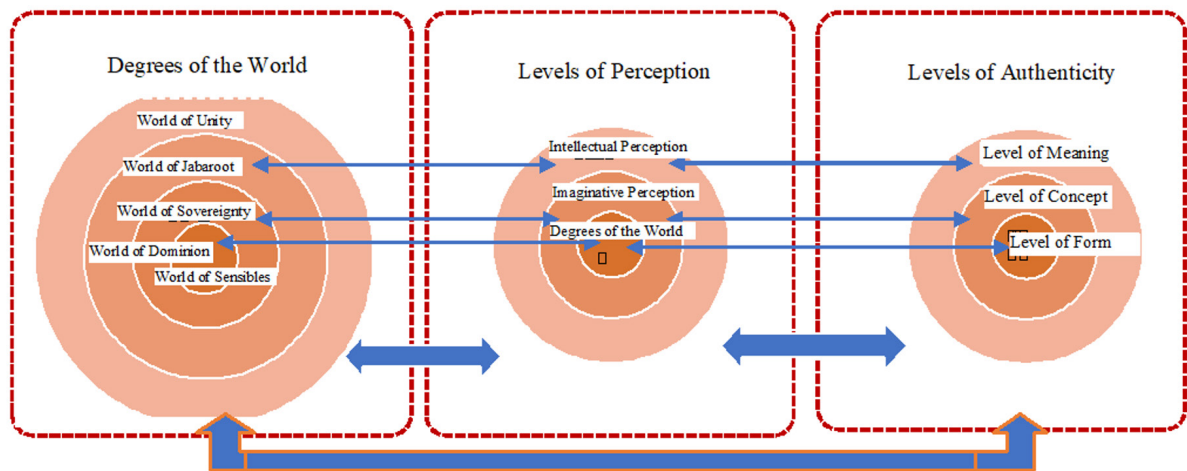


Fig. 6. Model of Correspondence Between Levels of Authenticity in Architecture and Levels of Perception and Existence. Source: Authors.

perception of existence and deep understanding of it, rather than striving to alter their environment in ways that conflict with natural principles, seek harmony and alignment with it, leading to a deeper experience of their connection to the world. Thus, if a person achieves the state of the complete human through substantial motion, they will have the maximum interaction and engagement with their environment. Through a profound understanding of the natural environment and their connection to the surrounding world, they will attain a deeper revelation of the universe and life.

In the view of Transcendent Theosophy, according

to the defined model, humans, with the assistance of external and internal senses, comprehend perceptible forms, leading to an understanding of the material world (nature). By utilizing internal senses, they grasp imaginative forms and the Alam al-Malakut (World of Sovereignty), and through reason, they attain an understanding of universal concepts and insights from the Alam al-Jabarut (World of Power). Therefore, based on the levels of human connection with the world and corresponding to their levels of perception of the environment (Fig. 7), the concept of authenticity in architecture can be expressed at three levels: meaning, concept, and form. In fact,

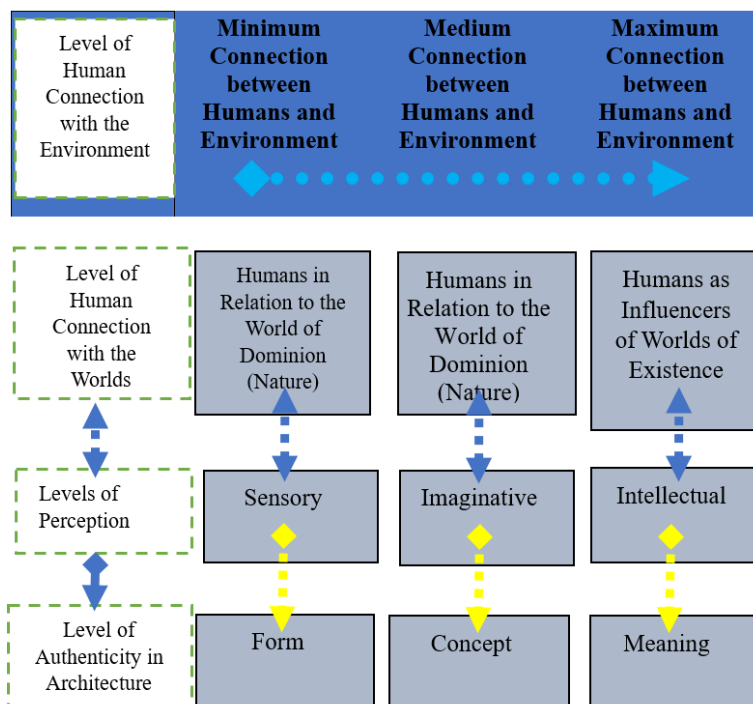


Fig. 7. Relationships Between Authenticity in Architecture and Human Levels of Perception and Environment. Source: Authors.

humans will achieve an understanding of each level of authenticity in a building following their levels of perception and their relationship with the environment (the natural world).

### Expression of Levels of Authenticity in Architecture Based on Mulla Sadra's Levels of Perception

The human soul, according to its perceptual faculties, exists within a world of existence. It perceives intellects in the intellectual world, which is above all other worlds, and it perceives senses in the world of material bodies and substances, which is beneath all worlds. Moreover, it perceives 'imaginative' in a world that lies between these two. Thus, each individual connects with the worlds of existence according to their level of perception, and through both external and internal faculties, they store a collection of meanings and forms within their soul (Taghdir, 2017, 60).

What is present to the perceiver is a form of a tangible object (not the object itself) with specific characteristics such as time, place, and condition (Araki, 2004). Mulla Sadra considers the matter to be an obstacle to perception, asserting that true understanding is based on the abstraction from matter, as the matter is ambiguous, mixed with absence, and the source of potentiality and deficiency (Sadruddin Shirazi, 1996, 182 & 183). He likens the reflection and influence of external objects on the senses to the effect of an image on photographic film. According to him, human external senses (such as sight) cannot independently reflect external reality in the mind and create knowledge. After receiving environmental information through the five senses, the human soul encodes these images and information through common sense. In the final stage, which is the primary stage of perception, the mental image of the external object is reconstructed based on attention and immediate knowledge. This reconstruction occurs after awareness of the imprinted forms in those senses and through one's creativity, allowing

individuals to recreate their perceptions from these inputs (Arshad Rīyāhī & Wāsi'ī, 2011, 13).

In this way, the soul initially achieves sensory perceptions in its substantial motion and later perceives imaginatives; once it reaches intellectual abstraction, it then attains the ability to perceive intellegibles. Mulla Sadra sees change and transformation as inherent to the essence of the soul in its substantial motion, as the existence of material objects, which are mixed with material properties, constitutes the existence of the tangible (Sadruddin Shirazi, 1981b, Vol. 1, 290). Thus, corresponding to sensory perception in Mulla Sadra's thought, the physical and external characteristics of architectural structures can be observed. Based on this level of perception, individuals have varying interpretations of the relationship between a building, space, or material place and lifestyle, spatial values, etc. Materials, colors, sizes, spatial geometry, facades, etc. are among these characteristics that are subject to change over time and space within society.

According to Mitchel, authenticity in art or an artistic work is a multi-layered communicative context among records, designs, artistic intentions, expectations, and more (Mitchell, 2008). Therefore, understanding this level of the building's characteristics in its physical dimensions and layers (Fig. 8). leads to an understanding of authenticity at the level of form.

The next level is imaginative perception. At this stage, the soul, initially devoid of any perceptual form, gradually becomes actualized through the process of sensory perceptions. By activating its imaginative faculty, it generates imaginary forms in its realm and perceives these imaginative perceptions. According to Amini et al. (2019, 62), the imaginative space in each individual has a unique structure, differing from that of others. The imaginative space, like physical space, comprises various components that assist the audience in understanding the building at this level. The components that shape the imagination, such as memories, lived experiences, mental images, beliefs, and attitudes, are rooted in individual identity. These concepts are perceived by the audience and can be

interpreted based on various societal values and meanings. In the realm of imagination, the audience understands the underlying concepts in architectural structures based on the physical form of the architecture, utilizing mental images and associations within the imaginative world and their lived experiences in the building (Fig. 9). Characteristics such as privacy, hierarchy, fluidity, spatial structure, etc., fall under this category. Fadaei Nezhad & Eshrati (2015) refer to the continuity inherent in a work as a characteristic of authenticity—qualities that remain observable in architecture despite changes in the structure or geometry of the building and are transferable over time.

According to the definition of authenticity in Iranian thought, authenticity in architecture is interpreted as timeless qualities, which do not belong to a specific time and are eternal. Therefore, by perceiving these features in architecture, the audience attains an understanding of the building’s authenticity at the level of concept.

However, intellectual perception is the understanding of an object concerning its truth and essence,

it transferable. Therefore, authenticity is not merely a contemporary term but has emerged from the continuity of stable traditions throughout history, remaining relevant across all times.

The authenticity of anything can be sought in its existence, and it is a concept that can never be directly understood. What is referred to as the authenticity of a work is essentially its essence, shaped in various forms in our minds. Given the layered interpretation of authenticity in architecture, its characteristics are embedded in different layers of the structure. The audience’s perception of these characteristics depends on their own stored knowledge, meaning that each individual, according to their level of perception, will achieve a different understanding of the concepts of authenticity in a building.

Based on the principle of the gradation of existence in Transcendent Theosophy, authentic architecture elevates the human experience from the sensory to the meaningful and intellectual levels. Thus, an authentic architectural work addresses not only “meanings and truths” but also “concepts” and



Fig. 8. Perceptible Characteristics in Architecture (Surface Appearances) at the Level of Form. From right to left - Malek House, Rasolian House, Mortaz House in Yazd. Source: Haji Qasemi, 2004.



Fig. 9. Expression of Authenticity at the Level of Concept (Hierarchy). From right to left - Malek House, Rasolian House, Mortaz House in Yazd. Source: Haji Qasemi, 2004.

independent of other things; whether this truth is found alone or is accompanied by other attributes perceived in the same manner. Architecture, as an artificial form, like other phenomena in the world, possesses both external and hidden meanings. Meaning represents non-physical, internal aspects related to truth. Thus, at this level of perception, through intellectual faculties, the audience can perceive the meanings embedded in architectural works created across diverse cultures and times, which possess forms that may not be familiar to everyone. Authenticity arises as a continuation of stable and rooted traditions within the historical context. Consequently, creating new forms, and adhering to the enduring concepts of the past, signifies using timeless ideas characterized by stability, with architecture specifically aiming to reveal truth in existence. In fact, authenticity in architecture at this level does not refer to fixed instances and forms, but rather to stable principles that manifest in new shapes and forms at any time, resulting in a cohesive whole within architecture (Fig. 10). Such attributes include unity, purity, balance, and more.

Alexander (2006) considers authenticity as alignment with one's inner nature; thus, each person attains a level of this alignment based on their perceptual faculties. At this level, the audience, according to their level of perception, comprehends the truth of the building and its authenticity at the level of meaning—where, as Mulla Sadra puts it, authenticity resides in the existence of architecture rather than its essence. Some theorists argue that art serves as a medium between the worlds of sensation and imagination, and since the imaginative world is rooted in the worlds of meaning and intellect, an artistic work can guide individuals toward those worlds. Therefore, architecture (in

addition to the communicative features between levels of existence) can lead the audience from the stage of sensory perceptions to the stage of spiritual perceptions. Based on the understanding of the levels of perception and their relationship to the levels of the soul and how authenticity manifests at the levels of meaning, concept, and form in architecture (Fig. 11), Table 4 is derived.

## Conclusion

In exploring the background of authenticity in architecture, it becomes evident that each definition focuses on certain aspects of the concept, and a comprehensive and complete definition has yet to be established. In every region, based on culture, time, and the subject under investigation, authenticity is interpreted differently. Over time, these concepts intertwine, forming a more inclusive understanding. From the perspective of Transcendent Theosophy, humans are in a constant state of change, moving towards their ultimate essence. The human soul accepts multiple stages from the moment of its existence and undergoes various existential phases through substantial motion. Similarly, in architecture, an upward movement is created by establishing hierarchies and creating a defined path with varying spatial qualities. Mulla Sadra refers to the worlds of intellect, imagination, and matter, each of which can be distinctly represented in architecture. He posits that perception evolves from matter to abstraction, transitioning from the material world to the intelligible world through the imaginative realm. Accordingly, levels of authenticity in architecture can be defined corresponding to the levels of perception. Authenticity embodies the principles and traditions prevalent in a particular time, manifesting uniquely according to the conditions of that environment, making



Fig. 10. Expression of Authenticity at the Level of Meaning (Unity and Purity). From left to right - Malek House, Rasolian House, Mortaz House in Yazd. Source: Haji Qasemi, 2004.

“forms.” In seeking ideas from the worlds of meaning and spirit, it also considers the levels of “concepts” and “forms.” Therefore, authenticity in architecture, at its most basic perceptual level, pertains to material categories, where the observer engages with the physical characteristics of the structure—its design and material aspects.

At the imaginative level, the perception of the building transcends the sensory and material realm. Here, the

comprehension of concepts from the structure occurs through the imaginative faculty, as meanings and concepts are evoked within the architectural form. Since material attributes do not encapsulate these concepts, they are reflected in the architectural structure and interpreted based on each individual’s level of perception. According to intellectual perception, buildings encompass multiple meanings, which are grasped not through the senses but through rational faculties. Here, the presence of meaning in human perception is realized through their engagement with architecture, where the audience, beyond the material form, merges with the truth of the architectural space and becomes aware of the divine attributes reflected in it (Fig. 12).

Therefore, an authentic building possesses three levels of authenticity, which can be interpreted in various ways depending on the audience’s levels of perception. This framework allows for the assessment of authenticity in an architectural work based on human perception levels. The present study aims to decode the concepts between the levels of perception, architecture, and the authenticity of the building,

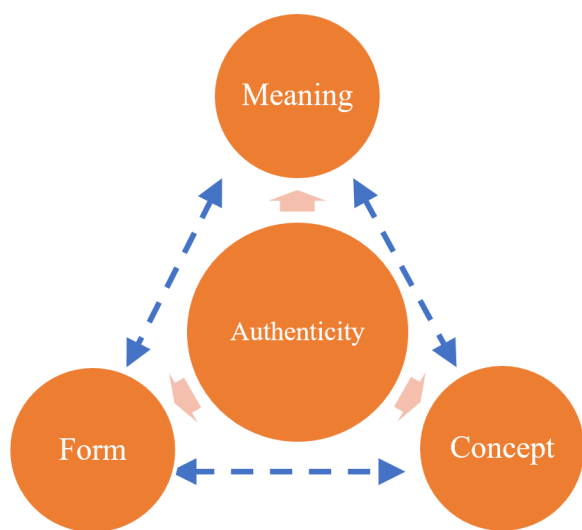


Fig. 11. Levels of Authenticity in Architecture. Source: Authors.

Table 4. Relationship Between Levels of Perception and Existence with Authenticity in Architecture Based on the Foundations of Transcendent Philosophy. Source: Authors based on Taghdir, 2017, 61.

Level of Interaction: Audience and Existence	Characteristics of the Corresponding World	Perceptual Level	Perceptual Tools	Level of Authenticity	Dimensions of Authenticity in Architecture	Tools for Perceiving Authenticity	Conceptual Visualization in Architecture
Connection with the World of Nature (Dominion)	The characteristics of objects in the world of dominion (Aalam-e-Mulk) are having time, space, gradual movement, and defined dimensions and size	Sensory Perception	Five External Senses and Inner Senses	Form	Change	Five External Senses	Materials, Elements, Façade, Shape
Connection with the World of Imagination in Accordance with the Existential Level of the Self	The characteristics of objects in the celestial realm are having time, space, movement, color, shape, and lacking matter and body	Imaginative Perception	Inner Senses	Concept	Continuity	Five External Senses and Inner Senses	Spatial Order, Privacy, Fluidity, Hierarchy
Connection with the World of Power in Accordance with Its Level	This World Has the Divine and Inner Aspects of Lower Worlds. This World and Above Transcend All Forms and Appearances	Intellectual Perception	Intellect	Meaning	Fixed	Intellectual Perception	Unity, Purity, Balance

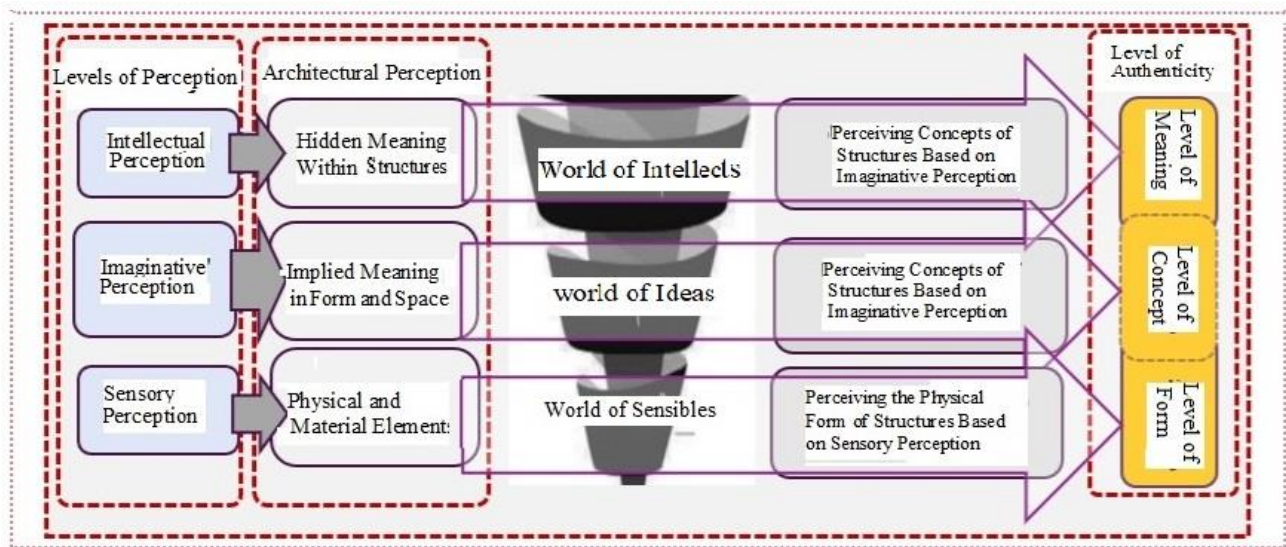


Fig. 12. Determination of Levels of Authenticity in Architecture Based on Mulla Sadra's Levels of Perception. Source: Authors.

enabling architects and audiences to attain a new understanding of authenticity in architecture.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there was no conflict for them in conducting this research.

### Endnotes

1. In this study, the term “architectural works” specifically refers to the houses from the Qajar era in the city of Yazd.
2. Modrak (object or entity) is something that exists or has characteristics, while Modrik (mind or subject) is the one who perceives it. The relationship between Modrik and Modrak implies that architecture is a perceivable entity understood by humans, and each individual comprehends it based on their accumulated mental experiences.

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