

Original Research Article

Layered Semiotics and the Perception of Meaning in the Architecture of Traditional Houses in Yazd*

Zahra Mahmoudi Ghaznavi^{1**}, Vahid Ahmadi²

1. Ph.D. Candidate in Architecture, Department of Art and Architecture, Faculty of Art and Architecture, Mashhad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran.
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Art and Architecture, Faculty of Art and Architecture, Mashhad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran.

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Abstract

Problem statement: Architectural studies of traditional houses in Yazd reveal that these structures embody multiple semantic layers, including access, construction, and aesthetic layers. These layers incorporate diverse structures through the integration of cultural and conceptual elements. The central issue is how these layers, based on principles of semiotics and meaning perception, contribute to the meaning-making of residential spaces and how successfully they sustain a connection with their cultural context. This issue is crucial for evaluating the role of space-culture interplay in contemporary residential architecture.

Research objective: The main objective of this study is to analyze and interpret the meaning-making process in the residential spaces of traditional houses in Yazd through the lens of semiotic and semantic principles. The research aims to examine how meaning is constructed across different architectural layers, its relation to the local culture, and the implications of these meanings for the design of modern residential spaces. The study also seeks to offer strategies to enhance the effectiveness of contemporary residential design by drawing on the patterns and embedded meanings in traditional houses.

Research method: This research adopts a qualitative approach through comparative study and content analysis, employing semiotic and semantic perspectives. Data were collected descriptively through literature review and field observations. The interpretation, explanation, and evaluation phases were conducted using an interpretive approach.

Conclusion: Using a semiotic and semantic framework, this study investigates the architecture of traditional houses in Yazd. The findings indicate the exceptional capacity of these houses to utilize architectural elements and codes to foster social and cultural interactions both inside and outside the home. The interweaving of meanings and functions reinforces internal harmony and connection with the local culture. From a semiotic standpoint, the traditional houses of Yazd serve as valuable models for contemporary design and the enhancement of residential spaces.

Keywords: *Meaning, Layered Semiotics, Comparative Approach, Traditional Houses of Yazd.*

Introduction and Problem Statement

The home has become the most significant domain for human presence and growth, and therefore it can serve as the ideal representation of culture and its

components. The necessity of preserving culture calls for a thoughtful return to indigenous Iranian housing, utilizing its key features and elements to create a new approach to residential architecture that incorporates modern technologies and contemporary requirements.

** Corresponding author: +989154411979, zahra.mahmoudighaznavi@iaiu.ac.ir

Different religions, philosophies, and cultures have proposed various solutions for understanding the issue of dwelling (Heidari et al., 2019, 51). Numerous studies have examined the role of culture in shaping the home, with one of the most prominent works being that of Amos Rapoport, who, in his book *Anthropology of Housing* and similar works, introduced the home as a manifestation of the culture of its inhabitants. Most studies, adopting a subjective approach, have examined the different lifestyles, activity systems, and behavioral patterns of the inhabitants of homes, aiming to understand their culture through the architectural works they create (Mozaffar et al., 2012, 61).

In the modern era, architecture is recognized as an influential and powerful language, and in structuralist and post-structuralist theories, architectural buildings are seen as texts (Nesbitt, 2012). Architectural texts, like a language, carry a set of values, ideas, and traditions. This language communicates covertly with the audience through its underlying layer, and the audience attempts to interpret and understand the meanings embedded in this language. Meaning, as one of the key concepts in psychology, sociology, architecture, urban planning, and landscape design, has gained greater importance, especially with the advancement of information technology and globalization. In the field of architecture, meaning is not only significant in the formal and functional dimensions of buildings but also in interaction with material meaning and the perception of implicit meanings in multiple texts and the reading of these texts to understand their underlying language, it is possible to study these issues through the science of semiotics. Therefore, the knowledge and research conducted regarding semiotics as a method of elements thus holds considerable importance. Its full recognition becomes even more valuable when, in addition to examining the physical and architectural features, the meanings derived from them are also explored (Castells, 2001).

Although the architecture of any region reflects its culture, customs, values, and even its climatic conditions, contemporary Iranian architecture lacks meaning and cultural roots. "Contemporary architecture in Iran is currently in a state of identity crisis, and new

buildings almost entirely lack the cultural and spiritual essence of the past" (Diba, 1995, 22). Rapoport (2009) believes that "despite the development of construction activities in Iran and the improvement of their technical level, architectural practices in most cases have not yet been freed from imitating fashionable global architectures, and are mostly devoid of specific and established ideas and values.". Based on the discussions and perspectives of experts in this field, contemporary architecture faces challenges related to continuity and transformation. The challenges and issues of contemporary architecture have led to the necessity of this research. The current state of architecture in Iran, particularly the unfamiliar and undesirable identity of contemporary residential buildings, presents a notable issue. Modern residential buildings are shaped based on the principles and norms of modern and postmodern architecture and possess significant structural, spatial, and functional importance. According to Schultz (Norberg-Shulz, 2008, 49), "Architecture, as a form of art, defines superior realities or values," thus, the importance of adhering to these principles in contemporary architecture cannot be overlooked. Architecture provides a visual representation of ideas that give meaning to human life by organizing reality. Traditional houses are full of symbols and meanings that, individually, explain and strengthen the cultural and architectural aspects of these buildings. The understanding and uncovering of the hidden meanings in these houses are based on recognizing symbols. Since semiotics is concerned with the transmission of information for studying these issues. This study seeks to extract concepts for making contemporary residential spaces meaningful by examining and interpreting the semiotics of Qajar architecture through a comparative approach. By perceiving the implicit meanings embedded in the spaces of the home, the study aims to uncover key features and components that will make the architecture of today more comprehensible. The purpose of this research is to explore the theoretical foundations and ideas related to the concept of the home by investigating various spaces and uncovering the hidden signs in the Qajar-era houses of Yazd. Through

the reading and interpretation of the architectural texts of traditional houses and understanding the meanings embedded within them, the research will present and derive a conceptual model.

Research Background

The history of semiotics dates back to ancient times, where philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle examined concepts related to signs. In antiquity, Stoic philosophers and Saint Augustine also discussed topics related to signs. In the modern era, John Locke, the English philosopher, addressed this subject, and gradually, semiotics developed into an independent field. In the early 20th century, thinkers like Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce conducted studies on semiotics. Roland Barthes (1991), in his renowned book *Elements of Semiology*, developed the most important theory in the field of signs based on Saussure’s linguistic achievements. Umberto Eco also proposed theories in this area. The origins of semiotics start with Plato and Aristotle and extend through the Middle Ages. Some philosophers who, before semiotics became an academic discipline and independent field, made early contributions include Plato, Aristotle, Stoic philosophers, Saint Augustine, and John Locke. Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, and Charles Sanders Peirce, who lived in the past, are the main founders of what is today known as semiotics.

Other philosophers who have contributed to this field include Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes, Louis Trolle Hjelmslev, Jacques Derrida, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Michel Foucault. In Iran, individuals such as Farzan Sojoodi, Amir Ali Nojournian, Mohammad Zeimaran,

and Nasser Fakouhi have offered views on semiotics (Table 1).

In the 1970s, linguistic studies found their place within the arts, and semiotics, as a branch of linguistics, began to be used in the critique and interpretation of artistic texts. In recent years, articles and research on the semiotics of architecture and the meaning of home have been published, and these are critically reviewed below. The doctoral dissertation “An Analytical Approach to the Evolution of the Iranian House in the Qajar Era” by Ghelichkhani (2012) offers an extensive and multi-faceted examination of this concept. The analysis of this research focuses on two central aspects: firstly, the impact of the social and historical environment in Iran during the studied period, and secondly, a critique of the architecture and structure of the buildings, along with the changes in both the interior and exterior of Qajar houses. This research integrates perspectives from history, architecture, and social sciences to provide a profound understanding of the concept of the Iranian house in the Qajar period.

The article “Investigating the Impact of Traditional Architecture on Contemporary Architecture with a Focus on the Architecture of Kashan” (Mohammadi & Mokhtari, 2018) is based on library research and field studies, focusing on four sample houses from the traditional architecture of the hot and dry climate of Kashan during the Qajar and contemporary periods. Architecture in these periods faced influences from Western styles while maintaining traditional Iranian characteristics. The general features of both traditional and contemporary architecture during these periods are compared and analyzed.

In the field of semiotics, the article “An analysis of

Table 1. Experts in the Field of Semiotics. Source: Authors.

Historical period		Experts			
Ancient Period		Plato (428-348 BCE)	Aristotle (384-322 BCE)	Stoics	Saint Augustine (354-430 CE)
		John Locke (1632-1704)	Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)	Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914)	
Modern Period	Global	Umberto Eco (1932-2016)	Roland Barthes (1915-1980)	Louis Trolle Hjelmslev (1899-1965)	Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002)
		Michel Foucault (1926-1984)	Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)		
	Iran	Farzan Sojoodi	Amir Ali Nojournian	Nasser Fakouhi	Mohammad Zeimaran

the issue of interpretation in the architecture of the subculture” (Bakhtiari et al., 2022) is presented. According to this research, subculture architecture is influenced by geographical and historical constraints, and the interpretation of buildings continues over time, evolving progressively and rectifying itself. The conceptual model presented explores the syntactic and semantic codes of buildings, the historical and geographical limitations of subcultures, and changes in the expressive and content forms of buildings.

The article “An investigation into the function and meaning of modern city form through a stratified semiotics approach” (Daneshpour et al., 2013) analyzes the city form from the perspective of layered semiotics, treating the city as a complex text with multiple layers of signs, including architectural, cultural, social, and historical signs. They, in this article, investigate the impact of these signs on the city form and the citizens’ understanding of the urban environment.

In an article by Farzan Sojoodi (2009a) titled “Challenges in the Layers of Text: A Semiotic Analysis of the Imam Mosque in Isfahan”, the mosque is analyzed using a layered semiotic approach (Sojoodi, 2009). The author breaks down various architectural elements, decorations, and textures used in the mosque to show that each represents a distinct sign with its own meaning. It is then demonstrated that the combination of these individual signs creates a more complex and comprehensive meaning for this significant religious-cultural monument, which plays a key role in the identity of the city of Isfahan and the architectural-spiritual history of Iran. The semiotic analysis of the Iranian housing system based on the relationship of text/house layers (Noghrekar & Raeisi, 2011) examines the different semiotic layers in Iranian housing architecture. This study, using a layered semiotic model, analyzes the reciprocal impacts of the physical structure, function, and meaning in the design of Iranian housing and its reflection of cultural and social values. In this framework, the structural layer refers to the physical structure of the building, the functional layer addresses how the space is used to meet the needs of the inhabitants, and the semantic layer reflects cultural, religious, and social

values and beliefs. The research aims to show how these layers together form meaning, making the house not only a physical shelter but also a living cultural entity.

Theoretical Foundations

• Meaning and semantics

Meaning refers to concepts such as purpose, intention, denotation, implication, interpretation, essence, and also what a shape, word, or form signifies (Dekhoda, 1998). In contrast to “form” and “word or referent,” meaning is generally considered something hidden and essential, related to reasons and mental awareness, as opposed to the visible and observable form. In the field of philosophy of language, various theories about the nature of meaning have been proposed. For instance, John Locke views meaning as a concept or a type of mental idea. The differences in philosophers’ views regarding the nature of meaning, ranging from it being a mental idea to examining individuals’ behavioral and external responses to words, demonstrate the complexity of this concept in the philosophy of language. One key issue in semantics is the subject of its different levels. The first level, the primary meaning or direct reference, denotes the function of an object. The next level is referred to as implied meaning, which has a symbolic nature (Haeri, 2009). Umberto Eco, in the field of meaning in architecture, differentiates between elements with direct and indirect semantic loads. He divides this into two categories: explicit meaning and implicit meaning, introducing these as two different aspects of the communication between architectural work and its experienter. According to Eco, explicit meaning in architecture can be related to the visual experience of the work at the moment of initial encounter. This first experience may seem like a visual display at first sight, without the influence of internal senses. Eco highlights the difference in meaning between the work and the first experience, particularly concerning the function of architecture. He emphasizes these two types of interpretation—primary and secondary functions—without prioritizing the primary function over the secondary. Rather, he indicates the realization of secondary function after the primary meaning (Eco, 1979, 25).

Wittgenstein, in the early stages of his philosophical life,

emphasized the “picture theory of meaning” (language or speech as a tool for presenting a picture of reality); however, later, he introduced the pragmatic or functional meaning theory (the meaning of a word equating to its use) (Hall, 1997). The concept of meaning has been explored in both Western and Islamic cultures for various reasons. In Western linguistics and philosophy, meaning is viewed as a linguistic and cognitive concept. On the other hand, Muslim scholars have implicitly presented their theories regarding “the truth of meaning” while analyzing religious and philosophical propositions. Ayatollah Khomeini views meaning as a concept that is present in the mind. He states that the location and container of meaning is the mind, but meaning is applicable both externally and internally. This view demonstrates that meaning, as an internal and external concept, has the ability to adapt and influence both realms (ibid.).

The meaning of a work is not its content, but is derived solely from its interpretation (Lotman, 2021). In other words, the audience, upon encountering the work, does not discover a pre-existing meaning, but rather creates a new meaning based on their perceptions and desires (Ahmadi, 2007). In fact, in a given work, meaning is unattainable and infinite because language is fundamentally based on the absence of fixed meaning, and the signifiers present in an architectural text do not refer to any specific signified (Zeimaran, 2004, 73). Semantics, as a field of study, focuses on the examination and analysis of the foundational structures in the process of meaning-making. This field deals with the intellectual meanings of words and explores the conceptual content of signs (Sholeh, 2009). In semantics, examining the different levels of meaning is of particular importance, and these are generally divided into three main categories: primary or explicit meanings, implied or presupposed meanings, and ideological meanings. Primary (explicit) meanings refer to the direct function and meaning of a word or sign within a text. Implied meaning has an intermediate nature, while ideological meaning, which has a symbolic dimension, focuses more on social, cultural, and historical aspects. These three levels of meaning enable the distinction between

the direct function of an element and the social understanding of it. In architecture, this close and comprehensive relationship with semiotics is evident. The semantic principles and signs used in architecture are not only limited to the appearance and tangible structures but also consist of concepts and symbols from which meanings and concepts are created and conveyed.

• Exploring the meaning of home

The history of the concept of home dates back to the beginning of human existence; however, attention to the issue of dwelling increased in the postmodern era due to the inadequacy of the home environment in addressing all aspects of life (Aghalatif & Hojjat, 2019, 43). Hayward was the first to propose a list of meanings attributed to the home, including its physical structure, its territoriality, its specific location in the world, and identity (Hayward, 1975). Following this, various studies emerged. At the same time, Claire Cooper Marcus introduced “the home as a symbol of self” (Cooper Marcus, 1997). Appleyard, based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs model, claimed that the home also provides psychological comfort and meets human social needs (Appleyard, 1979). During this period, studies related to the concept of home also began in the field of social sciences. Proshanski argued that the built environment is more of a reflection of social realities than just a physical phenomenon (Proshanski, 1978), while Rapoport’s studies led to more attention being paid to the cultural dimensions of the home.

In the 1980s, studies on the meaning of home, particularly in psychology, were underway. One of the significant studies in this field, titled “Tognoli’s Research,” identified five key characteristics of the meaning of home: centrality, continuity, privacy, self-manifestation (personal identity), and social relationships. These five characteristics differentiate the concept of housing from that of a home (Tognoli, 1987). Furthermore, two studies by Danesi (2007) and Duncan (1990) continued to emphasize this distinction.

In the 1990s, Newton & Putnam (1998) concluded that research on the meaning of home repeatedly brought up concepts such as privacy, security, family, intimacy, comfort, and control, with various interpretations.

The semantic view of the home as a place depicts a deeper level of meaningfulness, where architecture plays a determining role in facilitating and sustaining human presence in the created space. Among the different perspectives on the meaning of home, there are four main approaches: the traditional-juridical view, the phenomenological view, the sociological-anthropological view, and the typological and climatic view. This study focuses on the social sciences perspective, and one of the methods used to explore meaning is semiotics.

From the social perspective, the meaning of home is described in relation to human needs theory and a sense of belonging associated with social needs. The structure of the meaning of place in the social approach represents a concept in which humans seek a stable place to connect with the environment and form an intimate relationship with it. While many experiential scholars have primarily focused on social factors, some researchers have emphasized the role of the physical environment in forming a sense of belonging. Harold Proshanski views personal identity as stemming from place identity, which originates from cognitive perception and, ultimately, emotional responses to the place. He emphasizes place identity as a critical framework and communicative factor in human relations, underscoring the role of physical factors as part of the social elements in the environment. Therefore, the essential element of interaction and close connection between an individual and the environment refers to the physical elements of the environment, forming part of the subjective and personal identity (Canter, 1977).

Canter's place theory also provides a model explaining the relationship between the components that shape any place. He identifies three components for each place: physical features, activities, and perceptions. Based on Canter's theory, the quality of the environment is defined as the outcome of these three components, where each component is responsible for fulfilling one of the environmental qualities. Humans need a specific sensory, emotional, and meaningful experience regarding their living environment. These experiences can be realized through intimate interaction and a sense of empathy with

the place where one resides (Falihat, 2016). Research has also shown that studying buildings and residential homes reveals a tendency towards a sense of belonging and environmental differentiation in buildings, which is interpreted as environmental readability.

Other studies have also shown that the sense of place attachment arises from the cultural and social interactions and communications within that place, particularly in spaces designed with features of differentiation and separation. Social identity, as a form of attachment, is interpreted based on the users and their interactions (Javan Forouzande & Motalebi, 2011).

A semantic view of the home shows that this concept, as a prominent place in human life, has various and multi-dimensional meanings. The influences of social factors, the physical environment, and personal experiences in shaping the concept of home and the feeling of attachment to it are considered, revealing the development of diverse concepts of home.

• Sign and the evolution of semiotics

A sign is a visual name that briefly and simply represents the subject (Pourjafar & Montazerolhojjah 2010, 18). A sign always creates meaning in such a way that meaning appears within the sign itself (Sholeh, 2009) (Fig. 1). In the realm of identity, a sign can be a phenomenon or an observable event, and due to its connection with an absent phenomenon, it substitutes for it and refers to it. An important point is that a sign must be understandable and perceivable by human senses, and, therefore, it necessarily has a material form in order for it to be comprehended by human senses. Semiotics is the study that examines signs and symbols as part of social life, focusing on the systematic study of the factors influencing the emergence and interpretation of signs (Zeimaran, 2004). What is worth noting is that signs are not meaningful on their own; they are only interpretable when in relation to one another. The two main schools of thought in semiotics are Structuralism and Post-structuralism.

Structuralist semioticians (Saussure, Jakobson, and Locke) hold a linguistic perspective, considering the relationship between text and meaning as direct and focusing on uncovering the code of the text. Post-

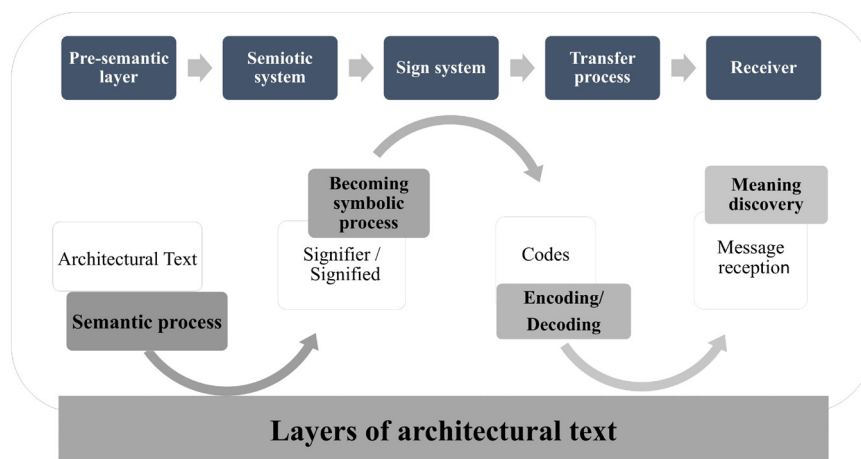


Fig. 1. The Process of Meaning Reception and Formation. Source: Authors.

structuralist semioticians (Peirce, Eco, Barthes, and Derrida), on the other hand, view the relationship between text and meaning as indirect and explore the multiple aspects, the inner layers of the text, and intertextual relations (Tajik, 2010, 35).

In Table 2, a brief summary of each theorist’s definition of semiotics and the domain influenced by their work is provided. These definitions highlight the differences and breadth in the semantic and practical fields of semiotics and illustrate the differences in the perspectives and approaches of this domain, both structuralist and post-structuralist. In Tables 3, the authors collected and classified the theoretical perspectives and written works of these theorists.

• **Layered semiotics in architecture**

Semiotics, as a field of knowledge, focuses on the study of signs and their effects in social life. This approach examines the impact of signs on human communication and the systematic, organized study of all the factors influencing the emergence and interpretation of signs. It analyzes how signs affect social and cultural structures and seeks to understand how communications and interpretations form in individuals’ minds (Zeimaran, 2004). In the 1960s, Peirce’s views on semiotics had a significant influence and left a lasting impact on contemporary semiotics. This period began with two key questions in semiotics: the formation of the elements of a sign system and the scope of this science. These questions led to two different approaches: “semiotics of communication” and “semiotics of signification.” The “semiotics of communication” emphasized human relationships, while “semiotics of signification” extended the scope of semiotics to all phenomena of signification.

Roland Barthes added to the theory of signification with the concepts of “explicit signification” and “implicit signification.” Explicit signification refers to the direct relationship between the signifier and the signified, while implicit signification creates a more complex sign where one signifier may have another internal signified that acts as a signifier for yet another signified. This diversity in semiotics was greatly influenced by Peirce and Barthes (Flamki & Ghafari, 2017, 341). Saussure, the founder of semiotics, introduces the sign as a “material” concept formed by the combination of two aspects, with each sign representing the relationship between the internal aspects of the signifier and the signified (Chandler, 2007, 32). In Saussure’s view, the social and cultural significance within the sign system is crucial, and signs are derived from social communication. By analyzing the structure of signs and the social influences on them, he concludes that meaning emerges from the interaction and relationship of signs, and each sign cannot hold meaning by itself (Saussure, 1983, 118). In Peirce’s view, every sign includes three key aspects: “representamen,” “interpretant,” and “object.” He describes the interaction between these three aspects as the “semiotic process.” In this approach, every text is formed by the combination of multiple signs, and each sign, through “interpretation,” can transform into another representamen, acting as one of the points of the semiotic triangle. In other words, the process of interpretation and meaning-making, through the semiotic triangle, forms the theoretical foundation of post-structuralist semiotics. This principle by Peirce was later expanded by other theorists such as Eco with the concept of infinite semiotics, Barthes

Table 2. Theories of Semiotics According to Theorists. Source: Authors.

Theorist	Definition and Foundations of Semiotics	School of Thought
Ferdinand de Saussure	Semiotics is the study that examines and investigates systems of signs such as languages, codes, and symbolic systems (Mirgholami et al., 2013). Linguistic signs result from the relationship between the signifier (sound) and the signified (meaning). The signifier is the mental image formed by sounds, while the signified is the mental image formed by external referents (Lotman, 2021).	Structuralism
Chandler (2007)	Signs appear in various forms, such as words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects, and their study is part of the study of sign systems or media.	Structuralism
Umberto Eco	Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols used to convey knowledge to others. This science, in the communication process, uses elements like source, sender, channel, message, and receiver for interpreting and transmitting information (Eco, 2018a).	Post-structuralism
Farzan Sojoodi	A sign derives its value from the differential relationship within a sign system and society, but this system is of the nature of possibilities and is deprived of textuality (Lotman, 2021).	Structuralism
Charles Sanders Peirce	Peirce considers every sign as having three aspects: representamen, interpretant, and object. The interaction among these three aspects forms the semiotic process. Each sign is transformed into a new representamen through interpretation, and this process is continuous and can go on indefinitely (Mokhtabad-Amrei & Dabagh, 2011).	Post-structuralism
Jakobson	Signs acquire meaning in social communications, and to understand them, we need the context of communication. Meaning production in discourses and social texts occurs through interaction with others, and the unit of analysis of signs is framed within a sign system in culture (Jakobson, 1998).	Structuralism
Louis Trolle Hjelmlev	A sign is defined as a combination of a phonetic element (sound) and a conceptual element (meaning), and the relationship between these two elements is not considered a fixed or arbitrary structure. According to this view, the study of signs should focus on their structural relationships (Rasouli & Nematollahi, 2021).	Structuralism
Michel Foucault	Foucault examines signs at the level of discourse and attributes to them a role in the formation of power and knowledge. Emphasizing the signifiers of power and ideology, he utilizes the concept of “discourse” to analyze the relationships between power and knowledge, offering a pragmatic and historical view of the role of signs in contemporary societies (Mirzaei et al., 2012).	Post-structuralism
Amir Ali Nojoomian (2017)	In the interpretation of signs, they are connected to a structure and an underlying language, and the actions of humans and objects of the world are considered as signs within a subject system.	Structuralism
Nasser Fakouhi (2004)	Linguistics emphasizes the influence of historical and social contexts on the meaning of signs and examines them within discursive networks. He believes that meaning arises from these networks and their contexts.	Post-structuralism
John Locke (2020)	Locke divides the sign into two parts: “symbol” (the conceptual part) and “effect” (the formal part), emphasizing the causal relationship between these two parts and endorsing the structuralist view of signs. He defines the sign as a unit of analysis in language and stresses the importance of analyzing its internal structure, considering the concepts of symbol and effect in language analysis.	Structuralism
Hans-Georg Gadamer (2016)	The founder of structuralist linguistics, he recognizes language as a semiotic system. He emphasizes signs and meanings, viewing them as formed from subunits of sound and meaning, and analyzes the grammatical and semantic structures of language with an emphasis on hierarchical rules.	Structuralism
Roland Barthes	Semiotics is the study of the cultural connotations and implications of signs, which themselves can transform into new signifiers for other signs (Zeimaran , 2004).	Post-structuralism
Jacques Derrida	Signs are studied based on their use and interpretation in texts. This approach emphasizes that there is no final or fixed interpretation, and the concept of interpretability is crucial. He pays attention to the hierarchy of sounds and letters and introduces contradictions and conflicts within texts as key elements of semiotics (Derrida, 2016).	Post-structuralism
Kourosh Safavi (Safavi, 2018)	The interpretation of signs by the brain and mind, based on similarity, cause, or convention, transforms the sign into an icon, index, or symbol.	Structuralism
Jürgen Habermas	With a critical approach, he examines signs within the context of communication systems and power. He believes that the analysis of signs must consider concepts of power, with the goal of revealing inequalities and discrimination in society (Ahmadi, 2007).	Post-structuralism
Mohammad Zeimaran (2004)	A part of social life is a form of knowledge, understanding, and perception of the phenomena of the world.	Post-structuralism

with the idea of intertextuality, and Derrida with his theory of the infinity of the signifier and the play of signs, which added new dimensions to semiotic studies. In layered semiotics, the concept of the sign arises from the concept of the text.

In other words, the text is not the result of the co-occurrence of codes; rather, it is the result of the interaction between layers. Each layer, based on its own selection of codes, interacts and communicates with others, allowing for the possibility of actualization. This approach analyzes

Table 3. Theoretical Perspectives of Theorists on Semiotics with Reference to Their Written Works. Source: Authors.

Book Title	Author	Foundations of Semiotics
“Ferdinand de Saussure”	Jonathan Culler	Language should be studied as a synchronic and relative structure, not as an absolute reality. Saussure laid the foundations for the structuralist approach to linguistics and semiotics, emphasizing the structural and relative nature of language (Culler, 2002b).
“Semiotica E Filosofia Del Linguaggio”	Umberto Eco	Typology allows us to clearly state that the signs commonly defined as signs result from various methods of production (Eco, 1979).
“Foundations of Semiotics”	Daniel Chandler (2007)	Semiotics, as an interdisciplinary field, can be used as a powerful tool for analyzing phenomena related to communication, culture, and media.
“Semiotics”	Umberto Eco	Typology allows us to recognize that signs, usually considered as signs, emerge through various methods (Eco, 2018b).
“semiotics Introducing”	Paul Cobley	Semiotic solutions show that many people build their lives but are deceived into engaging in semiotic activities, sometimes unconsciously working in the field of semiotics (Cobley, P., & Jansz, 2010).
“Applied Semiotics”	Farzan Sojoodi (2009c)	In this book, the core concepts of structuralist semiotics are revisited, especially in text analysis, the discovery of codes, and the role of media. These topics are explored in a new way with a contemporary approach.
“The pursuit of signs: semiotics, literature, deconstruction”	Farzan Sojoodi	Saussure wrote that every sign has two features: the tangible feature that represents the sign and the hidden feature that refers to its meaning. In fact, each sign has both a visible and a hidden aspect, known as the “manifest aspect” and the “hidden aspect,” respectively (Culler, 2002a).
“Semiotics: Theory and Practice”	Farzan Sojoodi (2009b)	The identity of the signified is always in motion and in change. These changes are explained through the concepts of differentiation and deferral. In this context, “differentiation” refers to the experience of differences, while “deferral” indicates the persistence and continuity of movement. This movement always represents the identity of the signified, reflecting the dynamic and continuous nature of the signified’s movement.
“Logic as Semiotics”	Charles Sanders Peirce	A sign functions as a means to represent various thoughts, ideas, or subjects. The representational capacity of a sign enables reflection and discussion on different concepts because a sign has the power to convey meanings and notions (Sajoudi, 2009a).
“Semiotics of Language and Art”	Mohammad Reza Ahmadvani (2014)	Signs are divided into two groups: conventional and non-conventional. In conventional signs, the form of the sign is separate from its internal meaning, arising from conventions and social significations. In non-conventional signs, the form and content align and are directly related.
“Visual Semiotic Meaning”	Hamidreza Shairi (2018)	Semiotic theories, as analytical tools, are applied in the analysis of various issues. This approach reveals a form of unity in linguistic and literary theories and emphasizes the role of signs and symbols in conveying meanings and cultural structures. The use of these analytical tools enables a more precise understanding of the meanings and cultural structures embedded in texts (Shairi, 2018).
“Semiotics in Architecture”	Erfan Mohammadi & Peyman Riahi (2018)	In architecture, the concept of the “sign” is regarded as an analytical tool. In other words, when architecture is considered as a text, a sign emerges from the coordination among various layers, each positioned according to the code system and other levels of denotation, collectively forming the final structure of the architectural text. (Mohammadi & Riahi, 2018).

texts from a layered perspective, and consequently, the impact of each layer on the final interpretation of the text (Sojoodi, 2009c). Each text or architectural work functions as a complex collection of signs and communications. These signs do not have a clear meaning on their own, but, through interaction with one another and within the overall context of the work, contribute to conveying part of the overall meaning. Architecture is also made up of these signs, and each one plays a specific role in the overall structure of the work. This structure leads to different stages, including recognizing the symbols of the text’s elements, understanding the relationships between these elements, and interpreting and meaning-making the text. In semiotic reading, by introducing a halo of sociological perspectives, the life within the text of an architectural design becomes

significant. It doesn’t matter what perspective the author holds, as every text presents a range of meanings to the audience. Consequently, semiotic reading of the text is like discovering the language of the text, which generates a multiplicity of meanings from the audience’s point of view and their social and temporal circumstances.

• **Codes**

Codes consist of a set of signifieds that utilize the governing rules of their relationships to explain the nature of semiotic processes, including both cultural and non-cultural (natural) (Semenenko, 2017, 31). From the viewpoint of Gero, logical codes are derived from objective and logical experience and include scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge. Action-oriented codes are based on sign systems, educational programs,

and professional systems, while paralinguistic codes are formed from concepts such as recounting, substitution, and assistance (Guiraud, 2013). According to Umberto Eco, syntactic codes are based on the relationship of spaces and architectural elements, which are arranged in specific logical proximity and adjacency, leading to the creation of semantic significance (Lotman, 1978). Semantic codes in the field of house semiotics aim to uncover and understand implicit meanings based on elements and factors that construct and conceal meaning in texts. From the role of light in creating meaning processes to the repetition of texts in a calm and harmonious rhythm to reach a deeper meaning, these codes are sequentially embedded in texts, and, through the co-occurrence of semantic, aesthetic, technical, and syntactic codes, they analyze the text. This view is based on elements such as the water pool, trees, and the role of light in the courtyard, which can be seen through repetitive and continuous text in other texts (Lotman, 1977). The perception of aesthetic codes is based on elements such as proportions, the framing style of portal elements, the geometric form of the vestibule, the interplay of color and light in the skylight, the beautiful form of the ear pendants at the sides of the hall, as well as proportions, contrast, balance, color of facades, the windcatcher form, and the framed areas around the doors. These components indicate the presence of both perceptible and mental aesthetic codes in the expression of texts, pointing to the connection between aesthetic and technical codes (Lotman, 2021).

Research Methodology

This paper uses a comparative study and content analysis method, employing a semiotic and semantic approach, within a qualitative research framework based on an interpretive and historical epistemological system. Qualitative research is a method focused on phenomena occurring in natural settings, striving to describe, explain, and interpret phenomena based on the meanings individuals attach to them. In qualitative research, understanding moves from the surface to the layers of depth, and after reading and understanding the phenomenon, the realities will be revealed. Therefore, qualitative research provides a clear view of the subject being studied to the researcher (Heidari, 2016, 88). Content analysis can be considered as a method for the subjective interpretation and clarification

of the content of textual data through systematic categorization, theme building, and coding or planning of recognized patterns (Tavakolnia et al., 2017). This research, using the semiotic method, analyzes the indices and various dimensions of the semantic layers of Iranian houses and employs an interpretive approach in the stages of interpretation, analysis, and evaluation.

The stages of data analysis utilize logical reasoning. Considering the subject and goals of the study, this research applies the semiotic method to examine the indices and dimensions of the semantic layers of Iranian houses in terms of signification and meaning. Semiotics in this research is used as an analytical method, focusing on the context and the centrality of understanding the mental assumptions of audiences when encountering the effects of revelation and reflection in the domain of meaning. This research not only uses library studies to access the desired theoretical principles but also collects primary data through field studies of traditional houses in Yazd (Fig. 2).

Introduction to Case Studies

In this study, due to the life-enhancing quality of traditional houses in Yazd and their responsiveness to psychological needs, the houses in the old texture of Yazd city have been examined. These houses, located on Imam Khomeini Street, in the Sahl ibn Ali Alley of Yazd, have been selected as the primary area of study. The selected houses are currently part of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning at Yazd University and are located in nearly the same geographical area (Fig. 3). These houses include the Rasoulia, Lariha, Mortaz, Mehdi Rasoulia, Shafiepoor, and Nikbin houses, which are considered prominent examples of inward-looking Qajar architecture. The reason for selecting these buildings, in addition to their proximity and connection to the Faculty of Architecture at Yazd University, lies in their life-enhancing quality and spatial adaptability to the climatic and psychological needs of the residents. These houses, through the use of symbolic elements such as courtyards and windcatchers, transfer specific cultural and social meanings to the residential spaces and create a balance between the physical and psychological needs of the inhabitants. From a semiotic perspective, these houses serve as symbols of local identity and culture, and their spatial structure contributes

to creating a sense of calm, privacy, and connection with nature. In this section, the case studies are examined in detail and specifically, with a greater focus on their relationship with local culture and identity. These semiotic analyses help in a more accurate evaluation of the spaces of traditional houses in Yazd and clearly demonstrate their influence on contemporary architectural designs.

Findings

The sign, as a fundamental element in the field of architecture, has been given significant attention and, as an element that displays semantic implications, is closely



Fig. 2. The research approach in this study is based on the Sanders model. Source: Afshari Basir et al., 2022.

related to semiotics. Examining the concept of semantics and semiotics helps us better understand the relationship between architecture and semiotics. Based on this, using a semiotic approach in architecture and the theoretical foundations discussed in Fig. 1, the path of understanding architectural texts through the study of documents and previous research in various sources has been carefully followed. These materials were then summarized and analyzed, leading to a model for interpreting architectural texts from a semiotic perspective, which divides meanings into two main categories: explicit or primary meanings and implicit or connotative meanings. In this process, selected examples from traditional houses in Yazd were considered as case studies for semiotic analysis and were evaluated more precisely from this perspective. The model for analyzing architectural identity signs in traditional Iranian buildings was derived through content analysis and coding of the data, contributing to the understanding of the meanings and various levels of these built environments. Through examining the case studies and analyzing the statistical population, a deep understanding of the signs' meanings has been achieved. In this regard, the model has been presented as the process of meaning-making in architectural texts, shown in Fig. 4. The results of this research, based on selected samples and field visits, include various architectural layers such as physical, spatial, usage, access, and construction. These layers were chosen due to their impact and key role in analyzing and explaining architecture. Each of these layers plays a systematic role in semiotic analysis of architecture and contributes to a deeper understanding of the meanings and implications within the structure. The



Fig. 3. Map of the study area location. Yazd, 1956. Source: Authors.

indicators related to these layers were extracted based on the analysis of samples and the meaning-making process (Table 4), and their explicit and implicit meanings are presented in Table 5.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research, the architecture of traditional buildings in Yazd, with an emphasis on entrances and central courtyards, essentially includes texts that carry numerous meanings. These meanings, based on the functional aspects of the text and the conceptual and social characteristics of each space, are shaped based on the meaning-making factors present in the texts within the houses. According to the image taken from the formation of meanings, which was based on the diversity in convergence and measurement of meanings based on meaning-making factors, the perception of the concepts within the houses relates to the cultural elements and the placement of meaningful elements in focal points. As a result, this system, based on semiotic principles and the perception of meanings in traditional spaces of Yazd,

creates a system of continuity, connection, and dialogue within the cultural scope of the city.

In the examination of case studies, such as the houses of Rasoolian, Lariha, Mertaz, Mehdi Rasoolian, Nikbin, and Shafiei Poor, it was observed that the design of these houses, following semiotic principles, displays a profound meaning of the cultural and social identity of the people of Yazd. These houses not only respond to the physical needs of the residents, but also, through interior design, use of symbols and colors, and adherence to aesthetic principles, successfully create tranquility and psychological security. In this research, the traditional urban Iranian house was examined semiotically through a layered approach. These houses communicate with the audience through their structure and various buildings on multiple layers and levels. In contrast to the scattered contemporary architecture in Iran, traditional Iranian architecture, using cultural and social codes, has a deep connection with culture and society. In these houses, meaning manifests on various levels, from the functional and practical level to the aesthetic and symbolic level.

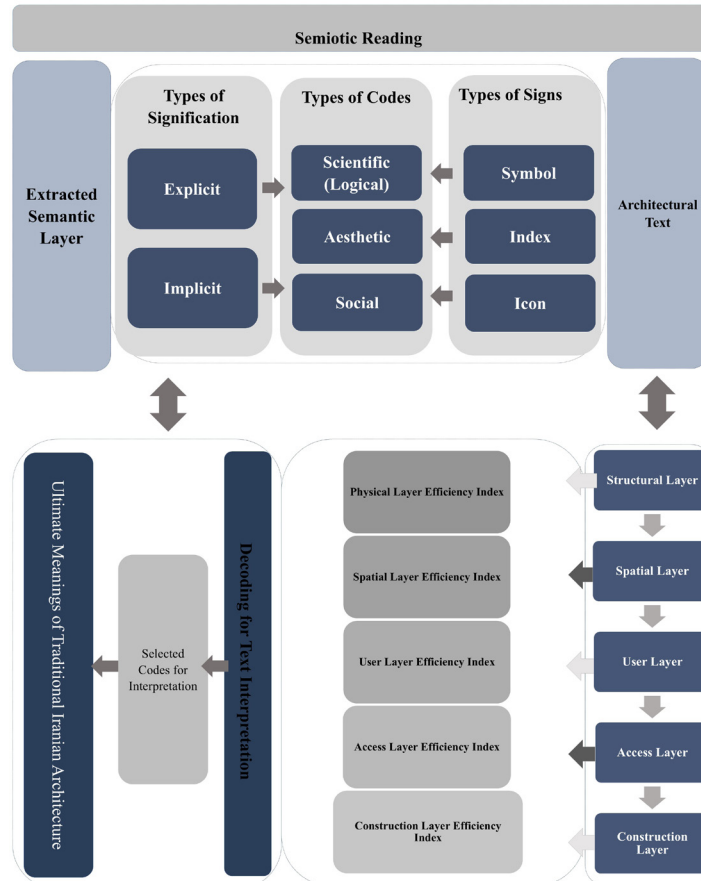
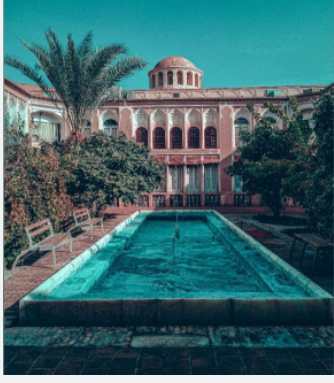
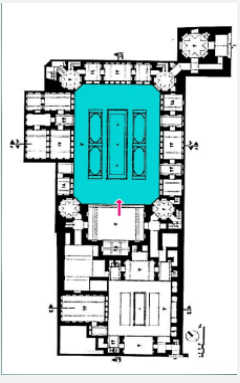
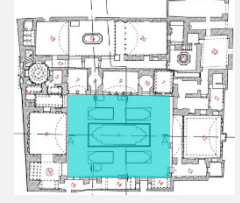

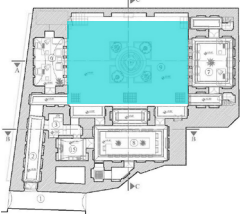
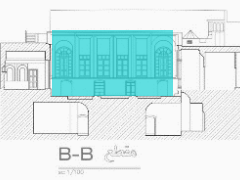

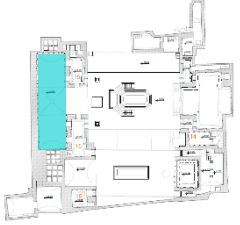


Fig. 4. The semiotic approach in this study is based on Peirce's perspective & the process of meaning-making of architectural text from a semiotic perspective. Source: Authors.

Table 4. Analysis of samples based on the meaning-making process and extraction of efficiency indicators. Source: Authors.

Architectural Layers	Indicators	Images of Selected Samples		
Physical Layer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enclosure and Introversion 2. Composition and Overlap of Volumes 3. Presence of Main and Secondary Axes in the Building 4. Compatibility of Spaces with Human Size and Scale 5. North-South Stretch 6. Presence of Symmetry in the Parts 7. Sustainable Design and Maximum Use of Sunlight, Wind, Soil, Plants, and Water 			
		1. Courtyard of the Mertaz's House		
		2. Courtyard of the Rasoulia's House		
Spatial Layer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing space in line with the residents' needs for habitation0 2. The inner courtyard as an open and green space within the house, complementing the interior spaces 3. Dynamism and adaptability in spaces over time 4. Creating proper connections and links between open and closed spaces to enhance coordination and interaction between them 5. Diversity in the use of materials and colors, and changes in spatial arrangement 6. Quick comprehension and understanding of space 7. Creation of shared spaces 8. Separation of inner and outer spaces (guest and family areas) 			3. Courtyard of the Nikbin's House
				4. Courtyard of Mehdi Rasoulia's House
				5. Interior Space of Shafiei Poor's House

Rest of Table 4.

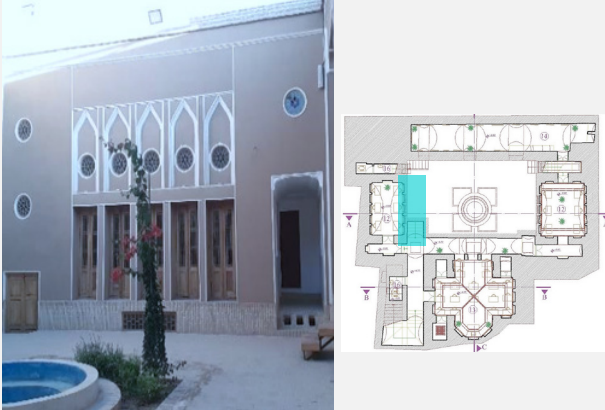
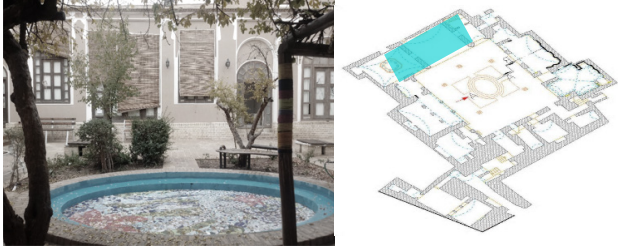
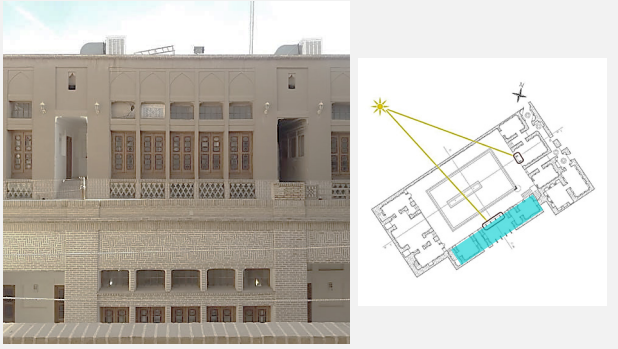
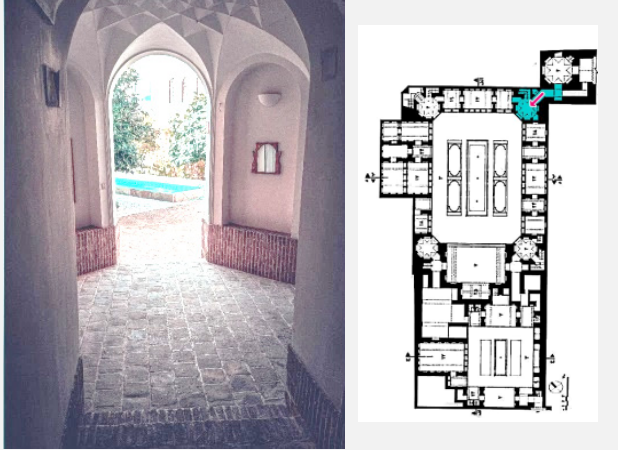
Architectural Layers	Indicators	Images of Selected Samples
Usage Layer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hierarchical organization of spaces based on users' needs 2. Division of spaces into main and secondary based on type of use and seasonal scheduling 3. Coordination of residential activities on the first floor with the provision of shared services and amenities on the ground floor 4. Optimization of the use of main spaces to increase productivity 	 <p>6. View of the Nikbin Courtyard Wall</p>
Access Layer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complexity of movement from the courtyard to the porch, then into the semi-open space, and finally into the enclosed space 2. Ease of movement and access to spaces 3. Classification of spaces 4. Movement junction 	 <p>7. View of the Mehdi Rasoulian Courtyard Wall</p>
Construction Layer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thick walls to counteract temperature changes and maintain optimal heat retention 2. Use of multi-layered roofs made of wood and mudbrick with high thickness 3. Suitable open spaces to counteract heat and increase natural ventilation 4. Use of arches and vaults to reinforce the roof structure 5. Use of materials: wood, tile, brick, and mudbrick 6. Utilization of materials with high thermal capacity 	 <p>8. View of the Lari Courtyard Sunshade</p>  <p>9. View of the Corridor of the Mertaz's House</p>

Table 5. Meaning-making process with coding of explicit and implicit meanings. Source: Authors.

Architectural Layers		Selected Codes for Text Interpretation Explicit Implication	Semantic Implications
			Implicit Implication
Physical Layer	Form- Shape	Use of regular geometric shapes in the plan and facade (e.g., rectangle and square)	Spatial continuity (cohesion and connection of parts)
	Aesthetic	Adherence to the golden ratio between the parts of the facade and the plan	Continuity and flow in human movement or vision
	Social- Cultural	The role of the corner element at the entrance	Connection among the local people
Spatial Layer	Form- Shape	Designing a green area at the heart of the courtyard	Attractiveness and greenery in the environment
	Aesthetic	Creating diversity in space through balance, symmetry, rhythm, and repetition, in harmony with the textures and elements of the facade	Diversity and visual quality
	Social- Cultural	Defining spaces with specific functions and uses, such as: Three-Darya, Five-Darya, and Seven-Darya	A place for solitude and reflection
Usage Layer	Form- Shape	Adherence to the ratio of surface area to volume	Spatial cohesion and readability
	Aesthetic	Use of local materials compatible with climatic features	Sustainability and sustainable development
	Social- Cultural	Attention to family structure, considering different roles and age groups of members	Enhancement of social interactions
Access Layer	Form- Shape	Clarity and ease of movement in the main and secondary internal and external paths	Clarity and comprehensibility
	Aesthetic	Improved connection with the environment, considering the attractiveness of natural elements, especially in the central courtyard (water and greenery)	Sense of belonging and attachment to the place
	Social- Cultural	Coordination and connection between adjacent spaces	Valuing and paying attention to the meaning of each space
Construction Layer	Form- Shape	Designing calming spaces and using light and sound to reduce stress	Sustainable design and compatibility with the natural environment
	Aesthetic	Harmony and balance in the plan by creating equilibrium between filled and empty spaces	Diversity and visual quality
	Social- Cultural	Adaptation of the structure to climatic, social, and cultural conditions	Building adaptation to its context

These houses not only meet the basic needs of the residents, but also, through architectural elements and symbols, convey deeper concepts of local culture and identity.

These findings suggest that the case studies examined in this research can serve as models for contemporary designs, especially in creating spaces that accurately convey cultural and local identity in contemporary architectural designs. Semantics, as part of semiotics, seeks to understand and interpret the meanings embedded in signs. This close relationship between semantics and semiotics is clearly observed in architectural analysis. In the study of traditional Iranian houses, signs and their meanings have been analyzed at different levels: explicit, implicit, and symbolic. These various levels of meaning in Iranian architecture are reflected in diverse forms and

interact with the culture and society in which they were shaped. The primary task of culture, as the organizer of the world around humans structurally, is carried out at any time based on the characteristic of renewing meanings with feedback from the environment. Therefore, cultural signs in the architecture of traditional houses can serve as the foundation for a new language in contemporary architecture. These signs have existed fluidly throughout time in architecture and can be reflected in new forms in contemporary architecture, effectively contributing to the continuity and enhancement of local architectural identity. Attention to these concepts and signs in contemporary architectural design will lay the foundation for the connection between historical and spatial identity and new needs. To achieve this goal, the following strategies are proposed (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Cultural Foundations and Their Impact on Meaning Creation in the Home with a Global-Local Approach. Source: Authors.

Declaration of No Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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