Ahlul Bayt International University

Concepts and Functions in the Building Engineering

Journal homepage: https://cfbejournal.abu.ac.ir/

The Role of Robots and Smart Technologies in Industrial Building Architecture

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DOI:

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: 28 June 2024
Revised: 12 August 2024
Accepted: 20 September2024

Keywords:
Robots, 3D printers, Smartization, Industrial Architecture, Building.

ABSTRACT

The construction industry has always been one of the most challenging engineering fields, which in recent decades has faced issues such as resource wastage, reduced productivity, unstable quality, heavy reliance on manual labor, and weak safety standards. Concurrent with the expansion of new technologies like robotics, digitalization, and intelligent systems, an opportunity has emerged for this traditional industry to move toward purposeful and technological industrialization. This article aims to examine the role of robots and intelligent systems in the transformation from design, construction to execution and operation of various buildings. It analyzes their functions in smart building construction and management, sensing and control systems, and explores the possibility of localizing these technologies in Iran. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach and utilizes specialized Persian and English sources. Findings indicate that the synergy between robotics, information technology, and industrial design provides a suitable platform to overcome the limitations of conventional and outdated construction models and paves the way for the creation of intelligent, safe, fast, flexible architecture based on sustainable development in an architectural manner.

E-ISSN: 000-000

How to cite this article:
M. Vafamehr; A. Moeini Tabatabaei; S. Farivar (2023). The Role of Robots and Smart Technologies in Industrial Building Architecture, 1(1), 70-81. https://doi.org/

1. Introduction

Currently, the building construction industry in Iran faces crises such as unstable quality, extensive energy waste, material loss, high dependence on manual labor, and structural weaknesses in execution standards. Meanwhile, in developed countries, the transition from traditional and outdated methods to industrial, prefabricated, and digital models has not only reduced costs and waste but also enhanced safety, quality, and accelerated the construction process.

Contemporary Iranian architecture also requires a conceptual redefinition to respond to technological advances and the new complexities of urban structures, where design, execution, and technology are integrated seamlessly. In this context, robots and intelligent systems are recognized not only as mechanical tools but also as key facilitators in optimizing resources, improving quality and speed in construction and execution, and creating high-quality environments.

The aim of this article is to present the capabilities of new technologies in the building construction industry, with a special focus on 3D printers and construction robots, control systems and sensors, prefabricated structure fabrication, and smart technologies for the operation phase. Figure 1 illustrates an example of the necessities of "industrial building architecture" as one of the foundational pillars of today’s architectural transformation.

Figure 1 : Industrial Construction: A Necessity for Contemporary Architecture

2. Research Background

Global transformations in the construction industry—particularly within the framework of the Fourth Industrial Revolution—have paved the way for the integration of digital, automated, and smart technologies into building projects. Countries such as Japan, Germany, China, and the

United States have taken the lead in utilizing construction robots, 3D printers, off-site construction systems, and intelligent building management systems.

Scientific and technical sources categorize construction robots into three main groups:

1. **Remotely Controlled Robots:** Employed in hazardous or hard-to-reach environments.
2. **Programmed Robots:** Used for repetitive, high-precision tasks such as concrete pouring and steel placement.
3. **Intelligent Robots:** Capable of learning, environmental analysis, and real-time decision-making.

In examining innovative construction approaches, **industrial building architecture** and **off-site construction** are recognized as fundamental to transformative development. Systems like **Thermomur**, which rely on lightweight, modular, and heat-resistant components, have proven effective in reducing construction costs and accelerating timelines.

International studies, including those by *Mardani et al.* and *Esmaeili et al.*, emphasize the effectiveness of models such as **Lean Construction**, **Design for Manufacture and Assembly (DfMA)**, and **Building Information Modeling (BIM)** in establishing a systematic link between design, construction, and operation phases. These models demonstrate that integrating architecture with advanced technologies can drive the construction process toward intelligence, efficiency, and structural adaptability.

3. Findings and Analysis

3.1 Application of Robots in Construction

Robots in modern building construction are used not merely as replacements for human labor, but as **precise, repeatable, and multifunctional tools**. Various types of robots are used in different phases of construction processes, including:

- **Fireproof Coating Robots:** These robots are used to apply fire-resistant materials to surfaces in high-risk projects such as hospitals, metro stations, and towers (see Figure 2).

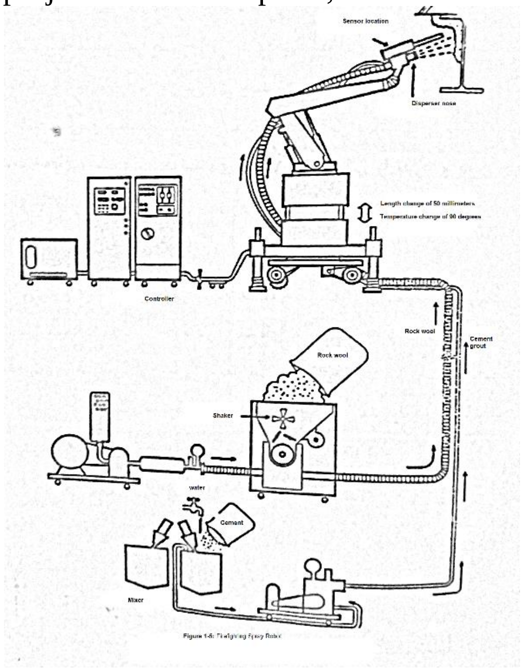


Figure 2 : Schematic Diagram of the Fireproofing System

Rebar Placement and Steel-Installing Robots: These robots, through precise programming, can accurately position rebar and securely connect them using various methods, ensuring high speed and safety during the process.

Shotcrete Robots (Concrete Spraying Robots): Utilizing guided spraying systems, these robots enable uniform and controlled concrete application on walls and formworks, significantly reducing the need for human operators (**see Figure 3**).

Figure 3 : Shotcrete Robot Equipped with Guided Spraying Systems

Plastering and Tiling Robots: Equipped with articulated arms and laser leveling systems, these robots perform precise leveling, adhesive application, and installation of stone, ceramic, and tiles with high accuracy (**see Figure 4**).

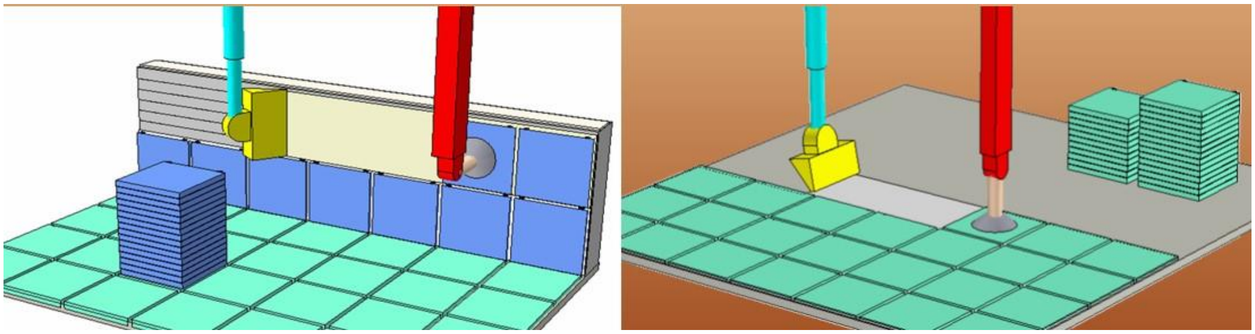


Figure 4 : Automated Wall and Floor Tiling Robot

Painting Robots: Utilizing precise nozzles and surface scanning algorithms, these robots can perform uniform paint spraying or apply any type of design and poster images on walls at high speed—eliminating the need for ladders or scaffolding (**see Figure 5**).

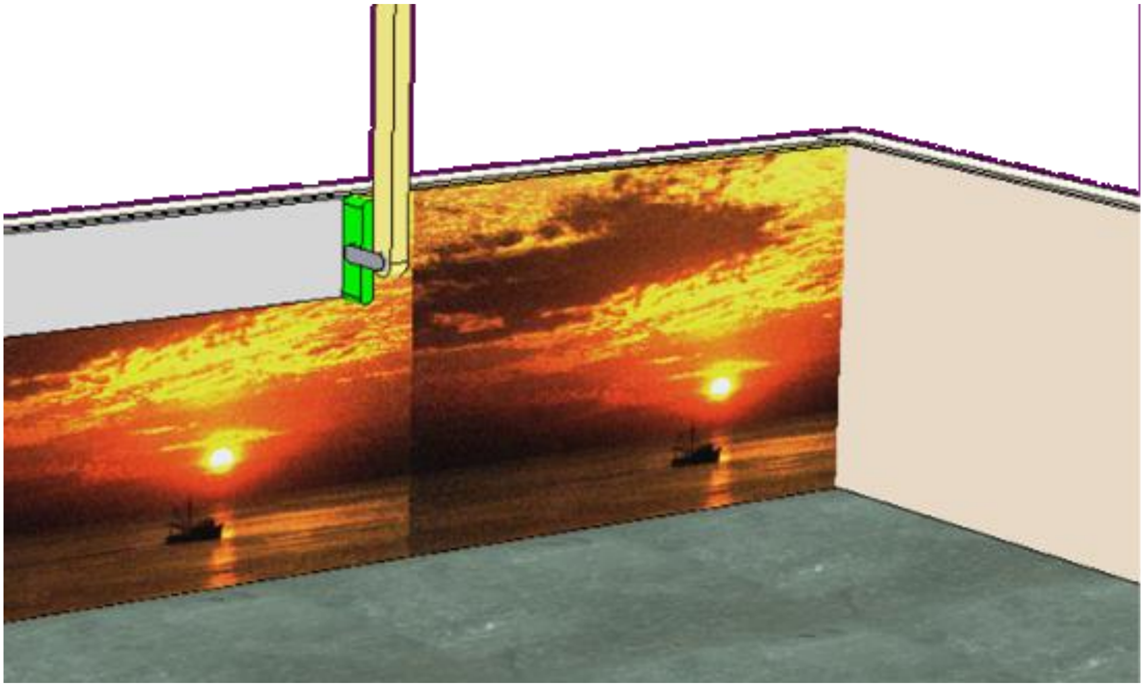


Figure 5 : Automated Painting Robot with Injection Technology

Inspection and Quality Control Robots: Equipped with optical, thermal, and magnetic sensors, these robots are capable of detecting defects, inspecting weld quality and surface cracks, monitoring gas pipes, and checking sewage systems. These robots not only accelerate the execution process but also enhance safety by reducing human involvement and significantly improve the uniformity and final quality of work (**see Figure 6**).

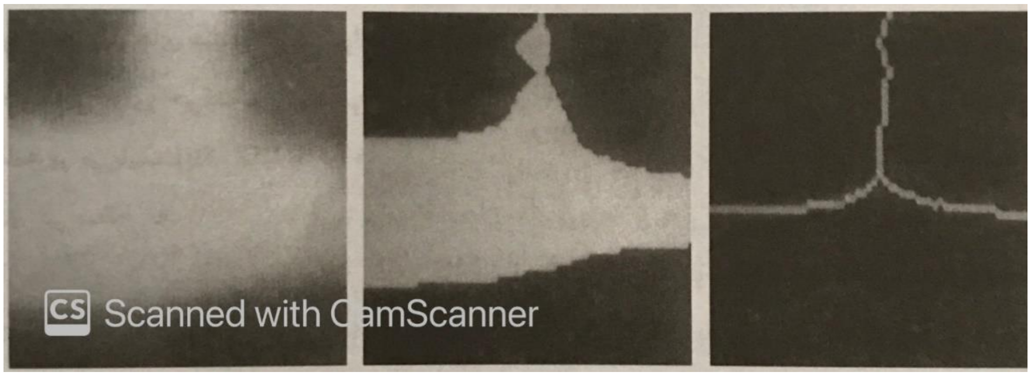


Figure 6 : Robot Vision: Raw Data and Progressive Interpretation of Cross-Reinforced Rebars

The use of these technologies is particularly efficient and effective in large-scale construction projects, harsh environmental conditions, or confined and hazardous spaces. **Figure 7** illustrates part of the application of robots in the construction and execution of cradle (arched) roofs and high-value traditional architectural structures using common building materials.

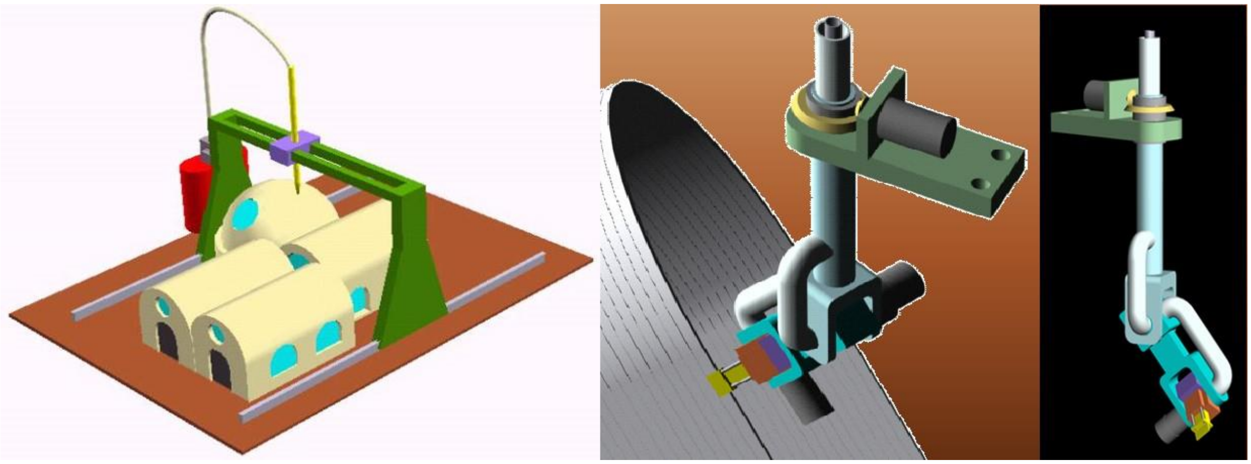


Figure 7 : Robot for Constructing Cradle (Arched) Roofs and a Robot for Building Traditional Houses Using Traditional Materials

3.2 Motion and Control Systems

In construction robots, motion systems operating along the x, y, and z axes serve as the main components determining maneuverability, precision, and accessibility. These systems shape and build various surfaces and volumes (**see Figure 8**).

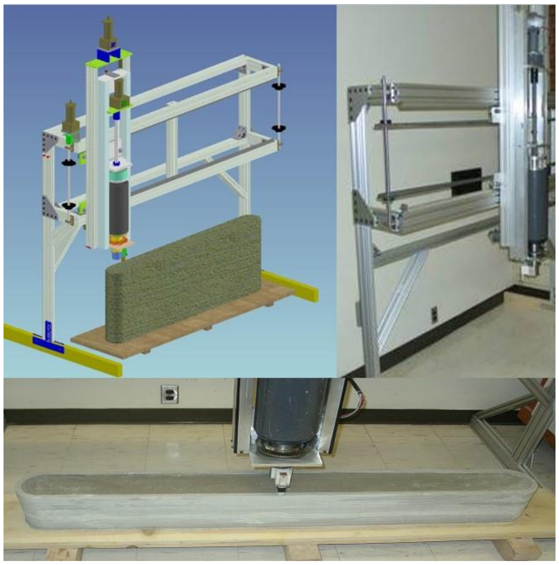


Figure 8 : Example of a Robot Capable of Constructing a Wall: One Robot Builds the Wall and Covers its Exterior with Mortar or Concrete, Then It Can Also Fill the Interior Volume with Concrete.

These systems are classified into four main groups:

1. **Wheeled:** Used for flat and extensive surfaces such as flooring and transporting equipment in mass construction projects.
2. **Articulated Arm:** Used for precise and localized operations such as welding, painting, or spot concrete pouring.
3. **Rail or Cable:** Designed for longitudinal movement along tall walls or façades.
4. **Hybrid or Mobile Platform:** Like robotic arms that provide simultaneous multi-directional and height mobility (**see Figure 9**).

Figure 9 : Various Examples of Robots with Different Movements

From a control perspective, control levels are divided into four categories:

1. **Abstraction Level:** Defining general tasks
2. **Manipulation Level:** Operational commands
3. **Servo Level:** Fine-tuning of motion
4. **End Effector Level:** Final application of tools such as grippers, nozzles, or executing arms

These control levels are designed hierarchically to provide an organized and integrated mechanism, from high-level decision-making down to precise low-level execution.

Alongside this structure, sensor systems play a vital role in environmental data acquisition and performance adjustment. Optical sensors such as **LIDAR**, magnetic photocells (for detecting the position of metals or cables), and **machine vision cameras** are among the most commonly used sensors in construction robots. By processing environmental data, these sensors enable robots to automatically respond to obstacles, material locations, surface conditions, and even potential hazards.

The combination of these motion and control systems paves the way for the development of robots capable of real-time decision-making, operational flexibility, and high precision in unpredictable construction environments.

In the transition from conventional and traditional construction to industrial architecture, technological and architectural construction, a precise understanding of robot classifications and analysis of their roles in the construction process is the first step. Construction robots are defined in three main groups according to their level of intelligence and performance:

a) **Group One:** Remotely controlled robots used in hazardous or difficult environments (e.g., disaster zones, high elevations, tunnels). Human operators control these robots from a safe distance to carry out tasks such as demolition, material removal, or initial stabilization.

b) **Group Two:** Programmed robots precisely designed to perform repetitive tasks such as concrete pouring, painting, steel placement, tiling, and plastering. These robots play a significant role in optimizing material consumption, ensuring uniform execution, and reducing human errors.

c) **Group Three:** Intelligent robots with learning capabilities, environmental recognition, automatic response to changes, and real-time decision-making. These robots utilize optical, magnetic, thermal sensors, and machine vision systems to control parameters like material density, surface leveling, and uniform distribution of materials during execution.

Within modern construction technologies, the **3D gantry construction printer** is one of the most prominent systems. Utilizing XYZ motion paths, a movable head, and a material extrusion nozzle, it can build different parts of a structure layer by layer. This 3D printing machine includes units such as the **printing head**, **material mixing and pumping unit**, **digital control center**, and **operator and worker monitoring station**. This setup simultaneously allows operators to adjust speed, layer thickness, spray direction, and emergency stops (**see Figure 10**).

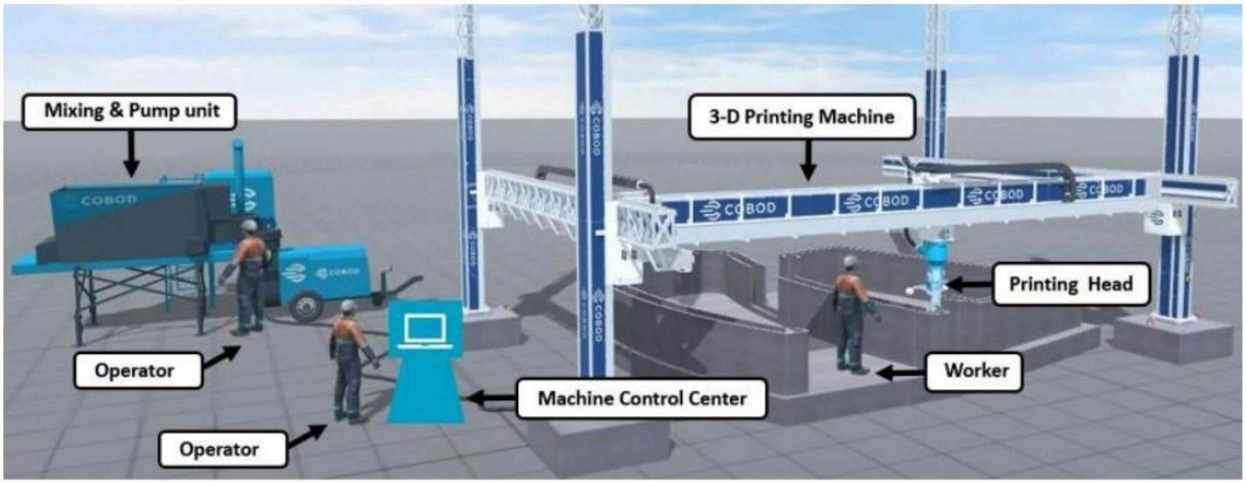


Figure 10 : Components of the Gantry 3D Printer

Analysis of this digital construction model shows that the complete execution of a structure from floor to ceiling requires adherence to a specific sequence of construction stages:

1. Printing the initial base (foundation or subfloor layer)
2. Gradual, layered construction of side walls

3. Internal connection of components (passing pipes, ducts, cables)
4. Printing the roof covering and final areas

This process, defined as **integrated on-site construction**, offers multiple advantages including reduced construction time, centralized quality control, and elimination of human errors in formwork processes.

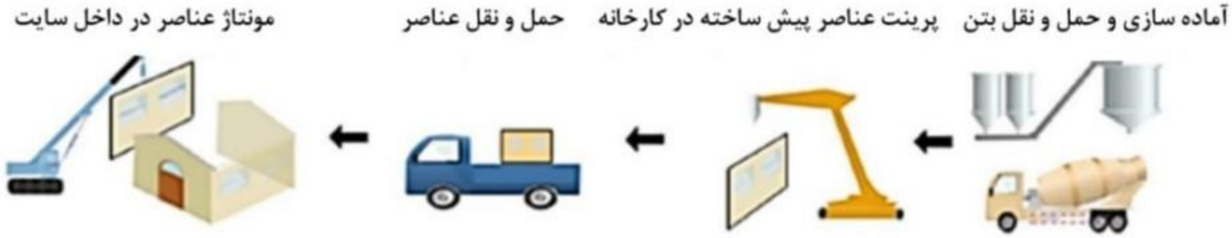
Alongside this model, two other approaches in 3D building printing have emerged:

1. Production of prefabricated parts in factories and transporting them to the construction site
2. On-site construction of modular formwork components and manual or robotic assembly

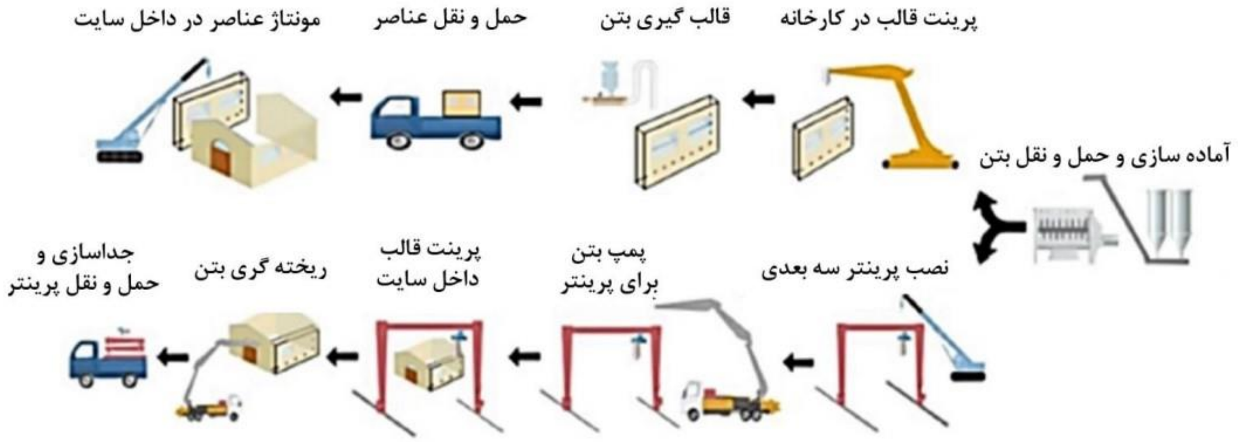
In **Table 1**, different types of printers and these three methods are analyzed in terms of cost, speed, labor, quality, and adaptability. It shows that the third method (integrated on-site building construction and execution) holds a higher competitive advantage in specific, large-scale projects.

Table 1 – Comparison of Three Types of Large-Scale Concrete 3D Printing Methods

a) 3D Printing of Prefabricated Elements:



b) 3D Printing of Prefabricated Molds:



c) Integrated 3D Printing of Buildings:

Another notable advancement in this field is the integration of Building Information Modeling (BIM) systems with the Robot Operating System (ROS). This combination creates a platform for real-time control of robot operations, collision avoidance, path adjustment, and decision-making based on project data. Such a structure enables self-regulation and precise execution in the construction process while reducing dependence on human intervention.

At the same time, the role of humans in these systems must be acknowledged. Although robots handle a large portion of the execution process, human operators still play a crucial role in initial planning, sensitive adjustments, error control, exception management, and decision-making in critical situations. Therefore, the digital construction model should be viewed as a combination of advanced automation and targeted human intervention, which synergistically enhances the system's performance (see Figure 11).

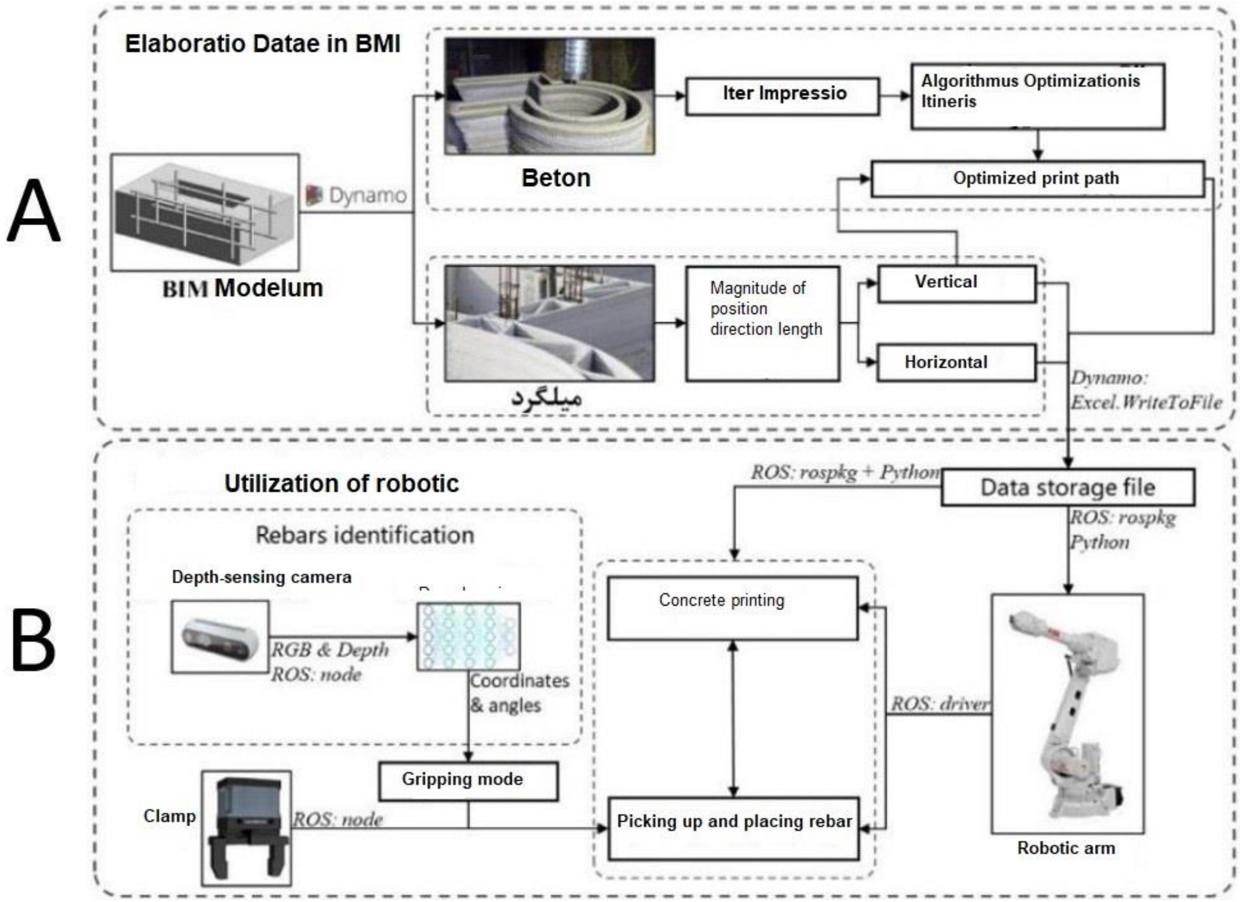


Figure (11): Robot Control System Equipped with BIM for Automatic Integration between Reinforcement Bars and 3D Concrete Printing

3-3. Smartization and Operation

In the building operation phase, intelligent Building Management Systems (BMS) play a key role in monitoring and controlling environmental conditions. These systems, connected to the Internet of Things (IoT) network and using sensors for temperature, light, humidity, presence, and motion, enable simultaneous and real-time management of various building components. With the help of machine learning algorithms, BMS can analyze occupant behavior patterns and environmental conditions and automatically adjust heating, cooling, ventilation, lighting, and security systems.

Smartization also reduces energy consumption, increases system efficiency, prevents human errors, and optimizes equipment operation. One of the advanced features of these systems is the ability to provide proactive alerts when facing technical faults or potential incidents. For example, in case of gas leakage or unauthorized temperature rise, the system automatically activates ventilation or sends a warning message to the control center.

In large projects, connecting BMS to central Smart City platforms allows environmental data to be collected and analyzed on a city-wide scale, enabling macro-level policy-making in energy, transportation, and urban safety. This approach transforms a building from an isolated unit into a part of an intelligent urban ecosystem.

3-4. Advantages of Industrial Construction

Industrial construction based on new technologies such as robotics, 3D printing, and modularization is recognized as a fundamental approach to improving construction project performance. The most important advantages of this method include:

1. **Significant reduction in execution time:** The use of prefabricated components and multipurpose robots speeds up the construction process by over 50% compared to traditional methods.
2. **Optimization of human and financial resources:** The need for unskilled labor decreases, and costs due to human error, rework, and maintenance are drastically reduced.
3. **Improved construction quality:** By precisely controlling production and installation in standardized environments, the final quality is more uniform and compliant with technical specifications.
4. **Increased site safety:** Reduced human traffic, elimination of risky activities such as working at heights or carrying heavy loads, and the use of precise robots minimize accident risks.
5. **Ability to operate in special conditions:** Industrial construction technology enables projects to be executed in remote areas, harsh climates, and even disaster zones.
6. **Environmental sustainability:** Due to optimal material usage, waste reduction, and elimination of unnecessary activities, the environmental impact of projects is significantly reduced.

Overall, using robots and automated systems in industrial building construction not only enhances productivity but also lays the foundation for a transition towards technological architecture and sustainable development in the construction industry.

Figure (12) Diagram, titled “Integrated Advanced Industrial Construction Model: From Fundamental Research to Large-Scale Rapid Construction,” symbolizes the three-layer integration of Fundamental Research, Technology Thrusts, and Technology Demonstrations in digital architecture and intelligent construction and execution.

This diagram conceptually outlines an integrated framework where research achievements in areas such as Composite Materials, Dynamic Modeling and Control, 4D Modeling and Visualization, and Multi-Robot Coordination lead to targeted industrial design, ultimately resulting in rapid, precise, and adaptable construction through technologies like construction robots, 3D printing, and Integrated Software Systems.

The proposed model contrasts with conventional construction methods, which largely rely on unskilled human labor, material waste, and trial-and-error cycles. Here, relying on synergy among parametric design algorithms, Building Information Modeling (BIM), Real-Time Inspection systems, and Workflow & Logistics Planning, the construction process becomes an intelligent, scheduled chain.

Also, the upper part of the diagram, focusing on the slogan "A House in a Day," shows that achieving such a goal is not solely a technological matter but requires coordination among economic, environmental, social, regulatory, and architectural impacts. This model, as a strategic framework for future construction and execution, demands effective collaboration among academia, industry, and regulatory bodies.

Ultimately, building a house in a day is not just an engineering idealism but an achievable goal through systematic convergence of knowledge, technology, and implementation; a paradigm that can revolutionize construction nationally and even for extraterrestrial construction.

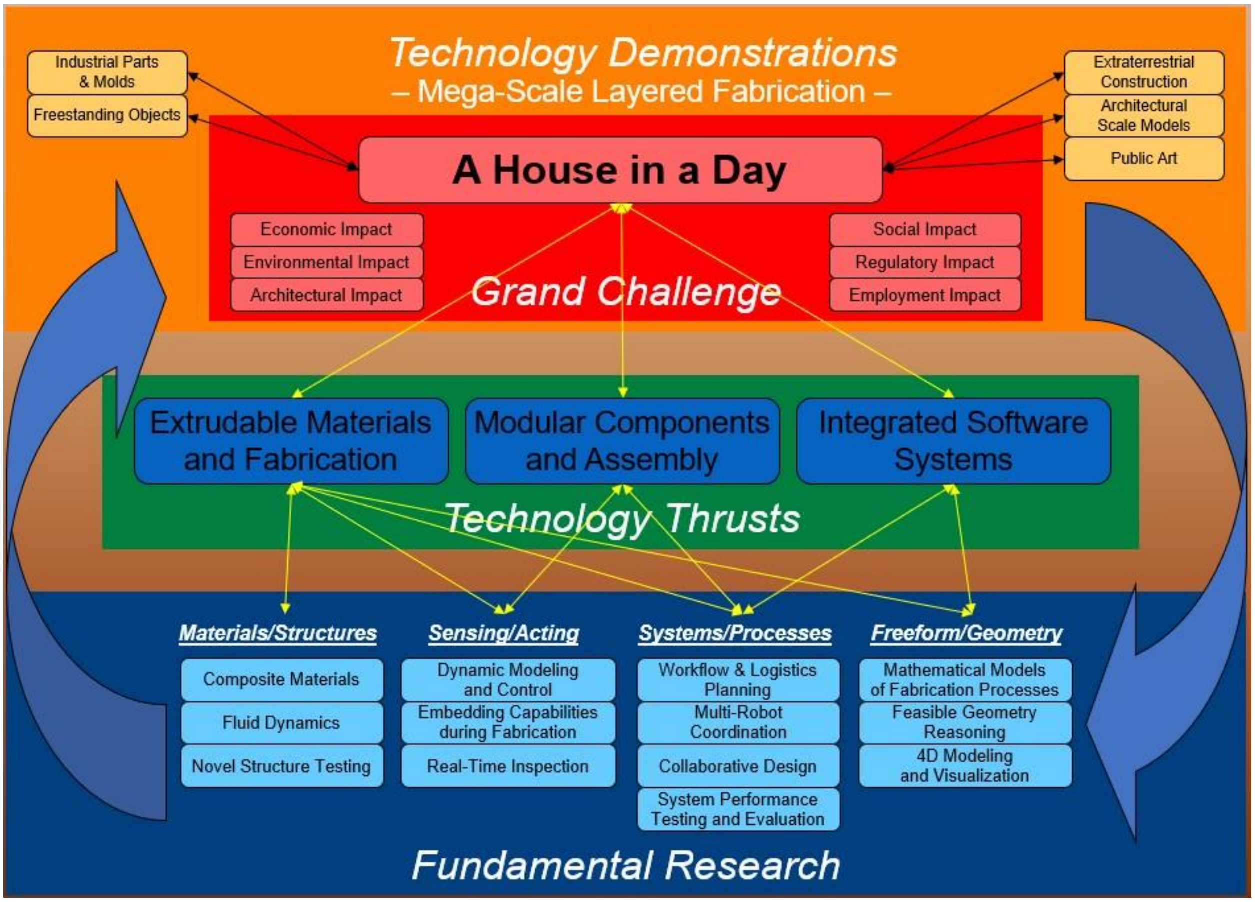


Figure (12): Rapid Industrial Construction and Technological Architecture: The Concept of "A House in a Day"

3-5. Challenges of Localization

Localizing modern construction technologies, including robotics and intelligent systems, is a complex and multifaceted process that requires careful adaptation to the social, cultural, climatic, and economic contexts of each country. In Iran, this process faces challenges such as climatic variations across different regions, diversity in construction practices between urban and rural areas, limited access to technological equipment and components, and a lack of specialized training.

From a climatic perspective, designing robotic systems to operate in the extreme heat of the south, the dry cold of the northwest, or the high humidity of the northern coasts requires special calibration and component reinforcement. On the other hand, the prevailing construction culture, which is still largely based on non-engineered and experience-based methods, is not yet aligned with the adoption of automated and smart technologies. This cultural gap must be bridged through education, the promotion of successful technological applications, and policy reform.

In terms of human resources, a shortage of skilled operators for robots, BMS data analysts, and technicians for assembling advanced equipment presents a major obstacle to the successful implementation of these technologies. Additionally, the absence of localized technical standards and codes for the design, installation, and operation of such systems leads to inconsistency in implementation and weak institutional acceptance.

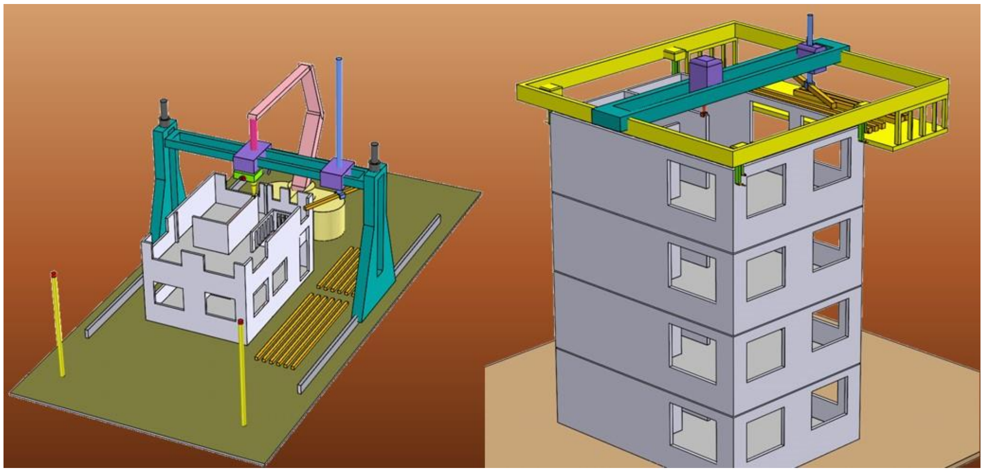
To overcome these challenges, it is recommended that alongside technological development, educational institutions, policymakers, and industry stakeholders develop programs to promote a technology-oriented culture, invest in infrastructure, train specialized personnel, and draft national standards tailored to the country’s local capacities.

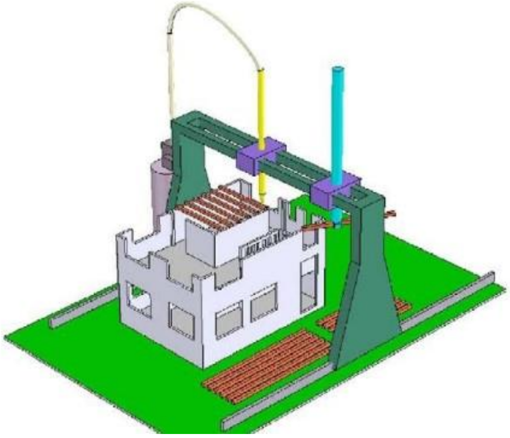
3-6. Comparative Analysis with Global Examples

In Japan, companies such as *Shimizu* and *Obayashi* employ robots for welding and transporting steel structures. Germany utilizes articulated smart arms in tunnel construction and heavy concrete work. In China, particularly in large-scale housing projects, massive 3D printers have been used to build 10 houses in under 24 hours. In all of these countries, technology has been accompanied by supportive policymaking, training, and investment, enabling practical implementation.

A comparison with Iran reveals that while scientific and research foundations are in place, the lack of investment, specialized education, and effective policymaking has hindered the practical development of such technologies.

(Figures 14 and 15) illustrate the advancements in industrial building construction and the use of robots for multi-story housing construction.





Type of cost	Share in traditional and common construction (%)	Percentage reduction using robots and automation
Labor cost	٪30	50% reduction
Material cost	٪50	20% reduction (due to execution accuracy and material waste reduction)
Financial and managerial cost	٪20	10% reduction (due to reduced execution time and rework)

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