

The Role of Public Urban Spaces in Creating a Vivacious Society: A Case Study in Tabriz, Iran

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Abstract

Public spaces are an arena for displaying the flow of human life. Social interactions with triple classifications including compulsory, optional and social activities take place in these spaces. The issue that we will review in the present discussion refers to lack of public lively spaces for doing optional-recreative activities in Tabriz. First, public urban spaces and necessity of their existence in creating a lively and spirited environment will be described. Second, we will discuss the subject of virtual world and its impact on redefining of social relations, and disruption of the recent generation from the past one. Then with reviewing the available spaces in the city and their analysis, and also regarding different factors, we will try to provide appropriate solutions and new ideas in creating new spaces which will altogether take into account the issues of recreation, welfare, peace, interaction, art and virtual world. The results show that the inadequacy of the public spaces with a recreational approach is felt in urban arena and inside the dense context of Tabriz regarding its large scale in comparison with other megalopolises.

Keywords: Public Spaces, Liveliness, Urban Activity, Virtual World, Tabriz

Introduction

The public space in an environment which results in the union of people in a common place in order to do functional activities or conduct formalities (Maryam Khasto, 2010, p. 63), and includes urban texture (places) which have been common among the people, and everyone has the right of access to them such as street, city squares, etc. (Francis Tibaldz, 1992, p. 1). The social interactions of citizens take place in the public urban spaces which will bring about the superiority of the society's culture in its own context.

In order to interact in the city, we should create public pedestrian places, presence of people in the city is the requisite of the public spaces vivacity; but nowadays for different reasons the street is not considered as a place for passing leisure times, and spending a lot of time on the street would be abominable in a way that adolescents are prohibited from this activity; however, if the street provides a secure and optimal space, and safe activities and recreations are provided in an organized way and according to social values, lively presence of population and consequently, livelihood and livability will increase. By identifying and enhancing the effective factors on the livelihood of the urban spaces and creating vivacious places, the city can be vivified (Maryam, Khasto, 2010, p.63). On the other hand, nowadays with the improvement of technology and creation of the virtual environments, the manner of communications and the speed of information transfer among people of the society have adopted different descriptions considering the first place of human civilization. In the past, physical activity in the external environment would necessarily result in creating social interaction and vivacity among mankind, but now all of us are enclosed in an artificial world which we ourselves created its rules, and mind has adopted a much superior status in comparison with body and its characteristics. All of us are cognizant of the improvement happened during industrial revolution because of the mechanization of affairs. By describing the virtual world a very big jump is now passing, and this has increased the inclination towards private life. In some places, this factor

with the help of other factors such as climate, has resulted in gradual elimination of the public urban and environments of vivacity. The aims of these environments are establishment of social interaction among people of a society, and creation of a cheerful society. This research is going to emphasize the necessity of considering the prominent humanity dimensions. We should create environments including different spaces, the supply of tranquility and welfare regarding Maslow's theories, and the highest needs of human being, i.e., the need to beauty and art. If we want to compare Tabriz with Tehran, we should refer to the lack of the public park's role and also art places such as Tehran's City Theatre.

Research Method

This research tried to compare urban needs with the needs of other cities. An issue which has engaged the researchers of this paper is the study of the reasons for the lack of appropriate recreational places on a vast scale in Tabriz with a public function, along with the culture of its application among all members of the community in Tabriz. In this research, observation method and data collection from various people both in recreational places and other public space were used, and we tried to investigate the extent of their inclination toward the existence or lack of public spaces with recreative function. Also, an appropriate analysis was provided by using library method and referring to the previous reviews of researchers in this regard. Definitions of key terms and their applications

Public space

In "Longman dictionary of contemporary English", the word public means "provided for the use of people in general" which is in contrast and opposite to the word private which means "personal and not for public use". "In Oxford Dictionary" (1992), the word public means "general" and often is the opposite "private". "Connected or related to people in general" and "available or common for all the population" also "with available or applicable freedom".

The term "public space" denotes to an environment which provides a common ground for doing functional activities or conducting ceremonies in order to make a connection among society members. In addition, public space can be defined as a scene displaying social life, whether these activities are routine and permanent or ceremonial and periodic. These functions include political, religious, commercial and sport activities. The major characteristic of public space is that it "describes the collective life, urban culture and routine debates, and also impacts them" (Ker and Syreen, 1992, p. 11).

From the point of public arena, the public space refers to all of the urban contexts in which people have physical and visual access including streets, parks, and city squares. The main component of a city or town is public place that most of the human contacts and interactions take place in. (Francis Tibbaldz, 1992, p. 1).

At last, the public place involves natural and artificial environments which are available for most of the people including streets, squares and other routes which others have the right to pass them, in residential and commercial areas and localities, open spaces, parks and private/ public space to which people can have access at least a few hours a day" (Rafian, 2002, p. 2).

The functions of public urban spaces in the cities are: a tool for communication, a place for interaction, managing and attuning of free citizens (Rafian, 2005, p. 37).

Generally, all the activities done in the city involve three different spectra: the first spectrum includes necessary and important activities that take place under any circumstances such as going to school, shopping and waiting in a bus station. The second spectrum is related to suitable conditions and arbitrary situation of a person, and covers optional and selected activities such as walking in open air, stopping in recreational places, sitting and resting in attractive and perceivable

places, etc. The third spectrum involves social activities taking place in the urban space and also a vast range of interactions among people. These activities are under the influence of other activities and social space, and thus are called final activity (Raffian, 2005, pp. 37-38).

According to most urban researchers, public spaces such as neighborhood parks and/or local garden are the main components of a city which describe its attractive and unique places. Some believe that, in urban habitants before Modernism, public space such as city squares and markets have been regarded as an area for communication and in fact included some places composed of lots of people's social actions and reactions, which led to such interactions. In addition to creating a sense of confidence in people, these places bring about a sense of attachment (Madanipoor, 1992).

Space of Vivacity: refers to a group of the public space which have recreational functions, and in addition to the physical needs, takes into account the spiritual needs of people.

Virtual world and relations of the modern society

Since 1970s, computer and telecommunication technology have changed the routine of man's life, and since 1990s, personal and social life have been under the influence of computer and telecommunication in such a way that the term space seems meaningless. Physical spaces and their description from the point of humane have been influenced; for example, in opposite to the past, a meeting room is presided virtually (Sherbini and Krawczyk, 2004, p.137).

Taking a comprehensive look at the situation of life nowadays, we can say that the virtual world has influenced the mentioned public and classified activities at higher levels. Indeed, the possibility of individuals' interaction, sense of confidence and the resultant dependence and belonging to these communications have transcended geographical borders of the past and can also be defined in another form. In explaining the dimension of the public spaces, some arenas have been referred to display everyday life such as shopping, work, recreation etc. In addition, virtual space of the internet has increased capabilities of human being in a way that in the past if some of the necessary activities should have happened in a public space, today are happening in different ways. In fact, there is no need to leave home in order to do bank works and one can easily do all of his bank transportations and exchanges using internet. Many activities of this type can be mentioned such as buying life necessities, communicating with friends, studying, doing research programs, etc. If we try to take a closer look at this issue, we will see that even the activities inside the public spaces have also been influenced. According to Edward Ti Hall's theory (1914), understanding the space can be achieved through the quandary senses and the data that are collected and synthesized by them. Now, imagine that a pedestrian who is crossing a street or walking in a local place is listening to music via a headphone, does this individual have similar understanding to that of another individual who hears available sounds in the surrounding? Or is the perception of a person listening to jazz music similar to that of another person who is listening to traditional music? It is worth mentioning that individuals in public spaces would be like fragments of a puzzle which are not related to each other. Regarding all of these factors, it is the duty of architecture and designer (programmer) to provide an appropriate time specific definition for the public spaces and creating interaction in the city.

Vivacity and Viability

There are four major conditions for creating a yielding variety in urban streets and localities. Accordingly, there are four main features for a vivacious city: the district should preferably have more than two functions.; most the blocks should be short.; the area should be composed of buildings with different ages and conditions; and adequate compressed density of people should be available regardless of the reason for their presence (Jiccobs, 2007, p. 160).

One of the essentials of the streets' vivacity is the existence of a mixed and various function. But, variety is only one of the necessities in creating vivacity and dynamicity in a space and there are other powerful components which are effective in creating vivacious urban space; For example, on a micro scale, urban design and appropriate activities are attractive for people, and on a macro scale, social, cultural and environmental factors which externally affect the place should also be considered attractive activities (Khastoo, 2010, p. 65). According to Quin Lynch, livelihood along with other factors such as meaning, symmetry, access, surveillance and authority, efficiency and equity are composed of functional pivots of good form of a city (Lynch, 2003, pp. 155- 166). Spirited urban spaces are those in which a significant number of people from different age groups do most of their activities optionally or socially. Types of Vivacity and Viability

Table 1. Types of vivacity and viability (Source: Landry,2000)

<p>Viability: long-term satisfaction, durability, compatibility, adaptability and self-renovation Vivacity: levels of activity, use and partnership, interactions, communications, exchanges and transactions, and levels of display (quiddity of manifestation of activities and interaction in the outer world)</p>	<p>1. Economical liveliness: is evaluated by levels of employment, crude income and standards of people's life in a district under study, annual calculation of tourists, proceedings of retails, value of land and asset</p>
	<p>2. Social vivacity: is gauged by levels of social activities and interactions in addition to social communications. A vivacious and viable city can socially be described by low levels of deprivation, strong social cohesion, good communication and dynamicity among social levels, collective morale and civil proud, extensive amplitude of life methods, harmonious relations and a verdured urban society.</p>
	<p>Environmental vivacity and viability: involves two dimensions. First, ecological stability which is related to variables such as air and noise pollution, elimination of useless material and sewage, congestion of traffic and green places, and the second dimension is designation which involves variables such as readability, sense of place, architectural distinction, connection and relation of different districts of city, quality of lightness and how much the urban environment is friendly and secure, and psychologically approachable.</p>
	<p>Cultural vivacity and viability: includes duration of respect and glorification from city and its people, identity, tradition, social ceremonies, production, distribution and consumption of manmade products and signs representing distinctive nature of the city.</p>

The area under study

Tabriz, the center of Eastern Azerbaijan, is placed in north-east of Iran. This city has a quadrilateral situation in the spectrum of the region including Eastern, Western Azerbaijan and Ardebil provinces. The geographic location of the city is 38° and 15" of the Northern Latitude, and 36° and 23" of the Eastern Longitude of Greenwich Meridian.

Climatically, this city is classified as cold Mediterranean climates and because of the natural typographic conditions, the shape of the city, in addition to following the climatic specialties, is somehow subordinate to special quality of the city's natural region (Arseh Consultant Engineers, 1994, p. 6).

At present, Tabriz has old, traditional, new-foundational, designed, marginal and reportorial contexts (Mohammadzadeh et.al, 2005, p. 19). According to the definition that provided for public

spaces, Tabriz has many suitable arenas for necessary activities such as work, shopping, and public transportation vehicles, but with regard to the large scale of this city, and also according to its historical tradition which is famous as the city of firsts, lack of hilarity spaces is evident for doing recreational activities in comparison to Tehran and other cities such as Isfahan, Shiraz and the like. One of the reasons, which can be mentioned for the lack of adequate expansive urban parks with public and free function for population is the cold climatic conditions. New appropriate public spaces have been created and demolished in the city. Places such as Laleh Park having a collectivist space and provides abundant help in creating a sense of urban belonging and more transaction of economic prosperity. It should be mentioned that the entrance of this complex in some periods of upper entrance post has not completely been able to satisfy needs of the users and brings about problems for parking of cars. In front of this new place, there is Valiasr square that had previously been a very collecting place, and the beating heart of the city in the afternoon till 12 PM, but now because of the constructions under the square, its shape has completely been changed and its past function has been disordered. There are many other examples in the city having public commercial functions such as Tarbiat and Valiasr pedestrians, but our discussion involves spaces for recreation and gathering people together, and a place for resting and paying attention to psychological dimensions that only a few of them are available in the city. El Goli Park, Khagani Garden, Shams Park, Mafakher Park, Golestan Garden, Mashroteh Park and etc. are a few of these cases.

Conclusion

Available hilarity spaces are not adequate regarding the large scale of the city. New spaces are under construction, but the main problem in this case is considering this point that the new spaces are in the country-sides or in places which from the point of spatial value are classified among the passage districts. The problems which are created for these kinds of places, which are away from the major public arenas are the accumulation of individuals who had been away from the society's norms and bring about major problems from different dimensions. When such uncontrollable spaces evolve, the corollary will be much more different than our main expectancy. If we divide the city into target and route spaces, or in other words, if like Lynch refer to routes and loops, we will see that accumulation of people takes place in loops and target points. Khagani Garden which is spatially situated next to Kabood Mosque and the district of Saat Square, has created a very beautiful, restful and exhilarant environment with combination of the holy presence of the mosque along with the architectural elements such as defining arcs of the porch and the fronts, which are physically apart from each other but visually continuous, and vital elements such as water and plants and height difference with the mosque's yard and has begun to relax the body and soul of a human being. However, it has occupied a very limited space. In this paper, the topic of virtual world and restatement of communications were considered. As a designer, we can use the new capabilities that computer provide us and improve the environment we are aiming to create. Using the facilities of the virtual world, we can provide more information about the present in the reach of the users' receptive sense and influence them. By constructing hilarity spaces, we can also add to the spatial brightness of the city and bring about a place for the users' rest and tranquility. The best example is Khagani Park, which despite its small scale, has used formational and vital elements, and has reached optimal results, or in Shams Park, the statue of this big poet has provided a distinctive quality for the space. We can also use such elements to fulfill the todays' needs and provide virtual facilities for the users in order to increase the social interactions and to reach the general cohesion in this field. In the case of accomplishment of this kind of combination, we can somehow fill the gap existing between family members (parents and children), that is, both the enjoyment tool for the parents will be provided and the young people can expand their private space

in public space by using the facilities which are at their disposal. Another issue deserving attention is the lack of the public space in order to display the art of citizens; unclosed amphitheater is one of the elements whose lack is manifest regarding vivacious and recreational spaces. The only place that has an unclosed amphitheater in Tabriz is Mafakher Park, which its usage has been disturbed because of the holy presence of the mosque. However, building laying seats in El Goli Park has somehow solved this problem, which is not formally suitable. In conclusion, construction of vivacious public parks in compressed and crowded areas of the city with recreational, welfare, tranquility and artistical function are recommended along with an approach towards the virtual world and the major compatibilities that can be provided for enhancing the quality of the space. In addition, creating an appropriate framework for interaction of society's population and finally establishing a happy and hilarious society, endeavors should be taken to acculturate people by using these spaces. If it is possible to give such a quality to the urban space, in addition to bringing people to the foreground, we can create an interaction between different generations, and with the established harmony, some steps can be taken to enhance the art which is the manifestation of a culture.

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