

Place semantics based on Lynch, Rapoport and Semiotics viewpoints

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Abstract

Years after world war two, modern approach to rebuild the environment leads to lose some of the qualities of space. One of the main lost qualities is meaning.

Also, there are huge studies from different viewpoints on the meaning of place, but it still is a problem for people to understand the meaning of place.

This article is about to find the meaning of place based on three main approaches. The first is by Kevin Lynch which emphasis on the body of the place. The second is by Amos Rapoport as a Nonverbal Communication. The third is semiotics which is an approach in Language to describe how meanings are conveyed by texts.

The conclusion is showing that though all 3 viewpoints are about meaning, but they take different aspect and indicators of place as responsible parts in making meaning and understanding it.

Keywords: Meaning, Place, Lynch, Rapoport, Semiotics.

Introduction

After world war two and its huge demolition, rebuilding the environment had been started. due to the situation and instant need for liveable spaces, rebuilding was fast and wide.

In comparison with new and old place Shultz says: “although good order is visible in new places, but it is from bird’s eye and not people who are living in the city. Living in places which can lead to individuality and belonging to place has been missed” (Schulz, 1980)

Considering the studies on lost meaning, still there is a missing point in this case of place. This article is about to studding meaning in applied manner and finding the indicators of it. So it has chosen three most popular approaches in the meaning of place in order to reach the common idea.

Research Methodology

Since this article has theoretical approach, it’s benefiting from descriptive- analytical approach. In order to collect the information studying the documents and other written materials and in order to analysis Logical reasoning has been chosen. In collecting information, taking written notes from original documents has been considered. Then content analysis on the written materials of each approach and then comparing between them in order to respond to questions of this research have been used.

Kevin Lynch's sense of meaning

Kevin Lynch, an American urban planner (1918-1984) in A Theory of Good City Form (1981) in order to ensure the quality of a city, introduces five principal areas: vitality, meaning, relevance, accessibility and control authority. (Lynch, 2005)

Lynch to explain how people perceived the environments used the five elements, edges, nodes, routes, landmarks and areas of use.

It is also effective in his view of the meaning of the environment. Access and effective action on the environment requires understanding of the meaning he knows. (Lynch, 2005)

Lynch has defined the meaning of city as: “meaning is that how a city can be clearly understood And how its inhabitants can bring it to visualize in time and space. And this mindset is to what extent related to the values and concepts of society. (Lynch, 2005) In summary Lynch introduces meaning as conformity of environmental and emotional, mental and cultural structures of its inhabitants.

Because Lynch takes meaning in the interaction between person and place (Lynch, 2005, p. 167) he introduces this quality both depends on the shape and physical-spatial dimension of the space and to the Humane Society characteristics such as culture, character, location, and experience of the observer.

That's why a fixed place among different observers means differently. But since all these observers share certain characteristics such as biology, common perceptions and cultural norms must be noted that there is a collective common meaning between them.

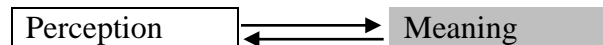


Figure 1: Dependence of meaning and perception of Lynch's perspective

Based on this shared vision between the human and environment, Lynch does depend meaning on two key factors; the identity and structure. The Structure is the characteristic form of place and identity are in relation of people and places.

Identity by Lynch is an aspect of form to let people know about space and time and present it in their own pattern form (Lynch, 2005, p. 173). The identity is the "meaning of place" (Lynch, 2005, p. 168). The extent to which any individual can distinguish a location than other places.

Therefore, clear and specific characteristics in each location that distinguishes it from other places is necessary to establish the identity and meaning. Lynch attributed meaning not only to the location, but to the events.

He believes that the events that occur in space, such as special celebrations and ceremonies can also make meanings. (Lynch, 2005, p. 169) It is therefore involved in meaning of places.

Another factor in Lynch's meaning is the structure. For Lynch, the structure is the feeling of being at this time and place instead of another place and time. the person needs to identify Where he is in order to understand the meaning (Lynch, 2005, p. 170). The Location should have a role in determining one's place than other places and with respect to time. give him a sense of belonging to a specific period.

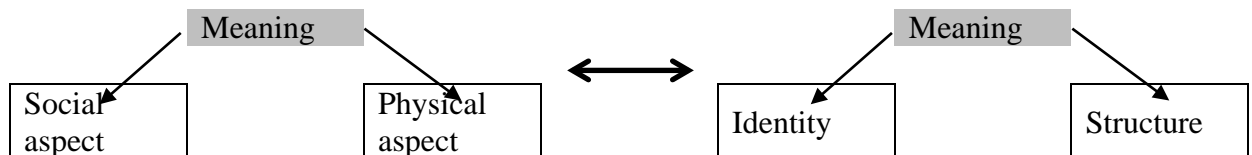


Figure 2: The main aspects of the meaning to Lynch

Although Lynch takes the structure as a form of meaning, but also other aspects such as consistency and transparency and Legibility to make meaning is necessarily in his point of view Compatibility is the context of meaning. This means having full compliance with the environmental non-spatial structures and physical structures. (Lynch, 2005, p. 173)

Each building must link its form and function in the city. He says that the body should reflect the non-physical properties. This means that if a single building shows its activities and characteristics of living in it.

Is an urban center, which has maximum of activities, have a maximum density of physical structures? Is in the housing part of the city, residents are supposed to represent their characteristics?

Lynch's another meaning element of place is transparency. Transparency or immediacy is a level of freedom and the opportunity to direct perception of residents and social processes and natural activities that occur in everyday life. He means perception any settlement's activities and events which could be interesting or even unimportant.

This meaning aspect for Lynch, in fact, is the form of protest in the ambiguity of modernity. He believes that each person should be able to see other people at work, to hear the sound of waves crashing on the beach, to see when parking's are full and ... (Lynch, 2005, p. 177).

Another meaning aspect is the Legibility. This means that to which extent residents of a settlement are able to communicate with each other via structural symbols? Lynch sees the city as a means of communication which has implicit and explicit symbols. Symbols that can contain flags, grass, intersections, signs, picture windows, columns and trees are carrying messages such as property, status, belonging to, covert operations, services and correct behaviors.

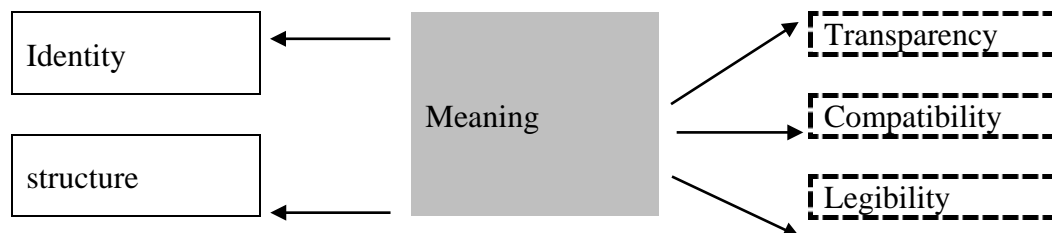


Figure 3: major and minor element Lynch's sense of meaning

Rapoport's sense of meaning

Amos Rapoport (1923), is considered as one of the urban scholars in environmental studies and behavior (EBS). He who has a cultural view to the issue of cities in his book "meaning the built environment, an approach in nonverbal communication" (1982) explained the meaning of place.

In his view, there are three basic methods for the study of meaning:

- Use linguistic patterns
- studying symbols that are a traditional approach.
- Use patterns of nonverbal approach which is taken of anthropology, ethics and psychology.

(Rapoport, 1982, p. 36)

His book on the meaning of the built environment, has adopted non-verbal approach in the study of meaning. It related meaning as a communication issue. The Meaning of environment is achievable through direct observation of the environment and see references in it and interpret them. (Rapoport, 2005, p. 94) Thus, cities can identify by seeing the type of clothing of its inhabitants, its type of buildings, shops and

According to Rapoport category , people in the environment communicate verbally, vocally, and non-verbally (Rapoport 1982, p. 49). vocal and verbal behaviors, deal with hearing. In non-verbal communication, although the sense of sight is involved, but auditory, tactile, olfactory, or other gestures are also important and hence this connection. (Rapoport, 2005, p. 50)

Rapoport knows environment full of references and codes that although they do not convey the message verbally, but has the meaning of environment inside (Rapoport, 2005, p. 50). He states that the information in the environment has codes and needs to be decoded (Rapoport, 2005, p. 86).

Rapoport In his opinion to the meaning had given two points: one is cued or reference and the second is the text that transmitted the message. He considers both of these elements in terms of the meaning of the environment.

The role of the text in Rapoport view point is learning the meanings of signs and then decode them. He says: "People often act based on reading of environmental cues, ... thus the language that is used in this environmental implications should be fully understood ... The environment must be designed in such a way that data, codes perception. then people can clearly understand the code. if the codes are not understood, one can't interact with the environment. this position is similar to the experience of being in the unfamiliar culture and so become a culture shock. " (Rapoport, 2005, p. 59) in the field of familiar culture, it is almost trivial to decode and no one thinks about it. Note that this process starts only when the meaning of gestures and behaviors, not get (Rapoport, 2005, p. 91).

Text's role in Rapoport view point is to help to understand the meaning of the codes. In his view, the meaning is affected by the states (Rapoport, 2005, p. 75). For example, informal dresses in formal and informal situations, although informal dress is constant, but different meanings come to the mind according to the context. Informal dress in formal situation can mean to protest or neglect the formal setting which does not give the same meaning in informal situations.

For Rapoport, meaning also depends on the decoder person. He emphasizes the importance of coding the environment, according to a person that will decode it. But how can people get the meaning of these cues? How they know the meaning of the codes? Rapoport takes the meaning as a cultural issue, "we are told and shown how to treat people and what people expect from us, a part of the world objectives comes from other people applying it"(Rapoport, 2005, p. 61). Obviously, many of these lessons took place in the early years of life and via culture (Rapoport, 2005, p. 67). Rapoport alongside culture also points out the environment that is effective in the limited response, defining the position and to show people how to behave.

Rapoport said that constant references almost have a constant meaning in a culture and it is because of it that repeated and constant actions can occur in a community. He says: "members of a culture face with constant cues and meanings embedded in them, this helps to stabilize the behavior of any particular culture, although these cues can have a different meaning from one culture to another" (Rapoport, 2005, p. 62).

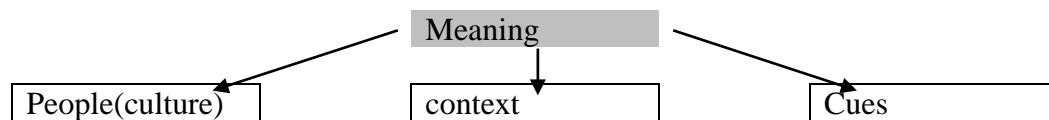


Figure 4: Elements of Rapoport's sense of meaning

from the standpoint of Rapoport In nonverbal communication of meaning, the environment is divided into three categories: elements and its cues:

- element
- semi-fixed elements
- non-fixed elements

constant elements in the environment As their name implies, in terms of physical location are stable and changing rarely and slowly. These include walls, roofs, floors in the field of architecture and streets and buildings in urban-scale. (Rapoport, 2005, p. 95).

constant elements, how they position in space, the communication between them and their order in space have meaning. Of course here the importance of culture in decoding is must be considered too. order in a cultural group has different meanings elsewhere. American cities in terms of the French observers were in disarray as US observers have the same opinion about Muslim cities. (Rapoport, 2005, p. 96)

The second group of elements is semi-fixed elements. These elements include a variety of components from furniture, curtains, stands, street furniture, shop windows and other elements of the city. (Rapoport, 2005, p. 96)

Rapoport knows the importance of these elements more than constant elements in transmission of meaning in the environment. He believes that designers do not need to completely design everything. Given the opportunity to personalize and to create space is the opportunity of making meaning for users. people abandoned the previously built environments and prepared and fixed structural elements and tend to have the right to communicate with their personal choice.

The Third category is non-fixed elements. This category of elements, including humans and their environment and data transmission through physical position, gestures and visual expressions, , pauses and speed of speech and many other non-verbal behavior (Rapoport, 2005, pp. 104 and 105). Studies related to this field are linked to urban anthropology.

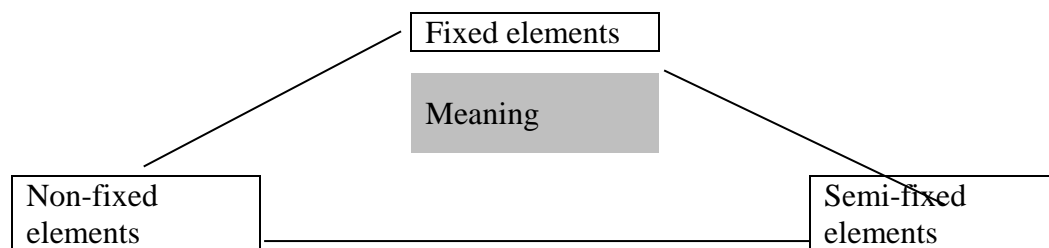


Figure 5: The significant elements of the Rapoport viewpoint

Semiotics sense of meaning

Another approach to semantics that today is used both in the field of literature and architecture is semiotics. This approach was first introduced in linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839) almost simultaneously but separately.

The main theme of semiotics is to study of sign systems. the study of sign systems Nowadays such as, fashion, theater, music, photography, ethics, computer, ... and also entered the city and architecture and has helped in understanding the meaning of them. (Kamrani, 2009, p. 52)

Using a model called sign semiotics is looking to explain, how the meaning is conveyed. A Single sign is consists of a (form) and a signified (concept), (Sojudi, 2008, p. 18) that is formed with the intention to convey a message. (Gyro, 2001, p. 39)

For example, it can be said that traffic light is a sign, because the green light, is a signifier for the concept of moving.



Figure 6: a sign of Saussure's view

Semiotics as well as two previous views knows meaning depends on a set of elements. Structure, text, media and codes are the most important elements of meaning in view of semiotics.

The concept of structuralism, in semiotics took shape in looking for ideas of structure in Europe, introduced a general framework that does not make any meaning out of it. In fact, the structure is the system and the general framework of the meaning and significance. No sign outside the scope of its structure is meaningful. For example, the whole meaning of the texts is originated by the structure of literary. All of realist novels make meaningful based on realism structure.

Text is a part of the structure that has been materialized by an author. In linguistics, it can be said that the language in general is a structure and speech is the text made by an individual (Chandler, 2008, p. 320), when speaking of writing a novel in special genre, must say that, that genre that could arise in hundreds of novels by various authors, is a structure. Every novel in a genre is a text that inherits its attributes from the structure and author. In fact, the writer brings structure in the form of a novel. Text is not independent phenomenon, but the structure is an independent phenomenon that contains all the properties that can be seen in the text.

Another concept associated with meaning in semiotics, is media. In semiotics, the term media refers to various means of communication such as books, radio, cinema and fashion (Gyro, 2001, p. 31). Signs, always communicate in the form of a media, so Medias are the limitations and capabilities. Users take Media as a tool that is transparent and ineffective in representing meaning, but it actually is involved in the meaning and the media specifications are effective in conveying the message (Chandler, 2008, 331).

The fourth concept is code that is associated with the transmission of meaning in semiotics. It is a series of contracts in a communication system that makes it possible to decode the sign. The codes are intricate patterns that all members of a society or culture need to learn it. A code is a set of processes that users, who live in a cultural context, know it (Chandler, 2008, p. 222).

Theorists have been made different categories for codes. From The speech codes to codes related to physical appearance, facial expressions and look and codes related to fashion, merchandise, clothing and so on. Codes are categorized signs and made easy access to meaning. For example, looking at different cultures makes different meanings. And people, who live in different cultures, understand different meaning from one same looking. The role of codes in interpreting the signs is indicating. Codes can help not to forget the role of culture in meaning.

Semiotics approach to the place, such as other sign systems is a comprehensive approach to meaning. Semiotics takes all components of urban as signs that are intended to convey a message. Broadbent says: "All buildings are more or less the semantic implications. Each building evokes special meaning in the mind of the viewer, even the architect likes it or not. Monuments such as the Savoy villa in Poissy, which is now used as a museum, although were built in terms of functionalism, today marks the grand 1920s. (Broadbent, 2001, p. 121) this indicates that every building, regardless of what the planners intended to convey would have their meaning in user's eye.

According to Broadbent, Pierce and Saussure both were trying to find a general theory of meaning to start. They follow these issues that how one thing, anything- a word, an image, a diagram, rain clouds, smoke, or a building - are signs that bring something else to mind. But it should be considered that comparing architecture as a sign system to the literature; the difference is that in the language each word at a time only has one meaning. But in a place a broad range of senses, different messages are received. (Broadbent, 2001, pp. 122 and 124)

The complexity and variety of signs in the city are much more evident. meaning in place includes the physical and non-physical aspects of it all.

Analysis

The study of three approaches shows that:

From the Lynch point of view, identity and structure factors have played a significant role in meaning of places. Identity can belong to location or event. The Structure is about the sense of orientation in space and time. On the other hand opportunity to find the meaning is supported by transparent and function compliance. Legibility with a symbolic approach also explains that the symbols of place, transmits its meaning.

So if a place has its own identity and people can find their own way through it and the function of the place is clear for users and the functions matches the forms, then this place can be meaningful in lynch's eye.

This analysis shows that lynch takes meaning as an aspect of the place. So To provide the meaning of the place. it is necessary to make the list of meaning assumptions described above (identity and structure, etc.) Based on Lynch theory, it can be said that meaning belongs to the environment is less dependent on the user.

In Rapoport view, the place is full of references that have representations in non-verbal communication. These references, which means, according to the culture and environment (context) is categorized into three areas of fixed, semi-fixed and non-fixed elements. According to Rapoport, semi-fixed and non-fixed elements containing more hints about the meaning of environment.

So the meaning of a place is more related to users and how they use space rather than place and associated components and elements. Since the semi-fixed and non-fixed elements are considered as dynamic elements, it can be said that this view takes meaning depend on the user and as a dynamic issue so the meaning of environment can change over time and via its component changes.

Meaning\views	Lynch's	Ropopot's	Semiotics
Place	City shape	Communication	Communication
Elements	Identity/Structure	Cues	Signs
Scale	Whole	Components	Components
Way of conveying	Transparency	Context	Text

Figure 7: Considering all three views

In semiotics view, meaning of environment is transmitted in the form of signs. These signs are decoded due to the structures and texts (contexts) in which they objectify. So if you change the signs, the meaning of the environment will change.

It seems that since the signs are a reflection of the environment, any changes in the immediate environment affects the signs. Hence, in this view, the meaning is a very dynamic attitude.

On the other hand, in semiotics meaning is neither of the components and characteristics of the environment, but is the people's perception of the environment. The meaning of any environment placed in the user's mind and this shows that the meaning is not a belonging aspect place. On the other hand the dependence of meaning to the user's mind also raises the importance of the meaning of individual and collective meaning.

Results

Ideas and approaches in meaning studies and meaning researches related to the place, in the years after World War II was a new strength. Among these approaches some can be noted .one that focuses on the form of place, second takes communication as an effective means of meaning transfer in place and third with introducing place as a sign system.

In order to answer the question of this article that where the meaning of the place is and how it is conveyed the three views has been used. As seen in view of nonverbal communication and semiotics, meaning is depending on cultural issues and we get to know the messages that are transmitted through communication. The question of communication and conveying meaning in both approaches is visible.

As well as non-verbal approach semiotics also needs in the field of text, to get the meaning. This means that any indication with regard to the context in which it is located can find its meaning. But in Lynch view the issue of transfer does not considered. His meaning is related to transparency and opportunities to see activities related to the environment and therefore is an aspect of places.

On the other hand the concept of the structure in Semiotics can be compared with a culture that Rapp port refers to. Culture is a structure. Rapoport says that references is the outside of culture, does not make sense to people. When the cultural structure changes, unfamiliar people to the new structure, are not able to receive the meaning. Based on the views of semiotics and non-verbal approach can be said: design in order to have meaning, must move in a direction which is primarily based on the culture and mentality of the people.

So Lynch views about the character and the physical body is unlike the other two views. Lynch calls for reforms in the field of the shape and form of the environment to make it meaningful. Although he also refers to the human aspect of meaning when he says, "city in people's eyes is different", but the main attention to fulfill the meaning of the places is on form.

Lynch has a macro perspective, but the non-verbal and Semiotics approach to the smallest details in the environment and meaning. In two last views, Meaning is not a parcel that is deposited in and be received by the people and therefore is not the place property, yet all parts of the environment could be consisted of messages or the meanings.

So it can be said that two views of Rapoport and semiotics have more similarities with each other and make it matter to know the mind of users, While Lynch's view is more physical and more dependent on the place and characteristics of it. So the hypothesis that there are commonalities between different perspectives on the meaning, in the case of three selective approach of this research is rejected. Although there are commonalities between the two approaches, but the third approach is completely different perspective.

In the end, that meaning as one of the quality of urban planning principles has ideas and facts to be learned among theories and utopias imagination. This article explores three important perspectives and views of others in the field are ignored. So the study of the meaning of place, understanding its details and elements that are an important step in planning places and human societies, does not end here and this article is only a port to the topic of theories of meaning in place.

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