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The role of place sociability in giving identity to urban spaces: A case study of Safir Omid Boulevard of Astara

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ABSTRACT

With the introducing of urban spaces as a context for social interactions and livelihood activities of humans, the statement of the problem of the crisis of identity in contemporary architecture and urban planning as well as sociability as one of the manifestations of quality and stability in the built environment is essential. The identity of urban spaces as a context to improve human communication and social interactions be studied from the perspective of sociability and the impact of creating social spaces in giving identity to the urban areas be examined. Therefore, contextual question of the present research is the supremacy of Safir Omid Boulevard of Astara as compared to its similar and adjacent boulevards and spaces in authentication in neighboring urban context. The default of the present research is the sociability impact of this place in its authentication in the minds of citizens, which has been carried out with the aim of promoting collective and civil life in the contemporary urban environments and the revival of the spirit of collective life in public spaces. The identity crisis in urban spaces is the necessity of the research and attention to the social dimensions of the place in giving identity to urban spaces are the importance of the present study. The present research method in determining the dimensions and indices of sociability and its role in giving identity to the studied urban space is based on documentary studies, survey, descriptive and observational that has been conducted by using descriptive and inferential statistics analysis methods.

KEY WORDS: PLACE SOCIABILITY, PLACE IDENTITY, URBAN SPACE, SAFIR OMID BOULEVARD

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, giving an identity to urban places has been interest of urban architectures and designer by defining identity as a qualitative characteristic of built-up areas (Alexander, 1977, Alexander, 1979, Walmsley, 1990), the relationship of place identity with human personality and becoming as one of the aspects of the human personality (Proshansky, 1983 Mesch & Manor, 1998, Abel, 2000, Lynch,1 960) and its role in belonging and attachment to the place. With the establishment of the concept of place identity on three factors of body, activity and meaning (Punter, 1997, Canter, 1977, Rapaport 1981, Rapaport, 1982), attention of designers and planners to the three mentioned areas has become more important and an emphasis on human and social activities in urban areas and it identification taken into consideration (Walzer, 1986; Rafieian and Seyfani, 2009; Gehl, 2004; Carmona et al., 2012; Sennette,; 1980 Whyte, Marcus & Francis, 1998). According to John Lang (2002), the interaction is occurred in public sociability spaces and different groups use the spaces and are directly available for users and therefore those are the places where belong to collective identity.

The subject and question of the research is contextualist, consequently; Safir Omid Boulevard unlike its similar and adjacent spaces always has specific identity in the minds of citizens and is one of the symbols of identity of the city of Astara in the image. Regardless of the symbols of the identity of build-up places and the functional and structural similarity of the boulevard with the same Blvds, the question of the research is "the cause of the supremacy of Astara Safir Omid Boulevard in identification as compared to its adjacent and similar spaces and boulevards and in its neighboring urban context". Research background is "The impact of boulevard sociability in its identification as compared to similar and adjacent samples". The purpose of the research is "The improvement of collective and civic life urban environments". The enhancement of collective soul and social interactions in compliance with human objectives of the theoretical approach of the research, identity crisis in urban areas, the necessity and the research background in attention to the social dimensions of the place in identifying the spaces are the importance of the research as compared to the similar researches. The research has considered the impact of the components in identification of the case study through the study of the indexes of sociability and correlations with the components of place identity.

THE SOCIABILITY CONCEPT OF PLACE AND ITS SHAPING PRINCIPLES AND COMPONENTS

The use of words like sociability or social loving, showing space qualities in architecture that brings people together or keep them away. Humphrey Osmond with Robert Sommer has proved the words in the study of the role of furniture in sociability of architectural spaces (Osmond, 1957). Sociable environments are aimed to encourage collective interactions and unsociable environments decrease it (Hall, 1982). The process of socialization is crucially important by establishing communication and social interaction between the users of any reachable architectural public and common spaces and the ability to participate effectively in interaction with others both in private life and in public and professional life of humans (Frgas, 2000).

According to the diagram (1), considering the studies conducted, sociability dimensions in three areas of "physical and environmental", "activity and functional", "subjective and semantic" can be investigated. In some studies, an only physical and environmental aspect of sociability has been considered. The role of space in the control of anti-citizenship behaviors (Schulz, 2005), the impact of physical space as a system in collective interaction (Pasalar, 2003), the formation of activity centers and enthusiasm to work in specific parts of space with features such as natural elements, natural landscape and natural materials (Danshgar Moghaddam et al, 2011).

The existence of physical factors such as furniture and quality of environmental elements (Ghamari and Mardomi, 2011), the impact of space in the pleasant and pluralism (Applyard, 1969), and the impact of concave and convex forms on contemplation and inspiration of the sense of place, privacy, sense of belonging and ownership (Sommer, 1967, Kaplan, 1998, Kaplan, 2002 Sommer, 1974), are the characteristics of the perspective. Accordingly, (Moleski & lang, 1986) have stated that physical place supports behaviors and behavioral events in an ideal situation in three forms in space. First, physical place provides physical elements and the required characteristics for continuity and reliability of individuals' comfort in environment. Second, the physical environment is a provider of facilities and spatial organization that consolidates systems and the particular patterns of activity in space and pales other activities. In some studies, activity and function aspect along with physical aspect are social determinant of sociability of place. Anticipating and creating social events is ground for improving sense of place while creating opportunities to participate in social activities (Lennard,1984), the definition of the sociable spaces as a multi-purpose spaces and supplier of activities and for users' use and social harmony of them (Lenard, 1998), the definition of collective interactions in spaces' activities as capability for the space (Barker, 1968), the definition of activities as variable elements of urban spaces and guarantee for society and the continuer of public and social life (Parsi, 2002) are among the perspectives.

FIGURE 1. Dimensions and components of place sociability.
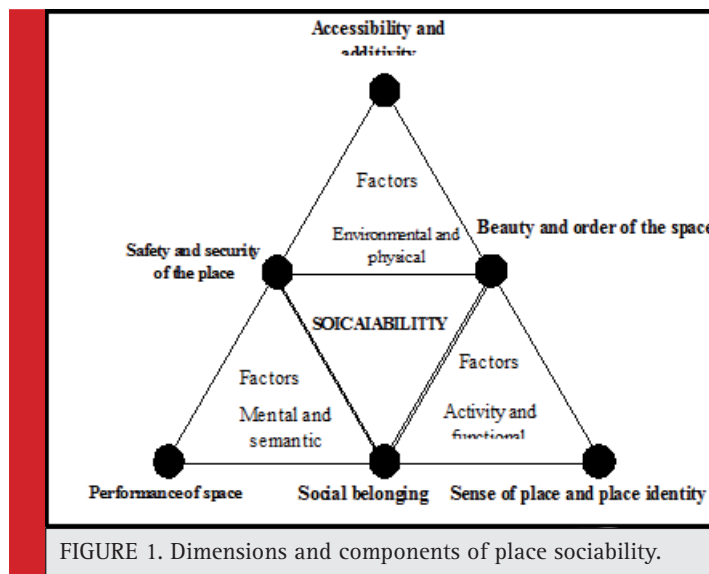
As an example, Ayatollahi and Mohammadi (2015) consider the factors affecting the sociability in two aspects of physical and activity. Physical factor includes dimensions such as location and accessibility, form, geometry, proportions, variety, and space organization. Activity also includes the assessment dimensions of functional spaces, the way the users apply in the space, problems and obstacles in the users' movements and social characteristics in acting. Therefore, creating inviting spaces shaped for the site's climate and capabilities and taking into account the cultural characteristics and social and economic fabric creates active and inactive public participation as well as strengthening the collective life.From this perspective, the process of sociability inside the public spaces is based on four steps: Accepting the space for people to participate, providing physical and psychological comfort, enjoying the space and continuing active social presence in it (Daneshpour and Charkhchian, 2007).

In some studies, along with physical, environmental activity and functional dimensions, aspects of mental and semantic of the place has been emphasized. The influence of emotion and mentality of people in sociability of place due to the passage of time and repetition of the place and becoming the common element linking people (Mansoori and Jahanbakhsh, 2016, 63), Emotional and impermanent dimensions of the experiences of individuals in the environment as essential components of interaction between people and the environment (Bonaiuto & Bonnes, 2000), the impact of the quality of social behaviors and interactions in space on attachment to the space (Poll, 2002), the impact of sense of place, reminiscent-ness and willingness to reappearance, the role of rituals, legends and traditions to create a lasting sense of place and a sense of belonging to it (Fried, 1963), are among the views.

For example, (Montero, 2001) considers the characteristics of general space of sociability in the security space, coherent structure, continuity, readability, territory, existence of appropriate facilities, environmental and educational comfort, complexity and mysteriousness, diversity, privacy, attachment, and social interactions (Montero, 2001). From Wheeler's perspective, place sociability is caused by people interact with place, meanings and related environmental attributes that a person is willing to stay in that place and re-referral, and is achieved by the sense of space of the place (Wheeler, 2004). Noghrekar et al (2014), are considered criteria of "physical-background", "psychological and personality (meaning)" and "behavioral and activity" to investigate the "sociability in the backyard of Iranian house". They have stated sociability indexes of the place in the society, social connection, 24-hour availability, diversity and user mixing, comfort, pleasure, long presence, in face-to-face, exchange of feelings, experiencing, human scale, people observation, talking and meeting, popularity, supervision, facilities and services, physical and visual penetrability, presence of people, protection and physical framework by enjoying the views of experts.

RESEARCH METHODS

Considering the question and default research, the research method in this study is based on documentary and survey, descriptive and observational methods. In the documentary studies by reviewing the sense of place, its identity and sociability it has been tried to extract appropriate theoretical framework. In this way, in the field of explaining analytical approach, first the concept of the sociability of the space and its relationship with the place's identity are considered. Therefore, it has been

FIGURE 2. Results of field study in order to prove research hypothesis.
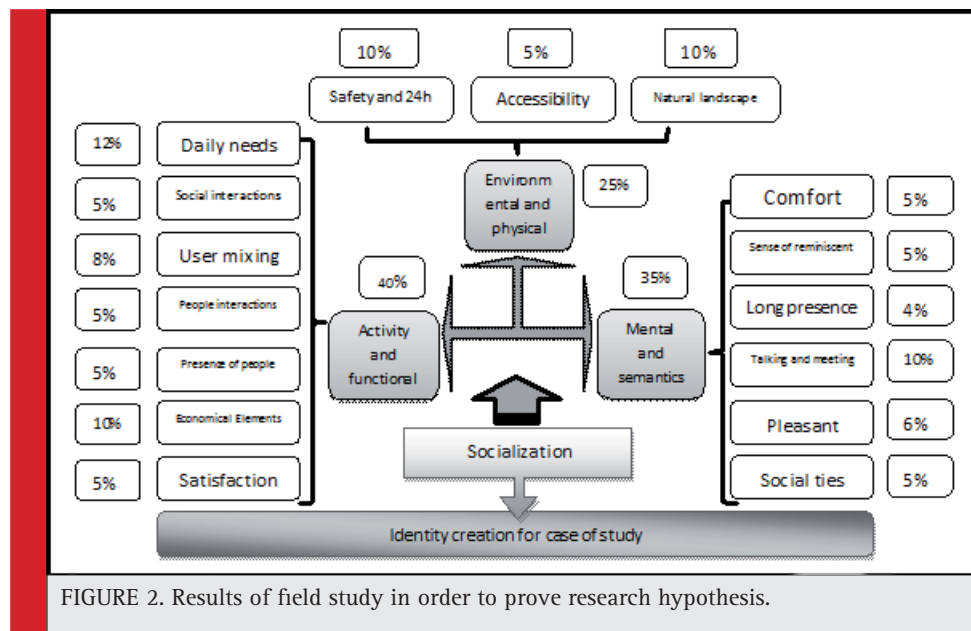
evaluated in the sample case according to the psychological studies of the environment, the dimensions of sociability have been described and finally by extracting indexes of sociability, the survey, observational, and the use of statistical analysis. In this study, spatial characteristic of the place with identity has been considered as independent variables and sociability rate of the place was examined as dependent variable.

Confounding variables of age, gender and other factors were moderated during field studies and in the distribution of questionnaires through sampling and control method. It has been tried to consider all groups in the study by using targeted systematic cluster sampling to maximize reality coefficient and validity of the research as well as control of confounding variables to choose the statistical population appropriately and the target group according to age, occupational, social, gender, duration of residence groups, etc. For this purpose, 200 questionnaires with 20 questions were designed to provide total research aims. Therefore, 16 questions of the questionnaire were questioned (measures) in the form of three functional and activity components (Socio-economic elements), environmental (natural causes and context of the place) and semantic (social ties, attachment and sense of place) as the sociable components of the Likert scale. In connection with performance and activity indexes as well as factors such as attachment, satisfaction, comfort, accessibility, diversity of activities and the daily needs were assessed.

CASE STUDY

18 metric Safır Omid boulevard is located in the eastern range of Astara which leads to telluric customs of Astara port and Caspian sea coast from north and east side, respectively; also waterfront is located at southern site and Astara beach bazar, public parking, low-density residential texture and Farabi avenue are located at western side of this Boulevard. Caspian sea and Astara beach bazar are located at East side and west side of this avenue. Footbridge is located in Safır Omid avenue in which passers pass on it from Astara beach bazar to beach. Networks accessing to this Boulevard include 12 metric Farabi avenue; axis accessing to city center is 12 metric Farabi avenue and also axes accessing to Astara beach bazar and beach are 6 metrics Parian alley at northern site and 12 metric Sahel avenue. Table (2) shows specification of mentioned axis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, all the data gathered are analyzed. Analyses are presented in two parts, descriptive statistics and inferential statistic. In first part of descriptive statistics, a general description of research variables is presented and initially in second part of statistical inference, distribution of variable scores are studied. According to conducted studies, results of field study are presented in accordance with diagram (2) in order to prove research hypothesis.

Preliminary data collected from questioner, are assorted and analyzed and also their descriptive and inferential statistics were analyzed using AHP, CHOICE and EXPERT applications. In the part of data analysis, two basic actions were taken, correlation analysis and regression analysis. General description of respondent's characteristics containing frequency distribution of

Table 2. Specification of case of study (Safir Omid Boulevard)		
Neighborhood of Safir Omid Boulevard of Astara		Location of Safir Omid Boulevard of Astara	

Western site of axis	Easten site of axis	Southern site of axis	Northern site of axis

respondents were conducted in terms of sex, age, education, etc. In the next stage, Likert scale 5 point was used for any question and a number was allocated for any range of division in SPSS. For presenting descriptive findings according to frequency distribution of respondents in terms of sex, percentage of men and women were 50% and 45%, respectively. According to frequency distribution of respondents in terms of age, 0.7% of respondents with minimal frequency distribution are 50 years old or so and 40% of respondents with maximal frequency distribution are between 40 and 50 years; frequency distribution of respondents in terms of education as follows: 7.5% of respondents with minimal frequency distribution have diploma or less and also 55% of respondents with maximal frequency distribution have bachelor degree and finally, according to frequency distribution of respondents in terms of work experience, 10% of respondents with minimal frequency distribution have 15 years or so and this value for maximal frequency distribution along with work experience between 6 and 10 years is 52.5%. Inferential findings (analysis of hypotheses) based on results of multivariate regression analysis among levels of place sociability and identity creation among the urban environments and also given that significance level of test error is 0.01 for confidence level of 0.99, we see that the correlation coefficient between the two variables of place identity has significant and positive impact on urban environments and this value equal 0.55.

Therefore, we can say that first hypothesis is proved. Correlation coefficient between two variables of place sociability has significant and positive impact on urban environments and this value equals 0.79. So, second hypothesis is acceptable. Natural elements and Local

bed has significant and positive impact on urban environments and correlation coefficient between this two variables is 0.58. Correlation coefficient between two variables of socio-economic elements for identity creation of urban environments is 0.93. Therefore, it can be said that the third hypothesis is approved. Correlation coefficient between to variables of social ties for identity creation of urban environments is 0.95 and has significant and positive impact and thus, fourth hypothesis is approved. Correlation coefficient between to variables of place attachment has significant and positive impact for identity creation of urban environments and this value equals 0.95 and finally the fifth hypothesis is approved.

In order to determine the effects of each variables of place identity, natural elements, place context, social ties and place attachment as predictor variable and identity creation of urban environments as criterion variable, these variables are analyzed using multivariate regression analysis with Enter method; results have been showed that variables of place identity (BETA=0.79), natural elements and place context (BETA=0.58), socio-economic elements (BETA=0.93), social attachment (BETA=0.95) and place attachment (BETA=0.95) is predicting variable and identity creation of urban environments. Although, variable of place attachment with beta value of 0.95 and variable of natural elements and place context with beta value of 0.58 have the most and least value of the dependent variable of identity creation for urban environments. After study and analysis of data, values of relative abundance, absolute frequency, and bar chart, the impact amount of each component in triple indicators for socialization of urban environments were analyzed and assorted. Socialization variables of urban environments and their impact on identity crea-

tion of Boulevard was studied in 3 general category of environmental and physical, activity and functional, mental and semantics. Based on figure (2) we can see that indexes of physical and activity, mental and semantics and environmental and physical have 40%, 35% and 25% of greatest impact in Socialization of this urban areas, respectively.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Question of the present research is the supremacy of Safir Omid Boulevard of Astara as compared to its similar and adjacent boulevards and spaces in authentication in Astara urban context and hypothesis of this research is socialization of this boulevard as compared to its similar and adjacent boulevards in Astara urban context. Current study showed that not only environmental, functional and Semantic components are important in identity creation of urban environments, but also have direct connection with mentioned components. In relation to environmental components and their role in urban environments socialization of case study, it can be said that natural landscape, place context and existing perspectives in site and accessibility have an important role in socialization and identity creation for these spaces.

In relation to functional components, fulfillment of social needs, socio-economic interactions, safety and 24-hour availability of urban environments and also diversity and user mixing in urban environments lead to socialization. In relation to semantics components, several factors such as social ties, comfort and pleasant, sense of confidence due to the presence in space lead to long presence and have an important role in socialization of urban environments and from this it would have an effect in identity creation of urban environments. Not only field study results accept research hypothesis and effect of socialization components for identity creation of space of study, but also it showed that considering the social factors in urban environments is essential in terms of introduction of social quality as qualitative indexes of space and stability and also in terms of research goal for achieving collective and civic life in urban environments. According to the conducted studies for fulfilling purpose of this study, following items are presented as a guideline in terms of identity creation for urban environments and community role in place socialization of urban space:

- A need for beautification of urban environments through natural landscapes, utilization of natural elements and creating perspectives
- Anthropocentrism in urban environments and appropriate access to urban environments

- Attention to Sociability of outdoor furniture and utilization of spatial scales to creating environments for cognition and social interactions
- A need for security and safety in urban environments
- Attention to peace and comfort in urban environments
- Environments creation for presence and leisure while paying attention to age and sex groups at most of the day
- Attention to needs of different population groups to improve presence

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