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## Designing Shopping Centers: The Position of Social Interactions

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### Abstract

Shopping centers are regarded as the intermittent buildings in which a number of commercial activities work hand in hand to establish a general rule and order in order to improve their common economy. Since shopping centers are normally among those that are created with the collaboration of a number of groups, therefore, planning for them is natural. Reaching a part of the basic organized and functional knowledge to respond to new needs of the commercial centers based on the studies that were done by the theorists of environmental psychology, which is limited to the subject of social interactions, different scales and types of interactions are debated, some of which can be utilized in designing new urban shopping centers with regard to the social and cultural conditions of the city of Tehran. Using them in designing the skeletal sections of the spaces of the shopping centers is possible through the introduction of the main criteria of the creation of interactions. This study investigates these phenomena by implementing a qualitative methodology and a field study.

**Keywords:** Social interaction, Designing, Shopping center, Mall, Urban area, Public space.

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## **Introduction**

It has been a long time since commercial spaces have become one of the bases for each living organization and in fact, it has played the role of heart in them. Although this importance has seen ups and downs throughout the history, it has never lost its role. Expecting and planning shopping centers is among the most important issues of architecture and urban development which can solve a great number of urban issues. With the entrance of cars to the cities, the cultural changes caused by relationships with western countries and enhancement in the presentation of industrial products, the lifestyle, facilities and connections of the commercial spaces have faced basic changes in recent years. Today, because of the problems caused by urbanism and lack of the opportunities and new facilities, clients prefer to go to the shopping centers in their cars and purchase their needs for the month or the week in the shortest possible time. Therefore, in recent years, the establishment of chain stores in which all the necessities and demands of the buyers are presented has increased intensely and the competition between them has led to the creation of new ideas in presenting important systems and services to bring about customers' satisfaction.

Purchasing is an activity that indicates signals of the economic, social and especially cultural conditions and structures of an environment and causes the creation of positive social interactions between the buyers. Although in the beginning, shopping spaces were only designed to respond to the economic needs in the form of linear plans and the placement of individual objects –meaning stores- around the linear or curved paths for the attenders, the idea that shopping centers must include functions to have responses to the other needs of the attenders eventually turned into the prominent idea in the architecture of shopping centers.

In the hustle and bustle of today's cities, people are looking for grounds with unique identities to together with providing peace and interaction with people, reach their eminence on the grounds of social dynamism. The increasing growth of the aspects of urbanism and the formation of a new scale of urban growth during recent decades have caused the contemporary city and urban development to face new challenges like the increase of social abnormalities, fading of identity and sense of social belonging and in general, decrease in the quality of life. In this respect, the use and specialization of public spaces is a subject that must be analyzed in the studying of the routine lives of people who live in the cities. In the view of the experts, public spaces are defined as open places that are accessible.

As the neighborhood of the shopping centers is the place where the individual spend most of the time in after the house, public places are important elements in the formation of social interactions among their residents. Since in the past, the neighborhoods and bazaars played an expansive and major role in social interactions, therefore, by creating a focused series of urban services functions that complete and cover each other, people can be attracted to these spaces and the attractions of their public spaces.

## **Public space as a social asset**

The Putnam index defines the evaluation of the social asset as in relation with the amount of the endeavors of the social life and organizational activities, public events like elections and the citizens' volunteer collaborations in the urban social activities and informal socializing like meeting friends, therefore public space can create a social asset.

**Table 1:** Public spaces

Being together is possible through creating types of public places. For instance, the public place is a common ground in which people are able to do the functional and ritual activities that connects them together. It seems that with the formation of places in which different people can mingle together can increase their endurance.	Public places and social connection and unity
We can gain shared experiences by participating in special occasions like rituals, shows, performances, debates, etc. This experience and interaction is the very core of group life.	Public places and group life
Social sustainability in architecture deals with the flowing events within the space. Therefore, social sustainability focuses on sustaining events for long years and adapting the space with the behavioral patterns of the present and also, increasing the quality of the flow of life.	Public places and flexibility

**Shopping centers**

In general, shopping centers are covered or open air places that include a number of stores which can be consisted of one or several type. These places are centers of trading and create a direct connection between offer and demand.

**Table 2:** Classifying different types of shopping centers

It includes retailers, restaurants and other services that are focused in the airport	Airport center
Arcades are types of urban public covered shopping centers that have glass curved ceilings.	Arcade
It is a shopping center that is consisted of one or two departments, drugstore and home appliance stores.	Community center
It is an open air shopping center that provides the daily needs of the people with less than six stores.	Convenience center
These are shopping centers that are completely located in a covered structure.	Enclosed mall
These are shopping centers that include places like theater houses, restaurants and entertainment centers.	Entertainment complex
It is a shopping center that includes stores that offer up-to-date clothing and fine products.	Fashion mall
These are urban shopping centers that are a combination of restaurants and entertainment centers that are also connected with historical and cultural places.	Festival market police
These are types of glass-ceiled stores or stores with front yards like European stores of the Victorian age with ceilings made of glass arches.	Gallery

These are open air shopping centers that are placed in rows in the form of external stores, such as woman fashion stores, jewelry stores, leather stores and restaurants that are designed to attract wealthy consumers.	Lifestyle center
These are the biggest shopping centers and they are usually classified based on the needs and are often located in a covered place with areas of 800000 square meters and more than 100 stores that include several chain stores.	Super regional center
A designed group of retailers that are connected with each other, often by a parking lot and are usually run by a single organization.	Shopping center
It is a small neighborhood shopping center that is located in the open air space with less than three rows of stores.	Strip
It is an open air shopping center that often has several lanes and one central square.	Village center
An often covered shopping center with 40 to 100 stores.	Regional center
A shopping center in which stores are directly accessible for the public. Their pavements may have ceiling by these stores are not confined under the same roof.	In-air
This is a shopping center which is not covered and has 3 to 15 floors with a supermarket.	Neighborhood center
This is a complex which may include residential houses, offices, restaurants, hotel, etc. that are connected to a retailer.	Mix-use center
They are big shopping centers that are usually covered and parking lots are constructed in their vicinity.	Mall
This is a urban shopping center and the biggest examples may consist of several stories with access to parking lot.	Urban mall

### Social interaction approach

Added to being called the century of occupying the outer space, age of atom, age of laser, etc., this age is most famously called the age of communications. In this perspective, the world is like a global village and in this cycle, the people's communications are close to each other and their thoughts and actions and the populations are not hidden from each other.

The role of public relations is based on taking away the veil of strangeness and alienation and spreading the notion of familiarity. Public relations can be the connection between the members of the society and organizations. However, if these connections were to be not enduring and resilient, they will definitely lack the sufficient optimization and efficiency.

### **Position of social interactions**

Urban residences before modernism, and public places like urban squares and markets were like a field for social connections and in fact, they were considered places consisted of the social interactions of a great number of people who made these interactions possible (Madanipour, 2005). Added to this, open spaces helped people in creating a sense of trust in them caused the increase in the sense of unity and belonging in people. In fact, these spaces are more than merely spaces for active presence. Pakzad (2010), by differentiating between public and urban spaces, only evaluates the groups of spaces that have the capacity for the occurrence of interaction and formation of social interactions in higher degrees and as urban spaces. In a study which was done on more than one thousand urban public space in different countries of the world, it was shown that there are four basic factors that have more importance in evaluating the quality desirability of the state of urban public places. These factors are accessibility and connection, peace and landscape, functions and activities and also congregation. Hannah Art (1958) defines the public domain as the main factor of extroversion and political and public life. Paul Zocker (1959) considers the range of the public domain as the factor for changing the group to a society and not merely a place for people to gather. Jane Jacobs (1961) regards pavements as a factor for creating a sense of security and empowering social interactions.

William White (1980) stresses on the social role of urban spaces. Without a doubt, the neighborhood, as one of the fields of urban spaces has the capability to provide the appropriate grounds for the formation of social interactions. The neighborhood is the skeletal realization of the society and its boundaries are the indicators of limits and borders. Attention to the social aspect of the neighborhood, social and non-skeletal realms and creating skeletal elements that could further provide the boundaries of social limits can lead to the more accurate organization of the mutual actions and social interactions. Reviving neighborhoods with identities is one of the social needs of the city and to attract people to the social spaces of the neighborhood, security, accessibility and supervision factors, and also holding religious-national and traditional ceremonies with a congregational nature in public spaces, together with constructing cultural centers, coffee shops and shopping centers are important factors.

### **Effective factors on social interactions**

People form social interactions based on their benefits and deal with them based on their certain expectations, values and roles. Therefore, the way an individual is present in one place with others is a strong factor in that person's decision for staying in there. In this way, individuals may even identify places in which individuals with characteristics similar to them in terms of social class, race, religion, economic group, life pattern, education, income and the way children are treated. But although the harmony between individuals encourages meeting and increase of interaction with physical and social places and consequently, increasing dependence to that place, uneven social places are also opportunities for people to experience being together and rich and free social interactions. In fact, public spaces, having potential capacities in the first stage, create these equal opportunities in order to create and form social interactions (although unstable and fragile) and offer them to all the citizens. In the next stage, after the first formation of social interactions, present differences in social, economic and cultural levels which are the creators of different behavioral patterns, lead to the creation of unified and sustainable social relations (Qanbaran, 2004).

Some authors express their thought in relation with the other. They consider the characteristic of this field as the gathering of private individuals together and debating about public interests, therefore, this social phenomenon should be accessible to all the citizens. Gehl (1987) pays attention to the human aspects of public places and considers it to be the factor for the enthusiastic presence of people and their participation.

Some acknowledge the factors of structure, expectation and creating social events as effective factors in the social presence and interaction of individuals which is also effective in improving the sense of belonging to the place. Daneshpour (2007) deals with the knowledge of space and different aspects of the public places and considers the utilization of their social potentials and improving participation opportunities in group life effective in creating a successful public place.

Kaplan (1998) considers the skeletal qualities of a public place as dependents on the existence of natural elements that lead to the increase of excitement and liveliness of the environment, the possibility to rest, quality of desirable experiences and more health for the people. Whyte (1980) names the effective factors in improving the skeletal aspects of public places as memorials, stairs, fountains and other effective factors encouraging the presence of people and interaction. Pakzad (2005) holds the determination and equality of the space, scales, relations, flexibility, form, geometry, materials, limits, bodies and structural and spatial connection as effective on the individual's understanding.

PPS (2000), which is an institution that researches the planning for public places, acknowledges appropriate structural chances to sit, pause and ponder in the space, gathering places for people like bus stops, playgrounds, eating areas, inviting entrances, access to the space in visual and structural terms, preparing practical elements together with their aesthetic aspects, proper spatial paths and connection to guide people to these places, readability and spatial clarity, controlling access to vehicles and safety of the passersby, defining the body and identity of the walls, connection to the urban transportation system and preparing interesting activities among the effective factors in the desirable responsiveness of public places.

Providing the needs of people to love and be in a company needs the existence of a structural basis and urban public places have the greatest capacity in this area. Peaceful atmosphere, existence of natural factors, limits of the space and controlling the vehicles are effective as they provide the need of individuals to relax.

### **Public place as grounds for social interactions**

One of the most important aspects of public spaces is to create opportunities for social interactions. In these interactions, people establish a stronger relationship with their environment and society and the sense of belonging and identity is empowered in them. This is followed by the formation of social networks and increase in the sense of group participation. In public places, the possibility for face to face interaction, conversation, friendly meetings, different gatherings, participation in social activities and the sense of participation is created. The motivation for gathering can be different. It can be an intimate conversation between two people or in a larger public scale, include costumes, rituals, shows, celebrations, sport events, etc. (Madanipour, 2008). Face to face meetings take place only in an expansive scale. These places provide the mingling of people in different groups, regardless of their social class. In public places, these are the activities themselves that each acts as an important supportive factor for other activities. People come to public places to experience each other.

Since human beings spend most of their life in environments where the social interaction factor is sensitive to the environment more than any other activity, the physical environment of the interaction is what Joseph P. Gars mentions as region. He believes that most people are unaware of the impact of the physical environment on their interactions. He points out the two aspects of the architecture space and its impact on the present individual's social interaction.

### **Public place and group participation**

Participation can be defined as the amount of the intervention of the members of the social system in the process of decision making, arousing people's sensitivity in understanding and the ability to respond to the development plans in different aspect or a process headed toward enriching the decision making power as a provider of the conditions for the human's basic growth and capability.

### **Public place and identification**

Identity in public places has turned into one of the most controversial subjects of the present age, to the point that today, each person, one way or the other, consciously or unconsciously is in trouble with the lack of identity. One of the ways to create an identity for the city which is in coordination with the city's present time and place is to construct public places. The basic question is that in cities is how the pattern of public places and social interactions reflect the patterns of social identity and consequently, social sustainability and also how the identity is revived through empowering collective memories in the city and among the citizens. Therefore, it is necessary to present a summarized definition of identity and identifying factors.

### ***Collective memory***

In Oxford dictionary, the word memory is defined as: "The power of accumulating information in the conscious mind and the ability to recall them at will; storing past experiences to use in the future". The term collective memory was first defined by Maurice Halbwachs in the year 1925 in the book entitled as *The Social Framework of the Memory*. He stated that collective memories are memories in which a group of people took part, transported them to others and participated in their formation.

Later he states the reasons of the social nature of memory as follows:

- Memories take place in the city's public places and spaces.
- Time and place that have social aspects, like days of the year and related ceremonies and traditions are used as references to remember and appreciate them.
- People recall memories next to each other and together.
- The structure of a society's beliefs and what is related to the past, goals, ideas and ideals are resulted from the common subjective image in that society. Collective memory can be considered as a basic element for forming national, local and civil identity that helps create a sustainable society.

Factors of memorability in public places are:

- Religious events take place in public places.
- Sport event take place in public places.
- Places are designed in accordance with the culture, costumes and traditions of the region.
- Public places must be differentiated and unique in different places.
- Public places must be friendly and intimate.

### **Public places and the city's memorability**

Today memorable spots in cities are very seldom found. Rem Koolhaas speaks of the city without identity as the general or generic city. Memory has a social nature, therefore, it is in connection with the city's public places and the formation of memories in group realms and residents – meaning the city and its

neighborhoods- is possible. Therefore, if collective memories have nature in the field of social time, the grounds for their formation (city) must also be a place for social interaction. In this way, the history of living in the city in itself is a factor empowering collective memories (Mirmoqtadaei, 2008). The city can be known as the place for its people's collective memories. Different urban spaces cause the survival of the events of history by keeping the memories alive and as a result, form an important aspect of the collective memories of a nation, a race or a culture through urban places filled with collective memories and establish a relationship with their cultural past and gain social identity.

Therefore, today public places not only have structural indicators, but they are also identifying factors and are considered to have cultural functions. These places, as a great capacity to respond to the social needs of men, including the need for social interaction, can help the formation of unity and social interaction and create shared collective memories and collective identity through providing structure quality, concepts of history and culture and especially, defining different social and cultural events and preparing the grounds for activities and desirable efficiency. As a result, for the city to have a strong and memorable identity, the public places of the city must have a proper, beautiful form, responsive to the function related to them to cause the formation of the sense of belonging and proper connection between people and the place which eventually leads to the social significance of the place.

To achieve this, the city's public places must have the following characteristics:

- Public places as factors of knowing the city and its identity
- Public places as symbolic elements in the city to create stress spots in it

Therefore, public places not only have structural indicators, but they are also identifying factors and are considered to have cultural functions. The identity of an urban public place indicates the values that the society have tendencies for them and thinks of itself as going toward evolution and development only when it has those qualifications and observes those values (Pourjafar, 2009: 107).

## **Conclusion**

Different studies have somehow shown the tendency for constructing shopping malls and megamalls in the world and paying attention to entertainment and leisure time and people's support of them and their impact on urban life. It has been rationalized that the contemporary shopping mall is the main part in the commercial perspective of most countries of the world and has found an important role in the retailing industry.

The retailing geography is located in the common grounds of the related subdivisions, including economic retailing geography, services geography and urban geography and determines the perspective of a different range of purchasing and selling which includes different selling geography, like supermarkets, street vendors, big stores and shopping centers. In other words, the new economic geography of retailing is reconfigured with regard to the consumption spaces like megamalls and the transportation of the retailing capitals, both in the city and the international status, has given a special attention to the phenomenon of remaking and change in retailing.

During the course of history, shopping has been seen as a troublesome errand. It was seen as an activity that must bear a meaning of life and survival. But today, shopping is one of the most important common leisure activities in the world and consumption is also defined as leisure. In the year 1991, Jackson, using a typology of dependence and relation between shopping, leisure and the place of purchasing stated that the megamall is a place to shop as leisure.



Therefore, the theoretical approach of shopping and consumption as a form of leisure have caused the formation of new structures of commercial, service-entertainment and leisure spaces in the world, one of which is the megamall. Megamalls were first established in the 1980s and then they expanded. In the space of the megamall, an interesting relation between the shopping experience and the tourist's experience is shown. The visitors have the experience of being in the biggest specialized park in the world, which is located within a covered shopping mall. So in this sense, megamalls are spatial sights.

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