EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVE FACTORS ON SOCIAL INTERACTIONS ENHANCEMENT IN UNIVERSITY SPACES: A CASE STUDY IN ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITY, ARSANJAN BRANCH

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Abstract. Besides its primary function as an educational-investigational institution, the university promotes social interactions among people on the grounds that it plays a crucial role in fostering relationships through conversation and meeting. Social interaction involves different aspects of spatial desirability such as privacy, territory, personal space and crowding. In this paper, various definitions of social interaction along with the related key concepts are presented. Using the mixed-method approach, this study first set to evaluate the theoretical framework regarding the social interactions and in university spaces through library research using available records and documents, and then applied the Field method employing a questionnaire, interviews and observations to explore the students’ social interactions and activity types focusing on their perceptions of the factors that are more likely to promote social interaction on the campus. The sample comprised 200 students randomly selected from different fields and levels in Islamic Azad University, Arsanjan branch (Fars Province). The data collected were analyzed and evaluated using Excel software. The results showed that spaces such as the campus (27 percent) and bus stop (2.2 percent), and activities such as amusement-recreational games (36.2 percent) and campus temporal exhibitions (7.5 percent) are the first and the last selections by the students, respectively.

Keywords: Social interactions, university, open space, joint memory

INTRODUCTION

All living beings have physical needs such as nutrition, clothing, shelter, as well as social needs such as making relationship with other creatures and engaging in interpersonal interactions among themselves. Relationships increase information, create ideas and also lead to the development of attitudes. Among human beings, relationships are shaped through the five senses and inter-personal interaction is generally made possible using verbal and non-verbal modes. Verbal interaction refers to a collection of relationships which are realized through conversation and comprises the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Non-verbal interaction occurs voluntarily and involuntarily and is often made possible through visual methods (for example, the theater).

The way people make relationship with each other plays an important role in shaping the environment and directly influences interactions among human beings as well as interactions between human beings and the environment. The kind of spatial performance, position, spatial dimensions, and the way relationships take place can affect the enhancement of social interactions.

A number of studies have investigated the relationship between physical structure of university campuses and social interaction among students. In Iranian context, too, this topic has been considered in a couple of studies. However, no study has investigated the effect of environmental factors on social interaction in university spaces in Islamic Azad Universities in Fars Province

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using a mixed-method approach. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap by exploring what factors are likely to promote on-campus social interaction among students studying at Islamic Azad University of Arsanjan.

**Objectives of the study**

The present study aimed to explore factors affecting social interaction on university campuses, and evaluate the performance of spaces that enhance social interaction in Islamic Azad university, Arsanjan Branch. More specifically, this study aimed to seek answers to the following questions:

What are students’ perceptions of factors affecting social interaction on university campuses?

What types of spaces and what space features are more likely to promote social interaction on university campuses?

**METHODS**

As there is a reciprocal and tight relationship between the method of dealing with a specific problem and the structure and nature of research, selecting an appropriate research method and being consistent throughout the process of investigation is integral to any scientific research. Accordingly, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed throughout the investigation process to create an integrative foundation for the present study. In order to collect the data required to obtain accurate results and find suitable answers to the research questions, first Library research was conducted examining sources such as books, theses, papers and the web-sites, and then the Field method was employed using two-stage cluster design. Three instruments and techniques were used to collect the data for the purpose of this study: a questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and observation. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers and included both multiple-choice and open-ended items. The rationale for using a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended items was that while some information could easily be elicited through open-ended items, some specific types of information could more accurately be elicited through multiple-choice items. A sample of 200 male and female students studying at Islamic Azad university of Arsanjan in the academic year of 2014-2015 participated in this study. The participants were randomly selected using two-stage cluster sampling and ranged in age from 17-40. They were from all disciplines and levels from sophomores through seniors.

**Theoretical framework:**

**Social interaction**

Social interactions means making relation between two or more people which causes a reaction between them, and this reaction is known for them. Therefore, meaningless relationships have no place in this definition. In other definitions, social interactions and making relationships can be a physical subject, a looking, conversation or relation between peoples, which needs the human definition about the suitable activities and events and consequently peoples role in spaces and groups or social networks membership (Gheibi, et. al, 2014).

But, what we are facing in today's societies, is the reduction in relationship levels in small scales. Therefore, the virtual worlds and the technological developments have been a priority in this field and the social interactions occur in high scales and virtually, between all peoples/Therefore, this trend causes irreversible damages to social relationships framework and also limit the behavioral standards (ibid, 2014).

Sufficient cognition about the human and his relationships style and method with other people can be effective on shaping the interaction and relationship environment. Therefore, following this trend, assuming human as a social creature having different qualitative and quantitative social interactions levels in order to maintain social interaction and significant relationships, knowing the behavioral standards and their social pragmatics and also the activities with-potential capacities is important (Tahmasebi and Behzad -far, 203, p.2).
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The space is regarded as the bed for social interactions and its use, in which the information, values, sensations and suitable behavioral patterns are transferred to other peoples. Totally, to achieve the social interactions or enhance their Levels, we should try to provide it a spatial desirability with attention to concepts such as privacy territory, personal spaces and crowding and we should define all of these concepts accurately and use the resultant behavioral standards to make the common memories (Gheibi, et. al, 2014,p.7).

Table 1. Some concepts to make behavioral standards in arriving the social interactions (source: Authors).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction concepts</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>The process of supervision on ourselves with others’ limits. Privacy is the ability of peoples or groups in visual and hearing interaction and dynamism with others. John Lang define 4 types of privacy including isolation, affinity, obscurity, and fellowship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territory</td>
<td>The territory defines the person’s or group’s belongings and attachment to an area, which is defined only based on physical symbols. The role of territories is to facilitate the social interactions and social disciplines stability. The territorial behavior is important to manage the social interactions, life stresses reduction and defining the peoples roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal space</td>
<td>The people’s physical distance with other peoples which is not visible and non-obtrusive has no way in it, is the environmental personal space and make possible all social relationships in different shapes and levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowding</td>
<td>The crowding definition and its related concept such as social isolation is in opposite to arriving to suitable privacy level. Therefore, it has been said that the crowding because of direct relationship with social pressures causes the negative behaviors. The crowding sensation means the sense of no control on the environment. It should be said that the designers should create environments using different designing styles to facilitate the relationships with others in different levels. Therefore the social interactions enhancement would be possible in order to human environmental attraction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hena-Arent one of the main theorists in public domain has compiled a book regarding human conditions (1958). She encourages the extraversion and social and political life style in which the public territory plays the main role. She has analyzed the space in two meanings: the space of presence among other peoples and the space between peoples to provide a comprehensive insight about the policy public territory and also the city public space, Human and objects harmony is a key points in allaying and accepting this content that the social relationships are shaped due to the objects, which is said in Arent’s analysis about public space (Kashani-joo, 2010).

Oldenburg in his book entitled “An excellent place, cafes, coffee shops, book stores, bars, toilet saloons and other groups in the heart of a society”, discussed this central theory that daily life to be pleasant and easy should find its balance in three experimental territory: social, working and residential. By defining the third space on cities, public spaces emphasize on the role of the first and second places proximity (the work and house territory) as main identity- making factors in cities Oldenburg argues that because of people’s expectations regarding the work and family functions which is beyond their potential, they need freedom and stimulation that are provided in more social territories (ibid,2010).

With attention to concepts based on scholars’ viewpoints regarding the social interactions, Table 2 has provided a classification of all these perspectives.
Table 2. Scholars perspectives to enhance the social interactions (source: Kashani-joo, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Theorist</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Theory/Title</th>
<th>Key Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hena- Arent</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Human conditions</td>
<td>As main factor of political and public life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Paul- Zucker</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>The city and square the square</td>
<td>The factor to change the population to the society not only as a crowding place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jeane- Jacobs</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>The life and death of American huge cities</td>
<td>The side-walking are effective factors to make the safety and enforce the social interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wiliam-White</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>The social life of small city spaces</td>
<td>Emphasis on the social role in city spaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jan- Gehl</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Living among the buildings</td>
<td>Three activity groups in city spaces: essential, social selective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Oldenburg</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Good place: cafes, coffee-shops and other crowding centers in heart of society.</td>
<td>Emphasis on city public spaces as the third space(house and working-place as the first and second places).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Color- Cooper marcues</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Human spaces</td>
<td>Evaluation the residential environment and defining seven-level city spaces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above perspectives emphasize on human and environment in order to enhance the social interactions trying to make listening and conversations, appointment and traffic spaces and also side-walking and human centered viewpoints and making the sociability and common life.

**Sociability and common life**

The common life provides valuable opportunity to get rid of daily stresses, enjoy free times, making social interactions with peoples and different groups crowding and as a bed of openness and their guarantee in the space. The common life in open public depends on social interactions enhancement, peoples and different group’s attraction, social security and finally enhance the different groups tolerance in sociable society and making an active and dynamic environment (Tahmasebi, Behzad-far, 2013:3).

Altman, describes the opposite point of social cooperation, as sociopath, peoples’ aversion to engage in interactions and social cooperation, behavioral abnormalities and indifference regarding social domains, and these disorders are results of from high-speed live and social places and spaces deficiency (Kokabi, et.al, 2012).

There are different perspective regarding making these spaces such as Jeane Jacobs, GehlJeane Jacobs emphasizes on providing different shapes of social relationships, social interactions and city places dynamic. He knows the daily street activities as a way to attracting others and writes: the activities of all buyers or their crowding for eating or drinking, is an instrument to attract others. He speaks about human's looking attraction on other peoples, one that designers and architects have neglected it and erroneously think that the citizens prefer the order and silence. He knows the city space quality, effective on shaping such relationships and emphasizes on places diversity and attraction functions: the streets need to increase their shops and public spaces in wall-side areas, some of these places should be open thorough the days and nights. (Dodangeh,2013).

Jan gehl in his book entitled “Living among the buildings” emphasizes that, in these current conditions, the cities and city areas should have correct function, and provide their pleasure and
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d this is as a valuable quality. He knows the social activities growth and finally the social activities in direct relation with these spaces quality and their attractiveness. Based on his viewpoint, when the external space has not suitable quality only essential activities will be done and people come back to their home, rapidly. In these conditions, the people do not choose to stay in city spaces (ibid, 2013).

The above-mentioned perspectives generally describe special factors such as functional complexity, visual attractiveness and dynamic, space maintenance and also the factors such as sitting possibility, stopping, suitable access and safety, proportionality, diversity and space publicity as the main effective factors on attendance and social interactions (Tahmasebi, Behzadfar, 2013:3).

Consequently, the quality has important role in social interaction, and by paying attention to suitable spaces for peoples, we can preserve and develop different social group interactions and the space suitability includes preservation against the traffic and accidents, safety against the crimes and violence's and unusual weathers, the environment tranquility such as side-walking facilities, staying, stopping, sitting, observation, conversation, activity, fun and suitable visual quality, satisfaction and acceptance from the users side such as human scale, using appropriate weather conditions such as light, shade, wind, suitable scene quality, satisfaction and space belonging experience (Kokabi, et. al, 2012).

Concept of University

The universities are different populations of researchers which collaboratively search the science and knowledge, and is a learning and teaching environment. Usually, each university has defined physical domain which gives it, special identity and social crowding (Azemati, 2012).

The aim of making high-education environment

The aim of starting a university is providing conditions and facilities for education, investigation, relationships and social interaction resulting in production and exchange of knowledge. This will up-date and promote professors’ scientific knowledge and status, in turn will enhance students’ knowledge and social relationships.

Based on the purpose of this study, interaction in higher-education environments is classified into anatomical and social categories.

Physical restriction in buildings determines the definition of social spaces. The formal interaction between buildings, along with its main functional purpose, should clearly demonstrate interaction modes, hierarchical relationships between forms, visual cohesion and coherence in buildings. The overall design of a university should create a feeling of belonging and promote social and scientific interaction between and among students and professors.

Figure 1. The Virginia university, sharlotsweal, American.
Figure 1 shows the location and structure of Virginia University. The green space has been designed in a way that is suitable for scientific discussion and social interaction among students. There is a wide street crowded with a line of trees on both sides leading to the university library. This green place has been designed to be used by students as a place for rest as well as scientific and social interaction (Azamati, 2012).

The model maps which are important in designing universities plan include radial maps, collage-mode maps linear maps, maps with distinctive parts, the maps with mole culler growth, unpredicted maps and network maps. Each of them has direct or indirect effects an social interactions. Table 3 indicates their advantages and disadvantages.

Table 3. The Effect of different university maps on social minter actions (source: Authors).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Map model</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College-mode maps</td>
<td>Tight relationship between student and professors, physical, social and scientific dominance.</td>
<td>Lacking the central control on collages which causes the university anatomical identity destruction. Making the collages is not appropriate in city center, socially.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear maps</td>
<td>Internal street or buying centers which different facilities such as library, self- service, book store,… can easily be placed in them are useful points for students and professors relations.</td>
<td>Lacking the sense of direction in central street and difficulty identity creation in colleges and separation of outer view from buildings may cause someone feel unfamiliar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network- maps</td>
<td>In making rectangular streets design, walking routes or foundational porches which make right angle with each other, the land is used correctly and defines different routes in the space.</td>
<td>In many stances, the structures and shaped spaces obscurity cause the space scientific sensation weakness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a university is defined as investigators society which collaboratively search the knowledge, this society, will find scientific, social and cultural concepts. thinking space and mental territory in learning condition essentially have interactions with social space (Azemati, 2012).

Obstacles of social interaction enhancement in high-education environment

The first point to make social interactions is damages removal and changing the weakness to strength points which some of them have discussed. Some of these factors include landscapes and lacking the unity sensation or space sensation among the students regarding these spaces which pale the students presence in these spaces and case their part- time presence, lacking easy access and attractive factors to these spaces (lacking the spatial attraction), lacking suitable scene, lacking the experiential sensations inside the open spaces, lacking the private spaces, lacking the students penetration to these spaces, moving in green routes. John Lang, the space architect and designer emphasizes that, without enough attention to space users, even irreversible mental and physiological damages occur for human (Azemati, 2012).

Making social interactions spaces in universities

We need to define spaces with a variety of functions before we are able to make social interaction in public places possible. These spaces are generally designed and constructed taking into account social interaction concepts and needs. They include hallways, auditoriums, stairways and sidewalks, and welfare spaces such as sports rooms, bus stops, taxi stands, restaurants, coffee shops, green space, dormitories, praying rooms, and banks, and have received considerable attention in higher education institutes. They are also building blocks of instruments used in this
study. The above-mentioned spaces are generally constructed to provide opportunities for meeting and social interaction.

Walking along-side the precincts is the most important method of student and professors which lead to a living sensation in university precincts. The routes should be straight word, safe, completely intelligible and pleasant regarding their usage and should be influential on human mental aspect. The walking routes provide the opportunity of interaction beyond the university classes. Face to face relate townships, in randomized or organized method is an important dimension in university life. Therefore, university main routes should not be limited to group or inside the collages, and it is better to be as external spaces and public walks which around them coffee shops, book stores and student facilities are placed. Relationship designing in university spaces should be penetrable for students. Bridges, graded routes, balconies, benches, fountains and probably the rash and oak trees for sheltering or shading have different functions (Azemati, 2012)

Arbors in open spaces make an intimate environment for students interaction in different scientific branches, as multi- person or bigger groups to do their scientific-in yestigational or free discussions. Finally, group presence in these spaces causes the social interactions between students and professors enhancement in a wider environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To evaluate and determine the role of different factors in social interaction enhancement based on a theoretical framework, different components were selected and a questionnaire was administered to investigate them. The results of the present study showed that factors such as age, sex, grade and field of study can influence students’ responses to the questions. The results also indicate that 82% of students are aware of social interactions and discussions, and 89.5% of them are interested in discussions and interactions, which lead to the enhancement of social interaction in university spaces. Also, the time which the university students assign to their discussions seems to have an important role, so that (63/5%) of them assign two hours or more to their interactions. In general, the statistics show relatively good level of interactions in Arsanjan University.

The statistics obtained in this study (85/5%) support the idea that interaction is one of the important needs for human beings. Friendship and cooperation between students in different disciplines in university environment seem to have a high value. The fact that (51/5%) of students like interactions with students from other disciplines and (59/5%) select the recreational spaces for making social interaction and (83/5%) prefer free discussions and (83%) of them prefer the discussions in mixed groups indicate that data updating and exchanging information can increase the scientific level in a university.

![Figure 3. Spaces priorities which causes the university social interaction(source: Authors).](image-url)
As can be seen in the above figure, the function of different spaces for social interaction such as arbor spaces (27%), class rooms (19%) dormitory (13/5%) and gathering saloon(10/5%) are respectively the four priorities for students, and their selection percentages suggest that these spaces are more effective than other spaces for social interaction enhancement.

![Figure 2. Prioritization of activities which are effective in social Interactions enhancement(source: Authors).](image)

The above figure shows effective activities on social interaction; namely funny games (36/5%), seminars (14%), congresses (21%) are respectively the first three priorities for students. These statistics suggest that providing the facilities for these activities can promote university social interactions on the campus.

CONCLUSION

Making relationships is one of the most important human needs. This relationship can be physical or social often realized through looking or conversation and requires spatial desirability in terms of privacy, territory, personal space and crowding.

The higher the spatial quality the more suitable the conditions for social interactions will be. By designing attractive up-to-date buildings and friendly external spaces, we can create a feeling of calmness and acceptance and encourage students to take part in different social activities. Providing enough seats, walking routes alongside the green landscape and providing conditions for navigation and easy access to open and closed spaces can promote social interactions on the campus. Although Arsanjan University has provided some facilities for interaction among students it seems that these need to be improved in both quantity and quality to make the campus a more attractive place where students can engage in social interaction.

REFERENCES


Appendix

Figure 3. Spatial functions, which are effective in university's social interaction, Arsanjan branch (Fars province).