

# Comparing Mental Pattern of Architects and Users to Increase Belonging to a Place in Commercial Sociable Spaces; Case Study: Café-Restaurant Area of two Royal and Golestan Complexes in Shahrak-e-Gharb of Tehran, Iran

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## ABSTRACT

Belonging to third place and sociable spatial realization in contemporary collective spaces in response to the shrinking living space and the house of the contemporary human is a proper solution for improving social interactions and urban vitality. This solution requires creating some spaces to meet the need for interaction for the prosperity of community members by creating micro-spaces in macroscale urban cultural, educational, and commercial buildings with pause and relaxation aspects. The extant study aims to explain the feasibility of spatial realization with third-place sociability in contemporary buildings investigating the factors affecting its strength in the architecture of free spaces of commercial complexes. This is applied research in terms of objective and is a mixed quantitative-qualitative method in terms of the search system. The data were collected through two library and field methods and were analyzed using the path analysis technique and structural equation modeling (SEM). In this method, sampling was done randomly among the audience's society of the study area within ten intervals of the year. Realization of a third place and promotion of a sense of belonging depends on physical factors affecting the invitation of the audience to be present in the place but also requires matching policymaking of executors and managers that organize the place, quality of the audience society, and behavioral factors ruling it. In this case, the priority of social moralities, demographic homogeneity, obtaining privilege from users' long-term referrals to commercial complexes, and avoiding short-term profitable approach to individuals' presence can be seen in prosperity and higher impact of space quality on vitality.

**Keywords:** Third Place, Sociable Space, Commercial Complexes, Belonging to Place, Quality of Place.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Public spaces that are sociable can play a vital role in improving the spirit of solidarity, social interactions, and behavioral levels of society. In this regard, some physical characteristics, such as physiological comfort in climate conditions, access, situation, and security at a basic level and using natural elements, creating potentials for happiness and personal experiences in the place at a developed level, and general features such as the interior design of the place, lighting, sound, and harmony between its adjacent functions are discussed as factors affecting the sociability of public space (Javan Majid and Negari 2019).

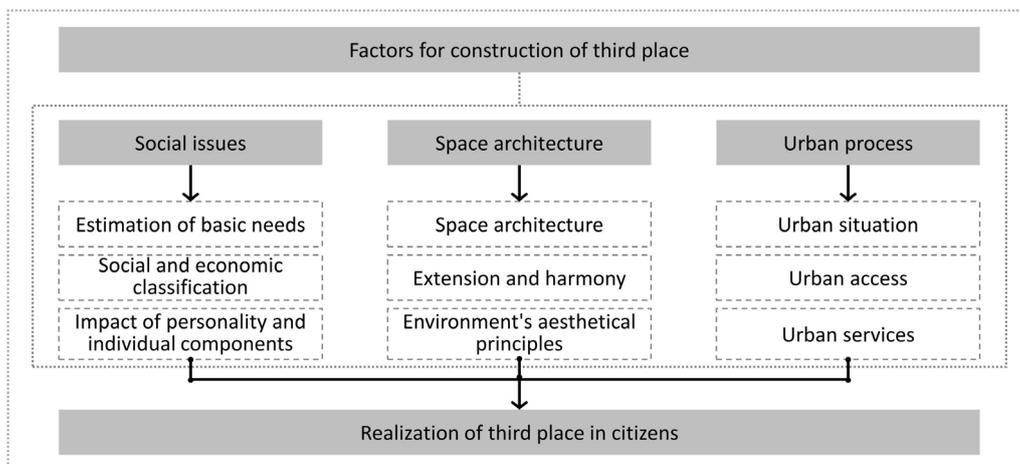
According to Oldenburg, the urban sociologist, the actualization of this subject that is designed in a space out of the house and workplace with interaction and communication nature for society is known as "third place." (Oldenburg 1999, 21), which can be an effective strategy is the absence of contemporary social activities, which some simple excuses, such as pause, sitting, relaxing, and negotiation in different environments (Coburn 2006; Mohamadi Salek, Asgari, and Fathi 2021).

Oldenburg describes the third place by introducing the real value of this environment in providing the field for experiences and communications occurring in it (Oldenburg 1997, 21). This social life is shaped

far from the previous friendships but can lead to close friendly relationships (Sandelands 2003). Montgomery defines this type of life as follows: public social life includes social interactions occurring in the public territory. The concept of public social life is a concept that covers a wider range of public spaces of places in the city but implies a set of social relationships (Montgomery 2006: 30).

The positive potential of third places is highly effective in the likelihood of "choice" and "possible" occurrence of pleasure activities for individuals instead of doing required and binding activities. This case that brings the permanent presence of individuals resulting from the sense of comfort and safety in the place would lead to place attachment and a higher sense of belonging in the long term (Montgomery 2006, 31).

Processing a third place is a result of interaction between different comments of urban planners, architects, and social theorists. In other words, urban architecture and interior space of a place, from desired access to the place, population estimation, conformity of services to the qualification of architecture design and its social issues influence the improvement of third place in the environment (Mohamadi Salek et al. 2021, 76).



**Fig. 1. Components for the Construction of third Place and Its Subcomponents**

(Nejad Ebrahimi, Gharehbaglou, and Farshchian 2017, 169)

The nature of the third place can be not just limited to open urban space but enter the semi-public spaces in the body of urban buildings. For instance, informal and sociable places located in the cultural and commercial complexes can lead to the advent of a space or leisure time regarding the inviting nature of the pause in itself and being far from the main aspect forming the whole complex (Mohammadi Salek and Asgari 2022, 85).

This case improves markets and commercial complexes making them memorable and thriving

place that depends on the place attachment to survive (Mojtabavi, Motalebi, and Ghoddsi Far 2022, 33), which can apply some phenomena for the sake of society and social interactions. These phenomena include wander rituals in commercial streets, malls, and bazaars that indicate the need of society in modern life. In other words, many audiences exist in the buildings in commercial areas of contemporary consuming cities but these places are vulnerable to lack of place attachment since they cannot positively direct this potential. In the body of a modern bazaar in

a metropolitan like Tehran where people are interested in buying, it is assumed that the audience is looking for a certain motivation. In contrast, audiences are not just searching for purchases but go to this commercial space to meet their interaction needs. This case indicates the need for few to be present in a place that differs from life and work (Asgari and Fathi 2021, 109), which sometimes occurs to meet the need for medium and high-income walks of society attending a formal space to experience a peace not afraid of urban acceleration, an interaction, and higher security and safety in the opinion of women (Amin 2008). This is an opportunity for informal interactions and non-systematic recreation and enjoyment for social classes, especially young people making the malls or large city centers a place for cultural productions. In other words, bazaars are not just a place for economic issues but play an important role in creating social interaction, and communication, and giving identity to the space (Asgari et al. 2018, 25). This role, however, remains unknown.

Although the frequency of studies conducted on the third place is important in dealing with social changes in a city, the selected place in the study is highly substantial. Specific features of a place, the location of the area, and the space's audiences can involve latent factors, such as quality and style of architecture, presence of a specific social class, and type of space management in the analysis of findings. For instance, the effect of the following elements is critical in the studies related to the areas located north of Tehran: covering, type of relationships, interactions, and activities (Mohammadi Salek and Asgari 2022). Hence, the impact factor of these latent factors or variables on the interference of main qualification variables in the third place can contribute to the function of previous studies.

## 2. QUESTIONS

The main concern of this study is paying attention to the variables mediating the correlation between independent and dependent variables in the studies conducted in the third place. In this regard, the extant study defines the independent variables about the factors affecting the "physical" quality to pay attention to the role of mediating variables, including "issues related to social and behavioral factors," "management method, functional rules, and rapid service giving by a space in a complex" under the influence of dependent variable of study "satisfaction with and belonging to a third place." Hence, the following questions are asked based on the presumption of multiple relationships between variables:

1. To what extent do the social and behavioral factors in the relative sociology of a place audience affect the quality of place of satisfaction with it in the presence of an architecture suitable for third place?
2. How can a functional realization shaped in an

environment to actualize third place in a commercial complex affect the interference of physical factors on satisfaction with it?

## 3. BACKGROUND

As mentioned before, the third-place concept that is defined as a sociable space by Oldenburg (1997) goes back to the past two decades. This concept that its literature began in urban spaces was linked to the literature of other architectural spaces, such as cafes, bookstores, beauty salons, etc. as urban hangouts through the allegorizing process by this researcher (Oldenburg 1999).

Mehta and Bosson (2010) investigated the concept of third place in commercial units of the street and concluded that this topic is directly related to some concepts, such as distinctiveness, recognizability, and permeability of the commercial area of the street, and sitting spaces for social action in the motion field.

Ahmadi and Diyanati (2014) generalized the concept of third place to urban pedestrian spaces and recognized the physical levels of these spaces with an emphasis on revitalizing and linking the third place as the urban lost place in urban traffic routes and pause points to enhance dynamics and revive the concept of its places.

Mahjob Jalali and Ghalenoe (2014) studied this concept in Iran's cities from the past to now and expressed that third place existed in traditional cities providing many benefits, such as linking past and new generations, creating a sense of belonging, security, and friendship, reducing costs, enhancing information, etc. to meet human needs.

Modiri and Davoodi (2017) conducted a comparative study and generalized the components of third places to the older platforms in the urban body of Old Tehran expressing this space in the structure of cities from the Constitution Era to the Islamic Revolution as the spaces influencing the general interactions and strengthening the collective wisdom. They explained that people play a significant role in the formation of these spaces that are increasing in the present time.

Lukito and Xenia (2017) studied this concept in cafes of the UI campus and explained that characteristics of Oldenburg's third places can be modified with modern culture and IT expansion. This concept includes time in its varying nature and also requires to be searched in various similar studies.

Uthpala and Meetiyyagoda (2022) examined changes in third-place usage during pandemics and considered the resilience of the environment in adaptation to health instructions as an effective factor in matching individuals with the space.

Mohammadi Salek and Asgari (2022) examined third-place realization in informal and sociable spaces and introduced "functional," "cultural," "structural," "managerial," and "social" components as factors improving "physical" capabilities of a place in

creating a sense of satisfaction, peace, and invitation for audiences in a sociable spatial experience.

#### 4. METHOD

This study is applied-practical research regarding the research objectives and their influences on the functional improvement of spaces and space management techniques. The research approach is a correlational method based on structural modeling. In this regard, the "physical" factor is the independent variable, and "satisfaction and sense of place" is the dependent variable, while "social and behavioral indicators" and "functional rules and fast service" are defined as mediating variables.

The extracted data were analyzed through two library and field methods. Two statistical analytical SPSS

Statistics v17 – 2019 and AMOS v23 – 2019 software were used to examine quantitative data based on the SEM. In field observations (10 observations), random observations were done during different periods of the year, including diverse days of the week and common working hours of café-restaurants.

The statistical society of this study comprised all audiences that do not work in café-restaurants of two commercial Royal and Golestan complexes located in Shahrak-e-Gharb of Tehran as reported in Table 1. These two centers were selected because of their spaces that can realize the goals of third place, users' freedom to pause and stop in the space, location proximity and similar social community, and business prosperity.

**Table 1. Information about Studied Spaces**

Space's Name	Address	Main Destinations of Audiences	Operation Type	Features Influencing Addressability	Financial and Physical Management
Golestan Commercial Complex	Shahrak-e-Gharb, Iran Zamin St., Mahestan St.	Relaxation and pause during shopping, spending leisure time, and talking together	Free open space and development of café-restaurant spaces next to the courtyard	Informal and public, having natural elements of water and plant, landscaping and diverse furniture, and spatial opening between complex's parts	In an integrated system in the complex and charging annual fees for complex's shopkeepers and high rent fees for café-restaurants
Royal Commercial Complex	Shahrak-e-Gharb, Sharifi St. on Modiriati Cross section	Studying, leisure time, relaxing, eating food, and drinking beverages	Closed and semi-closed space (terrace), and deployment of a café-restaurant in the center	Lack of formal performance, ability to stop in a hot space, using light and connection to the electricity and wifi, and diverse zoning	In an integrated way by management of food-court space by charging fees and allocation of parking lot income

The sample size was determined using the Klein Method based on the number of questionnaire components; accordingly, 200 subjects were chosen using cluster random sampling and locational lor. The selected subjects were equally divided into two complexes emphasizing the gender proportion. It is worth noting that Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this questionnaire equaled 89 in this study.

In terms of audience age, the demographic distribution of the studied population included 43 (21.5%) adolescents, 91 (45.5%) young people, and 66 (33.3%) middle-aged people. In terms of education level, 39 members (19.5%) had diplomas and lower degrees, 84 members (42.0%) had BSc and MSc degrees, and 77 members (38.5%) had Ph.D. or Specialized doctorate degrees (educating or graduated).

**Table 2. Descriptive Indicators (Mean and SD) for Research Variables**

Variable	Component	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Physical	Sound Comfort and Music	200	16	96	49.23	5.53
	Flexibility and Diversity	200	16	96	76.33	7.96
	Cleanliness and a Pleasant Aroma	200	16	96	63.06	4.59
	Suitable Perspective and Landscape	200	16	96	70.55	5.53
	Color and Materials	200	16	96	68.21	4.79
	Enclosure and Covering of Space	200	16	96	62.12	5.25
	Thermal Comfort and Illumination	200	16	96	59.24	5.79

Variable	Component	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Social and Behavioral	More Stay and Pause	200	8	32	27.92	4.16
	Space Health and Control	200	8	32	25.76	3.96
	Individual and Social Responsibility	200	8	32	26.45	4.93
	Possibility of Personal and Group Activities	200	8	32	26.13	3.24
Functional Rules and Fast Services		200	27	108	71.4	14.65
Satisfaction and Sense of Belonging		200	29	116	83.01	10.94

As reported in Table 2 about the descriptive indicators of mean and SD scores, physical variables of "flexibility and diversity" and "suitable perspective and landscape" with mean values of 76.33 and 77.55, and "sound comfort and music" with the mean value

of 49.23 had the largest and smallest mean values, respectively. The rest of the components were in the middle range. Among the four components of "social and functional" variables, "more stay and pause" with a mean value of 27.92 had the highest row.

**Table 3. Result of Normal Distribution Test of Kolmogorov-Smirnov of Data in Research Variables**

Variable	K-S Statistic	df	Sig.
Physical	0.540	200	0.96
Social and Behavioral	0.34	200	0.12
Functional Rules and Fast Services	0.840	200	0.88
Satisfaction and Sense of Belonging	.440	200	0.72

Because the normal distribution of data is important, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was done in Table 3. According to the significance level of variables in the considered test, the null hypothesis is confirmed and data follow a normal distribution.

Therefore, the zero-order correlation of each variable with Pearson correlation has been measured to reveal the relationships between variables in the model. Table 4 reports the results in the whole sample.

**Table 4. Matrix of Correlation between Research Variables in the whole Sample (n=200)**

Variable	1	2	3	4
Physical	1			
Social and Behavioral	0.70	1		
Functional Rules and Fast Services	-0.51	0.36	1	
Satisfaction and Sense of Belonging	0.56	0.53	-0.59	1

As seen in Table 4, a positive and significant relationship (0.70) was seen between the independent and first mediating variables, while a negative and significant relationship (-0.51) existed between the independent and second mediating variables. Moreover, a positive and significant relationship (0.56) between the independent and dependent variables of the study. Other relationships are reported in the table, and all coefficients were significant ( $P < 0.001$ ).

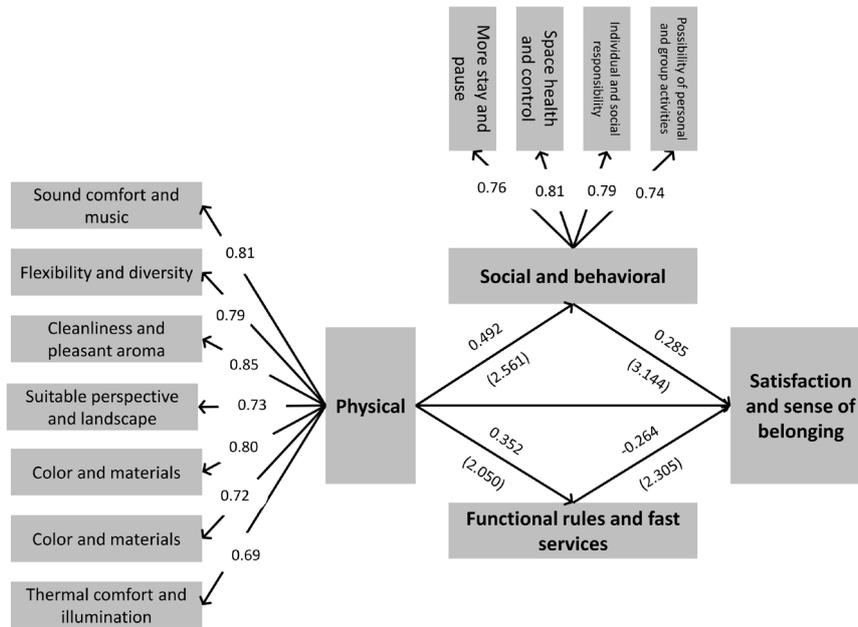
In this case, SEM must be proposed to analyze the hypotheses about the influence of research variables. This model includes two parts: analyzing the causal structure between latent variables and measuring relationships between latent and observable variables<sup>1</sup>.

The structural part considers the causal effects of exogenous variables on endogenous variables. The measurement part indicates how indicators measure the assumed latent constructs.

Analysis of the data fit through ASMOS software shown in Table 5 indicates the construct's validity. As reported in Table 5, two important fit indicators of RMSEA and X2/DF equal 0.024 and 2.151, respectively. The smaller the X2/DF than 3, the more the model is fit. RMSEA index indicates the model's mean squared of errors, which its allowed threshold equals 0.08 indicating that values less than 0.08 are acceptable, while values less than 0.05 are very good. Other indicators are in the acceptable range.

**Table 5. The Goodness of fit Indicators of the Suggested Model**

Fit Index	X2/DF	RMR	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	NFI	NNFI	IFI
Acceptable Values	<3	<0.05	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9
Calculated Values	2.151	0.017	0.024	0.99	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.99



**Fig. 2. The Tested Model of the Structural Relationship between "Physical Qualities" and "Satisfaction and Sense of Belonging" with Mediating Role of "Social and Behavioral Factors" and "Functional Rules and Fast Services"**

**5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

According to fit quantitative data and indicators, the theoretical model of research is confirmed. The

hypothesis can be tested by analyzing the internal relationships of the model and regression coefficients between latent variables. Table 6 indicates the significance of this model if the partial index of P is less than 0.05 and T-value is between -1.96 and +1.96.

**Table 6. Results of Hypothesis Testing Based on the SEM**

Row	Path	Path Coefficient	T-Value	P-Value	Result of Hypothesis
1	"Physical factor" on "satisfaction and sense of belonging" with mediating role of "social and behavioral factors"	0.140	-	0.000	Confirmation of Main Hypothesis (Indirect Effect)
2	"Physical factor" on "satisfaction and sense of belonging" with mediating role of "functional rules and fast services"	-0.091	-	0.000	Confirmation of Main Hypothesis (Indirect Effect)
3	"Physical factor" on "satisfaction and sense of belonging"	0.322	3.144	0.000	Confirmation of Hypothesis (Direct Effect)
4	"Physical factor" on "social and behavioral factors"	0.492	2.561	0.000	Confirmation of Hypothesis (Direct Effect)
5	"Physical factor" on "functional rules and fast services"	-0.352	2.050	0.000	Confirmation of Hypothesis (Direct Effect)
6	"Social and behavioral factors" on "satisfaction and sense of belonging"	0.285	3.122	0.000	Confirmation of Hypothesis (Direct Effect)
7	"Functional rules and fast services" on "satisfaction and sense of belonging"	-0.264	2.305	0.000	Confirmation of Hypothesis (Direct Effect)

According to Table 6 and Figure 6, the acceptable interval of P-values and T-values and structure significance of the main hypothesis about the effect of "physical" factors on "satisfaction and sense of belonging" with mediating role of "social and behavioral" factors equaled 0.140, which indicated a positive effect of this variable. Therefore, the better realization of "satisfaction and sense of belonging" is matched with a higher quality of "social and behavioral" factors.

Moreover, the effect of "physical" factors on "satisfaction and sense of belonging" with mediating role of "functional rules and fast services" equaled -0.091, which indicates the negative effect of the mentioned mediating factor. Accordingly, the efficiency of the common services provided in a café or restaurant cannot necessarily realize a third place. The main hypotheses of the study indicate that desired management in a third place requires the realization and enhancement of social and behavioral efficiency regardless of the quality of its services. This result rejects this hypothesis that each high-quality café or restaurant can be considered a third place indicating that the formation of a third place in some complexes such as food courts in commercial complexes depends on some factors for walks of the society from similar social and behavioral levels. These factors include the smooth flow of space performance concerning audience presence for increasing individual pauses in the space. The effect of "physical" factors on the "social and behavioral" factors, which equaled 0.492 indicate the synergy of these two conditions.

## 6. CONCLUSION

According to the comparison of common body-centered and physical views in the studies conducted in the third place that try to improve the sense of belonging and positive sociability in urban and public collective spaces, the mental pattern of applicant users in the space values the discussed subject and emphasizes the space management and social-behavioral society attending the place. In other words, the realization of a third place requires observing some general issues to improve the quality

of architectural space and create naturally attractive capabilities. This case also depends on the social group, behavioral issues, and managerial attitude existing in the complex.

According to the correlation between mediating variables of the study and their effects on the place's prosperity and urban vitality, a third place is vulnerable to explicit and fast performance of café and restaurants that is an income-dependent business in place actualization, so cannot be realized without these factors. In other words, in the literature of third place that focuses on sociable public spaces, place profitability or free pause is highly important for urban wandering. This subject can be achieved in commercial spaces that are economic places if financial profit is obtained from the users' long-term presence. In this case, a profitable attitude towards the place and rapid operation of individuals' entrance and food services must be avoided.

Moreover, when the effect of social and behavioral factors on the formation of the sense of belonging is matched, it is emphasized that third-place actualization depends on the quality level of society, personal and social responsibility, the health of individuals, and possible stay of them in the place without any worry. In this case, a commercial place with social priority or demographic homogeneity makes it possible to create a third place. On the contrary, the factors disturbing the security of people make this case difficult and impossible. It is worth noting that the considered factors can be described and explained in the frame of urban social sciences.

Moreover, this study confirms the effect of design quality, natural factors, landscape, flexibility, and spatial diversity explaining that café-restaurant areas in the contemporary and modern commercial complexes have been developed in recent decades. These are effective spaces in realizing the place and choice by providing users with new experiences and communications. It should be noted that audience community and management policies made for the place play a significant role in improving the sense of invitation to the place.

## ENDNOTE

1. In SEM, the researcher aims to conclude that a common factor probably explains the contemporaneous variations by observing the calculation of these changes (common variance). The common variance in an index indeed is a part of variance that is shared with other indicators and is explained by one or more factors.

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