

Revising the Principles of Designing Based on Promoting Social Interactions (Case Study: Designing a Religious-Complex)

Sepideh Khoshnam^a, Neda Khaksar^{b*}

^aM.A. in Art and Architecture Department, Yazd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Yazd, Iran

^bPh.D. in Department of Art, Art University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

Received 10 July 2017; revised 26 September 2017; accepted 15 October 2017

Abstract

One of the most significant issues in architectural design is to take into account the users' needs, particularly social interactions, which in turn lead to individual growth. Weakness in expressing social interactions in designing a space is among the principle issues in today's architecture. In fact, what was not infrequent long ago, in old religious and cultural constructions of Iran, such as mosques and other religious building, was the manifestation of people interactions and relations in the body of the constructions. Based on the observations, nowadays the individuals seem to be estranged from these spaces. This leads to a lack of fascination on the users and thus a gradual decrease in the quality of the spaces. The primary purpose of the current research is to explain the criteria of designing a religious and cultural complex, the aim of which is to increase social interaction among users. This research uses library studies, and descriptive-analytic research method. The social and physical solutions that are deduced from this research are to create the affiliation, security, public participation, accessibility, cordiality, as well as creating public and collective spaces, using climate-appropriate natural elements, and variety in form and robustness.

Keywords: Social Interactions; Religious-Cultural; Complex; Architecture

1. Introduction

In all societies, architecture is influenced by culture, religion, and also the social context of that society. In societies where the intention is to ameliorate the social condition and people's interactions, spaces can be designed by taking into account the religious and cultural beliefs of that

* Corresponding author. Tel: +98-9171164369.

E-mail address: khaksarneda@gmail.com.

society, so as to meet the cultural and religious needs of the people besides increasing social interactions. Nonetheless, nowadays the spatial and qualitative structures of architectural spaces are in such a way that individuals have the least amount of encounters and communication with one another. The aforementioned issues lead to a decrease in the sense of excitement, psychological calmness, and ease of mind, and hence a lack of quality in urban spaces. Consequently, designing a religious and cultural complex seems to be a matter of great importance in Iran. This is due to the fact that culture and religion are intertwined in Iran, and it is easy to use this principle as the starting point for designing a complex that not only meets the religious needs but also satisfies the cultural needs of the people. The structure of the current research is as follows:

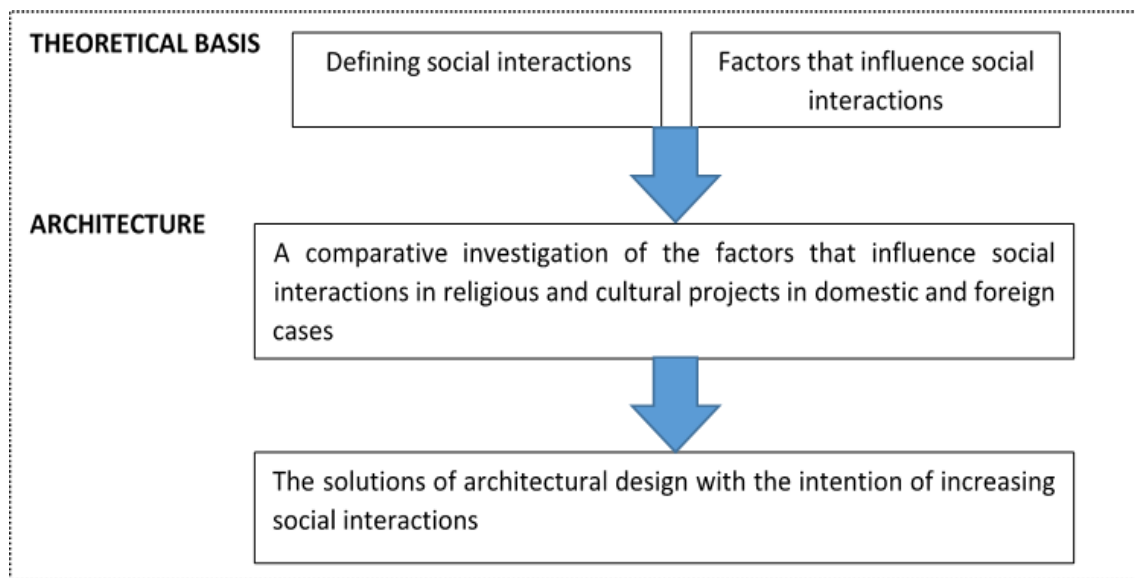


Fig 1 Introducing the article's structure

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1. Social Interaction

When an action is done by an individual and a mutual response is received, it can be said that a social interaction or a social mutual action has taken place. In such a case, a social relationship has emerged between the two individuals (William & Meyer, 2001). In other words, social interaction can be defined as the establishment of a relationship between two or more individuals that leads to reactions among them that are recognized by the two sides (Behzadfar & Tahmasebi, 2013: 18). When the system of actions among individuals is intentional, it could be said that “social relations” are established. Social relations should be “meaningful” and “conscious”. Social relations could be “temporary” or “permanent”. If a mutual relationship is constant and regular, it is probably describable, recognizable, and relatively stable (Coser, 1975). Obviously, the human need to establish a direct relationship with the environment is reflected in a direct experience of space, people, and social activities such as interaction with acquaintances, meetings, walking, playing, having fun, exercising, body activities, the possibility of competition, etc. That in turn plays a significant role in helping individuals to create a good mental image of space, dynamism and excitement, leading to acquisition of new experience, and environmental education (Whyte, 1980).

2.2. Necessity of Social Interaction

Humans recognize their abilities, make meaning, and create their identities through interaction with other individuals (Wood, 2000). Humans possess a natural need to establish social relations, and thus they create situations that lead to experiencing social relations. What is seen today is a decrease in the level of relationship among individuals in a society. As a consequence of the increase in the size and spread of the cities, speed, density, etc., the primary rules of urbanity such as civility, citizenship, and social relations are weakened (Behzadfar & Tahmasebi, 2013: 18). The emergence of modern architecture in some of the developing cities has caused changes in the social structures of that society; as it could be seen in large cities in Iran, an increase in the height of the buildings, density of construction, population density, and other factors have caused a decrease in people's communication with each other and in social interactions. An increase in social interactions leads to the promotion of the sense of liveliness, an increase in social trust, cultural cooperation, and a decrease in delinquency. These issues are among the goals of urban and architectural design (Tabrizi et al., 2014: 264).

Social interaction may include a physical relationship, a conversation, a glance, or communication among people, and thus needs the definition of events and appropriate activities and consequently, people's acceptance of their roles in space and their membership in social groups (Carr et al., 1992). Social interaction and observing people's activities advance individual growth through creating the basis for sociability and accepting the society. Nowadays, these interactions are significantly fading in metropolises due to various reasons such as the emergence of automobile technology and other private transportation vehicles, long distance between the living and the workplace, the instability and transience of people's relationship with one another, and finally the immigration and non-durability of residence in the neighborhood (Tabrizi et al., 2014: 258).

2.3. Factors Influencing Social Interaction

Some of the most significant factors that influence social interactions are as follows; it should be noted that a summary of the following issues is brought in tables 1 and 2.

a. Sense of Belonging: The sense of belonging to an environment or a place (such as city or neighborhood) is a certain type of the sense of belonging as a general category. The existence of this sense in an individual not only develops honor and prestige in him/her, but also makes the residents of a certain place feel responsible for the affairs related to that place, and persuades them to cooperate in those affairs. In other words, the sense of belonging to a place increases the level of cooperativeness in the related affairs in the residents of that neighborhood or city (Naeemi et al., 2015: 136).

b. Cooperativeness of the Space: Cooperation is a process in which the individual willingly attempts to do social activities through the sense of belonging to a group, and participates actively and voluntarily in it. Some theorists have defined and analyzed the concept of cooperation on a large scale, and have considered cooperation to mean active cooperation of the individuals in political, and cultural lives, and generally all other aspects of life (Naeemi et al., 2015: 138).

c. Security: Sense of security is one of the necessities of people's freedom in public spaces, and any kind of threat to this sense would cause them to give up active attendance in urban spaces (Mahmoudi, 2009: 149). Providing security in urban and architectural spaces is an integral part of a good design. Providing security for the presence of children and women in these spaces should be prioritized, since in case of insecurity these spaces are less welcomed, fewer people would attend them, and consequently the level of social interactions would decrease significantly.

d. Green Spaces: The existence of green space is one of the methods to increase communication and social exhilaration in public spaces (Sullivan et al., 2004). The way of using natural elements directly influences the emotional atmosphere of the space and the five senses of humans, and consequently affects the physical and mental aspects of humans. In fact, the sum of all the things that are perceived by various senses leads to the perception of the environment (Mousavi & Zahedian, 2013: 152). Through adequate furniture, which can help to increase the interactions, green spaces can provide an appropriate foundation for gathering different people and groups, and this in turn would increase the liveliness of the space and consequently makes it welcoming.

e. Activity: The activities that take place in an architectural or urban space have great influence on the amount and the type of social relations in that space. In what follows, three categories of the current activities in a space are defined according to Gehl's point of view.

- Necessary activities: these activities are done under any conditions and are not relative to the specific social condition of that environment. Activities such as going to school or workplace, shopping, waiting at the bus stop, and other daily activities can be categorized in this group of activities.
- Selective activities: these activities are done under the appropriate conditions for the users of certain space. Walking in the open air, stopping at amusing places, and also sitting or resting in attractive places are categorized in this group.
- Social activities: depending on the features of an urban space, these activities include a wide range of people's interactions. Due to the fact that these activities are influenced by other activities and social spaces, they are also called eventual activities. Particular conditions of the spaces - for standing, sitting, eating, playing, etc. affect the activities of this category. In urban spaces that lack the necessary aspects for reinforcing social relations, only a few of these activities are realized, and they in turn differ depending on people's certain conditions. Contrary to this, in the spaces that are rich in these aspects, a great amount of these activities happen.

f. Collective Spaces: A collective space is a space in which one is in a relationship with a stranger. This type of space is appropriate for politics, religion, trade, sport, peaceful coexistence, and impersonal encounters (Walzer, 1986). In the cities, collective spaces act as the spaces in which maximum interactions and communication happen among citizens. These spaces provide the basic ground for practical and ritual activities of the citizens and are significant elements in creating social bonds among the citizens and making collective memories (Andalib, 2010).

g. Public Spaces: Public spaces are the most significant foundations for social interactions. In fact, most of the social interactions take place in these spaces. An appropriate design in these spaces can increase social interaction; furthermore, an inconsiderate designing of the public spaces, and also a lack of appropriate basis for social interactions in these spaces may lead to ill effects. This part of the research will express some ideas regarding public spaces. Satisfying the human need to be loved and to be accepted as part of a group needs a structural setting. Public urban spaces have the maximum capacity concerning this issue. Due to the fact that the calmness of atmosphere, the existence of natural elements, the frontage of the space, and controlling the transportation vehicles satisfy the human need to rest, they are effective in this regard (Whyte, 1980). Public spaces are shared by various individuals and social groups; these spaces are spaces for exchanging thoughts and information, and therein social networks are created. In fact, such a space could be recognized as an experience rather than only a physical place (Hajer et al., 2001).

h. Collective Life: Collective living is an opportunity to get rid of daily tensions, spare the leisure time, have social interactions, gather together with different people and social groups, and it is also a basis for presence, freedom of speech, and expressing it in a space. Collective life in open public

spaces depends on the promotion of social interactions, attracting different individuals and groups, social security and consequently, encouraging the people to tolerate different groups in the space, more sociability, and creating an active, dynamic and lively space (Behzadfar & Tahmasebi, 2013: 19).

Table 1 Comparing different viewpoints towards social interactions

Comparing different viewpoints towards the promotion of social interactions	Theorists	Naeemei	Gehl	Mahmoudi	Behzadfar & Tahmasebi
	Spiritual-social solution	Creating a sense of belonging Providing the cooperativeness of the space	Creating the basis for necessary, selective, and collective activities	Providing security	Creating collective life
	Architectural theorists	Sullivan	Walzer	Whyte	
	Architectural solution	Creating green spaces	Creating collective space	Creating public spaces	

3. Comparative Investigation of Factors that promote Social Interaction in Religious and Cultural Spaces

One of the most important issues in today's architecture is the weakness in taking social interactions into account while designing a space. Although in the past religious spaces were labeled with the name of the religion, in practice, cultural activities also took place within them. However, today's religious spaces such as mosques are only used as a place for doing daily religious activities and rituals. Therefore, people's relationship with religious spaces is fading compared with the past. This research intends to investigate the principles of culture, religion, and social interactions, and to study similar cases and their solutions in designing. Studying cases of cultural and religious spaces can be effective in identifying structural solutions for the promotion of social interactions. In what follows, some of these cases are studied briefly (table 2). The Islamic-cultural complex in Tirana, Albania, and also Imam Reza cultural complex at Imam Hossein square, in Tehran are among the similar cultural and religious spaces.

3.1. Imam Reza Cultural Complex (Designing architects: Clout Architectural Studio in Collaboration with Saeed Reza Bariri and Samane Qasem Pour)

This complex was built in 2011 and covers an area of 6500 square meters. The complex site is located near Imam Hossein square in Tehran. This district is considered as a cultural one in Tehran. Therefore, the project of designing Imam Reza multipurpose complex is based on creating an urban space for social activities of different social groups and ages (www.setavin.com). Regarding his design, the designer of the project has stated that "I defined and arranged a project called 'the house of knowledge.' It was based on the philosophy that our generation was in close contact with the mosque, and the next generation was more in touch with cultural houses, therefore the aim of designing this complex was to create a space in which the two detached generations could get

nearer to each other, whether regarding its use or its design. In this space, the ‘Shabestan’ (or the nave) of the mosque is defined alongside its library, IT center, coffee shop, the amphitheater and the other various uses that were not considered as having the potential to be alongside each other in the past. This kind of designing intends to make the two generations familiar with this space, and to make interaction and conversation happen (fig 2).”



Fig 2 Imam Reza cultural complex (Source: www.setavin.com)

3.2. Albania Islamic-Cultural Complex (Architect: Big Architects)

Tirana, the capital of Albania in southeastern Europe, has undergone an enormous change in urban planning. This change includes reconstruction of the available buildings, construction of several private and public urban buildings, and also a reconceptualization of Skanderbeg square. This important square is the site of the new cultural complex of the city, which consists of a mosque, a center of Islamic culture, and a museum of religious correspondence (www.e-architect.co.uk). This mosque can accommodate thousands of people daily to say their prayers. Through its exclusive connection to the yard and to the public area, it can also increase its capacity up to five thousand people on Fridays and up to ten thousand on celebration, or special days (fig 3 & 4).

In what follows, some of the solutions for increasing social interactions in the above mentioned cases are considered, based on the items mentioned in table 1 (table 2).



Fig 3 Exterior view of Albania Islamic-cultural complex (Source: www.e-architect.co.uk)

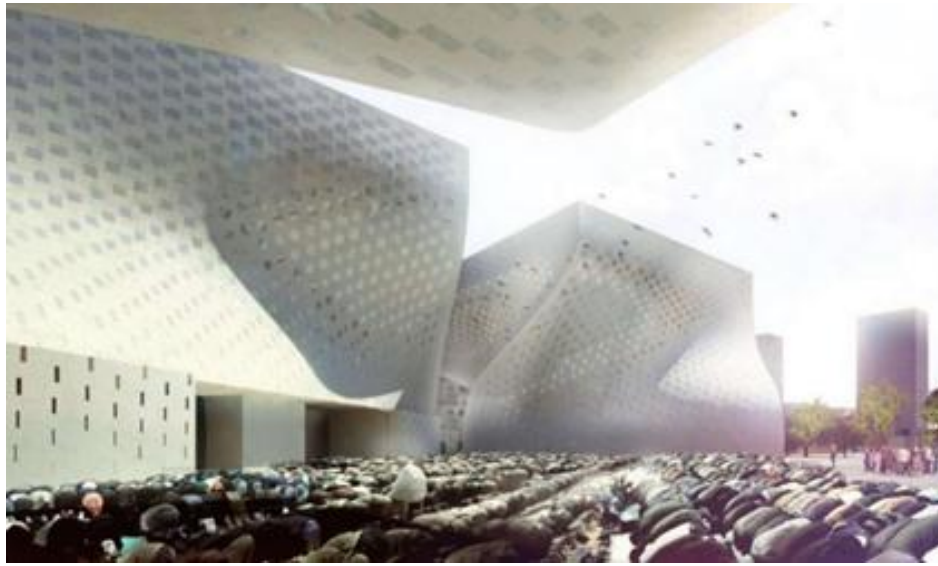


Fig 4 Interior view of Albania Islamic-cultural complex (Source: www.e-architect.co.uk)

Table 2 Studying the reflection of the solutions for increasing social interactions in sample cases

Sample case	Structural feature of the construction	Comparing structural features of the construction with theories of modern theorists and architects							
		Creating the sense of belonging	Providing the cooperativeness of the space	Creating public spaces	Creating green spaces	Creating collective spaces	Creating the basis for necessary, selective, and collective spaces	Providing security	Creating collective life
Albania Islamic cultural complex	Existence of square-like spaces			*	*	*			*
	Existence of narrow windows with adequate height for easy entrance of light and securing the frontage							*	
	Creating a public space with high invitingness and appropriate flexibility			*		*	*	*	*
	Providing the uses related to the previous and the next generation	*	*				*	*	
	Using symbols such as numbers; pointing to the 8 th Imam of Shiites (for example repetition of 8 God's names on the skin of the dome, or the existence of 8 intertwined wings or fingers as a symbol of unity)	*			*				

		Comparing structural features of the construction with theories of modern theorists and architects							
Imam Reza cultural complex	Using Iranian architectural elements such as sunken courtyard in the main yard.	*			*				
	Using some of the most significant Iranian architectural elements such as <i>Gereh Chini</i> (making geometrical knots in Persian) in the 'Shabestan (the nave)', the walls of the sunken courtyard and the corridor	*			*				
	Putting a fountain in the sunken courtyard and across the 'Shabestan'	*			*				

4. Conclusion

According to the above mentioned issues and the research done, the solutions for increasing social interactions can be summarized follows: creating the sense of belonging, providing the cooperativeness of the space, creating public spaces, creating green spaces, creating collective spaces, creating the basis for necessary, selective, and collective activities, providing security, as well as creating collective life. Some of the above mentioned items are social solutions and consequently need a structural solution. We have attained several principles and strategies through studying them. The results are brought in table 3 and are categorized as three groups: social solution, structural solution, and strategy (the manifestation of the solution in the structure of the building).

Table 3 Comparative study of architectural solutions in religious-cultural projects

Social Interaction	Structural solution	Manifestation of the solution in the structure of the building
Sense of belongings	Accessibility	Creating various entrances to different fronts Adequate stopping spaces The possibility of providing public transportation for the complex (for ease of access for the users)
	Invitingness	Appropriate space-making (open and semi-open spaces) for the entrances
Security	-	Creating short walls to separate the spaces while preserving the visual extension of the spaces Adequate lighting at nights Preventing the creation of dark and lonely places
Cooperative-ness of the space	-	Putting religious space alongside an amphitheater, a coffee shop, and a library, in order to respond to the needs of not only the previous generation and the next generation, but also people with various tendencies. Employing native people in order to do the activities with the aim of increasing their sense of responsibility Employing native people with related professions in different

		sections (a kind of entrepreneurship)
Creating collective life	Creating public and collective spaces	Creating convergent and communal spaces in open, semi-open, and closed spaces.
-	Using natural elements appropriate for the climate	Using water in order for humans to communicate with it through their audio-visual and tactile senses. Using vegetation in the complex in order to reduce noise pollution
Creating basis for necessary, selective and collective activities	Variety in form and flexibility	Creating multifunctional and public spaces Combining open, semi-open, and closed spaces in the complex Variety of dimension in spaces, furniture and vegetation Creating spaces for desirable privacy

References

- Andalib, A. (2010). Collective space and civil life. *Manzar*, 7.
- Architectural network of Iran. (2016). Retrieved from [http:// www.setavin.com](http://www.setavin.com).
- Behzadfar, M., & Tahmasebi, A. (2013). Identifying and evaluating the elements affecting social interactions-developing and maintaining citizens' relations on urban streets: A case study of Sanandaj. *Baqe Nazar*, 18.
- Carr, S., Francis, M., Rivlin, L. G., & Stone, A. M. (1992). *Public space*. Massachusetts: Cambridge university press.
- Cattell, V., Dines, N., Gesler, W., & Curtis, S. (2008). Mingling, observing, and lingering: Everyday public spaces and their implications for well-being and social relations. *Health & place*, 14(3), 544-56.
- Coser, L. (1975). *A sociological theory*. New York: McMillan.
- Gehl, J. (2011). *Public spaces, public life*. (A. Ghafari, & S. Soheilipour, Trans.). Tehran: Shahid Beheshti University.
- Hajer, M., & Reijndorp, A. (2001). *In search of new public domain*. Rotterdam: NAI.
- Mahmoudi, M. M. (2009). Pavement, an arena for social interactions: a case study of Tehran's Valiasr street. *Sociology*, 17, 145-168.
- Mousavi, M. S., & Zahedian, E. (2013). Effective factors on women's social in urban spaces: a case study of shahriar pavement in Valiasr neighborhood of Tabriz. *Women and family studies*, 21, 145-166.
- Naeemi Nazmabad, Z., Farajpour, M., & Amirshaqai, M. R. (2015). Measuring the level of social interactions in old urban textures of urban Bahamestans, a case study of darbe no neighborhood, Gorgan. *Urban Management*, 38.
- Sullivan, W. C., Kuo, F. E., & Depooter, S. F. (2004). The fruit of urban nature: Vital neighborhood spaces. *Environment and Behavior*, 36(5), 678-700.
- Tabrizi, O., Mokhtabad Amreei, M., & Fayzi, M. (2014). The effects of collective architectural and urban spaces' design on social relations and interactions. *Urban Management*, 37, 257-272.
- Walzer, M. (1986). Public space-pleasures and costs of urbanity. *Dissent*, 33(4), 470- 475.
- Whyte, W. H. (1980). *The social life of small urban spaces*. Washington, DC: The conservation foundation.
- William, F. O., & Meyer, F. N. (2001). *Sociology* (13th ed.). (A. Arianpour, Trans.). Tehran: Shahid Beheshti University.

- Wood, J. T. (2000). *Interpersonal relations: Psychology of social interactions*. (M. Firouzbakht, Trans.). Tehran: Mahtab.
- World Architecture: Buildings across the Globe, <http://www.e-architect.co.uk>, access date: 24 November 2016.