Conduciveness of Women Social Setting in Traditional Iranian Bazaar from Functional Dimension

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Received: January 14, 2015 Accepted: January 28, 2015 Online Published: April 30, 2015

Abstract

Iranian traditional Bazaars are not just physical settings for everyday commercial activities. They are places of communal life especially for women and provide the main daily sources of their outdoor recreations. The research hypothesize that there is a serious lack of sensitivity to the cultural values, especially for women within modern Iranian market places. In this regard, the aim of this research was in filling this gap and describing the relationship between women communal life and urban public spaces. To reach the aim, this study was conducted among middle-aged Iranian women within the Iranian traditional Bazaar of Isfahan (as the most public urban space in the Iranian cities). To increase the accuracy of findings, the data collection methods through triangulation were unobtrusive behavioral observation of women communal life within two selected settings, semi-structured single face to face women interviews (n=24), semi-structured focus group interviews (n=5), and taking photographs. In order to analyze the collected data, a qualitative content analysis and descriptive analysis were used. The finding of the research showed that the social settings of traditional Isfahan Bazaar are proper for women communal life functionally.

Keywords: traditional Iranian Bazaar, women communal life, culture, environmental quality, good urban spaces

1. Introduction

In its most fundamental form, culture consists of norms that shape life conditions, behavior, interactions of humans. These norms are transformed to unwritten rules over time and become common in more or less formal ways in order to control people's lifestyle and behavior. Ralph (1978) asserts that from an anthropological point of view, culture means methodology of people's lifestyle and their behavioral patterns, in a way that culture lies in the center of human behavior (Altman et al., 1980). In other words, culture is internalized through human activities and communications and is accepted in the form of lifestyle (Rapoport, 1980). That is, built environment always exist in the context of a culture and is part of it (Parsons, 1975). Thus, it can be concluded that the relationship between culture and environment is a complicated relationship in which it is not possible to determine unilateral and simple relationships. On the other hand, cultural values, influence people's understanding and viewpoint about environment and consequently influence space design (Altman et al., 1980).

Space has been defined in numerous ways in different historical eras based on social and cultural approaches (Golkaar, 2005). Space doesn't express any characteristics in its concept alone, but as soon as a group of humans start an activity in a place, the symbolic meaning of space is established. In this regard, space is a context to practice activities and human behaviors, and a place to merge imagination with reality (Khalili et al., 2014). In other word, space provides some opportunities and constraints which people choose based on their cultural criteria (Gans, 1968). Therefore, public urban spaces provide different conditions for activity formation depending on cultural framework, time and space. Using and attributing public spaces is an experience that is not the same for everyone: because variables such as age, gender, social, ethnic, and racial groups influence on how urban life is understood. To sum up and from a socio-cultural point of view, urban spaces are defined as places for outside events and communications, social interactions between different groups with dissimilar demands