

## Role of Public Space on Social Identity

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### Abstract

*There are different physical dimensions and characteristics, which help in defining the public space and its role in the identity of human beings. In addition, there is a general place-identity for each person which reflects his or her unique socialization in the physical world. This paper reveals that it is important to imagine place and space as a particular component of public self-identity. Place-identity is defined as those aspects that illustrate an individual's personal approach to the external environment using a critical point of conscious and subconscious values, feelings, aims, likes, skills, and behavioral activities related to a particular environment.. The paper seeks to address the relationship between people and their urban spaces. To achieve this aim, the research method in this study is qualitative, which is included of literature review, observation and interview. The research shows the sociology and identity of a person is directly related to the space and surrounding.*

**Keywords:** public space, self-identity, physical environment, urban planning.

### **1. Introduction**

“public” spaces are those that are inhabited by individuals who are “personally unknown or only categorically known to one another.” (Lo & Lyn, 1989). On the other hand, Urban public spaces are as a means of creating urban identity. It is important to the life of the city and impact the self-identity (Cybriwsky, 1999). each city has a unique identity, which is composed of its public spaces. Gillian Rose believed that identity is related to a specific place when you feel you belong to that place. That place is the one that you are comfortable in it (Rose, 1995). Public spaces are often classified as accessible, and comfortable. They should portray a good image and should be friendly. In addition, Public space is a key aspect in urban planning and urban sociology; it is a critical area of research as it involves the aspect of space for contention. It is an accessible venue that creates conflicts related to identity and self-recognition (Franck & Stevens, 2013).

Accordingly, this paper discusses the relationship between public space and self-identity, and their relation to modern urban planning and sense of place. Also, aimed at analyzing the effects of modern planning and design on people's sense of identity, determining the effect of architecture on everyday public life, and give suggestions for enhancing a good relationship between the public and public space. The paper investigates the different concepts of public space, in the context of city public spaces, theories, and the role of identity in urban planning and the physical environment. The focus lies on the safety aspect that is most responsible for the comfort of public life, and the potential of different people to find a comfortable identity with their surroundings.

### **2. Method of Study**

In this study, the method is qualitative, which is included of literature review, survey, observation, and interview. In addition, use of case studies was applied to the research for the output of this paper; real life examples were applied to create a connection between the practical issues and the theories applied. it also included conducting interviews with the local citizens.

Based on observation; data was collected by watching and analyzing people's behavior. Interviews were also conducted; it involved a detailed qualitative interview, on different people across age, race and gender as illustrated by Low and Smith (2013). At the end, conclusions are drawn from the findings of the case studies.

### **3. Role of Public Space on Identity**

Public space plays a great role in defining segregation and bringing out the different obstacles that can limit different identity and a good life. The modern designs influence the way people associate with space. This aspect leads to disruption and attitude towards each other (Tonkiss, 2015). According to the data collected in the local neighborhood, by observation and recording, the following table was generated. A survey of fifty people was done on a public place and recorded against the various activities they were doing.

Table 1. Data showing percentage of different activities in the estate

Activity	No. of people	Percentage
Walking	10	20
Meetings	8	15
Relaxation	38	75
Psychological benefits	28	55
Appreciating nature	20	40
Social interactions	43	85
Getting fresh air	5	10

A public place is found to be defined as a place where strangers often interact and meet. It is highlighted by many researchers that it is a public realm that different people become participants in society (Madanipour, 2013). Different kinds of public spaces are facilitating interactions and meetings. Changes in these spaces from what they were before causing a significant change in people's perspectives. Creating permanent ties between people through social interactions helps in enabling positive outcomes in the social society. It helps in enabling tolerance in the society and enabling positive integration. Previous research shows that conditions for this idea to occur are very limited (Levy, 2015).

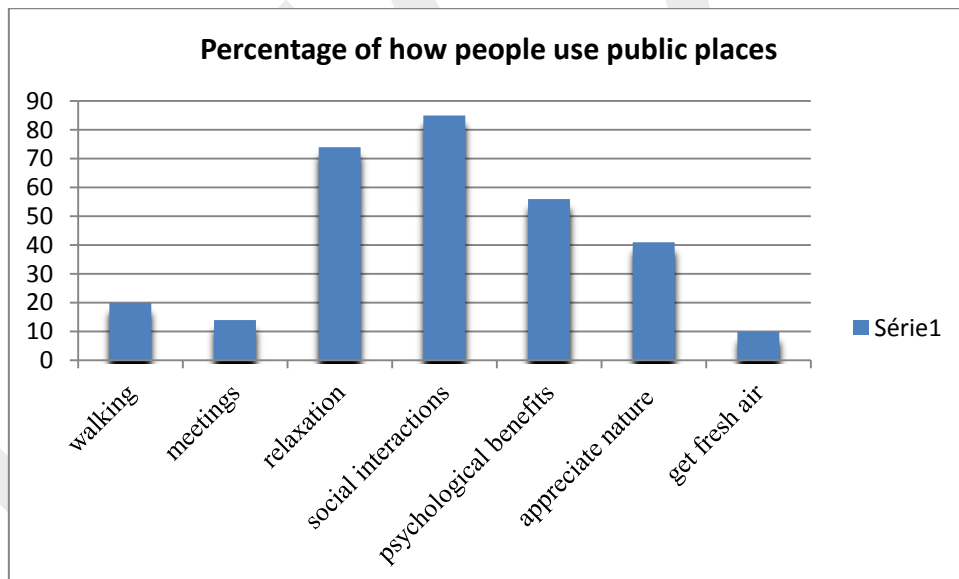


Figure 1. Different uses of public spaces

#### 4. Public Spaces and Culture

The elderly people occupy the places referred to as public spaces during daytime and parents with their children in the morning and the evenings. This is because of school and work while most elderly people are retired; they find comfort and a sense of belonging by sitting in the parks instead of staying indoors idle (Thoits, 2013). This is a clear pattern that is observed every day. It shows the importance of having public spaces in the society.

An environment that is modernized and build does not provide an opportunity to enjoy public space; it does not create a need for the non-locals to enjoy the space (Shaftoe, 2012). The occupation of public space is often governed by various characters; a neighborhood that is designed in such a manner that it limits the flow of people freely. A limiting separation of the public space with the working areas and residential locations, the neighborhood is regarded as a central element where people find comfort (Barton & Tsourou, 2013).



Figure 2. A comfortable public space (Shaftoe, 2012)

Public space is considered to be a square by many researchers; it is the key element of urban planning and an important aspect of public life. This public place is often isolated and unsafe; it often brings discomfort and vulnerability.

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{no.ofparents}}{\text{totalnoofparents}} * 100$$

Feedback	Percentage
Definitely agree	6
Definitely disagree	46
Somewhat agree	14
Somewhat disagree	30

Currently, various neighborhoods are built without the consideration of the external environment. Whether they are located in a safe place, or in a place where people can feel a sense of belonging is often disregarded (Gieseking et al, 2014). The design and planning of urban spaces does not consider how public space is supposed to operate. Different stages of social development are linked with dynamics and variety; a bad urban form puts a lot of pressure and constraints on life and social living. There lack any acceptable places where the urban life can express and move. Larice and Macdonald (2013) have explained that the social structure of a place changes in every 20 years. However, the spatial structure does not change.

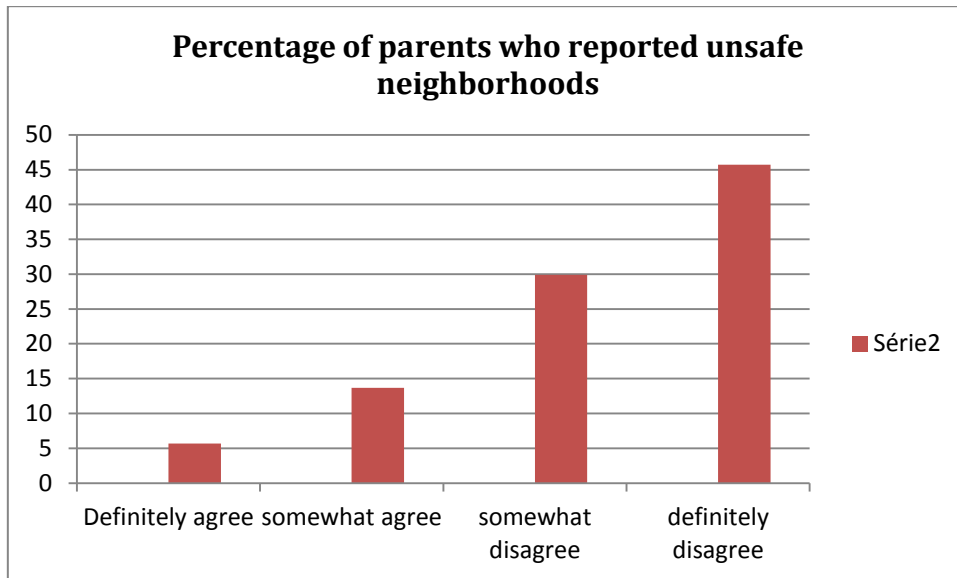


Figure 3. Graphical presentation of safety respondent

### 5. Future expectations

Shaftoe (2012) argues on the idea that many urban places have the potential to become more comfortable and safe, it is further revealed that beauty is important in enabling someone to identify entirely with public space, but a lot of aspects matter, not just one person's opinion. What other members of a public think affects significantly to what degree one would feel a connection with it. A good public space, therefore, needs to have a proper identity, and a good architectural expression.



Figure 4. A public park (Thoits, 2013)

It is a big challenge as pointed out by Thoits (2013), that in the modernist neighborhoods, it's hard to express one's sense of identity. Aesthetics make places seem alike, but they might not be the same time.

Most of the interviews showed that people need a public space that has its identity and architectural design, people are mainly affected by the practical issues affecting a public space. It is their aspect of feeling safe and comfortable on a public square. A feeling of connection must often exist for one to feel proud of open space, and thus identify with a



certain neighborhood. According to Barton & Tsourou (2013), a real public space is one that has room for improvement and has the required potential (Barton & Tsourou, 2013).



Figure 5. An ideal public space (Pile, 2013)

Good and familiar places are an essential element in the versatility of public spaces. The sites need proper planning and maintenance; the planning should be in respect to shadow, sunlight and enough space to accommodate many people (Pile, 2013). Another key aspect is lighting, there should be installed street lights to enhance safety and comfort, and they are often combined with other functions to enhance aesthetics. A lot of different measures can be applied to keep the outdoor environment safe (Taylor & Williams, 2013). Having proper security measures is a good initiative for various places that are perceived as unsafe.



Figure 6. Reclaiming public space (Tarlor & Williams,2013)

## 6. Conclusion

The research shows the sociology and identity of a person is directly related to the space and surrounding. Many people have the notion that the social and physical dynamics of a public space enhance a crucial role in the integration of citizens and the public culture. A town's squares, streets and parks are seen to be the symbols of well-being and self-identity. They are useful expressions of aspirations by visionaries and urban leaders. They show the formation of civic culture. Good public places are seen to be those who can comfortably allow the mixture of culture, social gatherings, celebrations, and economic exchanges. They are the key aspects of our public involvements. They allow us to interact with each other and serve as the main stage of our social and public lives.

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