

"Meaning Quality of Urban Public Places" In Yazd Citizens Perception

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Abstract

Meaning quality of urban public places is a big concern. Various indices shape meaning quality of urban public places. Some indices have more roles in perception quality and some of them less. Finding these indices could help planners and designers to improve meaning quality from the perspective of citizens. The main question of this paper is: what are the main indices in perception the quality of squares in the view of Yazd (Iran) citizens? To answer this question, this paper used survey analysis method. With 376 participant to answer questioners. Process of survey start with literature review to determine meaning quality indices and T-test and Friedman test, in SPSS, used to analysis data. Results indicate that among the 22 indicators, three indicator (public place, accessibility and efficiency) have the most effect on perception meaning quality. Amir Chaqmaq square has the best quality between Yazd squares. Referring to history and heritage was the main index in meaning quality of Amir Chaqmaq square.

Key words

Place, Urban Public Places, Meaning Quality, Citizens Perception, Yazd

▪ **Introduction**

Making sense of place in urban planning and management has proven a formidable challenge.

Over the past four decades a surfeit of place concepts has found its way into scientific research and popular discourse intended to describe people–environment interactions.

Recognizing how places embody various meanings, senses, ideas, and understandings is particularly crucial to investigating place-making in landscape planning and management.

Unfortunately, meaning is a notoriously difficult concept to operational in the human sciences as evidenced by the multiple, overlap-ping, and conflicting positions embedded within and among philosophy, linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, communication, and rhetoric. Rather than engage directly such complex philosophical terrain, place researchers have often sought handy refuge in some previously established operational definition (e.g., as a cognition or attitude) regardless of its suitability to the question under investigation (Williams, 2014). Not only has this contributed to frequent lamentations over terminological confusion and inconsistency in place research (e.g., Relph, 2008), more importantly, it has forestalled much

needed critical refinements to the conceptual and empirical literature. Rather what is needed is for investigations to be more clearly embedded in conceptually coherent frameworks that guide any given investigation of place meaning. The aim is not to eliminate multiple conceptions of place, but rather to acknowledge plurality and position in order to avoid leaving the faulty impression (a) that a satisfactory accounting of meaning is accessible through some singular methodology and (b) that methods function as passive instruments for rendering place meanings, when in fact they impose structures on observations that shape what counts as meaning (Williams & Patterson, 2007). The discussion below can be read as a call for more rigorous and transparent explication of philosophical commitments and implications of one's chosen methodological standpoint.

Physical structure and function is led to place. Place by imagination and memory is defied.

Today, urban spaces are placeless. There isn't citizen perception. The purpose of this research is proposing, effective indicators in perception of citizen in urban spaces.

2. Research methodology

a. Studied area

The studied area is Yazd city in Iran country. So, Yazd province is located in the centre of the country, and its center is city of Yazd. The province has an area of 131,575 km², and according to the most recent divisions of the country, is divided into 11 counties.. Yazd province has a population of over 990,000 of which 75% are estimated as urban residents and 25% resided in rural areas. The city of Yazd is the economic and administrative capital of the province and therefore the most heavily populated.

Yazd is one of the major and historical cities in the world and this city has been known as the oldest adobe and a live city which is the second historical city in the world. Yazd is the capital of Yazd province which is located in center of Iran. This city is located between Shirkooh and Khranq mountains and inside a wide valley. Yazd prosperity started from 5AH and then Atabakan Fars played an important role in the development of the city in past centuries. Yazd is located in South East of Iran.

b. materials and methods

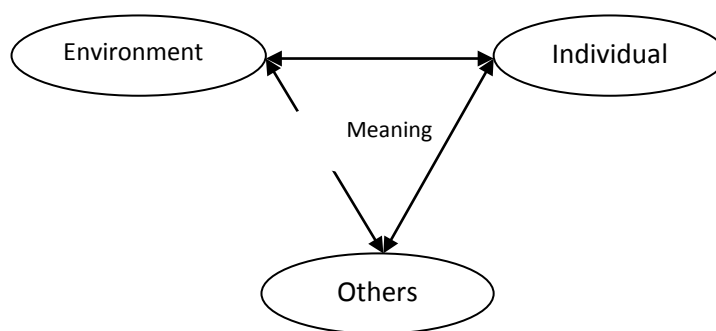
The aim of research is, introducing indices in perception the quality of squares in the view of Yazd (Iran) citizens. So, the research method is "descriptive- analytical". Also, survey analysis method was used. At first, the literature was reviewed due to proposed indicators. In order to analyzing indicators the sample size is 376. So, the questionnaire was used. On the other hand,

T-test and Friedman test, in SPSS, used to analysis data.

3. Literature review

a. Perception and meaning of space

Many definitions have been stated for place, but generally the term ‘place’, as opposed to space, expresses a strong affective bond between a person and a particular setting (Sime, J. D, 1986, pp. 49-63). In other words, place is mixed with human values and principles. As a result, place is a particular space which is covered with meanings and values by the users. Places play an essential and vital role in human life. Each place has its own unique character that is an important issue in social science (Gustafson, P, 2001, pp. 5-16). The reviewed studies reveal that places not only are important elements in developing and maintaining self and group identity but they play a significant role in human behavior and their mental health. Rapoport(1990) argued that places in addition to physical features include messages and meanings that people perceive and decode based on their roles, experiences, expectation and motivations. Therefore, Sense of place is referred to the particular experience of a person in a particular setting. It is a general way someone feels about a place. Sense of place is an important factor in maintaining the quality of the environment. It is also an important aspect in integrating user and place. It contributes to better use, satisfaction and attachment to places. Reviewed seminal literature reveal that in contemporary societies due to the growth of human societies, changes in people’s lifestyles and also development of technological advances places convey no meanings anymore and people suffer from a sense of ‘placelessness’. Relph (1976) explained that ‘placelessness’ refers to the settings which do not have any distinctive personality or sense of place. Relph (1976) claimed that when places cannot be culturally recognized, they suffer from lacking a sense of place; in this case people are faced with placelessness. Therefore, Placelessness can be explained as the physical characteristics of non place, which is culturally unidentifiable environments that are similar anywhere (Sime, J. D, 1986, pp. 49-63). In this regard, Relph argued that designers who are ignoring the meanings that places bring to people’s mind, they try to destroy authentic places and make inauthentic ones (Relph, E, 1976; Gustafson, P, 2001)In the meantime, scholars discuss that since one of the main goals of urban design is creating a sense of place; architects, designers and planners should pay more attention to the quality of places and built environments.



Source: Gustafson: 2001

b. Meaning Approach

Empirical research about meanings of place has focused on different kinds of places and used different methodological approaches. In a large study of some 300 interviews of Canadian cottagers, Jaakson (1986) investigates what recreation homes mean to their owners. He identified ten ‘broad themes of meaning’: duality between routine and novelty, inversion of

everyday life, back-to-nature, identity (identification with the location of the cottage, but also a 'cottager identity'), surety, continuity and sense of place, work, elitism among cottagers, aspirations that differ from those of the locals, and time/distance away from ordinary city life. Jaakson positions his study within the field of tourism re-search and believes that it may contribute to the distending of second-home domestic tourism. In my view, several themes in his analysis also are important for the meanings of place more generally. Some of the themes, however, seem vague and at times overlapping and some appear to belong to different analytical levels.

Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) use a different approach in their interview study of place and identity processes among residents in the London Docklands. In a creative adaptation of identity theory, they investigate in what ways the place attachment of their respondents expresses the principles of identity described by Breakwell (1986, 1992):

- (1) *Distinctiveness*: respondents use place identification to distinguish themselves from others;
- (2) *Continuity*: the place provides a sense of continuity of the self, as respondents have lived at the same place for a long time, or have lived at the same type of place (cf. Feldman, 1990);
- (3) *Self-esteem*: respondents feel proud of the place where they live;
- (4) *Self-efficacy*: qualities of the residential area facilitate respondents' everyday life in various ways.

Public space is one of the necessary elements of urban daily life and the most important section of cities. It is a scene that shows social life. "The characteristic of public space represent social life, urban culture and daily issues and meanwhile impacts on them" (Madani-Pour, A, 2008). It is called as a space, which is assessable to all public members, but individuals are not free to do what they wish and they should obey the norms and laws (Habibi, 2008, p. 39). General space empowers us to experience and understand the existence of other people to be identified with their viewpoints that is necessary for survival of life in human being society (Madanipour, 2010). Public space is space of city and artificial body of environment that citizens should assess them without any limitation. This assess should be skeletal, visual and social. In this space people experience togetherness and represent the social life. Such social life can be represented in the form of various functional and ritual activities. These spaces are multipurpose that their control, management and preparation are a duty and administrative responsibility (Carmona, 2009). Public space is a place to enjoy experiences, hobbies and different urban activities, a place to exercise, playing, eating, political usages and more important a place for walking and rest (Habibi, 2008).

Quality of public urban spaces and influential factors: The crisis of the quality of public spaces is one of the most important issues of our cities. This issue on one hand causes mental and behavioral abnormalities and also decreasing social activities, on the other hand causes decreasing of the quality of urban environment and declining social, cultural and visual values in urban spaces. Improvement of the quality of public spaces of cities influences on daily and social activities of people who are habitant in the city (Habibi S. M., 2000). Fransis Tibaldez believes that learning from the past, compounding users and activities, freedom of passengers, accessibility for public, providing transparent and persistent environments, controlling and compounding methods are of principles and criteria that applying them one can increase the quality of public spaces of the contemporary cities (Golkar, 2005, p. 28). In Kurosh Golkar's ideal the qualities of livelihood, readability, visual character, sense of time, sensual richness, dependency, learning, influence and movement, formal and user compound, generality, general

quality, climate welfare, security and safety, flexibility, coordinating with nature, energy - efficiency and environmental clearness are called the qualities of urban design.

C. Quality of urban public places meaning

While we see the space as an open and abstract extension, place is a part of space that is occupied by a person or something having valuable and meaningful load (Madani-Pour, A, 2008). To people space is an abstract issue and what they are interacting with is place. Inhibition area, ally, street, square, city center and as such are place to people and each place has a meaning so that the expectation of a place only belongs to that place (Pakzad, 2002, p. 6). The characteristic of place is its importance than space and mixing it with human values and characteristic of space is its abstraction than place (Falihat, Mohammad Sadiq, 2006, p. 57). Individual facing place see him in historical, cultural, physical, emotional and conceptual relations with environment that causes the sense of dependency in him that can reach peace and welfare. Rapaport defines place as one of the four defining factors of space that in compound with the meaning, time and communication composes the man's environment (Modiri, Atoosa, 2008, p. 69). Ralf considers places as central meaning of environment that composes of personal experiences. By converging space and meaning, people individually or in group form changes space to place (Habibi S. M., 2000). In his idea, the meaning of place is in mental images and people's memories and is the most important factor in identity of a place. Until the meanings of places occur in the physical structure and activities, nothing can be found, but the meaning should be searched in mental pictures and experiences of man (Habibi R. S., 2008). Also, Lynch specifies three factors of "skeletal form", "activities" and "meaning of special order" as three main factor of place identity. The sense of place does not exist inside these factors, but it shapes because of mutual relationship of man with these factors (Habibi R. S., 2008). Dependency to place comes from activities and interactions between man-place and man-man in a spatial place and by mutual influence of sensitivity, Urban design to create suitable urban places and increasing the quality of current places needs "recognition and quality evaluation" of public spaces (Golkar, K, 2005 , p. 28). Public spaces are places to hold rituals, economic exchange and social interactions between various people with different features and cultures. The good function of a place services as one important element in our public and social life. Public Spaces Projects by evaluating the quality of public spaces by many people around the world considers the successful of these places in four following key qualities: Assess and communication; accessibility of public space. User and activity; cooperation and involvement of people in public space activities. Relief and imaginability; the sense of relief in space and creating a good mental image from public space. Sociability of public space; it means a place that people get together to meet each other ((PPS), 2012).

4. Findings research

a. Proposed indicators

Based on research method, at first scientific studies has been reviewed. So, indicators have been concluded from some ideas such as: (Lynch, 1981), (Violich, 1983), Bentli, 2012, Coleman, 1987, Alen jacobz & appelyard (1998), Southworth, 1989, Greene, 1992, Houghton & Hunter, 1994, Punter & Carmona, 1997, Carmona 2003. Also, National and international institutions such as PPS, theoretical issues about the quality and the quality of

the survey have developed during the past few decades. Table 1 shows, the components of urban space quality in scientific ideas.

Scientific idea	Proposed criteria
Lynch,1981	Vitality, meaning, adaptability, Accessibility, control, justice, efficiency
Violich, 1983	Social life versus private life ,Freedom of choice, Motivation through contrasting urban forms, preservation of native cultural
Bentli, 2012	Permeability, variety, robustness, adaptability, richness, efficiency, livability
Trancik, 1986	Connectivity, enclosure, attached ledge, control of axis,
Coleman, 1987	Urban restoration , Historic Preservation, design for walk-able, vitality and variety, natural and cultural context, regard to architectural values
Alen jacobz & appelyard (1998)	Vitality, identity, accessibility to opportunities, meaning, social life, environment for all
Southworth, 1989	Legibility, structure, form, sense of place, identity, landscape, human scale
Greene, 1992	Four components: function (connectivity , safety and variety), Discipline (including cohesion, clarity, coherence and balance), identity (unity), Attractiveness (including scale, rotation, visual and performance, vitality and harmony)
Haughton & Hunter, 1994	Variety, centralization, democracy, robustness, security, appropriate scale, organic design, appropriate economic, flexibility, partnership of user
Punter & Carmona, 1997	Urban design issues, Urban form, environment sustainability quality, urban landscape quality, urban form quality, building form quality, public space quality
CABE. DETR, OPDM, 2000	Accessibility, attractiveness, vitality, functional, security, flexibility
Carmona 2003	Accessibility, soft and hard space, security, urban landscape, density and mixed land use,
Golkar , 2012	Experimental aesthetic components (Personalization , , sensory richness, sense of time, visual character, legibility) , Environmental (harmony with nature, energy efficiency, clean environment), Performance (permeability and movement, mixed land use , quality public, Climatic comfort, safety and security, compatibility, flexibility).
PPS	Main four components: sociality (social reaction, variety, cooperating, friendship),accessibility (Continuity, proximity, eligibility, walk-ability, availability), image of city (security, walk-ability, Historical, attractive), land use (activity, vitality, functional, sustainable, native, festival

Table 1: components of urban space quality in scientific ideas

Source: researchers

Also, table 2 proposes final indicators with function and conceptual definition.

	indicator	Conceptual definition
Explicit	Eco-friendly form	The importance of respecting the environment in the form of square
	Visual compatibility	Visual discipline form Square factors in the resident perception
	Visual character	Unique understanding of the Square
	Accessibility	Ease of access to the square and its spaces
	Permeability	Ease of entry to different parts of the square is possible
	Walk- ability	The perceived ease of use in mind pedestrians
	Environment for all	Square is available at different times
	Social reaction	Social place for improving social reaction
	Variety land use	The square should be proposed variety land uses
	Customizable	Person feel comfortable to do
	Performance	Efficiency and performance must be appropriate Square
	Happiness	The square should be happiness
	richness	Strong sense of aesthetics is created in the perception
	Friendly	Familiarity perception is created
	According to past values or historical	Exploration of previous Learn With cultural and historical meanings in the min communicate
	Eligibility	Make clear map in the mind
	Learning	Associated with previous knowledge
	Personalization	Be consistent with the ideas and expectations
	Security	It is led to perception of security
Sense of time	It is updated	
Implied	Cultural	With cultural Learning of persons is associated
	Meanings, manifestations and spiritual themes	prevention of neglect and attention to the spiritual realm

Table 2: meaning of place quality indicators

Source: researchers

Public spaces belong to the all of citizens and provided the inherent needs of them for face to face social relationships within the social and city framework. So assess how experience and understanding of these places can be considered as one of the most important criteria for measuring the quality of urban spaces. This research has been done on the geographical domain of the Yazd city. The case study is the Evaluation of public places in urban scale, in the Yazd city. Data were collected using a questionnaire. These questionnaires are about the importance of meaning quality indices and meaning quality of the Yazd public spaces in the perception of citizens. According to the research study, the questionnaire has been simplified as much as possible to come close to understanding the different individuals and groups. In order to assess the impact of each indicators on the citizens' perception of the quality of places, questions were proposed in LIKERT scale. The statistical population of this research was obtained using Cochran formula and taking into account the total population in Yazd are about 500,000 people and the error coefficient of 0.6, so the sample size is 376. The questionnaire asked citizens to elect the highest quality spaces that among the public spaces of Yazd. Each indicator's score range of meaning quality indices is between 1 to 5. Answer the questionnaires were described using descriptive statistics and then were analyzed by one-Sample T test and Friedman test in SPSS software. The results of this analysis are presented below section.

b. Descriptive findings

In terms of gender structure about half of the respondents were male and half of them were female. Also, more than half of them were single and others were married. The average age of the subjects was 34 years. In terms of education, about 40 percent of respondents had a master's degree and 30 percent of participation had bachelor degree. The birthplace of half respondents in this study is Yazd city and others were born in other cities. The participants were residing in Yazd city. Table 3 shows the relative distribution of respondents according to the context of feature.

Table 3: The relative distribution of respondents according to the context of feature

SD	M	%	F	Variable			SD	M	%	F	Variable	
-	-	54.5	205	single	status	marital	-	-	50.3	189	Male	Gender

		45.5	171	Married				49.7	187	Female	
		100	376	Total				100	376	Total	
-	-	17.6	66	Diploma or less	Education	12.7	33.67	35.4	133	Less than 25 years	Age
		7.7	29	Associate's Degree				19.1	72	25-30 years	
		35.1	132	Bachelor's degree				45.5	171	Over 30 years	
		39.6	149	Master's Degree or higher							
		100	376	Total							
-	-	80.1	301	Yazd	Residence	-	-	50.3	189	Yazd	birthplace
		19.9	75	Other cities				49.7	187	Other cities	
		100	376	Total				100	376	total	

c. Analytical findings

- *Measuring the perception of residents (In terms of divided squares)*

The participants were asked to express their judgments about the quality of urban public places in order to evaluate the effect of the 22 indicators on the perception of respondents and their judgment about the meaning quality. Answers were analyzed using one-sample t-test and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: analyzed indicators (source: researchers)

Permeability	Meanings, manifestations and spiritual themes	Culturally	Sense of time	Security	Personality	Learning	Eligibility	According to past values or historical	friendly	Richness	Happiness	Performance	Personalization	Variety land use	Social reaction	Environment for all	Walk- ability	Accessibility	Visual character	Visual compatibility	Eco-friendly form	<i>indicator</i>
																					<i>statistic</i>	

0.281	0.001	0.844	0.330	0.466	0.121	0.001	0.084	0.001	0.001	0.141	0.001	0.033	0.001	0.205	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.003			
-1.080	-24.26	0.197	0.975	-0.730	1.555	-14.47	-1.73	-13.70	7.010	-1.47	6.801	2.13	-7.8	1.27	3.28	5.048	-14.58	-5.272	-22.64	-20.66	-2.97					
1.38	1.04	1.57	1.42	1.41	1.52	1.18	1.16	1.155	1.18	1.39	1.41	1.25	1.36	1.30	1.41	1.38	1.16	1.23	0.94	1.02	1.35					
2.92	1.69	3.02	3.07	2.95	2.88	2.12	2.9	2.18	3.43	2.89	3.49	3.14	2.45	3.09	3.24	3.39	2.12	2.66	1.90	1.90	2.79					
																									M	
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																										P-Value

The values more than 3 for each indicator represent significant effect on the quality of judgment in the perception of citizens. According to this analysis, these indicators i.e., variety of land use, Social interactions, Sense of time, The environment for all, Welcoming and friendly, Culturally, performance have average above 3 and have been effective to understand the meaning of place quality in Yazd city. The results showed that other indicators are not effective on respondents' perception of the quality squares.

▪ *Respondent's prioritization of the meaning quality indices*

Achieving to the importance of each indicator in shaping the perceptual quality of the squares was important result of this study that will be used in the future by others. To prioritize the respondents' perception of meaning quality indicators, Friedman test was used. Table 5 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 5. The results of Friedman test

indicator	Conceptual definition
Eco-friendly form	13.06
Visual compatibility	11.94
Visual character	13.1
Accessibility	12.50
Walk- ability	14.43
Environment for all	13.33
Social reaction	10.75
Variety land use	7.53
Customizable	13.49
Performance	14.28
Happiness	12.76
Richness	11.28
Friendly	11.50
According to past values or historical	12.33
Eligibility	9.41
Learning	11.68
Personalization	12.34
Security	9.11

Sense of time	5.33
Culturally	11.38
Meanings, manifestations and spiritual themes	10.27
Permeability	11.22
Chi-Square Test	915.06
Significance level	0.001

Source: researchers

The results of Friedman test confirms that there are significant difference between 22 indicator's impacts on meaning quality of spaces perception. It should be noted that the most important indicator in the formation of meaning quality are pleasance, performance and the environment for all.

Conclusion

Analyzing the meaning quality of urban public spaces by means of quantitative methods and experimental models is an approach that is used to identify the overall level of quality. Meanwhile, access to reliable results close to reality can be used to planning and decision-making around proceeding strategy and physical, non-physical intervention on public spaces. This study was done based on using those approaches of measuring environmental quality. According to table 2, it can be found that the most powerful aspects of Yazd public space's meaning quality are pleasance, performance and the environment for all in the perception of residents. Interestingly that the other indicators have no great contributions in the perception of citizens and qualitative judgment of them. This result indicates that insignificant levels, explicit indicators are easily form. But if urban places provide the ability to perceive the implicit indices, the implicit indexes due to the relationship with audience meaning context are allocated the greater contribution in perceived quality.

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