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Flânerie as the Most Important Leading- to -Success Activity of Public Spaces, Case Study Valiasr Street, Tehran, IRAN

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to find leading-to-success activities for creating successful public space in the meaning of creating more social activities. So Leading-to-success activities are those who have direct effect on the creation of social activities. For this reason, article highlights different levels of activities according to Gehl, Carr et al., Oldenburg, and Whyte; and verifies which activities are leading-to-success activities. Then by using statistical method examines the correlation between leading-to-success activities and social activity in Valiasr Street. The correlation between levels of activity shows that optional activities completely have direct effect on creation of social activities in different levels. But, recreational walking and window shopping (which could be named flânerie) are principle factors in the creation of permanent sociable place.
KEY WORDS: Successful public space, activity levels, lead-to-success activities, flânerie

INTRODUCTION

Public space is a mix of physical milieu with various activities whose purpose is to show the social life visible for all (Carr et al. 1992, p.11). All parts of an urban fabric which are accessible physically and visually for all are considered as public space. They are the most important part of towns and cities in which the greatest amount of contact and interaction among people take place (Tibbalds, 1992, p.1). In those spaces, existence of users is not the only sign of success; a successful space attracts **different levels of activities** as well. As Whyte said, "the best-used plazas are sociable places with higher proportion of couple, more people in group, more people meeting people, or exchanging goodbyes" (Whyte, 1980, p.17). Like Whyte, many theorists of public space believe that the philosophy of public space is based on their **activities** and the best kind of **activities** is the social one. Public space is a place for social interaction where people meeting each other face to face, people who are not member of private circle of family or friends. As Walzer (Walzer, 1986, pp.470-475) says public space is defined as "a space we share it with strangers, people who are not our relatives, friends or work associates". It is a common ground for social interaction, intermingling, and communication; and a stage for social learning, personal development, and information exchange (Loukaitou-sideris & banerjee, 1998, p.175).Therefore, types of activities which take place in public space are important for its success. So, **Identification** of different activities and the **relation** between them in public space could be the key step in defining lead-to-success activities.

Concepts, theories, and theoretical framework

The role of activities in the success of public spaces

Many theorists present activities as one of the factors to create a successful public space. In this matter, Montgomery (1998, p.96) presents Vitality as the number of people who are in and around the street at different times of the day and night, the number of cultural events which take place during a year, and the presence of an active street life, as one of the factors creating high quality activities. Thus combinations of different activities are considered to be the key to successful urban places (Montgomery, 1998, p.98)

Successful public spaces support and facilitate the activities of people and activities have key role in changing spaces to successful one. As Jan Gehl (1989) believed that a successful space is identified according to the life on the street and different ways in which **activity** occurs in and through spaces and buildings; he also mentioned people and human activity were the greatest object of attention and interest, and they were more essential and more relevant than the spaces and buildings themselves (Gehl, 1996, p.31).

According to these explanations, the importance of existing different types of activity for creating successful public spaces is realized. Now these activities need to be classified, for understanding which ones are leading-to-success activities.

Different types of activities in public spaces

In this section different types of activities will be determined in public spaces and distinguishing which ones are leading-to-success activities.

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Jan Gehl (1996) categorized public space activities into three groups: necessary, optional and social activities. Explanations of each activity level will be presented.

- **Necessary activities** include those that are more or less compulsory – going to school or to work, shopping, waiting for a bus or a person, running errands, distributing mail – in other words, all activities in which those involved are required to participate in a greater or lesser degree. Among other activities, this group includes the great majority of those related to walking. The participants have no choice in enacting (Gehl, 1996, p.11). Gehl somewhere else mentions "where public life is dominated by necessary activities, the quality of public spaces is not at all-important issue. People will use the city spaces regardless of quality because they have to." (Gehl,2007,p.16)
- **Optional activities** – are undertaken voluntarily. This category includes such activities as taking a walk to get a breath of fresh air, standing around enjoying life, or sitting and sunbathing. Most of the recreational activities that are especially pleasant to pursue outdoors are found precisely in this category of activities. (Gehl, 1996, pp.11-13).
- **Social activities** are all activities that depend on the presence of others in public spaces. Social activities include children at play, greetings and conversations, communal activities of various kinds, and finally – as the most widespread social activity – passive contacts, that is, simply seeing and hearing other people (ibid, pp.13-14). Social activities could also be termed "**resultant**" activities, because in nearly all instances they evolve from activities linked to the other two activity categories (necessary and optional). They develop in connection with the other activities because people are in the same space, meet, pass by one another, or are merely within view. Social activities occur spontaneously, as a direct consequence of people moving around and being in the same spaces. This implies that social activities are indirectly supported whenever necessary and optional activities are given better conditions in public spaces (Gehl, 1996, p.14). Table 1 shows these activities.

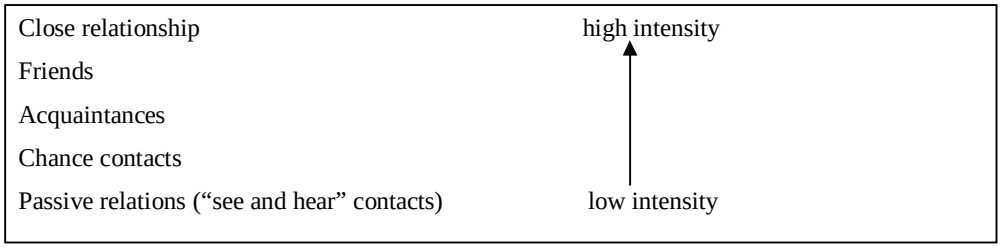
Table 1.The scale of activities in different levels and in successful and unsuccessful environments

	Poor in quality of physical environment	Good in quality of physical environment
necessary activities		
optional activities		
Resultant activity (social activities)		

Source: Gehl, 1996, p.13

Gehl, in connections to activities, defines some levels for the relationship between users which is termed as "degree of contact". Its levels ranges from passive relation to friendly and close relationship scale (Gehl, 1996, p.17). Consequently, the levels of relationship reflect the levels of activity, so close relationship is considered as social activity. Gehl says life between buildings represents primarily the low-intensity contacts located at the bottom of the scale. But these contacts (activities) valuable both as independent contact form and as prerequisites for other, more complex interactions (Gehl, 1996,p.17). Figure 1 shows different levels of intensity.

Figure 1. Different levels of relation intensity



Source: Gehl, 1996, p.17

If activity between buildings is missing, the lower end of the contact scale disappears. The varied transitional forms between being alone and being together also disappears. The boundaries between isolation and contact become sharper. People are either alone or with others on a relatively demanding and exacting level

of contact (ibid, 1996, p.19). So the **value of different activities** in public space was evaluated according to their role in **making boundaries, flexible and soft.**

Carr et al. allocate five duties for public spaces including comfort, relaxation, passive engagement, active engagement and discovery. In this research active and passive engagement, which will be presented next, are important because they could be considered as social activity or opportunity for social contact.

Passive engagement: It involves the need for an encounter with the setting, albeit without becoming actively involved. Perhaps the prime form of passive engagement is people-watching (Carr et al. 1992).

Active engagement: it means direct experience with place and the people within it. Although some people find satisfaction in people-watching, others desire more direct contact with people – whether they are strangers in a site or members of their own group.

Another concept in relation to passive and active engagement is "triangulation" as Whyte explains that features or occurrences in a plaza, such as an entertainer (like street performance (Simpson, 2011,p.8))or a fine sculpture, will often result in what he calls “triangulation” whereby that special feature “provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to each other” (Whyte,1980, p.94).

Consequently, most of the views concentrate on sitting activities of public space, although in this article emphasize is on both, sitting and moving. As Carmona noted (Carmona et al. 2003, p.67) to design successful public spaces, it is essential to understand movement, especially that of pedestrian. Pedestrian movement is compatible with the notion of streets as social space (ibid, p.67). Movement through public space is at the heart of urban experience, an important factor in generating life and activity (ibid, p.169) the movement of walkers is important to animate the horizontal linearity of the street (Vergunst, 2010, p.381). Hillier also emphasized the pedestrian movement by presenting “by product” discussion. “By products” are those spaces between source and destination which have potential contact. Hillier believed that the streets which have more “by product”, have more potential for generating contact (Hillier, 1996a, p.126). So, he believes that moving in different grids of streets present different levels of contacts and so, different level of activity from merely movement to upper level of contact is probable in them.

Moreover, in public space there is another kind of **moving** activity which called “**flânerie**”. That means **strolling** and **looking without a special purpose**. (Tester, 1994, p.1 noted in Banerjee, 2001, p.14). Referring to "third place" concept of Oldenburg (1989), Banerjee affirms that **successful public life** is a combination of “**flanerie**” and **third place** (Banerjee, 2001, p.14). In third place, as Oldenburg (1989) claims, the most important activity is “conversation” but when the spoken contact is absence (out of third places), people’s bodily gestures (flanerie) become even more important for the creation of sociality (Vergunst, 2010, 380). Banerjee continues, that flanerie is only a stage set that can be easily changed and embellished to accommodate celebrations, happenings, and other such ephemera. However, the success of street and spaces demonstrates a shift of emphasis from form to function—that being flânerie (ibid, pp.14-15).

In contrast, there are some views against the importance of moving activities for public space .Gehl Architecture Aps (2002, p.49) expressed, high number of **pedestrians walking** in the city does not necessarily indicate high level of quality and otherwise, high number of people choosing to spend time in the city indicates a lively city of high urban quality. And also Carmona (Carmona et al. 2003, p.69) noted **movement space** has few opportunities for interaction, and development facing onto it will tend to be socially passive.

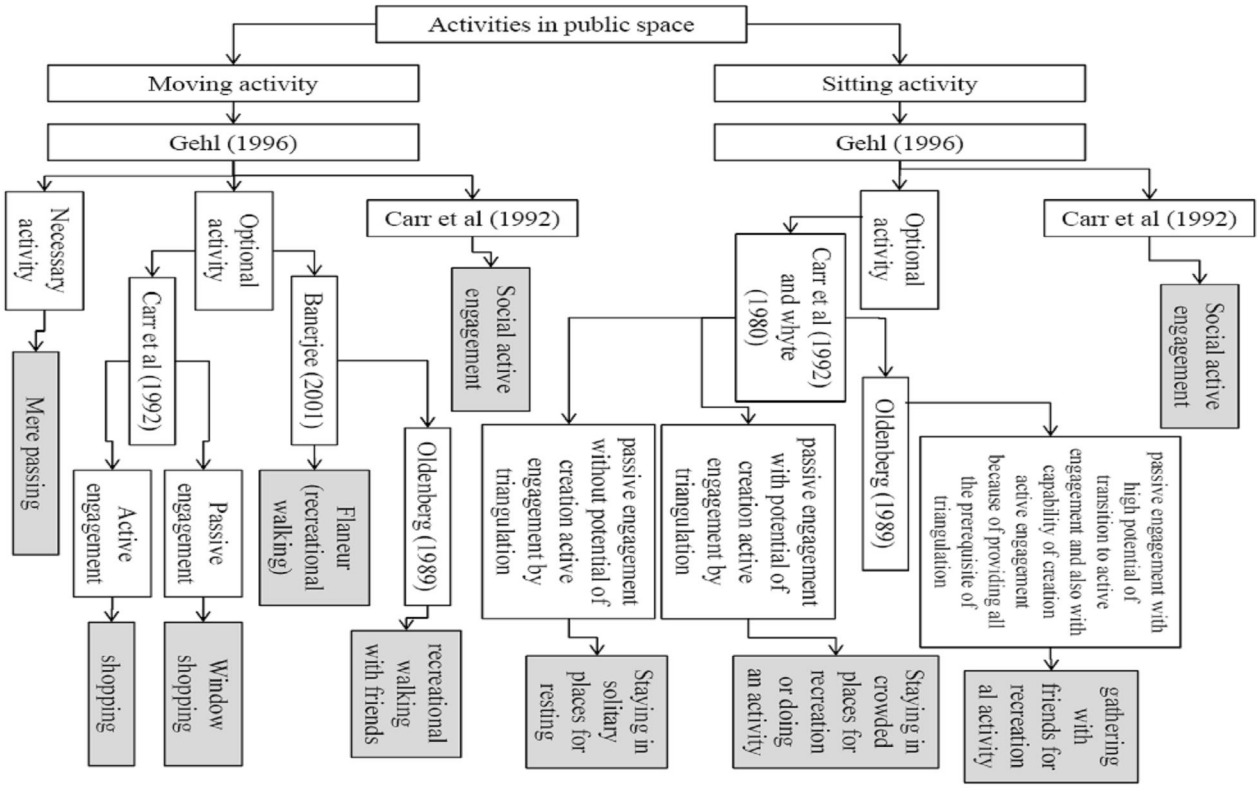
Theoretical framework:

So up to here different types of activities in public space had been defined. Summary of literature review is presented in Figure 2. Therefore, levels of activity in this survey are classified into 9 levels of interval scale, from necessary (merely passing) to social active engagement. These levels are presented in Table 2. As shown in figure 2 the most equipped activity in public space is social active engagement (it was named social activity). In next section it will be presented what types of activities (the other levels of activities except social active engagement) have more effect on social active engagement, and in this way determining Leading-to-success activities will be possible.

Table 2 different levels of activity in public space

Levels of activity	Activities in this level
Level 1	Mere passing
Level 2	Passing and window shopping
Level 3	Passing and shopping
Level 4	Recreational walking
Level 5	Recreational walking with friends
Level 6	Sitting in solitary places for resting
Level 7	Sitting in crowded places for recreation or doing an activity
Level 8	Sitting with friends for recreation
Level 9	Sitting and involving in direct contact with strangers

Figure 2 Conclusion of literature review



Question of research:

As successful public space is one that people mostly use it for active engagement or social contact, then the question of research is,

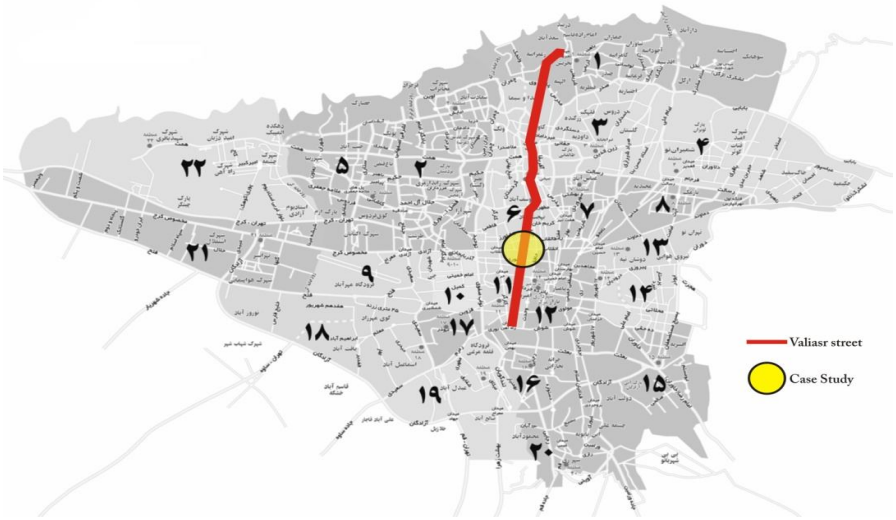
What kinds of activities could be leading-to-success activity in urban public space?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Selection of case study

Case study is the section of Valiasr Street between Jomhuri junction and Valiasr square. This street is one of the most important streets in the spatial structure of Tehran (Figure 3). It starts from Rahahan Square at the southern part of the city extending towards Tajrish square in northern part of the city, showing different characters along this long path. The reason for the selection of this section was because of its mix land-use and also being very active public space. It contains old and tall buttonwood trees. This street has more than 11000 buttonwood trees along itself which creates unique identity for it. The most frequent land-use in the street are administration units, universities, embassies, shopping centers, residential units, hotels, banks, cinemas, commercial unites, etc. Because of this reason, the street is used by wide range of people.

Figure 3.Location of Valiasr Street (case study) in the map of Tehran



There are two prerequisites which could verify validity of findings. The first one is general quality of physical aspect of street as pictured in Figure 4. Physical quality of street was evaluated higher than normal. So this can justify the process of research according to Gehl view which is "optional activities take place only when exterior conditions are optimal". The second prerequisite is desired number of people who are present in the public space. So we should emphasize that all former discussions or findings of research will be significant if **desired number** of people would be present in public space. Although, Whyte says the problem in public spaces is underuse not overuse (Whyte, 1980, p.73) some do not believe this and on contrary, emphasize on the population desirability. Population desirability in the meaning of comfort in physical aspect of public space (Gehl Architecture Aps,2002; Fruin,1971; Jacobs, 1993) and also comfort in psychological aspect of that (Ardent,1958; Simmel, 1903). Ardent (Arendt, 1958, noted in Madanipour, 2003, pp.168-9) believed that when public space is very crowded, the biggest problem is not the number of population but the world among them would lose the ability to attract people and make relations. Simmel (noted in Bridge & Watson, 2010, p.105) also introduces blasé in metropolis where agglomeration of so many people exists, as stimulates the nerves to their utmost reactivity until they finally can no longer produce any reaction at all. Figure 5 presents desirability of population. In Valiasr Street for calculating the desired number of people, Fruin method (1971) was used. Fruin determined six level of service for pedestrian (From A for under used space to F for over used one). Figure 6 prove that Valiasr-Street stand in desirable level of population.

Figure 4. Physical quality identified in the case study

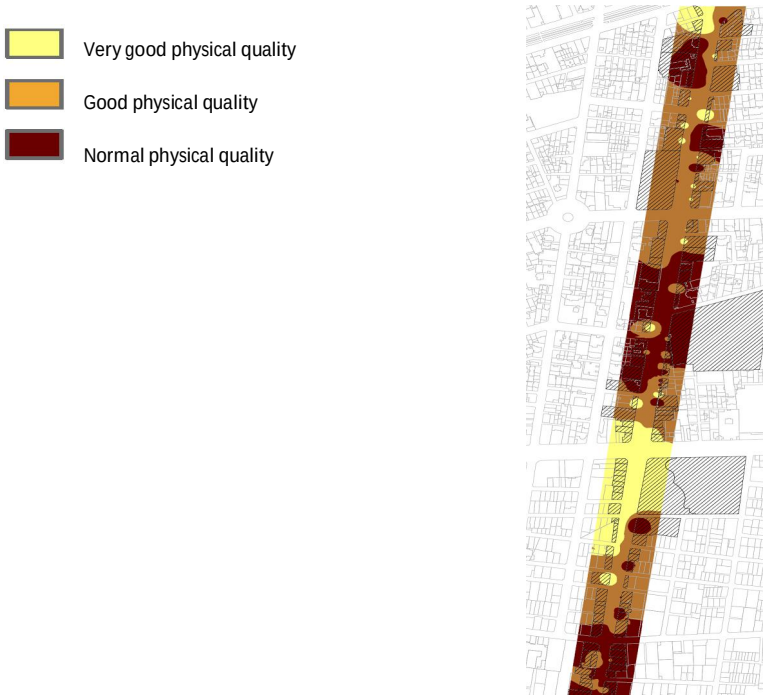
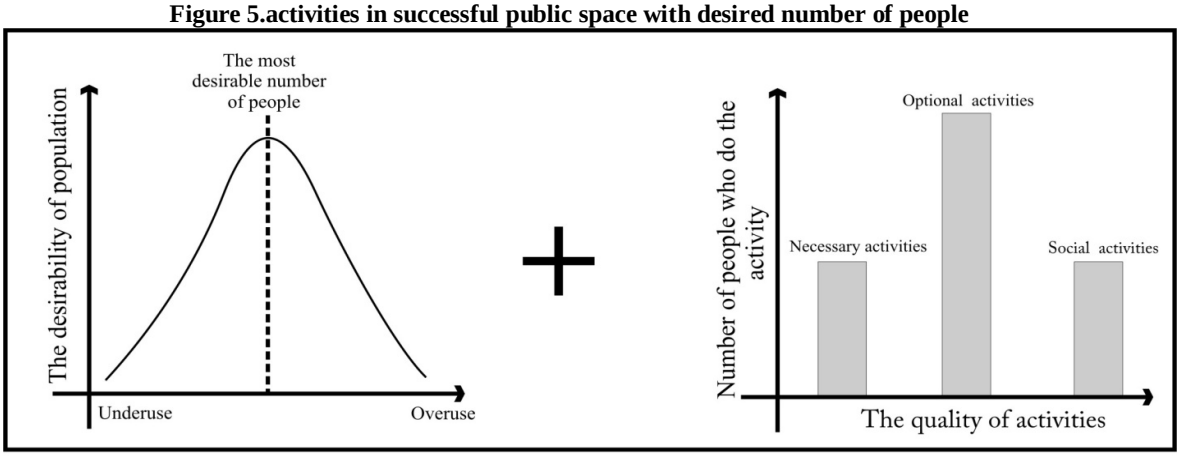


Figure 5.activities in successful public space with desired number of people



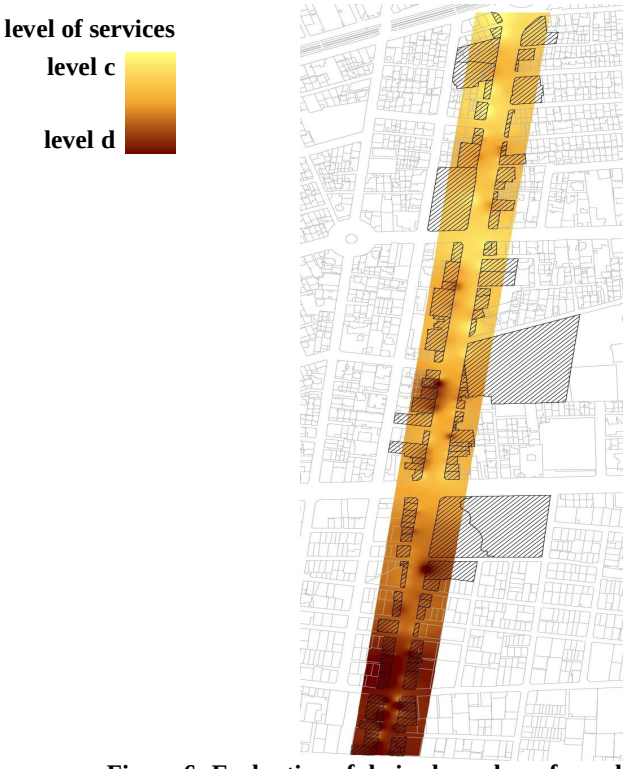


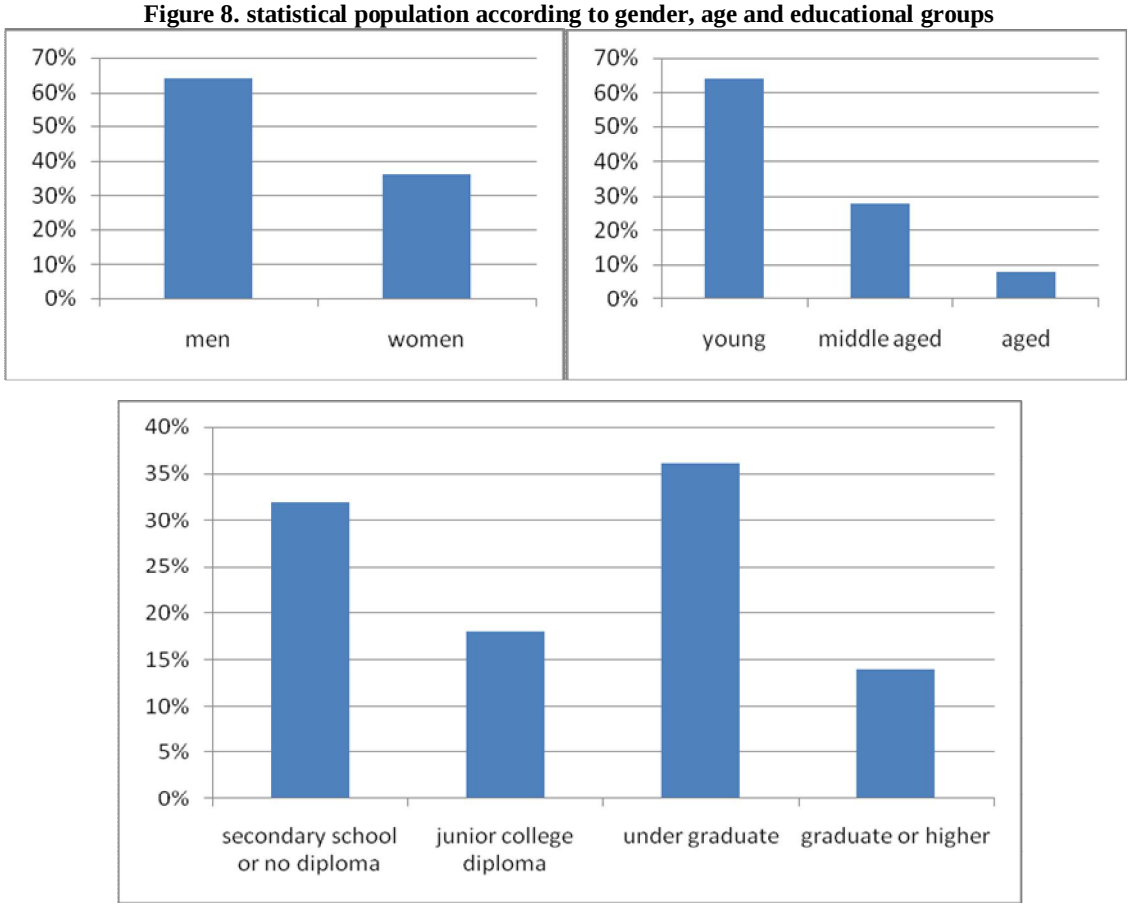
Figure 6: Evaluation of desired number of people in Valiasr Street

Sample size:

For gathering data systematically, the case study had been divided into 124 sub- areas (see in Figure 7). These sub-areas have been specified by each building in the space. Since the populations of users were various in different frontages, sampling method used in sub-areas was stratified sampling based on user's population. Survey technique was quantitative. Required data were collected by questionnaires. Since, the statistical population was unlimited, therefore the sampling standard error in this research was considered 0.05 with significance level of 0.95.The sample size calculated, was 400.

Figure 7. Presentation of 124 sub-areas

Figure 8. statistical population according to gender, age and educational groups



Indicators, validity and reliability analyzing unit:

Indicators of research are different activities as shown in table 2 and are measured in interval levels. According to the method of research which is testing theory, selecting indicators from presented theories justify the validity of them. For evaluating the reliability, correlation coefficient is calculated for the data. Questionnaire's reliability has been calculated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient which has been measured 0.83 in this survey. Questionnaire was used for achieving different levels of activity. As each user might have selected several levels of activity, the process of transformation from interval scale to ratio scale has been achieved. It means that, if 8 questionnaires were filled in a sub- area and 4 people referred to level 1, score 0.5 were considered for level 1 in this sub- area. According to this process the best statistical method for answering research question was Pierson correlation technique. So, correlation testing was performed for all levels and result was presented in table 3 which had been verified according to significant level.

Table 3.Correlation and meaningful level between activity levels

Functional levels	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Level 1	-	-	-	-0.19		-	-	-	-
Sig.	-	-	-	0.03		-	-	-	-
Level 2	-	-	-	-		-	-	0.24	-
Sig.	-	-	-	-		-	-	0.0069	-
Level 3	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Sig.	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Level 4	-0.19	-	-	-	0.35	0.39	-	0.20	0.17
Sig.	0.03	-	-	-	0.001	0.000	-	0.019	0.047
Level 5				0.35					0.14
Sig.				0.001					0.042
Level 6	-	-	-	0.39		-	-	-	0.24
Sig.	-	-	-	0.000		-	-	-	0.0065
Level 7	-	-	-	-		-	-	0.33	0.31
Sig.	-	-	-	-		-	-	0.0001	0.0004
Level 8	-	0.24	-	0.20		-	0.33	-	0.27
Sig.	-	0.0069	-	0.019		-	0.0001	-	0.0021
Level 9	-	-	-	0.17	0.14	0.24	0.31	0.27	-
Sig.	-	-	-	0.047	0.042	0.0065	0.0004	0.0021	-

RESULTS

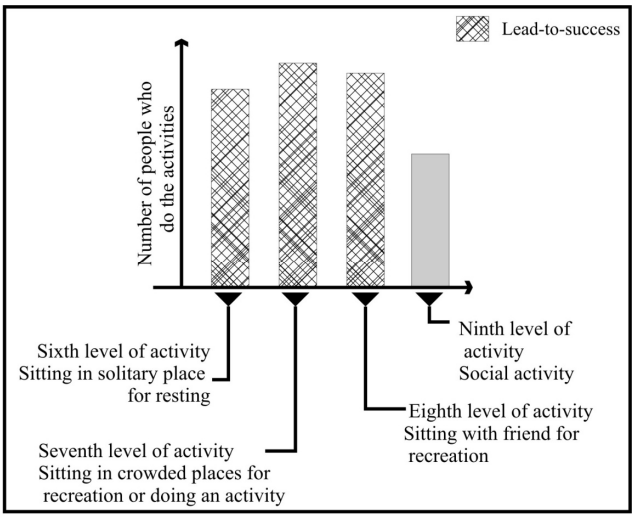
All findings of research have been presented according to figure5 which shows the relation between desired number of people and main public space activities. Also the sitting and moving activities will be separated according to optional and necessary role that they can play.

Sitting activities:

These activities occur when people sit in public space and are classified in three levels of optional which are: "sitting in solitary places for resting" (level 6), "sitting in crowded places for recreation or doing an activity" (level 7), "sitting with friends for recreation" (level 8).According to correlation between the sitting optional activities and social activity (level 9), all sitting activities have correlation with social activity, so all of them are leading-to-success activities. But each of sitting activities plays different role in successful public spaces. As presented in table 3, correlation coefficient between social activity (level 9) with sitting levels (level 6,7,8) are in medium range (0.24,0.31,0.27). So based on correlations rate, figure 9 shows the effect of each sitting activities on success of public space.

Results show that people who desire sitting in a place or doing activity near population (level 7) have the most influence on social activity. The second significant level which affects social activity is recreational sitting with friends (level 8). The last level is "sitting in solitary place for resting" (level 6) which has already the least social character by itself. So it means that being lonely in public space is more leading-to-success activity than when people coming to public space with their friends.

Figure9. Diagram of sitting activities in successful public space



Moving activity

These activities occur when people move in space by different intentions and have been classified into five levels which are "mere passing", "window shopping", "shopping", "recreational walking" "recreational walking with friends". Referring to Gehl theory "mere passing" is clearly necessary activity although the others are optional activities. In contrast to optional sitting activities, optional moving ones do not completely support social activity.

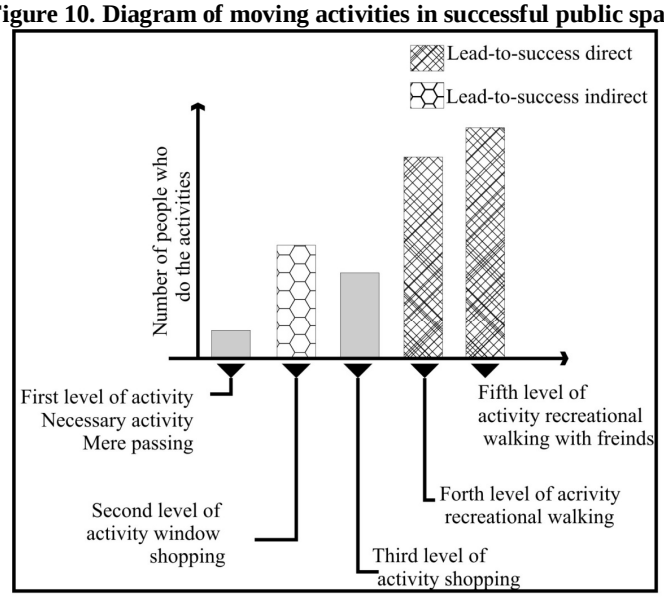
Since, there is lack of correlation between mere passing (level 1), shopping (level 2) and window shopping (level 3) with social activity (level 9). So it seems that shopping in this street has more necessary character than optional or voluntarily. Although "Window shopping" and "shopping" do not have direct effect on social activity but "Window shopping" indirectly (by affecting "sitting with friends for recreation"- level 8- with 0.24 correlation coefficients) can affect social activity. Therefore, this activity can be considered as indirect Leading-to-success.

The remaining moving optional activities which contain "recreational walking" (level 4) and "recreational walking with friends" (level 5) have correlation with each other and also social activity (level 9), so they are direct leading-to-success activities. There is another significant finding, recreational walking (level 4) is the only level which has negative correlation with necessary level of mere passing (level 1) and also it has correlation with level 8 which is "sitting with friends for recreation".

According to correlation coefficient between moving activities and social one, figure 10 present the role of each moving activity in success of public space. The most effective level is "recreational walking" after that

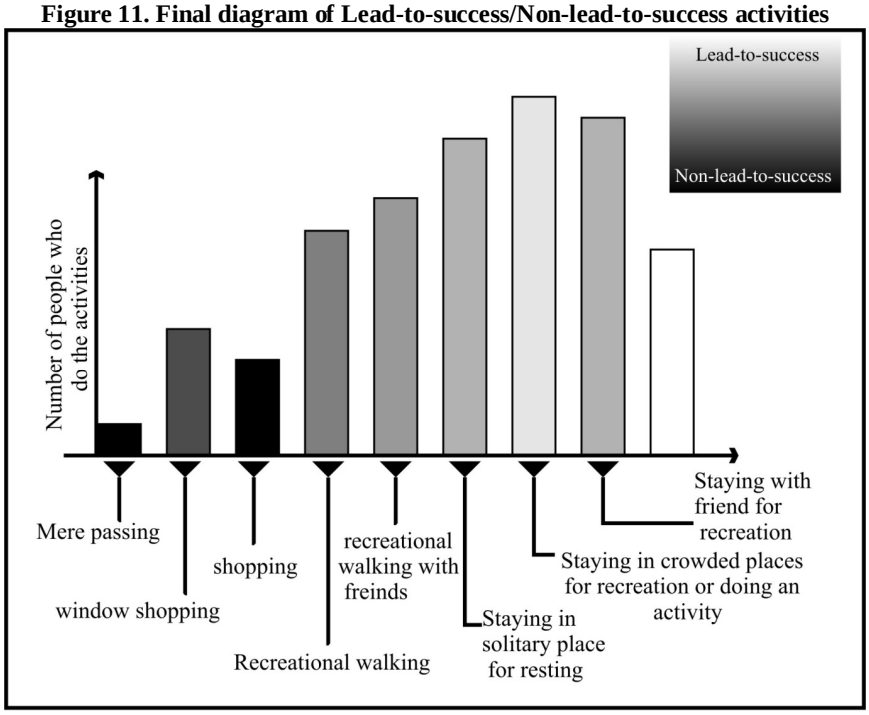
"recreational walking with friends" which has the most direct effect on social activity and "Window shopping" which has indirect effect on social activity is the last one.

Figure 10. Diagram of moving activities in successful public space



Finally, in this section by using spectrum color which shows the role of activities as leading- to- success, comparison between activities is possible (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Final diagram of Lead-to-success/Non-lead-to-success activities



DISCUSSION

There are two critical subjects to discuss: the first one is that people can play or act the role of special feature or events as a third point in triangulation (Whyte, 1980, p.94) because correlation between level of "sitting with friend for recreation" and social activity is significant. It means that the group of people (especially friends) could act as potential for making contact between strangers. According to this subject, Oldenburg concept could be represented when he refers the **conversation** as a main factor of **successful third place and**

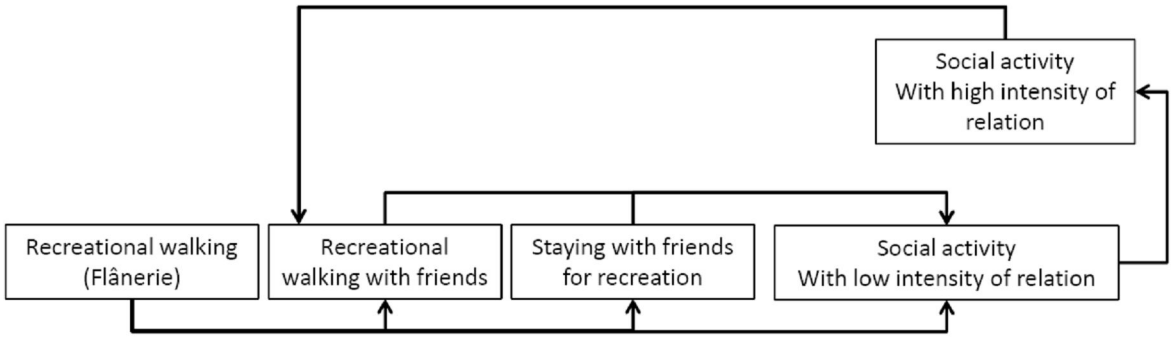
public space.

Although, by comparing the correlation rate between "sitting with friend for recreation (level 8)" and "being alone near group of people (level 7)" with social activity, it could be conclude that the latter is more important for successful public space. Since group of friends prefer to involve in speaking each other, so the potential of making relation with strangers became less possible.

The second critical finding to discuss is about recreational walking. As we anticipated and also according to theoretical framework, sitting activities have more effect on social activity than moving activities but the results show that recreational walking has extraordinary effect on social activity.

Although the effect of **recreational walking** is lower than **sitting activities** on making social activity, but existing correlation between this level and sitting activity levels, especially level 5 and level 8, shows that recreational walking is essential for permanency of success on the street. Because correlation and behavior pattern shows that more "recreational walking", attract more people and also more friends who are interested to have recreational walking (reinforcement of level 5).Then more friendly walking (level 5) leads to more sitting and recreation with friends (level 8). This could lead to being acquaintance with strangers, so therefore, recreational walking could reinforce social activity and develop the circle of friends and acquaintances. This hierarchical development increases gradually through "recreational walking", and space become more successful (as shown in figure 12).According to definition of flanerie "**recreational walking**" and "**window shopping**" could be unified under the character of flânerie. As mentioned before in findings "window shopping" has relation with "recreational sitting with friend". So, flânerie can affect different levels of sitting activities in a matter of creation permanent circulation of relationship between Leading-to-success activities and social activity.

Figure 12. Permanent circulation for creating successful public space



Conclusion

According to Jan Gehl theory, social activities occur spontaneously, as a direct consequence of people **moving** about and **being** in the same spaces. This implies that social activities are indirectly supported whenever **moving** and **sitting** activity is given better conditions in public spaces. Between sitting activities "sitting with friends" because of making comfortable atmosphere in space and also providing contact, especially conversation between people, is able to convert space into third space. But we should emphasize that public space is the sphere of being in contact with strangers and sitting among strange people with potential of making contact is more important for making public space successful.

Conclusion of article is that sitting activities as Carmona said have more effect on social activity than moving ones But "flanerie" as a moving activity is the most critical Lead-to-success activity because it can change from "optional lonely presence" to "being with friend" and "being with stranger". Because of this transitional potential the boundaries between isolation and contact in public space become soft and this matter can transform from low-intensity contact to high-intensity. If Gehl present the social activity as resultant activity, this article can present flânerie activity as medium activity that can transform optional activity into social activity.

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