

Elements and Components of Sociable and Unsociable Spaces Girls' Dormitories of Tehran University

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ABSTRACT

Architects, environmental designers, and urban planners design the environment in a way to provide opportunities for social interactions. The importance of the close relationship between social interaction and people's attachment to social and built environments has underlain many studies on the effect of architectural elements and components. Stairs, windows, walls, doors, floors, ceilings, etc. are the architectural elements which involve part of the spatial patterns and play role in shaping, giving theme, and creating modes. From paving to grid walls or platform and protruding sheets from the bottom or different levels with windows, doorways, and openings all have their own individuation and independence and play a key role in definition and differentiation of sociable and unsociable spaces, as they can provoke the establishment of positive and constructive social relationships between the beneficiaries and increase the opportunities for interpersonal and transpersonal interactions. Fixed, semi-fixed, and dynamic physical elements and also the position of a space in the whole spatial organization of a building affect the desire to interact with and participate more in the space. The present study, as a case study on public spaces of girls' dormitories of Tehran University, was carried out based on non-intrusive method and the required information was collected through direct observation, that is to say, presence at the studied location, tracking the space beneficiaries, and recording their actions in public places, either internal and external spaces. The findings led to a classification of the constituent elements and components of sociable and unsociable spaces. Some of these elements include stairs, wall, natural elements, kitchen, yard and open area, and store. Although studying each of these elements requires a long discussion, paying a special attention to each of them can be path finding to the future comprehensive discussions and research.

KEYWORDS: Unsociability, Sociability, Stairs, Wall, Natural elements, Area.

1. INTRODUCTION

Activities such as interacting with others and observation of people's behaviors help the personal growth of humans by promoting socialization and sociability contexts. Opportunities for meeting with and paying visit to others is a prerequisite for the promotion of informal and unforeseen mutual relations, which have not been already planned for common goals[1]. Acquisition and shared experience of individuals during socialization create common aspects in the behavioral environment of individuals and groups that strengthen the interactions[2]. With the expansion of individualism in modern times, paying attention to the physical environment, as the carrier of neighboring humans, has found a more significant importance to get them closer to each other and compensate for the lost part of the social interactions in architectural and urban monuments and sites. In the context of increasing human interaction, Understanding the process of mixing and adapting human and physical factors and trying to raising this adaptation are of great importance. If this issue is viewed from the perspective of common opinions and ideas in the early modern architecture, there is no point in discussing. However, based on research of recent decades on the impact of physique on behavior, the important and decisive role of psychosocial characteristics of users in the type and amount of interactive behaviors occurred in public spaces cannot be ignored. Sociability of architectural spaces is evaluated positive and favorable from different dimensions. More clarification of duties and social obligations in the overall activity and performance of buildings, more support of beneficiaries for each other, less self-alienation, and paving the way for development of friendships and everyday relationships are of other effects of higher sociability of public spaces in architecture of human buildings with mere non-functional feature. The terms "sociable" and "unsociable" refer to the spaces that either "bring people together" or "take them away from each other". If accountability to the diverse needs of people is taken into account in the environment, the anticipated capabilities of the environment are more likely to be used and, as a result, the built environment will have the ability to provide social interaction. Otherwise, environments and spaces will not be used and their construction will cause disinvestment [1].

2. The constituent elements and components of sociable and unsociable spaces

In the literature of contemporary architecture, each building is divided into two parts of architectural patterns and architectural elements [3]. In contemporary sense, architectural elements refer to columns, windows, walls, doors, floors,

ceilings, etc. which involve part of the spatial patterns and play role in shaping, giving theme, and creating modes. From paving to grid walls or platform and protruding sheets from the bottom or different levels with windows, doorways, and openings all have their own individuation and independence and play a key role in definition and differentiation of sociable and unsociable spaces. Increasing the architectural strength of roof, floor, and walls is part of space empowerment which needs to be recognized and expanded.

2.1. Stairs

According to Aldo Van Ike, although architects can create spaces where the activities and rituals take place, they have not been successful in differentiation between space and location as much as the people who hold alive a space with their activities and convert it into a location. According to Figure 1, the dormitory's stairs, in addition to establishing a link between floors, provocatively invites the residents sit. One hour of presence in this space and observation and recording the behaviors of students residing in dormitory showed that the space in front of stairs is usually chosen by students for a stop and talks. Residents can sit there and talk to each other.

Figure 2 shows the way the residents come together in this space. In the design of stairs, as the public space of dormitory, it has been improved from a mere stairs box to stairs space by redefining the required privacies and a variety of spatial, perspectival, and lighting expansions. In the definition of landing, as a space for short stop, it should be considered independent of passing spaces with spatial, perspectival, and lighting expansion. To liven up the stairs and turn it into a dynamic and pleasant space, that part of the stairs that provides connection between two different levels of height should also enjoy perspectival and lighting expansion. For this purpose, the form of walls defining the stairs

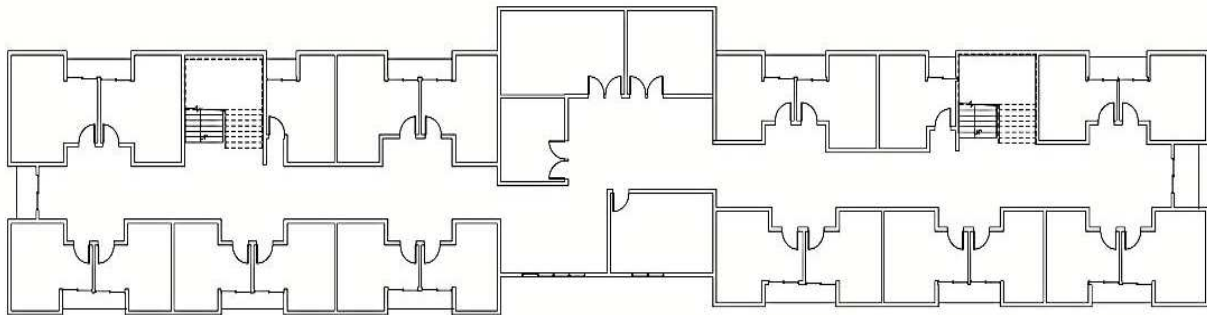


Fig. 1.Recording the behaviors of students during one hour of presence in the space. Gathering in front of stairs
(Reference: authors)

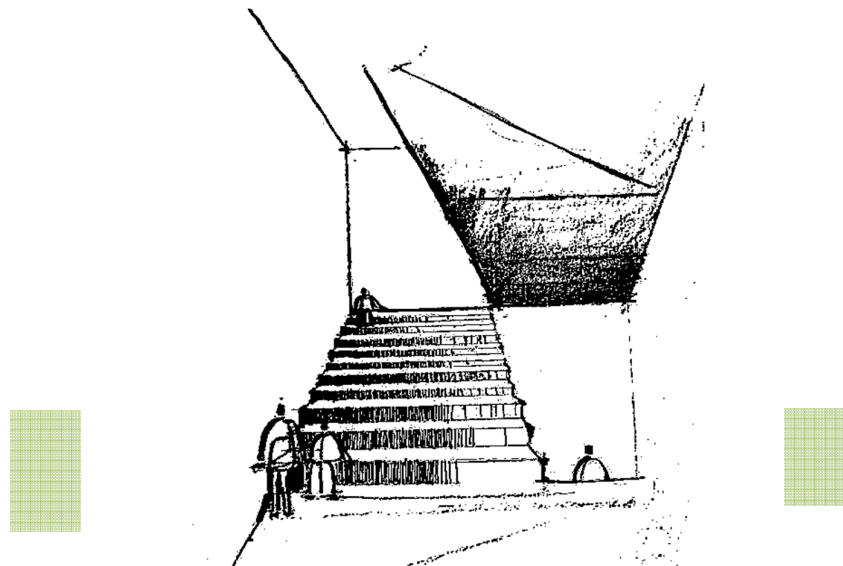


Fig. 2.Stairs between the floors of girls' dormitory of Tehran University (Reference: authors)

2.2. Walls

In order to use the power of walls in the manifestation of sociability and unsociability feature of the studied dormitory space, walls should be designed for any indoor, outdoor or enclosed space based on the two-faced characteristic with the defining and combining capability. The potential of covering elements is that they can be designed as both the defining body and the element connecting the spaces. Walls can be designed in the interface between a hollow vertical frames to a full body. In this interface, the conditions for definition and connection of spaces appear. Connection,

continuity, and sequence of spaces through embedding doorway, door, window or smaller frames within the walls is quite effective in spatial, perspectival, and lighting expansions and, consequently, increases the individuals' willingness to be present in the space. According to Figure 3, direct accessibility of ground floors of dormitory buildings to the open area provides an opportunity for emergence of social behaviors. On the other hand, because of the openings created to the areas in all floors through balconies and windows, we witness such behaviors in all floors of the dormitory.

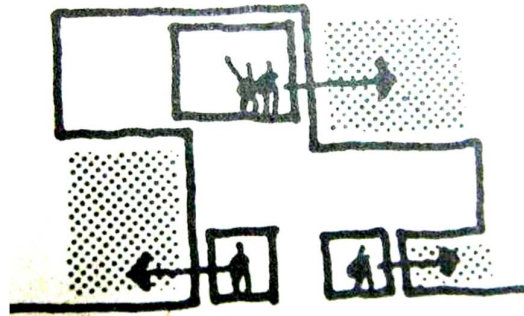


Fig. 3.The opening of balconies and windows to the area of girls' dormitory of Tehran University (Reference: authors)

According to Figure 4 and Figure 5, students tend to pause in the corridors between their rooms. According to experts, it is not necessary that things always go on the same as now and architectures can design the buildings to more and more be close to people's needs. They can strengthen their ability of prediction, learn to join the reality, and design the world in their mind. Unlike our assumption, narrow corridors of this dormitory invite the residents to pause and talk. The current behavior of the space is completely at odds with the geometry of the space. The way the walls connect to floor and ceiling should be designed carefully and creatively. When designing decides that connection of ceiling to walls to be something other than two perpendicular sheets and makes use of a variety of features of connection between walls and ceiling, it causes the enclosed space within walls and ceiling to be more effective.

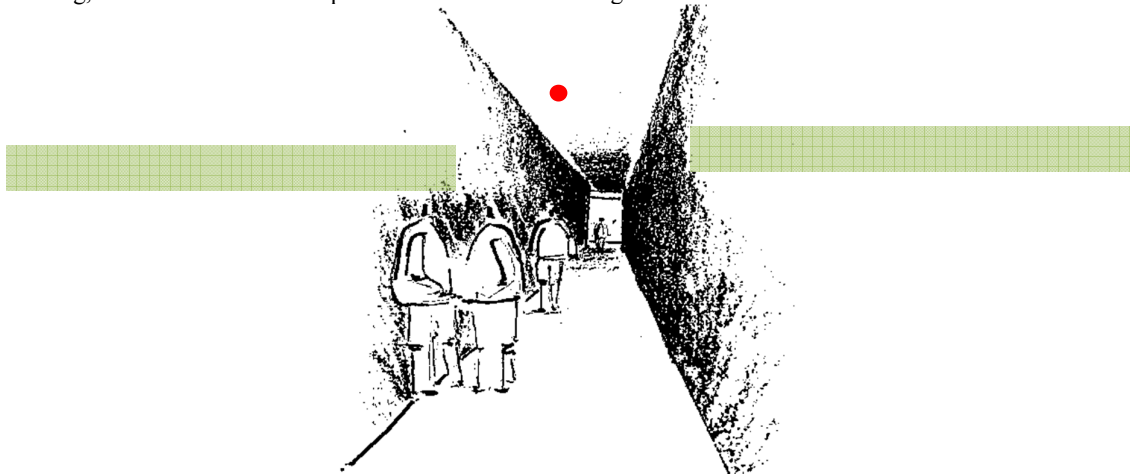


Fig. 4.Presence of students in the corridors of girls' dormitory of Tehran University (Reference: authors)

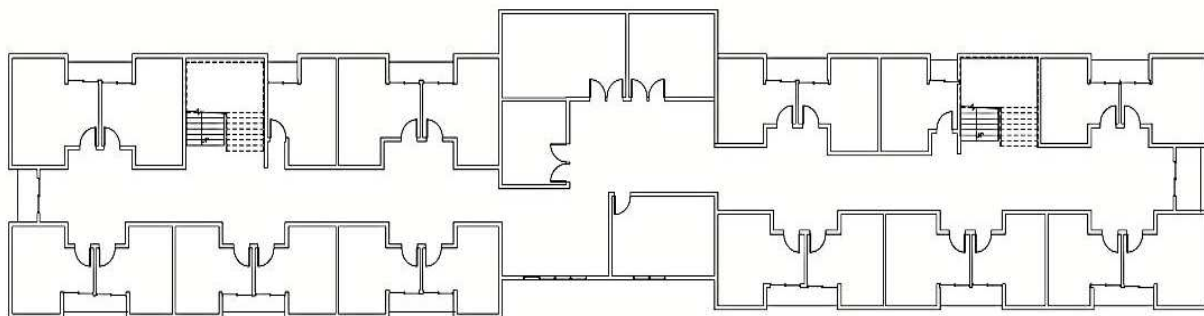


Fig. 5.Recording the behaviors of students during one hour of presence in the space. Gathering in corridors (Reference: authors)

As seen in Figure 6, when designing decides that connection of ceiling to walls to be something other than two perpendicular sheets and makes use of a variety of features of connection between walls and ceiling, it causes the enclosed space within walls and ceiling to be more effective. Depending on the characteristics of the connection plan, quality and appearance of space would be different. Connection, continuity, and sequence of spaces through embedding doorway, door, window or smaller frames within the walls is quite effective in spatial, perspectival, and lighting expansions and, consequently, increases the individuals' willingness to be present in the space. In the case of floor-to-wall connection, when this connection is other than the usual mode of two perpendicular sheets and takes other displays, the state and quality of space will be affected.

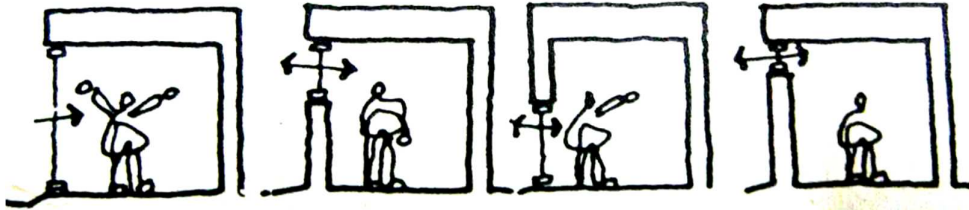


Fig. 6. Studying the defining capability and spatial, perspectival, and lighting expansion of walls in girls' dormitory of Tehran University (Reference: authors)

According to figure 7, despite the unfavorable conditions of thermal comfort, the window provides an opportunity for social behaviors. In Rappaport's idea, people in many cases sacrifice their physical conform for meeting their cultural needs.



Fig. 7. A schematic view of girls' dormitory of Tehran University (Reference: authors)

2.3. Natural elements

Non-roofed spaces which provide the possibility of gathering and dialogue for people can be designed as famous places for meetings in order to give richness to urban life [4]. Many authors believe that contact with the natural elements of the environment is important and essential to human well-being and happiness. These statements are highly speculative and based on the normative vision to human life rather than scientific evidence and documents. Since few organized studies have been conducted on such statements, it is difficult to assess the impact of such contacts on human psychological happiness [1]. Architects usually consider the space as an abstract concept and not a behavioral phenomenon. On the other hand and in apparent contradiction with the assumptions, they think that human behaviors will be matched on their predictions. According to Figure 8, the incidental space between trees causes the occurrence of a social behavior.

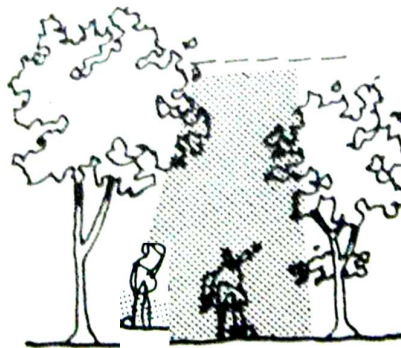


Fig. 8. The sociable space created between the trees in the area of girls' dormitory of Tehran University (Reference: authors)

According to Edward T. Hall, an unsociable space is not necessarily a bad space, as well as a sociable space is not quite good. What is desirable is a variety of different spaces, so that people can get involved in some of them based on their own moods and requirements [5]. If the needs and demands of people are taken into account in designing, the resulting built environment will have the capability to provide social interactions. Otherwise, environments and spaces will not be used and their construction will cause disinvestment. As Figure 9 shows, none of the seats in the dormitory area has been occupied and, instead, the residents have preferred to sit on the grass. According to experts, if the social

needs of people are in balance with a sense of personal independence resulting from solitude, social relations become easier.



Fig. 9. Non-use of the seats in the area and sitting down on the grass between trees in girls' dormitory of Tehran University (Reference: authors)

2.4. Kitchen

Behaviors of students were recorded during one hour of presence in the spaces and as shown in Figure 10, kitchen and spaces in front of toilets are places where residents stop and start a conversation with each other. In terms of providing social interaction opportunities, behavioral headquarters and locations in buildings are divided into two groups; places built by considering the possibility of interaction between people and places where social interaction is the result of other functional purposes. According to Figure 11, kitchen and the spaces in front of toilets are of the second type. The higher the power of kitchen for adopting functions such as sitting, gathering, talking, and eating, the more accountable it would be to the behavioral pattern deduced during the study. The behavioral pattern observed in kitchen and the spaces in front of toilet was gathering of students and talking to each other.

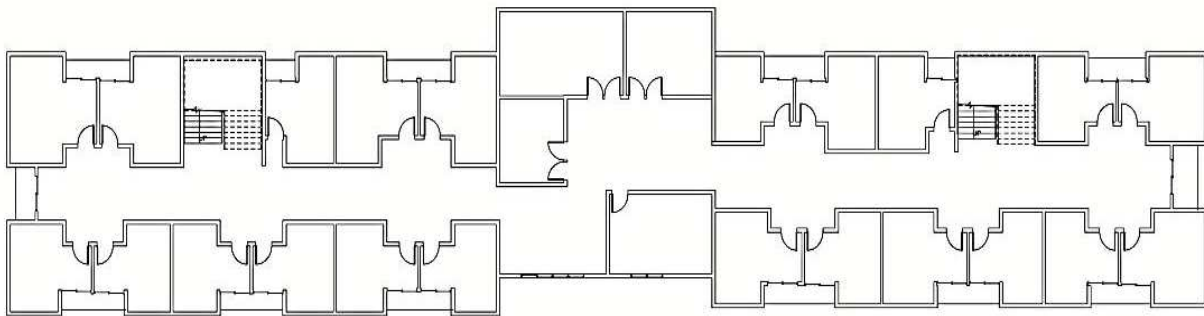


Fig. 11. Gathering of students in the kitchen and the space in front of toilets in girls' dormitory of Tehran University (Reference: authors)

2.5. Dormitory area

Behind the building of dormitory, we are witnessing anti-social behaviors. The resident do not have any desire to be present in the area behind the buildings and the seats in that part of dormitory have been left unused. In contrast, in front of the buildings of dormitory, where the entrance of the dormitory exists and students enter and exit through, the occupation of seats can be seen in abundance. It seems that there is a relationship between the dormitory's entrance, which is located in front of the buildings and students enter and exit through, and stopping or sittings on the chairs. Maybe sitting down on seats and watching others are part of the charm that encourages the residents to be present in this space. Red dots in Figure 12 show the places where students usually are present and gather. Concentration of red dots in front of the dormitory buildings, shown in blue, is more than the area behind the buildings.

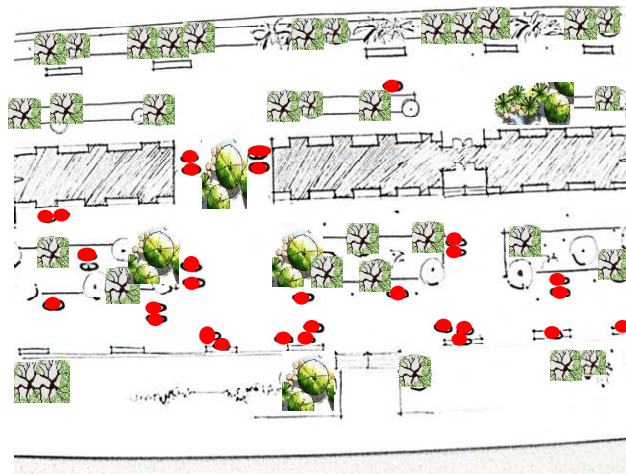


Fig. 12.Recording the behaviors of students during one hour of presence in dormitory area. Red dots show the places where students usually are present and gather (Reference: author)

2.6. Dormitory store, a context for realization of social relations

The store in the dormitory area is of places where social interaction is the result of functional purposes. The pretext of shopping provides an opportunity for social behaviors. As it is shown in Figure 13, the possibility of taking advantage of social interactions is provided for the dormitory residents and a context is provided in which social relations can be easily established. In such spaces, social interaction will increase and a place will be created for social dialogues and occurrence of cultural behaviors and norms. Many social activities are now waiting for a safe environment for the occurrence and, as soon as such environments are provided, such activities and their spatial and physical requirements will put their badge on the space. If the use of such spaces are supported, the anticipated capabilities of the environment are more likely to be used. In student dormitories, common living spaces need to be considered for formal and informal gatherings. The results obtained from designs do not show such accuracy.

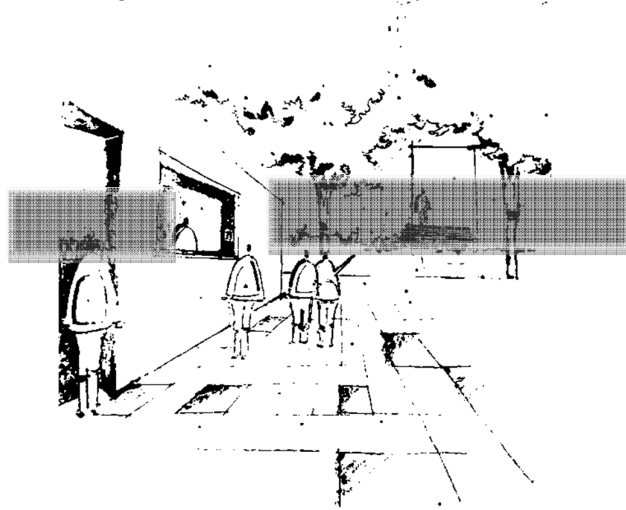


Fig. 13.The store in the area of girls' dormitory of Tehran University is a place for social dialogues and occurrence of behaviors (Reference: authors)

3.CONCLUSION

Stairs, windows, walls, doors, floors, ceilings, etc. are the architectural elements which involve part of the spatial patterns and play role in shaping, giving theme, and creating modes. From paving to grid walls or platform and protruding sheets from the bottom or different levels with windows, doorways, and openings all have their own individuation and independence and play a key role in definition and differentiation of sociable and unsociable spaces. Increasing the architectural strength of roof, floor, and walls is part of space empowerment which needs to be recognized and expanded. The dormitory's stairs, in addition to establishing a link between floors, provocatively invites the residents sit. One hour of presence in this space and observation and recording the behaviors of students residing in dormitory showed that the space in front of stairs is usually chosen by students for a stop and talks. Reflecting on the designing in order to empower this architectural element was a response to a need which was found during the study on the mentioned dormitory. In the design of stairs, as the public space of dormitory, it has been improved from a mere stairs box to stairs

space by redefining the required privacies and a variety of spatial, perspectival, and lighting expansions. In order to use the power of walls in the manifestation of sociability and unsociability feature of the studied dormitory space, walls should be designed for any indoor, outdoor or enclosed space based on the two-faced characteristic with the defining and combining capability. Connection, continuity, and sequence of spaces through embedding doorway, door, window or smaller frames within the walls is quite effective in spatial, perspectival, and lighting expansions and, consequently, increases the individuals' willingness to be present in the space.

Architects usually consider the space as an abstract concept and not a behavioral phenomenon. On the other hand and in apparent contradiction with the assumptions, they think that human behaviors will be matched on their predictions. The results obtained from studying the girls' dormitory of Tehran University show that the incidental space between trees causes the occurrence of a social behavior. None of the seats in the dormitory area has been occupied and, instead, the residents have preferred to sit on the grass.

Behaviors of students were recorded during one hour of presence in the spaces and, as mentioned before, kitchen and the space in front of toilets are places where residents stop and start a conversation with each other. In terms of providing social interaction opportunities, behavioral headquarters and locations in buildings are divided into two groups: places built by considering the possibility of interaction between people and places where social interaction is the result of other functional purposes. It seems that kitchen and the space in front of toilets are of the second type.

Behind the building of dormitory, we are witnessing anti-social behaviors. The resident do not have any desire to be present in the area behind the buildings and the seats in that part of dormitory have been left unused. In contrast, in front of the buildings of dormitory, where the entrance of the dormitory exists and students enter and exit through, the occupation of seats can be seen in abundance. It seems that there is a relationship between the dormitory's entrance, which is located in front of the buildings and students enter and exit through, and stopping or sittings on the chairs. Maybe sitting down on seats and watching others are part of the charm that encourages the residents to be present in this space.

Many social activities are now waiting for a safe environment for the occurrence and, as soon as such environments are provided, such activities and their spatial and physical requirements will put their badge on the space. The finding show that the store in the dormitory area is of places where social interaction is the result of functional purposes. The pretext of shopping provides an opportunity for social behaviors. It was also found that if people need to have social interactions and relations, they provide the required conditions for themselves in any environment.

The results showed that although common living spaces are need to be considered for formal and informal gatherings in student dormitories, the results obtained from designs do not show such accuracy.

Important spaces that are not clear to be private or public reduce social interactions. The blank seat in the dormitory area designed along to each other and without respect for the defined privacies for each of them corroborates this point.

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