

Malls: a Modern Revelation of Public Space in Tehran

Shahrzad Khademi

Ph.D candidate in Landscape Architecture, Nazar research laboratory, Iran and University of Paris8, France.

shahrzad.khademi@gmail.com

Sara Alipour

Ph.D candidate in Architecture, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran branch.

Alipour.sara@yahoo.com

Abstract | With the rapid growth of cities, the lack of efficient urban management, and the volume of construction that generally takes place without considering comprehensive plans and urban landscapes and expenses which goes to the town hall, our cities have been transformed into massive spaces that have been completely overlooked in terms of mass-space proportion. On the other hand, the disappearance of public spaces and lapses, which were a place for collective experience and socialization practices, and even the experience of a place, changed the face and the essence of the city into spaces without any quality and merely a physical and spiritless shell. This excessive expansion, which mandates consumerism and lofty demand, led the shopping centers to morph toward malls and mega malls, an area which has always been a place for the critique of urban area researchers and critics of modern architecture. The main objective of this research is to review these spaces from a new perspective. How to use the potentials of these new spaces? And whether malls can contribute to the formation of new kinds of public spaces? Although the reviews attributed to these spaces can be considered in diverse areas and the challenges posed can be studied, it seems that, in spite of the theories about the malls and the need to eliminate or marginalize these spaces in the city, in the last decade, we are faced with a kind of transformation in The function and even the concept of such spaces for the new generation of Iranian urbanites. After field surveys and the classification of observations by a descriptive and analytical method on four major commercial malls in Tehran, it was concluded that, these spaces, in addition to the spatial function and the role played in meeting the needs of a region, are transformed into A club or meeting circle, and perform as a place for social gatherings in the urban space of Tehran.

Keywords | Malls, Shopping Centers, Public spaces, Urban area, Tehran.

Introduction | Public spaces are urban areas that are generally considered to be a way for the local and central government to hold social events and celebrations and collective activities in open environments. Although these spaces should provide a stage for all groups, and because these spaces are the scene of the city's social life, they are very important in urban design, but unfortunately, we see the disappearance of such spaces in Tehran. In the city of Tehran, due to the importance of constructing these areas and making them financially plausible through the town hall regional finances, the spaces with the public function in the urban planning program are being eliminated or ignored. Public spaces and even at least the per capita green spaces have been replaced by residential, office and commercial buildings. By diminishing the level of public and social spaces in the city, citizens, in their own way, tend to shape and utilize modern urban spaces into a platform for expression and social presence. By reviewing the commercial varieties of these spaces and peoples well reception of them, we noticed a new redefinition of public space experience in these places. What is certain is that the city is alive with the presence of the people and their interactions, and in the meantime, people are in need of spaces to be. By eliminating or neglecting the design of such spaces, people have welcomed the malls and attended them not only for the act of shopping but also for the concept of being present. In this way they introduced a new atmosphere to these places, which is the main topic for this research.

In this regard, this study selects four commercial malls in Tehran as a case study and examines social events and how these spaces are converted into public spaces in Tehran.

Research Background

In the United States, chain shopping stores increased in number in the late 1920s. In the 1930s, these stores flourished and turned into big supermarkets with discounts. The Second World War was the period of the American recession, and then, in the 1950s, suburbanization grew widespread. In 1956, with the establishment of the first indoor mall in Southland, by Victor Groningen and his visionary ideas, the mall turned into a place for social gatherings and hangouts. This trend continued in the following years, and many shopping centers became indoor malls. In the 1970s, the culture of malls popularized due to the addition of new sidelong functions such as restaurants, cinemas, and theaters (Guinn, 2017). Almost everywhere in the United States, a large number of teenagers planned their hangouts near the suburban malls. In a research project published in form of a paper in 1985, 63 percent of mall users come in once or twice a week, most of them

spending one to five hours a day in this place. They rarely go to the mall by themselves and usually go to these places with their friends. Only half of these people have stated that shopping is their objective for going to the mall. Another reason is to watch other things including the opposite sex, computer games, meeting friends and watching people in general. In the years to come, with changes in the designing, planning and locating styles of the malls, changes were made in the pattern of using these spaces.

But in Iran, traditionally, markets have always been the place of trading and the occurrence of social events. With the arrival of modernism in Iran, major changes were made to the pattern of designing shopping spaces. The opening of Ferdowsi shopping center in 1958 and Kourosh shops in 1971 and their expansion in the city created a new style of shopping atmosphere in Tehran, which influenced Tehran's lifestyle. With the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution and the Iran–Iraq imposed war, the process of construction and development was stopped, and after these years, these stores were either dismantled or renamed. In the 1992s, new chain stores, such as Citizens (shahr-vand) and Welfare (refaah), were opened in Tehran. The stores themselves were important because the city was changing from the aspect of procurement, consumption, and leisure (Varij Kazemi & Razaei, 2000). In designing shopping malls and chain stores of the 70's, there was no consideration for life.

As it is clear within their names, the passages (malls) were designed for purchasing and moving on, but people were using these places as their free space because an existence of public spaces was absent, but leisure was not the main theme of these malls. In 2002's Major developmental changes occurred in Tehran. The mayoralty of the time encouraged designers to high-build and build towers and malls. Many shopping centers were built in Tehran during this decade (Such as Golestan Shahrak-e Gharb, Ghaem Tajrish and ...). These spaces turned into youth hangouts. Women became more and more present in these places, and soon these spaces became a place for roaming, dating and communicating with one's peers and keeping up with the fashion and daily news. Shopping centers of the 80's were often commercial spaces that only one or two services, such as a restaurant or cafe were integrated into them. By starting to build malls from the 2012-2018 and adding more service and access areas to them such as Food courts, Cinema, fun fair, and... A very new type of recreational and shopping pattern was emerging in Tehran; this time shopping was not the main purpose of these places. These spaces were welcomed by the people more each day. These spaces had lost their profile as commercial spaces with some services alongside them, and the peripheral functions themselves came into the

spotlight. Now, these spaces are not just a youth hangout, they are also the destination for their sightseeing, which they can spend a full day among the stories buying, going to the cinema, having fun and eating.

Public Spaces

The public space is a common platform in which people carry out the functional activities and ceremonies that bring the community members together: Whether these activities are routine, periodicals or festivals. In other words, the public space is a scene in which social life is exposed to the public. Public space is a space for politics, religion, commerce, and sports; a space for peaceful coexistence and non-personal encounters. The characteristic of the public space is that it expresses collective life, urban culture, and everyday issues and also influences them. (Rafiyani and Sefaei, 2005 : 36).

For example, the public street, as a whole belongs to all of the people, and it is open to them. It is unrestricted and is provided by the government and is related to it. These concepts are reflected in the definitions of the public spaces. From Kerr et al., Public space is "a common zone in which people perform functional activities and ceremonies that binds members of the community, whether they are ordinary daily routines or periodic festivals". From Walers' point of view, "the public space is a space which we share with strangers, people who are not relatives, friends or colleagues" (Moshiri, Rajabi & Shukraei, 2010: 5). Ian Gul divides human public space activities into three categories: essential, social and selective activities. According to Gul, while essential activities occur regardless of the quality of selective-recreational activities and physical activity of the community, a good city could provide the right conditions for many of the essential activities.

Selective activities depend to a great extent on what the environment brings to the individual and how it triggers his/hers behavior (Pasad, 2007: 436). In Ian Guls' opinion, the more quality the place has, the more selective activities occur in it. In a pleasant location, more selective activities occur, while the essential activities remain stable. He emphasizes that, charisma of a city can be determined according to the number of people coming together in their public spaces and spending their time there. On the other hand, according to Gul, social activities are the result of "quality" and "duration of occurrence" which are two prior types of activity, because they are accomplished when many people can meet in a certain place. Concerning social activities, the quality of the environment is more of a foundation than being the motive of action. For in this way, the presence of citizens is the main motive and space is expected to prepare the arrangements for citizen's assembly (Ibid.

437). The public space is a kind of space which has a high quality of landscape apparition due to the active presence of humans.

What transforms a space into a landscape is the number and depth of the relationship between space and space usage. The public space is a space that is open to everyone 24/7. In other words, accessibility to the public is the first indicator of a public space. Public space is a functional utopia which has an active participation in the urban life. The basic elements of the public space are the individuals. The freedom of possibility for individual's presence and equal advantage of space facilities which they experience determines the level of a public space success rate (Mansouri & Atashin-bar, 2014). The public space is a concept that was introduced in the 1980s, particularly in Europe, to overcome the social and urban crises of the time, including denial of values, isolation of social groups and behavioral violence. This concept aimed at relieving social relations and developing a sense of belonging to a common community (Mansouri, 2015).

Today, malls are referred to as public spaces, which are no longer considered only for shopping. apart from shopping experiences which are diverse and are studied in sociological works such as Abbas Varij Kazemi and Abazari (For example, look to Varij Kazemi & Abazari, 2005) Other social actions also occur following the use of mall spaces. Strolling and walking in the streets (corridors) of the malls will not necessarily lead to a purchase. However, shopping is also a kind of social norm. The shopping areas, and in particular the malls, which are the subject of this paper, as in other areas of the public domain, contribute to cultural changes and reevaluating of society; mall as a modern space of shopping, is an active field in everyday life, that is pioneering in creating change, transformation And the re-creation of multiple cultural forms (ibid). But there is a divergence in the mentality in using these spaces among people, designers, planners, and those who are trying to control them.

What is evident in the definition of a public space is its relation to the open spaces and the relation of the space with its surroundings. But what determines the quality of public spaces is the presence of people and the establishment of free social relations, which generally speaking these relations have been limited in Iran. Malls have consumed these free spaces unto themselves. Although social interactions in the malls are less effective in the pleasant urban areas, urban hangouts¹ placed in the surroundings of the malls² affect the dynamics of cities. On the other hand, selective activities in these spaces occur more easily. Since malls are indoor spaces that can be exploited in different seasons, they can be used in different situations. Physical and psychological security³

in the mall is provided by the presence of the police, individuals, and sellers at different times.

Public domain

The public domain also called the public district and the public province is a place in the collective life of citizens, in which the members of the community can speak and give their attention to public matters and subject them to the discussion. In the public domain, individuals in a free situation far from impositions and compromise, the public discusses social matters and each other's views, thereby maximizing the possibility of reaching a genuine collective agreement. This dialogue, communication, and agreement, which are not based on guiding forces such as power and money and advertising, create an "alternative policy" different from the usual perceptions. The human being is the initiator of the public domain and the main essence of it and is both a part of the arena and its influence.

Among Famous public theorists, we can mention Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas. Habermas believes that public realm comes about when individuals think of their public needs as a group. In his opinion, the role of the public domain in both controlling and legitimizing the political power exercised by the state is observed. He interprets the public domain in term of social terms in which people, through communication and reasoning based on logic, adopt normative orientations that leaves an informed and rational impact on the process of exercising of power by the state. Habermas believes that citizens and private individuals are only publicly engaged in issues of public interest when there is no compulsion and distress. This is only possible when they are provided with the guarantees necessary for their association and assembly, and they can freely join each other and freely express their thoughts. Jürgen Habermas references the public domain as a missing link in modern society, which can be a bridge between the civil society and the government, and prevent the state from modern authoritarianism and oppression⁴.

In recent years in Iran and in Tehran, especially with the shift of generations of the seventies and eighties, and the expanding use of social networks in setting up their meetings, Tehran's bars and cafes have been the foundations of emerging social movements. Movements that were sometimes quite contradictory compared with existing structures⁵. In fact, this generation uses these spaces as a place for discourses appropriate to their generation. In the broader sense, the public domain can be considered as a broad concept that influences the formation of a democratic society. Although law enforcement and state sometimes do not coincide with these trends, we see that a generation among us injects

new concepts into the community with their presence⁶.

Why does it seem that malls are transforming into communal spaces?

In addition to sociological and behavioral studies of owners and users of these spaces in the area of shopping centers, news and events dispersed and published in newspapers, social networks and websites indicate the occurrence of collective actions and the election of these spaces as a place for social events. In the following four commercial centers of Kourosh, Argh Tajrish, Palladium and Rosha are investigated. These business centers are selected based on the amount of news and events which surrounds them.

Kourosh Shopping Center

This shopping center is located west of Tehran on the margin of Shahid Sattari Highway. Having a wide commercial space, several cinemas, restaurants and various Food court since its opening, Kourosh has been a destination for the shopping and entertainment of Tehranians, especially residents of western Tehran. But on the afternoon of June 18, 2016, an internet event in this place made the news. The newspapers (for example, Hamshahri Newspaper on 13/06/2016) and Internet news databases (for example, Tabnak News Agency, 12/06/2016) went about the news with headlines such as "Student gathering in the West Tehran, "how much do you know about the 80s kids?", "The 80s kids have conquered Kourosh," "The Voice of the Telegram Generation", "the sound of 80's kid's footsteps". This was an internet event by 80's social media members who were planning to start their summer vacation in this place. The gathering led to the shutting down of the business complex, police action, and the dispersal of students. This news was reflected in numerous media outlets.

In fact, the selection of this place by some people for an assembly or gathering brings two things to mind: 1- For the new generation, often born in the 80's, new spaces such as shopping centers and malls are not just a place to shop, but are a place for their communal hangouts. If in the past spaces such as the park, restaurant, etc. had such a function, today the occurrence of social entertainments takes place in malls. 2- Among the electors of this place (students in this case) and the inhabitants of this place (shopkeepers, security forces and space owners) there is a constant conflict of understanding of space usage. In other words, there is a dispute over how they use the space. There is even doubt in the universality of this space.

It is deduced from these news as well as the observation of relations between space users by the spectators, is the lack of a proper definition for the spatial form of this



Pic 1: Kourosh Complex in west of Tehran.
Source: : www.iransublet.com

mall, which has created confusion in the use of space and the occurrence of unexpected behaviors. (pic. 1)

ARGG shopping center

This commercial center is located in Tajrish region. Tajrish has always been considered as a recreational and tourism last stop due to the presence of bay climate, dominant natural texture, Imamzadeh Saleh and the bazaar (market). After the construction of commercial centers and tandiss in the 1370's and 1380's, the tourism-commercial usage of the region was increased. It is worth noting that the ARGG was originally intended for another use, and its reclamation and pillaring later changed it to a commercial center. In fact, the architect of the ARGG entered the project from the middle of the construction process. Alireza Sharafati, the architect of the citadel, said: "The most important issue in the design of the citadel was the emphasis on urban space. The ARGG was a financial institution that people could go to, not just to shop, but also to spend time. For example, in front of it, a concert, a fun program or ritual, could be held and people sometimes go to the mall just for these programs. So we tried to highlight the spatial aspect of

the mall. So we focused on the site and its connection with Tajrish which was very crowded, and eventually, we tried to create a place for the gathering of people in the front of the citadel. In the early days of this place, it worked out very well, to the extent that the employer said he would open the ceremony with world's biggest selfie." (Sharafati, 2016); (Pic. 2).

The announcement of the invitation to the world's largest selfie was broadcast on social networks and the corporate website of the ARGG, but one day before the ceremony on March 7, 2014, the announcement of the cancellation was broadcast through the commercial complex website. After this incident, the courtyard was closed down and to this day people are not allowed to use this space (Same). Another was the selection of this place by a group of young people to perform modern dancing in the central space. The middle atrium of the citadel is visible from all levels. The program was welcomed by many people. Videos from this ceremony were shared on some sites. The third news was about the performance of a pop band and a young singer. The program was also held in the middle of the complex and was notably welcomed by the public. All the news indicates the election of this space by



Pic. 2: The entrance to the Argg complex is designed as a surface for people to gather, which is not currently used.
Source: : www.archdaily.com

a specific group (age-appropriate) for a cultural event. In fact, the middle space of the commercial complex or the front of the building is chosen as a space for a collective performance. Considering the news mentioned above, a few points can be deduced:

Different points of view on the use and definition of space among designers and users, custodians, stakeholders and the authority have also led to dual behavior. On one hand, space is designed and planned for the public domain as well as for the events of collective actions, and on the other hand, it is confronted by controlling forces during operation. This is a sign of non-acceptance of commercial spaces as a public space and their desire to control the maximum space and direct it to predefined acts such as shopping, going to the cinema and eating. While the citadel was planned and designed from the beginning with another purpose in mind, these different views toward space have led to some violent conflicts and security measures.

The common space of the citadel, in the eye of the general public, is a public space, which can be a field of view like an amphitheater with the ability to be seen from all floors. It is also noteworthy that this space is chosen by the youth.

The relative comfort in controlling the temperature of the space, as well as the proper ventilation and lighting,

are among the other factors of public acceptance toward using this space. In their opinion, this space has a relative security compared to what is happening in the city and the public spaces of the city. A public space where there is a fairly fine comfort and is controlled and does not have the real meaning of freedom. This control is not only protected by manpower, but CCTV cameras and spatial warnings for space use are also other controlling forces of space.

Palladium shopping center

Palladium is located in the Za'faraniyah region, one of the Tehran's aristocratic regions. Rose from the spatial rulings that followed location-seeking and use of the prosperous group in palladium, (Varij Kazemi & Rezaei, 2000) to prevent the entrance of adolescents without a family, all this is a separation that has been applied to this place. A Separation imposed not only based on the social and economic status of the classes but also based on age differences which have produced many limitations. (Pic. 3)

The food court space of this commercial complex with large TV screens is sometimes the place for a group to watch television programs such as football. In fact, the functionality of the restaurant is losing its position and it's becoming a place for collective acts such as watching



Pic 3: one of the atriums of Palladium Mall, Tehran, Iran.
Source: <https://www.kikojas.com/place/>

soccer and rooting for one's favorite team. On the other hand, we see in the news that traditional and folk music performed in the middle of the business center in spite of expectations is faced with a limited number of people. This news contrasts with similar news about the Citadel Business Complex, which a popular young dance performer or young pop singer is immensely welcomed by the public. Acknowledging the program choice, given audience's interest, both in term of age and cultural taste which comes from the situational atmosphere, is an issue which has been neglected. Analyzing the events and news of the palladium commercial complex, several points can be deduced:

Preventing the free entrance of the people, regardless of age, gender and social class is a violation of the universality of the space. Public spaces, as noted above, are free spaces for customers and users of those spaces. Here, separation is a controlling goal set by the managers and stakeholders of the complex in order to maximize its profitability and maintain its class order.

With accommodating the relative comfort of the space, space users are encouraged to participate in a collective event such as watching football. the atmosphere of the

restaurant or Food court, which is a space with a free plan in the collection, becomes an arena for the current collective event at certain times. however these spaces, in terms of closure, control, and security, do not allow users to act as they see fit, For example, screaming and expressing joy when one's team scores. In other words, their collective action is also subject to maximum control and regulation.

Rosha's Shopping Center and Store Department

This shopping center is located in the district of Tehran and the beginning of Lavasani Street. Rosha is one of the free space structures, which are referred to as store department. The commercial complex also includes multistory parking lots and multiple commercial floors, with various Iranian and foreign brands competing in unbounded spaces. The location of the Food court and the restaurant, one of the other spaces of the complex, is also on the top floor (Pic. 4).

An American Brand Opening Ceremony with Licenses Issued on July 19, 2016, is scheduled to be held. The ceremony will be canceled on the day it is scheduled to take place with police intervention to disperse the people



Pic 4: Rosa Shopping Center is a commercial department Store that includes a variety of Iranian and foreign brands in unbundled spaces.
Source: https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https://lookaside.fb.com/lookaside/crawler/media/3%Fmedia_id%3D1649794078628617&imgrefurl=https://www.facebook.com/roshadepartmentstore/&h=960&w=960&tbid=v_xuHrZWKSpPnM&tbnh=225&tbnw=225&usq=__GYI9DQtyZGXsXKA6SDB53K22vPl=&hl=en-IR&docid=jeL5sFPI-M7eeM

and cancel the ceremony. The site was also selected by a community-based group for holding public events, and despite the necessary permissions, it is shutting down due to some unfit perceptions on using a commercial space with the intervention of the security force (the police). This news was reflected in many online news feeds (for example, www.sedayiran.com).

It is also noteworthy that the difference between the viewpoint of the users, residents and security forces in

the definition of space usage has led to violent clashes. In addition to providing relative comfort in this commercial complex, what is necessary for the current collective event, is a free plan structure that allows for the creation of a fluid and multi-functional space. The organizers of the fashion show attempted to use this opportunity but due to the differences in spatial definition between them, security forces and controllers, the program was canceled.

Conclusion | The spatial experience that occurs in the malls is so great to a generation of young people that other urban spaces are less popularized. In fact, the malls in Tehran have experienced a new meaning that is due to the value and meaning that has been injected as a place of fun for the new generation; this meaning has been comprehensible for other generations. Public spaces are open urban spaces that, given the location and design quality and the acceptability of others, have the most impact on social interactions and the creation of sense of space in a city. Unfortunately, with the rapid growth of buildings, these spaces have been minimized in modern urbanization, especially in Tehran and other major cities of Iran, for they have lost their former popularity. Since the city is alive with the presence of the people and people always need to establish social relations, we encountered a kind of metamorphosis in peoples demands especially in the youth in Tehran, which is the indoors presence in

the malls. This trend is growing with the expansion of social networks. Virtual spaces have created a new world of virtual communication, which, despite the disapproval of families and even law enforcement, is still being used by the new generation. These individuals, whose social interactions are limited to being in a space which their peers use and introduce programs, has created a new experience of public space in the city, that is also pleasing to others. Malls, a symbol of consumerism and one of the tensions of modern cities, in Tehran, with their attractive and popular appearances, embraced people who are struggling not only to shop but also socially interact and bring new experiences to the corridors. This way of using and planning by people is a social event which added a new meaning to the realms of the malls. Regardless of the accuracy or inaccuracy of this phenomenon, it seems that these places can be used with their new meaning in the development of future social interactions.

Endnotes

1. Invitation to the world's largest selfie in 1393 at the commercial center of the Citadel (Sharafi, 2016).
2. Students planned an event at the Kourosh Shopping Center in 2016.
3. Sometimes their maximum control is a reason to disrupt the psychological security of the malls.
4. Derived from Soules, 2008
5. Making dance and pop music in the center of the business citadel is an example of this.
6. An online plan from 80's students to start their summer vacation in the mall triggered a police response. The rally led to the shutting down of the commercial complex and dispersed students.

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