

A systematic study of public life in urban space

Case Study :The 17th Shahrivar pedestrian way in Tehran city

Rasool Haghbayan

Master's candidate in Urban Planning Iran University of Science
and Technology, Tehran ,Iran.

Mohammadsaleh Shokouhibidhendi*

Assistant Professor, Iran University of Science and Technology,
Tehran, Iran.

Abstract | The advent of technology has reduced the need of citizens to buy, work and do even social interactions in urban space. This condition has increased the power of individuals to choose between attend or absent from the public space and consequently has highlighted the importance of public space quality. The purpose of the public life study is to focus on the daily life of urban space to identify factors affecting public life and provide a favorable urban environment for the presence of various social strata. In this regard, the 17th Shahrivar project in Tehran was selected, which, despite the planning for pedestrians, has not been able to provide the invited and desired space for citizens. The present research, with an emphasis on the ideas of Jan Gehl, uses Gehl's study tools of public life, including counting, mapping, looking for traces, keeping a diary and test walks in the area. The findings of the research show that the study area has not had a proper public life condition except in the evenings. The main factor was lack of transparent, attractive, dynamic and diverse activities in the axis. For this reason, abandoned spaces have been created with little social monitoring which cause unwanted and unplanned functions, such as becoming a vehicle park or the emergence of social unpredictable activities that is related to the background and potential context of space. By changing the social context of users toward abnormal, alien and specific people, has reduced the quality of the environment, especially in terms of psychological security, and has decreased the presence of normal people, specifically women and children.

Introduction | The advancement of technology with the emergence of different things such as cars, televisions, refrigerators, telephones, computers and the Internet has reduced the need for the presence of people in urban spaces for shopping, recreation, work and even social interactions (Hampton et al., 2015). That might explain why we are seeing an upward trend in private life; but public life can increase the vitality, health, security and sustainability of the city (Gehl, 2010). Therefore, urban spaces need to be accompanied by the current needs of people who are changing from necessary activities to selective activities (Gehl & Matan, 2009). Selective activities of people in urban space are related to the qual-

ity of the environment (Gehl, 1987). The environment must be able to guide the walking (Matan & Newman, 2012) and create a suitable place for people to strengthen public life. This requires prioritizing life in relation to form and space and its systematic and methodological study in urban space. Despite the importance of a systematic study of public life, weakness in the investigation of public life in the urban spaces (like pedestrian ways) of Iran is evident. In other words, although walkability in the urban spaces of Iran by creating elements such as pedestrian ways has become popular with the modeling of advanced countries, the pedestrians life in such spaces as in Western countries has been understudied. However, such sustained surveys and ongoing monitoring is essential to the sustainability of these spaces. In this regard, the 17 th Shahrivar axis of Tehran city that despite the planning for pedestrians, has not been able to provide an

✉ *Corresponding Author: shokouhi@iust.ac.ir
+989125470608

open space for citizens, has been selected as research case. The present study seeks to answer the following questions by systematically studying the status of public life in the framework of the 17 Shahrivar axis of Tehran: (1) What is the status of public life in this axis? (2) What are the obstacles and opportunities for improving the standard of living? With emphasizing Jan Gehl's thoughts, he has been one of the leaders in providing comprehensive tools for studying public life and executive strategies to improve it, drawing on extensive field studies and theoretical studies.

Background and definition of public life

Social life studies started in the 1960s, when criticism of modern architecture and urbanization peaked due to the neglect of social needs and marginalizing human interactions (Mahmoudi Farahani & Lozanovska, 2015: 178). During this period, the public life studies were initiated by scholars such as Jacobs (1961) and Gehl (1987), who are considered as the key authors in this area of knowledge (Gehl & Svarre, 2013: 2-3). In the meantime, Jan Gehl played a key role in the gradual movement of this knowledge from an area of theoretical and practical realm that occurred in major cities such as Copenhagen, New York, Melbourne. For Jan Gehl, the basic concern of urban planning was the daily life of the streets rather than ambitious programs (Matan, 2011: 244).

He defines public life as how people use public space (Madanipour et al., 2015: 1). Public life includes all of the very different activities people engage in when they use common city space: purposeful walks from place to place, promenades, short stops, longer stays, window-shopping, conversations and meetings, exercise, recreation, street trade, children's play and street entertainment (Gehl, 2010: 19). Public life changes constantly in the course of a day, week, or month and over the years and this makes it difficult to recognize it. In addition, design, gender, age, financial resources, culture and many other factors determine how we use or do

not use public space (Gehl & Svarre, 2013: 2).

Suitable urban space for public life

Streets for Life are inclusive so that it is easy and enjoyable to use by all members of society (Burton & Mitchell, 2006: 4). This does not mean that one place must serve everyone, but particular groups such as elderly persons, women, and children should not be excluded either by implicit or explicit rules of enforcement (Rivlin, 1994: 291-292). The qualities that are considered to enhance public life in urban spaces include factors that encourage space users to walk or which encourage them to engage in stationary activities. Table 1 presents the main factors that encourage public life in urban spaces among the elderly, in various aspects of the environment.

The factors listed in Table 1, Although they are complementary, they have priorities to each other. In order to encourage people to attend the public space, the basic need is not a specific, outstanding and beautiful architectural designs, but at the first, the pre-requisite for the presence of walking people in space is safety and security, which protects against vehicles, crime and insecurity and unpleasant climate-environmental experiences. People should have an opportunity to be involved in various activities, especially voluntary activities and spending leisure time such as walking, talking, watching, shopping, playing, sports, and resting. Planning for the various activities, with the passion that rise in space, can attract more people, especially in more vulnerable and more leisurely classes, such as children, women and elderly persons and Consequently enhance social and economic sustainability of urban space.

Research Methodology

The present study is qualitative. It uses a descriptive-analytic method based on the public life study tools of Jan Gehl (direct observation, its basic tool), to investigate public life in 17th Shahrivar pedestrian way of Tehran city. The study of

Table 1: Strengthening factors of public life in the aspects of the environment. Source: Simoes Aelbrecht, 2010: 118, Southworth, 2014: 39, Rivlin, 1994: 291-292, Mehta, 2007: 184 Gehl & Svarre, 2013, Sellers, 2003: 634, Mahmoudi Farahani & Lozanovska, 2014: 229).

aspect	criterion
Public space	1) Provide comfortable sitting opportunities; 2) Provide community gathering facilities; 3) Provide play space (children) and sports facilities; 4) Set ups for observing urban events; 5) Artistic activities; 6) Good quality lighting; 7) Equipping and maintaining space appropriately.
Activity	1) Optional activities (emphasis on leisure activities) 2) Soft edge 3) Active edge 4) Mixed land use 5) Variety of business activities.
Access	1) Creating connecting routes of important destinations 2) Easy access for pedestrians 3) Improving bicycle conditions 4) Improving pedestrians 5) Appropriate hierarchy of access 6) Pedestrians safety against vehicles 7) No obstacle on the pedestrian path.
Physical-visual	1) More density 2) Human scale development 3) Position and design of building entrances 4) Provide interesting landscapes for standing and staying 5) Transparent vision 6) Rich visual context.
Social	1) Environmental attractions of all social inclusion; 2) Crime prevention; 3) Ensure the movement of people overnight; 4) Emphasizing less-effective groups such as women, children and the elderly.
Environmental	1) Freshness 2) Good air quality 3) No sound pollution 4) Use of water element 5) Trees and soft vision, 6) Shadow supply 7) Preventing unpleasant sensory experiences in external environment such as snow, cold, heat, dust.

public life were carried out in the three main stages consisting of the stage of "familiarity and general knowledge about the environment", the stage of "taking and recording of public life and the stage of "validation of the findings of public life and determining the main causes of the occurrence of common life". In the first step, was carried out observing and registering space activities, observing the characteristics of people using space and how the activities are done by space users. This step was accompanied by patrols in the environment and test walks and asking questions from space users about the encountered issues in test walks.

Then, after basic understanding of the environment, in the second and main stages of the research, field surveys and public life recordings is done with emphasis on pedestrians in the course of the 10 days, from the morning until the evening of April 2017. Due to the rainy days or political events that affected the public life and behavior, field surveys did not occur within 10 successive days. The record of public life was done by using direct and systematic observation of the public life developed by Jan Gehl including counting (number of people and activities), mapping (number, type, and location of people's activity by using abbreviation markings), looking for traces (activities performed at absence of the researchers), photographing and keeping a diary that was determined to the purpose and scope of the research and specification of the area. At this stage, in order to facilitate and improve the quality of work, the study area was divided into seven sequences according to the characteristics of different parts.

In the third stage, examining the accuracy of the findings and the main reasons for their occurrence was performed, with

the help of observations and environmental experiences of the authors on other days (other than 10 days of public life), space users statements, theoretical foundations and logical reasoning of the authors. Therefore, this study, in addition to investigating of the public life, determines the weakening and reinforcing factors of public life in the area. So that the present study can help development programs to reduce issues and increase environmental capacity for improvement of the life quality in urban space.

Investigation of the public life in the area

The 17th Shahrivar axis in the centre of Tehran, is characterized with the commercial edge and dominant texture of the residential building and it is located between the two important functional and historical nodes, Shohada square and Imam Hossein Square, With a large volume of riding and walking (Fig. 1). In 2012, in the city of Tehran, in order to deal with car-oriented and attention to the cultural and historical background of the area, was made the decision to construct a pedestrian way with a cultural-ritual vision. But after implementation of the project, the quality of life in the space decreased and this led to a low level of satisfaction for users. As a result of the protests and dissatisfaction, a large part of the route was reopened on the vehicles again. The present study seeks to investigate the quality of life and provide solutions for improving the public life of the 17th Shahrivar axis. Accordingly, in the framework of the sequencing (Fig. 1), the quality of activities, the quality of pedestrian and vehicles traffic, the fixed and moving obstacles in space (disruptive obstacles to use the space by pedestrians), the quality of accumulation and staying People in space, rendezvous and be-

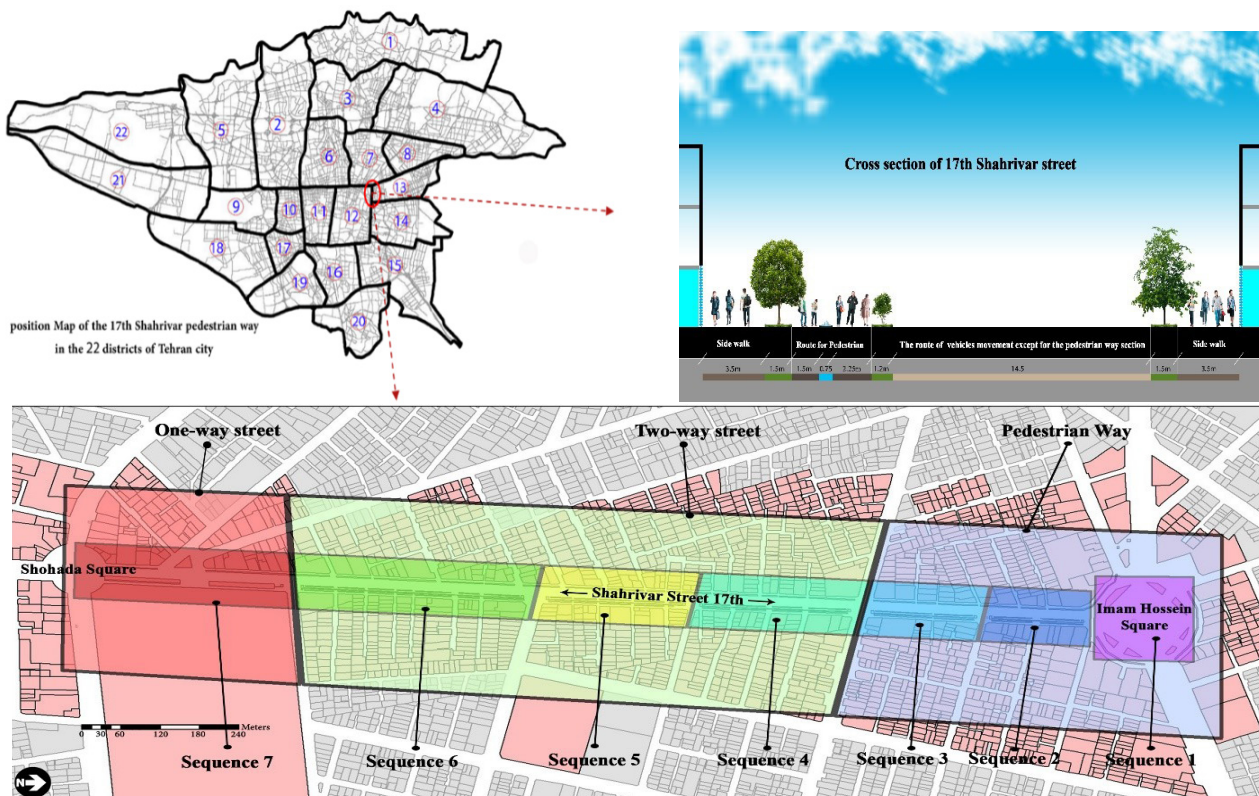


Fig. 1: Characteristics of the 17th Shahrivar axis, with the sequences set. Source: Authors.

havioral stations and other basic environmental factors that influenced life in space, was analyzed in the form of maps and photographs taken by the authors in the spring of 2017.

Quality of public life in the first sequence (Imam Hossein Square)

The pedestrian space of square has a suitable vitality, especially in the evenings; People of all ages, sexes and different social classes spend time in space, so that at crowded times people even sit on the ground, pond or inside the gardens and They go to rest, spend time and talk to each other. in this section, specific characteristics of public life is resting and sleeping inside the gardens, playing children in the evenings, selling Afghan cards, and the considerable presence of working men, townspeople and Afghans in space (Fig. 2).

The main factors contributing to the public life include large social gatherings, the proximity to the highway and metro lines, the existence of small and walkable business units, music and competition ceremonies, especially in the festivities, temporary exhibitions and the establishment of the martyrs' tomb. The main weakening factors of the public life include the large size of the space, the iron enclosure around of square (the barrier to be visible business units), poorly-structured social fabric (the full presence of men, urban workers, Afghans and poor economic and social classes).

Quality of public life in the second and third sequences (pedestrian way section of 17th Shahrivar axis)

The pedestrian section of the 17th Shahrivar axis also has a relatively good liveliness, especially in the evenings, relying on street vendors. The usual movement of people in space is from sidewalks on both sides of the route with looking at

commercial units (mainly Gold and Clothing Exchange) but in the evening, with the presence of street vendors and horizontal sunlight, the movement from the middle of the road becomes the first choice. The seats in this section are often full and at busy times (in the evenings), young and middle-aged men, who are more prominent and more spacious in space, sit around the ponds or rely on the railing adjacent to the pedestrians, they watch the surroundings and talk to each other. The other specific features of public life in this section are people waiting for electric cars throughout the day and the presence of prostitutes in the evenings (Fig. 3). The main factors for improving the public life of the pedestrian are small and walkable business units, presence of a lot of people, the presence of street vendors and news stand stalls. The main weakening factors of public life include social anomalies (in particular the presence of street addicts and women), Population displacement with electric vehicles, a inactivity part in Sequence 3 and the disrupted traffic situation of the Safa crossroad.

Quality of public life in the in the fourth, fifth and sixth sequences (two-way street section of the 17th Shahrivar axis)

In this section, the vitality rate has decreased relative to the pedestrian way section and local men are more likely to use space. The traffic and speed of the vehicles are balanced and suitable because of the closing of the most alleys and traffic plans. Pedestrians on the move, use sidewalks on both sides of the street and the possibility to cross the street is sometimes difficult, due to concrete obstacles in the middle of the roadway. Also, the emptiness of the route and lots of vacant seats on the pedestrian path are visible at different times of the day

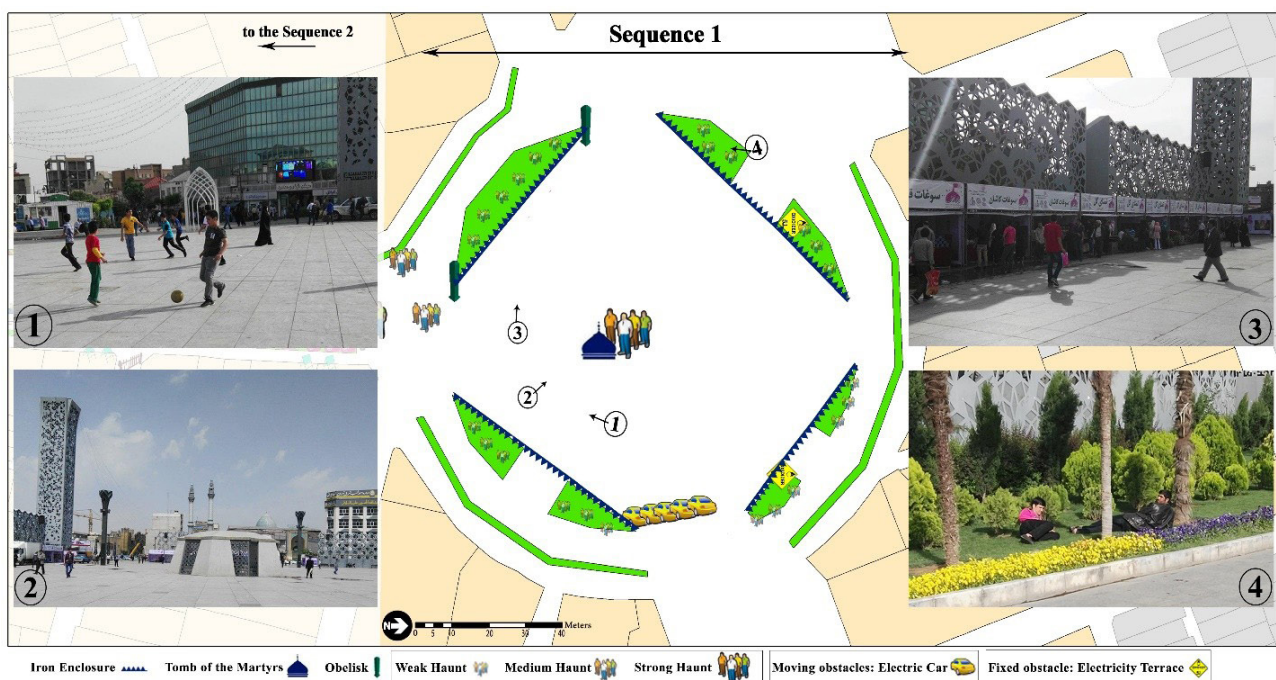


Fig. 2: Expressing the essential characteristics of the public life in the first sequence (photo descriptions: 1) Children are playing in the evenings 2) emptiness of the square in the morning 3) Temporary exhibitions 4) Rest and haunt in the gardens). Source: Authors.

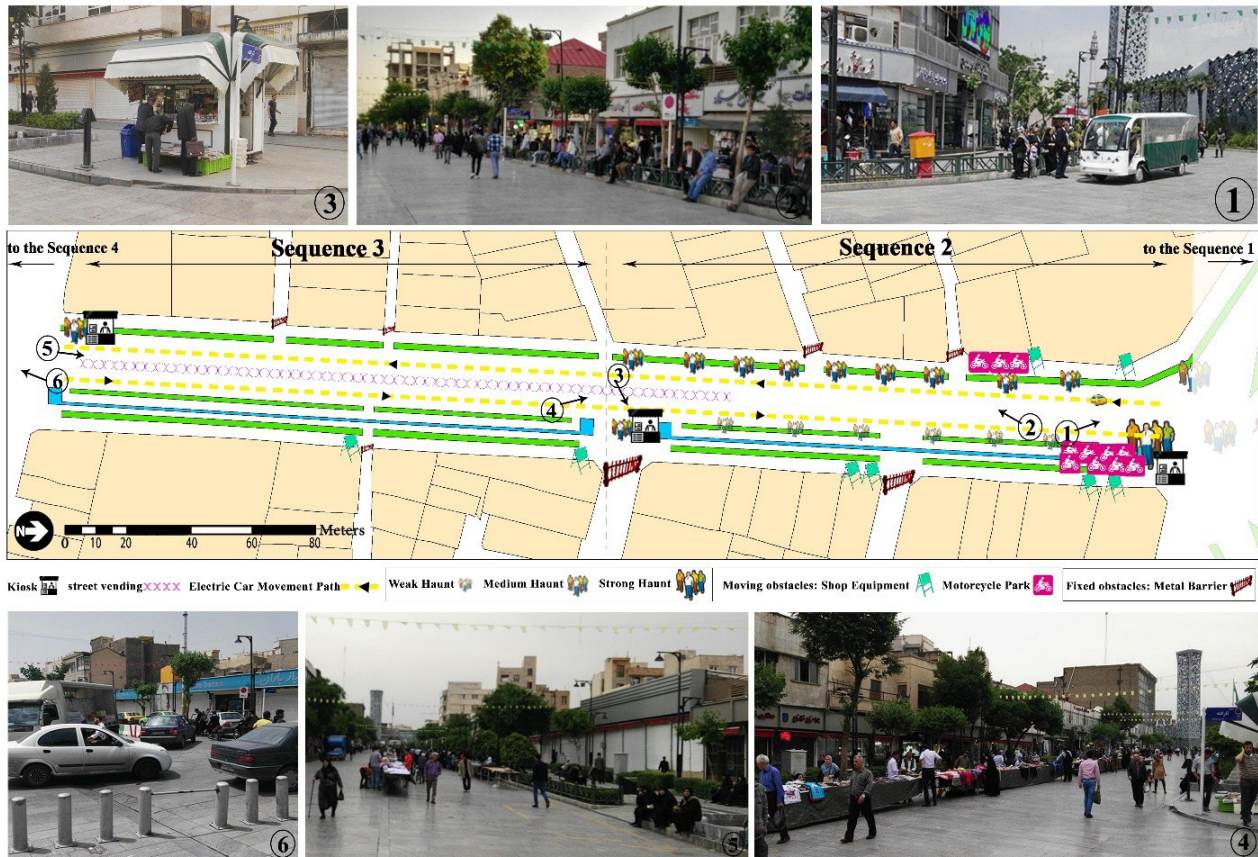


Fig. 3: Expressing the essential characteristics of the public life in the second and third sequences (photo descriptions: 1) Waiting for people to ride electric cars 2) Men loiter on the fences in the evenings and watching the surroundings 3) The role of newsagents in boosting vitality during quiet times 4) Strengthening the vitality with the presence of street vendors in the evening 5) Increasing the presence of women by increasing the bustle of space (in the evening) 6) the disrupted traffic situation of Safa crossroad). Source: Authors.

except in the evening. This situation worsens by moving from sequence 4 to sequence 6, gradually decreasing the number of walking and sitting people in space (Fig. 4 & 5).

The main factors reinforcing public life in two-way street include appropriate vehicle speed and allocating a large portion of the route width to move and stay the pedestrians comfortably. The main weakening factors of public life include the presence of semi-active, local and incompatible units with pedestrian (such as car and motor showrooms, hookahs, etc.), the existence of closed commercial units and closed areas, a concrete barrier in the middle of the roadway (reducing the connection between the two sides of the street), the park of cars at the entrance to the pedestrian route, the occasional pouring of rubbish on the ground, the lack of suitable space for children and the presence of social anomalies (Addicts, Homeless people and ...).

Quality of public life in the Seventh sequence (one-way street section of 17th Shahrivar axis)

The one-way street section has the lowest level of vitality compared to the entire path sequences, and is seen lower stopping and staying of pedestrians in space. The large volume of passing vehicles with high speeds and relatively high traffic (usually in the evenings), along with the vast property of the power department which has created an inactive urban facade, has led to the domination of the vehicle and dire drop

in the quality of people life (Fig. 6).

The main factors contributing to the general life in the one-way street include the existence of behavioral centers and the establishment of the metro entrance. The main weakening factors of public life include the wide width of the riding path without stop location for pedestrians, semi-active and incompatible parts with pedestrians (establishment of the vast property of the power department, building materials sale, hookah house etc.), high altitude difference between the pedestrian and riding paths in the western wall of the route, the presence of noise pollution around the Shohada square and numerous cars parked in front of the power department, which has caused poor pedestrian life.

Findings

Findings show that for most of the day, the vitality of 17th Shahrivar axis was low and only in the evening, it was good which leads to a significant increase in stopping and staying of women and children. The amount of vitality gradually reduced by moving from the pedestrian way section (sequence 3, 2, 1) to the walkable section (sequence 6, 5, 4) and finally the car-oriented section (Sequence 7) that related to decrease in the number of sitting and staying people in space, the amount of staying time of people in space, the share of space allocated to the pedestrian and the convenience of passing pedestrians from the street width (the connection

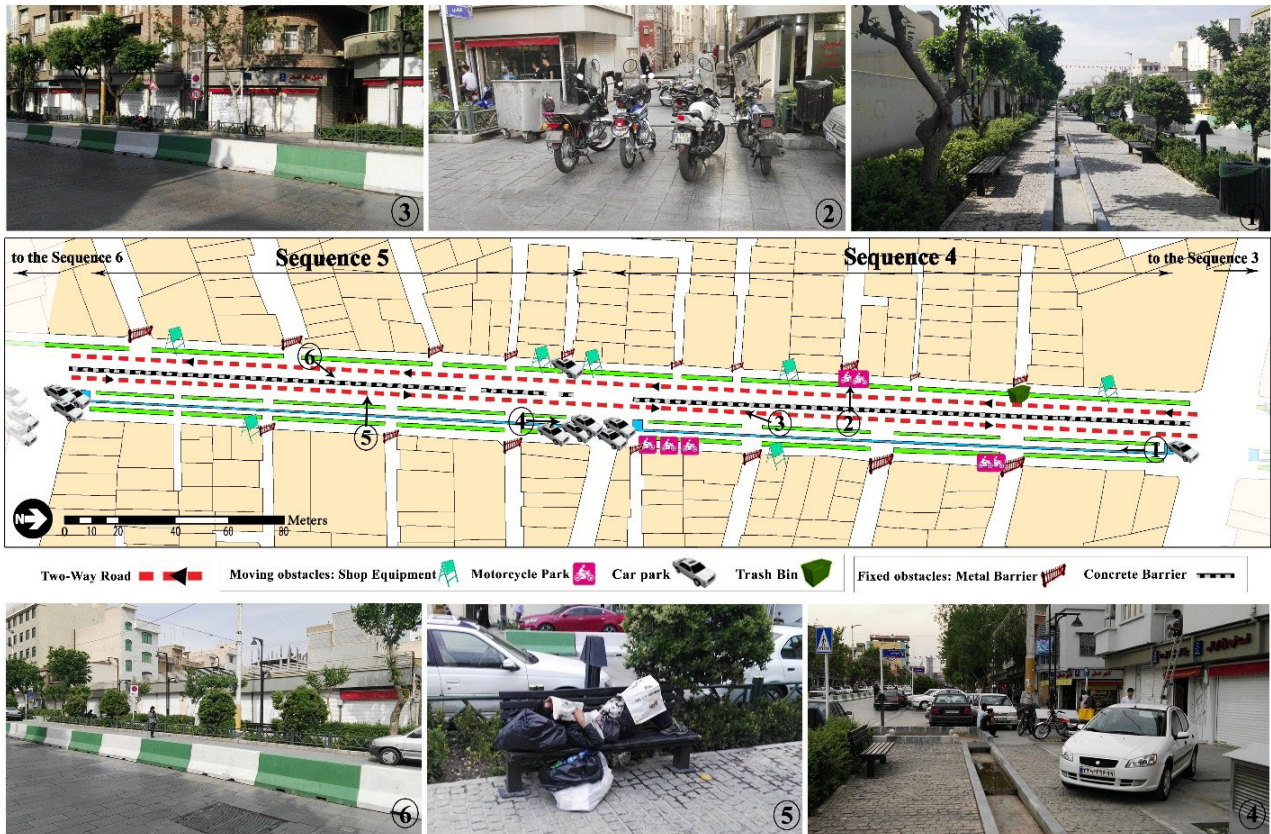


Fig. 4: Expressing the essential characteristics of the public life in the second and third sequences (photo descriptions: 1) emptiness of Route for pedestrian 2) Motorcycles have been parked at the entrance of the alley 3) inactive part in the early morning 4) a car has been parked at the entrance of the pedestrian path 5) Homeless people 6) The existence of large-scale non-active lots). Source: Authors.

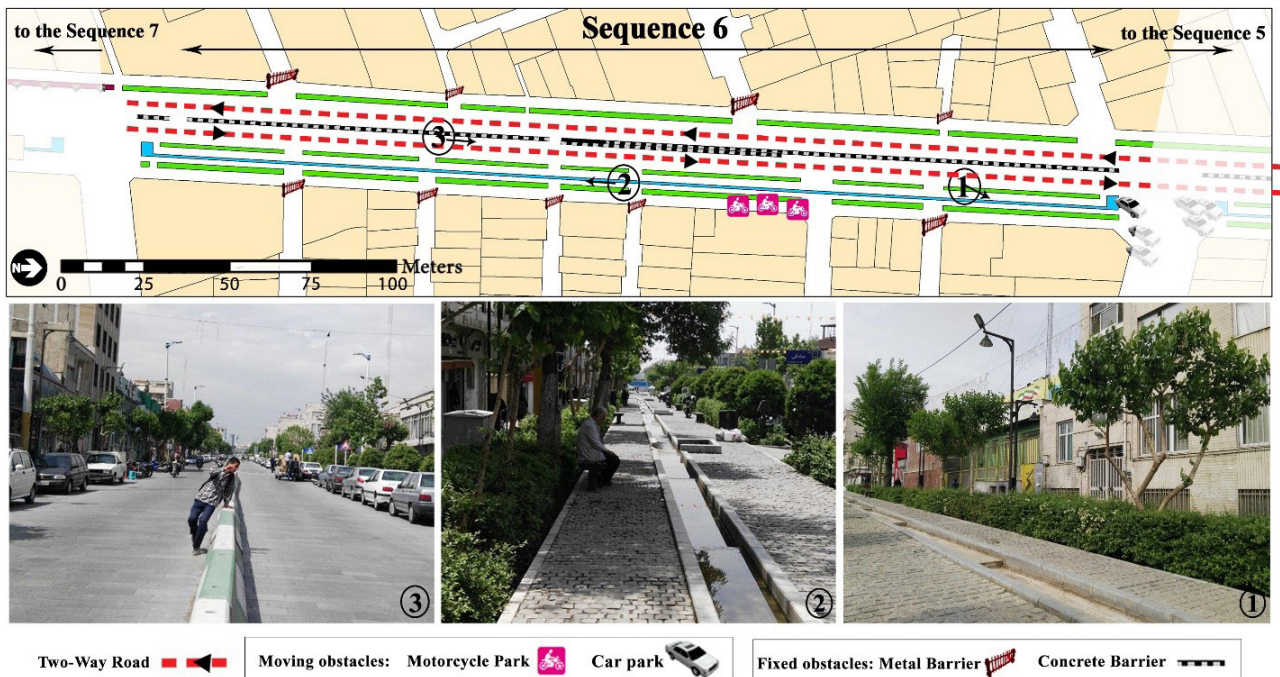


Fig. 5: Expressing the essential characteristics of the public life in the Sixth Sequence (photo descriptions: 1) inactive and car-oriented part 2) Preference for people to sit in shadowy areas 3) Occasionally jumping people from the impenetrable barrier in the middle of the road). Source: Authors.

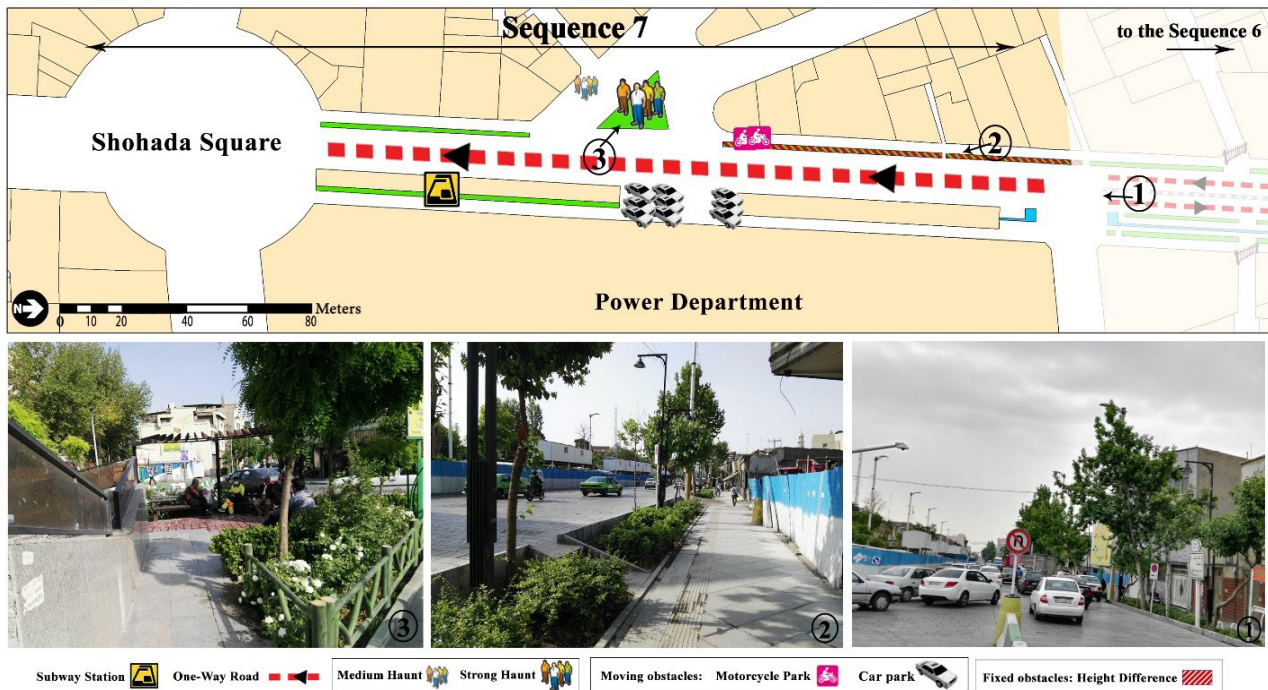


Fig. 6: Expressing the essential characteristics of the public life in the Seventh Sequence(photo descriptions:1) High traffic congestion of the road in the evening 2) Disturbed pedestrian traffic due to the high altitude difference between the sidewalk and riding path 3) The existence of an organized rendezvous with acceptable environmental quality). Source: Authors.

between the sides of the street). There are also special and significant activities in the 17th Shahrivar axis, including sleeping, resting, watching the environment, reading the newspaper and prostitution. These activities are mainly carried out by the dominance of young and middle-aged indigenous males, non-native workers and Afghans. (The lack of significant presence of women and children in current activities indicate the inadequate quality of space).

however, there are problems in the access aspect, the vision aspect and environmental aspect, the two main factors affecting the quality of life are functional aspect and social aspect. Although in the pedestrian section, active and lively space has been created by the presence of street vendors and commercial exchanges (garments, gold stock, Shahrestani market), these activities do not encompass all hours of the day and do not flow in the entire scope of the study (absence of active and attracting edge for people from sequence 4 to sequence 7). Therefore, the space has been largely silent and low in people on ordinary days. In such circumstances, space provided a place for unwanted and unplanned activities, such as becoming a vehicle park, the emergence of social anomalies (the presence of prostitutes, addicts, sales outlets, Homeless people and so on) that relates to the background and potential of space (such as the past crimes and car oriented).

The result is that the decline in the quality of space, in particular in terms of security, has led to a reduction in the use of normal people from urban space (in particular women and children) and the gradual shift in the social fabric of space users towards abnormal people, social stigmatization and the significant presence of immoral strata (prostitution, addicts, Afghans and non-native workers). The change in

the social texture is higher in the pedestrian way section. This section has a lower level of efficiency and definition because of lack of vehicles, deteriorated area, single housing and commercial stock, which can stimulate the absorption of abnormal social tissue. but in the riding section of the route, a variety of factors such as more density, the increase of the mixing land use (often local), the existence of newly renovated residential spaces and the vehicles traffic, makes it possible that space has fewer defenseless spaces and more social monitoring. Consequently, the space is controlled over different hours of the day and non-indigenous groups have no interest in being part of this area.

Conclusion

Although the conversion of urban spaces into pedestrians way is a valuable event, only providing access to space and the creation of beautiful and suitable urban furniture to move and stay of pedestrians is not sufficient for lively and active pedestrian way. Rather, by deliberated and gradual planning, pedestrian way should be able to provide transparent, active, engaging and diverse activities for people of all ages, sex, and social strata in different times of the day (This is less feasible in inappropriate locations such as 17th Shahrivar street, which has a long length, car oriented activity background and deteriorated area). Otherwise, urban space will become an abandoned and non-existent space of social control and will provide a context for abnormal people and the prevalence of abusive and insecure activities. Then, this situation can discourage people, especially vulnerable and sensitive ones including women and children to attend in space. It is because the security in the pedestrian space has priority over the quality of the optional and recreational activities in

space. The issue that needs to be addressed in the security debate is the issue of psychological security which is influenced by the culture of any country. So psychological security should be considered alongside physical and financial security. The presence of groups such as prostitutes, addicts, homeless people, strangers and non-natives diminishes the psychological security of individuals, especially women and children, and as a result, they have less comfortable and en-

joyable sense with the presence in space. Therefore, planning urban space should focus on the daily life of people. Otherwise, it can cause the daily harassment of local residents and the deprivation of their essential needs, such as psychological security because of responding to recreation activities of citizens during the weekend or year.

Reference List

- Aelbrecht, P.S. (2010). Rethinking urban design for a changing public life. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 3(2): 113-129.
- Burton, E. & Mitchell, L. (2006). *Inclusive urban design: Streets for life*. London, Architectural Press.
- Gehl, J. (1987). *Life between buildings: using public space*. Washington DC, Island Press.
- Gehl, J. & Matan, A. (2009). Two perspectives on public spaces. *Building Research & Information*, 37(1): 106-109.
- Gehl, J. (2010). *Cities for people*. Island press, Washington DC.
- Gehl, J. & Svarre, B. (2013). *How to study public life*. Washington DC, Island Press, .
- Hampton, K., Goulet, L.S. & Albanesius, G. (2015). Change in the social life of urban public spaces: The rise of mobile phones and women, and the decline of aloneness over 30 years. *Urban Studies Journal*, 52(8): 1489-1504.
- Lutt, F. E. (2015). Jan Gehl and Birgitte Svarre, How to Study Public Life Washington, DC, Island Press, 2013). Ali Madanipour, Sabine Knierbein, and Aglae Degros (Eds.), *Public Space and the Challenges of Urban Transformation in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2014). *Journal Of Urban Affairs*, 39(1):135-137.
- Mahmoudi Farahani, L. & Lozanovska, M. (2014). A framework for exploring the sense of community and social life in residential environments. *International Journal of Architectural Research: ArchNet- IJAR*, 8 (3), 223-237.
- Mahmoudi Farahani, L. & Lozanovska, M. (2015). The social life of historical neighbourhoods: case study of a Middle Eastern city, Shiraz. *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism*, 39(3): 176-187.
- Matan, A. (2011). *Rediscovering urban design through walkability: an assessment of the contribution of Jan Gehl*. PhD Thesis. Curtin University.
- Matan, A. & Newman, P. (2012). *Jan Gehl and new visions for walkable Australian cities*. *World Transport Policy & Practice*, 17(4): 30-41.
- Mehta, V. (2007). Lively streets: Determining environmental characteristics to support social behavior. *Journal of planning education and research*, 27(2): 165-187.
- Neary, S.I., Symes, M.S. & Brown, F. E. (ed). (1994). *The Urban Experience; A people-environment perspective*. London: E & FN Spon.
- Rivlin, L. (1994). *Public spaces and public life in urban areas. The urban experience: A people-environment perspective*. London, Chapman & Hall, 289-296.
- Sellers, B. (2003). Designing Streets for People. *Journal of the Faculty of Architecture Silpakorn University*, 19: 197-207.
- Southworth, M. (2014). Public life, public space, and the changing art of city design. *Journal of Urban Design*, 19(1): 37-40.

COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the authors with publication rights granted to MANZAR journal. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Hagh Bayan, R. & Shokohibidhendi, M.S. (2019). A systematic study of public life in urban space; Case Study :The 17 th Shahrivar pedestrian way in Tehran city. *Journal of MANZAR*, 11 (46): 36-43.

DOI: 10.22034/manzar.2019.84296

URL: http://www.manzar-sj.com/article_84296_en.html

