

Investigating People's Sense of Place in Jameh Mosque of Zanjan, Iran

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Abstract

The present study investigates people's sense of place in Jameh Mosque of Zanjan located in Zanjan city, Iran, and then evaluating their effects on creating sense of place in this mosque. Participants were pedestrians, traders, visitors of the mosque, and seminary students (n=226) which were selected randomly. A survey questionnaire was used to collect opinions of participants. To analyze collected data, statistical tests including Binomial test, Kruskal-Wallis and Friedman test were used. Binomial test results revealed that, according to participants, physical factors (81%), meaning (89%) and social activities (79%) are three factors that shape sense of place in Jameh Mosque. Kruskal-Wallis test results showed that these three factors have significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place in this location. Moreover, Friedman test results showed that components of meaning, physical setting and social activity are the most important factors in creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque of Zanjan, respectively.

Keywords: Sense of place, meaning, activity, physical properties, Jameh Mosque of Zanjan.

1. Introduction

Sense of place is one of the most important factors in assessing and communicating with diverse environments. Sense of place can be found in places that have a distinctive character. Sense of place is not only a simple way to explain how is the person's perception of place, but a multi-dimensional concept to identify the location symbolically and emotionally (Stefanovic, 1998). It is "The complex bundle of meanings, symbols, and qualities that a person or group associates (consciously and unconsciously) with a particular locality or region" (Shamai, 1991: 348). In phenomenology, a sense of place means connection to a place by understanding the symbols and daily activities (Relph, 1976). Sense of place can affect values, attitudes and especially individual and social behavior of people in the place, and their willingness to participate in social activities (Canter, 1977). Lynch (1998) suggested that sense of place makes a good relationship between human and place. The strongest sense of place experience is what Relph called *existential insideness*, "a situation of deep, unself-conscious immersion in place and the experience most people know when they are at home in their own community and region" (Seamon, 1996). Rogan et al. (2005) defined sense of place as a factor that makes an environment psychologically comfortable. Phenomenologists used some similar concepts such as 'Topophilia', 'character of place' and 'spirit of place' (Steele, 1981) to explain the concept of sense of place. *Topophilia* is a term that first was presented by Tuan (1974) which means "love of place". He used this term instead of sense of place and defined it as impressive connection between people and place (Tuan, 2001). Relph (1976) described that place is an interaction of three components (1) the place's physical setting; (2) its activities, situations, and events; and (3) the individual and group meanings created through people's experiences and intentions in regard to that place. Environmental psychologists argue that physical settings play a significant role in facilitating the goals and aspirations of their users (Stokols, 1990). Physical properties which are effective in sense of place and perception of place are: dimension of place, enclosure degree, contrast, human scale, proportion, distance, texture, color, smell, sound and visual variety (Steele, 1981). Overall, different definitions of sense of place reflect the fact that this sense is the result of activities as well as physical and semantic features. Concepts indicates that social factors resulting from the activities as well as physical characteristics and meanings (personal or environmental) are influenced by the history, culture, traditions, decoration, aesthetics, emotions and thoughts of a person which is the main factor in shaping a sense of place. Understanding the factors referred to in the formation of a sense of place (physical characteristics, meanings, activities) are important factors in identifying indicators for perception of the environment.

There are many studied that investigated the sense of place. For example, Nik mohammad et al. (2013) studied sense of place within the landscape in cultural setting. Najafi et al. (2011) studied sense of place in architectural studies. Our study investigates the sense of place in Jameh Mosque of Zanjan in Iran. The most important structural elements of Iran's religious and traditional buildings are mosques that have profound implications associated with the presence of humans and substantive applications. In this study we investigated the existence of three components of sense of place (physical setting, meaning and activities) in Jameh Mosque.

2. Case study

Jameh Mosque of Zanjan also known as, Seyyed Mosque and Sultani Mosque is the grand, congregational mosque of Zanjan city, Iran. The mosque is situated in the old part of the city and was constructed in 1826 during the Qajar era (see Fig. 1). The construction was carried out by Abdullah Mirza Dara who was one of the children of Fathali Shah Qajar in the year (1242 AH.). This historical site is of great value where planning and architectural feats are concerned. To the east and west of the court yard of the mosque sixteen chambers exist running parallel to each other. Facing towards south are rise chambers used as residential quarters for theology students. The ceilings of these chambers are artistically decorated with diagonal arches 2.5 m from the floor (See Fig. 4). The portions have beautifully vaulted and have arched ceilings. The chambers have also been worked in tile dating back to Qajar era. This mosque has three places for nocturnal payers or Shabestan (see Fig.2) each having an altar. The dome of this mosque is spectacular, inspired by the architecture of Parthian period (see Fig. 3).



Figure 1. A view of Jameh Mosque of Zanjan (Photo taken by author)



Figure 2. Bedchamber (Shabestan) of Jameh Mosque of Zanjan (Photo taken by author)



Figure 3. Dome of Jameh Mosque of Zanjan (Photo taken by author)



Figure 4.
Decorative mosaic

tiles of Jameh Mosque of Zanjan (Photos taken by author)

Jameh Mosque Zanjan, due to locating in the historic fabric of Zanjan city and its potential relationship with the Zanjan Bazaar as a traditional urban element, is of particular importance, and is used as the main and secondary entrances to Zanjan Bazaar. Therefore, taking into account all the above features, it can be valuable building with meaning and identity, and considering its physical importance, physical connections and its concepts, can be suitable for studies on sense of place and influence different people in Zanjan city.

3. Materials and Methods

This study is a descriptive survey. Based on previous studies in field of sense of place, its three components including *physical factors*, *meaning* and *social activities* were used for the study and we investigated their existence in Jameh Mosque. Accordingly, hypotheses of the study were formulated as follows:

H1. Physical setting has significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque;

H2. Meaning has significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque;

H3. Social activities have significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque.

Statistical population consists of the people who were visiting the Jameh Mosque in Zanjan city of Iran. Using stratified sampling method, they were divided into different social classes, and then by simple random sampling technique, the samples were selected from each of the classes. Finally, using Cochran formula, 226 subjects were selected for the study. Samples were above 15-years old citizens who permanently and continuously were associated with Jameh Mosque in their daily lives, and felt the presence of the building continually in their life.

In order to assess the existence of the components of sense of place in Jameh Mosque and recognize hierarchy of influence of this sense of place on people, a Persian- language questionnaire was designed rated based on 5-point Likert scale. It had 24 items, 8 items measure the effects of physical factors of the mosque, 8 items assess the semantic effects of the mosque, and 8 questions measure the effects of social activities in the mosque. Reliability of the questionnaire was obtained as 0.87 using Cronbach alpha which was acceptable.

Data were analyzed in SPSS v.21 software by using statistical tests including Binomial test (for identifying existence of constituent elements of sense of place), Friedman Test (for ranking main variables of the study and their effectiveness), and Kruskal Wallis Test (for analyzing whether the opinions of participants and the effect of study variables on sense of place are identical).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Characteristics of participants

Data reported that participants were 72 pedestrians (31.9%), 50 Zanjan bazaar traders (22.1%); 52 visitors of the mosque (23%) and 52 seminary students and servants of the mosque (23%). Age of the majority of participants was 31-40 years ($n=70$, 31%) and most of them had Bachelor degree ($n=68$, 30.1%).

4.2. Testing research hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 stated that, according to participants, physical setting of Jameh Mosque has significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place in this place. Our assumptions are:

- (a). Physical setting has no significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place ($p < 0.05$)
- (b). Physical setting has significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place ($p > 0.05$)

Binomial test indicated that the proportion of agreed viewpoints of 81% was higher than the expected 50%, $p = .000$ (1-sided) (table 1). In this regard we can say that physical setting of Jameh Mosque has significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place, and the variable of physical setting" was determined as one of the factor causing a sense of place in Jameh Mosque.

Table 1. Binomial test results-H1

Groups	N	Observation prop.	Test prop.	Sig.
Opposing viewpoints	44	0.19	0.50	0.00
Agreed viewpoints	182	0.81		
Total	226	1.00		

Also, results of Kruskal Wallis test indicated that all participants had identical viewpoints towards the physical factors of the mosque at significant level of 0.52 ($p > 0.05$) and have same opinion on the impact of physical setting on creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque (table 2). Overall, it can be said that physical setting has moderate impact in creating a sense of place in Jameh Mosque of Zanjan in view of all participants.

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis test results-H1

Chi-squared (x^2)	7.805
df	3
Sig.	0.052

Hypothesis 2 stated that meaning has significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque in view of respondents. For binomial test our assumptions are:

- (a). Meaning has no significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place ($p < 0.05$);
- (b). Meaning has significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place in mosque in view of respondents ($p > 0.05$).

Binomial test indicated that the proportion of agreed viewpoints of 89% was higher than the expected 50%, $p = .000$ (1-sided) (table 3). This supports the assumption that meaning in Jameh Mosque of Zanjan has significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place in this place, and it is one of the factors that create sense of place in this mosque.

Table 3. Binomial test results-H2

Groups	N	Observation prop.	Test prop.	Sig.
Opposing viewpoints	24	0.11	0.50	0.00
Agreed viewpoints	202	0.89		
Total	226	1.00		

Results from Kruskal Wallis test, indicated that all participants had nonidentical viewpoints towards the meaning factor in the mosque at a significant level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) and therefore, have different opinions about the effect of meaning on creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque (table 4).

Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis test results-H2

Chi-square (x^2)	20.021
df	3
Sig.	0.000

Hypothesis 3 stated that Social activities in Jameh Mosque of Zanjan have significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place in mosque according to participants. For binomial test of this hypothesis, our assumptions are:

- (a). Social activities have no significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place ($p \leq 0.5$)
- (b). Social activities have significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place ($p > 0.5$)

Binomial test indicated that the proportion of agreed viewpoints of 79% was higher than the expected 50%, $p = .000$ (1-sided) (table 5). This indicates that social activities have significant effect on attracting people and creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque of Zanjan in view of participants, and activity is determined as one of the factors in creating sense of place in this mosque.

Table 5. Binomial test results-H3

Groups	N	Observation prop.	Test prop.	Sig.
Opposing viewpoints	48	0.21	0.50	0.00
Agreed viewpoints	178	0.79		
Total	226	1.00		

Results of Kruskal Wallis test showed that opinions of all participants about activity in the mosque were not identical at a significant level of 0.002 ($p < 0.05$) and have different viewpoints towards the effect of social activities on creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque (table 6).

Table 6. Kruskal-Wallis test results-H3

Chi-square (χ^2)	14.866
df	3
Sig.	0.002

4.3. Friedman test

In order to compare the effectiveness of each of the study variables (physical setting, meaning and social activities) in influencing the dependent variable (creating sense of place), Friedman test was carried out. Table 7 presents the ranking of three effective factors. As can be seen, the “meaning” factor were the most effective variable among other two factors to create sense of place in Jameh Mosque of Zanjan (mean=2.08).

Table 7. Rank

Variable	Mean rank
Physical setting	2.02
Meaning	2.08
Social activity	1.90

Table 8. Friedman test statistics

N	226
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Chi-squared (χ^2)	7.198
df	2
Sig.	0.027

Friedman test statistics showed that there was a statistically significant difference in opinions of participants on the effectiveness of three studied factors, $\chi^2(2) = 7.198, p = 0.027$ (table 8). Significant level is 0.027 which is less than 0.05, so it means that difference between meaning with highest rank (2.08) and social activity with lowest rank (1.90) is significant.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to survey the effectiveness of physical factor, meaning and social activities in creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque of Zanzan. Participants were pedestrians, traders, visitors of the mosque and seminary students ($n=226$). Results of research hypotheses showed that components of sense of place (physical factor, meaning and social activities) certainly existed in Jameh Mosque of Zanzan and they can create a sense of place in this mosque. However, effectiveness of these factors was not the same and results reported different percentages for them.

The most effective and important factor in creating sense of place in Jameh Mosque of Zanzan was "meaning" and the second and third important factors were physical setting and social activities, respectively. The "meaning" factor was the choice of the seminary students who were continuously at this location, and suggests that if the number of people in this place increase, and the mosque becomes a place to live and learn especially for people those who attend with Gnostic insight at this location, this meaning element will have the greatest impact on people because of religious and spiritual impact. In contrast, social activity which had the lowest impact on creating a sense of place, was reported as the highest effective factor according to participants which indicates that the social activities, from the perspective of worshipers and visitors to the Jameh Mosque, was the most important factor. As a result, according to the research findings, it can be concluded that people's relationship with the environment influences on an individual's perception of the location, and type of motivation in his feelings towards a building. As pedestrians, traders, visitors and seminary students had different views about physic, meaning and social activity, this indicates how people communicate and are close to Jameh Mosque, and also it can be said that with the increase of a person's attachment with a place, a greater sense of place will be created towards the place.

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