From Spaces to Societies: Exploring the Impact of Public Interior Design on Urban Social Interactions

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Abstract. Social interaction is a fundamental human need that involves activities of connection and conversation within urban communities. Previous studies indicated an important approach to enhancing social interactions in urban space to create a livable and sustainable urban community. However, the influences of public interior design on citizen social interactions are underestimated while interior space is where people spend the majority of their time. The primary aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between urban space and interior design and its impact on human social interaction through studies about public interior design. The research method is qualitative and involves studying documents, books, professional magazines, scientific journals, related research projects, and the World Wide Web. The findings of the paper provide a deeper perspective from the standpoint of interior design and underscore the significant responsibilities of interior designers within a larger context, extending beyond the confines of four walls.

1 Introduction

Humans are social beings, and social interaction is essential to normal human development [1] (Sociology, 2024). It is proposed that social interaction is one of the important components in urban space and crucial elements of urban development process. According to Zare (2015), social sustainability is one of the aspects belonging to the concept of urban sustainability [2].

Previous studies indicated an important approach to enhancing social interactions in urban space to create a livable and sustainable urban community. There is the visual continuity in pedestrian motion (Camillo Sitte, 1889); considering the pedestrian sequential views in urban space planning (Gordon Cullen, 2961); physical elements, and aspects in cities public areas (Rob Krier, 1975) (Aldo Rossi, 1982); urban spaces gradual growth and non-geometrical order (Christopher Alexander, 1987); the role of streets and squares in the city (Cliff Matin, 1999); urban space social-local process (Ali Madanipur, 2000); design

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principles of various urban spaces (Jahanshah Pakzad, 2005)…cited in (ZARE, 2015) [2];
landscape design (Aysel Uslu, Safak Gokce, 2010) [3]; the high quality of public space
(Kate Bishop, Nancy Marshall, 2017) [4]; the roles of the urban park (Karin Peters, Birgit
Elands, Arjen Buijs, 2010) [5]; healthy neighborhood environments (Xi Jin, Xu Zhou, Bo
Gao, 2010) [6]. However, there is limited research conducting analyses on the relationship
between social interaction and urban development from the perspective of interior
designers, specifically regarding the role of interior space in this system.

It is claimed that social interaction occurs not only in urban or architectural spaces but
also within internal spaces, where individuals spend the majority of their
time—specifically, the “interior of boxes”. We study, work, experience, live, and meet other
people in the interior spaces of many different buildings, such as schools, offices, houses,
residents, restaurants...etc where we spend the majority of days and nights [6]. “In modern
society, more than 70% of a person’s lifespan is spent indoors so the role of architecture is
to provide built environments that sustain the occupant's psychological well-being” (Kim,
1998, cited in (Mahmoud, 2017) [7]. As a result, it is not estimated the role of quality of
social interactions in interior spaces, specifically in public interior spaces. As 'the father of
all design,' interior space serves as an “educational tool” for human social behaviors, with
well-designed interiors capable of shaping positive social behaviors and interactions [8].
Therefore, it is essential to take into consideration the impact of interior public space
designs on human behaviors and social interactions within large urban contexts.

That’s the reason why this paper aims to bridge this gap by exploring and increasing
concerns about the importance of influences of social interaction in public interior design.
The second aim is to find how interior design enhances social interaction in internal spaces,
thereby promoting the development of urban environments. This research method is
qualitative and is carried out by studying documents, books, professional magazines,
science journals related to research projects, and the World Wide Web.

The outcomes of this paper can benefit other professionals, such as urban designers,
planners, sociologists, architects, and citizens, who consider creating a positive social
community. The findings of the paper provide a deeper perspective from the standpoint of
interior design and underscore the significant responsibilities of interior designers within a
larger context, extending beyond the confines of four walls.

2 Social interaction, urban development, and interior design

There are many previous studies claimed about the concept of “social interaction”. It is the
simplest element of human common life. According to (ZARE, 2015), social interaction
happens whenever an action, is committed by an individual, which is accompanied by a
reaction from another individual creating mutual interactions [2]. Social interaction is a
dynamic sequence of social actions between individuals (or groups) who modify their
actions and reactions due to actions by their interaction partner [1], even with strangers.
Social relations between strangers can be categorized into passive and active relations
(Aelbrecht, 2016) [9]. Active interactions involve a conversation between two or more
people and occur on many levels which are transformational and have a fluid nature.

Conclusion, social interactions occur across a spectrum of physical spaces, spanning
from urban environments to internal spaces. In each different space setting, social
interaction would happen differently based on various environmental components. The
appropriate space to interact, the opportunity for contact, and proximity to others could
enhance the possibility of social interaction [9]. Establishing a strong positive social
community often begins with fostering smaller positive social communities, from “intimate
space” to “personal zone” to “social distance” and “public space” [6].
Therefore, fostering good social interactions within internal public spaces can contribute to positive social interactions within urban environments. As a result, creating a positive social community is one of the fundamental factors of a livable and sustainable urban environment [8]. Consequently, it is crucial to recognize the interplay between these factors and the influence of physical interior public spaces on human social interaction. To enhance comprehension, the paper will discover the relationship between social interaction, urban space, and interior space in the following sections.

2.1 Social interaction and urban space

Social interaction is a fundamental human need through activities of connection and conversation in urban communities. When people try to connect, they start to initiate social relations and social life in urban space [10] which is shaped based on rational intellectual foundations, civil participation of society, and social behaviors formed based on human values. This social interaction and public participation could be considered as the main elements in urban space content that impact human relations and urban activities [11]. Social interactions have a profound influence on the way that people behave within urban space, so that, this impact – which is derived from the quality of the built environment – is transmitted to people and the way they behave in their personal lives [12]. As a consequence, good social interaction and educated social behavior could create a positive and livable urban environment.

“The higher the opportunity for social interaction, the more diverse relationships are bound to be established. Social connectedness is then shaped leading to a higher sense of community and belonging. The sense of belonging to a community is seen to be a life motivator and a catalyst for happiness and health. Consequently, this sense of belonging is transferred from the community to the place (Hall, 2014; The Fullframe Initiative)” [9].

The design of urban spaces can significantly influence how people interact and shape social dynamics among individuals, such as enhancing student’s engagement in university campuses (Hisham Negm, Dina Sameh Taha, Dina Mohamed Saadallah, 2020) by promoting their sense of ownership, sense of capability of making change, and the time student spend on campus. A. Khoram (2019) indicated that there are four indicators of promoting social interaction in urban public space with a happy city approach including the sense of belonging to the place, security, urban pedestrians, and urban furniture [13]…etc, which have a similar link to elements in interior space based on human triple needs [14]. Additionally, discussing how the physical environment shapes and educates human daily activities across different scales of space, two famous quotes come to mind. “City builds its citizens and citizens their city” (Richard Togers) and “We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us” (Winston Churchill). The impacts of surrounding environments on humans are undeniable, encompassing not only large urban spaces but also small internal spaces. And, nowadays, when identifying the concept of interior design, it is not limited to a full or partial enclosure that caters to human needs and promotes well-being.

2.2 Social interaction and public interior space

Besides person-based variables and social connections, physical settings are important factors that influence how people interact with each other (Gifford and Gallagher, 1985; cited in (Prabu Wardono, Haruo Hibino, Shinichi Koyama, 2010) [15]. “The public space is the interior of the built environment. The mutual analogy between the parts of the city and
the interior of the buildings that make it up is supported by similar means of expression in their creation” [16]. Public interior spaces, such as shopping centres, green spaces, libraries, mosques, hospitals, restaurants, and cafes, constitute integral components of urban cities, where people of varying ages spend a significant portion of their social time.

The physical characteristics and spatial relationships of these spaces can have a significant influence on where and when social interaction occurs and, when it does, on the efficiency of social interaction (Steinfeld, 1972; cited in (İmran K. Altun, Bilge S. Onaran, 2022) [17]. Additionally, previous studies indicated that the characteristics of a great public space are safe, and welcoming not only has design and architectural features but also reflects the local culture or history. The crucial aims of these spaces is to promote human contact and social activities, and community involvement also (Prvanov, 2017) [18].

In the nutshell, the social interactions here are bustling and diverse, with the potential to impact numerous societal groups significantly, from young children (Abu Lawi, 2017) [19] to elderly individuals (İmran K. Altun, Bilge S. Onaran, 2022) [17]. The interior design of these spaces yields profound social effects on individual life and society; specifically, it not only influences the social interaction capabilities of a community but also affects the social behaviors of individuals through these activities. Well-design public interiors could encourage the use of all age groups together which can be considered as a big step to be taken both in breaking the prejudices about aging and in ensuring social interaction and making the active elderly feel they belong to the society and public interiors (İmran K. Altun, Bilge S. Onaran, 2022) [17]. Therefore, given the influential role in shaping and educating human behavior, designers should pay closer attention to fostering positive social interactions in public spaces and educating users through the utilization of their spaces by elements of interior elements of public spaces (shapes, forms, colors, materials, furniture, layout, orders..etc..)

3. Interior design’s role in fostering human social interaction

The end goal of interior design is the promotion of human well-being. Successful interior design does not rely on artistic elements but also on factors that help to define the individual’s place in the world at large. Interior design principles toward adapt the triple human needs, include psychological needs, physical needs, and emotional needs. Promoting intangible factors include trust and respect to foster humans to attain a state of well-being and promote efficiency, productivity, and satisfaction across society (Caan, 2011) [6]. As 'the father of all design,' interior space serves as an educational tool for human social behavior, with well-designed interiors capable of shaping positive social behaviors and interactions (An, 2023) [8]. It is essential to pay attention to the impact of interior public space designs on human behavior and social interactions to have a proper “educational tool” (Figure 1).
Previous studies indicated the effects of interior design on human psychology, human behavior, and human social interaction. It has been previously suggested that the role of interior design elements in mitigating the negative relationship between residential crowding and user psychological health. To be more specific, residents of crowded homes with greater architectural depth are less likely to socially withdraw or to be psychologically distressed than residents in crowded homes with relatively low depth (Evans, G. W., Lepore, S. J., & Schroeder, A., 1996) [20]. Interior colors, lighting, and decors on perceived sociability, emotion, and behavior in restaurant interior space (Prabu Wardono, Haruo Hibino, Shinichi Koyama, 2010) [23]. They claimed that “the restaurant with monochromatic colors, dim lighting, and plain decors yielded a statistically significant difference in the entire dependent variables with almost any other interior conditions on romantic dining, as opposed to the case of casual dining”. In 2005, John Manzo presented interior architectural elements such as corridors, furniture, and flooring in enclosed shopping malls that can mitigate techniques of social-interactional management (Manzo, 2005) [21]. Nextly, Mahmoud (2017) studied the psychological impacts of interior architectural elements, such as identity, privacy and safety, health concerns, accessibility degree, open spaces feature, and aesthetic sense on user’s psychological behavior. “There is a complex interaction between a person and a space. The person defines the space, the space defines the person; the person gives meaning to the space, and the space gives meaning to the person. In other words, there is a complex and bilateral interaction between the person and the space in its cultural, psychological, economic, and physical dimension” (Ayalp, 2012; cited in (Mahmoud, 2017). (Susanne Coenberg, Tuuli Jylhä, 2021) [21] also claimed that four interior design strategies for a healthy workplace, in which strategies for healthy behavior aim at nudging physical activity in the workplace. Xinyi He (2018) presented that the interior public spaces of high-rise residential buildings can be better used to promote social interaction between the occupants of the building (He, 2018) [22].

Based on the results of the literature reviews above, it is essential to recognize the role of interior design in fostering human social interaction through daily activities that occur
within internal spaces. It is supposed that a well-designed interior space can create conducive opportunities for social interaction through effective spatial zoning, and furniture arrangement, fostering a sense of closeness among friends, and instilling a feeling of safety among strangers. For example, large lobbies or corridors of shopping malls are supposed “social places” with many different activities of all age users (Figure 2); or optimal furniture selections and placements within the interior zoning can encourage individuals to engage in both brief and extended discussions (Figure 3).

**Fig. 2, Source: By Author**

The “focal points” of interior design in the coffee shop environment can be place for social activities where strangers share the same zone but still feel safe in their internal space. The boundaries are created by using different material or color in order to create separated visible zones.

**Fig. 3, Source: By Author**

In conclusion, a pleasant atmosphere in a public interior environment can contribute to people feeling relaxed and comfortable, promoting positive mental health and facilitating connections with individuals from different social groups. This is achieved through the effective division of intimate zones, personal spaces, social zones, and public areas within the layout. Individuals have the freedom to choose whether to engage in the social rhythm or seek personal space as desired. Consequently, they are inclined to revisit the place due to a sense of belonging and safety within the internal space, despite its public nature.
4. Discussion and Conclusion

Social interaction is an essential element in human social life and is a crucial component of urban development. Positive social interactions in the community can contribute to creating a livable and sustainable urban development. These positive human social interactions should happen not only in urban spaces but also in interior spaces where people spend more than 70% of their time. Positive social interaction can be shaped by the design of the surrounding environment. That is the reason why it is not underestimated the role of interior space to educate human social awareness and engage good social skills.

The transition between urban space and interior space sometimes is just an enclosure, represented by 'a wall,' but social interactions always happen 'in' and 'out' of the walls. Therefore, creating sustainable urban development is the responsibility not only of urban designers or architects but also of interior designers, to create a 'smooth transition' from 'in' to 'out'. Social interactions happen naturally, but by educating this system through the design of space, we can create positive social engagements.

Due to time constraints, the study primarily addresses the issue from the perspective of interior design, highlighting the role of interior space designs in promoting social interaction within urban contexts. Therefore, this paper only incorporates a limited number of specific case studies within limited scope. The findings should be interpreted within the context of the existing literature and may not fully capture the complexities of the subject matter. Future research will delve deeper into the analysis and study of specific internal spaces, employing more qualitative research methods to provide richer insights into the dynamics of social interaction within these environments.

The findings of this paper emphasize the significance of not overlooking the relationship of interior design in forming social interaction within the urban context, they should play a pivotal role in the urban development process of cities and communities in the bright future. The outcomes of this paper hold profound value for various professionals, including governments, urban designers, planners, environmentalists, architects, and citizens, as they all play a part in shaping an urban future. Furthermore, these results can be integrated into the curriculum of interior architecture programs at universities and colleges to educate future interior designers. This approach will enable future designers to recognize their significant responsibilities in understanding more about human and social factors, leading to the development of more practical designs that foster social community.

References


