

Shariyeh Hosseininasab*

The Interaction of University and The City; A Socio-Spatial Bond

Abstract

In recent years, with growth in number of universities to overcome the lack of educational environments in the country, several universities have been shaped within inappropriate spaces without considering quantitative and qualitative needs of users. Nevertheless, this approach can have various negative impacts on users including decline in vitality of space, lack of association with academic environment and loss of sense of belonging which all eventually can affect the quality of education. This paper aims to find out how university spaces can interact with their urban context which may influence the quality of space to increase sense of belonging among the users. The paper employs descriptive analytical methodology. Data is collected from various secondary sources and available literature on the topic. After analysing the data, paper concludes that university campuses can develop their interaction with urban context through balancing enclosure and permeability, using university campuses as urban public spaces and sharing facilities with community.

Keywords: Sense of belonging, University campus, academic space, urban environment, place, city

1. Introduction

Sense of place is affiliation of human being to the place where he/she is living which can be identified at different levels and can affect the quality of space to a great extent (Camellia Pavela, 2014). Educational spaces due to the nature of their needs, have some limitations which have the potential to convert them to boring and monotonous spaces. Many experts believe that one of the factors to inspire the students in educational spaces is rooted in the ability of built environment to motivate them which can have reverse impacts in case users' needs are not responded. The relationship between man and place in educational spaces must be considered, as youth spend a considerable part of their life within them. The design of an educational environment should not be limited to meeting educational needs, rather it should consider the learner's mutual interaction between his physical and social environments (Camellia Pavela, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the attachment of students to educational environments as their active participation in the academic environment; collaboration in academic discussions and the sense of responsibility towards the university environment can be achieved by increasing the sense of belonging to the place. Hence, this paper aims to identify the ways

* Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, COMSATS University Islamabad, sharia@cuilahore.edu.pk.

through which university spaces can increase their interaction with their urban context. It is believed that sense of belonging to the place in academic spaces can be developed if they have appropriate interaction with their urban context.

2. Research methodology

The aim of this research is to investigate the methods through which university spaces can increase their interaction with their urban context. It is believed that interaction of universities with their urban surroundings through built environment can improve relationship of citizens and students which eventually can enhance sense of belonging to the place and hence quality of education. The research has employed descriptive analytical method. Required data has been collected from various secondary sources and available literature on the topic. After analysing data based on objectives of the research, several solutions and their architectural interpretations are presented.

3. Literature Review

Interaction of academic spaces with urban areas, has always been considered by experts. In contemporary universities however, the need for this interaction is more necessary. Pierce et al. classifies university centres in Europe based on their spatial organisation and their relationship with the city into four categories (Camellia Pavela, 2014).

The first generation are universities whose spaces and landscape have all been developed within the city periphery and along with city growth. Oxford University, University of Paris, Cambridge, and Bologna Universities are among them. In many of these universities such as Cambridge, the identity of city and university is merged and even many of urban services such as cafes and banks are combined within educational spaces.

The second generation of universities which are known as “red brick universities”, were in a particular district of the city. Although they were located within the city periphery, they had less interaction with the city as compared to the first group. The third group of universities were formed outside the city and they had limited connection with urban areas. They were established as a quick response to the need for higher education institutes. The fourth generation of universities were similarly located outside the city periphery and were not a part of city and its growth. These university compounds were designed as independent settlements which were able to provide all the academic and daily needs of the users including students, teachers, and staff (Kamelnia, 2015).

In 1970s, with increasing use of automobile and need for vehicular access, university sites followed the city structure in design and included pedestrian and vehicular accessibility in the layout of their site plans. Furthermore, cities alike, universities were confined to respond to needs such as development, functionality and complexity as well as managing density of space within academic environment. At the same time, the theory of “open university” was launched to support the concept of “education for everyone” as the reflection of the idea of sharing the public services equally for all the people of the society (Kamelnia, 2015). Similarities between university and city roles and responsibilities as well as evolution of new ideas in civil service management, ended up in shaping the idea of

“university town”. In fact, the idea of university like a city and open university can be considered the products of contemporary democratic societies. Because university not only for fulfilling its functional considerations; but to sustain dynamic environment and vitality, needs to maintain social relationships which has root in mechanisms of democracy. Development of such social relations are essential for active and delighted presence of students in academic environment.

In 1998, Thomas Bender in his renowned book “university and the city”, surveyed the history of mutual relationship between universities and the cities in European and American cities (Ian Albuлесcu, 2014). Bender declared the ways through which a university could interact with a city and its cultural productively. Moreover, he stated how city and university build and represent each other’s socio-political images.

In the 21st century, universities, educational and social institutions are important and should be supported by a community that is part of it. They must be somewhat separate from society, while at the same time they must contribute to the social, scientific, technical, economic, political, and cultural development of the community.

Camellia Pavela (2014) examines the role of university in relationship between the individual and community. He sees the link between the needs of the university and the needs of society as a factor in enhancing the mutual and beneficial contributions of these two areas. Thus, he reveals the way social and civil responsibilities are shared among students, university, and society.

Kamelnia (2015) considers the entire university as one of the main educational facilities in contemporary time, which will be needed more in the future. According to him, university is one of the most important educational environments in the future, whose necessity will be more recognized day by day.

4. Discussion and analysis

Considering the university as the center of city, can lead to the interaction between university and society as well as motivate the university and its surrounding community to develop mutual communication.

In the first step, the doors of university should be opened to the community so that there will be hope for change. Educational spaces must be able to create balance between dual needs of human beings, such as desire for social interaction and privacy. Because education takes place both in silent moments and within situations of communication with the lively community. Creating a social space for collaborative activities, creating opportunities for social interaction as well as space for privacy, are among the most important issues in designing learning environments.

Moreover, the impact of academic sites on their surrounding context, can be considered at three different levels as follows:

- External scale: Interaction of a site with the city, country, or even globally
- Intermediate scale: Interaction of a site as an urban space with its immediate context to act as a platform for social interaction with its users.

- Internal scale: considering the main characteristics of university as an educational space for learning and research and their reflection on internal spaces.

In other words, universities can no longer be an enclosed environment, isolated from the urban community. Even in terms of urban design, university buildings, especially in-town universities, should contribute to the city skyline and have a strong presence on the urban façade.

Internationally, higher education institutions provide civil society participation and social services in their research and teaching in a variety of ways. Ian Albuлесcu (2014) states that modern university, in addition to its original role which includes research, education and cultural performance, also plays an important role in the society it belongs to (Ian Albuлесcu, 2014).

The role of university in society is assessed on the basis of its services that promote local and regional development. For example, a university with strong entrepreneurial spirit and provision of training different students, can have a strong relationship with its social and economic context.

Paul Bernd Spahn (2015) points out the complicated relationship between university and city regarding the necessity of university autonomy, which also poses a threat to the university, as it may turn the university into an almost alien and shaky as well as anti-urban and anti-economy position. The fact has to be kept in mind that connections of a city with universities and colleges are particularly relevant to socio-economic development. On the other hand, city too has the responsibility of supporting the university as a physical, economic, and cultural context which holds the university.

4.1 Different methods to increase interaction between city and university

Considering the importance of city and university interaction, it is necessary to know how to achieve it. Followings are the aspects which can be considered while designing.

Permeability and enclosure:

Today, universities, in the context of multidisciplinary development, need to be in a strong connection with the urban community and the social context around them. As a result, the physical boundaries of university are getting faded. The essential issue is to communicate with community which has to be considered while designing educational spaces, as the communication primarily helps to grow socialization and strengthening social interaction of individuals as well as advancement of human societies (Ian Albuлесcu, 2014).

With development of multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary programs as well as the link between city and university, university will turn into a place without walls and fences. University campuses are social environments, and the proximity of the city and the university reinforces the role. As a result, university must have the requirements of a communal space in order to establish a greater connection among its users and with the community.

Universities are among the spaces where creating social interaction has to be considered as a necessity. If the purpose of campus building is to help students understand social, ecological and artistic aspirations, then these are also key factors in connecting the university with the wider community of the periphery.

University Campus as a public Space:

One of the factors influencing the interaction between city and university is the use of functions that can be used mutually by them. The public spaces of university campuses have always been needed by the university to create interactions among students. However, the use of urban public spaces and their integration with academic spaces is one of the factors that this research is focusing on.

At Pennsylvania University, the civic and outdoor space layouts are based on a new combination of parks, public spaces and tourist routes that link the East Campus area to the main campus and the surrounding periphery. The collection of large public spaces and spaces of civil parks is such that they have the characteristics of urban public space and are part of the urban space used by students and citizens.

Other university campuses like the University of California in Berkeley play a similar role. They are considered as one of the most valuable public parks in their area. The campus of the University of Oklahoma, located in the Norman University, has been one of the most popular public spaces in the area over the years. Shady pedestrians, colorful gardens and plantations are very attractive to visitors as well as an inviting and memorable environment for residents of the Norman area.

Sharing university facilities with community:

Kamelnia (2015) with reference to the effective collaboration of university and city, suggests that certain facilities such as gym, library and lecture halls can be used for education and leisure by non-university students too (Kamelnia, 2015). Parks, exhibition halls, community centers, libraries, sports facilities, theaters, mosques etc. are places where people of different backgrounds can be interwoven. Engaging in such public places does not guarantee that people adopt mutual attitudes and trust, but at least allows them to realize the concept of common interest and learn about each other.

4.2 Place

Meaningful places are formed in a social context and through social interactions among people in a physical environment and are linked to the cultural, social and economic spheres of that society. This creates a personal sense of place that ultimately leads to the formation of a kind of psychological identity towards the environment in the person's mind. Ralf defines the place in three dimensions: form, function and meaning. He states that the formation of a place is a social process based on community connections and activities within it. Therefore, given the fact that meanings, components and activities are embodied in a physical environment and are created by human realization, it is important to understand how groups make these identities (Edward Relfu, 1970).

On the other hand, places play a very important role in promoting social affinities in urban communities. In this regard, Altmann point out: "Places are a conduit for cultural, interpersonal and social communication, not just a mere place." Place

provides an opportunity for social interaction, thus communication with culture is possible at the context of place and through the symbols that are expressed in it. As a result, place is mediating realm that embodies such tasks which is a container for holding various experiences of life and an inseparable element.

4.3 Sense of place

In addition to physical elements, the environment includes messages, meanings and codes that people decode, understand, and judge. This overall sense, which comes from the perception and judgment of the particular environment in a person, is called sense of place. Sense of place is an important factor in the coordination of an individual and the environment around him; which will bring about better exploitation of the environment, user satisfaction, and eventually, sense of belonging to the place and his persistent presence.

From the phenomenological point of view, the most essential notions to express the sense of place are intimacy of place, the experience of place and personality of place. In other words, sense of place means immaterial characteristics and personality of the place, which has a meaning close to the spirit of a place (Edward Relu, 1970). The term sense of place means that people experience a place beyond its physical characteristics which can be obtained through five senses; thus, they develop sense of belonging to the place.

4.4 Sense of belonging to the place

In university campuses, like in any other place, sense of place is generated by creating an emotional relationship and sense of satisfaction in individuals. In practice, many elements such as internal and external factors have an impact on the quality of this sense in individuals. Perhaps one of the most important of these factors, which has two-way relationship with sense of place, is the feeling of belonging to a place. Hence, it is apparent that to create sense of place in university campus, one has to look for ways to create sense of belonging to the place.

In fact, sense of belonging to a place is a higher level of sense of place, which plays a decisive role in enriching the quality of space in order to sustain the presence of man in that place. This sense leads to link the individual with the place; as a result, he considers himself to be a part of the place. He makes an image of space in his mind based on his experiences, signs, meanings and his personality. Contrary to sense of place, there is a sense of inertia. This sense is the sentiment of people who are tired of similarity and resemblance of the image and appearance of their city and its places. This sense is the result of loss of diversity and variety in place. This quality first was established and added to urban literature by Canadian geographer (Edward Relu, 1970).

In university campus, variety of form refers to the diversity of place and the right to choose for individuals that can meet the educational, cultural and recreational needs of student community. Accessibility includes the ability to approach resources and facilities in the environment. The mentioned set of subjective and objective variables provide the possibility of understanding the potential of the environment and implies its stability which is one of the factors influencing the sense of place .

4.5 Different dimensions of sense of belonging to place

According to the literature available on sense of belonging to place, they are mainly based on the definition of place as a social environment; hence belonging to a place is generally interpreted as belonging to public environments. Some researchers, such as Jeanne Altman (1974) with emphasize on the social role of place, points out to the socio-cultural interactions in a place and believes that sense of belonging to a place is the result of attachment among users (Jeanne Altman, 1974).

However, other scholars underline the role of physical elements as essential factor in shaping sense of belonging. Therefore, there is a need to pay attention to physical dimensions of a place in design process in order to create sense of belonging. In general, two categories can be classified as essential factors involved in belonging to a place;

Social association:

This type of attachment, which is mainly based on social interaction in the space, is based on the theory of the social environment. In this form of relationship with space, an individual seeks his/her own attachment through a combination of his/her social experiences within that space. Lawson (2001) in his book, "Language of Space," refers to social rules of space as their design criteria and calls them the unwritten rules by which he means the value norms of communities derived from their cultural and social interactions (Lawson, 2001).

Gifford (2016) in his research, aims to identify the differences between the architects' priorities in designing a space and that of people who use the space. According to him, one of the most important factors in creating the space is its social dimension which is normally neglected by architects and designers (Gifford, 2016). The lack of attention to the social dimension of environment and the sole attention to the physical and formal elements, results in utilitarian spaces which are unable to generate sense of belonging among their users.

Physical elements:

This type of association is derived from the physical elements of place as a part of process through which human identifies the identity of space around him.

Yaghubi (2016), in a group research, explores the role of public spaces in neighborhoods and refers to physical elements as physical interaction and considers them as equivalents to attachment to space through physical elements. Before this, Proshansky (1970) too, raises the need to pay attention to the physical elements in the human environment and their role in the formation and continuation of individual human identities (Proshansky, 1970). Emphasizing on the crucial role of physical attachment in the space as a part of spatial identity, he highlights the individual identity and ultimately the social identity of individuals in different environments.

In another research, Sarmast et. all (2002) identifies three main stages of sense of belonging to a place; attachment to a place, affection to a place and commitment to the place. He also defined seven levels for each stage. These levels demonstrate the application of sense of place in a process, which varies in different places from disinterest to sacrifice for a place. The seven levels are as follows: Disinterest to place, awareness of being in a place, attachment to a place, sense of belonging to a

place, uniting with the objects in a place, presence in a place, and sacrifice for the place.

Physical elements of environment are effective in creating sense of belonging through their impact on the quality of social interactions among users and between users and space. Physical factors are consisting of form, spatial relationship and organization of space. According to above mentioned points, effective factors on sense of belonging to a place and their interaction is briefed in diagram 2.

5. Conclusion

Considering the necessity of attending and benefitting from academic environment by students and the impact of sense of belonging to place on continuity of their presence in space, the study of methods to create sense of belonging to a place in university environment was considered.

According to diagram No. 1, there are three ways for interaction between urban and university environment; spatial connectivity between university and city, the creation of a common public space between city and university and sharing the university facilities with community. This approach will result in creation of social interactions and even participatory activities between university students and citizens.

Looking at diagram No. 2, we observe the following factors: social interactions and activities, physical interaction with neighboring units (interaction of university with the urban space), provision of activities and the creation of distinctions and relationships between internal and external spaces. The above-mentioned factors are the outcome of the social and physical dimension of the sense of belonging to place that overlap with the results from interaction of city and university. Resultantly, physical interaction of city and university will bring about the outcomes which generate sense of belonging to place. Balancing enclosure and permeability, using university campuses as urban public spaces and sharing facilities with community are methods to increase interaction between university and the city.

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