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## Codification of the Principles and Basics of Designing Higher Educational Spaces with an Emphasis on the Cultural and Social Factors

Babak Dariush<sup>1</sup>, Somayeh Jalilisadrabad<sup>2</sup>, Naseredinali Taghavian<sup>3</sup>,  
Shadi Mohammadi Oujan<sup>4</sup>

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### Extended Abstract

Artificial space and environment play important roles in the formation of identity, intellectual and cultural structure and the lifestyle of the individuals and can influence the creation, intensification and/or reduction of their psychological and social problems. The present study has been prepared and produced with the objective of attaining solutions to the facilitation of identification process and reduction of intellectual, social and cultural stresses of the university students in academic educational space(s). The research has been conducted herein on five selected state universities in Tehran based on a mixed survey method and the data have been collected using interviews and questionnaires. The findings of the interviews with the university professors, officials and cultural experts of the ministry of sciences, research and technology have been obtained based on snowball Delphi method and the findings of the questionnaires and interviews for performing students' need assessment have been obtained based on cluster sampling method and this section's findings have been analyzed using SPSS software. To analyze the current social-spatial status of the studied universities, as well, interviews were made with the academic cultural activists. The study results are indicative of the idea that two scales, namely creation of a sense of attachment and sociability, are of a greater importance as viewed by the academic experts, in contrast to the other factors. The university students, as well, were found believing that the cultural and social as well as the contextual spaces existent in the universities do not respond to their needs. In the end, suggestions will be presented in a classified manner based on the study findings.

**Keywords:** higher educational spaces, identity, security, sense of attachment, sociability

1. PhD Student of Landscape Architecture, Faculty Member of Sheykh Bahae Research Center, Tehran, Iran.

✉ [dean@gpmsh.ac.ir](mailto:dean@gpmsh.ac.ir)

2. MA of Urban Planning, School of Architecture & Urban Planning, Shahid Beheshti University (Corresponding Author).

✉ [somayehjalili2012@gmail.com](mailto:somayehjalili2012@gmail.com)

3. Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Institute for Social and Cultural Studies, Tehran, Iran.

✉ [taghavian@gmail.com](mailto:taghavian@gmail.com)

4. MA of Urban Planning, School of Architecture & Urban Planning, Iran University of Science and Technology, Tehran, Iran.

✉ [shadi.mohamadi1369@gmail.com](mailto:shadi.mohamadi1369@gmail.com)



## INTRODUCTION

The academic life period is replete in the entire world with dynamicity, demand for change, innovation and collection of interactions that eventually lead to the social, economic and cultural development in the society (Sheikhi, 2010: 72) because the academic life period, besides teaching science, is an arena for exercising social activities and acquiring experience. University students spend a lot of time in universities for learning and they finish the socialization process via joining the academic groups and gatherings. Therefore, the preservation and protection of the scientific, educational and research environments and making contributions to keep them safe and sound are largely important (Ashouri; Ghaed, 2013: 112). Education in university is an opportunity for learning and the majority of the university students consider university as a chance for empowering themselves parallel to the achievement of a job and earning an amount of income (Isadzadegan; Hasani, 2009: 150) and, on the other hand, all the aspects and parts of the university, including the contextual spaces, institutions and academic, participatory, social and cultural aspects and even spiritual dimensions like the spirits of the place, sense of attachment and environmental qualities influence the cultural, social and ideological structures of the students to a large extent hence capable of corroborating and enhancing and/or reducing and downgrading those structures.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this article is attaining solutions to the facilitation of identification process and reduction of intellectual, social and cultural stresses of the university students in academic educational space(s).

## METHODOLOGY

The present study makes use of a mixed research method (Nagi; Biber; 2017). It is a descriptive-analytical and cross-sectional research. The present study's findings have been collected through interviews with academic experts (Delphi circle) and the university students who were selected as the case study.

The study was carried out amongst five state universities in Tehran (Allameh Tabataba'ei, Tehran, Shahid Beheshti, Iran University of Science and Technology and Tarbiat Modares University). These universities were selected from amongst the elected specialized and comprehensive universities.

## RESULT

In this section, the findings with regard to the university students, professors and experts' interviews and answers have been presented. The findings obtained from

the interviews with the university students that were undertaken with the objective of investigating the social-spatial statuses of the academic spaces are reflective of the non-optimality of these spaces from their perspectives. The allocation of low quality spaces to the collective activities of the university students does not respond to their expectations as opined by them. From their perspective, the spaces allocated to the collective and cultural activities should be favorable in terms of size and wideness, natural light, proper ventilation, appropriate furniture, sound insulation, suitable siting and non-interference with the other uses.

The university students' feeling of security is of a great importance and, generally, depends on various factors in contextual respects in the university. The automobiles' ability of movement is amongst the factors that might cause a feeling of insecurity to the university students and the other passersby in case of falling short of defining appropriate equipment and separate paths for it. On the other hand, the university's walkways should not only enjoy suitable pavements so that the university students can achieve good feelings by walking on their surfaces but they should also be separated with a good elevation level and proper equipment from the vehicular passageways. The next case is the emergency stairs in the structures that influence the university students' feeling of security. On the other hand, the quality of the universities' hangout spaces, as well, is of a great importance for the university students who prefer to gather around in open and informal spaces and consideration of spaces with high flexibility can be very much contributive to the contextual design as well as in increasing the university students' interests for spending their leisure times because when the university students desire to spend their free time in the university rather than outside it, it would mean that they are satisfied with the abovementioned spaces and the space features a relatively good quality for the university students. The next scale that is viewed important by them is diversity some indices of which are the existence of green spaces and tree or flower planting in those spaces. That is because they not only help the refreshing of the university and leave a beautiful color and odor in the environment but they also exert a lot of effects on granting spirits and tranquility to the students and enhancing their happiness and jollity of them. The next index of this scale is the holding of classrooms and ceremonies in open spaces that are not only expressive of the academic spaces' capabilities but also factoring the increase in the students' spirits, creation of diversity and enhancing of their learning levels.

The other assessed index is opening booths, academic feasts or various ceremonies in the university that is usually performed and planned by the university students. Due to the same reason, the participation and cooperation for holding them is another positive factor that can somehow be reflective of the high rate of



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social interaction, social solidarity and cooperation spirits amongst the university students. On the other hand, the existence of sport and recreational spaces not only contributes to the physical health of the students but they are also of a great importance as spaces wherein the students can gather around in safe and sound groups away from academic spaces. These spaces' enjoyment of a high and proper quality leads to the doubling of the university students' presence therein. Sociability is one of the other influential factors interrelated with the way the elements and spaces are arranged inside the university. Such considerations reached their peak in Bill Healer's theory of spatial arrangement; he expresses that the configuration and placement of various elements and spaces at the side of one another in both urban and academic as well as home level would not only severely reduce the spaces' efficiency, if not done properly, but it would also set the ground for the elimination of the face-to-face contacts and social interactions with the reduction in the individuals' common presence. This is very much important for the university students. On the one hand, the academic formations, institutions and councils not only see themselves as members of the university and have increased sense of attachment thereto but they, on the other hand, also cause the increase in the interactions and improvement of the social and cultural relationships between the university students. Security is also of a great importance and it is one of the most important considerations and supplying adequate lighting inside the buildings and university environment is also one of the important factors in supplying security to the university students, especially at nights. Due to the same reason, the main passageways and paths of the university should not only be adequately illuminated but also the supply of sufficient lighting to the maximum possible extent prevents the creation of insecure spaces wherein the view field is intensively decreased. On the other hand, the distant and hidden spaces inside the buildings and precinct of the university that cause the creation of spaces with low ability of defense and limited vision are amongst the other factors that result in severe reduction of security to the university students and the other individuals in the university. The quality of open academic spaces and the possibility of hearing the sound of water and/or birds in them are amongst the factors that not only increase the memorable nature of the university from the perspective of the university students but they also add to the university students' interests and willingness for spending their time in them through providing them with a pleasant environment. Service centers are enumerated as important places in universities in regard of meeting the university students' needs. Due to the same reason, access to them in terms of distance is amongst the factors that should be taken into account. The university students' interests in spending their time in university is a positive factor the high rate of which in the university is expressive of the appropriateness of various factors,

including contextual, social and cultural ones. The more there is a higher possibility of satisfying the university students' needs through their university place of education, the higher they would be attached thereto and this provokes them to prove a longer presence therein. The natural landscapes at the side of the university are amongst the factors that are more dependent on the environment outside the university but the method of designing the interior spaces of the university in such a way that they can be viewed from various directions and making their beauties more visible is amongst the important factors that needs planning. The university's enjoyment of natural landscape, existence of natural sceneries in the precinct and broad field of vision and vista are amongst the important factors that play a significant role in the enhancement of the quality of the university in general.

The experts' ideas obtained from the interviews with the university professors and specialists are reflective of the idea that the sense of attachment has the highest priority with its evaluation indices like the university students' participation in the affairs related to the university and their own selves, the university students' presence in the university and the extent to which the university students' needs are satisfied. Sociability was found in the second rank of priority with its evaluation indices like the attractive uses, consistency of the uses' mix, people-oriented furniture, designed spaces and possibility of gathering around, quality of the student-driven institutions and formations, quality of the conference halls and student-run booths or ceremonies. The contextual quality of the space was found in the third rank of importance with its evaluation indices like the age and quality of the buildings, the status and masonry used in the buildings' exterior façade, building's strength, classrooms' lighting, width of the corridors, dimensions of the classes and workshops, status of the staircase and elevator; creation of a sense of security was ranked fourth with its evaluation indices like the professors and staff members' way of treating the students, the rate of enclosure, lighting adequacy and number of distant and hidden spaces. Memorable nature of the academic spaces was found taking the next degree of importance with its indices like the rate of suicide amongst the university students, the professors and employees' way of treating the students, the enclosed nature of the spaces, lighting amount and number of distant and hidden spaces. Next, the scales like proper access, security, flexibility, identity, visage and landscape, diversity and sense of entry were found in the next ranks of priority.

### DISCUSSION

A review of previous literature shows that research's has mainly focused on criteria or indicators affecting educational spaces in relation to students, but so far research's has not been conducted with the aim of formulating criteria and



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suggestions for the design and development of academic spaces with emphasis on social and cultural factors.

## CONCLUSION

From summarizing and analyzing all of the findings and taking into account studies in this field, the following suggestions are categorized by themes that have common themes:

- Paying attention to the spaces of the academic associations, centers and formations, including the adjacencies, being situated in spaces with high environmental quality and independent space allocations as well as consideration of physical issues and environmental comfort and concentration on the spatial quality matters.
- University and its adjacencies, including the necessity for the establishment of proper relationship between the city and university in performances and activities; the necessity for minimizing the fences, walls and physical barriers between the city and university; paying attention to the city's cultural capacities and facilities.
- Increasing the social interactions, including paying special attention to semi-open spaces in relating the open and close spaces and emphasis on these spaces as a capacity for university students' pause, conversation and rest; paying attention to the spaces in the periphery of which social interactions are more likely to take place; paying special attention to green spaces and its importance in increasing the social interactions and the university students' lived experience; avoiding scattering of the universities from one another and emphasis on their coherence and solidarity with the objective of increasing the social interactions of the students from various fields of study.
- Paying attention to the form, shape and function, including the necessity for focusing on the principles of Iranian architecture in the designing of the academic spaces, particularly, consideration of the perfection trends of Iranian architecture; the necessity for paying attention to culture and vernacular architecture of the region in the designing and construction of academic spaces; paying attention to the academic space's eligibility and avoiding the complexities.
- Specification of the collective spaces, including the designing and allocation of open, semi-open and closed flexible and multipurpose spaces with the objective and possibility of holding cultural events.



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- Paying attention to the identity of the spaces, including the designing of nostalgic and memorial spaces using appropriate elements and symbols for the strengthening of the space's identification; paying attention to the entry gates of the university and the faculties and the other academic spaces as an identifying element.
- Paying attention to the university students' life and their leisure times, including the designing and creation of spaces wherein the university students can spend more time and the necessity of paying attention to the academic spaces as places that should meet all of the social and cultural needs of the students during their presence in university.
- Presence of nature in space: presence and circulation of water in the open and semi-open spaces; making efforts for establishing natural places in academic spaces accompanied by the sounds of water and birds along with the pleasant odor of the planted trees and flowers; paying attention to the landscapes, including the natural panoramas (mountain, river, sea and so forth) and artificial landscapes (city and so forth) as well as classrooms and university precinct.
- Security in space: paying attention to the feeling of security in collective space; reduction and omission of the hidden and unsupervised spaces in the closed, semi-open and open spaces with the objective of crime prevention.
- Design planning and development: reducing the attentions paid to the administrative hierarchy and structures of the university in designing works; the necessity for paying attention to development and the university's developmental plans; the necessity for paying attention to the university students; ideas as the most important exploiters in the civil and developmental designs; consistency in mixing the university uses.



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