Conception of place for architects and non-architects
(Case study: two main bus stations in Isfahan, Sofeh and Kaveh Terminals)

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Abstract

Nowadays discussion about different conceptions of place and how it is perceived by users of the place is an important debate in architecture and urbanism, especially in the area of behavioral sciences. In this vein, one of the most important concepts associated with this area especially in the discussions about environmental psychology is the conception of place. By recognizing different conceptions of place, its formation process and also parameters contributing to the perception of people of place, it is possible to create a desirable environment, which is the ultimate goal of architecture and urbanism. The main thrust of the present study was to extract and measure the factors contributing to the conception of architects and non-architects of place and the distinction between the two through a place narrative analysis. This was accomplished by a case study carried out in two main bus stations located in Isfahan. For this purpose, two concepts namely "thinking content" and "thinking modes" were separately investigated and compared for architects and non-architects, using closed and open questionnaires and in-depth interviews with people in two terminals (i.e., Kaveh and Soffeh) in Isfahan. The sample was 174 people. Out of this sample, 100 were non-architects and 74 were architects. The results were indicative of the fact that both architects and non-architects consider individual factors as relevant to the formation of conception of meaning. However, according to non-architects, individual factors are more relevant to individual needs and to the degree to which these needs are met, given the facilities in the environment whereas architects express individual factors in terms of recognition of behavioral patterns and also the existing conditions and quality in the environment. In terms of thinking mode, the findings indicate that non-architects have an emotional, empirical or relative thinking towards place and the conceptions in it, but architects have abstract and conceptual thinking in understanding place conceptions.

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Introduction

In environmental design process, architects and designers, based on their thoughts and by using work components and elements, give a secret and symbolic meaning to the environment. On the other hand, users understand the hidden meanings by decoding them and at imes perceive new meanings from the environment (Amdu & Epstein-Pliouchtch, 2009: 152). The closer the encoding and the decoding process, the closer the architet is to his mission in creating a desiralbe environment for users at a better level. It seems that the right perception of the different dimensions of the perception of place by architects and non-architects could unravel the encoding and the decoding process and could pave the way for the closer correspondence of these two prcesses.

The main thrust of the present study was the investigation of the ways in which architects and non-architects perceive place and finally gaining insights into the formation of this perception on the part of them. This is an important issue as it has implications for designing and constructing public urban spaces. It seems that for the purpose of investigating the different dimensions of the perception of people of a place, it is necessary to investigate their mode of thinking and the content of their thinking. The present study seeks to gain insights into the possible effect of the professional training which people receive on their perception of different meanings of a place. Thus, in this study, the professional training in the field of architecture is taken as the independent variable and an attempt is made to gain insight into the ways in which architects and non-architects perceive places. On this basis, the current study is based on the idea that the mode of thinking and the content of thinking of architects receiving different trainings in perception of place and its different dimensions must be different from the perception of non-architects whose interaction with place is empirical. In the process of delineation of the research process, two main questions are posed. The first question is related to the content of thinking and the second one is related to the mode of thinking of both architects and non-architects.

-Which dimensions of meaning are more significant for architects and non-architects when encountering a place?

-How is the mode of thinking of architects and non-architects differ in interpreting a place?

In order to answer the two research questions, the present study has undertaken a place narrative analysis by architects and non-architects. The study is carried out in two public urban places in Isfahan, namely two bus stations of Soffeh and Kaveh situated in northern and southern Isfahan, respectively. The surveys and the interviews conducted with users were carried out at different times of the day and were done during everyday activities in the stations. The sample of the study could be divided into two different categories: passengers who lacked any knowledge of architecture and who referred to the stations for the purposes of travelling and the respondents who were invited to the stations by the current researchers and the surveys and the interviews were carried out with them in the above-mentioned places.

Literature Review
• Definition of Place

The concept of 'place' has been studied in different branches of sciences such as architecture, urban design, geography, environment psychology etc. There are different definitions presented for this concept which are sometimes quite complicated and vague (Creswell & Planto Clarrk, 2011; Sime, 1986; Dehkordi, 2012). However, it is possible to classify definitions provided for the concept of place into two broad categories:

1- Place as a geographical location
2- Place as content to transfer meaning (Amdu & Epstein-Pliouchtch, 2009: 152). The first category of definitions considers the physical dimensions of place; however, the second category focuses on the meanings and concepts contained in a place. According to those who subscribe to the second view, these meanings help distinguish a place from a simply geographic location. In this approach,

place is characterized as a space in which humans have interaction with the surrounding environment. Place is thus characterized not only in terms of its physical aspects, but also in terms of a range of psychosocial processes. Place is not only realized in physical positions, but also is full of symbolic meanings, emotional attachments, and feelings which individuals have in mind toward a place (Cuba & Hummon, 1993: 122; Stedman, 2002: 565). Therefore, place (Cheng & Daniels, 2003: 847). In his studies into the concepts of space and place, Madanipur believes that, "as we assume space as an open and abstract area, place is part of space which is occupied by a person or a thing and holds meaning and value concept" (Madanipur, 1979: 32). Tuan describes place as the center of meaning or focus of attention as perceived by human experiences, social relationships, emotions and thoughts (Tuan, 2001). From Christian Norberg Schulz's point of view, the phenomenon of place is something well beyond the abstract position and place refers to a totality made up of concrete phenomena including physical materials, shape, texture and color. These objective phenomena define 'an environmental character' which is the essence of the environment. Therefore, place is a 'qualitative and general phenomenon' which cannot be reduced to any of its characteristics such as special dimensions without losing its objective natur (Schulz, 1980).

• **Definition of place conception**

A brief review of failure of modern architecture especially in the residential complex of Pruitt-Igoe, which is cited as a failure of modern architecture, implies lack of positive perception of residents in these residential complexes toward their living places, which could be attributed to specific underlying causes. Following this incident, gradually recognition of different perceptions which people have toward different environments, especially residents in residential places gained momentum and, by recognizing the gaps in the field of environmental designing, designers and architects

took important steps to introduce these concepts and environmental feelings. Afterwards, architects, designers and researchers tried to gain insights into the different conceptions which people in residential places perceive so that they could minimize the gap between themselves and users and to come up with more quality residential places (Matlabi, 2002: 59).

In his book titled 'Place and Placeless' Relph takes a phenomenological approach and tries to delineate how and why places carry meanings for people (Relph, 1976). He defines place in a trihedral framework, consisting of form, activity and meaning. He believes that among these, meaning is more important than the two others and is more difficult to achieve (Tuan, 1977). At the same time, Canter suggested a tripartite model of place in which place consisted of three parts of activities, perceptions and form. He held that the impact of physical and formal dimensions was more pronounced in psychological and praxeological views. However, Canter believed that different people have different perceptions of place and thus, the individual aspects of perception of place are more important (Canter, 1977).

Lynch, in his book titled A Theory of Good City Form, considers the meaning of place as the result of the relation between space elements with the mental structures of the observer. In this definition, space elements and components refer to factors that define the physical aspect of the environment. In Lynch's definition, mental structures include all the concepts and values such as culture, character, situation, experience and the like of the users of space (Linch, 2009: 76). Rapaport considers the role of the culture in the formation of the meaning of the environment as extremely important. According to him, people give meaning to their environment through their culture, which is indeed a set of values, ideology, and shared institutional systems and are thus able to transform a meaningless space into a place. In addition, he believes that indirectly, culture is one of the psychological foundations of humans and that through the study of culture, it is possible to

gain insights into the perceptions of people of the environment surrounding them. In other words, the reaction of people toward different environments is the result of the meanings which they perceive in these environments so much so that people's behaviors in an environment depends on the meaning which they perceive in that environment (Rapaport, 1982:93).

Gustafson is among those who have carried out studies into place. In his study, he provided a three-dimensional model consisting of 'the person', 'others' and 'the environment' and believes that the meaning of place is not only the result of the interaction among these three dimension, but also it is distinguished based on the type of relation between these dimensions (Gustafson, 2001: 12).

• **Meaning of Place from the Viewpoints of designers and users**

As mentioned above, meaning of a place is a factor which distinguishes it from other places and spaces. However, the question which arises is: How is the meaning of place created?

Some theorists believe that by designing physical aspects of environment, meaning is created (Alexander, 1979: 59; Rapport, 1982:29). According to this view, the physical form of a place acts as a symbol and transfers meaning. Thus, meaning of place is formed by the designer's paying attention to the physical characteristics of an environment such as the combination of form, light and shade, color, sound, light, etc. In this view, when these elements are put together for the first time, a meaning is created and if these same elements are put together in another place, the same meaning may not be created or as he puts it, the same 'sense of place' may not be creaged Sennett, 1990:88).

On the other hand, there are those who believe that an environment by itself does not have a particular meaning, rather it is humans who give meaning to it (Bonta, 1979: 46). In this same vein, there are some who believe that by using signs and symbols, architects or designers given meaning to the environment which could be done formally or

functionally. Some consider the role of the users of a place as important in the formation of its meaning (Massery, 1994: 41; Berdou Lay, 1989: 87). According to these, different people, depending on their various needs and motivations, perceive different capabilities of the environment and by exhibiting a certain behavior in that environment, give meaning to it (Meesters, 2009: 203). Rapaport is amongst those who have paid attention to differences in meaning as perceived by architects and users of an environment. He believes that this difference is the result of schemas which every one of them has in mind. He also believes that this mental classification is influenced by one's culture. What this means is that based on culture, humans attach meaning to the objects and phenomena and given the meaning considered for them, humans classify them in their minds (Raporport, 1982: 79).

Research Design

The present study sought to investigate and compare the perceptions of architects and non-architects of a place. Given that in this study, the objective was to seek the views of a large range of people, in the sampling procedure, out of different urban places, it was necessary to select a place which is experienced by the public. Therefore, out of public urban places, given the familiarity of the majority of people and their experience in using them, suburban bus stations were chosen as the case study.

It is necessary to point out that in the current study, the objective was to investigate the mechanisms by which architects and non-architects perceive meaning in a place. Thus, it seems that this same study could be replicated in other public urban areas.

As mentioned before, the population of the study consisted of two groups, namely architects and non- architects. Therefore, the independent variable in the present study was the type of education or rather, the type of training received by architects and non-architects. However, other variables such as age, gender, level of education, social level and the like were not taken into account. In choosing

the population, different categories of people were randomly chosen. Almost all the non-architects were chosen from the passengers present in bus stations in question. The architects comprised of students of architecture and professional architects some of whom were present in the terminals for travelling purposes and some were invited by the current researchers to the terminals. In data collection, an attempt was made to make sure that all interviews were carried out within the bus stations so that people would have the opportunity to express their true feelings. All the interviews were carried out in the bus terminals and while the passengers were waiting for their buses. Every interview lasted 10-20 minutes. The interviews were carried out with an equal number of people each time and during different times of the day. During the interviews, they were asked to describe the terminals quite freely. The total sample was 174 people, using Cochran's sample size formula. Out of this number, 100 were non-architects and 74 were architects. The current study was a hybrid one, making use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collection in the quantitative part of the study was carried out through a closed questionnaire which was consistent with the theoretical framework adopted in the study and will be elaborated on later on. In the qualitative part of the study, use was made of in-depth interviews and narrative research method to collect the data. Content Analysis was utilized to analyze the data gathered.

As illustrated in the section on the formulation of the objectives and research questions, in the current study, for the purpose of shedding light on the way in which architects and non-architects perceive meaning, it is necessary to gain insights into the 'content of thinking' and 'mode of thinking' in relation to the environment of interest. In gathering and analyzing the data to investigate the content of thinking, use was made of quantitative method and for the purpose of mode of thinking, use was made of qualitative method.

In the first phase of the study, for the purpose of gaining insights into the content of thinking of architects and non-architects, following a thorough review of literature, and working out the theoretical framework of the study, a questionnaire was designed and was published in the respective website. The analyses carried out in this section were meant to address the first research question: Which aspects of meaning are more significant for architects and which aspects are more significant for non-architects?

In the second phase, for the purpose of shedding light on the modes of thinking of architects and non-architects, use was made of in-depth interviews, using narrative research method. The following were the major questions put to the respondents during the interview:

-Upon hearing the word 'terminal' how do you feel?

-What is the atmosphere of this terminal like?

-Is there a particular location or object in this terminal which has a special meaning for you?

In this section, in the narrative research method, the model proposed by Childress (1994) was used. According to this model, two major issues must receive particular attention:

-The content of narrative: This section is more concerned with ontological concepts related to place. In this section, the following questions are raised: How does the individual view the place? What carried meaning in a special place? Indeed, in this section, the factors and parameters which form meaning for the individual are investigated in terms of their narrative of place.

Thinking mode of the Narrator: This section takes an epistemological approach to place and seeks to answer the following question: How does the individual perceive a place? (Childress, 1994:146).

In terms of content of thinking, Childress (1994) names five factors which include physical environment, the activity, the people, the individual and environmental control. These cases correspond to the theoretical framework proposed by Gustafson (2001). It is necessary to point out that "physical environment" and "the activity" factors in Childress model correspond to "environment control" in

Gustafson's model. "People" factor in the Childress model correspond to the "others" factor in Gustafson's and eventually, "personal factor" and "environment control" in Childress model are equivalent to "individual factors" in Gustafson model.

The modes of thinking in the Childress model (1994) are divided into four states:

1-Abstract-Conceptual thought: This method is mostly related to narrator's knowledge and factors related to it such as type of education or job one holds. In this case, the narrator assesses the place based on principles and standards derived from academic training type or his specialized profession. For example, views held about a construct are different for architects, engineers and experts in installations, which depends on their expertise.

2- Experiential thought: In this mode of thinking, a person acquires his knowledge from the environment which is based on his experiences in that place. Therefore, the characteristics of the place and the duration of time have a bearing on the person's mode of thinking.

3- Emotive thought: In this method, experiences of place are taken from the person's emotions and attitudes. Therefore, in this case, the information taken from the environment is largely dependent on the emotive traits of the narrator.

4- Relational thought: In this method, the identification of place is achieved through comparison with other places. In this case, the narrator is interested in finding resemblances and differences between the place and other places of interest (Dehkordi, 2012).

Given the discussion above, the theoretical framework adopted in the current study is as follows (Diagram 1).

Case study

In the present study, it was necessary to choose a location for the case study with the possibility of being visited by a large segment of the population with great ease. Therefore, out of general urban spaces, passenger terminal was selected. The big city of Isfahan is located in central Iran and is in the middle of the biggest highway to the capital. Given the tourist attractions in this city, every year, a lot of tourists visit this city. Isfahan has two big suburban bus terminals, namely Soffeh and Kaveh.

Soffeh Passenger Terminal is located in southern Isfahan, in the beginning of the road from Isfahan to Shiraz and has an area of 80,000 square meters out of which 12,000 meters is constructed and 30,000 meters is greenery. It was inaugurated in June, 1994. With its 15 cooperatives, every day more than 8300 passengers travel to different cities inside and outside Isfahan. This terminal provides accommodation and recreational, cultural, commercial and administrative facilities.

Discussion

As mentioned already, the present study sought to answer two questions. The first question was related to dimensions of meaning which architects and non-architects pay attention to. The second research question was concerned with the mode of thinking of both architects and non-architects as it relates to place and its meanings. In this section, in order to gain insights into different dimensions of meaning as perceived by architects and non-architects, an investigation is made into the 'content of thinking' and 'mode of thinking' of each of these two groups when encountering a place.

• **Thought content**

In the discussion about thought content, an attempt is made to investigate dimension and sub-dimensions of meaning which according to architects and non-architects, carry meaning. Given the theoretical model of the study which has been taken from Gustafson's (2005) model, the dimension forming meaning consist of three individual, social and environmental dimensions. In addition, given the importance of the environmental dimension especially in the studies on architecture, in the present study, based on the Childress model (1974), this parameter is divided into two dimensions: Function and form. For the purpose of extracting the sub-dimensions forming meaning, use was made of the Delphi Technique and also the

Table 1. Comparison of factors forming meaning from Gustafson's (2001) point of
view and place narrative content from Childress (1994). Source: authors.

Place narrative content from Childress (1994)	Meaning dimensions from Gustafson (2001)
physical environment	environmental factors
activities	
people	others
individual	Individual factors
environmental control	

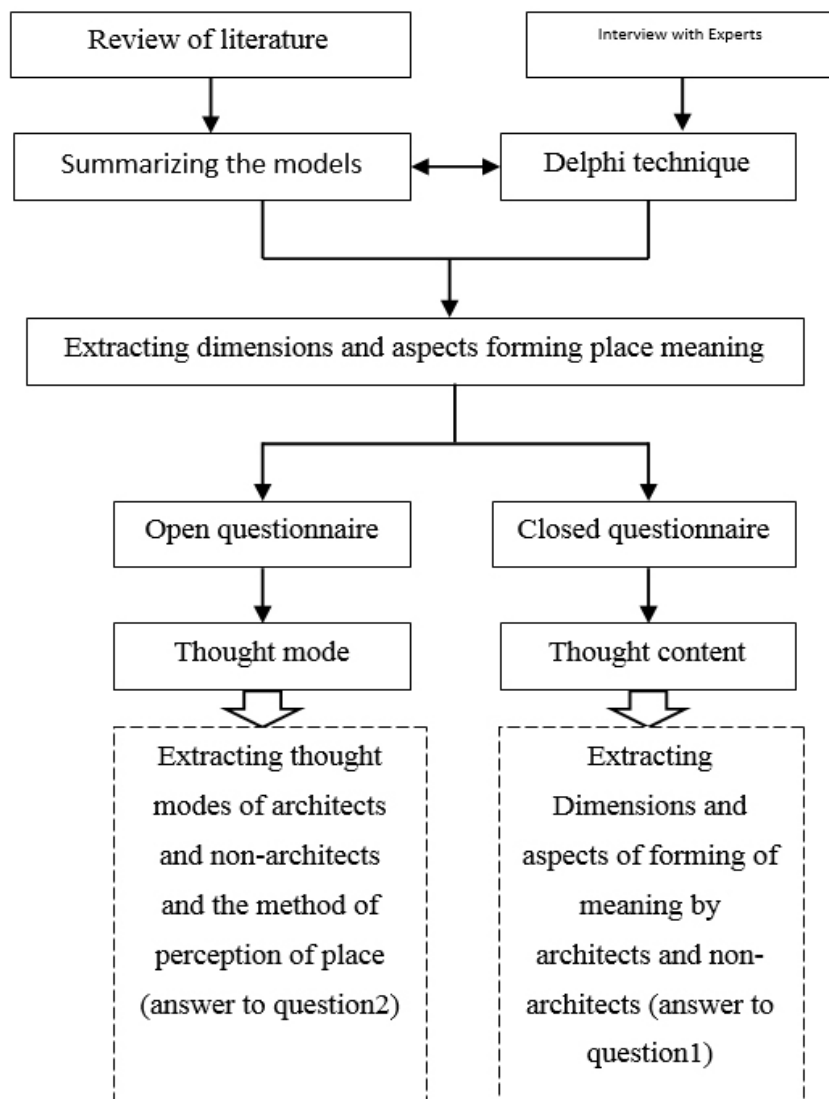Diagram 1. The Analytical Diagram of the study. Source: authors.

Fig 1. Soffeh Bus Terminal. Source: authors' archive.Kaveh Terminal is located in northern Isfahan with an area of 110,000 square meters out of which 30,000 meters is constructed and 25,000 meters is greenery. It was inaugurated in Azar, 1370. In this terminal, 13 cooperatives provide services to all parts of the country and every day on average 10,000 passengers travel from this terminal.

Fig 2. Kaveh Bus Terminal. Source: authors.

relevant literature. In the Delphi technique, using expert opinion, the determining factors relevant to a particular phenomenon are extracted. In the current study, a panel of 12 experts consisting of professionals and professors of architecture, especially the experts in psychology was interviewed about the factors which contribute to the formation of meaning. After summarizing the data, some items were formulated and each of these items was given under the relevant dimension. Relevant literature was also consulted to add to the dependability and increase the richness of the sub-dimensions contributing to the formation of meaning. To accomplish this, different studies were reviewed. In this vein, the studies carried out by Seksmit (1986) and Gustafson (2001) in which

they tried to work out some of the sub-dimensions effective in the formation of meaning of place were significant. Specifically, all the factors worked out in those studies were added to the ones determined through the Delphi technique, as seen in Table 2. In this table, the dimensions and sub-dimensions contributing to the formation of meaning of place are given. These will be used later on as the theoretical framework of the study when it comes to constructing the questionnaire as well as in the analysis of the data (Table 2).

After determining the theoretical framework of the study, we constructed a questionnaire and distributed it among the participants of the study. The questionnaire consisted of both open and closed

items. In closed questions, the potentials of each of the sub-dimensions being used as a symbol was assessed through a 5-point Likert Scale. In the open questions, the respondents were asked about their feelings and the meanings which they experience in a terminal environment. For this purpose, in order to gather a broader range of information, oral questions were put to the respondents. They were recorded and the recordings were later subjected to analysis.

After collecting the data, statistical analysis was used in both descriptive and inferential levels. In order to assess each of the parameters obtained through the Delphi Technique, we made use of Chi-2 Test in the inferential level. During this, the cases which were not meaningfully related to the formation of feelings and different meanings in terminals were deleted. Following that, in order to prioritize the remaining factors, we utilized descriptive statistics. Given that the responses were given in the form of five choices, in order to prioritize the responses in terms of the positive responses to the questions, the percentage of the frequency of two responses, namely 'agree' and 'disagree' was considered as the basis for classification. The results of the analysis for prioritization purposes are given in the following table.

The graph above suggests that as non-architects see things, 'security, 'navigation' and 'functional variety' are the most important factors contributing to the meaning of place. The scrutiny of the interviews conducted revealed an important point: Given that non-architects had received no training in the field of space, relationships and spatial elements, they considered their personal feelings as the criterion for assessing a place and the meaning present in it. What this means is that non-architects consider the meaning of place in terms of their satisfaction with a place, suggesting that if a place does not meet the needs of individuals, that place has no significance for them or may even have negative sense (Manzo, 2005:79). Consistent with this, their feelings of security about themselves and their luggage in the terminal were the important needs which they expressed and

were influential in their attitudes toward terminals and their feelings toward them. Following this, navigation while they were at home, was the important theme they referred to in their interviews. It is necessary to point out that although navigation factor was considered among environmental factors (Table 2), nevertheless, what the passengers pointed out was their ability in finding different functions in the environment. In this vein, functional variety was important for passengers. The results of the survey and the interviews conducted revealed that according to architects, the factors of geometry and functional variety in the environment are the factors influential in the formation of meaning of place. Of less importance for them was symbolism. Therefore, when these people enter an environment, unconsciously they react to its geometry, its components and its form and are attracted to it. In addition, they pay attention to the different functions in the space, where each function is located and the reaction of people toward those functions. Generally speaking, it is possible to say that during their professional training in their education, or during their professional activities, architects acquire a set of principles and standards and provide a critique of different spaces using these principles and standards. However, what is of significance in the current study is pointing out whether such standards exist or not for architects and non-architects. This is certainly the result of training received by architects and by the same token, lack of professional training received by non-architects.

To interpret what has been reported so far, it is possible to say that although the meaning perceived of a place by architects and non-architects depends on their feelings, because of the training which architects receive in the field of architecture, they perceive this meaning in terms of human relationship with the environment and in environmental factors such as form and function whereas the meanings which non-architects perceive of a place are more consistent with their satisfaction with that place and their needs being met.

Diagram 3. Comparison of factors forming meaning of place from architects' and non-architects' viewpoint. Source: authors.

• **Modes of thinking**

Many theorists believe that it is architects who create meaning in an environment, while some others believe that meaning is created during time by users and during various activities in that environment. In this vein, some people believe that meanings which architects perceive of a place are different from meanings which non- architects perceive (Rapoport, 1982: 221). They believe that architects and non- architects have typically different so-called grammars in the interpretation of a place, so meanings which they perceive of various places, are typically dependent on their viewpoint and their mode of thinking as far as that place is concerned.

As mentioned before in the Childress model (1994), people's mode of thinking about a place is formed in four phases: conceptual thought, experiential thought; emotive thought and relational thought. This section aims to find architects' and non- architects' modes of thinking and their differences when encountering a place. Given the discussion so far, there are differences between thought content of architects and non-architects about factors forming meaning of place. Having said that, architects mostly pay attention to environmental factors, while non-architects pay much attention to personal factors especially to their needs being met. This largely depends on the type of training received already. However, this could also be attributed to their different modes of thinking and attitudes toward the environment. The interviews carried out with people about how they viewed the terminal space were indicative of the fact that non-architects viewed terminals and their feelings about them in three major ways:

The first group mostly expressed their personal feelings about it which were consistent with their backgrounds and psychological make-up. These feelings were sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Feelings such as fear, stress, hatred, vitality,

over-crowdedness, security etc. were pointed out by individuals. The frequency percentage indicated that in expressing their feelings about a space, about 53% of non-architects involved their personal feelings.

"Terminal reminds me of travel, home sickness. When I enter terminal, I have no good feeling. For me, terminal means leaving and being away frome home ..."

The second group compared the terminal with other terminals and places when asked to describe the terminal space. In this comparison, they compared behaviors, functions and meanings of space with similar spaces they had in mind. So the meanings which they depicted for a place were based on similarity or dissimilarity with what they had in mind. About 24% of non-architects who were interviewd in this study, had a comparative view in their modes of thinking about space.

"Most terminals I have been to do not have a proper space for spending your leisure time, especially when you are waiting for the bus. This causes exhaustion for passengers in the beginning of their travel. However, in terminals where there are markets, people can buy their necessities and spend their leisure time."

For the third group of non-architects, the meaings which they perceived were mostly consistent with the experiences which they had had in that space. Sometiems, these spatial experiences were based on the incidents happened for the individual in that space or as the result of comparison of his experiences with other spaces. The findings of the study showed that about 38% of non-architects had experiential modes of thinking.

"The first time I came to this terminal was when I was accepted into a univeristy in a different city. At that time I was exhausted and homesick. In addition, something terrible happend to me in this terminal. From then on, I have not had a positive feeling about this terminal. Given that there was a delay of half an hour, I encountered a lot of problems. 15 years into this incident, I have the same negative attitude."

On the other hand, the interviews conducted with architects indicated that their modes of thinking were

Table 2. Dimensions and sub-dimensions forming meaning of place derived from the literature and the Delphi technique. Source: authors.

The meaning of place		
Dimensions		**Sub-dimensions**
Individual factors		Compatibility with mental schema, Sense of place, Security, Satisfaction, Memorability
Social factors		Social interaction, opportunity for social- group activity, making friends, Observing people,
Environmental factors	**form**	Penetrance, space scale, Geometry, Symbolism, Furniture
	Function	Functional variety, Leisure times, Vitality, Accessibility, Existence of Interesting activities, Navigation

Table 3. Degree of importance of each sub-dimension forming meaning of place
in terminals from the viewpoints of architects and non-architects. Source: authors.

Dimensions		Sub-dimensions	Architects	Non-architects
Individual factors		Compatibility with mental schema	%77	%79
		Sense of place	%55/5	%82/2
		Security	%45/5	%95/3
		Satisfaction	%44	%84
		Memorability	%59/5	%72
Social factors		Social interaction	%33/5	%22/5
		Opportunity for Social- group activity	%41	%24/5
		Making friends	%39/5	%19/5
		Watching people	%40	%47
Environmental factors	**form**	Penetrance	%80	%34
		Scale	%82	%60
		Geometry	%25	%49/5
		Symbolism	%85	%42
		Furniture	%79	%40/5
	function	Functional variety	%94	%91
		Navigation	%54	%93
		Leisure times	%57	%41
		Vitality	%69	%72
		Accessibility	%71	%82
		Interesting activities	%85	%36

Diagram 2. Graph for the degree of importance of each sub-dimension forming meaning
of place in terminals from the viewpoints of architects and non-architects. Source: authors.
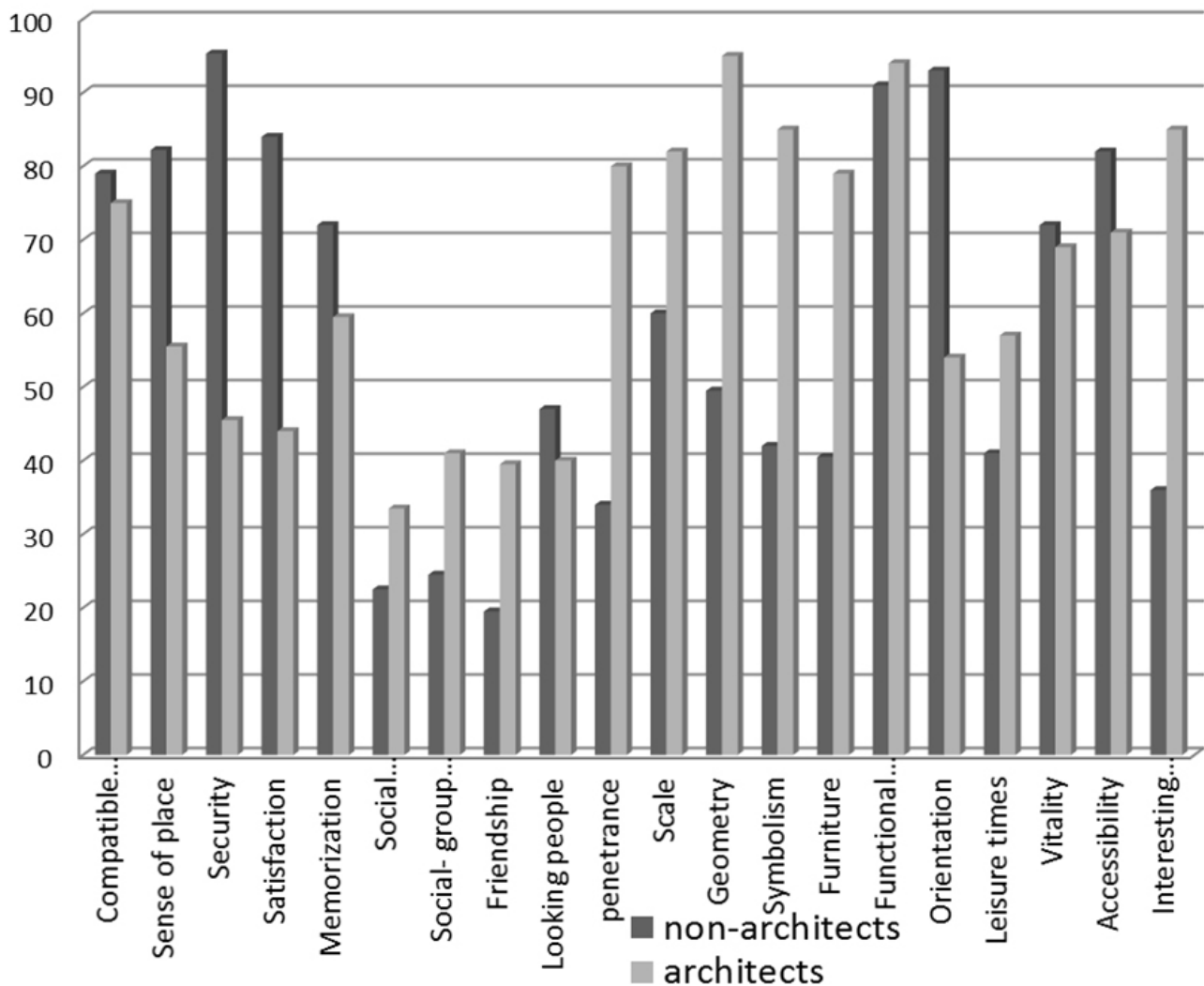
different from those of non-architects. When they were asked how they viewed the terminal, they expressed views which were somewhat different from those expressed by non-architects. The majority of architects talked about a terminal in the general sense of the word and as a utility in urban areas. In their descriptions, sometimes they made use of abstract concepts:

"In every city, terminal is like the entrance to that city. Maybe the terminal and the enterance to that city are the most influential pictures which are formed in the mind of passengers traveling to a city for the first time. As the etnerance to a building which is indicative of the identity and character of that building, the terminal in a city should introduce the identity and soical level of that city. When passrngers travel to a city for first time, maybe the first and the most influential picture about that city imagined in their mind, is terminal and entrance of that city." Given the discussion so far, in interpreting a place, architects provide a poetical description of that place. This leads to their content of thinking being different from that of non-architects (Ghasem Zade, 2011). Therefore, they can perceive different levels of meaning.

Conclusion

Based on the information obtained from interviews

conducted with interviewees, both architects and non-architects consider individual factors as extremely important in forming meaning of a place. However, non-architects defined individual factors more pertinent to their needs which included physiological areas (comfort) and psychological areas (related to internal peace of mind). Thus, the degree of satisfaction of an individual with a place is important in forming meaning of a place, whether positive or negative, which was the case for non-architects. It must be noted, however, that architects somehow emphasized individual issues, the difference being that for them individual factors should be viewed in terms of behaviors and environmental performances. On this basis, it could be said that architects consider environmental factors as the criterion for their perception and on the basis of the potentials of an environment and in the light of the principles and rules which they have acquired in their professional training, they interpret a place and its meanings. Therefore, architects consider environmental factors as the most important factors when it comes to defining the meaning of a place.

As for the modes of thinking of architects and non-architects, the findings of the present study showed that non-architects perceive a place in three ways. The first category is emotional thinking. In this mode of thinking, the meanings which individuals perceive are taken from their individual feelings, which are in turn taken from their intellectual and psychological backgrounds. The findings of the present study show that this mode of thinking is the most prevalent one and through which individuals with no knowledge of architecture perceive the meaning of a place. The second category is empirical thinking, which after emotional thinking, is the most frequent mode of thinking for non-architects. In this case, the meaning perceived of a place is influenced by the experiences and events experienced by the individual in that place or similar places. The third category is relational thinking. This mode of thinking, with some minor distance from the empirical thinking, is the third mode of thinking of non-architects in perceiving the meaning of a place. In this case, the meaning of a place is accomplished through the comparison of that place with similar places. This in spite of the fact that architects adopt a different approach. In interpreting the meaning of a place, they adopt an abstract and conceptual view. Therefore, they assess the place with a broader view and in relation to other components of an urban context and in a poetical way.

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