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Presenting a Conceptual Model for Place Meaning and Continuity Indexes (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Lived Experiences)

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Abstract

Today, the emergence and continuity of place meaning is significant in response to identity crisis. Additionally, it is clear that when a breakup occurred in the continuous flow of identity, a crisis appears, which is the focus point of this article. For this, the authors presented a conceptual framework for place meaning and indexes for its continuity, which could be a helpful guide in determining the priorities and continuity of place meaning. Considering this topic is really important as there is a large amount of literature on the meaning of place and its elements but there is not much on the continuity. On the other hand, regarding vast changes taken place in the Central part of Mashhad city, searching for the perception of continuity is essential. So, first of all, literature of place, place meaning and continuity as one of its major principles have been reviewed. Then our position in this amount of literature has been modified in the form of conceptual framework. In the conceptual framework a new conceptual triple model has been presented for place, which consisted of three components of space, time and human. In the proposed model, the meaning of place is considered as relations between these components. In addition, the concept of continuity as a principle governing place meaning is placed at the middle of the model. The primary criteria of continuity have also been described in this part. The concept of continuity has dynamics and stability in itself, simultaneously. These two are major dimensions of this concept. Stability in component's relation and dynamic in the components themselves are different aspects of these two dimensions. Indeed, relations expected to be series of psychological generalities perceived through mental process, which are usually called the invisible theme, connecting meaning and material. In this article authors try to define and complete detailed indexes of these two major dimensions of concept of continuity through case studies. Memory has a significant role in studying place meanings. It is the function of memory, which connects time and space and results in reforming the straight time axis to a curved line through placing meanings. This is why here, authors choose qualitative method and studied lived experiences of people. Therefore, next part explains the approach and methodology of the article. Overall approach here in the study of meaning is phenomenological semiotics. The techniques used in gathering data is qualitative interview around lived experiences of people and the techniques in analyzing data is interpretative phenomenology. Finally, considering the goal of this paper, which is a modification of criteria for continuity of place meaning, results were discussed. Results explained that stability of relations between different components of place seems to be more important than the stability of components themselves. Moreover, detailed analysis of interviews and implicated meanings revealed that the relation between space and human was more regarded. The focused indexes of this relation were vitality and content richness of activities.

Keywords

Place, Meaning, Continuity, Lived experience, Mashhad.

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Introduction

Simplism, imitation, ignoring the context in design and simultaneously appearance of phenomena such as globalization and large amount of disembodied information in this era resulted in the breakup in the continuous flow of meaning in the environment. So, it seems for achieving continuous flow of place meaning, slower and persistent aspects of place should be identified.

Although cities are changing instantly, the rate of change for different components is not the same. Carmona et al. (2010) believes this is why its essence and identity remains the same and sense of place persistence of characteristics and identity get importance. Lefebvre (2004) thought that in responding to critics such as breakup in the flow of identity and meaning we have to concentrate on persistent dimension of modern life. Therefore, this article investigated continuity of place meaning and tried to answer this question that what are indexes and components of the place meaning resulting in a perception of continuity? And how is their priority in perception of continuity?

In the domain of urban studies there are not much research have been done specifically on the topic of continuity of place meaning. However, the concept of continuity has been more regarded in psychology and linguistics. For instance, Edward Hall in his article titled "Continuity and the persistence of objects: when the whole is greater than the sum of the parts" paid attention to this concept. Additionally, in the linguistic domain continuity of meaning has been investigated in literal texts. Researches have been done by Shoeiri are of this kind. Specifically, there is also limited research on this topic in the area of urbanism and architecture, which mostly focuses on the concept of eternity in architecture works or the urban landscape. Trig (2014) and Noghrehkar et al. (2009) are examples of such research. However, defining criteria for continuity of meaning has not been much more regarded, yet.

It seems that pioneer environmental psychologists like Lynch (1960), mostly had focused on form and

physical dimension. However afterwards, scientists emphasized this truth that physical aspects aren't enough for achieving a place with rich identity. In addition, phenomenologists like Relph (1976) and Schulz (1980) emphasized on the importance of place experience in perception of the meaning of place. Semioticians gone forward and have believed that meaning is what occurred. They emphasized on the role of audiences in the perception of meaning and identifying process of formation of meaning. In the linguistic domain, continuity of meaning has been more regarded in Semiotics of literary texts.

Up to now, researches in this domain have mostly concentrated on introducing the content and components of place meaning. So, due to the lack of literature on continuity of meaning, this research becomes essential. On the other hand, according to the vast changes occurred in the central part of Mashhad city and facing with crisis of non-retrieval of meaning in this place, this research becomes more necessary. Aiming to modify criteria of continuity of place meaning, first different approaches toward place and its meaning were briefly reviewed. Secondly, conceptual framework of this article has been modified. Based on the framework with the proposed method which is semiotics with the phenomenological approach in the study of meaning and interpretative phenomenology in analysis part, lived experiences in the mentioned part of Mashhad has been studied.

Literature review

• Place, Place Meaning and its principles

One of the most welcomed models on the concept of place, has been Canter's so far. According to this model, place consists of form, activity and meaning and has three dimensions of physical, functional and cognitive (Canter, 1977).

Relph, as a phenomenologist, believed that place consists of natural and man-made environment beside activities and meanings that can be experienced in various scales (Relph, 1976). Furthermore, in his proposed model for place, Carmona defined form,

activities and concepts as three components which in their interactive relations form place (Carmona et al., 2010). Additionally Cresswell describes the place as a combination of material, meaning and practice (Cresswell, 2009:170). It seems in these models, place is supposed to be a connection of people with activities and functions which are geographically positioned (Ghavampour, Vale and Aguila, 2015). Place phenomenon begins from individual level and can be extended to the collective lived experiences level.

Reviewing the models proposed for the concept of place, now we focus on the different epistemological approaches toward the meaning of place, as a major component in most of the proposed models of place. Some thought experience was the most important component in the perception of place meaning. In the same line, Schulz stated that spirit of place is the essence of people-place relation (Schulz, 1980). And Gustafson introduced three poles for meaning: self, environment and others. However, he also considered relation of these three poles. Moreover, he introduces bottom layers of meaning (Gustafson, 2000).

In the area of environmental psychology, the concept of meaning is relevant to the cognitive aspects of people- environment relation, while it is not just about cognition. Gibson and Rappoport as psychologist considered different levels of primary to symbolic for the concept of meaning (Gibson, 1950) and (Rappoport, 1982). Rappoport also believed that institutionalizing environment is dependent on institutionalization of four elements of space, time, relation and meaning. . He considered environment as a sets of relations and meaning is assumed to be the relation of environment with people (Ibid). Besides Rappoport, other psychologists and philosophers proposed meaning as relation for years.

In addition to the two reviewed approaches, also Semiology search for the meaning of phenomena. In this recent area, codes has been recognized as units of meaning (Babakmoein, 2015: 35). Along with this, Eco proposed two levels of explicit and

implicit meaning of place (Eco, 1968). In the 80th, mentioning of body, perception, sense and presence in addition to considering phenomenological perspective, semiology has been evolved. In this approach perception of meaning from clear textual and non-textual data has been regarded (Babakmoein, 2015:36-56). Due to these items, it seems there are different opinions on what meaning is, which include similarities beside differences.

In addition to different approaches toward meaning, Gustafson, Rappoport and others have proposed specific elements forming meaning. Based on the review, this article proposes meaning as a multi-level and dimensional concept. At the upper levels, it occurs as a result of people-environment (physical, social and cultural) relation. At the lower levels, meaning seems to be the function of phenomenon due to the people's intension.

Some, like Rappoport believe that distinction is the essential principle of the perception of lower levels of meaning (Rappoport, 1982), while relation and social actions are supposed to be effective elements in the formation of upper levels of meaning. These two would result in collective agreement on meaning and mental imagination (Rappoport, 1982; Gustafson, 2000). Besid these, scientists like Gustafson considered continuity important in the process of meaning formation.

Summing up these theories, distinction, relation and continuity are supposed to be major principles of meaning, on which there is general agreement (Alalhesabi and Charbgoor, 2015). These principles regardless of their value have major role in the process of perception of meaning. Distinction is a prerequisite for the perception of meaning and we cannot assume meaning without relations. This is while continuity as another principle of meaning is important from two sides. First it is significant as a quality of context in facing with breakup occurred in the flow of meaning and secondly because of its temporal nature, it can affect content of meaning, too. In other words, meanings should be formed around common meanings, which were persistent in time

if they will be able to get mental feedbacks in the future. Therefore, continuity have been investigated more precisely afterwards.

• **Continuity: a major principle of place meaning**

In Persian language, continuity means being persistent and eternal during the time. In the Latin it is equivalent with the words like eternity and continuing. It seems the word “resistance” concentrates on the physical dimensions of phenomenon during the time while eternity and continuity imply persistency beside being effective (Noghrehkar et al., 2009).

Generally spatial-temporal persistent phenomena have persistent characteristics, too. Psychologists believe these characteristic are like color, texture, position and so on (Hall, 1998: 29).

However, change is not in contradiction with continuity. Phenomena can change, but remain persistent. The best example of such a phenomenon is a tree, which during the growth change from a young tree to a mature one with new sticks and leaves added to it, but it is still the same tree (Hall, 1998: 30-31).

Indeed, continuity means keeping on coexistence of phenomena components through balancing between self- sustainability and creative changes. On the other word, continuity means persistency and dynamism simultaneously. Such dynamism is essential for eternal phenomenon, while it should not be so extensive and noticeable (Carmona et al., 2010). Therefore, longevity is also significant under the concept of persistency and beside dynamism.

It seems one of the dynamic, creative processes resulting in continuity is an evaluation and sacred signing in the city which cause reproduction or omission of meanings in time (Fakuhi, 2007:244). Additionally, in the linguistics, continuity owes to the thoughts that focus on interactive and open simio-meanings. they see value as a warranty for reproduction of meaning (Shoeiri & Ariyana, 2011: 163). In addition to these, some scientists believe that parts of the city which have remained the same during the time provide a sense of cohesion and continuity

in place (Carmona, et al, 2010). This cohesion and continuity needs connection of time and place (Trigg, 2014: 93) which occurred through functions of mind and memory (Casey, 2004: 42). Indeed, significance of mind in the perception of meaning is so much that psychologists believe mental imaging is equivalent to making meaning (Martsin, 2012).

Due to these, it seems that by studying mental persistency, the continued meanings will be revealed.

Conceptual framework

• **Presenting a model for place, meaning and continuity criteria**

Based on the literature review here we propose place as a triple model. Considering Rappoport theory of environment and its elements such as space, time, meaning and relations, in addition to Canter’s model of place, also ideas of other thinkers in Geography indicating place as a social and spatial-temporal phenomenon, space, time and mind are three component of place in our proposed model. In this model relation between these three is also significant (Fig 1).

Actually, environment is formed by time, people and space and other related elements can be classified under these three or in their relations (Fig 1- right). And place will be formed as a result of mutually interactive and dynamic relation of three components of environment (Fig 1- left).

As an attempt for dominating time, people form events, memories and meanings. And in an effort to dominate the infinity of space, they use physical forms which can define and enclose space. Space and time are in continuous relation, so these three components and their relation which are supposed to form meaning shape place. Along with this idea, David Seamon as a geographical phenomenologist stated that place is an environment which accumulates experiences, practices and meanings from both spatial and temporal dimensions (Seamon, 2014).

Among the elements of meaning there are three common principles: distinction, continuity and

relation presented in the inscribed circle in the proposed model of place. Regard to significance of temporal nature of continuity, it can be assumed as a context and also as a content in the process of formation of meaning, therefore from now we will concentrate on this concept. Finally, practical part of study will result in modifying criteria of continuity. There are two assumptions that continuity is achieved 1- through repeating elements in a new whole or 2- resulted from change of elements in old relations. These relations are series of psychological organizations perceived through the mental process (Hall, 1998: 30-31). With regard to this fact that relations or invisible theme connect material and meaning, it seems that the second assumption is stronger.

Therefore, continuity includes stability and dynamism simultaneously. Dynamism is essential for eternal phenomena which means evolutions should be piecemeal and continuous, not so much and noticeable. Additionally, due to Hall stability is important in continuity from both aspects of relation, characteristics and position (Hall, 1998).

Therefore, the longevity of characteristics instability is significant besides variability. Based on these qualities and the literature review, components of continuity of meaning are extracted as table 1.

Method

Besides, different components and elements forming meaning, there are also different qualitative and quantitative methodologies for study of meaning. Among different methodologies of studying meaning, qualitative ones have been more regarded so far. In the domain of qualitative methods and techniques for studying meaning some major instances are linguistic methods such as semantic, semiotics and symbology, beside nonverbal approaches (Rappoport, 1982: 43). Critically reviewing these approaches and methods showed that “since everything can be a sign, scientific and empirical advantages of semiology seems to be less” (Rappoport, 1982: 44). The second criticism of this approach is that it doesn’t consider empirical effects of meaning on people’s behavior and preferences. Additionally, symbology is subjective and complex due to the differences of



Fig 1. Triple model proposed for place and meaning. Source: authors.

Table 1. Qualities and components of continuity. Ref: Authors based on the information from. Source: Hall, 1998; Carmona, 2010.

component	dimension	continuity
relation	persistency	
position		
longevity		
elements	dynamism	

symbol's definition in each culture. In non-verbal approaches, elaborative methods that people define them are regarded (Rappoport, 1982: 56-60).

While some believe that having just linguistic and structural approaches to non-linguistic phenomenon is not appreciated (Chandler, 2007). This is why recently, semiology with phenomenological approach has been expressed, in which meaning is presumed to be embodied in lived experiences. Lived experiences are sets of spatial and temporal systems, which are related to independent consciousness of our life. They are represented in the features placed in memory (Barkley & Kruger, 2013: 2008).

According to the topic of research, in this article we choose qualitative approaches of phenomenological semiology. Additionally, method in this article is deep interview around collective lived experiences like traditions, local events and collective spatial habits which are interview topics.

As in the research process, it is not possible to survey all data, appropriate technique for choosing participant community sample is conscious and consecutive (Mohammadpour, 2013). The period of residency and disparity of respondents in all over the Mashhad's Samen region were considered as criteria in this process.

Due to the Saturation criterion in conscious sampling, interview process ends when data are repeated and no new data are achieved (Patton, 2002: 246)

In many qualitative researches, the number of interviews was between 10 to 30 (Zohour and Karimi, 2003), while Creswell proposes 5 to 25 interviews for a phenomenological research (Creswell, 1998). Considering these items through interview process, in this article after 21 interviews two other interviews took place which verified reaching to saturation point at 21th.

Discussion and Results

● Phenomenological analysis of lived experiences for identifying continuity criteria

In this part, interpretative phenomenological analysis of lived experiences of people with the aim

of interpretation of persistent meanings has been regarded. In order to elaborate the analysis process, sample part of an interview and the analysis process presented in the following.

“ ... For instance, in this Sara [place] at Fatemiye period, which was 10 days, Sara was full of men and women, despite city was small. In a year which Kafi gives speech [crowd was so much] that you see such a crowd just in marches these days/1/.

Mr. Abedzadeh built Mahdiye behind Naderi garden and after that he also built some other religious complexes under the name of 14 Masum. Shabaniye Celebration was held specifically in Mahdiyeh for 15 days/2/. People do much trouble for decorating these places in this Celebration with the equipment of that time. Even on cold days they set up huge fireplaces. Half of the population of Mashhad came to these celebrations/3/. ...”

As it is evident in the text of sample interview part, first, sections assumed to have meaning were coded. Then these coded sections were classified in a table like table 2, which developed for all interviews. In the next phase, it has been defined coded parts carry meanings according to which of the descriptive, linguistic or conceptual indexes. Then in the descriptive notes of researchers, coded parts were summarized. In the two last columns based on previous phases and two indexes of convergence and divergence of meanings, interpretation of larger categories of meaning in the form of themes were regarded (Table 2).

Based on such process, by analyzing all the interviews, persistent meanings were extracted. In conclusion, regardless of quantity and number of codes related to specific themes, larger themes were interpreted from different categorization of persistent meanings. Furthermore, these larger interpreted themes were categorized as indexes of continuity of meaning. It is noticeable that counting codes regarding special themes have been used for further analysis.

● Defining continuity criteria

By interpretive phenomenological analysing of lived experiences, considering convergence and divergence

Table 2. Process of interpreting meaning and continuity criteria from lived experiences. Source: authors.

	Lived experiences	Descriptive notes of researcher			themes	Interpreted meanings
		index	direction	Summarizing meaning units		
1	<i>... for instance in this Sara [place] at Fatemiye period which was 10 days, Sara was full of men and women...</i>	descriptive	+	Interest of people in the events	People’s interest in the events take place in specific location	Presence and special activities in specific places
2	<i>... Mr Abedzadeh built Mahdiye behind Naderi garden and after that he also built some other religious complexes under the name of 14 Masum...</i>	conceptual	+	Remembrance of concepts behind architectures	Applying narratives in naming and constructing places	Applying narratives in naming and constructing places
3	<i>...People do much trouble for decorating these places in these Celebration with the equipment of that time...</i>	descriptive	+	Decorating space for the events	Physical and formal occurrence of the events	Physical occurrence of the event

of interpreted meanings from these experiences, meanwhile contemplating the general concept of continuity, criteria for continuity of place meaning have been defined in table 3. The primary version of continuity’s criteria, which was presented in the conceptual framework has been finalized in this part through interviews analyzing and extracting persistent meanings. For verification at the end of this part, all interpreted meanings and codes have been checked with a ten- person group of PhD students.

• Integrated analysis of results

- Analysis based on qualities and dimensions of continuity

After completing criteria in table 3, by rereading interviews and reanalyzing them, frequency of meanings related to specific theme were counted. In fact, to make qualitative comparison and prioritization of continuity criteria easier, frequency of codes imply to each criterion were counted in

all interviews. It is noticeable that the quantity and frequency of codes were not considered merely at all. As mentioned before, they were presented just for comparison of value of criteria with each other due to their persistency in memory.

Therefore, first data have been presented due to the general classification of continuity criteria. These general classes are dynamism of components of space, time and people (mind), addition to persistency of relations between these components. As it is evident in Fig 2 meanings which had more continuity mostly imply to the relations between components. These are what Hall called “invisible themes”, which cause the whole to be perceived more than an assembly of parts.

However, if we consider objective continuity of these meanings, dynamism of components has been more persistent. This point, on the one hand, approves breakup occurred in the continuous flow of meaning. Since relations as invisible themes has significant

Table3. Criteria of continuity of place meaning. Source: authors.

qualities	components	dimensions		Criteria of persistent meanings
dynamism	elements	space	physical	Distinction in physical structure
				Distinction in natural elements of environment
			functional	Flexibility and multi functionality in space
				Functional distinction
			conceptual	Application of narratives in naming and constructing places
				Effects of economy and power on the urban form
		time	Repeat of event or activity	
		people	Forecasted interactive relations	
			Un-forecasted interactive relations	
			Collective behaviors	
			Social urban characteristics- residences	
			Social urban characteristics-tourists- residence	
persistency	Relation and position	People- environment	Presence and daily activities in place	
			Special activities in specific place	
			Vitality and variety of functions	
			Conceptual enrichment of activities	
			Cohesion of physical structure and daily life	
			People’s interest in place and events	
		People-time	Place of memory	
		Space- time	Preservation of physical and functional dimensions of place	
			Respect to old structures	
			Physical appearance of events	
			Longevity or being historic	

role in perception of continuity. And on the other hand shows the significance of integrated identity and dynamism for the persistent objects as changes have not been so much (Fig. 3).

Then, memorial persistency of codes was analyzed according to different dimensions of these qualities of persistency and dynamism, which simultaneously have been classified under the different elements of place meaning such as time, space, people and their

relations (Fig 4). As it is evident, from the elements of place, codes mostly refer to the relation of people-space. After this the relation of time-space was more regarded.

Since, each element of meaning consist of criteria due the concept of continuity analysis has been continued in detail according to these criteria. Based on this analysis, it was revealed that which criterion from people-space relation has been mostly implied. This also make possible the qualitative comparison

Qualities of subjective persistent meanings

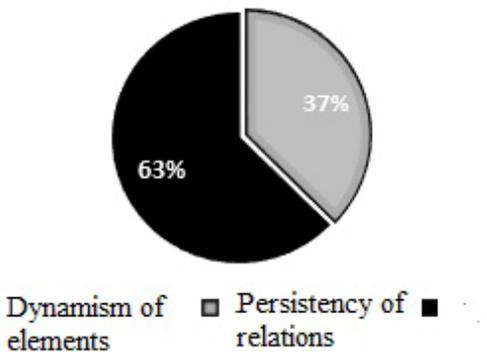


Fig 2. Meanings imply to the dynamism of the components and persistency of the relations. Source: authors.

Qualities of objective persistent meanings

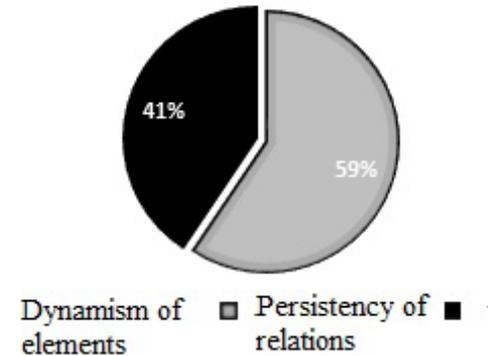


Fig 3. Meanings persistent in mind and reality (subjective and objective continuity) due to the dynamism in components and persistency in relation between them. Source: authors.

of value of criteria in memorial persistency .

- Analysis based on the criteria of continuity

Among criteria related to people-space relations, meaning codes were mostly referred to the criterion of vitality. Codes like “... People were vital by their heart...” and “... there was a good love [between people]...” approve this claim. Indeed, spatial habits of people were considered under the concept of people-space relation. Meanings related to such habits and behavior were persistent in mind sine they have direct effects on the context (Fig. 5).

Larg amount of meanings imply activities enriched with the concept of resistance is also noticable. Investigation around this item, revealed that the

interviews points refer to this criterion were mostly about Iran’s Islamic revolution. Some codes refer to this presented here; “... Two hundred women came to the demonstrations and the government arrested them, so their husbands became angry and sparks of revolution appeared...” and “... gathering occurred in this space [space around the holy shrine existed after the construction of Hazrat square]. Demonstrations also ended in this place in which statements were stated...”. It seems these meanings are near to what Castells called resistance identity. So, the reason that these meanings were persistent is their relation with such kind of identity and formation of new meanings around it during the time. Additionally, meanings imply place of memory are noticeable, too.

Conclusion

In this article, with the aim of defining criteria for continuity of meaning, firstly the authors proposed the triple model of place consist of space-time-people(mind). Meaning was assumed to be the relation of these three elements. Additionally, continuity, relation and distinction were supposed to be three principles governing the flow of meaning, which were placed in the middle of the model. As the concept of continuity included persistency of relations and dynamism in elements and characteristics of phenomenon simultaneously, it was expected that persistency of relations between elements of meaning have more significant role than elements themselves in the continuity of meaning. However, this assumption was not approved according to the results of analysis of objective continuity. This reveals the breakup in the continuous flow of meaning as a result of

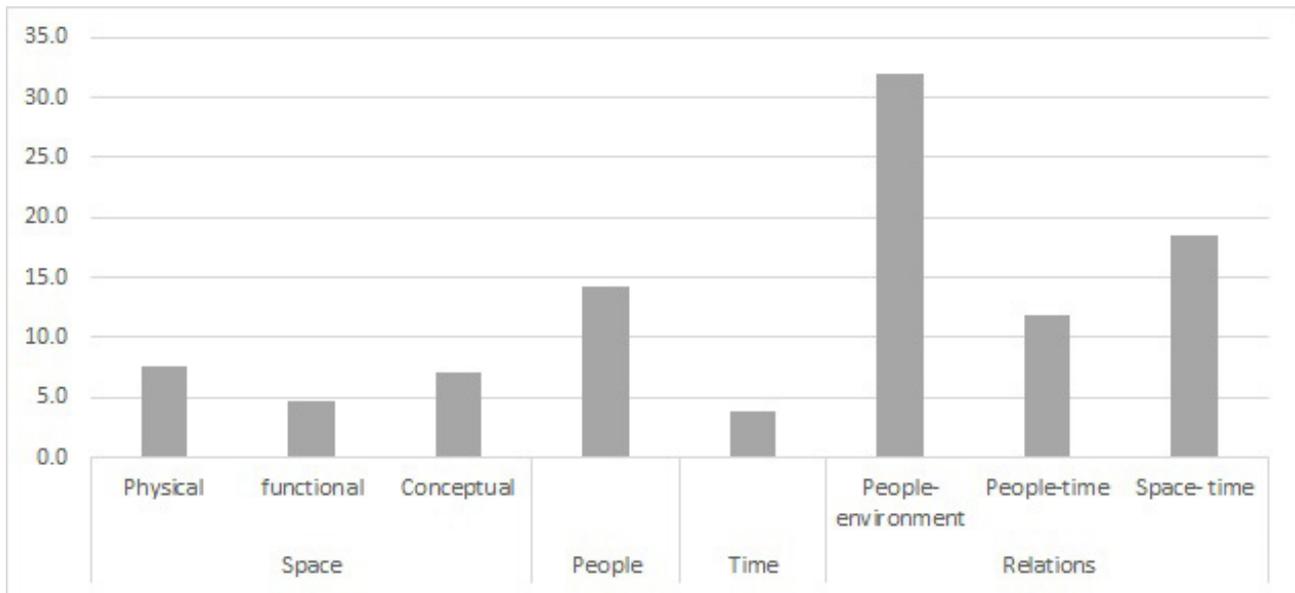


Fig 4. Persistent codes according to each element of place meaning. Source: authors.

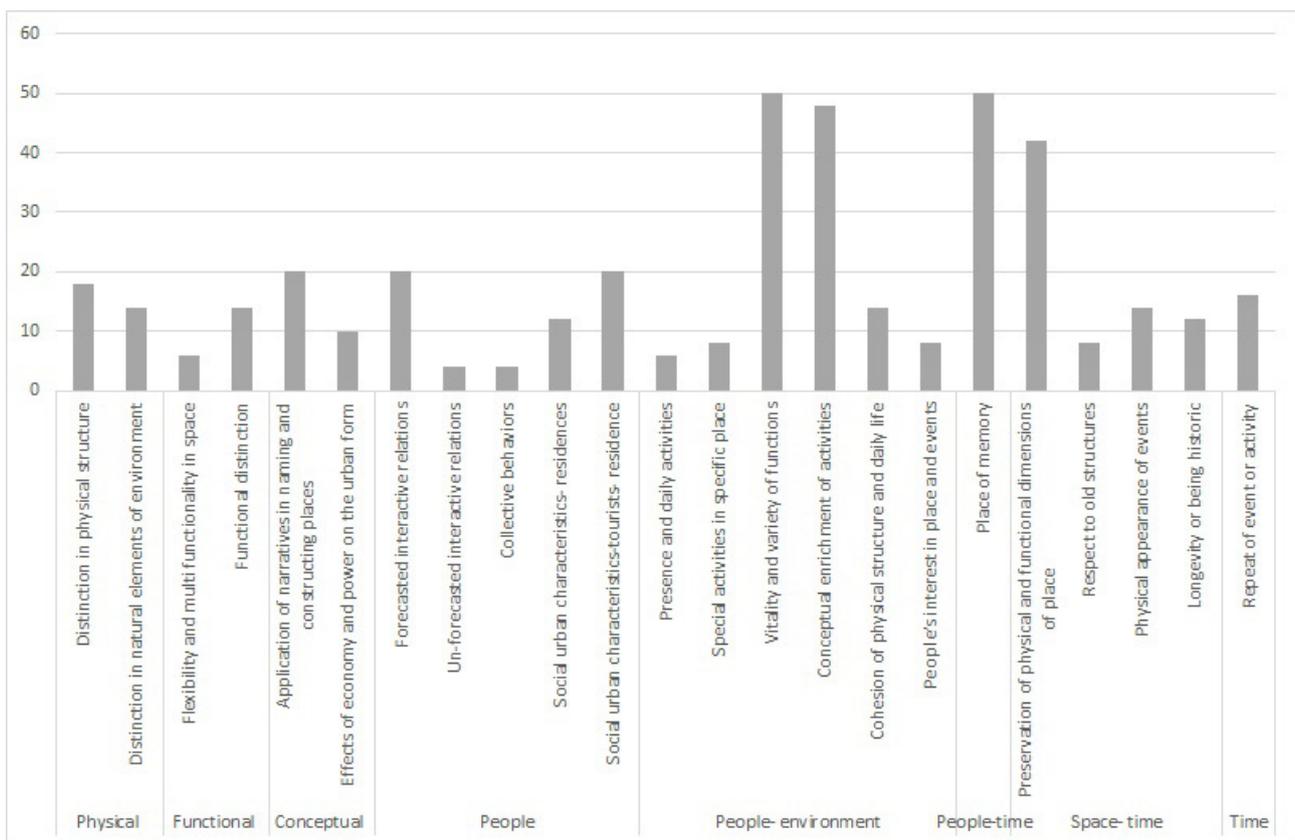


Fig 5. Persistent meanings according to continuity criteria. Source: authors.

break occurred between objectivity and subjectivity of meaning.

This conclusion that persistency of relations between elements was more significant than persistency of elements themselves in subjective continuity is along with current literature on continuity. For instance it

matches Hall's suggestion that "invisible theme" is more important in perception of continuity. More detailed results showed that the relations between people and space was more in the focus of meaning interpreted from lived experiences. These relations include various criteria, among which vitality and conceptual enrichment of activities were more referred to.

It seems vitality was the most persistent as it put a direct effect on context. And the enrichment of activities was persistent due to the concept of resistance identity of Castells, around which new meanings have been reproduced and will be continued. Furthermore, it was resulted that relation of people-time gets more consideration in the form of place memories. Therefore, defining criteria and parameters of continuity, plus qualitative evaluation of their memorial persistency make clear the priority of these criteria in urban design. This could be a helpful strategic guide for both designers and planners.

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