

# Extracting the Meaning Order of Alley

[Case Study: Historical Context of Sari City Center]

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## **Abstract**

The present study is an attempt to find out conceptual and fundamental aspects of alley meaning in the context of Sari historical city center. In this research the considered environment is the allies of historical center context of Sari city. This research tries to discover the hidden meaning system behind the current behaviors and activities in the alleys of this area. This research is based on Exploratory factor analysis research method which is one of the branches of correlation research method and is calculated by using covariance

matrix method of analysis. The results of this study showed that there is a collection of meaning components which are working as a network in the final model. The study identified 17 components that were categorized into four main systems: individual social position, individual internal feelings, cultural relationships, and tradition. This paper concludes that the proposed model carefully shows the meanings regulation of the historical fabric of alleys.

**Keywords:** Meaning components, Meaning order, Alley, Historical fabric

## **1. Introduction**

In each society different factors and phenomena are affective on the formation of urban fabric. Beliefs and opinions have played a direct role in the formation of some ritual and public spaces and how they are established (Soltanzadeh, 11:1362). Although many studies have addressed material and environmental factors, it seems that human factors, including the meaning of activities in the environment, have been less addressed. This issue has recently attracted more attention. Many researchers have emphasized on the affection of city's structure from Symbolic and semantic patterns. The issue of semantics in the structure of Islamic cities and how it manifests itself is an issue on which there are many disagreements among researchers. The city is like a book and this approach can be used to identify and design the city by expanding semantics to the realm of urban researches (Rahmani, 118:1398). Every people needs effective relations with his environment to live and if there is any meaningful relationship between the environment and the individual, the life quality can improve a lot. The path of improving a part of the environment is tied to trying to improve its meaning (Rahmani and Nadimi, 51:1398). The importance of city allies is that they are open and public places that a person walks in immediately after leaving the house that is owned by him and belongs to him. This point is especially noticeable in traditional contexts where the hierarchy of access was fully observed. Such structures in Islamic cities caused a harmony between the life style and the cultural principle of Islam. so that after leaving the house, the person entered a narrow alley and mainly a dead end, and then into the main alleys of the neighborhood texture and then entered the street or the main axes of the city, which were connected with urban centers, markets, mosques and government buildings.

## **2. Relation between Meaning and Alley**

The history of the formation of the context of Iran's urban centers in the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic periods has been directly related to the formation of urban societies. In every human society, a series of relationships between humans and the environment are formed over time, and the meaning of the city is the result of the same relationships created between individuals and their surrounding environment. Meaning or semantic is the communication channel between humans and the environments (Nourtaghani, 2:1392). The physical components of urban places each have a share of these meanings, and according to the activities that take place in them, they cultivate a set of meanings to regulate these activities. Lack of meaning in modern functionalist architecture, despises the emphasis on visual and physical aspects, perceptual aspects of the audience and also consider his knowledge of place insignificant and removes meaning from place (Alborzi and Parvinian, 1: 1398).

Alleys are an inseparable part of urban places, which are not studied from their semantic aspect a lot, but about their physical form and application in providing access, view and urban landscape. The Islamic worldview and the concept of the city have been closely related from the beginning, and according to Habibi (1390: 124), the concept of the Islamic city is based on the completeness of the Islamic value system, which organizes all patterns of behavior in Islamic society so it can affect the shape of the city and its components. Some proponents of the theory of the existence of the Islamic city do not consider the city apart from its components and believe that the characteristics of Islamic cities take on a different frame depending on the context, time and place. Since the purpose of this research is to find the effective semantic components in the formation of the semantic network of the alleys of historical center context of Sari city and how these components are related, for this purpose the alleys of this historical context have been studied.

Meaning has been one of the factors in the inevitable and continuous interaction between the individuals and the surrounding environment, and because of that, many researchers have studied this subject. The extend of meaning is such wide that includes all relations between man and his surroundings (Malone.2018: 43).

Phenomenologists have considered meaning to be the "basic human need" and the creation of meaning to be the goal of architecture (Schulz, 1988: 23). However, the variety of these aspects may cause people to experience different perceptions of the environment. The experience of place is, in fact, a general sensory experience that is able to be manifested through human sensory perception (Shamai, 1991: 349).

The meaning network that is formed in this way, first of all, starts by sending and receiving messages between the person and the place. After that, the meaning, sign and concept of the environment is gradually taken from the place; The next step is to link the meaning, which, by relating the meanings to each other, the synchronization step takes place and the perception prevents the messages from being repeated. Human perception, in the process of creating a meaning network, unifies the place meaning and personalizes it (Alexander, 1977: 118). One of the features of the alley and one of the reasons for choosing this subject is the presence of movement in this space. Movement and stillness are events that affect people's perception of their surroundings. Moving in space allows a person to perceive different views of space, and these different perspectives create different experiences at different times by changing the light and the weather. This experience of space in combination with observing different activities of people who are moving in space leads to experiencing different meanings for different people during daily movements in space (Rafiei, 1398: 92). The world in which an individual perceives the real environment in the higher levels of spatial determination appears in the form of a semantic network that includes such things as: sense of consciousness, cognition, belonging, moral commitment, loyalty, and ultimately self-devotion for saving the place which all makes individual's behaviors meaningful in that place. The inner force that drives a person to return to a place, or prevents him from being in a certain place, is the same semantic mental-physical<sup>1</sup> network that benefits from being in a

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<sup>1</sup> Meanings are divided into mental and physical parts. Activities take place in the physical environment, but it is based on the mental meanings that people perform the desired activity individually or collectively, and what causes an activity to

place or participating in collective and individual activities in one place. According to Yan Gehl, the classification of activities that take place in a place can be divided into three categories: essential activities, selective activities, and social activities (Gehl, 2008: 108). In the past, the life of the people in the neighborhood and their social relationships with each other were based on the cultural principles of Islam, so that good relations with neighbors and respecting them were among the strong recommendations of Islam and people tried to follow them. In other words, each activity occurs based on a meaning, and if the meanings are weakened, the form of activities and relationships also changes. Gibson (1979: 127) considers meanings in objects and environments and emphasizes on this idea in his Affordance theory, but Hershburger (1999: 47) emphasizes on the formation of meanings in the user's mind, in other words, architects consider a meaning for what they design although people attribute meaning to what they experience.

In other words, people's perception of the level of urban walls is the most important factor in evaluating users of a space and has the greatest impact on the formation of people's mental image (Shams et al., 1398: 174).

Many similar researches have been conducted on the old contexts of other Iranian cities in different climatic regions, especially in the central regions of Iran in cities such as Isfahan, Shiraz, Kashan, Yazd and Kashmar, which have studied these historical textures from a physical point of view. Explaining criteria for measuring the connectivity of these urban contexts (Lotfi, 2014: 7), reviewing the construction bond model in historical contexts of Yazd city (Behzadfar, 2011: 76), reviewing the dimensions of social sustainability in Shiraz Sang Siah neighborhood (Abdullahzadeh et al., 2013): 38), identifying the constituent components of the identity of the historical contexts of Kerman (Changizi. Ahmadian, 1392: 54) and examining the effect of neighborhood context on the social identity of individuals in the city of Isfahan (Ghasemi, 1389: 135) were among the researches that have been done before and this study has continued to examine the issue from a new and comprehensive perspective.

Table 1. Researcher's point of view, Resource: Authors

<b>Researcher's point of view</b>	<b>researcher</b>
Home, the central point of meaning. Creating meaning through direct phenomenological experience	<b>Tuan</b>
The emergence of human identity in the establishment of a meaningful connection with a world of things	<b>Schulz</b>
Defining meaning as a function of habitance	<b>Rapoport</b>

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occur is the meaning and by observing the activity, the meaning is reproduced and multiplied.

Definition of levels of meaning in 6 levels: 1- Instant and primary meaning 2- Functional meanings 3- Instrumental meaning 4- Value and emotional meaning 5-Sign meaning 6-Symbolic meaning	<b>Gibson</b>
The grading of meaning is three degrees of first: information Second: symbolic meaning and third:	<b>Barthes</b>
Understanding each semantic phenomenon at both primary and secondary levels	<b>Burdieu</b>
Meaning classification at 7 levels includes indifference, awareness, belonging, attachment, unification, presence, and sacrifice for place.	<b>Shamai</b>
In vestigating the Relationship between Meaning and Mindfulness	<b>Habib</b>
The connection between the weakening of the identity of the place and the destruction of emotional belonging and the loss of meaning	<b>Arefi</b>

*2.1 Theoretical Foundations of the Research*

The Means-End chain proposed by Cologne can be used to examine the relationship between activity and meaning. In this chain, any value leads to a physical manifestation that is a trait. In the case of activities, there is a similar connection, that is, each activity hides a meaning behind it.

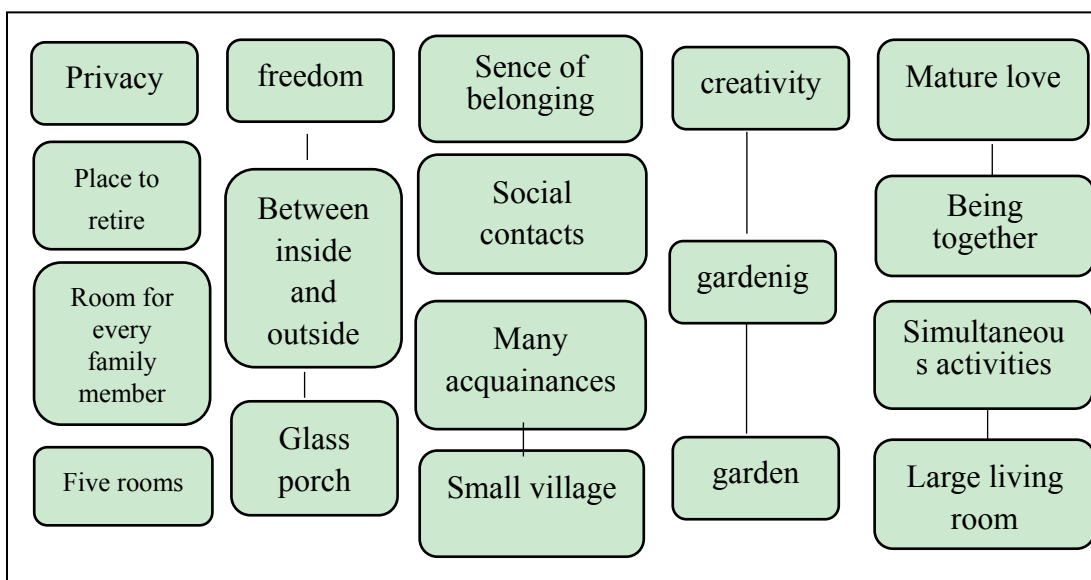


Figure 1. An example of Means-End chain in Residential environment values (coolen, 2011)

About the issue that how the built environment effects the activities organization there are two prevailing views on how the built environment affects the organization of activities: first,

the characteristics of the environment can be effective in forming interactions by providing opportunities for communication between people, and the second view considers the characteristics of the built environment based on its meaning as the reason of interactions for different ethnic groups. Anyway these activities are related to a set of meanings. Meanings are formed at different levels, and several opinions have been expressed about this classification. According to the "Means-End theory" and the "semantic structure model", "three types of meaning can be considered in the relationships between people and the environment" (Coolen, 2011: 27)

First of all is the meaning that obtains from the activities relation with some specific characteristics of the camp, this type of meaning is called capability. For example, sitting in the park under the shadow of a tree provides pleasure. The second meaning is the meaning attached to the activity. For example, eating with friends means sharing something between yourself and others. The third is the meaning that is added to the characteristics. For example, having a garden gives people the pleasure of nature. When the hidden aspects of action become apparent, it becomes more important. Each activity can be analyzed from four aspects: 1- Special activity 2- Special method of performing activity 3- Side activities 4- Meaning of activity (Rapaport, 2013).

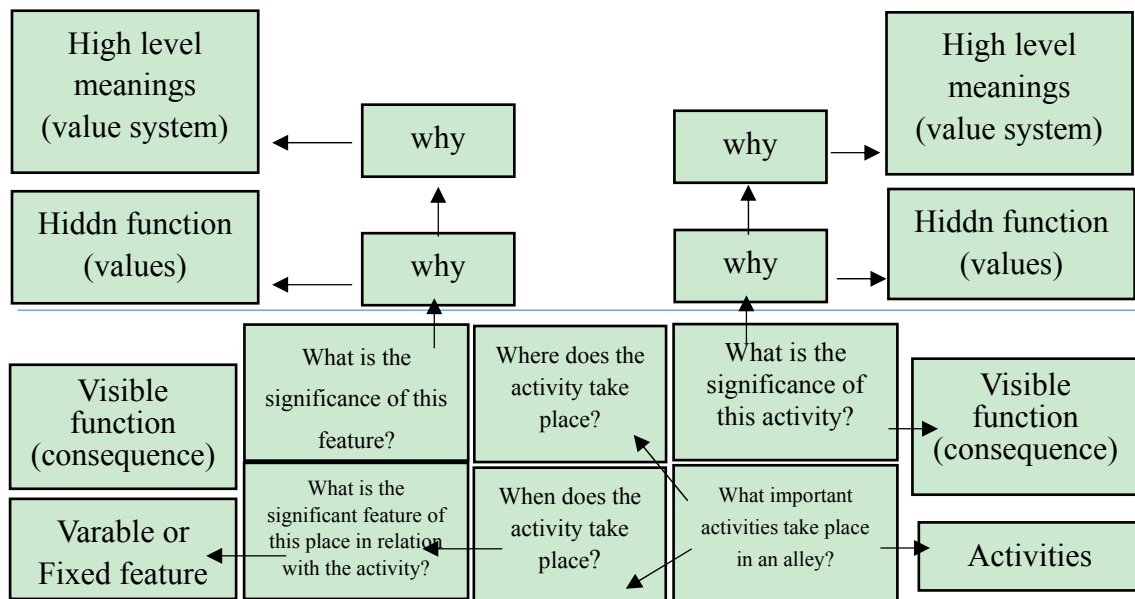
In this way, during this research, special questions were asked to process the research and obtain the desired answers. The discussed questions in this study were: what are the fundamental meaning components of the alley and how do they relate to each other? This is a general question and includes a subset of the following questions: What components create the meanings of the alley? Which components are more important? How is the relationship between these components? By examining a chain of questions, "What do people do in the alley and the surrounding environment?", "Why are these activities important for them?", "Why did they choose this alley for their residence?" and finally why are these characteristics important?" we can be aware of people's mental meanings about alleys. This method was used in the interviews of this research and its results have been shown in the research.

### **3. Research Method**

This research is based on the research method of exploratory factor analysis, which is a branch of correlational research, and has been done by covariance matrix analysis method. This method is used when the researcher wants to summarize the changes of variables in more limited factors from the correlation of a set of variables, or to determine the basic features of a set of data. If the researcher wants to study a specific model in terms of the relationships between the current variables, he uses the structural equation model (Sarmad et al., 2014: 96). This research applies exploratory approach and it is looking for the hidden meaning system behind the current behaviors and activities in the alleys of this historical context. First, due to the lack of corresponding measuring instruments to the research problem, by using the exploratory survey method, in order to reveal the components of the semantic network of the alley and the relationship between these components, some interviews have been done with a number of people with a history of living in the historical context of the city. In these semi-structured interviews, a series of questions were asked about

how to behave and why. Then, the text of the interviews was implemented and the components of the semantic network were extracted. The results were verified by another group of experts, and the results were implemented in the target-content table. Thus, in this study, due to the relationship between its independent and dependent variables with qualitative information, first, the semantic components in place have been identified. The information as the variables that can be studied in the research topic needed to be described and explained from a normative point of view, and according to the hypotheses raised in this field, research methods were used to improve the level of understanding of the meaning regulation and the relationship between components.

Table 2. Process of the interview adopted from Noortaghani, 2012 p, 5



### 3.1 Investigate Qualitative Research Data

After conducting interviews and extracting the results, based on the target-content table, a pilot questionnaire was set and distributed among the samples and the results were extracted. These results were revised by the researchers' opinions in this field which were presented in the former literature of the research. Regarding the extraction of research meanings, Zinc Mark 1995, Howard, 1975; Altman, 2003; Despress, 1991; Marcus, 1995 were also studied. Based on the summary of studies, the following list, which includes all the meanings extracted from various researches and interviews, was prepared and measured in the questionnaire.



Table 3. List of extracted meanings from interviews and documentary sources, *Source: authors*

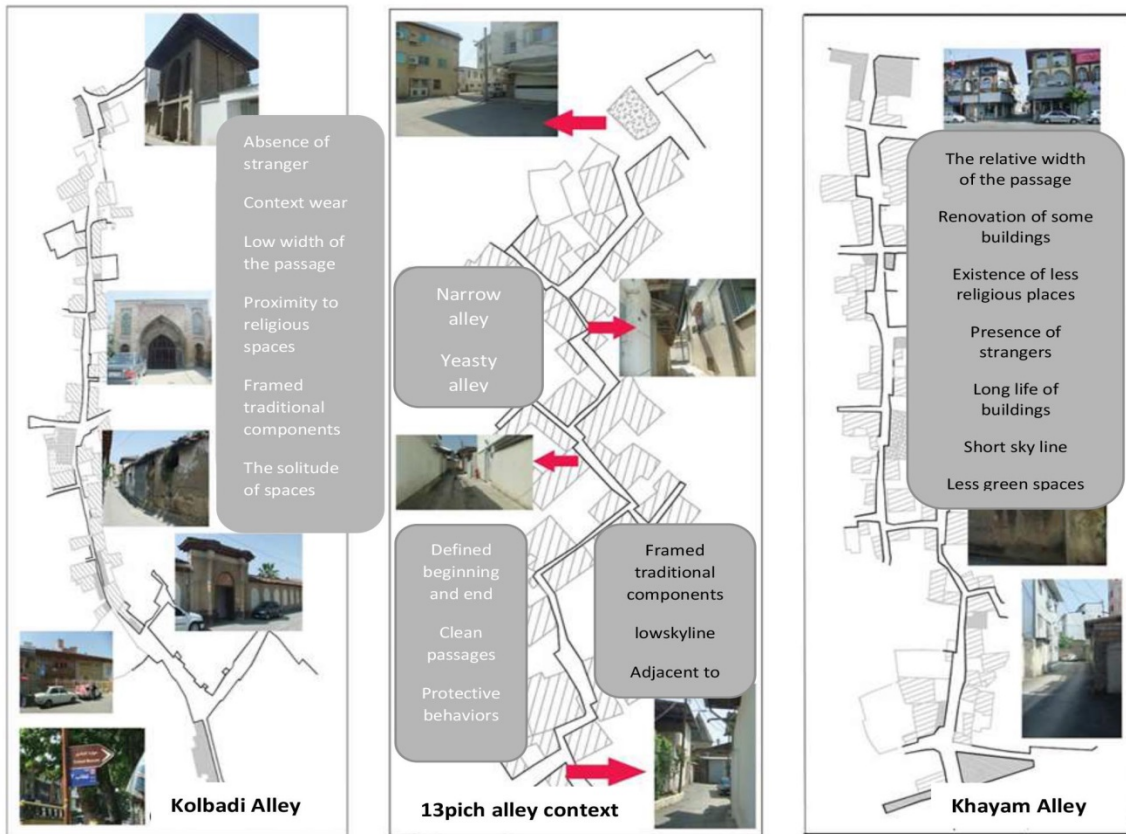
1	Respect and social approval	11	Participate in site protection	21	memory	31	Comfort- security
2	Sense of social belonging	12	familiarity	22	belonging	32	Scientific interests
3	Social relationships	13	tradition	23	memories	33	satisfaction
4	Social trust	14	beauty	24	peace	34	Pride and confidence
5	Spatial-based social interactions	15	privacy	25	entertainment	35	Reduction of mental problems
6	support	16	territory	26	emotions	36	Meeting daily needs
7	social participation	17	Commute	27	Personal improvement	37	Individual satisfaction
8	Social activities	18	access	28	intimacy	38	income
9	Freedom- control	19	Creating a deep emotional connection with the place	29	Feeling of intimacy with nature	39	Child's play
10	Continuity of residence	20	Feeling of respect to the place	30	Feeling of pride	40	Daily life

Based on the extracted meanings mentioned in the table 3, the final questionnaire was prepared and distributed among a number of people living in the context and then the results were collected. In the next step, the results of the questionnaires were entered in Spss software and the validity and reliability of the questionnaire were examined using the correlation coefficient of Alpha Cronbach.



Map 1. Detailed plan of Sari, the position of the context of the historical center and the alleys under study, *Source: Comprehensive plan of Sari city*




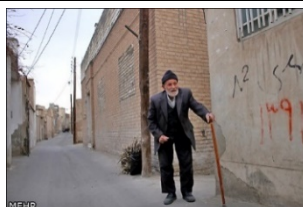








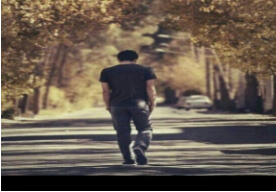







Map 2. The range of axes under study, Source: Authors

#### 4. Research Findings









In order to study more accurately, the current activities in the alleys of the historical core of Sari city were examined, the most important of which are presented in the table 4. This section covers an important part of the research, which was also very time consuming and it tries to record these activities during the study period. These field observations have been carried out mainly in three axes of Kalbadi Alley, 13 Pich Alley and Khayyam Alley (Qelich). During more than a year, these observations have been made continuously and people's activities have been recorded. Each of these activities has meanings that may be interpreted at different levels of meaning. The hidden aspects of performance are identified when it becomes clear how environments work, then centralizing of meaning and perception occur. The table below shows the current activities in the alleys along with their classification based on Yan Gehl's opinion (essential, optional and social):

Table 4. Results of direct observation of activities from April,2016 to September, 2017

	<p><b>Greeting with neighbors</b> (get mutual respect) (optional)</p>	<p>2</p>		<p><b>Daily commute</b> (access) (essential activity)</p>	<p>1</p>
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	<b>shopping</b> (meeting daily needs) (essential)	<b>4</b>		<b>Talking to neighbors</b> (friendship) (social)	<b>3</b>
	<b>Sitting or standing by the house</b> (spare time) (optional)	<b>6</b>		<b>driving</b> (access) (daily activity) (essential)	<b>5</b>
	<b>Parking cars</b> (check in) (essential)	<b>8</b>		<b>Staying in que at bakery</b> (Shared activities) (essential)	<b>8</b>
	<b>Walking alone</b> (hobby-concentration-thinking)(optional)	<b>10</b>		<b>Standing at alley</b> (check in) (social)	<b>9</b>
	<b>Alley cleaning</b> (social duty) (essential)	<b>12</b>		<b>Walking around and wandering</b> (hobby)(social)	<b>11</b>
	<b>planting</b> (check in-joy) (optional)	<b>14</b>		<b>Cleaning in front of the house</b> (social duty) (optional)	<b>13</b>
	<b>To peddler</b> (meet needs-daily activity) (optional)	<b>16</b>		<b>Watering and gardening of plants</b> (intimacy to nature) (optional)	<b>15</b>



	<b>Exercising and walking</b> (joy-presence in place) (Social)	18		<b>Guests' cars parking</b> (space occupation) (essential)	17
	<b>Children's play</b> (joy-social learning) (Social)	20		<b>Riding bikes</b> (access) (optional)	19
	<b>Nime shaban ceremony</b> (tradition-social activity) (Social)	22		<b>Tasoo and ashura ceremony</b> (tradition) (Social)	21
	<b>Welcome to Haji</b> (tradition-social activity) (Social)	24		<b>Fireworks Wednesday ceremony</b> (presence-accompany) (Social)	23
	<b>termination ceremony</b> (tradition-friendship) (Social)	26		<b>funeral</b> (tradition-social activity) (Social)	25
	<b>vowing</b> (tradition-social activity) (social)	28		<b>Chase the passenger</b> (tradition-accompany) (Social)	27

#### 4.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

After reviewing the current activities in the alleys and collecting the results of the questionnaires, the results were analyzed. Because of the multiplicity of research questions and its exploratory approach, the method of exploratory factor analysis was selected as a suitable method for classifying and structuring the variables. The main goal of factor analysis is to identify a relatively small number of subjects, dimensions, components, or basic factors of a relatively large set of variables. Factor analysis has been performed in two stages in order to classify the variables and extract the factors. In the first step, all variables are entered into the factor analysis simultaneously. Based on the statistical findings in Table 5, this analysis is

sufficient to extract and classify the variables.

Table 5. KMO quantity and Croatian Bartlett test

Indicative values			
0.766			index KMO
	8233.2		Bartlett test
	1485	K2	
	0.000	Degree of freedom	
			P- value

The results of the KMO index (0.776) and the P-value of the Bartlett test (0.000) for the analysis show that the adequacy of the data on the measurement of the structure has been provided.

Table 6. Total explained variance

<b>cumulative percentage</b>	<b>Variance percentage</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>factor</b>
16.931	16.931	9.312	<b>1</b>
24.089	7.157	3.937	<b>2</b>
28.755	4.666	2.566	<b>3</b>
32.848	4.094	2.252	<b>4</b>
36.724	3.876	2.132	<b>5</b>
40.217	3.492	1.921	<b>6</b>
43.509	3.292	1.811	<b>7</b>
46.481	2.972	1.635	<b>8</b>
49.119	2.638	1.451	<b>9</b>
51.631	2.512	1.382	<b>10</b>
54.080	2.449	1.347	<b>11</b>
56.204	2.124	1.168	<b>12</b>
58.316	2.112	1.162	<b>13</b>
60.355	2.039	1.121	<b>14</b>
62.317	1.962	1.079	<b>15</b>
64.210	1.893	1.041	<b>16</b>
66.077	1.866	1.026	<b>17</b>

#### *4.2 Communication Network Analysis of Research Variables and Exploratory Factors, Source: Authors*

Due to the large number of questions, only factors which their specific value is higher than one have been reported in this table. 17 major factors have been extracted in these variables, that the specific value of which is higher than one. These 17 components totally explain 66.2% of the total variance changes of variables.

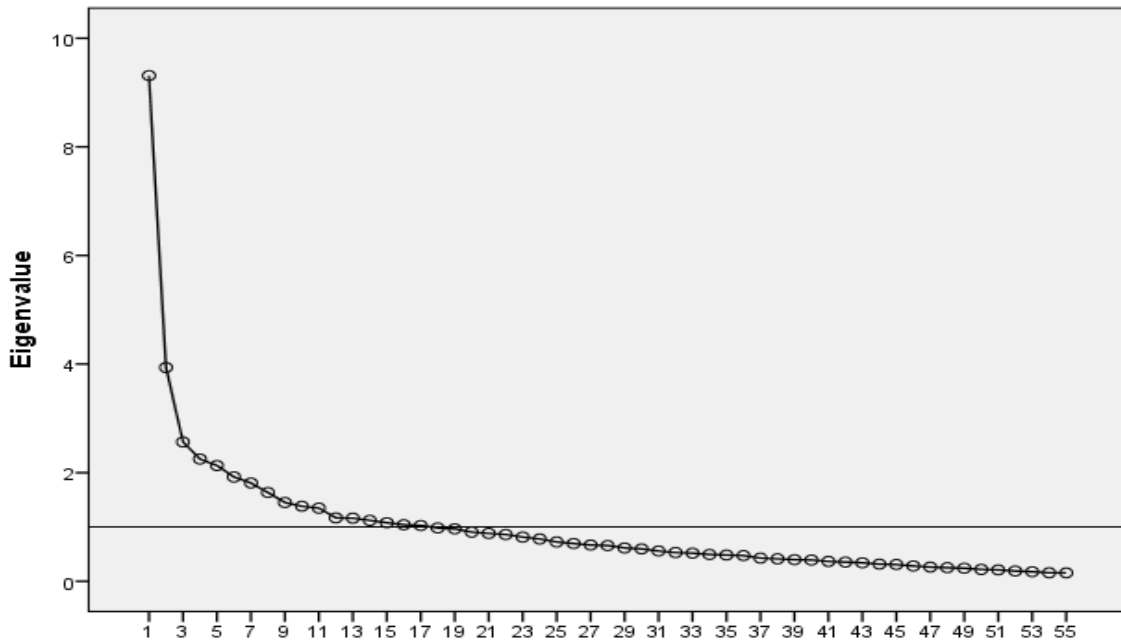


Figure 2. Scree diagram of the hidden semantic components of the alley

Table 7. Matrix of components and factor load of each of the variables, Source: Authors

	component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Factor2	.709				
Factor3	.703				
Factor1	.701	.421			
Factor4	.655				
Factor5	.640	.437			
Fact7	.623				
Factor6	.623				
Factor8	.615				
Factor9	.591		-.412		
Fact10	.409				
Fact13	.420	.540		-.458	
Fact14		-.466			
Fact17		-.441	.429		
Fact11	.403		-.530		
Fact12			.484		
Fact16					
Fact17		.525			.648

Table 7 shows the matrix of components and the factor load of each of the variables in relation to the components. The results were named in the table below. Following the analysis of the research results and based on the obtained data, the research results confirm the existence of 17 main factors, which are the main factors. These factors are as follows.

According to the information in the article, some of these factors are interrelated.

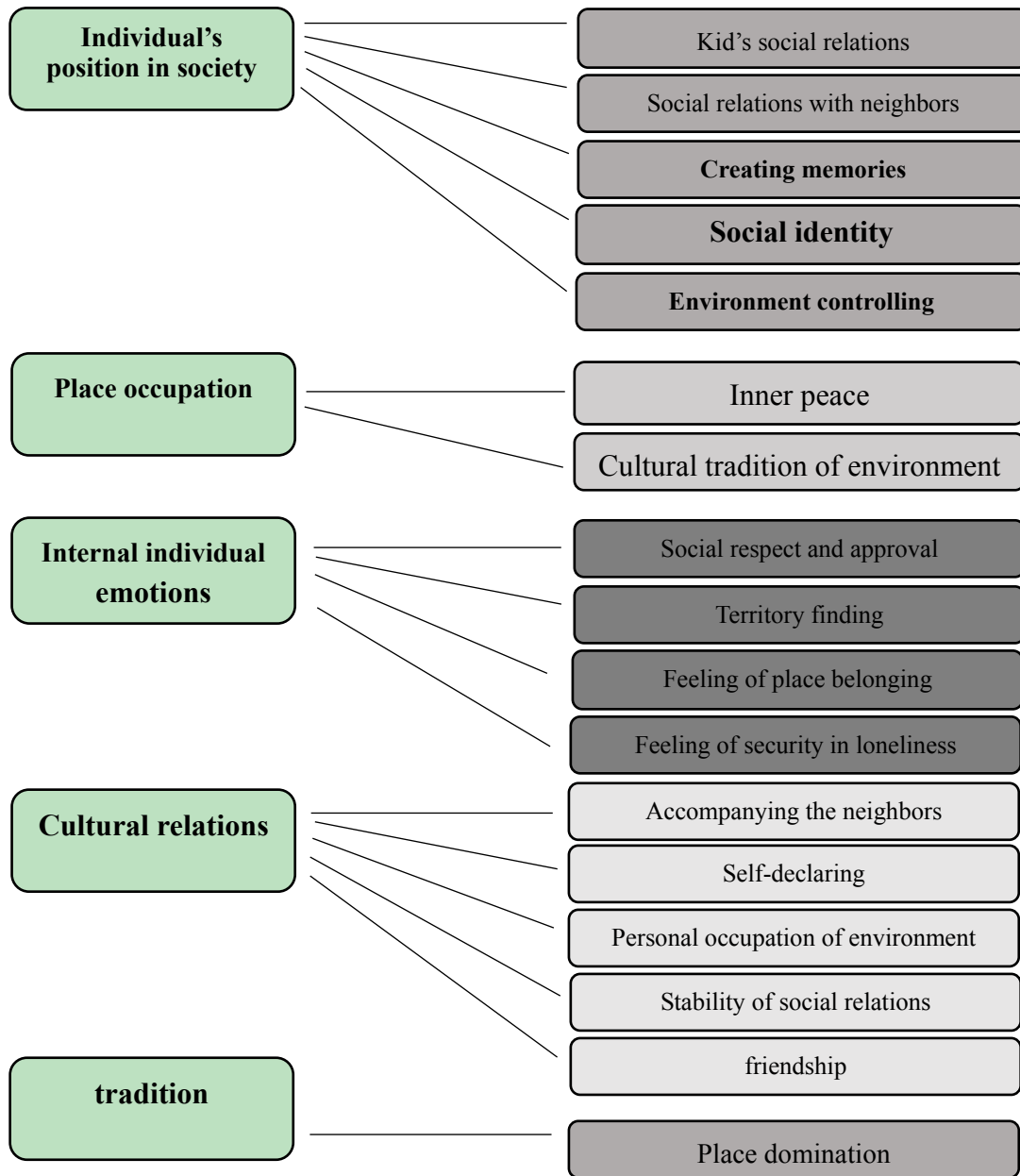


Figure 3. Connection model of semantic components of the alley, Source: Authors

Stability of Social Relations by considering the exploratory nature of this research and efforts to develop a model of variable relationship model, the best way to achieve a variable relationship system is to take advantage of the findings of factor analysis in the previous section and develop measurement models. In addition, the lack of previous hypotheses about the relationship between measurement models requires the structural model to use covariance and mutual relations. Finally, after performing all the above steps, the present research model, which is derived from the results of factor analysis in the previous section, includes five hidden factors and 17 variables were presented as follows:



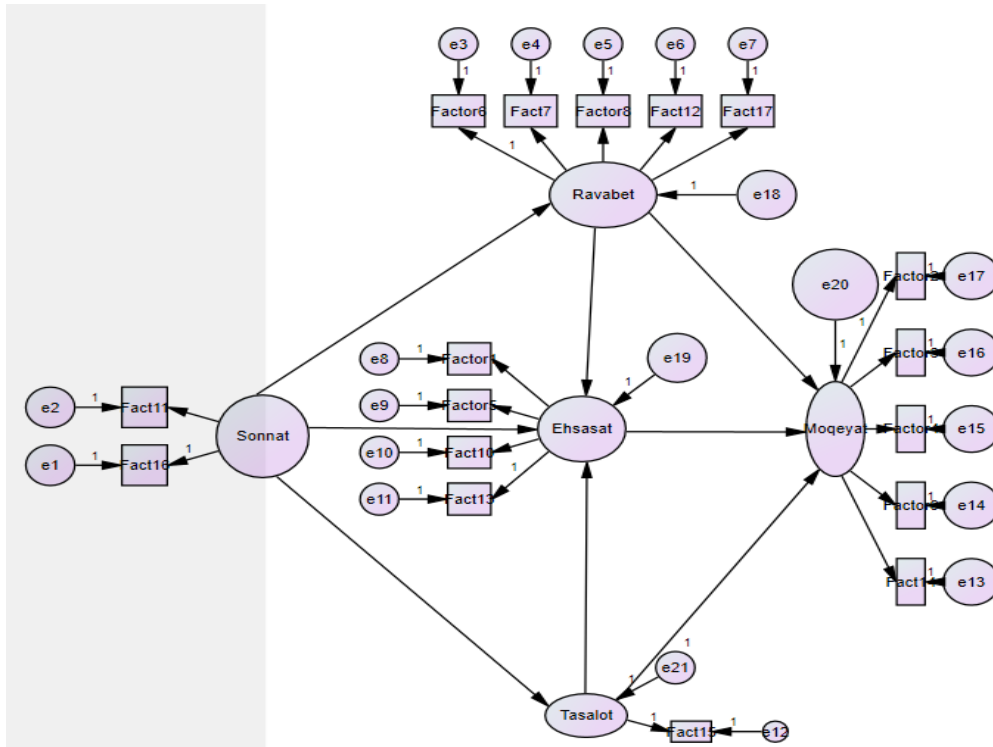


Figure 4. Research model based on standard regression coefficients, Source: authors

The Figure 4 shows the research model based on standard regression coefficients. Based on the results, it is observed that the strongest structural relationship between the structure of domination of the place and the individual's inner feelings is 0.63. The relationship of all three intermediate variables got meaningful by the dependent variable (individual's social position in society). In order to make decisions about the reliability of the results of model analysis and generalization; Some indicators are used. If the criterion is not met, the best way to modify the model should be presented while referring to the model correction indicators as well as the theoretical background. Based on the calculations made by the software, the Table 9 results have been obtained for the goodness of fit.

Table 9. Goodness of fit index for the model, Source: authors

Measurement model	Optimal range	Goodness of fit index
$\chi^2$	Nil	453.9
df	$\geq 0$	112
P	$\geq .05$	0.000
GFI	$\geq .80$	0.879
AGFI	$\geq .80$	0.835
PCFI	$\geq .50$	0.661
RMSEA	$\leq .08$	0.089
IFI	$\geq .80$	0.805
NFI	$\geq .80$	0.707
CFI	$\geq .80$	0.802
TLI	$\geq .80$	0.860

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the data in Table 8, after calculating the direct and indirect effects of independent variables on the social position of the individual in society, the variable of individual inner feelings with the relation intensity of 0.858 had the highest direct effect. The direct effect of cultural relations is equal to 0.224, and the variable of domination of place with the value of the relation of 0.579 - has had a strong and negative effect on the variable of social position of the individual in society. Studying of the indirect effects of independent variables on the dimensions of the individual's social position in society shows that the structure of domination of the place has had a negative effect on the dimensions of the individual's social position in society. The strongest indirect effects on the dimensions of the variable of the individual's social position in society are related to the variable of individual's inner feelings. The study of total effects shows that in general, the strongest total effect is related to the effect of individual inner feelings on the social position of the individual in society. Due to the fact that this variable has no indirect relations with the dependent variable, the amount of direct and total effect is equal. Although the variable of tradition has not had a direct effect on the social position of the individual in society, it has had a high indirect effect on the social position of the individual in society. By considering that the variable of dominance over the place has directly had a negative effect on the dependent variable and its indirect effect has been positive, in general its total effect on the individual's position in society has been very small and negative. Calculating the effect of independent variables on the dependent indicates that 75.3% of the variable changes in the social position of the individual in society are explained by the model. Also, 53% of the changes in the formation of social identity; About 50% of changes in children's social relationships; About 46% of changes in social relations with neighbors; About 35% of the changes in the memory creation of the alley and about 17% of the changes in the control of the environment have been explained by the model. Thus, it can be concluded that the proposed model, by showing the main and effective factors in the meaning formation, to a large extent regulates the meanings of the alley in the historical

context of Sari. This study, with a slight difference, confirms lots of previous researches in this field, and with a new and comprehensive view, it shows the general form of the process of forming the meaning of the alley. In other words, this model shows that the meaning of the environment is not just physically, and in contrast to many theories that emphasize on the physical modification of the environment to achieve the desired environment, this study shows that this strategy alone does not improve the relationship between people and the environment. Instead, the environment should be seen as a context for behavioral activities so that individuals can experience desirable social relationships.

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