

# **“Youth Spaces and Everyday Life in Tehran”**

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## **1. Introduction**

The questions that cultural studies poses towards cities and urban life are diverse. Cultural studies views the city as a flexible arena wherein a set of forces and spaces are involved in symbolic fights in their struggle to stabilize their position. As a readable text, the modern metropolis provides distinct opportunities and conditions for these representational conflicts and tensions. Cultural geographies of the cities give specific meanings to many of the roles, identities and everyday life actions. In addition to the obstacles and opportunities urban landscapes provide for the socio cultural inclusion or exclusion, they are also responsible for diverse mentalities and fantasies people may have towards them. On the other hand, given the developments and the expansion of the digital space and cyber technologies, urban life has gained more complex dimensions and forms which in turn hugely affect urban subcultures and their representations.

Amongst the diverse issues urban cultural studies is engaged in, urban subcultures and specifically urban youth subcultures are probably the most attractive and strategic ones which have been topics for empirical research for at least four decades (Hebdige, 1979; de Certeau, 1988; Thornton, 1995). The distinct geographies that youth enjoy, their socio cultural characteristics and the demographic importance of this age group in many countries (including) Iran, all make youth spatial cultural studies a dynamic and strategic research agenda. Youth life styles have undergone significant changes in Iran in the last two decades. Changes in youth cultures and values, together with some structural changes in society, have put them in a position fundamentally different from the experiences their counterparts went through only one generation before. Diverse forms of private and public leisure, the huge welcome of the social networking sites and of virtual participations, the spread of (informal) musical subcultures, a shift in patterns and values dominating gender relationships, shifts in youth transition patterns, an increase in the number of one person households and finally the emergence of new criminal subcultures are only some of the backgrounds and developments suggesting the mutual impacts of modernity and urban life on youths' values and behaviors in Iran particularly in the big urban centers.

Although the above mentioned developments have been much discussed by academics and the concerns around it have sometimes been extended to the public sphere, but the relation between the transformed life world of the

contemporary youth generation with the lived urban spaces, have rarely been subject to systematic conceptualization and experimental investigations. The city as a host for youth changes and as an arena affecting and affected by experiences and discourses dominating youth, has not been adequately discussed by academics worldwide and particularly in Iran. Urban geography and the youth mutually affect each other. The culture and experiences of urban youth give a different color to urban life. Similarly the physical and cultural context of the city provides specific opportunities for experiencing youth. On the other hand, the cities' spatial discourses, (which are in turn significantly shaped by the media), greatly impact how youth might experience it. Youths' work, play and interactions in different settings, depending on time, place and also on youths' own life courses, might be considered acceptable or unacceptable. Youths' inattention to the adults, the formal culture's mappings of space and its ownership, symbolic gaps, streets and pedestrians' designs and also to the definition of public and private sphere, all provide them with very different options for spatial behaviors. Young people decisions to follow short paths, to redefine spatial boundaries, to ignore them altogether or to reverse the common assumptions about fear and safety, are some of the strategies they might opt.

In the following paper and drawing on a cultural studies tradition, we aim to present a review of the trends, policies and discourses affecting their spatial communications, and the strategies they employ to counter or to negotiate the limitations (exclusions) they might face using recreational and leisure public spaces. The specific questions we address are as follows:

How do the Tehrani youth employ the urban public spaces to satisfy their needs? What is the role of public spaces in the identifications and the meaning they give to their lives? What are the strategies by which they experience, change and manipulate public leisure spaces? And finally, what kinds of policy implications can be drawn from their encounters to the urban spaces?

## **1. Youth and city life in Tehran: Trends and developments**

As social constructs, youth and young people are undoubtedly influenced by spatial structures. In the previous section I elaborated on the late formation of the youth phenomenon in Iran and the implications it involved

for the urban development. New youth has a joint history with urbanization and urban culture. Strong discipline and control governing many urban spaces, regardless of the kind of political regime and social development systems, create boundaries for the youths' inclusion or exclusion from the opportunities provided for (in different levels) participation. The limited and vulnerable citizenship position youth enjoy, to a great extent is defined and internalized within diverse urban spaces and in many cases exclusion is the only boundary specifying who an adolescent or youth is, what youth is not or cannot be and what they cannot do (James, 1986). Clearly, the interaction between youth and urban space is influenced by structural, cultural and discursive conditions. This relationship is not unidirectional. Youth culture both feeds the urban context and is mutually flowered in the urban context. In the following sections, I will briefly review some of the trends affecting this relation.

### 1.1. Juvenilization of the city

As social and cultural constructs, childhood and youth should basically be considered as experiences related to the modernity and the developments associated with it (Aries, 1960). Explaining changes in the Western conception of the childhood and the family and relying on the historical analysis of the childhood transformation in the West from the middle ages onward, the French cultural historian shows how post renaissance developments and specifically social differentiation resulting from industrialization, urbanization and the expansion of the urban middle classes in a historic process (from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward), have provided new meanings and boundaries for the life courses and have helped childhoods and youth gain more independence. According to Aries, the discovery of childhood as a distinct life stage, is a recent development that though connected to increasing individualization and the nuclear family empowerment, has nonetheless resulted to a decline in sociability and social connections in public spheres (districts and neighborhoods).

The emergence of the new youth in Iran, which to a great extent dated back to modernization policies of Shah in early 1340s, has inevitably facilitated the formation of new institutions serving the needs, roles and necessities of new life stages and serving youths' transition to adulthood. New youth has involved a redefinition of space and everyday life arenas specifically in the urban centers. On the other hand, youths' lifestyles and values have given different meaning to urban spaces. Youth cultures have Juvenilized the city

as youth values and cultures are increasingly promoted to or are attracted by the wider society.

Similarly, exposure to urban space can in turn transform the very meaning of youth. Training and educational centers, sites for children and youth leisure and sport, sub cultural spaces formed in streets and public spheres are only some of spatial fields within which youth experience is practiced, reproduced or otherwise confronted. The study of these special spaces enables us to investigate the transformed nature of youth and the diverse spheres through which youth is negotiated. Furthermore, leisure fields and spaces contain and represent youth discourses. Some spaces may seem more masculine or feminine, more safe or unsafe, more traditional or modern or more suited to the people belonging to higher or lower class positions. Spatial constructs have also a representational quality. The interplay of different identity and contextual features leads to diverse ways of constructing and meaning making of this space.

## 1.2. Social differentiation and the role of cultural intermediaries

Social differentiation process alongside the new position and value of childhood and youth in Iran, have provided new conditions for youths' spatial communications. Domestic division of labor, a change in parenting styles, the expansion of education and occupational trainings, the complexities of the labor market, the growth of popular culture industries, an increase in voluntary and nongovernmental organizations and the emergence of new forms of emotional and expressive participations (facilitated through virtual spaces), are all signs of this social differentiation which in turn have created new contexts for youths' relationship with the urban space. The large number of private clubs and sport centers, leisure and consumer centers, (like fast foods, coffee shops and restaurants), can only be understood and explained with reference to the differentiation process. Clearly this differentiation reflects the interconnection of structural and cultural conditions. However the very nature of urban life and its social dynamisms are the major venue promoting and directing this differentiation.

It is in the context of metropolitan centers, therefore, that those whom Bourdieu (1984: 359) called cultural intermediaries can play more active roles. A review of urban culture development in Tehran during the three post revolution decades reveals the role of these intermediaries in

differentiating tastes, forming and directing different groups' lifestyles (especially youth, those educated and the middle classes). Cultural intermediaries in Tehran, however, act less upon a global cultural economy model. To borrow Stuart Hall's model, (1997), their activity is not based on a complete "circuit of culture" (production, consumption, reproduction, regulation) and they are rather driven by a profit making logic, personal initiative and institutional or network supports. However, the cultural intermediaries have a crucial role in promoting social differentiation and setting life styles arrangements of the urban residents. The spread of leisure tastes in areas like arts, aesthetics, music, fashion and clothing, fitness, beauty and life skills trainings clearly require a complicated and different relationship between youth and urban spaces. Cultural intermediaries transform the city and the urban youth cultures give them special importance.

### 1.3. Changes in youth transition patterns

Changes occurred in the structure and the combination of population together with changes in transition patterns, have undoubtedly brought many direct and indirect impacts on urban youth spatial relationships in Iran. Non standardization and non linearization of the transition to the adulthood, which are in turn due to both demographic and values changes, are amongst the most important influential patterns. More and longer presence of youth, particularly women, in the city, formation of a big market for leisure and entertainment and more desire to occupy parts of the urban spaces, could not be properly understood without the above mentioned changes and trends. Similarly, the spread of alternative lifestyles in Tehran, like single person households or opting for celibacy (see Gholami, 1391), should also be seen related these new transition patterns. New transition pattern has specifically affected young women's lifestyles most. According to the latest formal statistics, currently there are over three hundreds thousands women living alone in Tehran and the number of those who have never married in this group is increasing. Tehran is the most attractive destination for the young girls wishing to pursue their career, follow their education or simply wishing to live an independent life. This habitus has already changed the urban fields in Tehran. Most families have equally accepted young girls living alone and they face little limitations managing their daily activities in the city.

Change in transition culture has led to more individualization and has undermined the role of family and community in giving an adult status to the youth (see Fornas, 1995; France, 2007; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Having faced such conditions, experimentation, risk taking and relying on personal initiatives in everyday life decision makings, could partly account for the differential spatial encounters and appropriations of youth from the urban spaces and thereby their more sensitivity towards its inclusionary or exclusionary potentials. Modern youth see the city rather belonging to their own and create different mental mapping from the potential or preferred urban fields and times they could use it. The new transition requires a different spatial and temporal relationship to the city. It also give the youth more power in shaping subcultures, extending communications, promoting agencies and seeking new forms of real and virtual participations. The combination of new communication and postmodern values in urban structures is also effective in the emergence of what Maffesoli (1996) has called the *neo tribes*. The new information and communication technologies enable youth to choose from a wide range of secondary social groupings and to maintain fluid, transient and still varied social ties. To the same extent, as these neo tribes depend on fixed social identities, they are also formed around values thus enabling the formation of different musical, sport, touristic or voluntary groupings.

#### 1.4. Prevalence of consumer values.

Increasing consumerization and leisurization of public spaces are amongst the major trends affecting urban life modern Iran. Numerous studies in Iran support priorities that youth, particularly those living in the big urban centers, give to individualistic, hedonistic and pragmatist values (see Zokaei, 1387 and 1391). The increasing consumerization of leisure values and behaviors, have changed the youths' logic and choice of lifestyles and have imposed the logic of the free market on their choice of hobbies and entertainments. The large number of stores offering brands (specially in northern wealthier parts, the large number of fast foods, restaurants and coffee shops, the increase in the number of lifestyle magazines, body building and sport clubs and an abundance of imported luxury cars cruising in the city are only some examples of urban space transformation both requiring and explaining different encounters and contacts youth take towards it. Many of the opportunities and venues that were freely accessible to the public before, (local communities' play courts, urban

gardens) are now leisure commodities thanks to commercialization and privatization processes. Adding leisure values to otherwise simple consumer items can also be testified by the emergence of a new car culture in Tehran wherein many youth embark on complementary and supplementary use of the cars for dating, showing off, discharging their tensions or satisfying their aesthetic needs (by modifying and decorating cars) (for a typologies of sub cultural uses of the car in Tehran, see Houshangi, 1392). Feeling guilty, anxious or responsible for the unnecessary and excessive consumptions, used to deter many people from indulging into conspicuous consumption. However, these values, in the new individualistic consumer culture are now often interpreted as outdated and unconventional. The fantasy spaces of modern shopping centers strongly motivate young peoples' desire to consume and to enjoy the pleasures tied to owning and displaying fashion and brand commodities. Owning these commodities is in fact a condition for expressing attachment to social groups enjoying wealth and cultural and symbolic capital.

#### 1.5. The role of community (sub) cultures

Population growth, geographical mobility, urban regenerations, changes in neighborhood sociability alongside many psychological and structural factors have all radically changed the meaning and the role community would play in young peoples' everyday life. Some sociologists in Iran, have noted, urban districts in Tehran have lost their unifying functions and have no longer the symbolic meaning they used to have. This claim in general is not far from reality. However, the physical and structural features of these districts and also the very context and normative atmosphere they display (again related to physical features), have different impacts on urban youths' spatial participations and their attitudes towards different urban sites. For example, more social controls in densely populated districts, where in ethnic groups have the majority, impact on the choice of public and leisure spaces youth make and affect their strategies and behaviors. Similarly communities less affected by the regenerations provide a different situation for their youth participations.

Habibi (1391) in her research on *Azad Koh's* migrants in Tehran shows how spatial and normative pressures governing over this community's residential place in, make some female youth to have double codes of conduct (for instance in the choice of clothing [*hijab*] or in contacts with the opposite sex), both inside and outside of the community. Similarly, in

some northern affluent areas of the city, where due to their leisure attractions are receptive to many young visitors in the evenings or the weekends, there are varied patterns in attitudes and also appropriation of the space both for the stable and their guest population. Urban districts cultures somewhat explain youths' tastes, consumption and value priorities. In other words the geography of community is connected to youth culture. The way youth familiarize and come to together, the choice of type and number of those they accompany for leisure recreations, their preferred place for consumption, the way they appropriate recreational spaces, their feeling and attachment to the community, their inclinations or potentials to display sub cultural behaviors (as in the male youth occupation of the local crossroads) are just samples indicating the relationship between youth and community geography. Some studies (like Zokaei, 1386), have already documented the impacts of urban districts contexts on youth experiences of exclusion and the strategies they adopt to counter this. For instance the more emphasis that the youth from the deprived areas of the city bestow to friendship and socializing with the peers, is a strategy to deal with and to compensate for the leisure shortages and constraints they face.

#### 1.6. Digital space and virtual participations

In addition to providing unique opportunities for recreation and what is called virtual leisure, virtual space affects spatial communications of its professional audiences. Virtual space have already changed the temporal and spatial meaning of Tehran and have allowed the formation of diverse professional and leisure groupings through expanding and diversifying human communications. Social networking sites which have been widely welcome by youth (particularly the urban youth) in recent years, allow youth to have more control on their lives. I do not have enough space here to assess optimistic approaches (Turkle 1996), or rather pessimistic ones (Herring et al, 2003) to virtual space and to clarify on the impacts it has on strengthening or declining urban capitals or social communications. However it seems that a precise and full fledged understanding of youths' approach to urban spaces and participations, or instead their reluctance to encounter some urban spaces, is influenced by the spread of virtual culture amongst young urbanites. Facilitating the formation of virtual subcultures and neo tribes, virtual space has made Tehran smaller and more accessible. Exchanging information and experiences youth have from the urban life, provide them with a valuable subjective experience and enable them to

shape social gatherings on the basis of different motives (seeking adventure, charity work, volunteering) and makes the city more susceptible to appropriation by them. Similarly, the diversity of youths' interactions and communications in the city, their geographical mobility, the very tensions and emotional overload experienced in it and the opportunities it offers for self expression (regardless of the serious fears of visibility), all provide youths with more subjects to discuss and to exchange their views and as a result makes resorting to virtual space increasingly more pleasurable. The virtual space potentials for creating or strengthening social capital and specially its rich capacities for self expression, is often used by youth striving for more social mobility. However, it also has provided a space for making up for some social exclusions resulting from gender identity, lifestyle and material deprivations and other geographical, locational and communicative limitations. National surveys conducted in Iran in the last decade clearly show the important place that the cyber space has for Iranian youths' entertainment and socializing. Relying on the cyber space has repeatedly allowed the Iranian urban youth to pursue the news of their desired sub cultures (in music, fashion, celebrity culture, etc) and at times to produce and coordinate some sub cultural activities (both legal and illegal) in the city sites.

It could be claimed, therefore that metropolitan experience has brought Iranian urban youth with diverse opportunities for digital participation and virtual lifestyles and that virtual life is an integral part of metropolitan lifestyle.

#### 1.7. Youth leisure spaces: discourses and representations.

Islamic revolution in Iran can be considered as a value transformation and as a reaction to the Shah' s government cultural anomies and what was often seen as the invasion of western culture permissiveness in a traditional and religious society. A simple content analysis of the messages and lectures of religious leaders in the years following revolution reveals their clear emphasis on immunizing the public sphere and avoidance of corrupt and unsuitable cultural commodities brought by the West. Although this discourse is derived from the basic principles of Islam, but a radical reading of this discourse is conducive to non trust, sensitivity and control of public recreational spaces particularly those approached most by youth. In the next section, I will clarify on the implications religious and formal discourse pose for segregation policies and spatial control. The

implications of this discourse involve other dimensions. For instance more strict rules for admitting single youth in some leisure or public spaces (restaurants, shopping centers, hotels), giving priorities to family based programs when launching public leisure programs (recreational games and contests in parks) or even rejecting youth, are examples of this dominant discourse. Inconsistency between family leisure (which is assumed as helping to moral health and promoting responsibility) and individual leisure, is established in the individualization experiences of both groups. Of course, suspicious approach to unmarried male or female youth can be more or less seen in many other countries. However, apart from the usual and often less important economic concerns (concerns related to the purchase power and shop lifting), the causes of this concern and exclusion in Iran, is related to their potential moral threats. Another difference is concerned with the moral claim makers who are not amongst the general public or business owners in these countries and in fact safeguarding moral and social safety in recreational spaces is often consistent with cultural considerations and necessities.

Similarly the formal media representations of entertainment and leisure put emphasis on family and despite the fact that many youth feel comfortable and not excluded when facing the favorite leisure spaces in Tehran, but in some smaller settings adaptation to these norms may also require self exclusionary practices.

#### 1.8. Policies on urban spaces

The most important and immediate factor affecting youths' spatial relations to the city, is the formal urban spatial policies. Spatial policies should be considered as part of direct and indirect methods and strategies formal culture use to help people make meaning, understand and interact with urban public spaces. Clearly, these policies have both encouraging and prohibiting dimensions. They also depend on employing direct and indirect signs and spatial and non spatial interventions.

Spatial policies cover wide range of planning and initiatives related to designing urban space. For instance in most of the Western countries, supplying spaces for work, life, leisure and other local venues necessary for urban life is not the only aim and criterion by which the efficiency of urban spatial policies is evaluated. The cultural turn in urban policies and the importance of communicative values in urban spaces have caused

governments to pay special attention to making public spaces convivial. Thus, providing spaces that “allow people experience sociability, peace and happiness in urban spheres is considered as the essence of urbanity” (Shaftoo, 2008: 5). Similarly, making public entertainment and leisure spaces convivial could bring about other positive results, of which one can refer to a higher social tolerance, more familiarity of the citizens with socio cultural differences, lesser amount of exclusions triggered by lifestyles and values, slowing down the process of culture privatization (a retreat to private sphere to obtain privacy and happiness) and also the polarization of society (see Carr et al., 1992, Wirpolel and Greenhalgh, 1996).

Clearly, making policies on spatial interventions, are closely tied to political ideology, cultural values and a history of urban development. For instance, in many of the Western governments, urban regenerations and developmental projects, in addition to their direct functional purposes, aim to control and to monitor the citizens and to create what can be named as visible public sphere.

Spatial developments in Iran have signs of continuities and changes in its contemporary history. Gender segregation, which as one of the cultural priorities of the Islamic government has been in force since the revolution, has affected spatial communications. Although maintaining some limited levels of gender segregations in administrative, educational, sport and leisure sites have been a common experience in many countries in some historical periods, but segregation policies have different dimensions, implications and functions in Iran.

The gender segregation of public leisure spaces in Iran has always (though with varying degrees) been a major policy since the 1979 revolution. In recent years urban managers have worked hard to create mono gender spaces for women to increase their participation in urban spaces<sup>1</sup>. Though this initiative can to some extent help attracting more participation, however it does not necessarily prevent self or structural exclusions of young girls and women from the public leisure spaces. The exclusive emphasis on designing spaces for women and insufficient attention to providing a context for more females leisure participation in the mixed

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<sup>1</sup> The biggest of these centers, named *Shahr-e Banoo* was first launched in down town Tehran in 20---. Currently there are one female only park in each urban district. Women are allowed to take off *Hijab* and to dress openly in these parks. Findings suggest these parks are rather welcomed by women of lower economic class, middle aged and those enjoying less education and professional skills.

gender urban spaces, in turn, could highlight the duality of male versus female spaces in the minds of Iranian women thereby weakening their required confidence to participate in the dominant mixed gender urban spaces. Given that, it is only in the mixed gender places where men and women from different backgrounds and value orientations can familiarize with each other and put aside the often exaggerated gender stereotypes widespread in society. Taking segregation policies extreme, could, in the long term, lead to more isolation of women, more strengthening of stereotypical gender images and finally more conflicts amongst male and females in the mixed gendered environments like the family (see Naderi, 1392). Having strengthened a polarized and stereotypical masculine and feminine image, emphasis on gender segregation may limit women's participations in the public sites of urban leisure. The creation of new public mixed gendered spaces, (alongside the segregated spaces), could be useful in the formation of communicative habitus amongst boys and girls built around tolerance, responsibility and concerns for larger society. Mixed spaces surely may cause some abuses and put some women at discomfort. However, in the absence of acting in the real spaces that give youth the chance of getting a better knowledge of themselves and the opposite sex, many of the youth may shift their contacts and curiosities to non controllable private meetings and parties<sup>2</sup> or to the anonymous spaces of social networking sites and virtual chat rooms.

Physical control of the public leisure spaces is another urban spatial policy aimed to safeguard religious values and to prevent unsuitable mix of the two genders. I do not have enough space here to clarify more on the post revolutionary Iranian spatial policy and the consequences it has brought about. However what can briefly be said about those cultural policies items related to segregation and spatial control are ambiguity, transcendental and idealistic approaches and at times judgmental and tentative practices and decisions leading to a variety of interpretations. In addition, administrative paradoxes continue to affect these policies. The political system has benefited from the different dimensions of power and also from the ideological apparatuses, but meeting the ends of these policies is only possible only by a more precise administrative control, revising some of the

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<sup>2</sup> Arguably a strict control on mixed gender contacts in the public sphere, have lead to the formation of a new and different (private) party culture. The expansion of these parties is believed to have carnivalized the private sphere of the family. For a detailed and empirical account of this phenomenon see Yousefi, 1387.

legal items and clarifying on their applications and also attending to new and varied procedures in practicing these policies. Applying these policies can be successful if in addition to covering Islamic-national values and norms, they also consider modern condition of the Iranian society. Not recognizing youth subcultures, ignoring young girls' lifestyle patterns, inadequate attention to consumption as an identity based action and increasing importance of virtual space in youths' everyday life and specifically on their citizenship rights and duties in urban locations are amongst the obstacles faces to a desired cultural policy making. Clearly, the persistence of such conditions, could pose pathologies because it can only stabilize a set of characteristics, behavioral manifestations and finally institutionalization of values and norms different from the formal cultural policy making. Arguably, ignoring the young peoples' everyday life logic and their deliberations and also deliberate reading and practicing policy prescriptions can widens the gap between what is considered as ideal and what people in real life perform. A continuation of this gap in the long term could undermine the efficiency of the formal rules or even can reverse its impacts (Zokaei and Shafiee, 1391).

Islamic republic spatial policy also aims to prevent the formation of youths' spatial subcultures and the carnivalization of public sphere. Inadequate spatial differentiation and the absence of sites in which youth can discharge their conventional or at time unconventional emotional tensions that often takes the form of sub cultural behaviors, will inevitably draw it to the streets. Recreational use of the car for dating and the show off, spontaneous and emotional gatherings triggered by sport victories or even defeats, carnivalizing Ashura's religious ceremonies, or carnivalizing funerals arranged for popular celebrities<sup>3</sup> are some examples indicating these sub cultural use. Limited investment in the leisure fields favored by youth will make it more probable for the interpenetration of youths' sub cultural spatial boundaries and what Lefebvre (1990) refers to as Eros sphere transfer to the Logos. This confusion in turn makes it difficult for the law makers and legal officials to take unified and clear spatial policies and procedures. Having faced such uncertainties, the formal politics often

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<sup>3</sup> One of the biggest gathering of this kind relates to the funeral held for the pop singer Pashaei in November, 2014. Employing the power of the new media and appropriating the chance that attending the funeral traditionally involves in the Islamic cultures, tens of thousands of people (mostly youth) displayed a massive demonstration of emotion and belongingness. Following Maffesoli's concept of neo tribe (1996), the young Iranian mourners took their chance to form neo tribe by which they could partly make up for the limited venues they enjoy for self expression and emotional discharge.

resorts to some degrees of recognition and acceptance (though reluctantly), of youths' theatrical self expressions in public fields (as in the sporting emotional reaction following victories or in the forms of leisure gatherings of youths of the opposite sex in urban mountains). However in some cases or times culture politics is less tolerant. In another article (Zokaei, 1391), I have elaborated on criminalizing forms of popular culture that are particularly fed by media culture. Inadequate familiarity with the context, motives and meaning of sub cultural behaviors in public field and spaces (like *Abo Atash* park) provokes a kind of non conformist and protest reading of the behaviors that in reality are rather hedonistic and non political.

Another important dimension in formal spatial politics, particularly in urban centers) is the sacralization of time and space. As already mentioned, the centrality of mosque, market and governmental headquarter in Islamic - Iranian city, has always been a distinguishing feature of urban identity. However, the imported modernization process and the accelerated urban development since the second Pahlavi period, radically changed this balance. As part of Islamic republic formal spatial politics, temporal and spatial sacralization aim both to guide and educate different social groups and to reform the portrayed secular image that is believed to have been damaged in the modernization process. Sacralization involves the display and highlighting of periodical religious customs and rituals in the city. From a more physical (objective) dimension, it also involves establishing, expanding, or regenerating of sacred times and places in the cities. It is expected that sacralization of time and space can strengthen the role of religious faith in the relationships displayed in different fields of youths' everyday life. By adding symbols, signs, interpretations or non material procedures to urban life perspectives, sacralization aims to moderate the materializing and consumerizing impacts of luxurious urban life and to recreate the spirituality lost in the process of secularization of subjects and human communities. Playing epic and revolutionary lyrics on certain occasions of the year in the public spaces (anniversaries for the revolution, the war. etc), in the public spaces, reciting Quran or playing religious prayers (*noheh*) on mourning occasions for the Shia's imams or religious leaders, launching or renewing mosques in different districts, launching praying rooms in parks, shopping centers and other crowded public centers, displaying religious message in urban public spaces (bill boards, bus stops, graffiti and paintings on bridges, tunnels and the like), launching public

prayers (*namaze jamaat*) on special occasions in major urban squares or streets, burying the imposed war's martyrs in public spaces like the university campuses, mountains on the edge of the city, are only some of the temporal spatial practices the culture politics takes to sacralize the public sphere. Clearly these spatial interventions are in many cases consistent with the cultural and social needs and values of a religious society giving it a distinct identity. Similarly, sacralising time and space can, in an ideal way, somewhat balance the materialistic and consumerist discourses and signs of the city and ties the everyday life to spiritual and other worldly thoughts. However, the choice of wrong place and time or unsuitable introduction and launch of these interventions, may not meet the desired ends making people distance from it. For instance Karimi (1391), in her research and comparing functions and spatial harmony of two big mosques (*imam Khomeini* in the old Tehran Market and *Imam Sadeq* in the Palestine square) show that because of unsuitable location, too decorative and self revealing architecture and inattention to some of the usual criteria employed in designing mosques in Iran, the latter has not obtained a major place in the district. In the case of young audience, that are of the key concern here, the main concern is related to the formation of negative approaches that might be developed by youths enjoying different lifestyles. Using unsuitable time and locations, ignoring the real needs and lifestyles of diverse audiences, unprofessional design and launching of plans and initiatives, inadequate involvement of public and informal section in promoting these programs and at times incongruent aesthetic tastes are amongst the barriers limiting the efficiency of spatial interventions.

## **2. Conclusion**

Urban life exposes youth to different experiences and trials and imposes special requirements for spatial identifications. New youth and the discourses associated with it are in great deal a result of increasing urbanization particularly living in metropolises. The everyday experiences of Iranian youth in the diverse urban sites (educational, leisure, consumer, streets and the like), have had significant impacts on their identifications in personal, interpersonal and societal levels. In this chapter I aimed to show the impacts of metropolitan spatial contexts on Tehrani youth and to clarify on some backgrounds and trends affecting this. The historical and empirical evidences clearly suggest a mutual connection between new youth and urban geography. Urban life has modernized Iranian youth to the same

extent as youth have modernized the city. I briefly elaborated on the democratizing feature of this metropolitan context on Iranian youth. However, in addition to the structural transformations of the city life and the global trends of the values changes youth has undergone, spatial behaviors of urban youth in present day Iran are also dependent on the Islamic government's culture politics. I argued that the triple processes of physical controls, gender segregations and sacralization of time and spaces are the cornerstones of the spatial politics the government has employed since the 1979 revolution. The combination of culture politics interventions and structural inequalities has shaped youths' spatial strategies and relation to the city. In addition to the opportunities and facilities it offers youth for self expression, seeking excitement and working on their identity projects, metropolitan life could also be seriously conducive to the creation of inequality, alienation and social exclusion. In this paper I reviewed some important trends and contexts affecting urban youths' spatial communications. On the whole what was inferred from the review of major fields of transformations (a normative dominance of youth values, formation of new leisure spaces, changes in transition patterns, the diversity of discourses and representations on youths' sub cultural and recreational spaces), is a dialectic of structural and cultural conditions explaining diverse and somewhat different experience youth have in their spatial communications. In the multicultural, differentiated and individualized context of the city life, many youths maintain pragmatist relationships with the city that is either based on a temporary adaptation or rather passive and self exclusion from its public or semi public spaces. Adopting these tactics, that are employed using strategies like carnivalising space, multiple or alternative use of the space, maneuvering in the space or changing the logic and functions defined for the space, clearly testifies to the individualistic, differentiating and destabilizing impacts of urban life on youths' spatial attitudes and behaviors. Dissatisfaction with public and leisure spaces or having limitations in the access and the use of it, (in turn related to personal, capital and value backgrounds), lead to exclusion, marginalization or distinctions shaped by lifestyle and subculture as a result of which a retreat to the private sphere and its expansion is probable.

Such conditions would clearly make it necessary for the urban managers to employ integrating and unifying strategies. Employing initiatives to promote youths' leisure and spatial participations in the public sphere, provide them with a reference for identification and collective self

expression. This in turn enables them to boost their social capital and act as more responsible citizens. Inadequate social differentiation, insufficient fields to discharge emotional tensions, inadequate familiarity with contexts, motives and the meanings of sub cultural behaviors in public space, paves the way for institutional or self chosen exclusions of youth from the urban public spaces fields and would make the city more alienating.