Genealogical Analysis and Root Examination of Contextual Factors Affecting the Formation of Borderline-Gray Spaces in Contemporary Iranian Architecture: A Grounded Theory Approach[*]

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Abstract

Introduction: Border-gray spaces represent a distinct category of third-degree spaces that, due to their existential nature, have received limited scholarly attention. In contemporary contexts, these spatial liminalities have increasingly become blurred and ambiguous due to various social, economic, and political factors. Existing literature on ownership has primarily focused on well-defined spaces or specific types of ownership, while intermediary spaces—those situated between different types of ownership—remain underexplored and insufficiently critiqued. Generally, these transitional spaces exhibit characteristics of in-betweenness, where the boundaries and the spaces between them, as well as their definition, are determined by the territories they separate. These dialectical spaces function as arenas for social interactions, evolving events, and relational dynamics that arise from the confrontation of ownerships. A historical and contextual reassessment of this topic has allowed for the identification of key factors contributing to the formation of such spaces.

Methodology: This research adopts a qualitative approach, employing grounded theory methodology to explore the nature of border-gray spaces. To investigate "what" constitutes these spaces, key influencing factors were identified through a systematic coding process applied to textual data collected from interviews. This analytical process led to the extraction of 18 core concepts and 10 major categories. In the "how" section, the study examines the relationships and interconnections between these concepts and categories to provide a deeper understanding of the formation and significance of border-gray spaces.

Results: The research findings were categorized into three qualitative levels: ontological, spatial, and boundary-related. Each of these levels was critically reassessed and interpreted to achieve the study's research objectives. The selective coding process within the grounded theory framework facilitated the classification of themes into three key categories: essential, structural, and boundary-related. These themes highlight the role of border-gray spaces in enabling various activities and social experiences within threshold environments—spaces where individuals interact and engage with one another. However, these spaces do not serve as the primary cause of boundary formation; rather, they provide the necessary conditions for such interactions to take place.

Conclusion: The evolving patterns of spatial consumption in contemporary urban environments, particularly in metropolises such as Tehran, underscore the importance of addressing the design elements of border-gray spaces. These liminal spaces serve as crucial contexts for shaping social relations and fostering socialization, allowing for diverse experiences, activities, and events to unfold between different ownership domains. Ultimately, the unpredictable and dynamic patterns of spatial consumption in these intermediary zones call for a more in-depth exploration of their role in urban and social dynamics.

Key words: Contextual Elements, Genealogical Analysis, Gray Spaces, Grounded Theory Approach, Liminal Spaces (Threshold Spaces)

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