

# “The Social Production of Space: a Study on Teenagers’ Creation of Social Space in a Shopping Mall”

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Simultaneous Wireless Information and The aim of the study is to examine the shopping mall(DLF Mall ) located on the Nelson Mandela Road, New Delhi, as a space through Lefebvre’s triadic space conceptions and the specific focus is on teenagers’ social use of the mall. In India, like anywhere else the shopping malls are increasingly providing its customers with the best built environment possible to enhance their shopping behaviour. Malls today are on the verge of erasing any replica of geographical locations given the fact that carbon-copy chain stores, ubiquitous greenery and floor plan directories have sprawled. Mall culture in India and especially in Delhi & NCR has grown with an incredible pace. A common trend has also been associated with the teenagers hanging out in the requisite food court .With the mushrooming of malls in India, hanging out at the mall is becoming one of the quintessential activities of urban adolescent life.

Teenagers have an equivocal relationship with the malls. This can be understood through the fact that most of the teenagers of today’s time because of lack of other spaces often take resource to malls as sites for hanging out(requiring a space outside adult supervisions).However their being in such places is often met with suspicion and exclusion (stratification of the mall space by age)(Mugan,2009).Its pertinent to refer to the root cause of such equivocal relationship of the teenagers with mall ,it after all stems from their particular age group. Firstly, adolescence can be regarded as that “luminal stage” in a society that refers to the transition from the innocence of

childhood to the indoctrinated realm of adulthood as uncertain with a negative vibe(Anthony Kathryn,1985).Thus the stereotype of teenagers being troubling furthers in strengthening of boundaries that contributes in naturalizing public space as adult space and serve to exclude teenagers from the space often seen as the platform for socialization. Teenagers are also perceived to use the mall primarily as a

site of social activity and not much as sites of commodity consumption. Hence the malls

perceive these activities of the teenagers as transgressive since these threaten the very commercial agenda. Moreover ,the teenagers engagement with such quasi public space(mall)relates to their collective desire for such a space owing to the lack of safe public spaces. Thus the study explores the creation of teenager’s own social space in the mall and throws light on their negotiation of the rules of the mall.

Shopping malls are examples of the rampant consumer culture of the contemporary Indian society(specially city like Delhi).The mall increasingly points to a shift in where everyday life is to be located because of an increasing privatization and interiorization of public life in the face of the traditional public spaces being constructed as dangerous. This raises a number of questions regarding what actually takes place within the mall in conjunction with and in opposition to its private and commercial agendas With this broader vision in mind the study looks at the social act of hanging out and the dynamics in the covert interaction between teenagers use of the mall and the mall authority’s expectations from their customers(teenagers in this case) .

### **Objectives of the research study:**

- 1)The creation of a social space in a commercial space (shopping mall)is to be understood and the notion of space is understood through both physical setting and the methods of control, organization in the mall.
- 2)The creation of this social space is specifically explored in the case of teenagers

### **Literature review and theoretical framework :**

An inquiry into the production of social space in a mall by the teenagers(in our case) requires us to look into restrictions and discourses which structure its setting. Lefebvre’s understanding of a lived or a social space will be used here. This section will throw light on the theoretical perspectives

related to the social character of space and how teenagers are associated with it.

A study by Jerry Jacob published in 1984 highlights six themes which are very relevant for the study. The first theme that concerns the study is related to the fact that the mall as a building type was preceded by the buildings located in the Agora and bazaar of ancient times. The modern times' architectural form is more located in the 19th century Paris and England characterized by a large number of arcades. The type of mall most prevalent today is the fully enclosed shopping mall, the first of which appeared in U.S.A.

The next theme touches upon the interiorization of the malls. According to Jacobs the commercial agenda embedded in the mall is often intertwined with a social activity that is underlying beneath it. According to him, the overarching commercial agenda is often bound up in the social activities that go on in the mall. Thus shopping becomes a social activity, it becomes a prerequisite to other social activities in the mall. Jacobs talks about the third theme, the quasi-public nature of the mall. To him, while reiterating the quasi public nature of the shopping mall, it provides a setting that resembles public space, but has a number of severe limitations owing to the commercial agenda. For example he goes on to say that a prominent characteristic of shopping mall is that aimless loitering in the mall is prevented to promote their commercial agendas of more sale.

Fourthly according to him, shopping forms an important part of our everyday life. To Jacob, the social nature of shopping emphasized as according to him it is a social activity. He goes on to say that shopping with friends can be seen as an action that emphasizes social interaction more than transaction. Since to him, social interaction often hinders transaction and hence a social activity results.

The social nature embedded in the commercial agenda of the shopping mall is reflective of as seen in the fifth theme of his study.

The fifth theme is associated with how people experience shopping malls. A recurrent theme is associated with the mall's site as a source of pleasure and leisure in the literature. To Jacobs, teenagers as a form of group explore mall as a primary site of their social lives and such activities such as shopping, conversing, dating etc take place. To Jacobs, hanging out at a mall which is a social activity which is seen as unproductive-loitering by the shopping mall organizers for whom the commercial logic of the mall gets threatened by such activities.

Teenagers relation with social space is very well bought out in his work.

According to Mats Lieberg, "teenagers unlike adults have no obvious right to spaces of their own; school, work and home are all places under adult supervision". According to Jacobs, for such reasons adolescents utilize shopping malls as a site of their public life, however they do face obstacles that are presented to their particular age groups". For example Gill Valentine argues that through the repetitive acts of parents, media and educators, public space has produced within a regulatory framework as adult space to such an extent that it is assumed to be naturally or is taken for granted as the realm of grown ups. Valentine also refers to the representation of youngsters as endangered, teenagers as transgressive, prompting teenagers to find means of circumventing the order imposed on them. Thus, my aim will be to look into the tactics by which the youth tries to subvert such assertions and deal with how they are generally perceived by the adults in creating their own social space.

In locating the use of shopping mall as a social space by the teenagers two theoretical rubrics come into being: space (as both context and practice) and youth (constructing them as deviant according to popular perception). This will help us facilitate an analysis of the impact of stratification of space (teenagers access to mall being limited since the mall is seen as an adult space) on the ways teenagers use the mall.

#### **Conceptualizing Space:**

To Carteau space is the outcome of movement and practice unlike place that is stable. Urban space according to Lefebvre is a social construct. It consists of social relations that he characterised as a triad of spaces: spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 1996). Lefebvre's The production of a Space is an attempt to construct a theory of space which unifies the physical, mental and social fields. The triad of fields results in a conceptual triad composed of spatial practices, representations of space and representational space. According to him, spatial practice includes both production and reproduction. He further holds the view particular location of such space is a characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. Examples of such a spatial practice are Built forms and the landscapes which means the physical setting serve as the concretised spatial practice. To understand spatial practice one must decipher the reified forms of routines and networks.

Representations of space is associated with the relations of production and order which those relations impose, this is

conceptualized as the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic sub dividers and social engineers.” Thus, to him , representations of space are shaped by the social order and in turn reproduce stratifications of society along lines of class and status. As such representations of space reflect dominant interests. Such surveillance related space can also be conceptualized through Foucault’s work Discipline and Punish wherein he examines “the internalization of discipline and the production of docile bodies” since these docile bodies can be comprehended as products of the way architecture has been built and hence a discourse is created(Foucault,1995).To him, such architecture as reflective of a certain kind of specialization is the prime key behind discipline. This is because ,through such architectural construction “internalization of surveillance” which is generated makes each body conspicuous and locatable(ibid).

Representational space is the lived space, often runs counter to the representation of space includes the possibilities for negotiation and resistance within a hegemonic space(Lefebvre,1996).Its the space of the inhabitants and users. The present study looks at this space of the teenagers(how they negotiate the rules in an adult space and turn into their own social space).Adult space may be conceptualized as a hegemonic space which the teenagers(inhabitants or the users)shape it for their social purpose of hanging out,

The representation of space is often converted into a representational space through various ways .Carteau’s concept of tactics will of immense significance to look at the ways by which a hegemonic space is shaped by inhabitants in their favor. According to Carteau, tactics are basically used by those who do not have a predominant space of their own and such a group of people are often mobile who barge into others’ space and try to shape the space by seizing the opportunities of that space in an oppositional and resisting manner(Carteau,1984).In this case the tactics used by the teenagers in producing their own social space will be looked at .

#### **Conceptualizing Youth:**

Youth’s conceptualization particularly its perception in the context of our study shall be understood hence the construction of youth as trouble shall be explicated. Cohen identifies youth culture from the perspective of delinquency, how the society perceives them as a source of adult anxiety-moreover, a threat to public safety which also amounts to perceiving their indulgences in leisurely activities as contradictory to the principle of adult dominated work culture(Cohen,1972).

Returning to Lefebvre’s theory I intend to apply his triad of (spatial practice),(representation of space )and social space (representational space)to the study of the DLF mall to understand how the teenagers produce their own social space(representational).The mall will be studied from the perspective of being the result of both spatial practices(the physical organization of space vis-à-vis architectural products ) and representation of space(the methods of design and control, particularly related to the construction of appropriate mall behavior) .I have tried to collect data that inform both these concerns by throwing light on how the DIF as a mall is physically structured(spatial structure) and the ways the security guards of the mall maintain law and order inside specifically in relation to the appropriate behavior(representation of space) that should be maintained by its customers(the youth in this case)inside the mall. Since the youth(teenagers) in general is seen as trouble maker and the mall and other public spaces considered as an adult space ,they have an ambiguous relationship with the mall in relation to their presence therein. Thus ,I would mainly look into the ways(tactics)through which the teens negotiate such ambiguity and create their own social space.

#### **Research Design and entering the field:**

Qualitative research approach has been adopted to investigate the ways in which the teenagers are making sense and using the mall space .The study looks at the ways in which the teenagers create their own social space through the common pursuits such as shopping and loitering which may be problematic to the mall authority. Teenagers lacking many viable options for the necessary space for socialization ,are forced into the mall through the construction of youth crime and of public space as an adult realm.

#### **Selection of the field:**

The DLMPromenade at Vasant Kunj,New Delhi was chosen because of the convenient location as it was close to where I live and also I was informed by a friend whose niece happened to be in DPS Vasant Kunj that many DPS students(mostly teens)after school often go to DLF to hang out.

Before conducting the fieldwork in DLF,due permission was taken from the Marketing officer who asked me to reveal my identity as a researcher to maintain transparency to the entire act(that it was an academic research)

#### **Time period:**

The fieldwork was conducted for over a period of 10 days .I could interview more people on Saturday and Sunday since the teenagers flocked the mall during weekends though they were found in good number during week days in the noon too.



***Selection of the respondents:***

In order to explore the mall as a space, two crucial population in the mall was identified: mall authorities (shop owners and security guards) who have a vested interest in the commercial success and teenagers (who use the mall as a site of social gathering) (Age: 16-19). An initial interview with the marketing officer of the mall led to subsequent interviews with security guards and shop keepers. In total 4 interviews were conducted among the members of the mall's official realm. The second population was the teenagers. On the second day of my fieldwork, I came across two girls in school uniform and conducted interview with them. From them I found out that many teenagers hang out around the food court of the mall. Food court and the store Punk were flocked by them. In total 8 adolescents participated in one on one interviews. 5 of them were boys and 3 were girls. Although gender is not the focus, it's important to acknowledge the nature of limits placed by parents on adolescents' leisure. Female teenagers are more likely to be subject to parental controls and demand of assistance than males, resulting in limits to their place and time of spending leisure. Class was not the focus but after interviewing and also observation it was noticed almost all of them were from affluent families. All of the teenage respondents possessed sufficient means to use the mall. The security guards were interviewed to look into their way of constructing the mall.

***Methods of data collection:***

Interviews and non-participant observation were adopted to collect data from the mall. The one on one interview lasted for 5-7 minutes. The interactions were recorded in the form of field notes. The interviews were unstructured to allow respondents latitude to explore meanings, suggest themes and so forth. Non-participant observation of the teenagers also provided data. Excerpts from the interviews with the teenagers are accompanied in the observations and analysis section. The recurrent themes from the interview will be included in the observation section.

***Entering the field and field experiences:***

On the first day of the fieldwork, I tried to loiter around through the mall to locate the adolescent crowd. It was a bit difficult for me to identify them. On the 1st day I didn't conduct any interview, just located them, most of them could be found at the food court and a store called pUnk. So a considerable amount of time was given in loitering within the structure of the mall to understand the nature of the mood of the crowd in general and teenagers in particular. This helped in understanding the changing crowd composition that took place within the mall through the various times of the day. I discovered through observation and speaking to a worker at the food court that teenagers (dressed in school

uniform) come mostly around 3pm in the noon and evening. Hence my visit to the mall was structured in terms of timing, mostly in the evening. The first three days were devoted to interviewing the security guards and shop owners to get their views on their expected, sanctioned activity and usage of the mall. The rest of the fieldwork included interviewing the teenagers on how they used the mall and their experience with the surveillance system in the mall. The detailed observations that were made and the interview responses were recorded in the form of field notes which helped in the analysis as my respondents were interviewed on the basis of unstructured interview schedule.

***Observations, findings and analysis :******Description of the field:***

DLF shopping mall situated in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi is one of the first truly zoned luxury malls to open in India. It has four floors including the Ground Floor. The Food Court is on the fourth floor which is the favourite hangout place for most of the youngsters owing to its beautiful ambience.

***Physical setting of the mall:***

The physical space of DLF PROMENADE is constructed like any other mall as a commercial space. Locations of stores, rest areas and advertising are all designed to facilitate shopping patterns (e.g. the big displayable of brands). It's pertinent to refer to a general trend that atomically draws a huge number of customers, i.e. most of the national and international brands related stores are located at the ends of the mall so that customers go through all the smaller stores since to have access to the larger branded stores located at the ends, they have to pass through these smaller stores as well. This physical setting represents an attempt at keeping intact the sole agenda of commercial purpose usage of malls. The food court on the 4th floor serves as magnet, people who come to the mall only for the food court must first walk past numerous stores, encouraging window shopping. Besides, food court acts as rest areas where many teenagers were spotted, but with ever increasing present signs reminding the adults that the area is intended for those with food and drinks and that their stay should be limited. Other rest areas include benches on the balcony type opening on the fourth floor. Advertising, along with stores at the ends, promotes movement within the mall. Above all, the lighting and temperature help to create an atmosphere, marketed like the commodities. Within the stores. Apart from occasional decorations and small competitions inside the mall, there is nothing in the mall that can mark the passage of time. Constant lighting and temperature control, create a constant daytime. These built forms and the routinized practices of the mall fall under Lefebvre's conceptualization of spatial practice.

***The law and order maintained by mall's authorities:***

After interviewing those who are in charge of the mall maintenance, ways in which the consumption culture is kept alive and their commercial agenda is attained were revealed indicating towards the ways a space is represented. As is obvious it was found that the strongest discourse in the representation of mall space is consumption. The security guards and mall's merchants spoke about the ways in which they facilitate this and maintain law and order. The mall officials were of the view that the necessity of consumption structures the expectation of appropriate behaviour from the customers, buying is not enough, one must not distract others from buying. A security guard's excerpt highlights it well "video surveillance systems, the visibility of security officers and certain showcasing of punishments can get invited on certain violation reflected through the warning hoardings etc are certain ways through which the consumption culture of the mall is maintained which would foil customers from breaking any order". On being asked about the lawful behavior that is permitted in the mall he went to say that "lawful behavior is more than simply restraint from shoplifting :the overriding law is the imperative to purchase". On asked about teenagers being viewed as deviants and possible threat to the consumption logic of the mall as they merely use it as a hangout place, he was of the view that "adults are usually perceived as a category of people who will demonstrate lawful behavior as opposed to the teenagers who are in their growing age and hence immature, they just come here for fun, so we try to be extra vigilant about them, for the teenagers this is their playground, this is where their friends are, if they cant see their friends they are going to smarten up"

It could be perceived that these guards application of rules are of mixed nature as they are more strict towards the teenagers but Other categories such as elderly people loitering around the food court are often tolerated .On being asked about the teenagers ,a guard cited an instance 'Once a group of youngsters celebrated a birthday party here and after the party they were creating nuisance at midnight by making loud noise and I had to tell them to maintain order".

Thus, distracting other customers through loudness, unbearable actions, different, abnormal appearance, their demeanor of a minority of teenagers are often generalized by the major chunk of population which often leads to categorization of the teenagers as a group that are perceived as a cause of concern.

Therefore, it can be summed up that, the successful construction of the mall as a representation of space requires the application of certain techniques of control on both the

levels of the physical –which would guarantee the movement of the customers within a meticulously thought out structure of the mall ensuring more and more consumerism and mental(which customers are cooperative and non-cooperative in terms of the commercial agenda such as the adults versus the teenagers).These techniques used by the mall authority in enforcing an appropriate behavior inside the mall reflect the representation of space conceptualized by Lefebvre.

After interviewing teenagers on how they negotiate with the rules and the perception of they being deviant and are under surveillance ,ways in which they create their own lived social space(representational space) will be analyzed(excerpts included).

From the interview it was found that for teenagers shopping is a recurrent focus as a group activity and is often not oriented towards a purchase per se,,but the pursuit serves as vehicle for inhabiting the mall. However, hanging out, doing nothing for the teenagers seems to be the most enjoyable activity to them.To me ,these wasteful practices in interacting with their peers and doing nothing produce a social space and transforms the mall into representational space(lived space).Besides periodic walks through the mall, window shopping and perhaps purchasing, teenagers were seen spending the majority of their time on loitering.

EXTRACT:" What is hanging out for you?"

Female respondent: Its about not doing anything specifically and not stationery also but just hanging out"

According to another respondent, its more about wandering around and buying stuff

Another respondent is of the view that its about sitting there and talking.

According to another respondent hanging out is all about window shopping. For example ,one said that whenever one used to get bored, they used to roam around the mall

Often the mall is associated with the first place that teenagers were allowed to go outside of their immediate neighborhood. Most respondents mentioned that their parents perceived the mall as a safe place for children to go without supervision because of the presence of other adults and security guards. But because these adults are not expressly in charge ,the teenagers regard the mall as their first 'taste of freedom. 'In terms of the freedom to do nothing in the mall, when they were asked about their parents consent to their hanging out at the mall, they were of the view that parents view the mall as a relatively safe environment (security guards and other adults presence).

The teenagers also spoke about how they like subverting the general norm of maintaining an orderly behaviour in the mall and most of them said that their experience of mall can be

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radically changed by the presence of their parents. They seem to associate a kind of autonomy to themselves and said that getting accompanied by parents is sometimes embarrassing if they come across their friends.

They were also of the view that socializing occurs at school, too, but within an adult structured framework that may impinge on when, how and with whom to hang out. At the mall, teenagers have a space in which to make and socialize with friends largely on their own terms. To most of them, hanging out as a practice is virtually synonymous with its predominant location food court.

Staying in the food court is associated with a consideration in the form of food, drink and is subject to mall policing to loitering. Adolescents find ways of staying longer in the food court e.g., one of the respondents said that they take turns buying foods or drinks so that one person at the table always has something and taking occasional walks around the mall in order to turn the loitering stop clock back to zero or to simply break up the boredom of doing nothing in a place where nothing unusual happens. It can be seen that loitering requires a tactical movement of the individual (going for a walk), some seen taking selfies while taking a walk at the mall or of money (buying a drink).

The use of the mall by the teenagers is also differentiated by time. One female respondent was of the opinion that morning time of the mall is for the elderly and after school in the noon time and on weekends the mall becomes theirs.

The description of mall as boring was recurrent, even in interviews with teenagers who are currently spending time hanging out at the mall. They were of the view that being bored and try to hope for excitement hanging out with your friends at the mall is better than being under the adult's supervision to do the appropriate activities.

From the interviews it can be analyzed that teenagers make purchases in a variety of ways, for a variety of reasons. A coffee in the food court is recognized as a necessary purchase to avoid accusations of loitering. Here they know that they have to buy, but in doing so accomplish, for minimal cost, the means to their social lived space. This is a conscious recognition of rules in order to better subvert it (buying only the coffee, or sharing one with friends). They were also of the view that, they demonstrate the intention to buy to occupy the mall and such a demonstration is itself a social activity, As a social activity and as the means to inhabit the mall, shopping serves the context for interacting with the friends as a collective activity.

With no obvious space to call their own, teenagers adopt the mall as a common meeting ground. The crowd serves as audience, educator and backdrop, bringing adult and teenage activities into the same location without requiring the latter to wholly defer to the former. Sitting in the food court, apart

from involving tactics of avoiding accusations of loitering, also involves conversational strategies. The crowd can be an important aspect of the mall as a source of entertainment, serving as a resource of conversation topics. In many ways, the crowd is as much a part of the mall as the advertisements and corridors.

EXTRACT: "Sometimes we can just look around at the crowd and enjoy the view whatever the people do".

One even said that he eavesdrops whenever he is around the crowd in a mall and finds it very entertaining.

Thus, since the mall's rule enforcing agents deem loitering and other leisurely activities as anti consumption as it is not explicitly shopping, the teenagers usage of the mall as explicitly against the consumption agenda is in disagreement with the representation of the mall as a space. The temporary production of a lived space by the teenagers is very obvious since it stands in contradiction to the commercial ground on which it is built. This can be best understood as the representational space (Lefebvre's concept)

**Concluding remarks:** It can be concluded that the teenagers create their own social space through the tactics that have been explained above by resisting the dominant norm of consumption in the mall. Thus, central to hanging out is the practice of movement as a negotiation, subversion of the mall regulations. Hanging out at the food court may become a matter of timing, a well timed walk around the mall to elude the security guard and evade the charge of loitering. The everyday creativity of the teenagers in the mall is a practice of symbolically transforming the resources available to them into an adolescent social space. In this lived space of theirs, it seems, social interaction is situated above commercial purpose. This teenagers' lived space's understanding of the mall can be applicable to in other quasi public space as well. The venue of hanging out may vary but the demand for creating their own social space away from adult's supervision may be the same. Such dynamics are not limited to just teenagers, it can be helpful in interrogating questions relating to how individuals in general shape, transform, negotiate and create space.

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