



## Gender and Third Spaces: A Study of Women's Perception and Experience of Coworking Spaces in the City of Tehran

Afsaneh Kamali<sup>1</sup>  Mahsa Larijani<sup>2</sup>  Mercedeh Modiri<sup>3</sup> 

1. Assistant Professor of Department of social sciences, Faculty of Social sciences and Economics, Alzahra university, Tehran, Iran. (Corresponding Author)
2. Assistant Professor of Department of social sciences, Faculty of Social sciences and Economics, Alzahra university, Tehran, Iran.
3. M.A. in Local Development, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.

### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 03 September 2024  
Accepted: 06 January 2025

#### Article Type

**Research paper**

#### Keywords:

Gender, Agency,  
Third space,  
Coworking space,  
Networking.

### ABSTRACT

A third space is a place other than home and workplace where people can spend their leisure time freely and regardless of the formal frameworks of workplace or the functional and affective requirements of home. The present research seeks to examine how women experience the use of joint spaces from the viewpoint of the mere or innovative creation of other spaces. Thus, the corresponding factors, backgrounds, and outcomes of using such spaces as well as the strategies applied are studied here.

This research is a qualitative study conducted on the basis of the grounded theory. The data were collected with interviews, and the participants were selected through maximum variation purposive sampling. The selected ones were 29 women who attended third coworking spaces in Tehran. As the results indicated, the women went to those spaces to resolve the problems of their formal workplace, form a support network, manage their time, balance their life activities, gain security, and design a space. For these purposes, the women used certain strategies such as personalizing the space and interacting professionally. The outcomes included familiarity and association with new individuals, variety in everyday life, and reduction of costs. It was also found that the women's creativity could change the joint places to professional networking spaces. This helped to weaken the manly social structure which had limited the presence of women for professional activities. The findings of this research generally point to women's agency in third social spaces.

**Citation:** Kamali, A., Larijani, M. & Modiri, M. (2025). Gender and Third Spaces: A Study of Women's Perception and Experience of Coworking Spaces in the City of Tehran. *Journal of Woman and Family Studies*, 12(4), 80-101. DOI: 10.22051/jwfs.2025.48193.3121

\* **Correspondence:** [afsane\\_kamali@yahoo.com](mailto:afsane_kamali@yahoo.com)



## Introduction

As an essential factor involved in social realities, space plays a key role in the formation of social relations (Qhobadi et al., 2024). These relations are, indeed, intertwined with space due to the occurrence of social interactions there (Zieleniec, 2007; Ali & George, 2022; Kanosvamhira, 2024). It is necessary to study space in order to identify power relations and understand the society deeply. In fact, it is space that affects people's identity and can give them good feelings or expose them to confusion, discrimination, and deviation. Therefore, the innate material aspect of space, which makes a common perception of it, should be avoided in favor of the interrelation of space and society, which defines the functionality of agents spatially. New opportunities for free relations and interactions with others can lead to the creation of other spaces where different forms of presence are experienced. Presence in urban spaces makes it possible to address one's needs, desires and challenges. After a person makes an actual contextualized presence in a space, his or her strategic interventions become meaningful and a new spatial logic is created. This logic is not necessarily consistent with the behavioral logic predetermined by the space maker or the enforcers of spatial rules (Yazdanian & Dadashpour, 2016).

Oldenburg (1989) was the first one who investigated the concept of third space within a certain framework. In his opinion, every residence or culture has places to which people refer for gathering or spending their casual time away from the formality of life mainly experienced in workplaces. He calls these informal places 'third space' (ibid). Based on Oldenburg's definition, third space is a general name for the various types of places that host the regular, voluntary, informal and pleasant gatherings of people from different walks of life. As he believes, people project their true self in such spaces, which helps them get rid of the stresses of life stemming mostly from working in formal places and sometimes from dealing with household problems. This does not mean that a third space is the only place for escaping from the formal routines of life at home and work (i.e., first and second spaces). Rather, it is a context for the informal activities whose formal types are done at home and work. It is, indeed, a public place where individuals can freely set up social relations with different people (Wang et al., 2017). A third space provides an opportunity for interactions, thus enhancing the sense of socializing and sharing daily affairs among people. It also encourages membership in groups and induces a sense of belonging to them.

A central question that Lefebvre (1991) has brought up regards how a social space is created. He responds that a social space is a social product, and the producing forces enable those who organize them to create a space and even control it. Social spaces make new actions possible while discouraging other actions (ibid). Lefebvre's basic concern is to reconcile two contrasting ideas about space. The first views space as something mental or strategic, and the second deems it as something physical or natural in which people live. According to him, a social space is made up of neither a set of sensible things nor a void pack of various contents that are somehow imposed on physical phenomena and entities. In a network of relationships with producing forces, social spaces are created and recreated (ibid).

As Soja (1996) states, space is as important as history and society, and the spatial domain of human life has never been larger than political and practical relations as it is nowadays. Referring to the three spatial dimensions, Soja elaborates on Henri Lefebvre's thoughts and argues that, when two dimensions are not enough, the third one comes to be needed. This third matter with whatever it includes is termed 'other'. It helps to explain the concept of space creation and its significance for achieving a 'third space' (ibid).

Women have their own spatial needs. Despite the expansion of public urban spaces as well as gender-specific spaces, they are still faced with a lot of problems to use those spaces (Zarei et al., 2024). A consequence of this social issue is the attendance of women in preplanned public spaces and their consumption of those very spaces rather than the goods offered and the functions intended there. In such circumstances, what they do is a kind of resistance for gaining their goals. Thus, a dynamic relationship between space and social agents entails a degree of individual freedom and a degree of compulsion or limitation for both of the parties involved in the relationship. In other words, although the rules and structures of a space are imposed on the individual, he or she can challenge the ruling spatial order by making specific choices, using one's exclusive skills, and adopting one's own spatial methods (Shafi'ee & Alikhah, 2014).

Providing urban spaces is of significance because they can predispose the growth of creativity and serve as a constructive recreational context for the self-recognition of women and others. Therefore, a third space is nothing but a place for the intra-spatial interactions of those who try to go beyond formal discourses and the routines of urban life. The third space concept somehow refers to the places that give women a sense of equity and help them identify points of resistance and strategies of confrontation in the face of the ruling patriarchal order. Examining the methods that women adopt to use space based on their needs indicates that they do not behave there in accordance with



predetermined spatial regulations or prescriptions. In this regard, the present study mainly aims at women's perception and experience of presence in third spaces as well as the corresponding conditions, backgrounds, methods and consequences.

As shown by Qhobadi et al. (2024), third places and their capacities lead to improved social livability and enhanced social wellbeing and quality of life. The factors qualifying a third space include security for pleasant gatherings, proper flooring and shading, and improvement of non-roofed spots and cafes (Salaripour et al., 2023). According to Rabi'ee and Shari'atmanesh (2020), what motivates the outgoing of modern women is to challenge traditional structures, define a modern lifestyle based on their own values, and practice resistance and activism. In fact, women attend public spaces as earnest activists, trying to create a new type of maternity that makes them different from their mothers' generation (Ghaffarinasab & Taghinejad Isfahani, 2020). Moreover, Syavashpour et al. (2019) characterize third spaces as places with unbiased atmosphere, where individuals feel on a par with others, have dialogues in informal situations, are accessible, and enjoy spatial simplicity. All these features contribute to the interaction of individuals with one another and with the society.

As Dal Falco (2024) believes, urban parks and gardens, with whatever size and dynamism, have turned into places for harmony and freedom to practice anthropocentrism in new a form. Other researchers, such as Kuzuoglu and Glover (2023) and Littman (2022), consider libraries, religious places, beaches and urban transportation sites as examples of a third space. As Dolley (2020) states, local gardens are dynamic places that contribute to the relation of people and space. He suggests specific design features for social gardens. Also, Fullagar et al. (2019) have shown that women go to third places and talk about their various gender-related, material and discursal limitations as well as the way of resisting them.

The theoretical foundations of third space are in line with what Lefebvre (1991) thinks. To him, a social space is something that makes new actions possible by inducing some actions and banning some others. Lefebvre's conceptual trilogy includes spatial practice, representation of space, and representational spaces. Spatial practices address the material and physical aspects related to individuals, groups and goods. These aspects include buildings and the forms and perspectives of the urban structures intended for specific purposes or functions. The representation of space refers to the indications and meanings that make the daily recognition of spatial practices

possible (Mohammadi & Behzadfar, 2020). As for representational spaces, they are, indeed, the lived social relation of users with the environment.

Foucault (1984) has classified places into utopia (nowhere), real place, and heterotopia (other place). He introduces heterotopias as the places lying between real ones, which do exist, and utopias, which are ideal and do not exist. In other words, heterotopias are those between ideal and real social spaces and include conceptual (nonphysical) places too (Gholami, 2014). As the semantic equivalent of other space, heterotopia denotes such concepts as suspense and spatial-temporal movements between dualities like private/public, family/society, and work/leisure. From Foucault's point of view, people choose a heterotopia to reconstruct their desired other place, get away from the space they are used to, and experience new things that have real or objective representation (Johnson, 2013).

The third space concept, which is related to Lefebvre's concept of representational spaces, is emphasized and elaborated by Soja (1996). From his perspective, a third space is the one in which everything goes together (Li and Zhou, 2018). In Soja's process of finding a third space, there lies a potential to revise the existing structures and to move radically toward other spaces. This process knows the power and dynamics of an existing structure and tries to part from it (Abdi & Habibi, 2021). In Soja's theory, the concept of third space comes in relation with Foucault's concept of heterotopia. In fact, the idea of heterotopia that Foucault never explained systematically was used by Soja for his conceptualization. In Foucault's view, heterotopias are real, physical or abstract spaces that coexist with visible spaces and derive their meaning and practices from the world around, but they are also places where 'other' ways and manners may exist or may be made (Myer, 2016).

## Methods

This study was conducted on the basis of Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory, which uses a systematic procedure to inductively draw conclusions. The data were collected from semi-structured interviews performed through intimate conversations in coworking spaces, namely spaces other than formal workplaces and private home environments. The research field was the coworking spaces in Tehran. Since a considerable spatial segregation is needed in these places, they are mainly built in large sizes. Each coworking space is made up of various sections such as personal rooms, meeting rooms, workshops, and production floors. This is why building those places in small lands is impossible. First of all, a list was provided of the coworking spaces in Tehran. Then, the authorities of each space were contacted for permission. The researcher could only take permission to visit six spaces. In the next stage, she frequented the research field regularly so as to get oriented there, be



accustomed to it, and get familiar with the female users. They were interviewed after their consent was received to participate in the study. To understand the lived experience of the women in third urban spaces and the strategies they adopted, attempts were made to take a highly representative sample of the participants. After 29 interviews, theoretical saturation was reached. The data were considered saturated when the participants' remarks were similar or repetitious. The remarks quoted in this article are based on the data extracted from eight interviewees.

**Table 1. The studied coworking spaces in the city of Tehran**

Participant	Age	Level of education	Marital status	Employment status	Job
1	33	PhD	Married	Employed	Computer programmer
2	32	Master's degree	Married	Employed	Computer programmer
3	25	Bachelor's degree	Married	Employed	Software designer
4	19	Undergraduate	Single	Unemployed	Student
5	32	Master's degree	Married	Employed	Freelancer
6	28	Bachelor's degree	Single	Employed	Clothing designer
7	35	Master's degree	Married	Employed	Graphist
8	40	Bachelor's degree	Married	Employed	Doll maker

Right after each interview, the contents were analyzed and coded. The coding process was of open, axial, and selective types. It was done by the individual authors, and then the results were compared. This helped to initially gain a common understanding of the concepts and finally reach the categories. All the categories were recorded by the authors' consensus, and the codes were sometimes revised. Each interview provided a set of novel data. After the extraction of the initial concepts, the categorization of the concepts, the integration of the categories, and the cleaning of some categories, the core category emerged to be 'professional networking'. To select this term as the core category, certain criteria were taken into account, including abstractness and generality, conceptual connection with all the categories, scientific analyzability, repetition and emphasis by the interviewees, and the general direction of the ideas expressed by them. Also, attempts were made to select

the codes based on the research problem and objectives so that they would embrace the target subject completely. Finally, the categories were integrated, and a paradigmatic model consisting of reasons, backgrounds, intervening conditions, and strategies was achieved.

Regarding the acceptability of findings in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that this issue is based on the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. Therefore, in the present study, the derived data were put to member checking; that is, the statements expressed in the interviews were given back to the corresponding participants so as to ensure their certainty. Moreover, the explanations were encouraged to be rich enough so that the findings would be transferable. In-site observations were also made on the side of the in-depth qualitative interviews to enhance the research validity. To minimize the researcher's personal interpretations, thus ensuring the validity of the findings, all the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed on the paper.

Throughout this study, ethical principles were taken into consideration. The participation in the research was quite voluntary, and the interviews were conducted with the women's informed consent and warm cooperation.

## Findings

### 3. Data analysis

**Table 2.** Demographic data of the research participants

Participant	Age	Level of education	Marital status	Employment status	Job
1	33	PhD	Married	Employed	Computer programmer
2	32	Master's degree	Married	Employed	Computer programmer
3	25	Bachelor's degree	Married	Employed	Software designer
4	19	Undergraduate	Single	Unemployed	Student
5	32	Master's degree	Married	Employed	Freelancer
6	28	Bachelor's degree	Single	Employed	Clothing designer
7	35	Master's degree	Married	Employed	Graphist
8	40	Bachelor's degree	Married	Employed	Doll maker



As Table 2 shows, the participating women were in the age range of 19-40 years and had academic degrees from bachelor to PhD. Of them, six were married, and only one was unemployed.

## 1. Women's perception of coworking spaces

**Table 3. Statements, concepts, and categories of how the respondents perceived coworking spaces**

Main categories	Concepts	Statements
Communicative actions	Creation of communicative situations, Possibility of creating new relations, Perception of the need to attend gatherings, Transfer of experiences, Communication networks	<p><i>"Some people may be here with different ideologies, temperaments, or even jobs. For example, I'm a computer programmer, someone is a psychologist, and another is a nutritionist. There is absolutely no certain line, but we are all friends and talk together here."</i></p> <p><i>"The family does not take you seriously; you are working, but they think you are fooling around. Here I am a freelancer, and the people around recognize me. Even if not so, they know me as a professional."</i></p>
Liminality of identity	Original and constructed identities, Identity fluidity	<p><i>"Being unidimensional, like only working or studying, leads to nihilism. Lack of mental rest brings boredom. I think I'm better off here. The place has made me rid of monotony."</i></p>
Daily life diversification	Feeling of peace and happiness, Walking away from problems of life	

### 1.1. Communicative actions

Many of the participants in this study described third spaces as the places that provide a chance of socialization. That is, in these places, individual and social relations with others, or strangers, are developed and facilitated, and the users are encouraged to practice kindness and association. Such relations are free, non-competitive, and submissive to no self-interested organizational or even professional set of regulations. They become part of the users' identity. Although coworking spaces are run on the basis of certain rules, their covert function is manifested in the speech of those who have used them. As the



interviewees stated, third spaces are exactly the places where work, association with others, exchange of ideas, leisure, rest, and recreation come into play to interact and produce new meanings. The following quotation from Participant 2 represents this issue:

*“People like me come here both to work and to feel the comfort of the place. We also get to know new ones. After the work time, we often stay here for chitchat and then we may find new friends when having lunch or afternoon snacks.”*

### **1.2. Liminality of identity**

In a space of liminality, a person's identity turns into a fluid state and becomes different from what is taken for granted in his or her daily life, i.e., mother, father, boy, girl, student, or clerk. As some interviewees stated, interaction with others enables one to adopt the values and the new ways that they have newly tested. In this regard, Participant 1 said the following:

*“For years, I've been a student, an employee, a housewife, and a mother. Now, I'm in a space that is neither as rigid as the workplace nor as pressing as the university and housework. Here I can study, do what interests me, and even promote my skills. It is really valuable for me. I like to come here more if I can.”*

### **1.3. Daily life diversification**

It is a kind of change and repose to attend coworking spaces. Owing to the possibility of communicating to others and meeting new individuals, which was lacking before, these spaces are favored by women. A coworking place is intended partly for work and in part for chitchatting, rejoicing, and some side activities such as playing group games. There are also spaces provided for studying and taking a rest. In general, the place is such that its users can feel rid of the monotony of their outside working life. This point was vividly mentioned by Participant 5 as follows:

*“Sometimes, I stay there longer for a couple of hours after the work time to feel the mood of the place with the girls around. It is pleasant to study here, do what I like away from my daily concerns and responsibilities. This gives me good vibes and feelings to sit at your own desk or do whatever you like in peace. I wish I'd come to this place sooner.”*



## 2. Women's motives to attend coworking spaces

**Table 4. Motives for coworking spaces: Statements, concepts and categories**

Main categories	Subcategories	Statements
<b>Resolving the conflicts of formal workplaces</b>	Work policies, High costs, Professional networking	<i>"The organizational hierarchy that would make the space rigid and require respecting the superordinates does not exist here."</i>
<b>Support network</b>	Helping each other, Friendly empathy, Support culture	<i>"When a trouble arises, there is more support. Some people around like to see their friends successful. This culture here in these spaces may gradually be transferred out."</i>
<b>Time management</b>	Avoidance of wasting time, Time budgeting	<i>"All on the way here, I listen to podcasts so as not to waste my time. I'm purposeful both on the way and in here. If at home, I wouldn't be even a quarter as efficient as I'm here."</i>
<b>Balance of work and life</b>	Separation of work and life, Individual development, Adoption of different roles	<i>"This space has spots for games and rest. Once tired, we can go there. It is possible to set up a balance between work and life."</i>
<b>Space security</b>	Freedom in clothing, Absence of strangers, Sense of security	<i>"This place has better security than outside. Women are allowed to have no hijab here. Everybody walks around at ease. For ladies in a society like ours, such secure places are very important. It gives you peace of mind when at work."</i>
<b>Space design</b>	Colors, Building design, Entertainment spaces, Space segregation	<i>"This is a well-designed place with highly friendly atmosphere and unique features. The wooden design has made the place attractive. It's generally an interesting place."</i>

### 2.1. Resolving the conflicts of formal workplaces

As the research participants argued, the existence of official work organizations decreases work efficiency and demotivates the employees at the workplace. However, some factors in these organizations, such as the diverse characters of individuals and their potentials, tendency to help one another, compliance with the norms of their group, and cooperation to meet social needs, can improve the workplace. In this context, informal networks come

into being through the interpersonal relations that spontaneously occur for meeting the individuals' needs (Waldstrom, 2001). To mitigate the formality of relations in organizations and thus to increase intimacy there, managers can use informal communication channels such as face-to-face contacts with employees and chatting with them. Obviously, these two informal strategies complement each other, and a combination of them helps managers achieve the best degree of efficiency at work. Note the following statement quoted from Participant 5:

*"This space is better than the workplace because it is not rigid. The company I work in gives waves of negative energy. This is because there is a hierarchy of a top manager and several intermediate directors and then the clerks. There is always a competition among them in this organizational chart. The top manager has his expectations, the clerks of the same level try to undermine one another, and a general air of dissatisfaction hangs there. It might be merely an atmosphere, but it gives negative feelings."*

## **2.2. Support network**

In a coworking space, a support network serves to provide solidarity among those who gather there to work in a network of freelancers and have a special lifestyle. The social support in this context is of five types as follows (Sarason, 1996 cited in Hashemian & Pourezzat, 2007):

a) Emotional support: It addresses the skill of taking help from others when in trouble.

b) Instrumental support: It refers to having financial and service sources accessible in the face of problems.

c) Information support: It is the ability to obtain the required information to evaluate one's situation.

d) Self-worth support: It means the attempt by others to give a sense of being valuable to a person who is in trouble or under stresses. The person is encouraged to use his or her specific capabilities to overcome the problem.

e) Social network support: It denoted having the possibility of membership in social networks.

The users of coworking spaces benefit from a kind of instrumental support and self-worth support. They work within a vocational culture provided by independent entrepreneurs. This culture injects motivation into them and puts a social support network on their side if they face innate job-related problems. These benefits are missing in other defined spaces such as home and workplace. The following extracts are suggestive of this issue:



*“The women here sit together at a table and have fun. It’s an interesting space. What makes it even more interesting is the mutual support they have among them.”* (Participant 5)

*“At times, we take the lunch table, but some women begin to talk about their challenges. Then, everybody tries to propose a solution. We also get informed of one another’s job challenges and try to use the expressed views.”* (Participant 6)

### **2.3. Time management**

Time management is the process of smart planning or budgeting the time so as to attain one’s short- or long-term goals. Since the attendance time, working hours, and the time for extracurricular activities are already set in coworking spaces, it is easy to manage the time. As the interviewees mentioned, due to their inability to manage their time at home, they considered the use of coworking spaces as the best way to utilize time for raising their work efficiency. According to them, the atmosphere in those places would not allow the waste of time. Here is a representative remark in this regard:

*“Being here made me orderly. When at home, I mix up my activities and fail to have accurate timing on them. For example, I cannot stick to a carefully set time for designing or cooking. But in this place, everything is regular. I can concentrate on my work. Home is unlike here; the TV is on, the telephone rings, I go eating something. In this place, however, there is a certain time for everything, and no time is wasted. When I’m home, my day often goes waste. Lack of a plan makes me confused.”* (Participant 6)

### **2.4. Balance of work and life**

A coworking place consists of separate spaces for group games, movies, and relaxation. These spaces on the side of a work space provide balance and, consequently, peace of mind and higher work efficiency. In this respect, two of the interviewees stated the following:

*“Unlike my workplace, there is no rigidity here. Most weekends, I have nothing to do here, but I do come. I usually spend my time on reading, searching in my laptop, talking to other women about future things to do, sitting in the café, and listening to the piano they play here. You know, it is fun to be here on weekends. Sometimes, I read books in the café.”* (Participant 3)

*“Those who are unidimensional and do one thing only, like working or studying, end up in nihilism. If the mind is given no rest, the result is boredom.*

*I think this place has done me good; I'm already rid of monotony.” (Participant 7)*

## **2.5. Space security**

The users of coworking spaces consider them as ‘secure places’. These individuals, who prefer to work in places other than home and formal workspaces, have the benefit of working in perfect peace without strangers or anybody disturbing them around. Moreover, unlike the common circumstances in state-run workplaces, there are no strict behavioral regulations regarding the women’s clothing and their communication with the opposite sex. This point is somehow reflected in the interview extracts below:

*“There are not many facilities in the café, but, if we get out of patience, we can take a walk in this garden, eat something, take a drink, and all that. I think we cannot be free enough inside the café as it is highly frequented sometimes by strangers as well. But out here, we already know one another, and there is an exchange of energy. This really matters.” (Participant 1)*

*“Well, you know, the time for café is limited. One cannot just sit in there and eat or drink nothing. It costs some cash. Every café has a specific time for a person to take a specific table. There are lots of unknown people, so we cannot leave our stuffs over there. Out here, however, the place is safe; No one touches our stuffs.” (Participant 6)*

## **2.6. Space design**

As explicitly expressed by the interviewees, the specific design of these spaces and the innovative work facilities provided there are important factor for attracting people. The spaces are made even more attractive with lights and colors. The quotations below are suggestive:

*“I just liked the place. It was beautiful, and beauty matters. Most of the time, I study in another place, but I come here for a change. It’s got a site for books, and one can study stuffs other than textbooks. It also has got a spot for rest and relaxation.” (Participant 8)*

*“I longed for this place whenever I passed by here. I once stepped in and got deeply impressed. I couldn’t believe the existence of such a beautiful place in this city. Its design fascinated me.” (Participant 7)*



### 3. Strategies used by women in coworking spaces

**Table 5. Concepts and categories regarding the strategies used in coworking spaces**

Main categories	Subcategories	Concepts
Taking the reins of space	Space, Using space, Cultural usage, Recreation of space, Reformation of space, Tacticality of space, Covert function, Possession	<i>"This space helps me a lot. I leave my chores home and come here. Part of my time is spent on my work, and then I can see my fellows. I love the place so much so that I come here everyday from Saturday to Wednesday, unless I'm too busy."</i> <i>"The best event we had in this coworking space was the attraction of great customers from the networking system we have."</i> <i>"There are lots of networks in coworking spaces. Due to the flatness of these spaces, the attending people can set up energetic relations together. Their close communication helps them raise their spirits or promote their business."</i>
Professional networking	Attraction of funds, Expansion of business, Transfer of experiences	
Creativity	Innovation, New ideas, Thinking	

#### 3.1. Taking the reins of space

From entry up to exit, every user specifies part of the space to herself and tries to make the best use of it. She does this so as to turn the space around to her own benefits and interests and make changes in the state of affairs within the scope of the regulations there. This means that using the space gives her a sense of possession, which makes her satisfied. Once the user stays in the space for long, she feels 'owning' that place. The severity of this feeling depends on the length of using the space. In general, owing to the accommodations provided in a place, the users of that place gradually feel deserving certain rights in urban life. Moreover, the compatibility of the features in the place gives the users a strong sense of belonging to it. This issue is pointed out in the following interview extracts:

*"For example, someone may have no religious beliefs. She happens to go to Imam Reza's shrine, but she starts wondering if such an Imam ever existed or whether he was righteous or a common person like us. Nevertheless, even an atheist may go to a sacred space, like a mosque, a shrine or a church, and*

*suddenly turn into a spiritual mood. This occurs due to the hopes lying in that place; people go there but avoid complaining. They pray to God and appreciate Him. Pretty much the same situation exists in coworking spaces.”* (Participant 5)

*“It’s really valuable for me to have a space that is neither as rigid as the workplace nor as stressful as the university. That is where I can satiate my interests, study, and even develop my skills. I really like to be here more.”* (Participant 2)

### **3.2. Professional networking**

As the users asserted, owing to the variety of the teams present in the coworking spaces, they can not only get to know about the concerns and challenges of those teams but also make the use of their experiences for professional enhancement. Thus, there is a kind of constant flow of information among the individuals. They use the space such that their social interactions are coupled with the expansion and professional promotion of their business. Indeed, walking out of the isolation at home and abandoning the limitations of formal workplaces lead to increased creativity, and interactions, conversations and associations with different people result in the transfer of experiences. Moreover, due to the high number of the attendees, events, meetings and conventions in a coworking space, there is a possibility of attracting enormous funds. Note the following view expressed in this regard:

*“It is of great importance to have a series of seminars, workshops and meetings here. There may be eminent startup and business individuals here. For example, through my communications, I met a customer in a seminar who was connected to a chain store. Currently, his monthly shopping from me amounts to 150-200 millions. This occurs a lot. It does occur if you really mean it and pursue it in such a space, where you gain new experiences and ideas and take guidelines from the people around.”* (Participant 5)

### **3.3. Creativity**

The creativity resulting from interaction with others provides capacity, but no creativity is born in isolation. A collective work atmosphere enables people to reach creative solutions by backing up each other, expanding their relations, and sharing information. This kind of interaction is organized with a set of activities in the workplace through which the individual works with other people or groups for a common end. The product is mutual support, interpersonal relations, shared information, and, ultimately, creative solutions. An opinion expressed in this case is as follows:



*“As I met others in other business fields, new ideas struck my mind. Previously, I was very interested in ceramics, both as a business and as something felt to be highly professional. However, I couldn’t get my job ahead easily, and I just thought I would have to begin from scratch with further time and cost. Fortunately, I ran into some women who did ceramics. They helped me to embody my imaginations. I owe the development of my job to this place.”*  
(Participant 2)

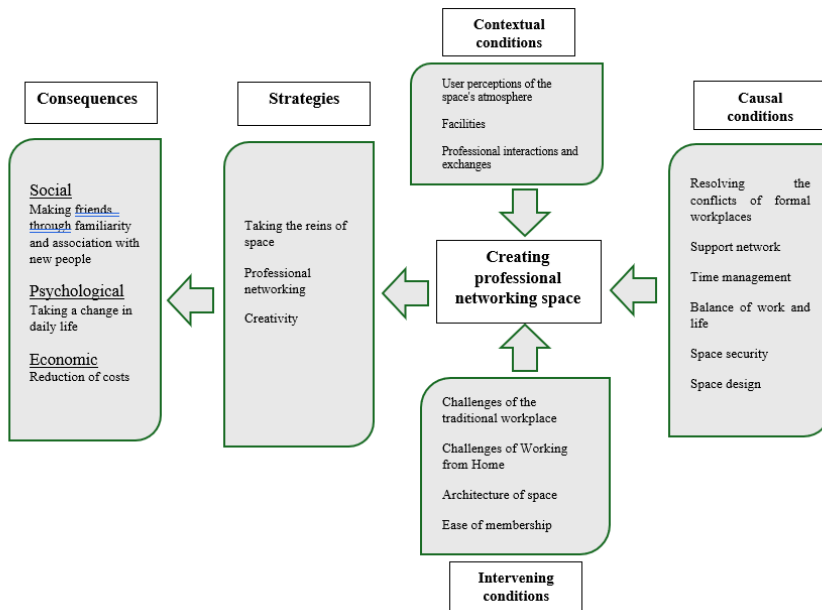
#### 4. Consequences of women’s attendance in coworking spaces

The general categories pertaining to the consequences of women’s attendance in coworking spaces are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Concepts and categories regarding the presence in coworking spaces**

Main categories	Subcategories	Statements
Social	Making friends through familiarity and association with new people	<i>“There might be some people here with different ideologies, temperaments, or even jobs. For example, I’m a computer programmer, someone is a psychologist, and another is a nutritionist. There is absolutely no certain line, but we are all friends and talk together here.”</i>
Psychological	Taking a change in daily life	<i>“My long stay at home during the COVID-19 pandemic undermined my ideas, motivation, and spirits. Coming to this place and finding new acquaintances was a leeway out of that isolation.”</i>
Economic	Reduction of costs	<i>“The rents in a coworking space are very low. For example, an office room is rented for three million Tomans elsewhere, but you can start your work in a coworking space just for one-fifth of it, namely 600 grands.”</i>





**Figure1. The Paradigmatic Model Derived from Perceptions, Contexts, and Consequences Related to Co-Working Spaces"**

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

The core category of this study emerged to be 'creation of a professional networking space'. Due to the variety of individuals and vocational teams in coworking spaces and the absence of certain physical borders to segregate the users, a kind of intimacy and association is formed among them in such spaces. This also leads to friendly relations and the interaction of coworking spaces with workspaces. A third space makes it possible for individual to find a support network which can help them in the face of the challenges of life and work. The users of coworking spaces consider security as an important feature of such places. A third place is an actual single space that can contain several spaces held together, combine several non-matching places, and thus form a continual movement from the second place (work) to the third place (somewhere for social interactions). The consequence of presence in this 'other' place is a kind of fluidity between work and social life. Moreover, the women attending this place can have benefits such as being rid of isolation and long stays at home as well as finding new friends and associating with them. Often, certain professional exchanges are developed through the cooperation of individuals or teams. In this study, the theoretical tools of the third space were used to encourage the interviewees to speak about the three interacting factors of their lived experiences, imaginations, and perceptions of



the place where they spent part of their time. The third space concept with a special emphasis on 'space' is a new issue that entails the development of social affairs, diversification of daily life, relations with fellowmen, and evaluation of one's position in creating urban spaces. As it postulates, people need to gather in public spaces with facilities for their easy attendance and activity. If that need is met, the spaces would be considered as the social product of their attendees.

Since women's subjectivity about the use of urban facilities has remained unknown, not much attention has been paid by metropolitan organizations, such as municipalities, to building the places that could meet women's living needs in distinct social groups. Gray et al. (2022) have shown that local green areas near residences can enhance peoples' psychological and physical health. With respect to the significance of living space, its role cannot be ignored in how women create their field of action in the society. Evaluation of daily life in its spatial domain sheds light on the potential residence that may be shown to the specific use of urban locations prescribed by the dominant social discourses.

The present study sought to identifying the desirable living spaces of women other than their first place (home) and second place (workplace) in order to detect their subjectivity and perceptions which motivate them to deal with power-submission relations by trying consciously to create favorable 'other spaces'. The subjectivity of gaining power and resisting the ruling order results in the use of space, such as cafes, coworking spaces and cultural centers, to live desirably just for a few hours. This is an action to gain power. Women choose those spaces for social living in accordance with their own values rather than what is dictated by the formal values of the society. The findings of this research are in agreement with the viewpoints of Kanosvambhira (2024). It is generally believed that third places significantly facilitate social interactions and reinforce social bonds, serving as safe and secure resorts for women.

The question is how women act spatially in terms of the mere reconstruction or innovative construction of other spaces. As a response, women are not passive in dealing with urban spaces; they continually create what they mean. This is especially true about those who have a modern lifestyle; they practice a kind of resistance with the aim of creating desirable spaces covertly. The results of this study are also in line with the research by Health and Freestone (2023). Both studies emphasize the vital role of third spaces for those who are of little public presence. What women do in these

spaces are smart reactions to the dominant ruling order. They seek to make a world in which the new meanings arising from social actions are experienced.

### Ethical Consideration

The principles of research ethics were strictly practiced. Informed consent was received from the individual participants, their personal data were kept confidential, and the quotations were made objectively.

**Ethical considerations of the research:** This study was derived from the master thesis in Ardakan University.

**Funding:** The research was funded by no institute or organization.

**Authors' contribution:** This article was extracted from a master's thesis by Mercedeh Modiri. The thesis was supervised by Afsaneh Kamali. Conceptualization, text writing, and category derivation were done by the first author. The review and revision of the codes and the editing of the manuscript were undertaken by the second author. Also, the interviews were carried out and the literature on the research subject was reviewed by the third author..

**Conflict of interests:** There is none to declare.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors appreciate all those who contributed to this study by sharing their experiences.

**Data availability:** The data supporting this research are not of public access. Demands can be made through email contacts with the corresponding author.

### References

- Abdi, M.; Habibi, M. (2021). Mechanisms of Space Production in the Process of Capital Accumulation in the Views of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey and Edward Soja. *Scientific. Journal of Architecture Restoration and Urbanism*, 1(2), 4-22. (Text in Persian). [link]
- Ali, M. (2021). Urbanization and Energy Consumption in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Electricity Journal*, 34(10), 107045 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tej.2021.107045>[link]
- Dal Falco, F. (2024). *Designing for the Post-Anthropocene Era: The Garden as a Metaphor for a Holistic and Symbiotic Approach*. In Beyond the Garden: Sustainable and Inclusive Green Urban Spaces (pp. 1-22). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.[link]
- Dolley, J. (2020). Community Gardens as Third Places. *Geographical Research*, 58(2), 141-153. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12395>[link]
- Foucault, M. (1984), *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, B. Neil Leach. NYC. Routledge.
- Ghaffarinasab, Esfandiar; Nejad Esfahani, Mohammad Taghi; Rana, (2021). Consumption of Space and Redefining Femininity; A Study of Women's Cafe Experience in Shiraz. *Applied Sociology*, 32(2), 49-70. (In Persian).



- 10.22108/jas.2020.124438.1964[link]
- Ghobadi, K.; Valizadeh, R; Azar, A.; Panahi, A. (2024). Analysis and Explanation of the Relationship between the Capabilities of the Third Place in Urban Livability (Case Study: District 6 of Tehran Metropolis). *Geographical Studies of Mountainous Areas*, 5(1), 135-152. (In Persian). doi: 10.22034/gasma.2024.714358[link]
- Gholami, S. (2014). A Study of Heterotopian Cinema with an Approach to Foucault's Concept of Power Discourse. *Kimia-ye-Honar*, 2(8), 45-58. ( text in Persian). [link]
- Gray, T., Truong, S., Ward, K., & Tracey, D. (2022). Community Gardens as Local Learning Environments in Socialhousing Contexts: Participant Perceptions of Enhanced Wellbeing and Community Connection. *Local Environment*, 27(5), 570–585 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2022.2048255>[link]
- Hashemian, S.M.H., Pourezat, A.A.(2007). An Introduction to Hermeneutics in the Realm of Organizational and Management Cognition. *Methodology of Humanities Sciences*, 13(53), 85-113. (In Persian).[link]
- Heath, L., & Freestone, R. (2023). Redefining Local Social Capital: The Past, Present and Future of Bowling Clubs in Sydney. *The Australian Geographer*, 54(2), 173–192.
- 10.1080/00049182.2022.2144257[link]
- Johnson, P., (2013). The Geographies of Heterotopia. *Geography Compass*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12079>[link].
- Kanosvamhira, T. P. (2024). Exploring urban Community Gardens as ‘Third Places’: Fostering Social Interaction in Distressed Neighbourhoods of Cape Town, South Africa. *Leisure Studies*, 1-18 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2024.2383481> .[link]
- Kuzuoglu, S., & Glover, T. D. (2023). Social Infrastructure: Directions for Leisure Studies. *Leisure Sciences*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2023.2253230>[link]
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Li, X & Zhou, Sh.(2018).The Trialectics of Spatiality: The Labeling of a Historical Area in Beijing. *Sustainability*, 10.(١٥٢٢) <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10051542> [link]
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. . (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*: Sage Publications.
- Littman, D. M. (2022). Third Places, Social Capital, and Sense of Community as Mechanisms of Adaptive Responding for Young People Who Experience Social Marginalization. *American Journal*

- of Community Psychology*, 69(3-4), 436-450.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12531>[link]
- Maier, P. (2016), *Paul, Ignatius, and Thirdspace: A Socio-Geographic Exploration*. In *The Apostolic Fathers and Paul*, Pauline and Patristics Scholars in Debate 2, ed. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite, Bloomsbury, 162-180 .[link]
- Mohammadi, M., Behzadfar, M. (2020). The Impact of Non-Hegemonic Coding Patterns on Enhancing Agency and Creating Representational Spaces, Case Study: Baharestan Square in Tehran. *Armanshahr Architecture & Urban Development Journal*, 13(32), 269-281. (In Persian). 10.22034/aaud.2019.151088.1695 [link]
- Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Cofee Shops, Community Centers, Be- Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day*. New York: Paragon House.
- Oldenburg, R. & Brissett, D. (1982). "The Third Place", *Qualitative Sociology*, 5(4),pp. 265-284.[link]
- Rabiei, Kamran; Shariatmanesh, Tahereh (2020). Hangouts and the Social Production of Space: A Phenomenological Study of Everyday Life in Women's Hangouts in Isfahan. *Woman in Development and Politics*, 18(2), 263-292. (In Persian).  
<https://doi.org/10.22059/jwdp.2020.294167.1007758>
- Salaripour, A.A., Beheshtizadeh, Z.; Mousavi, J. (2023). Investigating the Success Criteria of Theme Parks in Iran (Case Study: Construction of an Ice Cream Park in District 11 of Isfahan Municipality). *Studies of Human Settlements Planning*, 18(2), 79-92. ( text in Persian).  
[https://journals.iau.ir/article\\_688924.html](https://journals.iau.ir/article_688924.html)[link]
- Shafiei, M.; Alikhah, F. (2014). Space and the Reproduction of Power (A Study on Gender Segregation in Tehran Universities). *Iranian Journal of Cultural Research*, 7(1), 95-122. ( text in Persian).  
<https://doi.org/10.7508/ijcr.2014.25.005> [link]
- Siavashpour, B., Shadloo Jahromi, M., Nodehi, H. (2016). The Role of Green Space in Children's Educational Environments in Strengthening the Sense of Place (Case Study: Elementary Schools in District Two, Shiraz City). *Environmental Sciences Quarterly*, 14(4), 105-120. (In Persian).[link]
- Soja, E.W (1996). *Third space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Paces*. Blackwell Publisher.
- Waldstrom, C. (2001). Informal Networks in Organizations- A Literature Review. [link]
- Wang, Yun ; Qi Deng & Shaobo Ji, (2017), "Applying Third Place Theory in Mobile Social Media Research: The Physical-Virtual



- Integration*”, in Association for Information Systems.[link]
- Yazdanian, A., Dadashpour, H. (2016). The Issue of Presence in Space: Spatial Awareness and Agency with Emphasis on Urban Public Space. *Geographical Studies of Arid Areas*, 7(26), 73-91. (In Persian). [https://jargs.hsu.ac.ir/article\\_161431.html?lang=en](https://jargs.hsu.ac.ir/article_161431.html?lang=en)
- Zarie, E., Sepehri, B., Adibhesami, M. A., Pourjafar, M. R., & Karimi, H. (2024). A Strategy for Giving Urban Public Green Spaces a Third Dimension: A Case Study of Qasrodasht, Shiraz. *Nature-Based Solutions*, 5, 100102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nbsj.2023.100102>[link]
- Zieleniec A. L. (2007): Space and Social Theory, Sage Publications.

