

Social Activities in Campus

Introduction

I'm not a morning person but I always end up taking 9 am class in the morning. So, I always try to get a 10 minutes' nap at Majlis just before the class to compensate for my all-nighter. However, I end up chatting with my friends while lying comfortably on the Majlis sofa as I'm too tired to have a conversation while sitting at cafeteria. Besides chatting, these sofas work great by offering comfort as well as preserving local value during different social activities held at Majlis; which made write this paper focusing on **social activities**. In this paper, I'll argue how social interaction in Education City is more successful in smaller scale but less effective in larger scale. In the first stage, I'll study the '**Arabian floor sofas**' in the Majlis and analyze how effectively they embody the useful, usable and desirable aspects of social activities. In the next stage, I'll be analyzing how the sofas fit functionally as well as aesthetically within the **Majlis** in different social events which will be followed by its relation to the **CMU-Q** building altogether. Finally, I'll be analyzing how CMU-Q doesn't effectively fit in the **Education City** campus at social interaction and activities.

Definition

The analysis of all the stages will be mainly supported by the useful, usable and desirable framework and various reputed texts. Richard Buchanan (2001) pointed out that instead of analyzing form from external point of view as shape and visual aspects, analyzing form through synthesis of usefulness, usability and desirability deepens “our concern for, and understanding of, the nature of form” (Page 14).

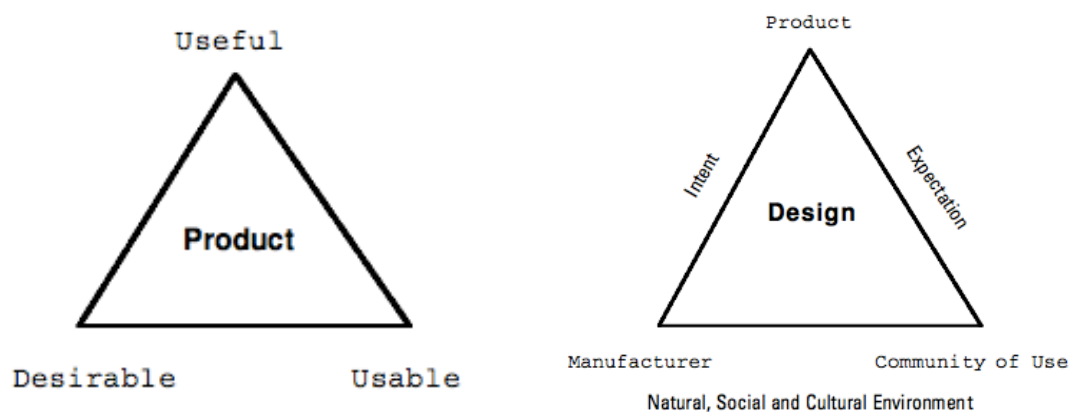


Fig 1: Internal view of form in product experience (left) & External view in design (right).

The usefulness aspect looks into the intent of a product where the product has to ‘work’, working not simply in engineering term but in design, social science, arts and terms as well. Convenience, ease of use and other human and cultural factors play a major role in usable aspect of a product. Finally, the desirable factor focuses on the aesthetic form, style and other aspects of fine arts. A product to be well designed have to focus on all the three aspects of the framework.

Object

Getting back to the Majlis sofa, it has been a popular and effective upholstery for social activities in the Gulf. Structurally this floor sofa is comprised of a lengthy mattress, back-cushions and two hand-cushions on each side, usually covered in popular Khaleeji pattern textile. Analyzing the Majlis sofa with the Usefulness-Usability-Desirability framework will help us understand its effectiveness in performing social activities.

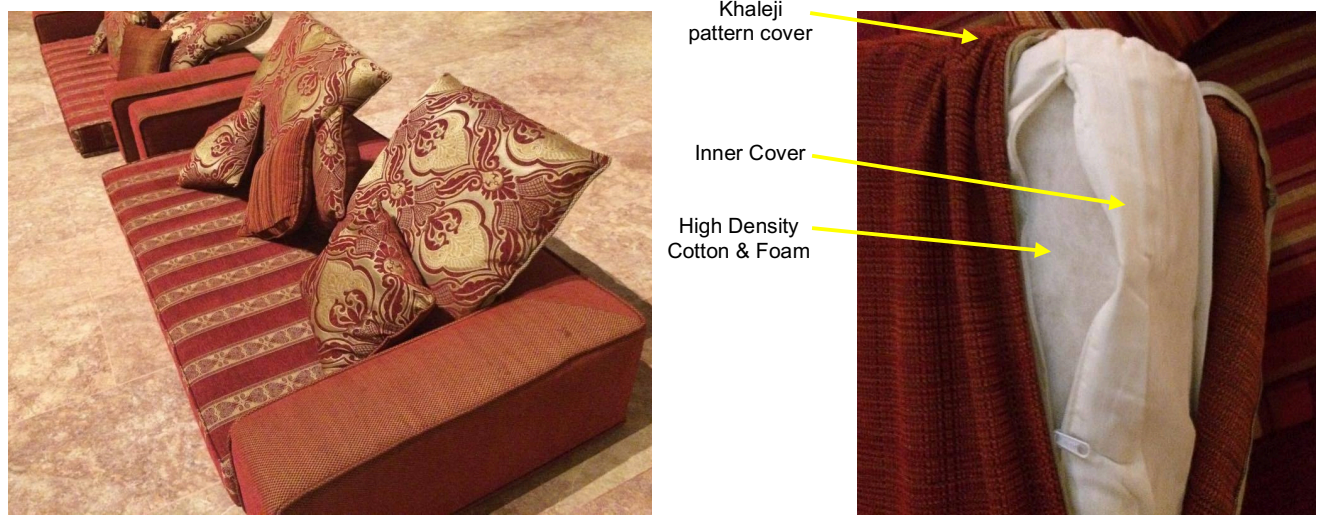


Fig 2: Basic components of Majlis Sofa (left) & Inner structure of the sofa (right)

Usefulness of a product states the purpose and intention behind its innovation. In this regard, Rams (1984) states, "Design is the effort to make products in such a way that they are useful to people". The usefulness of the Majlis sofa is evident from its meaning itself. "Majlis" is an Arabic term which translates to "council", the origin of the word also relates to "a place to sit". Therefore, the meaning itself leads to its intent of use which is to comfortably sit and perform social activities. In that respect, the usefulness of the object is simple to the users due to its plain and straightforward design where all the users have to do is sit in

any posture they want. Rams is a supporter of this simplicity and claims that the usefulness of a product should be self-explanatory which is apparent in the sofa. The simple and comfortable sitting arrangement provides an escape from formal seating for academic tasks and encourages to have social interaction with others casually.

The usability of the sofa relates more to its functionality and convenience. As fig 2(left) shows the basic elements of each sofa, it also shows the extended length of the sofa which makes them comfortable to sit and share with other users. The inner soft cotton and rough foam mixture (fig 2 right) makes the sofa pleasant to use for longer period of time.

Finally, the desirability aspect takes into consideration the aesthetic, values and form of the sofa. As the sofa is equipped with several cushions of different sizes and materials, provides individuals with flexibility to use the sofa in their desired form and posture. The Khaleeji pattern on the textile makes it more informal and encourages casual seating. Due to the popularity of these sofa at social gathering in Gulf, these sofas are more desired to the locals here and used mainly to have social interaction. Therefore, overall the Majlis sofa is really effective in enhancing social activities.

Small Scale

Now heading into the broader aspect of the sofa is where it sits; the Majlis or the Atrium. The Atrium in CMU-Q plays a crucial role in enhancing social activities if not any less than the Majlis sofa.



Fig 3: Students posing for a picture on Kurta Day at Atrium. (allaround blog)

In this semester, out of every ten social events almost eight of them were hosted in the Atrium. The usefulness of the Atrium is evident as it has been intentionally led to a center spot for majority of the social interaction in the building. As Atrium sits in the middle of the building, it has been designed while keeping in mind that it's visible from most part of the building. The Majlis sofas which sits similar to cinema halls makes it easier to have privacy in conversation due to spacious distance and elevation between columns. The elevation also enables the

students to sit as an audience during social events and enjoy properly without getting their views blocked.

The Atrium is also really convenient spot for effective social gathering resulting in effective usability. Rams stated, "Items should be designed in such a way that their function and attributes are directly understood". In this regard, the purpose of the Atrium is really self-explanatory as it is a large open space with water flow and furnished with numerous sofas, the students can easily interpret it as somewhere they can relax or break academic monotony. While some students use the Atrium as a place to take a nap, many engage in conversation and rest come on Thursday to sip Karak together and get social.

The desirability of the Atrium focuses more on value it holds to the students and the Atrium does a better job in making itself a place where the students can be themselves; a step towards their home. In this regard Rams claims, "Our culture is our home...It would be a great help if we could feel more at home in this everyday culture". As a center point of most social interaction and events, the Atrium plays an important role in being an architecture interpreting everyday culture, which Goldberg (2014) supports stating, "Architecture is the ultimate physical representation a culture".

Large Scale

While the Atrium effectively enhances the social activities in the building, CMU-Q itself struggles to successfully socially interact with its position to other campus.



Fig 4: East West Walkway in CMU-Q as a common path for EC. (allaround blog)

As CMU-Q was designed as the centerpiece to the whole Education City campus, the intention of making it the social hub would've enhanced the social activities in the building. The usefulness of using the East-West walkway (figure 4) as the pathway between both sides of EC could've resulted in more open and welcoming campus. However, it's not the case. There exist several usability issues against the social interaction through opening up the building. One of the most important one is the lack of specific pathways connecting the buildings together. In addition to that, several main roads also intersect the path between the universities

makes the condition even sever. Moreover, for the campuses which are close by to CMU-Q, they face other inconveniences like security and ID checks which affects the scope of usability to socialize. Similarly, factors like external extreme weather condition and value differences between universities hampers the desirability to socialize which overall results in ineffective social activities.

Campus-wide Scale

Finally, at the broadest sense; the effectiveness of social activity in Education City campus is the least successful. One of the key component of the whole campus which connects universities together is the Green Spine. Sitting at the center of the campus it dissects the two part of the Campus running from the Ceremonial Court at south to Convention Centre at North.



Fig 5: Green Spine from South. (CMU-Q)

The Green Spine has a vast open space which provides the opportunity to perform various social activities. This provides a chance for the different campuses

to interact with each other. The grass on the area breaks the monotony between contemporary architecture and sand which leads to more refreshing and unique possibility of relaxing and having conversation. Although the green spine is being used twice or thrice a year for organizing major events, its not being utilized well to organize events during suitable environment, if not round the year.

However, the bigger concern exists in the usability of Green Spine by the students and others. One of the main usability drawbacks is the lack of arrangement and props for social interaction and activities. As the whole area is only covered with grass and nothing else, it discourages any active use other than just passing by. Having a seating arrangement, food trucks or relaxing chair or other props just to sit and have a good time can make the Green Spine usable for social activities.



Fig 6: Relaxing chairs in Manhattan. (alamy.com)

Green Spine is also ineffective in enhancing desirability of social activities.

The factor that plays the biggest role in it is the adverse weather condition. Extreme heat for about two-third of the year results in unsuitable use of the open space due to lack of shading and air-flow. In this regard, Masdar city in Dubai shows an effective use of shading and natural air circulation which increases its desirability to perform social activities. Besides that, even during the suitable weather there's a lack of desirability in Green Spine due to lack of functions like seating, coffee stall facilities.

Conclusion

As a whole, the effectiveness of social activity in the campus successful in the lower and specific stage but not that effective in the larger and campus-wide scale. The buildings and the objects inside are efficient in enhancing social interaction and activates which makes them self-sustainable. This in addition to other obstacles like distance, security, lack of pathway and arrangements results in lack of social interaction throughout the campus.

Reference

Buchanan, R. (2001). Design research and the new learning. *Design issues*, 17(4), 3-23.

Rams, D. (1984). Omit the unimportant. *Design Issues*, 24-26.

Goldberger, P. (2014). *Why architecture matters*. Yale University Press.