

Original Article

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From the passageway to urban third place: Explaining the capacities of third place in strengthening the economic resilience of urban sidewalk corridors (Case study: Sarzendegi Pedestrian pathway, District 2 of Tehran Municipality)

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Abstract

Urban planners have recently considered urban sidewalk corridors as an important tool for recreating public spaces. However, operating many of these spaces shows that their continued vitality and economic dynamism in the long term face challenges and, in some cases, involve dependence on urban management resources. This situation highlights the need to pay attention to the concept of “economic resilience” at the microeconomic scale and at the level of pedestrian-oriented public spaces. Meanwhile, the concept of the “third place,” as a platform for voluntary social interactions, informal relationships, and the collective experience of people, can provide an analytical framework for understanding the socio-economic dynamics of public spaces. However, the conceptual link between third-place characteristics and the economic resilience capacities of urban sidewalk corridors has been less explored in the literature. This study aimed to explain the capacities of third-place components in strengthening the economic resilience of sidewalk corridors. The research approach was explanatory-analytical, and its strategy was a case study of the Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway in District 2 of the Tehran Municipality. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with a panel of experts, and the extracted mechanisms were evaluated. Expert consensus was then reached using the modified Delphi method. Facilitating voluntary social interactions, strengthening collective identity, the spatial functional flexibility, and event-based programming were considered potential capacities supporting the dynamics of micro-activities and the relative continuity of economic interactions on urban sidewalks. Accordingly, by providing a prioritized conceptual framework, the research aimed to explain the mechanisms linking third-place characteristics with economic resilience capacities at the scale of sidewalks. The results can be used to guide the planning, design, and management of urban sidewalk corridors, especially in the exploitation phase, as an analytical basis for strengthening the socio-economic dynamics of these spaces.

Keywords

District 2 of Tehran
economic resilience
public space vitality
third place
urban sidewalk corridor
urban regeneration

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1. Introduction

Urban public spaces, as the main platforms for social interactions, microeconomic activities, and people's lived experience, have been widely considered in the urban planning and design literature. Consequently, the quality of these spaces depends not only on physical aspects but also on the possibility of human presence, lingering, and interaction (Golkar, 2018). Meanwhile, urban sidewalks—beyond their physical role in improving pedestrian movement—have also been regarded as socio-economic infrastructures for recreating urban life (Abdelfattah et al., 2021). The development of these corridors in many contemporary cities has largely been shaped in response to challenges such as the degradation of public spaces, environmental pollution, and the dominance of vehicular traffic. It has been presented as a tool for enhancing urban vitality and strengthening social interactions. Accordingly, they have been proposed to enhance urban vitality and strengthen social interactions.

Despite the expansion of these interventions, implementation experience shows that many pedestrian corridors—despite possessing appropriate physical qualities—suffer a loss of vitality and reduced efficiency during the exploitation phase. This is often reflected in reduced presence of people, limited social activities, and difficulties in sustainably covering the costs of maintaining the space. These outcomes can be attributed to the dominance of physically oriented approaches in the design and management of these spaces—approaches that prioritize physical and aesthetic qualities over the space's social and economic dynamics. Such an attitude limits the space's behavioral and economic capacities, leaving them insufficiently flexible in response to economic shifts or functional fluctuations within the city.

As a result, many of these spaces remain dependent in the long term on unstable urban financial resources. In this context, economic resilience can offer an analytical framework for understanding the functional sustainability of these spaces. In this paper, economic resilience was defined as the capacity of a space to adapt to economic shocks, maintain activity, and reduce dependence on external financial resources (Wang et al., 2020). At the urban sidewalk corridor analysis scale, it is understood as the relative stability of microeconomic flows, the diversity of small-scale activities, and the possibility of minimal continuity in economic-spatial interactions. This perspective considers economic resilience not at the macroeconomic level of the city, but at the

microeconomic level of public spaces and everyday urban interactions.

Despite the importance of this issue, most research on urban sidewalk corridors has focused on physical, social, or environmental dimensions. At the same time, the socio-economic mechanisms affecting the economic sustainability of these spaces have been investigated less systematically. Meanwhile, the concept of “third place” can provide an explanatory framework for understanding the link between social interactions and the economic dynamics of public spaces (Oldenburg, 1999). Third places refer to spaces which, beyond the formal environments of work and daily life, serve as the setting for informal interactions, sustainable social relations, and the collective experiences of citizens. Such spaces can strengthen the diversity of activities and microeconomic dynamics in public spaces by enabling voluntary presence, everyday interactions, and the formation of local social networks.

From this perspective, urban sidewalk corridors can function beyond purely physical intervention when they are developed as a dynamic network of public spaces, urban activities, and social interactions. The functional connections between these corridors and urban open spaces, city places for a variety of activities, and surrounding public settings can shape diverse patterns of presence and linger over time, thereby making the corridor experience part of people's everyday lived experience. Such a process provides the capacities for microeconomic activity formation, a diversity of uses, and the functional dynamism of space.

The literature review shows that, although the concept of third place has been developed to analyze the social and experiential qualities of public spaces, and economic resilience has also been considered in urban studies, the conceptual and analytical linkage between these two areas has received less attention at the microeconomic level of urban sidewalk corridors. In particular, the lack of a framework capable of linking the experiential qualities of third place with potential mechanisms of microeconomic sustainability in walkways can be identified as one of the significant gaps in the research literature.

Accordingly, this study aims to explain the capacities of third places in potentially strengthening the economic resilience of urban pedestrian walkways at the microeconomic scale. The main research question is how the qualities and components of third place can be understood at the level of urban pedestrian

corridors as capacities that may strengthen economic resilience. To empirically investigate this question, the Sarzandegi walkway in District 2 of Tehran Municipality was selected as a case study to analyze the mechanisms related to the formation of third-place characteristics, patterns of social interaction, and the continuity of microeconomic activities in this space.

2. Theoretical foundations

2.1. Sidewalk as an urban public space

In recent decades, sidewalks—as one of the most important examples of urban public spaces—have played an increasing role in improving the quality of the environment, facilitating social interactions, and shaping everyday economic life. The realization of this role is linked less to purely physical aspects and more to qualities that enable users to pause, be present, and have a positive experience of space. From this perspective, sidewalk quality can be considered the result of the interaction between physical, perceptual, and social components. Such an interaction can support continuous presence, daily interactions, and the formation of social participation experiences (Sheikhi & Rezaei, 2017).

In this context, some micro-scale sidewalks acquire characteristics that make them lively, appealing, and preferred spaces in citizens' daily experience. William Whyte argues that there are small spaces in cities that people naturally choose—spaces that, due to their environmental and social qualities, generate positive and memorable experiences. In his book *Social Life in Small Urban Spaces*, he demonstrates how these micro-spaces can provide a basis for spontaneous interaction and presence (Whyte, 1980).

From this perspective, a sidewalk can function as a successful public space when it reflects some of the characteristic qualities of small urban spaces—qualities that provide the context for user presence, interaction, and persistence. Neglecting any of these dimensions may reduce the space's capacity to sustain vitality and the continuity of its social function.

2.2. Economic resilience in urban public places

Although influenced by national and international macro-developments, urban economic development relies more on endogenous capacities and socio-spatial mechanisms at the local scale (Nejad Ebrahimi et al., 2025). In this framework, urban economic resilience refers to the capacity of urban spaces to support the continuity of economic activities, adapt

relatively to fluctuations, and reduce reliance on external resources. Urban public spaces, especially sidewalks, as one of the most important platforms for urban microeconomics, have the potential to provide a favorable environment for the formation of flexible economic patterns at the neighborhood level. In addition to their physical role, pedestrian-oriented spaces can affect the quality of urban life and social behavior patterns by providing experiential, interactive, and accessible conditions (Kanooni et al., 2016). Accordingly, sidewalks and similar public spaces, through functional diversity, user presence, and various levels of social vitality, possess the capacity to shape low-risk and flexible economic flows. These flows are based more on social participation, continuous presence, and everyday user actions than on purely physical interventions.

In this view, the sustainability and economic resilience of public spaces are not only the result of their physical condition, but are also influenced by patterns of use, user behavior, microeconomic activities, and social interactions. Taken together, these factors can strengthen the space's capacity to maintain dynamism and prevent economic stagnation in the long term, without assuming a definitive causal relationship among them.

2.3. Role of economic resilience in the regeneration of urban pedestrian corridors

Regeneration is a key approach in the development of urban areas and is consistent with the principles of sustainable development. It can improve the physical, economic, social, and environmental dimensions of cities. Regeneration projects—especially at the scale of public spaces—have created structural changes in how urban spaces are used, imagined, and functioned, with the aim of improving environmental quality and enhancing the urban living experience (Arzamani et al., 2020). Meanwhile, pedestrian-oriented public spaces, due to their interactive nature and human scale, have a high capacity to improve the quality of urban space and strengthen urban creative flows.

However, one of the main challenges in recreating sidewalk corridors is not to create new spaces, but to ensure their continued socio-economic function over time. Experience from numerous sidewalk projects in different cities shows that the sustainability of these spaces usually depends on various contextual factors, such as the continued presence of users, microeconomic activities, local management

mechanisms, and the space's capacity to adapt to environmental and social changes. From this perspective, strengthening economic resilience can be considered one of the important components in increasing the likelihood of functional continuity in such spaces.

Thus, economic resilience in the context of regeneration is not meant to establish a causal relationship with the project's success, but rather to be understood as a capacity that provides the groundwork for supporting the sustainability and dynamism of sidewalk corridors. This capacity can create more favorable conditions for sustaining activities, reducing the incidence of downturns, and promoting vitality in the long term.

2.4. The concept of the third place and its socio-spatial characteristics

The third place, as one of the key concepts in the public realm, was introduced by Oldenburg as a space between home and workplace—one in which individuals can enjoy continuous presence, engage in informal interactions, and communicate with friends, acquaintances, or even strangers (Oldenburg, 1999). These types of spaces are considered the arena of informal life, in contrast to the formal order of everyday life (Modiri & Davoodi, 2017), and therefore play an important role in shaping the city's social life.

In the literature on public spaces, third places are known for strengthening social bonds, creating opportunities for sustainable communication, fostering a sense of belonging, and enhancing urban vitality. From an urban planning perspective, the third place is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon with a socio-environmental nature that goes beyond a purely physical space (Valenzuela-Levi et al., 2022). It can also contribute to improving the quality of urban experience by facilitating communication between users and the environment (Noorian & Khesal, 2018). Third places often provide a platform for the emergence of flexible, multifunctional, and human-centered urban spaces, and help realize a sense of belonging, urban identity, collective memory, and livability. Accordingly, paying attention to the creation and strengthening of third places compatible with socio-cultural contexts is considered an important aspect of urban space planning and management (Kamalizadeh & Mansour, 2018).

From a theoretical perspective, the urban third place can be considered one of the most suitable public spaces for diverse uses by people (Fullagar et al., 2019). In addition to physical qualities, these spaces are characterized by active social mechanisms that, in interaction with urban interventions, can shape users' livability experience.

Table 1. Analytical framework of global third-place experiences and potential mechanisms for strengthening economic resilience in the research conceptual model

International example	Actual and literary features of the third place	Potential mechanisms for strengthening economic resilience	Direct connection to the conceptual model
The High Line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The potential for pausing in space and creating a platform for social interaction - Public accessibility - Possibility of cultural-creative activities (Mullenbach, L., 2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthening the link between the creative economy and public spaces - Using neglected areas to create value-generating paths - Attracting creative, cultural, and tourist activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social capacity: continuous presence, social interactions - Economic capacity: creative activities and microeconomics - Spatial capacity: quality of place and the potential for lingering in the space
Clarke Quay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Combining public open spaces and active private spaces - 24-h social interactions - Creating a collective lived experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversifying micro-businesses - Enhancing private sector participation in the operation of public spaces - Reducing the dependence of spaces on the public budget (Chang, 2000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social capacity: promoting interactions and community life - Economic capacity: micro-income diversification - Spatial capacity: open-closed functional combination
Superkilen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attention to cultural diversity - Collective identity and everyday interactions - Multipurpose spaces with the potential for pausing in the space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving the microeconomic infrastructure - Linking the local economy with culture and creativity - Strengthening the participation of diverse groups (Waterman et al., 2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social capacity: Strengthening collective identity - Economic capacity: Micro and creative economy - Spatial capacity: Flexible design

International example	Actual and literary features of the third place	Potential mechanisms for strengthening economic resilience	Direct connection to the conceptual model
Strøget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High presence and continuity of movement - Daily social life - Hierarchical public space (Gehl,2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainability of economic demand - Small tourism activities and daily shopping - Self-reliance of small activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social capacity: continuous presence - Economic capacity: sustained demand - Spatial capacity: continuity of movement
Cheonggyecheon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating movement continuity - Presence and community life - Active urban landscape (Cho, M, 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving urban livability - Strengthening tourism and the local economy - Increasing the value of surrounding properties and businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social capacity: community life and presence - Economic capacity: strengthening tourism and economic value - Spatial capacity: continuity of movement and landscape

Note: The characteristics and mechanisms included in the table are the result of a combination of case study analysis and research interpretation and are not considered direct quotes from the sources.

2.5. The sidewalk as a third urban space

Sidewalks, with features such as spatial continuity, functional diversity, and connectivity between urban areas, allow for the emergence of collective activities (Pakzad, 2007), and accordingly, in contemporary literature, they can be considered a type of urban third place. Unlike static third places, such as squares or parks, sidewalks are “spaces in motion” where social interactions occur during transit and brief stops. This characteristic transforms the sidewalk into a dynamic space where movement functions (access and connection), pausing (informal stops), and economic functions (micro and creative activities) are experienced concurrently.

From a functional perspective, the way sidewalks are created and designed is related to urban economic patterns, because the continuity of daily activities and retail is usually accompanied by the presence of diverse uses that can be visited at different times. Also, the presence of commercial shops, restaurants, and cafeterias, as elements that create the attractiveness and diversity of the environment, plays a role in the users’ perception of the vitality of the space. From the perspective of the third place, sidewalks not only provide opportunities for presence, social interactions, and collective participation but also reflect manifestations of urban vitality through different cultural, recreational, and economic activities (Abedini & Saket Hasanlouei, 2021).

everyday value at the microeconomic scale. A review of international experiences shows that assessing the effectiveness of these corridors depends not only on their physical design, but also on their capacity to facilitate sustained presence, diversify everyday activities, and support the active participation of small businesses. Within this framework, the “third place” approach provides an explanatory lens for understanding this process, as such places, through social interactions, spontaneous pauses, and everyday patterns, create potential conditions for simultaneously supporting the social and economic mechanisms associated with resilience.

Comparative studies of five prominent international cases—including Clarke Quay in Singapore, Strøget and Superkilen in Copenhagen, the High Line in New York, and Cheonggyecheon in Seoul—show that several recurring mechanisms can be identified across these examples: social dynamism and the diversity of everyday activities, functional flexibility in response to changes in demand, and patterns of use based on the active participation of the microeconomy. The combination of these mechanisms, in creating feedback linkages between place quality and the sustainability of small-scale economic activities, makes it possible to operationalize urban resilience at the scale of pedestrian corridors. It should be emphasized, however, that in this study, economic resilience is understood as potential capacity and supporting mechanisms at the micro scale, rather than as a measure of responses to actual shocks.

Accordingly, the present study incorporated these mechanisms as capacity-based variables into its conceptual model and examined their applicability to the “Sarزندegi pedestrian pathway” in District 2 of Tehran. To extract the model components, five

3. Comparative analysis of global experiences of urban sidewalk corridors in the third place and the economic resilience framework

In contemporary urban practice, pedestrian corridors function not merely as physical projects, but as socio-economic infrastructures with the capacity to generate

contemporary successful global third-place experiences were reviewed and analyzed. It should be noted that the features and mechanisms presented in Table 1 are the result of a combination of case source analysis and researcher interpretation and are not

considered direct quotations. Table 2 summarizes the dominant features of these examples, their potential mechanisms for supporting economic resilience, and their relationship to the components of the research's conceptual model.

Table 2. Dimensions and indicators of the third place from the perspective of Oldenburg (1999)

Components of the third place	Dimension	Analytical dimensions of the third place
Social interaction and presence	Voluntary presence	The presence of users in space is based on personal choice and desire, not a functional or transitory requirement; this type of presence is a characteristic of the third place and is accompanied by patterns of sustainable social interactions in the space.
	Pausing in the space	The space allows users to stop, sit, and stay, creating an experience beyond a mere passageway.
	Presence repetition	The frequent presence of users at different times is a factor affecting social perceptions of the attractiveness and vitality of the space.
	Informal interactions	Social connections are formed in space without formal planning, including conversation, observation, and everyday interactions.
Activity and microeconomics	Microeconomic activities	The presence of small businesses or temporary services compatible with the pedestrian-oriented scale is considered among the patterns of economic activity in such spaces.
	Activity diversity	The diversity of service and recreational activities is accompanied by the presence of different groups of users in the space.
	Time distribution of activity	Activities are not limited to specific hours of the day and usually continue at different times.
	activity and presence linkage	Economic activities are strengthened by social presence and vice versa, which helps to sustain the functioning of the space.
Spatial flexibility	Multifunctionality of space	Social and economic activities in space are usually experienced simultaneously and reflect the understanding of the dynamics of the space.
	Temporal adaptability	The space use pattern is variable at different times of the day and days of the week.
	Soft functional adaptability	Space can change temporarily, seasonally, and informally without disrupting its overall structure.
	Responsiveness to changing needs	Space can respond to changing user needs and socio-economic conditions.
Sense of belonging and social ownership	A sense of belonging to a place	For many users, space is part of everyday experience and is associated with emotional-cognitive meanings.
	Informal social ownership	Users without legal ownership experience a sense of responsibility and entitlement to use the space.
	Informal care	The monitoring and maintenance of space is carried out through the everyday behaviors of users, rather than simply reflecting the management of customs and collective attention to the space.
	Identity of space	Space has identifiable identity characteristics, and its perception is usually associated with meaning and distinction.

According to Table 2, despite the spatial and functional differences among the global examples, three main categories of mechanisms—social dynamics, functional diversity and flexibility, and microeconomic

strengthening—have jointly played a role in shaping economic resilience capacities and were therefore included in the research's conceptual model.

4. Research framework and conceptual model

Given the explanatory nature of this research and its focus on understanding the socio-economic mechanisms associated with the economic resilience of urban sidewalk corridors, this study developed a conceptual model derived from theoretical literature

on third places and economic resilience at the urban microscale. The research's conceptual model aimed to formulate conceptual links between the spatial-behavioral characteristics of third places, socio-economic-mediating mechanisms, and economic resilience-related dimensions.

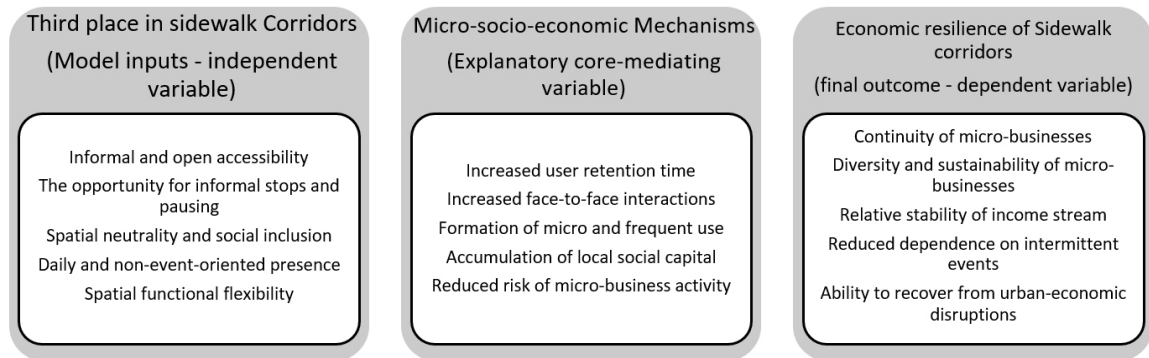


Figure 1. Research framework and conceptual model: The role of third place characteristics in strengthening the economic resilience of urban sidewalk corridors through micro-socio-economic mechanisms (validated with an expert panel and modified Delphi).

Within this framework, the characteristics of third places in urban pedestrian corridors are treated as explanatory variables that, through the activation of mechanisms such as increased user dwell time, the strengthening of informal social interactions, the formation of recurrent small-scale consumption, and the accumulation of local social capital, contribute to a better understanding of how patterns of economic resilience emerge at the micro scale. These patterns are understood to be associated with the continuity of economic activities, occupational diversity, the relative stability of income flows, and the capacity to recover from economic fluctuations.

The conceptual model of the study was organized as a three-level explanatory chain in which the physical-behavioral variables of third place are linked, through micro-level socio-economic mechanisms, to the different dimensions of the economic resilience of pedestrian corridors. The components and relationships of this model were identified, refined, and validated through an expert panel and a modified Delphi method.

5. Materials and methods

This research is applied-developmental in terms of purpose and analytical-explanatory in terms of nature and aimed to determine the conceptual links between spatial structure, daily behavior patterns, and microeconomic dynamics in urban sidewalks. Accordingly, given the mechanism-centered nature of the subject and the study's aim of explaining how

these linkages are formed, this research did not attempt to test statistical hypotheses or estimate quantitative relationships. Instead, it concentrated on qualitative analysis, expert consensus, and the conceptual explanation of the mechanisms involved. On this basis, and in light of the fact that the concepts of "urban third place" and "economic resilience at the microeconomic scale" do not yet have established quantitative measurement frameworks in the context of pedestrian-oriented urban spaces in Iran, a qualitative-explanatory approach offers a more appropriate basis for identifying the relevant components and explaining their conceptual mechanisms. Accordingly, the case study method was chosen, as it allows for the simultaneous examination of the physical, social, and functional dimensions of the corridor under study and provides a deeper understanding of the interaction between spatial characteristics, everyday patterns of use, and microeconomic dynamics.

The study assessed the "Sarزندگی" pedestrian pathway in District 2 of Tehran Municipality. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with a panel of 12 experts. The extracted mechanisms were evaluated, and expert consensus was reached using the modified Delphi method. The experts participated in the group sessions as follows:

- Urban planners and designers (4 individuals): experienced in the design and planning of urban public spaces.
- Urban economists and local development experts (3

individuals): specialists in urban microeconomic analysis and local economic development.

- Business owners and managers of businesses located on the walkway (3 individuals): informed about the operational conditions and daily economic challenges in the area studied.
- Social activists and key residents (2 individuals): informed about space use patterns, social interactions, and local dynamics.

After introducing the case study, the research method and operational steps are discussed.

5.1. Case study: The Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway

The Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway is in District 2 of Tehran Municipality. This area holds an important

position within the spatial structure of western Tehran due to its relatively planned physical form, substantial share of urban green space, and the coexistence of residential, recreational, and service uses. As a linear pedestrian-oriented corridor, this corridor functions as more than a mere passageway. It incorporates a range of urban open spaces, parks, and activity nodes into a continuous infrastructure for movement, lingering, and social presence. The project includes 47 kilometers of walking paths and 26 kilometers of safe, dedicated bicycle and scooter lanes, designed as a continuous network without intersections with highways. It connects four major parks—Fadak Garden (Iran Zamin), the 13-Hectare Park, Pardisan Park, and Nahj al-Balagha Park—within a linear corridor.

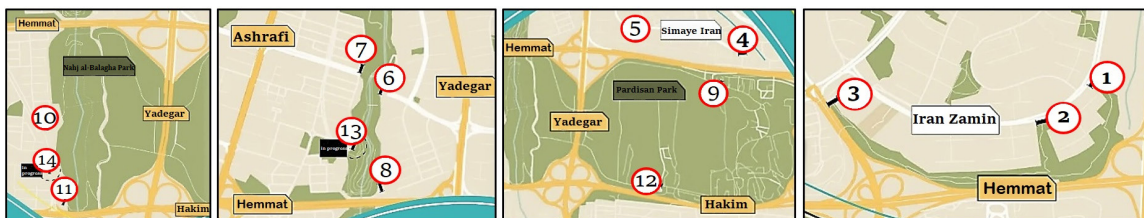


Figure 2. Location and spatial structure of the Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway in District 2 of Tehran Municipality and its entrances.

* The analysis was conducted at the micro-urban scale and focused specifically on economic-spatial interactions in sidewalk corridors. Therefore, the results are not generalized to the level of metropolitan strategies or the regional economy.

Along this corridor, two “Tabiat” bridges over Sheikh Fazlallah Nouri and Shahid Hemmat highways have strengthened the spatial continuity of the route on a translocal scale. The combination of physical continuity, the presence of shade over large sections of the path, and the cycling infrastructure has provided a basis for

the formation of walkway-oriented flows, leisure activities, and daily presence.

These features make the Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway a suitable example for studying the role of the creative economy and the mechanisms related to the third place in urban sidewalk corridors.

Table 3. The Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway in District 2 of Tehran

Park	Fadak Parkway	13-hectare park	Nahj al-Balagha Park (phase 1)	Nahj al-Balagha Park (phase 2)	Pardisan Park	Tabiat Bridge (A)	Tabiat Bridge (B)	Nahj al-Balagha Tunnel (C)	Total length
Length of the bike path (Km)	4.23	2.75	4.22	5.11	5.71	0.18	0.30	0.27	22.77
Length of the footpath (Km)	4.01	0.21	6.98	7.18	5.90	0	0	0	24.28

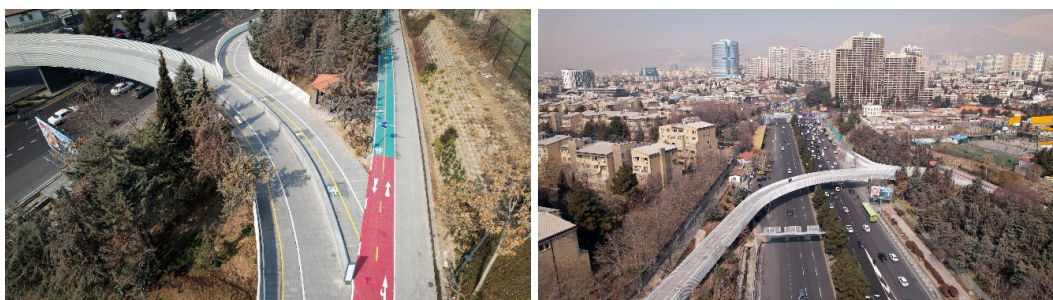


Figure 3. Aerial image of the Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway

5.2. Modified Delphi method

The modified Delphi method was used to validate, conceptually refine, and prioritize the components of the research conceptual model. The Delphi approach

focused on refining mechanisms and improving the theoretical coherence of the model, rather than testing statistical relationships or extracting effect coefficients.

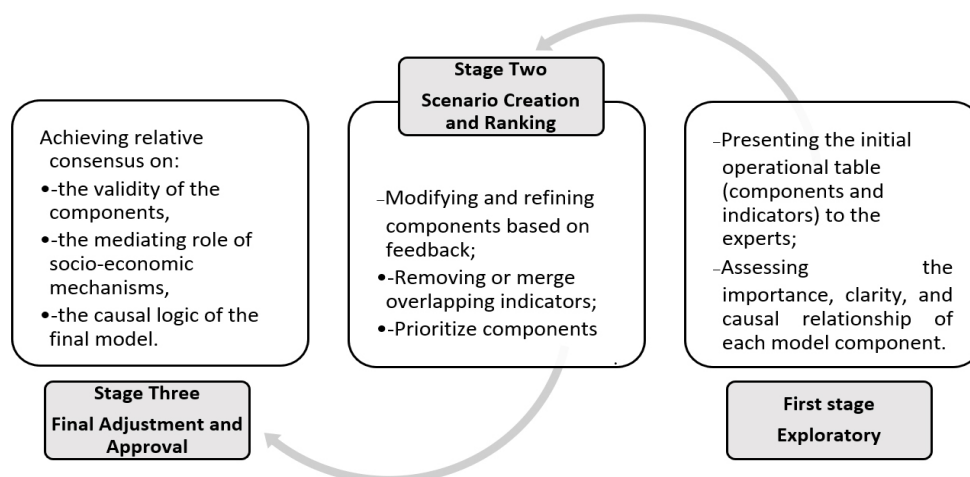


Figure 4. Delphi implementation steps

The modified Delphi process was initiated based on the theoretical framework derived from the research literature, with the initial list of components and indicators developed in advance and presented to the expert panel. This approach, while increasing the focus of the Delphi process, prevented conceptual dispersion and the introduction of irrelevant indicators, and enabled the experts to carry out a more coherent evaluation.

The output of this process is a set of aggregated expert

judgments and the relative prioritization of components, reflecting the perceived importance of each component within the study's conceptual model. These results should not be interpreted as "generalizable statistical data" or as "findings of quantitative modeling". Rather, they represent expert convergence and the conceptual validation of mechanisms within a qualitative-explanatory framework, and their role is to strengthen the coherence and adequacy of the model.

Table 4. Operationalization of the research conceptual model

Categories	Variable/component	Operational definition (in the research framework)	Evaluable indicators (for Delphi)	Role in modified Delphi
Characteristics of the third urban place	Informal accessibility	The ability to enter and be present on the sidewalk without having to pay or go through official processes	Free entrance, lack of official control, possibility of use without paying	Importance and weight assessment
	Possibility to pause and stop	Ability to stop users for short or long periods without disrupting their movement	Seating areas, active edges, shade, legibility of pausing/lingering	Prioritization
	Spatial neutrality	Inclusive access and usability for diverse social groups	Diversity of users, non-exclusive activity, and a sense of social security	Expert consensus
	Daily presence	Being active in the daily lives of people (non-event activity)	Daily use, frequency of attendance, hours of operation	Confirmation of conceptual relevance
	Functional flexibility	The adaptability of space to micro and spontaneous activities	Temporary activities, multi-functionality, variability	Indicator refinement

Categories	Variable/component	Operational definition (in the research framework)	Evaluable indicators (for Delphi)	Role in modified Delphi
Micro-socio-economic mechanisms	Increased presence time	Increased presence of users on the sidewalk	Multi-stage stops, purposeful pauses	Weighting
	Face-to-face interactions	Direct social connections between users	Conversation, accidental encounters, social interaction	Consensus Validation Proof of Concept Significance Assessment
	Frequent small purchases	Small but consistent uses over time	Low-cost purchases, frequent use	Validation
	Accumulation of social capital	Increased trust between users and businesses, familiarity, and local belonging	Sense of belonging, mutual trust, local knowledge	Conceptual validation
	Reduced business risk	Reduced economic volatility for micro-businesses	Customer stability, demand predictability	Assessment of importance
Dimensions of pedestrian-based economic resilience	Continuity of economic activity	The survival of micro-businesses over time	Survival of units, reduced closures	Final consensus Prioritization Final approval Final refinement Model validation
	Diversity of small businesses	Presence of different microeconomic activities	Diversity of services and goods	Prioritization
	Relative stability of income	The reduced sharp fluctuation of income from micro-businesses	Sustainability of business income streams	Final approval
	Reduced dependence on events	Independence of the space economy on temporary events	Non-eventful sustainable activity	Final refinement
	Economic recovery power	Resilience of economic activities after shocks and disruptions	Return of activity, adaptability	Model stabilization

6. Results

Urban pedestrian corridors are process-oriented in nature, and the costs associated with them are not limited to the implementation phase. Accordingly, the economic analysis of such projects requires a distinction between initial capital investment costs and the costs of maintenance and operation during the use phase.

1. Initial capital costs: These costs are associated with the project's creation and commissioning phase and are primarily defined as one-time expenditure, including:

- Design and construction: including urban design studies, landscape design, the creation of movement and lingering spaces, and adapting the project to existing physical conditions.
- Urban infrastructure: the modification or relocation of underground utilities, drainage management, and the provision of electricity and other service infrastructure required for future activities.
- Physical equipment and elements: urban furniture, lighting, paving, identity elements, and other

facilities that shape the initial spatial quality of the pedestrian corridor.

This category of costs is usually defined within capital budgets. It sometimes creates the impression that once these expenditures are completed, the "project is finished," whereas in reality, the life of the space begins after implementation.

2. Annual maintenance and operation costs: During the operational phase, pedestrian corridors incur recurring costs that are largely tied to the continuity of use, the degree of user presence, and the social dynamism of the space. These costs typically include:

- Cleaning and municipal services: daily cleaning, waste collection, and equipment maintenance.
- Repair and renovation: repair paving, refurbish street furniture, lighting maintenance, and compensate for wear and tear caused by continuous use.
- Social management and control: the presence of field personnel, coordination of activities, and the prevention of spatial conflicts.
- Event planning: actions that help keep the space active and sustain user presence, including social,

cultural, or economic events.

Given the ongoing nature of operating costs, part of the functional sustainability of pedestrian corridors is associated with the presence of endogenous economic mechanisms within the space. These mechanisms can contribute to the formation of microeconomic flows, increased user presence, and the continuity of everyday activities.

In this regard, the present study analyzes the characteristics of third places as a conceptual framework for better understanding the capacity of pedestrian corridors to strengthen microeconomic resilience. The data analysis process was conducted at two levels:

1. Assessing the extent to which the components of the third place are realized in the studied walkway and determining which features are most evident in the space.
2. Analyzing the conceptual links between these features and the dimensions of microeconomic resilience, relying on the mediating mechanisms identified in the conceptual model.

Based on the results of the first phase of the Delphi, some key indicators for analyzing the walkway condition were identified. In this section, the focus is on the indicators that achieved the highest level of consensus among the experts.

6.1. Third place indicators (product of expert consensus in Delphi)

- 1- Density of public seating: the ratio of benches and non-commercial open spaces to the length of the pedestrian corridor.
- 2-Flow of informal social events: the number of spontaneous occurrences, such as street performers, temporary markets, or small-scale gatherings, on a monthly basis.
- 3- Juxtaposition of complementary uses: the degree to

which cultural, service, and social uses are integrated with core retail activities, rather than following a pattern of strict land-use and functional separation.

4-Active resident presence: the extent of local residents' presence and participation during mid-day hours.

6.2. Dimensions of microeconomic resilience (re-sult of expert consensus in the Delphi process)

- 1- Diversity of income streams: the dispersion of revenue sources among business units, with at least three distinct sources.
- 2- Stability of local labor force: the percentage of employees who reside in the same area and the relative stability of their employment in micro-scale enterprises.
- 3- Capacity for functional conversion: the time and cost required to convert a commercial unit into a genuinely complementary activity, as one dimension of economic flexibility.

It should be emphasized that the evaluation of third-place components in this study was conducted based on the current condition of the Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway during its initial operational phase—a stage typically associated with a limited level of user awareness regarding the space's capacities, programs, and socio-economic functions. This condition has meant that patterns of presence have largely remained confined to everyday, transitional, or spontaneous forms of use, while many of the structural components of third place, including the juxtaposition of complementary uses and planned event orientation, have not yet reached a stabilized level. Accordingly, the scores presented in the table reflect the extent to which these components have been realized under conditions of low awareness and transition and should not be interpreted as representing the final condition or full maturity of the pedestrian corridor.

Table 5. Evaluation of the realization of third-place components in the Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway (Delphi Phase II)

Interpretation of the state of realization	Average score (out of 5)	Third place indicators
Average to poor; lack of spaces designed for long-term stopovers and sustained social interaction.	2.8	Density of communal seating spaces
Relatively strong; the existence of spontaneous artistic and social activities, but lacking institutional organization and program-oriented continuity.	3.9	Frequency and continuity of informal social events
Medium: Limited presence of small cultural and service centers, while dominated by single-function retail.	3.2	Coexistence of complementary uses
Strong; Due to the residential-administrative nature of the corridor, the daily and recurring presence of residents during the middle hours of the day is significant.	4.1	Active and regular presence of residents

Note: Average scoring scale: 1 = very weak and 5 = very strong

Based on the results of the second Delphi phase, the mean scores of the four third-place components indicate that behavioral-social characteristics, such as the active presence of residents, are in a more developed condition than the structural components. More specifically, “density of collective seating spaces” and “juxtaposition of complementary uses” received lower scores, which may reflect the early stage of the formation of the pedestrian corridor’s physical and functional structures during the initial operational period.

By contrast, the two components “flow of informal social events” and “active and regular resident presence” received higher mean scores. This indicates that spontaneous social behaviors and everyday patterns of resident presence have become more established at this stage of spatial formation than physical or functional elements.

Overall, the score pattern suggests that, in its current operational phase, the pedestrian corridor exhibits greater visibility in behavioral components than in structural ones. Accordingly, complementary functional features—such as the integration of uses and the density of seating areas—are still in the process of formation. In contrast, patterns of presence and informal interaction have emerged earlier. This pattern is consistent with the transitional phase characteristic of pedestrian-oriented regeneration projects and reflects the current state of the space rather than its final condition or functional maturity.

In the second Delphi phase, indicator weighting was

based on expert judgments regarding the degree of conceptual relevance and the potential impact of third-place characteristics on the dimensions of economic resilience. The results show that:

- The flow of informal social events received the highest weight in relation to the revenue stream diversity (RSD) indicator. This suggests that, in the experts’ view, the presence of small-scale events and flexible activities can help create conditions for diversifying microeconomic activities.
- Active and regular resident presence received the highest weight concerning the stability and retention of the local labor retention (LLR), as sustained patterns of presence can enhance the capacity to establish relative stability in micro-scale activities.

The juxtaposition of complementary uses received the highest weight concerning the adaptability index (AI), which is consistent with the conceptual nature of this indicator; integrating functions renders the adaptability of micro-scale activities more plausible.

The weights showed that the behavioral indicators of the third place (event flow and resident presence) had the greatest overlap with the dimensions of microeconomic resilience. In contrast, physical-functional indicators, such as seating density and the coexistence of uses, tended to be more prominent in later stages of spatial maturity.

The important point is that these weights do not imply a causal relationship. Rather, they indicate the degree of conceptual and perceptual overlap established in the Delphi process.

Table 6. The weight of the impact of third-place indicators on the dimensions of economic resilience of the walkway

Third place indicators (independent variable)	Effect on RSD	Effect on LLR	Effect on AI
Density of collective seating spaces	0.21	0.15	0.38
Flow of informal social events	0.45	0.35	0.29
Juxtaposition of complementary uses	0.51	0.42	0.33
Active and regular presence of residents	0.33	0.28	0.18

Note. RSD = revenue stream diversity; LLR = local labor retention; AI = adaptability index.

The analysis of the indicator weighting matrix reveals that each dimension of microeconomic resilience demonstrates a closer association with a specific type of third-place socio-spatial quality. This relationship is not causal but is identifiable through conceptual proximity and perceived co-occurrence by experts. In the “income stream diversity” dimension, the highest weight (0.51) was assigned to the “juxtaposition

of complementary uses,” indicating that, among the measured dimensions, functional diversity at the user-defined level aligns most closely with the dispersion and multi-source nature of micro-income. Accordingly, the multi-functional structure of space is considered by experts to be more synonymous with the concept of economic diversification than other components. In the dimension of “adaptability and functional

conversion,” the highest coefficient (0.38) belonged to “density of collective seating areas.” The position of this component indicates that physical elements related to pause and stopover play a more prominent role in the flexibility of urban micro-activities, according to expert perception. Therefore, the physical dimensions that facilitate more sustained user presence have found a greater semantic relationship with the capacity for activity transformation.

Within the dimension of “stability and retention of the local workforce,” the highest weight (0.35) was assigned to the “flow of informal social events.” This pattern suggests that the dynamism of spontaneous social activities, compared with other components, exhibited greater alignment with the concept of relative stability in micro-employment. Accordingly, the continuity of informal social actions in this matrix was regarded as the component most closely associated with the continuity of local labor activity.

Overall, the pattern of coefficients indicates that the three dimensions of microeconomic resilience each achieved the highest degree of alignment with a particular type of socio-spatial quality in the pedestrian corridor in third place. These alignments do not follow a single uniform pattern; rather, they display a differentiated and multilayered structure:

- Land-use diversity aligns with income diversity
- Pause spaces align with functional flexibility
- Social events align with labor retention

Accordingly, the data show that the various dimensions of microeconomic resilience are not organized around a single central component. Instead, they can be explained along the pedestrian corridor through a set of distinct third-place qualities, each of which corresponds more closely to a specific dimension of economic resilience.

7. Discussion

Data analysis indicates that within the Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway, patterns of everyday presence and informal social interactions have generated a set of qualities that conceptually overlap with the recognized characteristics of a third place. Although certain sections of the walkway are still in the formation stage and are in a transitional state physically and institutionally, the everyday usage processes of space reveal signs of the gradual formation of third-place-related foundations.

An examination of the mediating mechanisms shows that the third place, by providing opportunities for

diverse and asynchronous user presences, creates a different quality than purely commercial spaces. In such a space, the pattern of presence is not limited to peak shopping hours, and non-profit activities such as pausing, observing, conversing, or participating in spontaneous events create a different understanding of the daily flow of usability. This temporal and behavioral expansion, according to expert analysis, has found greater alignment with the sustainability of microeconomic activity and the diversification of space utilization methods.

In examples such as cafes or pause spaces located within the pedestrian corridor, user engagement is not solely dependent on initial consumption. Instead, the experience of presence, interaction, and the formation of a type of socio-spatial relationship play an effective role in continued visits and usage. These patterns have been identified in the research analysis as mechanisms that explain the dimensions of microeconomic resilience through their co-occurrence with third-place qualities.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

This research, adopting a qualitative-explanatory approach and utilizing a modified Delphi method, sought to elucidate the conceptual links between the qualities of “urban third places” and the capacities for “economic resilience” at the microeconomic scale of pedestrian corridors. The analysis of expert perspectives revealed that certain experience-based characteristics of urban spaces, including the potential for informal social interactions, the facilitation of pausing and voluntary presence, and the capacity for asynchronous use of the environment, exhibit the greatest conceptual alignment with dimensions of microeconomic resilience, such as activity diversification, spatial functional flexibility, and the relative permanence of local activities.

Within the research’s analytical framework, these alignments are interpreted not as direct causal relationships, but as potential capacities for understanding the economic dynamics of public pedestrian spaces. In other words, the results indicate that third-place-related qualities can, by reinforcing patterns of social presence, broadening the scope of daily interactions, and providing diverse contexts for space utilization, create conditions for the formation and continuation of microeconomic activities along pedestrian corridors.

Accordingly, this research, by presenting a prioritized

conceptual framework, has endeavored to formulate the mechanisms linking third-place characteristics with economic resilience capacities at the scale of urban pedestrian corridors. This framework can serve as an analytical lens for a better understanding of the relationship between experience-based qualities of public spaces and microeconomic dynamics in pedestrian-oriented environments.

From the perspective of urban planning and management, the research findings also suggest that attention to the social and experience-based layers of space—including opportunities for pausing, informal interaction, and the formation of everyday events—can provide a more accurate understanding of the functional sustainability mechanisms of pedestrian corridors. Within this framework, the design and management of these spaces can foster sustainable socio-economic dynamism by focusing beyond purely physical interventions to enhance qualities that enable the formation of collective experiences, voluntary presence, and diverse activities over time.

8.1. Analytical strategies for activating third place capacities

Based on the mediating mechanisms identified in the conceptual model, the proposed interventions can be framed within three broad analytical strategies. The aim of these strategies is not to prescribe an implementation package, but rather to clarify the latent capacities of the space for activating third-place qualities to enhance economic resilience.

1- Strategy for activating the experience economy: This strategy aligns with the model's mechanisms of "experiential consumption" and "increased duration of stay." Interventions such as temporary experience-oriented markets, thematic food corridors, and short-term educational workshops can create opportunities to combine shopping, interaction, and experience. These activities enhance the potential to transform mere consumption into lived experience, thereby fostering diverse microeconomic flows.

2- Strategy for strengthening the temporal presence cycle in space: This strategy refers to mechanisms associated with "frequency of presence" and "temporal diversity of space use." Organizing cultural events during off-peak hours, establishing temporary co-working spaces, and installing pause-and-focus stations can expand the use of space across a wider range of hours throughout the day. Such activities can reduce the pedestrian corridor's dependence on peak

times and promote a more even distribution of spatial demand.

3- Strategy for strengthening social interaction and local participation: This strategy is linked to the mechanisms of "recurrent social interactions" and "cohesion of the socio-economic network." Interventions such as participatory festivals involving local shopkeepers, interactive urban games, small-scale sports leagues, or collaborative urban agriculture activities can encourage repeated presence, strengthen a sense of belonging, and expand social relationships—factors identified in the model as drivers of economic resilience.

Taken together, these three strategies indicate that the activation of third-place potentials in pedestrian corridors is achievable through strengthening experiential, temporal, and interactive mechanisms, without interpreting these interventions as fixed or definitive implementation programs.

8.2. Policy and management suggestions to strengthen economic resilience

Based on the explanatory findings, strengthening the economic resilience of the Sarzendegi pedestrian pathway requires adopting multilayered and synergistic policies that simultaneously address physical-spatial, economic-functional, and socio-institutional dimensions. Case experience shows that one-dimensional approaches (purely physical or economic) face serious limitations in practice and provide less capacity to support microeconomic resilience compared to approaches designed within the framework of the third-place logic, focusing on continuity of presence, diversity of activity, and support for local socio-economic networks.

A) Physical-spatial policymaking (emphasis on facilitating long-term stay and presence)

1. Increasing active seating areas: The municipality should consider public seating areas not as decorative elements but as economic infrastructure. The proportion of benches, rest areas, and small stands per meter of sidewalk length should be increased to ensure long-term occupancy (Oldenburg components).

2. Facilitating temporary and adaptable uses: Revising licensing regulations for temporary stalls, small mobile cafes, and micro-cultural activities to allow greater flexibility in their deployment and relocation could create a context for more rapid activation of uses during periods of low demand or seasonality. Such arrangements would increase the space's capacity to

respond to fluctuations in demand.

B) Economic-functional policymaking (emphasis on diversification of activities and flows)

1. Allocating complementary spaces: allocating sections of the sidewalk length (Like every 200 meters) to non-commercial functions, such as local book stations, art exhibition spaces, or small offices for local associations, can foster a more diverse functional coexistence. This arrangement allows for a richer emergence of cultural, social, and economic flows at different points along the sidewalk.

2. Establishing a joint information platform between businesses: creating a joint digital platform for business owners along the sidewalk to exchange information on demand changes, introduce complementary businesses, and coordinate events can enhance transparency in the pattern of micro-income flows. Such a system will increase the capacity for synergy between micro-economic activities and strengthen the communication network among businesses.

C) Socio-institutional policymaking (emphasis on workforce sustainability and local networks)

1. Support for hosting small, self-organized events: Instead of organizing large, expensive events, the municipality can encourage businesses and residents to host small, spontaneous weekly events using small support funds (micro-grants). This type of support strengthens the sidewalk's capacity to foster a continuous flow of informal events and sustain collective activities.

2. Strengthening the presence of local labor: designing micro-scale financial or tax incentives for units that source part of their workforce from local residents can help maintain local-occupational connections and strengthen social capital at the local level. Such a policy increases the possibility of relative stabilization of the local labor force and promotes a sense of belonging to space.

Authors' Contributions

The authors contributed equally to the research and the writing of the article.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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