

Original Research Article

Enhancing Religious Tourism in Historical Urban Fabrics through Urban Design

(Case Study: Noghan Neighborhood, Mashhad)

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Abstract | The shrine of the Eighth Shiite Imam in Mashhad, the most prominent religious and pilgrimage site in Iran, attracts numerous domestic and international tourists annually. The Noghan neighborhood, with its rich historical and cultural background, is one of the most notable areas adjacent to the Razavi Shrine, continually drawing the attention of pilgrims and tourists. The implementation of renovation plans with a singular focus on the concept of pilgrimage as the primary objective, neglecting the historical and religious identity capacities of the area, has legitimized the reconstruction approach. This approach, by reducing the concept of pilgrimage and the sacred realm to a simple stay-visit point, has disregarded or eliminated many of the existing physical-functional capabilities. This study aims to articulate the concept of religious tourism as a holistic and integrative view of the capabilities of historical religious fabrics and the spatial qualities that influence them. A suitable urban design model for the historical Noghan neighborhood is presented to enhance religious tourism as an exemplary case. The research methodology is both qualitative and quantitative, and in terms of its objective, it falls under applied research. To collect data, reputable scientific sources and the opinions of urban design experts were utilized, and the results were evaluated using content analysis techniques. The research findings indicate that enhancing religious tourism through design-oriented interventions can play a win-win role in modernizing historical cities. In the derived design model, the functional, physical, movement, and accessibility dimensions of the existing urban fabric, respectively, had the most significant impact on enhancing the status of religious tourism in the historical Noghan neighborhood.

Keywords | *Urban Design, Religious Tourism, Content Analysis, Noghan Neighborhood, Historical Fabric.*

Introduction | Tourism is divided into various categories and classified based on different methods. Religious tourism has a history in all religions worldwide. Additionally, the motivation for travel can be considered the primary distinction between religious tourism and other types. In terms of the goal of religious tourism, cities that possess one or more attractions, such as pilgrimage sites, historical and cultural landmarks, diverse marketplaces, accommodation and recreational facilities, and other necessary amenities for tourists and pilgrims, are often the focus of travel.

Cultural, tourism, and historical capacities, especially in the central and historical parts of cities, serve as

attractive hubs capable of revitalizing and bringing dynamism to urban fabrics. These capacities can facilitate the development of spatial patterns of tourism, attract tourists, improve the cultural, social, and economic status of residents, and promote and develop local and regional identity and culture within the framework of urban tourism (Abbaszadeh et al., 2015, 12).

Religious tourism can be introduced as one of the oldest and most thriving types of tourism currently in the world (Ajit, 2004, 2). Religious tourism and pilgrimage have deep roots in religious beliefs and, in a specialized sense, go beyond leisure and time constraints, serving as a fundamental factor in shaping travel, creating focus, and providing cultural perspectives (Momenei et al., 2007, 14).

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According to statistics published by the World Tourism Organization, it is estimated that approximately 300 to 330 million pilgrims visit religious sites worldwide annually. This number has increased by over fifteen percent from 2019 to 2023. Based on information provided by the World Tourism Organization, more than 66 million international trips were made to the Middle East in 2022, and with the rising trend of these trips, it is predicted that this number will reach 159 million trips by 2030 (UNWTO, 2023).

Religious cities, due to their developmental nature, often possess valuable and unique historical fabrics. By historical fabrics, we mean those that, despite their age-related deterioration, contain valuable buildings, complexes, facilities, and urban infrastructure (or a combination thereof) (Sharan, 2005). Historical fabrics, with their inherent physical and cultural value, are the best indicators of urban identity, thus playing a significant and effective role in giving identity to the city. Simultaneously, the life and growth of these fabrics prevent urban identity loss and internal decay, limiting their uncontrolled expansion (Kiani et al., 2009, 121).

The activity and life of urban fabrics, especially in religious cities, often have a valuable and unique historical and cultural background, forming the basis of many existing customs and traditions. However, over time and with changes in the style and trend of physical and functional development, the role of historically significant and identity-rich buildings, spaces, and structures has diminished. This has disrupted the functional and operational processes of the fabric, reducing its attractiveness for tourism (Ghasemi Khozani, 2007).

Since religious and historical urban fabrics are often located in the city centers and encompass factors such as main and historical markets, identity-rich structures, religious and pilgrimage centers, buildings and spaces with historical backgrounds, service centers, and more, and since these factors connect as pathways to religious and pilgrimage centers, they always attract tourists, pilgrims, and travelers.

Urban design, as interdisciplinary and specialized knowledge, can use scientific tools to provide practical plans and proposals to preserve and strengthen valuable and identity-rich structures and to improve existing functions. By designing and enhancing the quality of space, it can maintain the history and identity of the fabric and present it as a foundation for attracting tourists, increasing economic, social, and physical vitality (Nazarabadian & Gahremani, 2023, 3).

The Noghan neighborhood, with its rich historical and cultural background and its proximity to the Razavi Holy Shrine complex, annually hosts a significant percentage of tourists and pilgrims who visit Mashhad to pay homage

to the Eighth Imam. Over the years, this neighborhood has not only experienced physical deterioration but also a decline in spatial, visual, social, and environmental qualities, as well as movement and access problems. Meanwhile, urban design, acting as a link between religious tourism and historical fabric, can enhance and improve the quality of urban space, transforming the historical Noghan fabric into a desirable environment for tourists and pilgrims to visit, stay, enjoy, and relax.

This study, by linking the topics of religious tourism, urban design, historical fabric, preservation of historical monuments, revitalization of parts of the pilgrimage routes to the Razavi Holy Shrine, revitalization of the main market route in the Noghan neighborhood, and enhancing tourism qualities to attract and utilize space by audiences and tourists while attempting to realize the potentials of the Noghan neighborhood in becoming a desired pathway for tourists, aims to strengthen the identity of the Noghan neighborhood and enhance its quality in line with local culture.

Given the stated problem, this research addresses the following two questions:

1. How can general approaches to urban design and planning influence religious tourism? What are the related dimensions and indicators based on the Noghan case study?
2. What are the urban design solutions to enhance religious tourism in the Noghan neighborhood?

The purpose of this research is to explain the concept of religious tourism and the spatial qualities affecting it and to present a suitable urban design model for the historical Noghan neighborhood to enhance religious tourism.

Theoretical Foundational

• Religious tourism

Religious tourism refers to the type of tourism where participants' motivation is partially or exclusively for religious reasons. It is mentioned here as a separate and distinct category, though it can also be considered a sub-group of cultural tourism. Often, a trip may have various motivations and secondary objectives (Rinschede, 1992, 52).

• Historical fabric

The central parts of cities, which often house a valuable collection of the history, culture, and identity of the community, have always attracted tourists. Given the mutual relationship between the revitalization of historical fabrics and the development of tourism, the optimal utilization of historical and cultural monuments brings cultural, physical, economic, and social benefits to the communities offering them. The historical-cultural spaces of cities reflect the traditions, thought and art styles, and

urban planning and architecture methods of their creators; thus, they attract people's attention and play a significant role in attracting tourists and investors. The economy of the historical part of the city is formed and flourished by tourism activities. Emphasizing tourism and a sustainable economy can be a desirable source for the economic exploitation of historical centers. This leads to the revitalization of historical centers and the revival of their noble and superior functions based on their capacities (Azimi & Partovi, 2012, 75).

• Urban design approaches impacting religious tourism

The term religious tourism refers to a trip with the priority of pilgrimage or visiting a religious site, along with other motivations such as recreation, sightseeing, etc. This implies that in recent years, pilgrimage and holy destinations have become multifunctional places that host many tourists and visitors from around the world. Religious tourists, after engaging in pilgrimage or visiting a religious site, spend part of their time visiting historical, heritage, architectural, cultural, or artistic values. Therefore, creating an attractive environment to draw tourists and visitors can be very effective in attracting them.

Holy and pilgrimage sites are sometimes the core of city formation, as seen all over the world and in places like Mashhad and the shrine of the Eighth Shiite Imam. In such cases, the surrounding fabric of the pilgrimage factor is often recognized as the historical and identity-rich core of the city. Preserving valuable historical and spiritual monuments in these fabrics can increase tourists' and pilgrims' motivation to visit or return. Hence, the importance of preserving and enhancing tourism environments becomes even more critical.

Urban design, as an interdisciplinary knowledge, can help elevate the status of religious tourism in historical religious fabrics by understanding the needs of tourists for a desirable space for staying, pilgrimage, and recreation, and by preserving and enhancing historical environments through design and policy proposals. The theoretical literature related to each aspect is detailed below.

- Design approach

The design approach can be examined in five dimensions: functionality and public spaces, physical form, movement and access, urban landscape, and environmental aspects.

Functionality and Public Spaces: Currently, the impact of tourism on urban structures and public spaces is significant enough that the urban tourism industry is of great importance from the perspective of urban management. This has led urban designers to conclude that enhancing the quality of spaces and creating appropriate facilities for tourists, including accommodation centers, recreational areas, and modern urban furniture and equipment, can

help maintain social interactions among local citizens. Additionally, these actions can increase the satisfaction of visitors to urban public spaces, thereby attracting tourists and providing the necessary conditions for motivating them to return (Sadeghi et al., 2016). Urban spaces are often recognized as public and open spaces. These spaces are known as environments for social interactions and creating connections among urban individuals. Therefore, the importance of these spaces in forming the public space of the city and enhancing the quality of life for citizens is significant (Pakzad, 2013). For example, parks, streets and squares, restaurants and cafes, libraries, shopping centers, cinemas, and theaters, internet cafes and cultural centers, mosques and Hosseiniyahs, exhibition centers and museums, stadiums, sports clubs, and concert halls are among the spaces that play an important role in creating social connections and cultural and recreational activities for citizens (Etemad, 2005).

Undoubtedly, each of these urban public spaces gains meaning with the presence of people, and ensuring the presence and engagement in daily activities in such spaces is crucial for the comfort, satisfaction, and welfare of citizens (Malekian et al., 2015, 240). Factors influencing the satisfaction and comfort of citizens in urban public spaces include elements such as aesthetics, diversity, novelty, sociability, comfort and landscape, permeability, interaction, richness, visual requirements, effective provision and maintenance of services and facilities, competition, specialization, exploitability, resource distribution, and appropriate urban furniture, which includes aesthetic and functional elements (Agashteh, 2000; Bahraminejad, 2003; Habibi, 2002; Rafieian & Khodaei, 2010; Seifae, 2005).

The quality of functionalities and public spaces can be considered one of the fundamental factors in improving the religious tourism experience. While the importance of pilgrimage and religious motivations for tourists is significant, other factors also play a crucial role in this regard. Providing suitable tourism services and facilities, offering diverse activities and services, providing proper guidance and information to pilgrims and tourists, and having a suitable environment for general activities can help attract and retain religious tourists. Additionally, enabling the presence of different age and gender groups and providing services that match their financial capabilities can increase the number of tourists and their repeated visits (Nazarabadian & Ghahremani, 2023, 9).

Physical Form: Urban morphology is one of the most important physical approaches to the form of a city and is defined as follows: Urban morphology is a major trend in the study of a city's form in urban geography. The word morphology means the science of form, which

examines the (shape, form, external structure, or the way of arrangement) (Mir Moqtadaei, 2006, 131). Proponents of this school of thought believe that human tendencies and values are embedded in the physical form of the city, and studying the physical form of the city implicitly means studying the human values that shaped it. Urban morphology focuses on studying the city as a physical environment but implicitly establishes a connection between urban spatial and material elements and the social and economic forces shaping them (Moudon, 2000, 2).

Cities can affect tourism development from various aspects, such as structure, physical form and morphology, cultural status, etc. (Suleiman & Mohamed, 2011). Among these, urban physical factors are highly important because they are more visible and tangible and manifest before any other aspect of the city (Ayati et al., 2016, 44). Physical factors include variables such as enclosure, beauty, and favorable landscape (Dubisch, 1995; Evans, 1998), accessibility, ancillary facilities, and a sense of tranquility (Bahrainy & Tabibian, 1998; Hashempour et al., 2014), a sense of security (Frey, 2008), place identity, and visual pleasure (Beer & Higgins, 2013; Rafieian & Khodaei, 2010). These factors can be categorized into objective and subjective dimensions.

The physical form, as an observable and understandable aspect of urban design in space, significantly impacts a religious tourist's experience. When a religious tourist enters a space, the first image that forms in their mind is the physical form of that space; therefore, the importance of entrances and behavioral patterns in this space is crucial. Adhering to the historical and identity values of the neighborhood, striving to preserve or revive valuable historical elements, and creating physical and spatial diversity can influence attracting religious tourists. Furthermore, organizing facades, preserving physical elements, and enhancing collective mental landmarks can help improve the religious tourism environment (Nazarabadian & Gahremani, 2023, 8).

Movement and Access: Today, the transportation system is an essential part of the tourism industry and a prerequisite for development in any region of the world (Currie & Falconer, 2014; Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2007; Musa & Ndawayo, 2011; Schiefelbusch et al., 2007; Szymanska et al., 2021). An efficient transportation structure increases travelers' comfort at various destinations and is essential for enjoying more recreational activities (Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2007). Tourism and transportation infrastructures are interconnected and economically beneficial (Chen et al., 2021; Haller et al., 2021; Nenavath, 2023). Tourism and transportation are not two different organizations; rather, they complement each other. Additionally, transportation is considered one of

the factors determining the attractiveness of a destination (Chew, 1987; Chon et al., 1991; Gallarza et al., 2002; Gunn, 1988; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Inskip, 1991; Martin & Witt, 1988; Naudé & Saayman, 2005; Robinson, 1976) and is the most crucial component, essentially enabling tourist access. Suitable road and transportation infrastructure is a significant factor in attracting tourists (Virkar & Mallya, 2018). Many researchers have suggested a positive relationship between transportation infrastructure and tourism activities (Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2007; Liu & Shi, 2019), directly impacting tourism development (Kanwal et al., 2020; Nazneen et al., 2019). Furthermore, tourism infrastructure positively affects residents' quality of life (Mamirkulova et al., 2020). Some studies mention that if a tourism destination lacks access, desirable tourism will not be possible (Chew, 1987; Prideaux, 2000). Access is one of the important considerations for tourism development toward innovations (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). Mobility and access infrastructure are crucial components, offering tourists the pleasure of movement and facilitating access to goods, services, activities, and destinations (Dhali & Dar, 2019).

Improving the quality of movement and access, including enhancing traffic quality in the neighborhood, ensuring proper lighting, providing suitable urban furniture for tourists and citizens, using appropriate flooring, and calming intersections to improve the quality of the street network, as well as providing transportation facilities and access to various means of transportation, can effectively meet tourists' needs (Nazarabadian & Gahremani, 2023, 10).

Environmental aspects: The environmental impacts of tourism become apparent when tourists seek unique experiences and memories in nature and destinations since tourism products are intangible and experience plays a significant role in these criteria (Foruzan, 2014). The impact of tourism on the physical environment is undeniable and has been considered for decades. However, recently this focus has shifted to specific ecosystems and the role of tourism in climate change and other related issues (McKercher, 1993). In the environmental aspects of tourism, it is crucial to emphasize the concept of sustainability and manage the use of non-renewable resources by planners (Mbaiwa, 2005). Tourism has an undeniable and significant impact on the environment, making a rational understanding of this concept necessary and useful. Misunderstanding the necessity of tourism programs by residents is considered the biggest risk in terms of development and growth. To ensure environmental sustainability in tourism, it is essential to enhance tourists' attitudes and understanding regarding natural resources and conservation (Foruzan, 2014).

Negative impacts can lead to resident dissatisfaction, resulting in an unsuitable image for the tourist destination. The impact of tourism on residents' quality of life is undeniable and should be considered in both long-term and short-term tourism planning. Notably, residents who benefit from the tourism sector and its income show higher levels of satisfaction and support. Additionally, the community structure changes with the presence of tourists and tourism growth. Residents living away from tourism areas may show high levels of dissatisfaction as they benefit less from the tourism sector and its development (Tosun, 2002).

Environmental qualities play a significant role in determining religious tourism destinations. Enhancing these qualities has always been a primary concern. An environmentally desirable setting includes appropriate vegetation that is suitable for the climate, suitable sound quality in the area, standard climatic and environmental conditions, and proper environmental monitoring and management (Nazarabadian & Ghahremani, 2023, 12).

Urban Landscape: The tourism landscape dimension is a complex, relativistic, and dynamic structure (Gallarza et al., 2002). The landscape of a desirable tourist site relies on two components: cognitive evaluation and affective evaluation (Walmsley & Young, 1998). While the cognitive component refers to tourists' beliefs or knowledge about a destination, the affective dimensions reflect tourists' or visitors' feelings toward that destination. A desirable landscape formed by these two combined components can directly increase tourists' repeated visits and their intention to recommend the destination to others (Giles et al., 2013; Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015; Qu et al., 2011). For religious sites, a positive image not only enhances personal beliefs and maintains mental health but also promotes social harmony and ensures security and stability (Homayouni, 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that maintaining or creating a favorable destination image is crucial for the sustainable development of religious tourism sites (Huang & Pearce, 2019).

In this regard, Weber et al. (2008) found that vegetation cover, uniformity of style, scale homogeneity, and symmetry are key elements of the urban landscape. Other researchers have evaluated and confirmed the following factors as influential on the urban landscape: vegetation (Cackowski & Nasar, 2003; Galindo & Corraliza, 2000), freshness and type (Hekkert et al., 2003; Nasar, 2017), order (Nasar, 1990), and the interaction between order and complexity and maintenance.

Enclosure and visual proportions, the desirability of visual qualities, and the organization of dark and hidden corners can be considered three significant factors in enhancing the status of religious tourism through urban design in historical fabrics (Nazarabadian & Ghahremani, 2023, 11).

- Planning approach

The planning approach can be examined in two dimensions: tourism management and social aspects.

Tourism Management: The characteristics of a tourist destination, including local attractions, cultural-identity factors, and welfare factors, are considered determining factors in attracting and retaining religious tourists. Welfare factors such as healthcare services, ease of currency exchange, suitable routes and transportation, diverse and appropriate food supplies, suitable and economical accommodation conditions, and other related factors collectively provide for the welfare of tourists in a place. In the tourism process, the destination usually attracts tourists with multiple attractions, including scientific, cultural, and historical sites, shrines, beautiful and diverse nature, communication facilities, shopping markets, and recreational and accommodation facilities. In other words, tourism is the result of the compatibility of various factors, each of which has significant impacts on the flow of tourism; therefore, welfare factors are also of great importance. Security and tourism are two interrelated factors with a direct relationship. Without security, travel does not occur, and focusing on tourism in an insecure environment is futile. This shows that security is one of the most important factors in tourism development worldwide (Pourang et al., 2020, 179).

The views of local residents towards the presence of pilgrims and tourists, attention to tourism-related research, and the education and cultural promotion of religious tourism among different social groups are considered three important and fundamental factors in improving and developing religious tourism through urban planning in historical contexts (Nazarabadian & Ghahremani, 2023, 13).

Social aspects: Religious tourism is considered one of the types of tourism that has a direct and close connection with pilgrimage and ritual ceremonies. One of the main aspects of religious tourism development is the arrangement of the urban space system. In this context, the components of social capital, with their performance, contribute to the organization of urban spaces and thus promote religious tourism. Enhancing the quality of a desirable religious tourism environment, when combined with the levers of social capital, can impact tourism development. The three main indicators of trust, participation, and social cohesion affect the prosperity of religious tourism and have a meaningful relationship with the spatial organization, functioning continuously with each other. Thus, the existing social capital can be leveraged in controlling and managing urban space, making it more people-oriented and providing more services for religious tourists (Daviran & Ahmadi, 2020, 209).

Table 1. Research background. Source: Authors.

Source	Research Title	Summary of Research Findings
Domestic Experiences	Abdood et al. (2021) Revitalization of Historical Fabrics with a Tourism-Oriented Placemaking Approach: Case Study of Central District of Urmia	The results indicate that creating places with a tourism-oriented placemaking approach not only boosts economic prosperity but also strengthens urban cultural and artistic features. This, in turn, increases the sense of place attachment, reinforces urban and citizen identity, revives historical and old fabrics, and creates an attractive environment for domestic and foreign tourists.
	Daviran & Ahmadi (2020) Effects of Urban Spatial Systematization on the Reproduction of Religious Tourism through Social Capital Mediation (Case Study: Tasu'a Evening Ceremony in Zanjan)	The results show that Ashura ceremonies, as a main aspect of religious tourism, play a significant role in the religious beliefs and minds of people. Urban spatial systematization is one of the influential factors in the development of religious ceremonies to enhance religious tourism. Therefore, social capital indicators, by their function, organize urban spaces and promote the reproduction of religious tourism.
	Pourang et al. (2020) Identifying Factors Affecting the Attraction and Retention of Religious Tourists in the Metropolis of Mashhad with a Data-Based Approach	The findings indicate that tourism in Islamic culture and civilization is deeply intertwined with the thoughts and beliefs of Muslims. It is considered a profitable industry internationally and a suitable way to generate income and solve economic problems at local, regional, national, and international levels.
	Akbari et al. (2021) Interpretive Structural Modeling of Factors Affecting the Development of Religious Tourism in Iran with a Foresight Approach	The results show that religious tourism is one of the most common forms of tourism in the world. Industry experts believe that religious tourism, due to Iran's unique cultural and religious position, has much potential for growth and development compared to other countries.
	Heidari et al. (2021) A Network Approach to Analyze Religious Tourism Businesses and Examine Its Components Regarding Holy Shrines in Iraq	The results suggest that studying business networks in a religious tourism destination can improve understanding of the interactions occurring within or between businesses by exploring the formal and informal connections linking them.
International Experiences	Sururi (2020) Participatory Governance Actor in the Revival Program of the Old Banten Religious Tourism Area	The results showed that various factors including commitment, identification of priority needs, integration and coordination process, and participatory and institutional models support the success of regional cooperation in the revival program.
	Tomljenovic & Dukic (2017) Religious Tourism – From a Tourism Product to a Factor of Social Transformation	The results indicate that religious/spiritual tourism can truly promote individual and social transformation, mainly through the emphasis on spirituality, or by offering experiences that encourage tourists to reflect on their life and worldview. To fully realize this potential, we need to move beyond viewing religious tourism as a growing niche and consider it as a transformative force that can facilitate individual and social changes. Implications for further research are also provided.
	Yakunin et al. (2016) Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage in Russia: A Cultural-Historical Analysis	This study outlines the objectives of religious tourism as participating in religious ceremonies, self-purification, affirming one's spiritual status, worshipping sacred places, churches, relics, obtaining spiritual and physical healing, receiving spiritual energy, and secular motivations such as curiosity, beauty, architecture, etc. It defines religious tourism as tourism for scientific purposes and religious educational tourism.

Research Methodology

This research is categorized as applied research and aims to enhance religious tourism through urban design in the historical context of Mashhad. Initially, the study uses a systematic review method to analyze research from two scientific databases, Scopus and Google Scholar, relevant to the research keywords. Subsequently, content analysis is employed to identify and extract effective strategies for boosting religious tourism in historical contexts through urban design, categorized using MAXQDA 2018 software. In this methodology, interviews with two urban design experts knowledgeable in religious tourism were conducted to validate the study's findings, using the Scott method for reliability confirmation. For the theoretical literature review, scientific and library documents were utilized, aligning with many applied research approaches. Next, the extracted strategies were classified into indicators, dimensions, and approaches related to the subject. Based on experts' opinions and using the AHP (Analytic Hierarchy Process)¹ method and Expert Choice software², the importance and impact of each indicator on improving religious tourism in historical contexts were measured through pairwise comparisons. The weight of each indicator was determined based on this evaluation. In the final step, strategic plans, operational goals, and policies were proposed in alignment with the design dimensions.

• Content analysis and conceptual framework development

After reviewing the refined studies, the data were initially analyzed by categorizing open codes extracted from the studies based on the topic and style into seven categories. Figs. 2 & 3 present a comprehensive categorization, including 77 proposed strategies derived from 28 indicators across 7 comprehensive and influential dimensions within two design and planned approaches to assess desirable religious tourism in historical contexts.

Based on previous studies, the following classification can be presented as urban design factors affecting the enhancement of religious tourism in historical contexts. To assess the validity of the obtained model based on the Scott coefficient index, between 10 to 20 percent of the total sample size was randomly selected for review. For this purpose, 15 indicators were chosen using the SPSS software³ and the Random Sample extension. Subsequently, four expert reviewers coded the open codes (spatial qualities), and their agreement or disagreement is shown in Table 2.

- Calculation of observed agreement percentage

The percentage of observed agreement was calculated based on the number of matching codes. After that, according to Scott's formula⁴, the expected agreement

percentage was determined, resulting in an 80% confidence in the test for achieving reliability.

$$P_o = \frac{12 * 100}{15} = 80\%$$

- Calculation of expected agreement percentage

In this stage, the expected agreement percentage (Pe) was calculated.

$$P_e = (0.155)^2 + (0.3)^2 + (0.1)^2 + (0.05)^2 + (0.155)^2 + (0.1)^2 + (0.14)^2 = 0.18015$$

- Establishing reliability

The reliability of the model obtained is equal to $\pi=0.75$, which means that considering the seven related subsets, there is a 75% similarity in the categorization between the four coders. The agreement criterion among the four coders ranges between zero and one. When $\pi=0$, it means there is no agreement or similarity between the coders. When $\pi=1$, it means the four coders have coded identically. Given $\pi=0.75$, it can be concluded that the coding of the categories was comprehensive, ensuring the validity of the research.

$$\pi = \frac{0.8 - 0.18015}{1 - 0.18015} = 0.756052937$$

The study Area

As seen in Fig. 4, the Noghan neighborhood is located in the central area of Mashhad, within the Samen district, and adjacent to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza. Due to its high historical significance and central location, the central area of Mashhad encompasses a major portion of city and regional scale activities, leading to the formation of diverse activity zones, including Noghan Street. Over time, the historical fabric of the Noghan neighborhood has deteriorated due to neglect. Given the importance of Noghan's historical fabric as a primary center for attracting tourists from the past to the present, the need to enhance the infrastructure for attracting and accommodating tourists in this neighborhood has become more critical than ever. This study identifies the urban design factors that contribute to promoting religious tourism and then assesses the importance of each indicator in the Noghan neighborhood. After understanding the priority of the dimensions and urban design indicators to enhance religious tourism in the study area, relevant recommendations are provided.

Discussion and Findings

Based on the study conducted with both design-oriented and planning-oriented approaches on the subject, it can be stated that the proposed solutions and the indices of an optimal environment for religious tourism can be categorized into seven general dimensions:

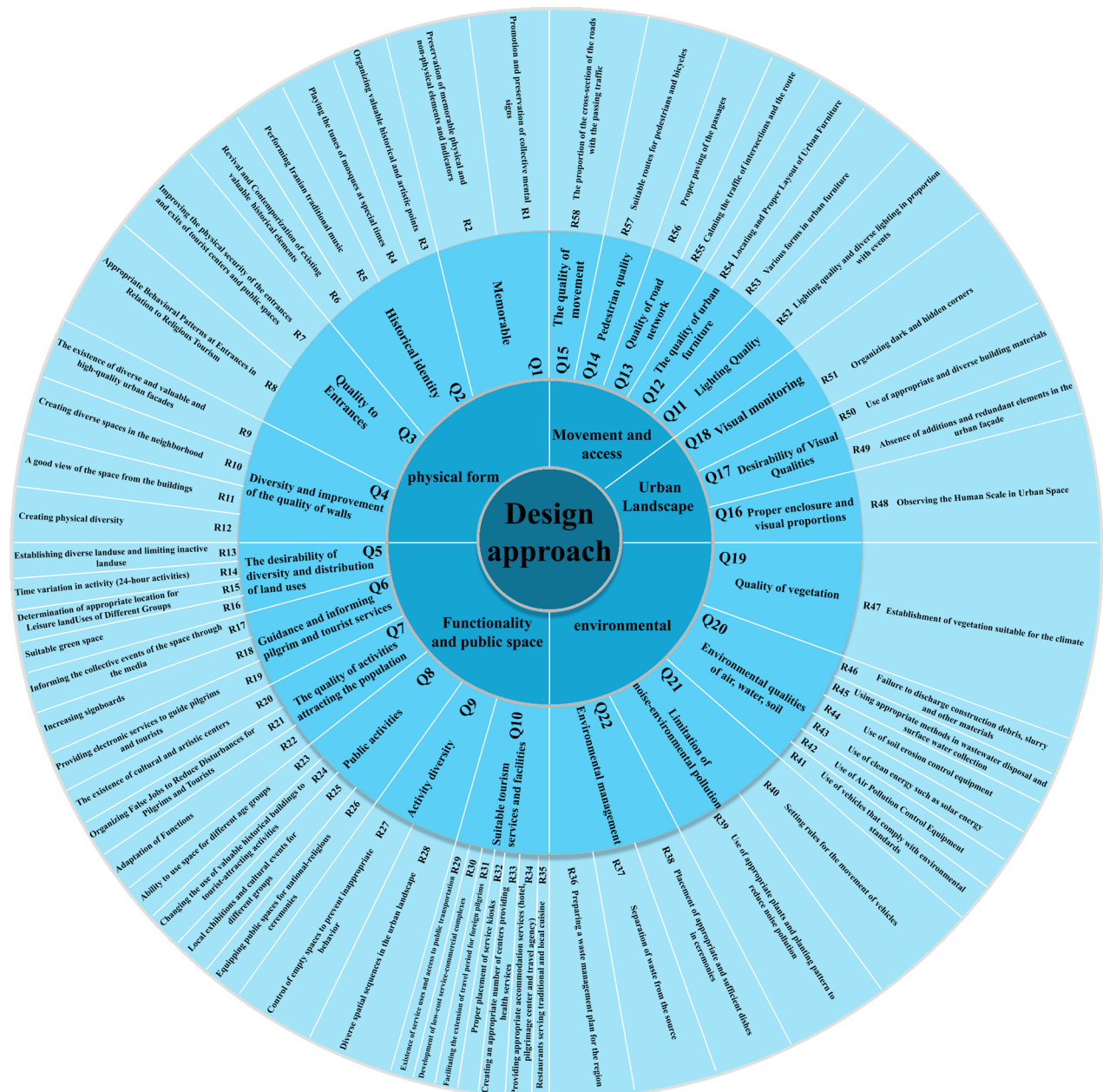


Fig. 2. Dimensions, Indicators, and Design Strategies Related to Enhancing Religious Tourism in the Noghan Neighborhood. Source: Authors.

Table 2. Agreement of Coded Sample Methods. Source: Authors.

Randomly Selected Number	Coder 1 Content Style	Coder 2 Content Style	Coder 3 Content Style	Coder 4 Content Style	Agreement (+) or Disagreement (-)
4	1	1	1	1	+
15	2	2	2	2	+
17	2	2	2	2	+
26	2	2	2	2	+
27	2	2	2	2	+
29	2	2	2	2	+
30	2	3	3	2	-
33	2	1	2	1	-
44	4	4	4	4	+
51	5	5	5	5	+
59	5	5	5	5	+



Fig. 3. Dimensions, Indicators, and Planning Strategies Related to Enhancing Religious Tourism in the Noghan Neighborhood. Source: Authors.

physical form, functional and public spaces, movement and accessibility, urban landscape, environmental aspects, tourism management, and social aspects. Urban design can directly contribute to enhancing the status of religious tourism in the urban fabric by providing optimal quality per index.

To evaluate the research indices, a pairwise comparison of the research indices was conducted using the AHP method in the Expert Choice software environment, with the opinions of experts. The ranking and the impact of each index on enhancing religious tourism in the historical fabric of the Noghan neighborhood were determined. In this assessment, two experts, after studying the indices derived from content analysis, compared the indices considering the location and characteristics of the Noghan neighborhood. Historical

religious fabrics are highly suitable and desirable settings for attracting pilgrims and tourists. Improving spatial qualities can lead to economic prosperity, increased interactions and vitality, better living conditions, increased motivation and willingness for repeated visits to the site, improved quality of services for stakeholders, increased visitor presence, and other qualities. Therefore, the significant role of urban design in improving service quality and enhancing qualities that lead to the attractiveness of historical tourism sites is increasingly felt. Attention to the impact of each index can be more effective in operationalizing the goal. Fig. 5 fully illustrates the theoretical framework of the research. The assessment indicates the significance of a design-oriented approach, which includes five dimensions: functional and public spaces, physical form,

movement and accessibility, environmental aspects, and urban landscape, with a total impact coefficient of 0.93, alongside a planning-oriented approach with an impact coefficient of 0.07. According to the conducted assessment, the dimensions of functional and public spaces, physical form, and movement and accessibility have the highest impact on enhancing religious tourism in the Noghán neighborhood. Providing suitable tourism services and facilities, creating a favorable environment for public activities, and paying attention to the historical identity and its preservation and enhancement are among the most important indices for promoting tourism in this neighborhood.

If the proposed solutions are realized, implemented, and executed, the Noghán neighborhood can be transformed into a valuable space for meeting the needs of tourists and pilgrims. The proposed strategies, operational objectives, and policies presented in Table 3 focus on improving spatial

and environmental qualities, as well as enhancing conditions for accommodation, recreation, and pilgrimage. The realization of the proposed urban design policies and their operationalization can best address the issues of religious tourism and meet their needs effectively. The strategies, operational objectives, and design policies corresponding to each quality are presented in Table 3.

Conclusion

Today, religion is one of the most prominent factors in attracting tourists, especially in pilgrimage cities. The presence of the holy shrine complex in the central and historical fabric of Mashhad can be seen as an excellent opportunity to link pilgrimage and history in attracting tourists and pilgrims. Creating an environment with suitable spatial and locational qualities can provide an ideal setting for accommodation, leisure, and pilgrimage for tourists and pilgrims. Religious

Table 3. Approaches, Dimensions, Indicators, and Proposed Strategies Related to Urban Design in the Naughan Neighborhood. Source: Authors.

Objective	Strategy	Operational Goals	Policies	Dimension
Redesign the Historical Noghán Neighborhood within the Spatial Structure of the City Center (Historical Texture) with a Religious Tourism Approach	A- Providing services for various age groups through necessary land use injections	Development of inclusive spaces in connection with the stakeholders of the area	Designing play streets in Noghán Designing learning streets to inform and engage age groups from children to youth between Noghán 16 and Kashani Street Building collective meeting points and local parks for all age and gender groups along Sharistan Street and adjacent to Imam Sadegh Clinic	Functional and Public Spaces
	B- Enhancing the quality of residence for tourists and pilgrims through various accommodation types	Developing inclusive spaces for different stakeholders among tourists and pilgrims	Constructing eco-lodges, hotel apartments, inns, and accommodation centers in the Noghán neighborhood	
	C- Enhancing the tourism image of Noghán through diverse spatial sequences	Redefining Noghán's historical roles	Reviving the old market role in the Noghán neighborhood	
	D- Assigning appropriate usage for upper floors of facades to prevent building deterioration	Enhancing mixed land uses in the area	Organizing street performances in formal structures like music houses, cultural centers, etc. Allowing live music performances in restaurants, cafes, etc. in the Noghán neighborhood	
	A- Strengthening Noghán's tourism status in the city's hierarchical structure	Defining a unique physical structure for the Noghán neighborhood	Restoring and renovating the Golden House, Noghán Bazaar Street, and historical mosques (Mehraab Khan Mosque and Pol Sangi Mosque)	Physical Form
	B- Enhancing the physical structure	Optimizing building density and patterns of mass and space fusion in deteriorated plots	Strengthening facades of land uses and historical buildings along Noghán's edges Renovating deteriorated plates to restore weakened physical identity Creating stepped setbacks from the second floor Aggregating deteriorated and small-scale plates	
	C- Enhancing the physical quality of Noghán's entrances to create identity and distinction	Strengthening identity and landmark elements of the neighborhood	Enhancing the physical structures of Mehraab Khan Mosque, Golden Historical House, Aghabozorg School, Aghigh Razavi Luxury Hotel, Negin Apartment Hotel, Komeil Hotel, and Emad Hotel Using elements, archways, or defining appropriate activities at the entrances of Kashani Street and Tabarsi Square	

Rest of Table 3.

Objective	Strategy	Operational Goals	Policies	Dimension
Redesign the Historical Noghán Neighborhood within the Spatial Structure of the City Center (Historical Texture) with a Religious Tourism Approach	A- Utilizing various color spectrums to enhance Noghán's lighting quality	Enhancing the neighborhood's lighting quality	Lighting up hotel and inn facades at night, such as Emad Hotel, Aghigh Razavi Luxury Hotel, Komeil Hotel, and Negin Apartment Hotel	Movement and Accessibility
	B- Strengthening the movement of different transport modes	Enhancing access to the area through various public transport systems, pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle routes	Using electric vans to transport tourists and pilgrims to the Holy Shrine at the intersection of Noghán Street with Sharistan, Noghán neighborhood entrance on Kashani Street, and from Tabarsi Square to the Holy Shrine entrance Creating parking spots for motorcycles at the intersection of Noghán with Sharistan and Tabarsi Street Establishing a bicycle path in the Noghán neighborhood	
	C- Strengthening and improving Noghán's organic structure to appropriately direct traffic flows	Prioritizing the social role of the area over the traffic role	Converting Noghán Street into a shared street by replacing thoroughfares with passageways for vehicle use Using speed bumps, pedestrian crosswalks, and changing types of traffic lines at the intersection of Noghán with Sharistan and in front of the clinic Calming and defining directional paving to reduce vehicle speed at the intersection of Noghán with Sharistan	
	A- Enhancing the visual landscape by reducing visual clutter	Organizing facades along Noghán Street	Removing additional and redundant elements from facades such as air conditioners, etc. Using greenery and green roofs in buildings to enhance the visual landscape along Noghán Street	Urban Landscape
	B- Improving corner security by increasing watchful eyes	Creating a new spatial sequence in relation to the existing context	Avoiding sudden setbacks or projections Injecting appropriate functions into land uses lacking compatible functions with each spatial sequence	
	A- Using vegetation appropriate to the climate to prevent soil erosion	Enhancing the area's vegetation cover in accordance with the existing microclimate	Planting shrubs and providing adequate green spaces to prevent soil erosion	Environmental aspects

tourism stands out as a significant type among various forms of tourism worldwide. The Noghán neighborhood plays a crucial role in providing services to tourists and pilgrims. Urban design, as a connecting factor between religious tourism and the historical religious fabric, can significantly enhance religious tourism in the Noghán neighborhood by improving spatial qualities.

Enhancing the urban design qualities that impact religious tourism in Noghán, the oldest neighborhood adjacent to the Imam Reza shrine complex, can strengthen its position compared to other neighborhoods and improve its mental image in the minds of tourists, pilgrims, citizens, merchants, and residents. The study's findings indicate that promoting religious tourism can be achieved by enhancing functional and public spaces, and physical form, as well as improving movement and accessibility. The strategies outlined in Table 3 can serve as an effective process to enhance religious tourism through urban design.

The proposed solutions not only improve spatial and

locational qualities but also increase job opportunities for all local groups, especially youth, and women, foster positive and constructive interactions between tourists, pilgrims, and the local community, enhance the sense of belonging among tourists and pilgrims, encourage re-visiting, boost residents' morale in attracting and hosting them, elevate the local community's cultural level, create economic and social welfare, attract investors to local projects, retain old residents, and encourage the return of migrant residents to the fabric, improve the quality of life, and ultimately ensure the local community's satisfaction with living conditions. Naturally, examining this topic in other historical neighborhoods of Mashhad and other religious cities in the country can refine, verify, and generalize the findings of this study.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the conduct of this research.

Endnotes

1. Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP): This is a decision-making method. The term AHP stands for Analytical Hierarchy Process. The first step in AHP is selecting criteria. Then, based on the identified criteria, the candidates are evaluated.
2. Expert Choice Software: Expert Choice is software for the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), first proposed by Thomas L. in 1980. It is based on pairwise comparisons. This process is called hierarchical because the decision-making process starts from the organization's goals and strategies and expands to identify and evaluate different decisions.
3. SPSS: SPSS stands for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. In

short, it is a Windows program that receives various information (such as survey data), analyzes it, and produces tables and charts.

4. Scott's Pi Reliability Coefficient: This is a measure for assessing the validity of qualitative analysis. This index was presented by William Scott (1995) to measure the reliability of coders in qualitative analysis. Scott's pi corrects for chance agreement in coding. The reliability coefficient estimates the chance agreement using an average distribution-based approach. This index assumes that evaluators participate in a chance-based process to determine whether to categorize each code randomly or non-randomly.

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