

Original Research Article

Bāghshahr: An Overlooked Potential in the Tourism Development of Natanz

(The Necessity of Moving Beyond the Commodification of the Cultural Landscape in Tourism Development and Emphasizing the Concept of Place)*

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Abstract | Natanz, a Bāghshahr (Garden City) born from the historical interrelationship between humans and nature within the valley-shaped landscape enclosed by the Karkas Mountains, embodies a distinctive landscape identity for this territory. Considering the city's unique natural characteristics and cultural landscape, Natanz possesses significant potential for attracting visitors, and tourism has long been viewed as a strategy for enhancing urban livability. However, the city as it stands today cannot be regarded as a tourism-oriented city. At the same time, given the authorities' efforts to promote tourism development, Natanz is currently exposed to various pressures related to tourism expansion. Therefore, before implementing any new development plans, it is essential to critically examine the reasons for the inefficiency of previous projects to address past shortcomings and mitigate existing deficiencies in future strategies. This article seeks to investigate the essence of Natanz's Bāghshahr identity through a holistic and ontological approach, employing concepts such as place (*makān*) to explore the underlying causes of inefficiency in tourism development across three levels: Area of Intervention: Revitalization of Urban Spaces, Area of Influence: Empowerment of the Local Community, and Area of Comprehensive: The Dominance of National Development over the City. Furthermore, it aims to interpret the role of Natanz's Bāghshahr character in shaping the city's tourism development trajectory. This study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology, grounded in field-exploratory observation and library-based research. It employs the walking approach, recognized as a distinctive method in landscape research, to investigate the subject matter. This study reveals that the tourism development of Natanz, instead of being grounded in an understanding of the urban landscape, has resulted from spatial reductionism, heritage commodification, and the absence of a multidimensional and integrative perspective. In other words, tourism development has approached the city not as a holistic place, but through a fragmented and object-oriented lens, one that perceives heritage merely as a museum exhibit, detached from the cultural landscape and the unique characteristics of Natanz. Moreover, rather than viewing tourism as a strategic tool for enhancing urban livability and the local community's well-being, heritage has been treated as a commodity serving the tourism industry. For a city like Natanz, a historic Bāghshahr rich in cultural manifestations of this place-making element, an ontological understanding of its Bāghshahr identity can significantly contribute to the effectiveness of tourism development and, consequently, to the enhancement of the city's landscape quality.

Keywords | *Tourism development, Place, Place-based tourism, Natanz, Bāghshahr.*

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Introduction Natanz is a manifestation of its cultural landscape, appearing as a green gem at the foot of the Karkas Mountain on the edge of Iran's desert, adorned with numerous gardens. Culture is the identity-forming element of a territory, resulting from human life during social and historical evolution. The cultural landscape, as a subsystem of the landscape, arises from the interaction between humans and nature over time, encompassing manifestations such as arts, laws, rituals, and others (Mansouri, 2020, 5), and it is the distinguishing feature of one nation.

Culture is a secondary adaptive mechanism developed by humans for survival, and in today's rapidly evolving world, development has become an inevitable process for humankind. A necessary condition for the effectiveness of development projects is the preservation of cultural landscapes, as they embody the unique characteristics of each territory (Rajab Bojani, 2024). In this regard, culture in tourism, as a generator of systems of meaning and epistemology, functions as a key conceptual framework (Mansouri, 2020, 5). The landscape of Natanz has resulted from continuous human interaction with nature within a valley surrounded by the Karkas Mountains throughout history, transforming it into a Baghshahr. An initial encounter with Natanz reveals its distinctive identity as a valley, consequently forming the territory's unique cultural landscape.

Natanz's unique natural and landscape features distinguish it from its neighboring desert territories. This distinction highlights the city's potential to become a prominent tourist destination. On the other hand, the Comprehensive Tourism Plan of Isfahan Province, with official statements and related reports, reflects institutional and managerial efforts to promote tourism development in the city. However, current observations reveal the stagnation of tourism activities and the weakening of urban vitality, with only a few restored sites barely sustaining visitor interest. This research seeks to analyze the underlying causes of the city's underperformance by focusing on the potential of Natanz as a Baghshahr. It appears that in the tourism-related planning initiatives for this city, insufficient consideration has been given to its natural context, cultural fabric, and identity foundations. As a result, the city has been commodified, serving as a means to satisfy tourism demand rather than functioning as a genuine cultural destination.

Significance of Research

In light of its natural and cultural landscapes, the city of Natanz, recognized as a Baghshahr, holds distinctive potential to evolve into a major tourist destination. Municipal management policies promote tourism development at multiple scales, from local to intermediate, and leverage its economic benefits within the region (see تصویب اجرای ... , 2025). Even local religious leadership has emphasized tourism as a

primary solution for the city's revitalization (Ahmadi, 2025). A diagnostic assessment of tourism development in Natanz is essential to prevent hasty managerial interventions and adopt more effective strategies. A critical analysis of tourism's positive and negative impacts, through an ontological and epistemological lens, supported by interdisciplinary inquiry and by addressing the existing gaps in current programs, is necessary for safeguarding the cultural landscape and avoiding an overly subjective interpretation of it. Accordingly, this study seeks to interpret and evaluate these dimensions through an ontological framework to contribute to a deeper understanding of tourism development in Natanz.

Research Question

Main Question: Why has tourism development in the Baghshahr of Natanz remained ineffective despite its distinctive natural and cultural characteristics as a valley landscape?

Sub-question: What role does the concept of Baghshahr, as a landscape and place-making identity of Natanz, play in shaping tourism development in the city?

Research Method

This study employs a descriptive analytical approach grounded in field exploration and library-based research while adopting the walking method as a distinctive tool in landscape research.

The walking approach, regarded as one of the most revealing methods for landscape exploration, seeks to uncover the essence of place through direct observation and embodied experience. In this research, by walking through and experiencing Natanz as a place, and synthesizing these insights with library-based studies, the underlying causes of inefficiency in tourism development and the existing gaps are critically examined.

Research Background

Numerous studies have addressed the significance of place and landscape in tourism development. Smith (2006) emphasizes that heritage should not be commodified through tourism, but rather serve as a means for redefining cultural identity, empowering local communities, and supporting urban development. He argues that heritage must be regarded as a comprehensive urban development strategy, rather than a purely economic product. Similarly, Mansouri (2020) stresses the need to focus on tourism of culture, as opposed to cultural tourism, highlighting the importance of the ontology of culture beyond its mere epistemological dimensions. Chen et al. (2021) conceptualize placeness and sense of place as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond physical or nostalgic aspects to encompass historical, economic, and cultural dimensions;

they also propose theoretical frameworks for analyzing how contextual characteristics shape tourists' experiences. Gholampour et al. (2021) highlight pathways' tangible and intangible dimensions and their profound role in human life, emphasizing that improving pathway quality, preserving the territorial landscape, and realizing cultural tourism are interrelated goals.

More specifically, regarding the role of Baghshahr in tourism, Khamedi & Rezvani (2012) identify the Baghshahr identity as a potential asset for attracting tourists. However, their study's exclusive focus on agricultural characteristics and neglect of other tangible and intangible dimensions represents its main limitation.

Although several studies have been conducted on Natanz County, they have primarily focused on rural development or specific sectors such as handicrafts. Consequently, previous research lacks a holistic and multidimensional perspective on tourism and the city of Natanz.

Research Literature

• Development

Development in the human-made secondary world is an inevitable process. Etymologically, the term derives from the Arabic root *tawassa'*, meaning "to expand" (Gharib, 1977, 306), and in the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Cambridge University Press, 2006) it is defined as "a change that results in progress." This suggests that development, by its very nature, is inherently progressive and represents a necessity in a world moving forward. Development is one of those concepts whose meaning remains contested. The evolution of this notion reflects a range of perspectives, from atomistic, sectional, and colonialist views to the paradigm of sustainable development. However, it remains unclear whether the idea of sustainable development genuinely addresses all dimensions of life or is still confined to environmental concerns and thus continues to carry a reductionist view. For development to be effective and beneficial, it must correspond to each context's territorial capacities and cultural landscape characteristics (Mansouri, 2023a). In essence, development is a multidimensional effort to enhance the quality of life through a comprehensive approach across all aspects of human existence.

• Tourism

Etymologically, tourism is derived from the word "tour," meaning to travel and journey, and originates from the Greek word "turns," signifying to go around and make a round trip between the destination and the origin (Papoli Yazdi & Saqal, 2006). In Webster's, Longman's, and Larousse dictionaries, tourism is defined as travel and recreation; that is, tourism is intrinsically linked with leisure, enjoyment, and satisfaction. Tourism is a socio-economic

activity and one of the most essential strategies for sustainable urban development globally (Akbari, 2018, 5). The concept of tourism is controversial, but examining its evolutionary path attests to a transition from an atomistic approach to a holistic perspective in tourism, subsequently leading to the formation of sustainable tourism; however, its definition remains shrouded in ambiguity. "Urban tourism is a category of tourism focused on touring and experiencing the city, which, with the development of post-industrialism, enhances the comprehensive capacity of cities" (Jafari Mehrabadi, 2014, 43). Emphasis on place and landscape in tourism development is an approach toward achieving sustainability goals.

• Place

Place is the result of meaning-attribution to objective and physical elements. Place is a whole to which space is indebted for its being (Norberg-Schulz, 1985/2002; Heidegger, 2015). Mansouri (2023b) considers place to be the product of the observer's interpretation of the environment, thus making it a dynamic and meaning-conferring phenomenon. Marc Augé (1992/2008) defines place as the superimposition of three parameters: identity, relation, and history, the characteristics of which can be analyzed using three other parameters: form (or physical configuration), function, and meaning. Based on the landscape approach and the belief in the objective-subjective nature of reality, which precludes the separation of the objective from the subjective, this research analyzes place based on two attributes: physical-meaningful and functional-meaningful (Fig. 1). Placeness in tourism development, owing to its multi-faceted perspective, fosters sustainability in tourism.

• Bāghshahr (Garden City)

Bāghshahr represents an expression of the Iranian Cultural Landscape, arising from the symbiotic relationship between human life and the natural environment of Iran throughout history. The elements of traditional Iranian cities were fundamentally formed by a water infrastructure system, within which the Iranian Garden (Bāgh-e Irānī) played a pivotal role in structuring the landscape of these cities. It also embodied the conceptual manifestation of the Iranian Garden City or "Shārbāgh" (City-Garden), which was systematically formed through the harmonious coexistence of water, vegetation, and architectural texture (Sheybani & Esmaeldokht, 2016, 14).

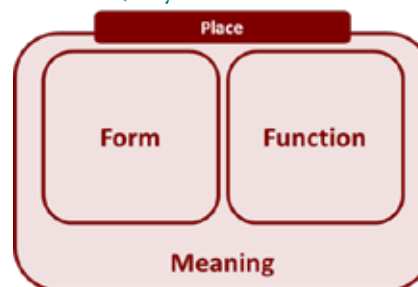


Fig. 1. Components Shaping Place.

Source: Authors based on Augé, 2008; Tuan, 1977.

The Bāghshahr may thus be understood as a system of interconnected gardens. The introduction of the term Garden City into academic discourse dates back to 1903, with Ebenezer Howard's urban planning theory proposed as a response to the challenges of post-Industrial Revolution cities. However, Howard's concept was confined mainly to "green towns," overlooking the deeper cultural and metaphysical dimensions inherent in the Iranian understanding of Bāghshahr. Consequently, it differs essentially and semantically from the traditional Bāghshahr attributed to Iranian cities (Etazadi, 2016, 65). Scholarly studies indicate that cities in Iran have been intrinsically intertwined with gardens (*ibid.*, 72). The Iranian Garden is, therefore, the foundational element in the formation of the Bāghshahr Sheybani & Esmaeeldokht, 2016, 14). The first Iranian city is believed to have been "Varjamkard", which, according to mythological accounts, was itself conceived as a paradisiacal garden (Asil, 1996). Although the compound term Bāghshahr does not explicitly appear in classical Persian literature, the historical and symbolic interconnection between garden and city remains distinctly traceable.

*He saw a city in that spacious fortress wide,
Full of gardens, courts, tall halls, and palaces of pride.
(Ferdowsi, n.d.)*

Mirfendereski (2004) is the first scholar to have employed the term Bāghshahr in reference to historical Iranian cities. He examines the historical interrelation between the city and the garden. He considers the garden the "workshop for city design" and the "precursor of the city," arguing that it formed the fundamental structure of Iranian urban form. He further introduces the notion of "Bāgh andar Bāgh" (garden within garden) as a conceptual model for understanding the spatial organization of historical Iranian cities. The Bāghshahr represents one of the principal paradigms of Iranian urban planning during the Safavid period (Shahcheraghi, 2010). The Bāghshahr goes beyond the notion of a green city abundant in gardens; it is a city whose spatial organization has been fundamentally formed and structured by the presence and logic of gardens. (Etezadi, 2016). As place-making elements, Bāghshahrs embody formal-semantic and functional-semantic characteristics of place. The formation of Natanz, based on the concept of Bāghshahr, has created a favorable microclimate within the arid climate of Iran's central plateau. This environmental condition has contributed to shaping the city's distinctive landscape identity as perceived by its inhabitants and visitors.



Fig. 2. Natanz as a valley and consequently a Bāghshahr, enclosed by mountains. Photo: Negin Rajab Bojani, 2025.

Case Study: The city of Natanz

A Brief Exploration of the Essence and Existence of Natanz

The city of Natanz emerged from human life's coexistence with the Karkas Mountains' foothills throughout history. This city's life-giving element is the Karkas Mountain range (Maghsoudi, 2017), whose unique topography and facilitation of water movement have generated a distinctive microclimate within the arid expanse of central Iran. This environmental condition has made the land conducive to forming gardens and developing a Bāghshahr within the desert region. The influence of these mountains on the life of the inhabitants is so profound that they have emphasized its importance by attributing specific names to the surrounding peaks (Fig. 2). The triad of water, vegetation, and sacred architecture, which reflects the symbolic and spiritual significance of water in the collective consciousness of the inhabitants, has formed the ritual landscape (*manzar-e āyīnī*) of the city. Over time, however, disregard for the intrinsic value of the Bāghshahr, its distinctive characteristics, and the ecological and cultural significance of the mountains has led to degradation. The mountain has suffered exploitation by industrial extractive activities, while the city has been subjected to modernist, grid-based urban planning interventions. These developments have negatively altered the city's physical and functional dimensions and undermined Natanz's semantic and identity values as a historic Bāghshahr (Fig. 3).

• Tourism development pathology in Natanz

The tourism industry results from human interaction and engagement with diverse cultures. Depending on the approaches adopted throughout various stages, from planning to implementation at the national, regional, and local levels, tourism can generate a wide range of positive and negative impacts on cities. This study analyzes the challenges and vulnerabilities of tourism development in Natanz. Drawing upon field observations, the discussion focuses on three thematic domains identified concerning Natanz's territorial and environmental characteristics. This analysis will derive indicators and criteria to define place-based tourism parameters within the context of the Bāghshahr of Natanz.

- Area of intervention: Revitalization of urban spaces

Fragmented Tourism (Point-Based Tourism): According to field observations, Natanz tourism primarily focuses on restoring a few historical points and establishing several eco-lodges. Once, Natanz encompassed lively and bustling spaces, yet travelers no longer visit them today. The destinations

remain in place, but the routes connecting them have become disjointed and fragmented. This fragmentation stems from a lack of attention to integrated urban development rooted in the city's spatial characteristics. The development of tourism in Natanz should be oriented toward the experience of the city itself, rather than being limited to visits to scattered destinations. Currently, tourism in Natanz follows a point-based pattern, although the essence of Natanz as a Bāghshahr lies in the integration of gardens within the spatial system of the city. In other words, one of the defining characteristics of a Bāghshahr is the role of the garden within the formal, functional, and semantic fabric of the city (Sheybani & Esmaeldokht, 2016).

The significance of routes, strolling, and path-based tourism, particularly in a city whose unique identity is formed by its garden alleys (kūche-bāghs) and the fusion of urban and garden spaces, has been neglected in the current tourism approach to Natanz. The disregard for Natanz's Bāghshahr character, along with the lack of attention to the importance of routes, sequential experience, and the city as an integrated whole, has resulted in the ineffectiveness of tourism development in this city (Fig. 4).

Ubiquitous and Imitative Tourism: Natanz, as a Bāghshahr, is the product of the systematic coexistence of three fundamental elements: water, vegetation, and architectural form. This composition demonstrates that both the soft and hard landscapes of the city's vernacular environment can be critically examined. For instance, the city's water

system, native plant species, and the architectural style of its buildings represent manifestations of its cultural landscape, all derived from the Shārbāgh-like nature of the city. However, field observations reveal that in the treatment of the city's most significant urban node, the forecourt (jolokhān) of the Jāme'h Mosque, design interventions have been limited to generic, tourist-oriented, and imitative schemes, disregarding the site's spatial characteristics and its multifunctional role. These interventions have focused merely on museum-like physical preservation of the mosque and its forecourt, without consideration for their living urban context. Neglecting the distinctive attributes of Natanz as a Bāghshahr and reducing design efforts to superficial greening of spaces and imitative borrowings from ubiquitous tourist destinations has overshadowed the local and place-based tourism identity of Natanz (Fig. 5).

- Area of influence: Empowerment of the local community

Urban tourism or City touring provides one of the most effective opportunities for interaction between visitors and host communities. Local communities play a key role in tourism development (Aref, 2011). Accordingly, assessing community capacity and empowerment is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving sustainable tourism. The lack of community empowerment and the limited understanding of how tourism development affects local communities are among the main reasons for the ineffectiveness of tourism development in cities of the Global South (Moscardo, 2008).

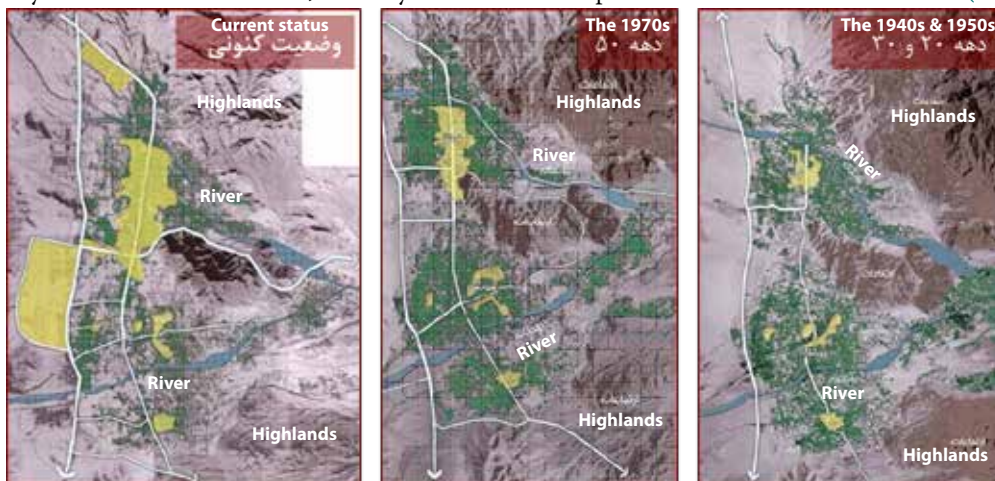


Fig. 3. The evolution process of the Bāghshahr of Natanz. Source: Koshapaydar Consulting Engineering, 2009.



Fig. 4. Left: The historic Bāghshahr of Natanz in the 1970s. Right: The present-day kūche-bāghs (garden alleys) of Natanz, reflecting its Bāghshahr character and the necessity of integrating this quality into place-based tourism development. Source: Authors.



Fig. 5. Left: Historical photograph of the mosque courtyard, illustrating its role as an urban node within the Bāghshahr. Right: Implementation of imitative design interventions lacking consideration for the spatial and landscape characteristics of the site. Source: Authors.

The relationship between tourists and the local community is dialectical in nature: the behavioral patterns of the local community, the prevailing spatial atmosphere, and the hospitality of the host society constitute intangible dimensions of tourism that directly influence visitors, while in turn, the local community is reciprocally affected by the presence and behavior of tourists (Vazin & Sheikhi, 2021, 21).

The inhabitants of Natanz, who once perceived their city as the outcome of an intrinsic union between gardens and urban structures across multiple dimensions, no longer recognize their own identity; instead, they have reduced their relationship with the city to a subjective and commodified use of it within the realm of tourism. The lack of awareness of their own existential essence, and at times their detachment from the green and natural roots of the city, has led to a form of alienation. However, a renewed understanding of the city as a Bāghshahr could once again foster a profound sense of belonging. Natanz is rich in activities and events that have originated from its Bāghshahr character, such as the Mulberry Harvest Festival (Tūt-tekānī) and the Apricot Festival, which together have formed the collective memory of its people and, consequently, the landscape identity of Natanz. These events have the potential to reconnect not only tourists but also residents with the city's natural and cultural landscape. Such events could serve as significant capacities for event-based tourism in Natanz; however, they have been largely overlooked in the city's current tourism practices. Strengthening these events would enhance collective memory, contribute to the revitalization of the landscape, and consequently reinforce the sense of place and belonging among the city's inhabitants (Fig. 6). Strengthening the sense of belonging to the city is one of the essential prerequisites for enhancing the urban vitality of Natanz (Habibi et al., 2018). To achieve this goal, it is necessary to move beyond the mere physical restoration of urban elements and to revive the metaphysical dimensions of the Bāghshahr as part of the experiential perception of the city. At the same time, the public understanding of how to engage with and apply their cultural heritage, which itself originates from the placeness (makanīyat) of Natanz, requires reformation. The people of Natanz, whose artistic expressions historically emerged from living in harmony with the valley's natural environment, have now limited themselves to the commodification of their cultural



Fig. 6. Tūt-takānī (Mulberry Harvest Festival) as one of the potentials of Natanz Bāghshahr for transformation into a tourism destination. Photo: Shaghayegh Baqerzadeh, 2025.



Fig. 7. The necessity of enhancing the legibility of the cultural expressions of Natanz Bāghshahr within the city's core through the way local communities engage with art. Photo: Shaghayegh Baqerzadeh, 2025.

manifestations, such as pottery and carpet weaving (Fig. 7). Within the city, particularly in the bazaar, which once served as the beating heart of urban life, this culture is now barely discernible except in a few small stalls. The art of Natanz has been displaced into luxury boutiques within modern malls, rendering it detached from the authentic urban experience. The identity of the Bāghshahr remains alive only when it is legible in the city's physical and cultural expression. Consequently, the development of tourism in Natanz necessitates the enhancement of residents' sense of belonging, the cultivation of their awareness regarding the utilization of the cultural landscape, and the readability of the Bāghshahr

characteristics of Natanz. Such place-based development can, in turn, positively influence the overall quality of the urban environment.

- Area of comprehensive: The dominance of national development over the City

Despite its unique landscape characteristics, the landscape of Natanz has remained overshadowed by the national development agenda, particularly due to the presence of the Natanz Nuclear Facility. The proximity of nuclear sites to urban areas poses one of the most critical challenges to urban development, especially in tourism. The name Natanz has become intertwined in international media with the country's nuclear program and security-related incidents. Consequently, before being recognized for its heritage and natural landscape values, the city has become associated with terms such as "nuclear site," "military attack," and "conflict zone." The military strike by the United States and Israel in June 1404 [May/June 2025] stands as evidence of the degree of risk and tension surrounding this site within the region. The main factors influencing the relationship between the nuclear facility and tourism in the surrounding cities, particularly in Natanz, can be summarized as follows:

- Security and Environmental Issues: Potential risks of radioactive radiation, environmental pollution, and the possibility of nuclear incidents are among the primary concerns of residents and tourists in cities adjacent to nuclear sites (Kaya & Do an, 2023). These concerns have contributed to the decline in tourism demand in Natanz.

- Negative Attitudes of Local Communities and Tourists: Observations indicate that instead of perceiving the nuclear power plant as an economic advantage or a source of energy supply, residents tend to regard it as an environmental threat and a barrier to tourism development. Kaya & Do an (ibid.) similarly conclude that rather than serving as opportunities for local communities, nuclear power plants often act as obstacles to tourism, contributing to pollution and ecosystem disruption, a condition that Natanz currently faces. To this day, the nuclear facility has been regarded as a deterrent factor for tourism in Natanz. This issue has been intensified by the atomic strike carried out by the United States and Israel, which has had severe repercussions for the region.

- Impact on the Mental Image and Destination Brand: According to Rapoport (1982/2013), the mental image is "a holistic perception that remains in a person's memory even after leaving the environment, as it encompasses the individual's engagement with the totality of the city." Nuclear sites are typically perceived as symbols of danger, disaster, and threat, which can distort people's mental image of a destination (Rush-Cooper, 2019). Consequently, despite their distinct natural and cultural potentials, nearby cities such as Natanz are negatively affected and perceived as less desirable tourism destinations.

- Lack of Awareness: Tourism in cities surrounding nuclear facilities, especially those that have experienced attacks, requires professional management, education, and comprehensive communication to inform residents and tourists about safety measures (Beeton, 2005). Given the recent attacks and the associated risks of radiation exposure, the city of Natanz urgently needs to adopt such an approach. The absence of these measures remains one of the significant weaknesses of its current tourism system.

The impact of the nuclear power plant on the landscape of Natanz may not be visually apparent; however, in the psychological and perceptual dimensions, it has generated a global image of the region as a dangerous and inaccessible area, which has become a significant obstacle to the development of tourism in this historic city (Fig. 8). This negative perception has discouraged tourists from visiting the ancient city with its rich cultural heritage, causing the unique tourism potential of Natanz to fade under the shadow of security concerns and environmental pollution. More importantly, the people of Natanz have always been advocates of peace and dialogue. Known for their hospitality and tranquil disposition, they aspire to transform their city into a center of tourism and cultural exchange, rather than a place associated with tension and anxiety. The Iranian culture of hospitality and the peace-seeking spirit of the people of Natanz are evident, for instance, in the establishment of the Global Peace Flower Garden beside the Jameh Mosque, symbolizing their message of peace and friendship to the world. Ultimately, by leveraging its potential as a Bāghshahr, Natanz can transform from a city known in the media for its security issues into an attractive



Fig. 8. Location of the nuclear site in relation to the city of Natanz. Source: Reyhaneh Nosratian based on Google Earth.

cultural and heritage tourism destination. In this place, peace-loving people welcome travelers for an authentic experience of Iranian history and culture. Achieving this, however, requires political will, appropriate investment, and long-term strategic planning.

Discussion

Tourism development in Natanz has emerged from a sectoral and one-dimensional approach. Based on the preceding analyses and the evaluation of challenges across the three identified domains, the intervention zone, the influence zone, and the comprehensive zone, the underlying causes of inefficient tourism development in this city have been identified, particularly in relation to its identity as a Bāghshahr (Fig. 9). The examination of these cases and causes reveals a commodified perception of the city and the absence of a holistic perspective toward tourism. In other words, tourism, instead of serving as a strategic opportunity for the city and a means of enhancing urban quality, has been reduced to a singular and exploitative goal. Furthermore, without taking into account the territorial and environmental capacities of Natanz, tourism planning has focused merely on its superficial identity, which over time has led to the degradation of the cultural landscape, transformation of the city’s visual character, and the erosion of residents’ sense of belonging, ultimately resulting in the decline of urban quality. Recognizing the Bāghshahr as one of the place-making elements of Natanz can serve as a transformative and restorative approach for guiding the city’s sustainable tourism development.

characteristic of Natanz, arising from the harmonious integration of the three essential elements of water, vegetation, and architecture. As one of the most emblematic expressions of Iranian civilization, the garden has formed the spatial system of Natanz, situated in a valley adjacent to the Karkas Mountains. The systematic network of gardens, serving as the natural symbols of the city, carries the collective memories of its inhabitants and contributes to the enduring identity of Natanz. An ontological exploration of the Bāghshahr of Natanz underscores the necessity of tourism development in the city, yet not in a way that transforms it into a commodified tourism product. Tourism, as a productive and generative force, can both utilize the garden-city characteristics of Natanz and, through a holistic and identity-oriented approach, prevent the city from becoming an inauthentic urban space that merely bears the name Bāghshahr without embodying its true essence beyond greenery. When guided by the principles of Bāghshahr, tourism can act as a tool for urban enhancement, contributing to improving the quality of life for the local community. Fig. 10, derived from the conducted studies, illustrates the inherent characteristics of the Natanz Bāghshahr as a place, demonstrating its potential role in promoting place-based tourism development and, consequently, in enhancing urban quality. The Bāghshahr identity of Natanz, beyond creating a pleasant microclimate in the desert and a unique landscape character, has historically provided functional and aesthetic value to the city.

Conclusion: The Bāghshahr of Natanz and Tourism Development

The Bāghshahr represents the distinctive and defining

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the execution of this research.

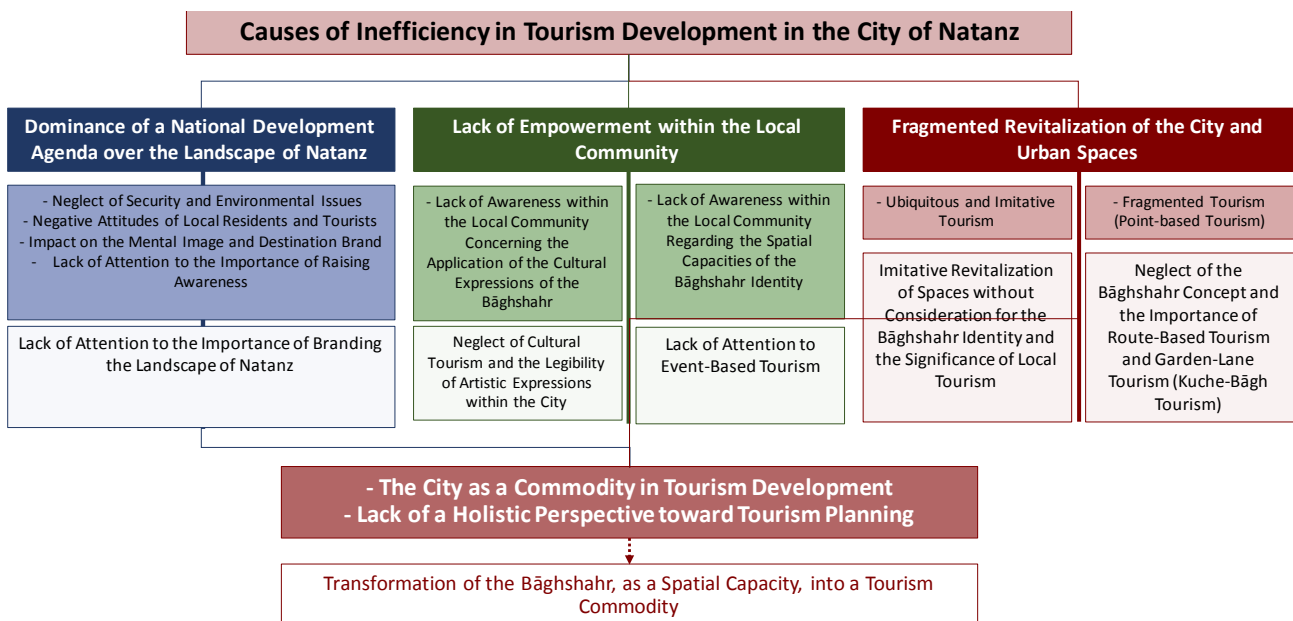


Fig. 9. Causes of the inefficiency in tourism development of the Natanz Bāghshahr. Source: Authors.

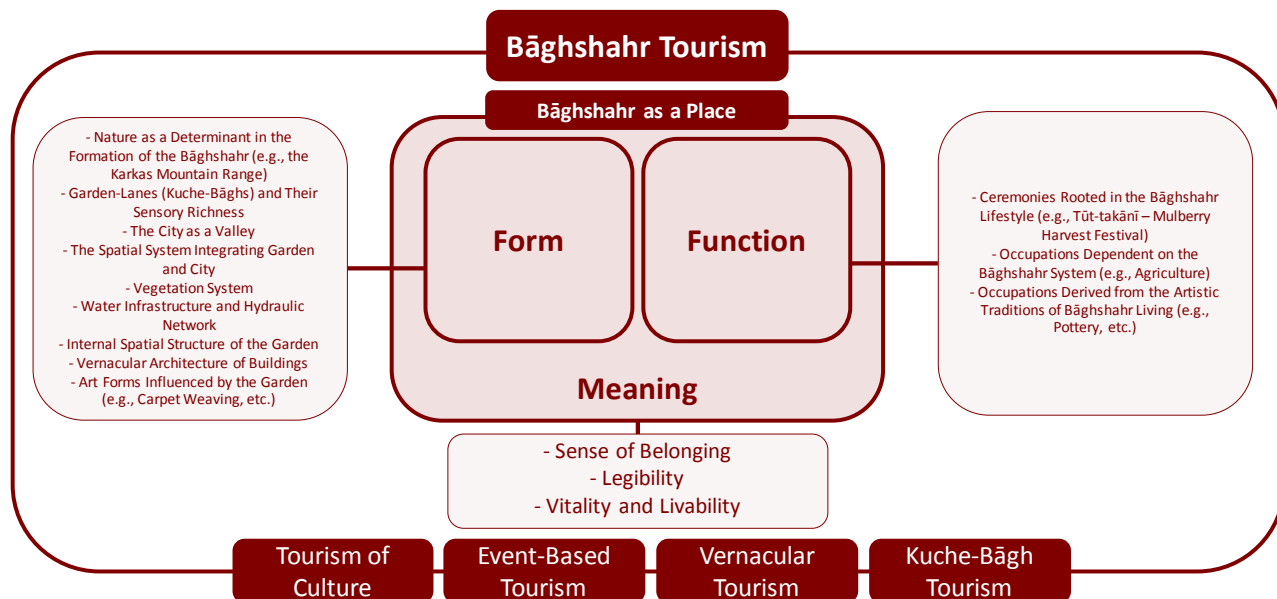


Fig. 10. Analysis of the potential of Bāghshahr as a place in the city's tourism development. Source: Authors.

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