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Exploring the principles and strategies of Islamic urban planning in organizing the fabric of pilgrimage sites (case study: the pilgrimage fabric of the holy city of Qom)

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the principles and strategies of Islamic urbanism as a normative and practical framework for organizing contemporary pilgrimage fabrics, seeking to answer the question: What are the principles and strategies of the epistemic system of Islamic urbanism for structuring contemporary pilgrimage fabrics? The case study focuses on the urban fabric surrounding the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh (SA). The research is applied in purpose and qualitative in methodology, conducted through a descriptive-analytical approach within the value-oriented Islamic paradigm. Data were collected from theoretical and jurisprudential texts, urban documents, field observations, and expert interviews, and analyzed through directed content analysis. Findings reveal that Qom's pilgrimage fabric is simultaneously influenced by two opposing forces: its sacred historical heritage and contemporary urban interventions. The interaction of these forces has led to central challenges, including weakened spatial cohesion, disruption of spatial hierarchy, reduced depth of meaning and sensory-symbolic experience, distortion of the sacred landscape and visual legibility, and functional, managerial, and economic incoherence. Spatial analysis indicates that these challenges not only diminish the quality of the pilgrimage experience but also undermine the process of producing and transmitting socio-cultural capital. Based on these findings, four strategic priorities are proposed: strengthening spatial cohesion and consolidating the sacred boundary; organizing functional pathways and pilgrimage services; reconstructing the meaningful, sensory, and symbolic experience of space; and establishing integrated management and economic transparency. Overall, the primary strategy for organizing the pilgrimage fabric should focus on creating an orderly, calm, meaningful, and human-centered environment.

Keywords

Holy City of Qom
Pilgrimage fabric
Principles of Islamic urbanism
Spatial cohesion

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1. Introduction

One of the key manifestations of Islamic urbanism is the formation of pilgrimage cities. The pilgrimage sites of Shia Muslims have played a significant role in preserving and spreading Shia Islam, functioning as cultural and religious centers that have contributed significantly to the production and transmission of Islamic knowledge. Indeed, the religious component has been a major driver in the development of Islamic cities, shaping their internal order. A shrine, as a pilgrimage destination and a sacred place, has catalyzed various socio-spatial transformations. For example, in Medina, Jerusalem, Mashhad, Karbala, and Najaf, the shrine has been the very reason for the establishment and expansion of these cities (Saeedi Razvani, 1989). Over time, with the construction of religious buildings such as mosques, Hoseiniyehs, libraries, seminaries, and bazaars around pilgrimage sites, these cities expanded and developed into major religious and pilgrimage centers.

The presence of pilgrimage sites affects the urban fabric and the everyday lives of visitors and residents across physical, functional, socio-cultural, and religious dimensions. Each pilgrimage site may embody unique features across these dimensions, and acknowledging and respecting these characteristics is essential in any urban intervention or development (Molaei, 2023, p. 301). Many of the issues observed around pilgrimage areas stem from one-dimensional perspectives and insufficient attention to the multiple significant factors influencing the urban fabric surrounding holy sites.

In some cases, changes and development in the areas surrounding pilgrimage sites have led to the violation of property rights and the displacement of local residents. Expansion and development projects for pilgrimage complexes often involve compulsory land acquisition, reduction in residential units, and an increase in rental housing, and rising dissatisfaction among inhabitants and property owners as a result of relocation and shifts in environmental conditions (Kolahi et al., 2023, p. 18). Many pilgrimage cities face shortages and inefficiencies in infrastructure and public services, severe traffic congestion, and overcrowding during peak pilgrimage seasons. In certain densely populated areas, issues of safety and public hygiene, such as environmental cleanliness and public health, are not sufficiently addressed.

It appears that the root of many of these problems lies in the absence of a comprehensive and epistemically grounded approach to Islamic urbanism. Islamic

urbanism has often been interpreted merely through symbolic or historical patterns, whereas it contains a deeper epistemic and value-based foundation that must guide urban planning and decision-making. Therefore, planning and organizing the urban fabric surrounding pilgrimage sites requires careful attention to the principles of Islamic urbanism in order to preserve efficiency while respecting the cultural and religious values embedded in the fabric.

The diversity of interpretations of Islamic urbanism from historical readings of Muslim urban morphology to mystical, philosophical, and jurisprudential perspectives has resulted in a multilayered and sometimes ambiguous concept in contemporary scholarly discourse. The present study is based on the premise that Islamic urbanism, as an epistemic system rooted in divine teachings, rational *ijtihad*, and Islamic value foundations, can provide a normative and practical framework for evaluating, planning, and organizing contemporary pilgrimage spaces. Therefore, understanding Islamic urbanism merely as a historical spatial pattern cannot offer practical solutions for organizing modern pilgrimage fabrics. However, if Islamic urbanism is defined as a value-based and strategic system, the following question emerges: What are the principles and strategies of the epistemic system of Islamic urbanism for organizing contemporary pilgrimage fabrics? Accordingly, the aim of this research is neither to reconstruct historical models of Islamic cities nor to present an abstract ideal, but rather to extract a set of principles that can be translated into practical programs and operational measures suitable for contemporary pilgrimage contexts.

In this regard, the pilgrimage fabric of the Holy City of Qom, due to the presence of the Holy Shrine of Masoumeh (SA) and its central role in religious, social, and cultural dynamics, provides a suitable setting for testing and illustrating this approach. This case study enables the identification of real-world challenges within the pilgrimage fabric and the application of principles derived from the epistemic system of Islamic urbanism to formulate actionable and practical recommendations for its organization.

2. Theoretical and empirical background

From a theoretical perspective, the literature shows that Islamic urbanism cannot be regarded merely as a physical, historical, or traditional model. Aminpoor et al. (2018) argue that traditionalist and historiographical

approaches are incapable of attributing a coherent theoretical framework to Islam, and that individual jurisprudence alone does not provide the necessary tools to connect social rulings with the understanding of urban subjects. In contrast, the system-based jurisprudential method, by establishing coherence between subject analysis and ruling derivation, offers the capacity to formulate practical principles derived from Islamic teachings. Moreover, Molaei (2023) emphasizes the importance of linking pilgrimage teachings with the principles of Islamic urbanism in shaping urban identity and spatial design. Amini Kashani et al. (2023) focus on planning indicators for the urban fabric of pilgrimage cities, highlighting the need to understand their underlying structural logic. In international studies, Orkia (2025) argues that Islamic jurisprudential rulings and values can serve as both theoretical and practical foundations for urban planning and design. Collectively, these sources underline that the integration of epistemic foundations, Islamic values, and socio-spatial applications constitutes the conceptual basis of the present study. From an empirical perspective, numerous studies have examined the effects of urban development and physical design within pilgrimage fabrics. Farhadi and Tavangar (2022) demonstrate that urban projects in central Mashhad have weakened the historical identity and traditional neighborhood structure, showing that dominant physical redevelopment—when detached from contextual and cultural values—becomes ineffective. Sabouri and Saboonchi (2022) highlight the importance of maintaining the physical continuity of the Imam Reza axis and its role in preserving place-based identity and ritual landscape. Saeedi (2022) emphasizes community participation as a key factor in the success of conservation programs in Islamic pilgrimage sites. Farhan et al. (2023), studying the old city of Najaf, stress the importance of preserving heritage and local culture amid urban development pressures. Likewise, Molaei (2024) introduces the Urban Arsen Model centered on sacred shrines as a practical framework for urban design and for organizing pilgrimage centers.

A review of both theoretical and empirical literature reveals that most previous studies have tended either toward historical–morphological analyses or toward managerial and functional assessments. These works have rarely examined the systematic connection among epistemic and jurisprudential foundations, Islamic values, and actionable urban principles and strategies. Hence, the present research fills this gap by

adopting a systematic and integrative approach, offering an operational framework for organizing contemporary pilgrimage fabrics, tested through the case of the Holy City of Qom. By grounding its analysis in Islamic values and principles, this research distinguishes itself from previous studies. It enables the formulation of practical and evidence-based strategies to improve the spatial and functional quality of pilgrimage environments.

3. Theoretical literature

3.1. Islamic urbanism

Urbanism, in its lexical meaning, refers to the construction of cities and the creation, maintenance, and organization of streets, alleys, and public buildings. The term Islamic, as an attributive adjective, signifies an urbanism associated with or derived from Islam (Amid, 2010). Islamic urbanism is among the most significant concepts related to designing and planning cities in accordance with Islamic values, principles, and culture, and it has deeply influenced scholarly work in this field—so much so that the broadest conceptualization of this domain can be referred to as Islamic urbanism (Babaei et al., 2018: 4).

Islamic urbanism encompasses the theoretical foundations and principles along with the corresponding planning, design, and implementation methods that must govern the living environment of Muslims, shaping their relationship with the natural and built environment as well as with one another in society. These principles and values are derived from Islamic teachings and encompass major cultural and national factors (Bemanian, 2014: 71). In essence, Islamic ideals offer a distinctive perspective on urban development that emphasizes community, sustainability, social justice, and the integration of economic and religious freedoms to achieve diversity and flourishing (Kamal et al., 2023, p. 700). The concept of Islamic urbanism has developed from the outset within an interdisciplinary and interpretive context and, in recent decades, has become one of the most prominent areas of research in discussions related to urban identity and theoretical foundations of urbanism.

Theoretical approaches to explaining Islamic urbanism

The emergence of the adjective Islamic in reference to art, architecture, and urbanism follows a similar trajectory. All three terms were first developed not by Muslim scholars but by Western researchers, gradually

spreading across both East and West. In the analysis of Islamic urbanism, scholars have employed five main methodological approaches, each defined by its perspective on religion, reason, humanity, and the built environment. Differences in interpretation stem more from these underlying methodological assumptions than from historical examples. According to Aminpoor et al. (2018), these approaches include:

- **historiographical approach:** this approach conceptualizes the Islamic city as a system distinct from the Western city, shaped by a specific social and cultural structure. Analysis relies on historical sources and comparative studies of past examples, focusing on the historical evolution of cities and the comparison between Islamic and Western urban forms.

- **traditionalist approach:** this viewpoint emphasizes a return to the traditional worldview and often adopts a critical stance toward modern phenomena. It relies on intuitive reasoning and traditional metaphysical experience, asserting that preserving traditional values and norms is essential for shaping the built environment.

- **philosophical–theoretical and meaning-oriented approach:** this approach posits that religion is not the only source of knowledge; reason, innate human nature, intuition, and the natural world are also independent, valid sources for deriving design and planning criteria. It aims to establish the foundations of urbanism on philosophical or meaning-based schools of thought, focusing on human meaning and values within the built environment.

- **Nass-centered textualist approach and individual jurisprudence:** this method emphasizes direct engagement with religious texts, the Qur'an, and the hadith, to extract principles relevant to the built environment. Research involves textual analysis and deduction of rulings from divine sources, aiming to define the foundations of Islamic urbanism based strictly on religious texts.

- **Fiqh al-Nezam (system-based jurisprudential method):** this network-based approach, while maintaining the foundations of individual jurisprudence, provides the capacity to address contemporary social and technical needs, including urbanism and architecture. Through the contextual and networked interpretation of rulings, it enables the extraction of actionable principles and strategies for designing and organizing urban environments consistent with Islamic values. It is considered the most suitable approach for formulating principles and strategies for Islamic urbanism in pilgrimage contexts.

Overall, each approach represents a particular level of engagement between religion and urbanism, from descriptive historical accounts to systematic jurisprudential and philosophical models. Accordingly, the formulation of Islamic urbanism requires precise methodological positioning regarding the relationship between religion, reason, human nature, and the built environment. Any research in this field must therefore identify its theoretical stance within one or a combination of these methodological streams to establish an evaluable epistemic foundation.

Dimensions and principles of Islamic urbanism

Within the framework of Islamic realism, several fundamental dimensions and principles can be extracted that anchor urban systems and spatial organization in Islamic epistemological, ethical, and jurisprudential foundations. These principles, including those elaborated by Molaei (2023: 135), are as follows:

- **epistemological dimension:** the city is viewed as a reality independent of human perception, and divine rulings serve as the primary criteria for assessing and validating urban laws and decisions. Thus, all cultural, social, economic, and physical policies must align with fixed Islamic rulings.

- **social and cultural dimension:** the Islamic city provides a setting for fulfilling religious duties and achieving a communal life of faith. Social behavior and interactions must be evaluated according to divine guidelines. Principles such as human sociability, unity of the Islamic community, preservation of communal interests, and reinforcement of social cohesion are foundational.

- **economic dimension:** key principles include God-centeredness, intention of spiritual elevation in economic activities, adherence to halal and haram, payment of religious dues, economic justice, altruism, and avoidance of waste and extravagance. Prohibitions such as usury, hoarding, and harmful wealth accumulation, as well as the promotion of cooperation and safeguarding property rights, shape the ethical–jurisprudential framework of an Islamic urban economy.

- **physical and urban landscape dimension:** jurisprudential principles such as rights of people, no harm, liability, and no domination, along with human dignity, tranquility, moderation, avoidance of ostentation, and protection of life and property, inform design and construction. The centrality of religious spaces, preservation of sacred boundaries, physical harmony, avoidance of extravagance in construction,

and rejection of anthropomorphic imagery in the urban landscape are key requirements.

- environmental dimension: divine order in nature constitutes the basis for environmental management. Principles such as moderation, avoidance of excess, respect for the rights of other creatures and future generations, protection of natural resources, prevention of waste and exploitation, and minimal human intervention define sustainable development in the Islamic city.
- urban management dimension: Islamic urban management is grounded in piety, justice, fairness in resource distribution, public interest, avoidance of corruption and oppression, simplicity, and benevolence. It rests on expertise, integrity, and ethics, and decisions must comply with jurisprudential rules. These principles form a value-based, accountable, and justice-centered governance structure.

Together, these dimensions provide a normative and theoretical foundation for articulating an Islamic model of urbanism capable of translation into operational strategies for contemporary urban and pilgrimage settings.

3.2. Pilgrimage places

Pilgrimage sites emerged as spaces for spiritual concentration and the gathering of individuals who

traveled from distant regions to be in the proximity of the saints of God. The tombs of divine saints are considered “heavenly loci,” as they provide an authentic connection to God, inner purity, spiritual security, and fulfillment of human needs. In this sense, the shrines of divine figures offer an environment for spiritual refinement and healing of the heart (Molaei, 2022, p. 144).

Only in Islamic-era Iran did shrines and pilgrimage sites acquire such a long history, distinctive architectural characteristics, and magnificent ornamentation. These structures became known as Borj, Gonbad, Boqeh, or Mazar. In the early Islamic period, the burial places of revered figures such as the Prophet’s Companions or the Imams were identified by a dome, a tent-like structure, or a similar covering. The original idea behind this was to provide shade for the deceased, a concept inspired by the Qur’anic depiction of shade as a heavenly blessing. Over time, and based on religious sanctity, these temporary coverings evolved into permanent domes and monumental structures that came to define formal pilgrimage sites (Kalan Pardeli, 2016). The presence of a pilgrimage site within an urban area profoundly influences the lives and conditions of both visitors and local residents across multiple dimensions. Table 1 summarizes the significant impacts of pilgrimage to sacred sites across different domains.

Table 1. Dimensions of pilgrimage to sacred sites (Molaei, 2022, p. 146)

Dimension	Description
Religious	A sacred space fostering closeness to God and establishing a profound connection between the pilgrim’s heart and soul with the Creator.
Spiritual	A serene and tranquil environment, away from worldly concerns and conflicts; a sanctuary for the needy and distressed.
Functional component	A multi-purpose space supporting religious, pilgrimage, educational, cultural, social, and even political activities.
Economic	Generates economic value and creates employment opportunities for the local community; establishes a sustainable economic flow.
Cultural	Reflects Islamic and Shiite culture and serves as a venue for religious and national rituals and ceremonies.
Social	A place for gathering, social interaction, human education and development, as well as fulfilling individual and collective vows and needs.
Physical & urban landscape	A prominent and recognizable religious symbol, acting as an urban landmark or node.

3.3. Elucidation of dimensions and principles of Islamic urbanism in the organization of pilgrimage sites fabrics

In this section, the dimensions and principles of Islamic urbanism related to the organization of the fabric of

pilgrimage sites are elucidated and analyzed succinctly. These dimensions and principles are extracted and classified based on the theoretical and epistemological foundations of Islamic urbanism and religious teachings, so that the process of enhancing the

structure and function of the fabric surrounding pilgrimage sites can be realized in a coherent, effective, and comprehensive manner in line with Islamic values and criteria.

Spatial–physical dimension

- Physical structure and spatial form: The physical form and spatial structure of pilgrimage environments are not solely oriented toward functional needs; instead, they are designed in harmony with spirituality, reflection, and worship. Therefore, spatial planning must be structured in a way that enhances the spiritual experience of pilgrims and residents. Spatial elements such as scale, light, sound, movement, and visual perception play a fundamental role in defining the spatial structure of pilgrimage settings.
- Rhythm (spatial rhythm): rhythm in space refers to the creation of variation and sequence, enabling spatial configurations to appear in an orderly, continuous, and harmonious manner. Through the repetition and alternation of spatial patterns, rhythm produces dynamism and spatial flow. Variations in dimensional proportions, textures, lighting, and structural details help establish rhythm and contribute to a sense of movement and vitality within pilgrimage environments. Rhythmic sequences and repetitive spatial transitions are among the prominent features of rhythm in Islamic urbanism.
- Spatial orientation: Spatial orientation is not limited to physical or functional aspects. It also nurtures a profound spiritual experience that deepens the individual's connection with God. This orientation may be achieved through attention to the qibla, spatial procession, integration of natural landscapes, and socially meaningful design. In Islamic architecture, the qibla is one of the most significant orientation elements, shaping the layout of many pilgrimage and religious structures.
- Sacred boundaries and territoriality: The boundaries and territoriality of pilgrimage sites possess distinctive characteristics and have always been the focus of planners, designers, urban managers, pilgrims, and neighboring communities, ensuring the preservation of sanctity and proper observance of pilgrimage etiquette. Neglecting sacred territoriality may result in significant perceptual, social, cultural, and identity-related consequences for pilgrimage cities (Eslami et al, 2022, p. 114). One of the challenges of contemporary pilgrimage cities is the disregard for visual and height-related setbacks around sacred structures. Maintaining the visual

dominance and spatial prominence of Holy Shrines and preventing high-rise construction within their proximity is therefore essential.

- Centrality: Religious spaces possess spatial centrality in their surrounding fabric and dominate their larger environment in terms of scale and form. The identity of pilgrimage cities is fundamentally derived from the Holy Shrine. Consequently, the development of a pilgrimage city should revolve around the sacred center, ensuring that it is functional and that its symbolic significance remains intact. Uses with higher religious or devotional qualities should be located closer to the center, forming a functional hierarchy based on their relationship to the sacred core (Molaei, 2020, p. 115). The sacred place, as the focal center and nucleus of the city, becomes a powerful magnet that attracts populations, activities, and functions toward itself. The center must be highly accessible from its surroundings and establish a network with other centers, either hierarchically or non-hierarchically. Consequently, the pathways that connect a primary center to other centers constitute a crucial component of the structural organization of sacred cities (Maroufi & Rosina, 2017: 33).
- Enclosure: Balanced enclosure when aligned with a coherent pattern and human scale enhances pilgrims' perception of spaces leading to the shrine (Adibzadeh & Farazmand, 2015, p. 11). Preserving continuity in building heights and maintaining visual coherence in the urban landscape reinforces enclosure and enriches the pilgrimage experience.
- Spatial hierarchy: Spatial hierarchy is among the archetypal design principles of sacred environments. Applying hierarchical sequences that correspond with the sanctity of the pilgrimage site guides pilgrims through progressive spatial transitions, allowing them to experience a gradual and contemplative approach toward the sacred center (Badiei, 2002).
- Hierarchy of access: Diverse access routes ensure that pilgrims may reach the sacred precinct efficiently during different times (Chandan & Kumar, 2019, p. 473). The hierarchical arrangement of surrounding streets plays a critical role in shaping the experience of arrival. Without hierarchical transitions, pilgrims may abruptly enter the sacred domain, diminishing the deep, gradual experience of spiritual approach (Ashouri, 2014: 38). Therefore, reviving traditional hierarchical access routes from the city to the shrine is essential.

- Authenticity and contextuality: Authenticity and contextuality constitute key principles of Islamic urbanism in pilgrimage settings, referring to the harmony of space with cultural, climatic, historical, social, and local contexts. A pilgrimage site must originate from its local conditions rather than impose predetermined or imitative forms. Employing traditional Islamic architectural typologies—such as central courtyards, iwan, domes, minarets, hierarchical entrance sequences, summer and winter prayer halls, and columned porticos is therefore vital (Molaei, 2023: 54).

Sensory–semantic dimension

- Mental identity formation of space: This principle directly addresses how space influences individuals' perceptions, emotions, and spiritual experiences. Mental identity formation refers to creating a meaningful and profound connection between the individual and the environment, fostering a sense of belonging, sacredness, and spiritual presence. The use of symbolic, religious, and cultural elements plays a central role in shaping the mental identity of pilgrimage spaces. Islamic motifs such as Qur'anic calligraphy, inscriptions, geometric ornamentation, and architectural features like domes and arches significantly contribute to the process of spiritual identity formation.

- Memorability: Pilgrimage and religious spaces must be designed to evoke emotional and memorable experiences for pilgrims. These memories, rooted not only in religious spirituality but also in aesthetic and social qualities, remain vividly in the minds of individuals and create lasting impressions. Due to their historical background and the occurrence of significant cultural–religious events, pilgrimage sites naturally generate collective memories across generations. Such sites function as a bridge between past and present, where history and religious belief converge.

- Symbolism and spatial metaphorization: Through symbolic design, use of metaphoric elements, and spatial storytelling, pilgrimage environments create profoundly layered spiritual experiences. Many elements of Islamic architecture serve to convey religious meanings. Light, for example, is perceived as a symbol of divine truth, representing the spiritual journey toward illumination. The Mehrab symbolizes the qibla, the point of connection between humans and God, while the dome signifies the heavens and the metaphysical realm. The transition from exterior

to interior symbolizes the movement from the material world toward spiritual transcendence.

- Sensory perception inspired by spiritual experience: This principle aims to guide pilgrims toward mystical and spiritual experiences through multisensory engagement with vision, sound, smell, touch, and even taste. Visual composition plays a significant role. Likewise, the call to prayer and devotional chants have a profound impact on spiritual perception. The use of incense or pleasant fragrances reinforces the sense of purity and sanctity. Tactile engagement, touching sacred surfaces or traditional materials, allows pilgrims to deepen their emotional and spiritual bond with the site.

Urbanlandscape dimension

- Desirable visual landscape: Visual attractiveness, color harmony, material expression, and the relationship between built forms and their context contribute to a pleasant visual experience for pilgrims. The absence of disturbing visual, acoustic, and environmental pollution enhances visual satisfaction (Ayati et al, 2016, p. 50). The significance of the sacred shrine's landscape is highly dependent on the observed location, its physical characteristics, and all foreground and background elements that frame its vista. Since a significant part of the sanctity conveyed through a landscape is trans-physical, it must be perceivable and apprehensible beyond sensory perceptions shaped merely by material senses (Asgari et al, 2020, p. 233).

- Visual legibility: Visual legibility refers to the ease with which visitors can understand spatial configurations, paths, and landmarks. High legibility fosters peace, safety, and intuitive orientation, thereby improving the pilgrimage experience. In Islamic pilgrimage cities, elements such as domes, minarets, and courtyards serve as major visual anchors aiding navigation (Molaei, 2023: 56).

- Memorable and harmonious skyline: A distinctive skyline dominated by domes, minarets, and monumental gateways creates an atmosphere of grandeur and spiritual solemnity (Molaei, 2023, p. 56). Hierarchical variation in building heights contributes to a sense of order and reinforces the sacred character of the skyline.

- Harmony in ornamentation and colors: Colors and ornamentation convey religious symbolism and cultural identity. Harmonious color palettes and compositions promote unity and prevent visual chaos, while reinforcing the spiritual atmosphere of

pilgrimage spaces (Molaei, 2023: 56).

- Harmony and diversity in materials: Although harmony suggests consistency and unity, diversity in local materials prevents visual monotony and adds vibrancy. The use of traditional materials such as brick, tile, stone, and stucco enhances authenticity while supporting aesthetic coherence (Molaei, 2023: 57).

Functional dimension

- Creating responsive environments emphasizing social justice: A responsive environment must address the needs of different social groups regardless of gender, age, economic status, or physical ability while reflecting the values of dignity, compassion, and justice. Such an environment facilitates an inclusive and adaptive pilgrimage experience.
- Spatial diversity to meet varied needs: Pilgrimage environments must accommodate a wide range of functions: worship, rest, social interaction, cultural engagement, and recreational activities. This diversity supports both material and spiritual needs, enriching the overall pilgrimage experience.
- Functional hierarchy: Functional hierarchy organizes activities and services according to pilgrims' religious, cultural, and social priorities. Proper hierarchical distribution deepens the spiritual quality of the pilgrimage experience (Nagizadeh, 2006).
- Functional territoriality of pilgrimage sites: Each territorial zone surrounding a shrine is designed to support the spiritual and social needs of pilgrims. The functional domain should strengthen the unique sacred-social interactions arising from the presence of a holy figure and the coexistence of pilgrims and residents (Ahmadi et al, 2017).
- Adequacy and distribution of religious centers: Religious centers serve as symbols of the spiritual identity of pilgrimage cities. Their number, distribution, and capacity should correspond to peak pilgrimage seasons and reflect the spiritual significance of the shrine.
- Adequacy of healthcare facilities: Sufficient public and specialized healthcare spaces are essential for serving pilgrims who may experience fatigue, unfamiliar climates, or pre-existing health conditions. These facilities can play a vital role during crises such as pandemics (Molaei, 2023, p. 293).
- Adequacy of cultural, recreational, and hospitality facilities: Cultural and recreational spaces support religious tourism and address the expectations of

pilgrims and residents. Hospitality facilities, especially during peak visitation periods, must be well-integrated with the urban fabric and proportionate to demand.

- Adequacy of infrastructure and access network: Infrastructure systems and access routes must accommodate both residents and pilgrims, ensuring safe and efficient movement. Well-structured accessibility networks are fundamental to the organization of pilgrimage urban environments.

Environmental dimension

- Attention to environmental resilience: Environmental resilience in the surrounding fabric of pilgrimage sites is fundamental to safeguarding human health, sustaining physical structures, and maintaining the continued functioning of the pilgrimage city. Achieving resilience requires addressing factors such as pollution control, protection of groundwater resources, and maintaining soil quality.
- Expansion of green spaces: Green space development plays a significant role in improving air quality, reducing noise pollution, moderating temperature, and increasing biodiversity within pilgrimage areas. Vegetation contributes to cooling through shading and evapotranspiration, which improves climatic comfort for pilgrims and residents. Beyond environmental benefits, green spaces also contribute to psychological well-being and spiritual tranquility—effects that are particularly important in pilgrimage contexts.
- Use of natural materials: Construction within pilgrimage sites should prioritize natural and sustainable materials such as brick, tile, stone, and wood (Molaei, 2023: 57). These materials have lower environmental impact compared to industrial alternatives, and their natural textures and colors foster warmth, intimacy, and serenity—qualities that reinforce the spiritual ambiance of sacred spaces.
- Utilization of water elements: In Islamic tradition, water symbolizes purity, cleansing, and life. Its use in pilgrimage environments produces profound spiritual and aesthetic effects. Environmentally sensitive water features—such as pools, channels, and ablution areas can enhance ecological sustainability while strengthening spiritual symbolism (Molaei, 2023, p. 57). Water elements also offer opportunities for educating visitors about the importance of water conservation.
- Consideration of climatic conditions: Climate factors such as temperature, humidity, solar angle, and wind

greatly influence pilgrims' comfort. Designing pilgrimage structures with natural ventilation, appropriate daylighting, thermal stability, and energy-efficient forms enhances thermal and psychological comfort. Climatic adaptation is essential not only in building design but also in urban management for addressing risks such as floods, droughts, heat waves, and extreme cold.

Faith–ethics dimension

- Commitment to ethical principles: Ethical commitment guides attitudes, decisions, and actions within pilgrimage environments. Values such as humility, fairness, justice, respect, honesty, purity, and faith should permeate all aspects of urban development. In architecture, humility may be expressed through modest, human-centered constructions. Genuine belief in God and adherence to Islamic ethics contribute to the creation of enduring and spiritually elevated pilgrimage precincts (Molaei, 2023, p. 305). Respecting justice ensures the protection of the rights of all stakeholders, owners, vulnerable groups, and the natural environment.
- Spiritual territoriality of pilgrimage sites: Safeguarding the sacred domain of pilgrimage spaces shapes pilgrims' spiritual state, emotional readiness, and behavioral patterns (Eslami et al., 2022, p. 114). This spiritual territoriality goes beyond physical boundaries. It constitutes a multilayered realm where religious, cultural, psychological, and social experiences merge, guiding pilgrims toward greater spiritual refinement.
- Islamic lifestyle: Lifestyle reflects beliefs, preferences, and cultural traditions, influencing aspects such as dress, behavior, leisure, consumption, and social relations (Molaei, 2019: 33). In modern cities where Western cultural influences are widespread, shrines can serve as spiritual sanctuaries that support and reinforce Islamic identity. Pilgrimage cities ideally offer environments that facilitate the experience of an Islamic–Iranian lifestyle across ethical, familial, and social dimensions (Molaei, 2022, p. 145).
- Religious identity: Pilgrimage plays a vital role in shaping individual and collective religious identity. One of its core functions is strengthening, reproducing, and stabilizing religious culture within society. Urban interventions that ignore the identity foundations of pilgrimage areas risk weakening this religious identity (Molaei, 2019: 28). Thus, reinforcing religious identity is essential for maintaining the

authenticity of pilgrimage urban fabrics.

- Attainment of spirituality: Spirituality is defined as the establishment of intellectual and inner–spiritual connection with the transcendent realm, accompanied by awareness and conscious choice, which strengthens human psychological health and growth. The absence or insufficiency of spirituality may lead to psychological and moral disorders such as depression and anxiety (Mirzaei & Delir, 2018, p. 94). Pilgrimage cities centered on sacred shrines, which possess extensive capacities in cultural, social, economic, and spirituality-related functions, require a comprehensive model to provide a form of social life imbued with spirituality for pilgrims and devotees (Molaei, 2019, p. 179). The hierarchical progression toward the sacred site and the avoidance of sudden confrontation with the shrine also play a significant role in shaping the depth of the pilgrim's spiritual experience (Barrie, 1996). Therefore, the design and planning of pilgrimage precincts must take into account the contextual factors and conditions that enhance the sense of spirituality.
- Acquisition of knowledge: Pilgrimage to sacred sites engenders knowledge within the human heart. The insight that arises from visiting an Imamzadeh, a shrine, or any sacred religious place is cultivated through human intellect, awareness, and consciousness (Adhami et al, 2018, p. 150). Ultimately, this knowledge guides the individual toward self-understanding, spiritual elevation, and more profound closeness to God.

Socio-cultural dimension

- Culture and authenticity: This principle illustrates how a pilgrimage site can embody the beliefs, traditions, lifestyles, and historical memory of a people, transforming from “a mere physical space” into “a component of the collective spirit.” Pilgrimage places are often founded upon layers of history and collective memory. Preserving authenticity in the design and regeneration of such spaces thus signifies maintaining the connection of present generations with the values of the past.
- Safety and security: The protection of human lives, property, and urban facilities against natural and human hazards is regarded as one of the fundamental objectives of urban planning (Kazemi & Tabrizi, 2015, p. 14). Security is likewise considered a basic human need within urban environments and human communities (Gol-Khatami & Haghghat-Bin, 2016: 77). In general, security can be defined from a

socio-cultural perspective as a state of tranquility in which individuals feel assured of safety regarding their lives, property, honor, dignity, identity, relationships, thoughts, and values both in the present and the future while conducting daily life with minimal exposure to threats and risks (Jafari et al, 2018, p. 64). In pilgrimage cities, the sense of security and social safety among pilgrims and residents constitutes a vital principle that must be given special attention in the planning process.

- Education: Education is considered an effective investment and a key factor in development; if properly planned and implemented, it can yield significant returns (Khodaei & KalantariKhalilabad, 2012: 57). Given the substantial presence of pilgrims in pilgrimage cities, training human resources directly affects pilgrims' satisfaction and quality of service.
- Socio-cultural capital: Sacred shrines influence social and economic activities and transform their surroundings into pilgrimage cities. One primary source of socio-cultural capital is the performance of religious rituals and ceremonies (Molaei, 2020, p. 184). Social capital in these contexts stems from trust, cooperation, altruism, participation, and collective concern.
- Social interactions: Place-related social interactions can influence people's attitudes, behaviors, and participation in architectural spaces, contributing to a sense of place (Vasigh & Yarikia, 2019, p. 40). As public type spaces, pilgrimage sites properly designed encourage social engagement, which leads to vitality and dynamism in urban life (Sattari Fard, 2014, p. 141). The presence of multiple religious centers, shrines, and tekyeh within the sacred precinct provides a broad context for religious rituals, events, and socio-political activities during different times of the year. With good management, this can strengthen social interactions, religious participation, and religiouscultural education among pilgrims and residents (Eslami et al, 2022, pp. 129-130). Therefore, pilgrimage spaces must be designed and planned to foster a sense of intimacy and closeness among various social groups, including pilgrims, local residents, and other users.

Managerial dimension

- Adherence to Islamic rules and jurisprudential principles: In planning and urban interventions, compliance with Islamic legal rulings and jurisprudential rules is a religious imperative; these must be determined collaboratively with jurists and

experts. Among the relevant jurisprudential principles in urban development plans are the rules of prohibition of harm, prevention of domination or control, prevention of unlawful gain, ensuring guarantees, and avoiding conflicting public interests (Molaei, 2023: 305). Compliance with these principles when making changes and developments in the fabric around pilgrimage sites is important for several reasons. First, adherence to Islamic jurisprudence helps preserve sanctity and creates a spiritually peaceful space for pilgrims and residents. Second, it helps protect the rights of pilgrims and residents, preventing the infringement of others' rights and contributing to a just and equitable environment. Finally, these jurisprudential rules can serve as operative criteria in urban design, planning, and governance of spaces surrounding pilgrimage sites.

- Respect for citizens' rights: Respecting the rights of all citizens is a fundamental legal and moral duty. This includes respecting the personal dignity of everyone, the rights of residents and shopkeepers around the site, avoiding disturbance or deprivation of comfort for others, adapting the environment for people with disabilities or special needs, allocating spaces for children and families, and considering the needs of underprivileged and vulnerable groups like the homeless or poor (Molaei, 2023, p. 305). The fabric around pilgrimage sites must attend to the rights of residents, stakeholders, and local business owners, ensuring their comfort and dignity in any spatial or urban intervention (Molaei, 2020, p. 188). In sum, for preserving sanctity and enhancing the spirituality of pilgrimage places, respecting citizens' rights is essential.
- Attention to the valuable context of the shrine and surrounding fabric: A contextual approach in the future development of sacred shrines and Imamzadeh complexes requires the protection and respect of pre-existing valuable elements, components, and settings. Safeguarding the physical context, particularly the religious and historical structures of the shrine and its constituent elements, is central to this perspective (Molaei, 2023: 311). Given the significance of valuable and identity-forming places surrounding sacred shrines, emphasis on preserving the historic fabric, maintaining the native population, regenerating and revitalizing historic neighborhoods, balancing conservation and development in urban management projects, and utilizing heritage

buildings through cultural activities is proposed as an appropriate model for the future of these precincts (Farhadi & Tavangar, 2022, p. 82). Accordingly, addressing the challenges and meeting the needs of pilgrimage spaces, while respecting the tangible and intangible historical heritage of the shrine's surrounding fabric, constitutes a fundamental necessity of urban planning.

- Coordination among management institutions: The multiplicity of decision-making centers and the lack of technical and executive capacity are among the challenges of urban management in pilgrimage cities. Therefore, collaboration and coordination among relevant institutions, such as municipalities, security forces, cultural heritage organizations, and tourism organizations, lead to better services and more comprehensive management of the surrounding areas around pilgrimage sites.

Economic dimension

- Economic justice in benefit distribution: In Islamic urbanism, economic justice implies that a particular group should not monopolize the benefits and opportunities arising from the pilgrim presence. Instead, they must be distributed fairly among all social strata, especially local residents, thus helping to reduce poverty and inequality.
- Strengthening local and indigenous economy: Revitalizing local markets, supporting small and traditional trades, and creating sustainable employment opportunities for locals are important principles. This not only improves the livelihood of the region's people but also preserves the cultural identity of the pilgrimage city.
- Land use through waqf (endowment) and charitable foundations: Utilizing the tradition of waqf (endowment) in allocating land and properties for economic activities ensures sustainable income for maintaining and developing pilgrimage sites. The revenue thus generated can be used for the welfare of pilgrims and local communities.
- Avoidance of waste and extravagance in construction: Economic and service-oriented projects should be designed based on principles of frugality, simplicity, and efficiency to avoid imposing unnecessary costs and extravagance that are incompatible with the spirit of pilgrimage.
- Transparency and economic integrity: Oversight of economic activities is essential to prevent corruption, usury, overcharging, and illicit trade, thereby strengthening public trust and promoting blessings

in commercial activities.

- Promoting economic participation and shared investment: Islamic pilgrimage urbanism should create a context in which philanthropists, pilgrims, and residents can participate in local development, for example, through friendly loan funds, cooperatives, or collective investments, which in turn strengthen social belonging and community cohesion.

4. Materials and methods

This study is applied in purpose and qualitative in nature, conducted through a descriptive-analytical approach within the framework of the Islamic value-applied paradigm. It aims to extract and articulate the principles and strategies of Islamic urbanism as a normative and practical framework for organizing contemporary pilgrimage fabrics.

The research process unfolded in three consecutive stages: (1) extraction of theoretical foundations and indicators, (2) collection and analysis of textual and field data within the pilgrimage fabric of the Holy City of Qom, and (3) development of a comparative matrix and derivation of operational strategies. The data sources comprised selected theoretical and jurisprudential texts including the Qur'an, Hadith, jurisprudential treatises, and the works of scholars in Islamic urbanism to establish conceptual foundations; official urban planning documents such as the master plan, local plans, and technical reports of the municipality and shrine authority; aerial imagery, cadastral maps, and historical and contemporary plans; published reports and studies on the pilgrimage fabric of Qom; field observations and thematic photography; and finally, semi-structured interviews with five experts in Islamic urbanism and urban management. The selected experts possessed substantial experience and knowledge in relevant domains, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Data analysis employed a directed content analysis approach. The initial coding framework was derived from the theoretical foundations identified in the first stage (nine overarching dimensions and their corresponding principles). Field and textual data were then examined to identify new instances and emergent concepts. A coding manual was prepared, defining each dimension and principle through conceptual definitions, observational criteria, and illustrative examples. Two independent researchers coded a pilot

sample of documents and images, with discrepancies resolved through discussion and revision to ensure consistency. For transparency, each cell of the matrix was documented with explicit source references.

The final comparative matrix was structured with nine dimensions on the vertical axis and, on the horizontal axis, the corresponding principles, empirical manifestations in the fabric, links to Islamic values, and consequences of non-intervention. Instances within the pilgrimage fabric of Qom were determined through frequency counts of evidence and functional significance, and subsequently prioritized through expert weighting (consensus among five experts). Conceptual validity was reinforced by triangulation with primary jurisprudential and theoretical texts, expert review, and the provision of documented evidence.

The case study focused on the urban fabric surrounding the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh (SA) in Qom. The city's spatial structure follows a monocentric pattern with the shrine at its core, historically expanding radially from this sacred nucleus. The presence of seminaries, religious schools, the traditional bazaar, and pilgrimage routes has created a unique continuity

between religious, social, and lived spaces, making Qom an appropriate context for analyzing the principles of Islamic urbanism in pilgrimage fabrics. However, contemporary urban interventions, including the expansion of courtyards, modifications to access networks, the extension of the Eram axis, the Payambar-e Azam Boulevard project, and developments along the Qom River, have significantly altered the historical spatial structure of the city. While these interventions have improved accessibility and facilitated pilgrimage, they have also disrupted traditional spatial hierarchies, diminished the sense of place, and weakened collective spaces. Consequently, Qom was selected as a case study to enable an empirical analysis of the interplay between Islamic urban principles and contemporary urban interventions, providing a robust basis for evaluating and deriving principles for organizing pilgrimage fabrics. Particular attention was given to pedestrian-oriented pilgrimage routes such as Eram, Enqhelab, and Bahar streets, as well as Astaneh and Imam Khomeini squares, which serve as the primary axes guiding pilgrims toward the shrine.



Figure 1. Map of the immediate precinct of the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh (SA) (Qom Municipality, 2020)

5. Research findings

5.1. The link between dimensions of Islamic urbanism and manifestations in the pilgrimage fabric of Qom

In this study, to assess the current state of the pilgrimage fabric in relation to the theoretical principles of Islamic urbanism, a directed content analysis approach was employed in the Holy City of Qom. This approach enabled the principles derived from theoretical and Islamic sources to serve as a predetermined framework for coding documents, interviews, and field observations. Within this process, the overarching dimensions of Islamic urbanism were first identified, and corresponding principles were extracted for each of these dimensions. Data collected from diverse sources, including documents, images, maps, expert interviews, and field observations, were

recorded in the form of indicators and instances. The potential consequences of non-intervention were analyzed based on the available evidence.

To integrate the findings, all information was organized into a comparative matrix. This matrix illustrates how each principle of Islamic urbanism is reflected or challenged within the pilgrimage fabric of Qom, and how it is connected to Islamic values. Furthermore, the consequences of neglecting these principles were presented in a separate column to highlight the necessity of intervention and urban planning. Accordingly, Table 2 not only summarizes the collected data but also functions as an analytical map that systematically reveals the relationship between theoretical dimensions, empirical evidence, and Islamic values.

Table 2. Comparative matrix of dimensions and principles of Islamic urbanism in the pilgrimage fabric of Qom

Dimension	Corresponding principles	Manifestation in the pilgrimage fabric of Qom	Link to Islamic values	Consequences of non-intervention	Source
Spatial-physical	Spatial hierarchy and sacred precincts	Division of spaces into shrine (first precinct), courtyards and arcades (second precinct), bazaar and adjacent neighborhoods (third precinct).	Respect for ḥarīm and sanctity of place in Islamic jurisprudence; order in approaching sacred space.	Functional overlap, disrespect for sacred precincts, and disruption of pilgrims' spiritual experience.	Qom Municipality aerial photo, 2021
	Physical structure of space	Radial organization centered on the shrine with pedestrian axes; organic integration of historic fabric and narrow alleys.	Reflection of divine order and unity of body and spirit in Islamic architecture.	Loss of spatial cohesion, dominance of modern construction, and disconnection between form and meaning.	Historic fabric map of Qom, 2019
	Orientation in space	Axes leading to the dome and minarets, marked by religious symbols and radial squares.	Orientation toward the qibla and shrine is a symbol of guidance in the lives of believers.	Pilgrim disorientation, movement disorder, loss of "spiritual journey" in pilgrimage routes.	Field observations
	Sacred boundaries and territoriality	Shrine precinct as a public-sacred space with transparent inner and outer layers; identifiable behavioral and spatial boundaries.	A clear distinction between sacred and everyday spaces.	Behavioral overlap, unintended disrespect, erosion of reverence and decorum.	Qom Master Plan, 2019
	Hierarchy of access and centrality	The centrality of the shrine, along with a network of central and radial streets, is integral to the core fabric of Qom.	Urban monotheism, spiritual concentration, and spatial unity.	Disruption of access, functional overlap, and dissatisfaction among pilgrims and residents.	Zamani et al., 2021; Venerandi et al., 2022
	Historical continuity and structure of the historic fabric	Historic urban core centered on the shrine; challenges in the old bazaar district; demolition of parts of the bazaar and surrounding fabric due to the construction of Taleghani (Azar) Street.	Necessity of preserving sacred precincts, respecting historic fabric, and preventing spatial-spiritual rupture.	Loss of historical identity, demolition of heritage buildings, and erosion of spatial cohesion.	Farmanian Arani & Jayhani, 2022; Mehr News, 2019; Tehran Times, 2024

Dimension	Corresponding principles	Manifestation in the pilgrimage fabric of Qom	Link to Islamic values	Consequences of non-intervention	Source
Semantic-sensory	Spiritual identity of space	Presence of shrine, local mosques, seminaries; Qom as a "pilgrimage-scholarly city."	Formation of a religious mindset, attachment to sacred places, and Continuity of Shi'i identity.	Loss of belonging, weakening of religious identity, erosion of cultural memory.	Expert interviews
	Memory and historical-cultural continuity	Old neighborhoods, mosques, and bazaars preserve the collective memory of pilgrimage.	Intergenerational link through the pilgrimage tradition, preserving religious and historical memory.	Rupture of collective memory, weakening of emotional ties, cultural-spatial disconnection.	Expert interviews; field observations; Mehr News, 2024
	Symbolism and spatial metaphors	Dome as a symbol of divine light, minarets as signs of guidance, and alleys as spiritual paths.	Symbolism as manifestation of tawhid in built form; space as language of meaning.	Reduction of space to material form, loss of sacred meanings, and monotonous experience.	Eslami et al., 2022
Urban landscape	Sacred landscape	The golden dome is visible from the principal axes and squares.	Beauty as divine manifestation; emphasis on ḥosn in Islamic aesthetics.	Loss of sacred vistas, dominance of high-rise buildings, weakening of spiritual atmosphere.	Field observations
	Visual legibility	Radial structure with shrine center, key pedestrian routes, and religious markers.	Clarity and spiritual guidance, ease of wayfinding, and mental tranquility.	Pilgrim confusion, decline in pilgrimage quality, and visual disorder.	Field observations
	Skyline integrity	Dominance of the dome and minarets in the city horizon.	Dome/minarets as symbols of divine proximity; moderation in height.	Visual chaos, dominance of incongruent high-rise buildings, loss of sacred skyline.	Field observations
	Harmony of materials	Use of traditional brick, stone, tile, and plaster in historic fabric.	Respect for nature, authenticity, and the Islamic economy in local materials.	Excessive use of modern, incongruent materials leads to erosion of Islamic architectural identity.	Expert interviews
Functional	Functional hierarchy	Connection between shrine, bazaar, local mosques, radial access routes.	Order and hierarchy in Islamic society and creation.	Functional disorder, overlap, weakening of the shrine's central role.	Expert interviews
	Responsive environments with social justice	The Eram pedestrian axis and Astaneh Square provide equal access.	Social justice and equality in access per the Qur'an and traditions.	Pilgrim dissatisfaction, spatial inequality, and concentration of services.	Field observations
	Spatial diversity	Variety of spaces: bazaar, courtyards, lodging, services.	Attention to diverse needs (women, men, children, and the elderly).	Uniformity, crowding, and decline in the quality of pilgrimage.	Field observations
	Cultural-recreational balance	Shrine museum, library, and nearby parks.	Emphasis on education, learning, and lawful recreation.	Fatigue, reduced stay duration, and a decline in attractiveness.	Field observations
	Access network adequacy	Streets leading to the shrine.	Facilitation of pilgrimage, safety of routes in Islamic teachings.	Congestion, traffic hazards, dissatisfaction.	Field observations
	Multiplicity of religious centers	Numerous mosques near the shrine.	Emphasis on prayer, education, and collective worship.	Over-concentration, deprivation of other neighborhoods.	Field observations

Dimension	Corresponding principles	Manifestation in the pilgrimage fabric of Qom	Link to Islamic values	Consequences of non-intervention	Source
Environmental	Environmental resilience	Use of shading, local materials, and air quality preservation.	Balance in resource use and stewardship of the earth.	Pollution, thermal instability, reduced comfort.	Expert interviews
	Green space expansion	Gardens, trees in courtyards, and small parks.	Symbol of paradise, purity, and tranquility in the Qur'an.	Heat increase, dryness, reduced vitality.	Quran; field observations
	Climatic considerations	Dense fabric, shading alleys, arcades controlling sunlight.	Moderation and respect for nature are in Islamic teachings.	High energy use, overheating, and material erosion.	Gouyeh, 2025; expert interviews
Faith-ethics	Commitment to ethical principles	Observance of respect, modest dress, assistance to pilgrims, and polite behavior of servants and people around the shrine.	Ethical conduct is emphasized in the Quran (Al-Hujurāt), while the emphasis on pilgrimage etiquette is found in the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt.	Spread of misconduct, weakening of the sacred dignity of space, and moral disorder in the environment.	Quran; Motahhari, 1991
	Islamic lifestyle	Reflected in pilgrims' behavior, dress, observance of purity, and balanced division of time between worship, rest, and social interaction.	Hayāt Tayyibah and the believer's lifestyle in the Quran; recommendations on etiquette in sacred places.	Cultural rupture, penetration of consumerist styles, and weakening of religious values in collective behavior.	Ṭabaṭabai, 1995
	Attainment of spirituality	Experience of tranquility, tears, prayer, and inner connection with God in the shrine and courtyards.	Emphasis on remembrance, reflection, and invocation in the Quran and Nahj al-Balagha; importance of "presence of heart" in worship.	Materialization of pilgrimage, decline in the depth of spiritual experience, and reduced educational impact of pilgrimage.	Javadi Amoli, 2006
	Acquisition of knowledge	Participation in religious sessions, Qur'an exegesis, sermons, and lectures at the shrine; linkage between pilgrimage and awareness.	Knowledge as a pillar of faith in Islam; "are those who know equal to those who do not know?"	Superficiality in pilgrimage, weakening of religious awareness, and reduced lasting spiritual impact on pilgrims.	Quran; SoroushMahalati, 2013
Socio-cultural	Cultural authenticity	Continuity of traditions, religious architecture, and historic neighborhoods.	Quran: remembrance of Ayyām Allāh, respect for sacred houses.	Loss of cultural identity, dominance of rootless modern styles.	Quran; Mehr News, 2025
	Social interaction and coexistence	Friendly relations between pilgrims and residents, as well as dialogue in the courtyards.	Quran: cooperation in righteousness, believers as a solid structure.	Social rupture, decline in vitality, reduction to functional space.	Quran; expert interviews
	Safety and security	Controlled entrances, a police presence, safe, and well-lit spaces.	Protection of life and dignity; enabling worship.	Disorder, reduced family presence, insecurity.	Quran; expert interviews
	Social-cultural capital	Religious associations, charities, seminaries, and volunteers.	Strengthening faith networks, solidarity, and cooperation.	Decline in empathy, individualism, and erosion of trust.	Expert interviews

Dimension	Corresponding principles	Manifestation in the pilgrimage fabric of Qom	Link to Islamic values	Consequences of non-intervention	Source
Managerial-governance	Institutional coordination	Shrine authority, municipality, heritage office; conflicting priorities.	Unity, cooperation, and social order in public affairs.	Fragmented projects, uncoordinated interventions, resource waste.	Expert interviews
	Compliance with Islamic law	Observance of religious rules in construction, respect for precincts, and waqf regulations.	Principles: no harm, justice, sanctity of sacred places.	Social dissatisfaction, rights violations, and weakening legitimacy.	Hawzah News, 2018; IRNA, 2015; YJC, 2016
	Respect for citizenship rights	Equal access to services, attention to vulnerable groups, and local participation.	Quran: dignity of humankind; principles of justice, consultation.	Public distrust, inequality, and resistance to projects.	Quran; expert interviews
Economic	Equity in economic benefits	Balanced distribution of commercial, accommodation, and religious services between pilgrims and residents; support for low-income groups in pilgrimage services.	Economic justice and elimination of discrimination as fundamental principles of Islam; "so that wealth may not circulate only among the rich."	Concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, widening class gap, social dissatisfaction, and weakening of faith-based solidarity.	Quran; expert interviews
	Transparency and economic integrity	Transparent management of revenues generated from pilgrimage (waqf, donations, and services) and supervision of permits and tariffs.	Avoidance of corruption, usury, and exploitation; observance of trust and fairness in economic dealings.	Economic corruption, decline in public trust, and erosion of the sanctity of shrine management.	Mehr News, 2015; expert interviews
	Strengthening the local and indigenous economy	Revitalization of the old bazaar, handicraft workshops, religious shops, and traditional souvenirs of Qom.	Support for lawful production and work; emphasis on self-sufficiency and blessing in livelihood.	Dependence on external investment, decline in local employment, erosion of the authentic economic	Expert interviews

In the pilgrimage fabric of Qom, the spatial-physical structure is formed upon a sacred hierarchy in which the Holy Shrine occupies the center of sanctity, while courtyards, arcades, bazaars, and surrounding neighborhoods are organized as the second and third precincts. This structure, beyond its physical organization, is rooted in Islamic values such as respect for sacred boundaries, order in approach, and the sanctity of place, all of which are emphasized in Islamic jurisprudence. Spatial markers, such as domes, minarets, and radial pathways, facilitate pilgrims' orientation and represent spiritual guidance throughout the pilgrimage. Neglect in this dimension results in functional overlaps, visual disorder, disorientation of pilgrims, and reduction of the spiritual experience, thereby seriously undermining spatial cohesion and the sanctity of sacred precincts. In the semantic-sensory dimension, the central fabric of Qom, with its prominent elements such as the shrine, Imamzadeh, historic mosques, and religious gathering spaces, provides a meaningful foundation for the formation of religious identity and a sense of

belonging for citizens and pilgrims. The evocative quality of these spaces and their historical connection to the tradition of pilgrimage nourish the collective spirit and cultural memory of the city. This symbolism is rooted in concepts of Towhid, continuity of righteous traditions, and the significance of sacred places in Shi'i culture. Neglect of this dimension—particularly through the demolition of historic fabric, homogenization of form, or removal of symbolic markers—leads to a rupture of collective memory, weakening of religious identity, and a reduction of pilgrimage to a material and spiritless experience. The sacred landscape of Qom's pilgrimage fabric, characterized by vistas of the shrine's dome and minarets along with principal axes and the visual legibility of routes leading to the shrine, is a key component in shaping the pilgrim's spiritual experience. This landscape reflects Islamic aesthetic principles such as beauty (*ḥosn*), visual guidance, and moderation in building heights. Failure to manage the landscape allows for high-rise dominance, visual chaos, the loss of the traditional skyline, and a

weakening of the spiritual atmosphere, thereby diminishing both visual and spiritual perception and disrupting historical and symbolic harmony.

The functional system of Qom's pilgrimage fabric is based on hierarchical centers, radial access networks, and diverse spaces (bazaar, courtyards, lodging, cultural facilities, and pedestrian routes). This structure corresponds with Islamic teachings on order, spatial justice, and responsiveness to diverse human needs, enabling interaction, worship, residence, and commerce in accordance with pilgrimage patterns. A lack of intervention and organization leads to functional overlaps, congestion, spatial monotony, a decline in pilgrimage quality, and dissatisfaction among both

pilgrims and residents. Consequently, the shrine's central role and its supporting functions are weakened, reducing the city's overall effectiveness.

In the environmental dimension, due to the region's hot and dry climate, the pilgrimage fabric of Qom requires interventions based on environmental resilience and vernacular architectural principles, including the use of durable materials, shading devices, compact fabric, narrow alleys, and green spaces along pilgrimage routes. These measures not only improve thermal comfort but also align with Islamic values such as balance in resource use, respect for nature, and stewardship of the earth as a divine trust. Neglect of environmental considerations results in pollution, physical erosion, overheating of spaces, reduced comfort for pilgrims, and disruption of environmental sustainability.

In the faith–ethics dimension, moral behavior, pilgrimage etiquette, modest dress, assistance to others, and respect in shrine surroundings are manifestations of the Islamic lifestyle and values such as human dignity, decorum, and presence of heart in worship. The pilgrimage environment of Qom provides a setting for spiritual growth, acquisition of knowledge, and moral refinement through religious sessions, congregational prayers, and spiritual experiences in courtyards. The absence of ethical management fosters misconduct, diminishes the sanctity of the experience, and weakens the pilgrim's spiritual experience, thereby undermining the educational function of pilgrimage.

In the socio–cultural dimension, Qom's pilgrimage fabric, which relies on religious and cultural heritage, historic neighborhoods, intimate social interactions, religious associations, charitable participation, and seminaries, creates a foundation for social capital and

faithful coexistence. This dimension corresponds to teachings on cooperation in righteousness, the preservation of righteous traditions, and the strengthening of religious solidarity. Without intervention and protection, the fabric suffers from weakened cultural authenticity, reduced social interaction, rupture of pilgrim–resident relations, and transformation into a purely functional space, thereby damaging the social spirit of pilgrimage and the city's cultural vitality.

In the managerial–governance dimension, Qom's pilgrimage fabric is influenced by multi-institutional management involving the shrine authority, municipality, heritage office, and other bodies, which requires effective coordination and decision-making based on Islamic principles, such as justice, consultation, unity, and respect for citizenship rights. Observance of jurisprudential rulings in construction, respect for precincts, safeguarding of rights, and public participation are essential. Mismanagement leads to institutional discord, fragmented projects, violations of residents' rights, a decline in public trust, and damage to the shrine's sanctity.

Finally, the economic dimension of Qom's pilgrimage fabric is sustained by services, traditional bazaars, handicrafts, and shrine-related activities. When benefits are distributed equitably and financial transparency is ensured, the system aligns with Islamic values of economic justice, elimination of discrimination, and trustworthiness. Strengthening the local economy resonates with principles of lawful livelihood, self-sufficiency, and support for domestic production. Failure to intervene appropriately fosters wealth concentration, economic corruption, decline in public trust, erosion of the authentic pilgrimage economy, and dependence on external investment.

5.2. Strategies and executive actions in the pilgrimage fabric of Qom

The urban fabric surrounding the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh (SA) possesses a radial and hierarchical structure that guides the pilgrimage experience gradually and sequentially from peripheral environments toward the sacred center. The main access axes include Eram Pedestrian Path, Enqhelab Pedestrian Path, Bahar Pedestrian Path, Astaneh Square, and Imam Khomeini Square, all of which play a key role in directing pilgrims and shaping movement flows. Field and documentary analysis reveal that contemporary urban interventions and specific

physical and functional weaknesses have affected these flows and the pilgrimage experience. Some of these challenges across different dimensions are as follows:

- Spatial–physical dimension (place-oriented)

Eram pedestrian path and shrine courtyards: Physical ruptures caused by modern constructions and the removal of historic narrow passages have reduced spatial cohesion and sacred hierarchy. The gradual movement of pilgrims from public environments to the shrine has been disrupted, diminishing the sense of sanctity.

Old bazaar and surrounding neighborhoods: Incoherent combinations of commercial and service uses have disrupted the continuity of radial routes and access lines, disturbing the hierarchical pilgrimage experience.

Interventions in shrine entrances: construction of new streets and boulevards (such as Payambar-e Azam Boulevard) with altered widths and forms has increased vehicular access but undermined traditional spatial cohesion and pilgrims' orientation.

- Semantic–sensory dimension (place-oriented)

Shrine dome and minarets as symbolic markers: Pilgrims' focus on sacred symbols has been weakened due to high-rise buildings and heterogeneous urban advertisements along shrine entrances.

Historic passages leading to courtyards: advertising boards, temporary stalls, and dense non-religious activities have reduced pilgrims' sensory and spiritual experience, limiting mental connection with sacred elements.

Historic fabric of the old bazaar: Physical changes and demolition of valuable buildings have diminished the transmission of pilgrimage memory and continuity of spiritual identity along the route.

- Urban landscape dimension

Skyline and golden dome vista: New constructions around ayatollah marashi street and Astaneh Square have reduced visual legibility and cohesion of the skyline.

Facades and materials of surrounding buildings: Inconsistencies in color, materials, and ornamentation have conflicted with Islamic architectural patterns, weakening visual identity.

- Functional dimension

Congestion in the Eram pedestrian path and Astaneh Square: High population density and shortage of service spaces have disrupted pedestrian movement and the smooth pilgrimage experience.

Old bazaar and surrounding alleys: lack of coherence between commercial and religious activities has fragmented and superficialized the pilgrimage route.

Shortage of cultural and recreational spaces: Facilities such as the Astaneh museum, library, and parks are limited and scattered, failing to meet the diverse needs of pilgrims (children, elderly, religious groups).

Functional hierarchy: lack of coherence among commercial, service, and religious spaces along radial routes has fragmented and diluted the pilgrimage experience.

- Environmental dimension

Shortage of greenery and shading: Narrow passages and shrine courtyards lack sufficient coverage.

Insufficient use of climatic elements: passages and courtyards are directly exposed to sunlight, reducing pilgrims' thermal comfort.

Eram pedestrian path and routes to the bazaar: Direct sunlight and lack of climate-responsive design have diminished the quality of presence.

- Faith–ethics dimension

Absence of quiet and contemplative spaces: Heavy commercial activity and crowd density have limited opportunities for solitude, silence, and spiritual presence during pilgrimage.

Shortage of educational and spiritual programs: Qur'an exegesis sessions, sermons, and religious education are scattered, reducing the formative impact of pilgrimage.

- Socio–cultural dimension

Reduced social interaction in courtyards, Eram path, and bazaar: High crowd density, lack of seating areas, and weak coordination of cultural activities have diminished social participation and cultural capital.

Security and safety in narrow bazaar alleys: Limited police presence and inadequate lighting, especially in narrow routes, have reduced social security.

- Managerial dimension

Institutional incoherence among shrine authority, municipality, and heritage office: Fragmented decision-making and uncoordinated projects have disrupted spatial cohesion and sanctity.

Incomplete observance of jurisprudential and urban regulations: some developments, such as modifications to Eram Path and Payambar-e Azam Boulevard, have caused functional overlaps and reduced respect for sacred precincts.

- Economic dimension

Concentration of economic activities in old bazaar and shrine-linked alleys: Commercial concentration in

limited points and weak revival of authentic handicrafts have undermined the economic–pilgrimage identity. The bazaar and surrounding religious centers face shortages of local jobs and handicrafts.

Limited financial transparency and public participation: inadequate oversight of revenues and tariffs has reduced economic justice and the economic–spiritual identity of the fabric.

The strategies and executive actions of this research have been extracted through the methodological framework of directed content analysis and a comparative matrix. Each proposed strategy directly responds to the challenges identified in the findings, derived from field and documentary data. The central intervention model of the study is place-oriented and human-oriented, meaning that each executive action is defined in relation to an access axis, courtyard, or historic bazaar, to enhance the pilgrimage experience by restoring spatial cohesion, reinforcing meaning and symbols, organizing functions, and deepening spiritual experience. This model represents the practical translation of Islamic urbanism principles into executable programs in the contemporary pilgrimage fabric.

Based on spatial analysis, strategies and actions have been designed around access axes, gathering spaces, and functional nodes, with each strategy aimed at enhancing spatial cohesion, facilitating pilgrims' movement, improving spiritual experience, and harmonizing pilgrimage, social, and service functions. Thus, the main access routes, key spaces, and zones of pilgrimage–social density form the foundation for developing strategies and actions. The strategies are as follows:

- Eram pedestrian path and radial routes:
 - Reinforce spatial hierarchy by reconstructing historic passages
 - Provide shading, seating areas, and climatic elements
 - Introduce religious lighting and soundscapes to strengthen sensory–spiritual experience
- Astaneh square and surrounding courtyards:
 - Organize service and cultural spaces
 - Control crowd density through route management and distribution of pilgrim flows
 - Harmonize building materials and facades to preserve the skyline and visual identity
- Old bazaar and historic neighborhoods:
 - Preserve traditional uses and strengthen local cultural–economic activities
 - Revitalize communal spaces and intergenerational

links to sustain historical memory and religious identity

- Pilgrimage centers and local mosques:
 - Create contemplative spaces for prayer and reflection; expand educational programs
 - Strengthen the role of mosques and imamzadehs in the functional hierarchy of pilgrimage
- Integrated management and urban governance:
 - Establish coordination councils among the shrine authority, the municipality, and the heritage office
 - Define jurisprudential and urban guidelines for development interventions and ensure continuous oversight
- Economy and local participation:
 - Develop local markets, handicrafts, and indigenous jobs
 - Ensure financial transparency and public participation in managing pilgrimage services

Field evidence and observations indicate that in specific access routes and surrounding passages, disruptions in spatial and functional hierarchy, excessive crowd density, physical ruptures caused by modern constructions, and a lack of visual coordination have reduced the quality of pilgrimage experience and weakened pilgrims' sense of belonging and spiritual connection to the sacred place. Moreover, shortages of contemplative spaces, weakened sensory and symbolic experience, and limited service and cultural facilities have restricted the formative and spiritual capacity of pilgrimage.

This analysis and the proposed strategies, being detailed, place-oriented, and operational, enable precise planning to enhance the pilgrimage experience and preserve the identity of Islamic urbanism. The primary focus of programs must be on access routes, courtyards, historic passages, and the sacred shrine center, as these elements exert the most direct influence on spiritual experience, pilgrims' movement, and spatial cohesion. Accordingly, an operational table (Table 3) has been developed, specifying for each dimension of Islamic urbanism the operational indicators, strategies, and proposed actions, and ultimately clarifying their situational impact on the pilgrimage experience. Presenting strategies and executive actions in this tabular format constitutes a practical and evidence-based response to the specific challenges of each dimension (spatial–morphological, semantic–sensory, urban landscape, functional, environmental, faith–ethics, socio–cultural, managerial, and economic). This table not only demonstrates the proposed solutions but also

explicates the direct relationship between spatial principles, thereby generating scientific and practical analysis, field evidence, and Islamic urbanism added value for managing pilgrimage fabrics.

Table 3. Place-based strategies and executive actions for enhancing the pilgrimage experience in the sacred city of Qom

Dimension	Operational indicator	Location/axis	Strategy	Action program	Impact on pilgrimage experience
Spatial-physical	Spatial rupture and reduced cohesion	Eram pedestrian path, shrine courtyards	Strengthen spatial cohesion and sacred precincts	Define spatial hierarchy; stabilize shrine precincts; reconstruct Astaneh passage; install boundary markers at entrances.	Hierarchical pilgrimage experience preserved; pilgrims' movement becomes smoother and more spiritual.
Semantic-sensory	Decline in sensory and spiritual experience	Courtyards, historic passages, radial routes	Enhance sensory and symbolic experience	Religious lighting and soundscapes; preservation of traditional and symbolic elements	Strengthened mindfulness and spiritual presence; increased memorability and pilgrims' spiritual connection
Urban landscape	Disruption of the skyline and visual harmony	Astaneh Square, Ayatollah Mar'ashi Street, shrine surroundings	Preserve visual identity and historic skyline	Limit building heights in Marashi Street and Astaneh Square; reconstruct inconsistent facades; harmonize colors and ornamentation.	Greater sense of tranquility, beauty, and cohesion in the pilgrimage environment
Functional	Congestion of routes and shortage of service spaces	Eram pedestrian path, Astaneh Square, radial access routes	Organize routes and improve functional hierarchy	Design separate pedestrian and vehicular paths; expand service and accommodation spaces	Smooth pilgrim movement; reduced stress; increased satisfaction with pilgrimage experience
Environmental	Shortage of greenery and weak resilience	Courtyards, narrow passages, and surrounding areas	Improve the environment and resilience of the fabric	Create green spaces, shading structures, and use water and climatic elements.	Increased tranquility, freshness of environment, and thermal comfort for pilgrims
Faith-ethics	Limited spaces for silence and contemplation	Courtyards, secluded shrine surroundings	Create spiritual and educational spaces	Design contemplative areas; expand religious and educational programs	Deepened spiritual experience; strengthened connection with religious teachings
Socio-cultural	Decline in social capital and cultural interaction	Courtyards, surrounding neighborhoods, and the old bazaar	Strengthen social interaction and cultural activities	Create interaction spaces; organize religious events and cultural workshops	Increased sense of belonging, participation, and solidarity among pilgrims and residents
Managerial-governance	Weak institutional coordination and regulatory compliance	Entire shrine surroundings	Integrated management and compliance with jurisprudential and urban regulations	Establish coordination councils; define guidelines; and provide continuous oversight.	Improved service quality; respect for sacred precincts; increased pilgrims' trust
Economic	Concentration of economic activities and weak equity	Old Bazaar, religious and commercial centers	Balanced distribution of opportunities and support for local capacities	Develop local markets; ensure financial transparency; encourage economic participation	Increased economic justice; enhanced public participation; strengthened economic and spiritual identity of pilgrimage

The review of indicators, strategies, and action programs in Table 3 demonstrates that the pilgrimage fabric surrounding the Holy Shrine of Hazrat

Masoumeh (SA) faces a set of intertwined challenges that directly affect the quality of the pilgrimage experience. A general analysis of the table's dimensions

indicates that four principal axes—spatial, morphological, functional, semantic, sensory, and faith—ethical—hold the highest priority for intervention, as these domains exert the most significant influence on pilgrims’ behavior, quality of presence, spatial perception, and psychological tranquility.

In the spatial–morphological dimension, problems such as spatial rupture, disorder in spatial hierarchy, and reduced cohesion have disrupted pilgrims’ movement along major routes such as the Eram Pedestrian Path and shrine courtyards. The absence of a clear demarcation of sacred precincts and the weakening of entrance passages have diminished part of the symbolic meaning of entering the shrine. Therefore, strengthening the spatial structure and stabilizing the sacred precincts are considered primary priorities.

In the functional domain, congestion of access routes, insufficiency of service spaces, and the overlap of pedestrian and vehicular movement make pilgrims’ presence difficult, increasing psychological stress and physical fatigue. Organizing radial and ring routes, separating pedestrian and vehicular flows, and expanding service spaces can significantly enhance the quality of the pilgrimage experience.

The semantic–sensory and faith–ethical dimensions also occupy a special place in the pilgrimage fabric. Decline in lighting quality, fading of traditional symbols, and lack of spaces for silence and contemplation have reduced the spiritual depth of the pilgrimage experience and disrupted pilgrims’ mindfulness and spiritual presence. Designing contemplative spaces, revitalizing symbolic elements, and improving religious lighting and soundscapes play a fundamental role in reinforcing the spiritual character of the environment. Other dimensions, such as urban landscape, environmental, socio–cultural, managerial, and economic, although secondary in priority, serve supportive and reinforcing roles. Organizing the skyline in Astaneh Square, increasing greenery in courtyards and narrow passages, strengthening social capital in surrounding neighborhoods, and establishing integrated management are all important elements that provide the foundation for enhancing the pilgrimage experience.

Overall, the analysis of the table shows that although challenges are dispersed across various dimensions, the key to improving the pilgrimage experience at the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh (SA) lies in focusing on the following four principal axes:

- Strengthening spatial and morphological cohesion of the sacred precinct
- Organizing functional routes and service spaces
- Enhancing the semantic, sensory, and symbolic experience of space
- Deepening spiritual presence, silence, and faith–educational opportunities

These four axes constitute the fundamental infrastructure, and the success of other dimensions depends on their realization. Therefore, the overarching strategy for the shrine’s surrounding fabric must concentrate on creating an orderly, tranquil, meaningful, and human-centered environment—an environment in which pilgrims’ movement is natural, their presence is conscious, and their experience becomes profound and spiritual.

6. Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that the pilgrimage fabric of the holy city of Qom lies at the intersection of two simultaneous forces. On the one hand, there is the heritage of sacred spaces and the historical structure formed around the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh (SA); on the other hand, there are contemporary urban interventions carried out in recent decades to facilitate circulation and upgrade infrastructure. These two forces are coordinated in some areas and contradictory in others, with much of the fabric’s challenges arising from this lack of harmony.

Analysis based on the principles of Islamic urbanism shows that the spatial hierarchy and observance of sacred precincts, which are clearly recognizable in Qom’s traditional structure, have been weakened in specific layers today. Straight and wide street constructions such as Eram, Enqhelab, and Payambar-e Azam Boulevard have severed the organic connection between the second and third precincts. Spaces that once gradually brought pilgrims closer to the shrine through narrow passages, bazaars, and transitional forecourts have now turned into high-speed transit corridors. This change has not only disrupted the perceptual experience of approach but, in some areas, particularly between Astaneh Square and Eram Street, has led to the loss of respect and spatial tranquility.

At the semantic–sensory level, identity-forming elements such as historic passages, pilgrimage caravanserais, bazaar cells, and small-scale religious symbols have either disappeared or been concealed beneath layers of commercialization and signage. As a

result, the pilgrimage experience along some shrine entrances has shifted from a “slow, gradual, and meaningful” journey to a “hurried, stressful, and commerce-driven” one. For example, the Astaneh–Chahar Mardan axis, which previously contained religious markers, traditional cells, and collective memory continuity, is now surrounded by new constructions lacking historical connection, losing much of its spatial narrative.

From the perspective of urban landscape, results show that the shrine’s skyline, its most important perceptual element, has in recent years been affected by medium-rise constructions, large-scale signage, and visual disorder in facades. Along routes such as Eram Street and the 45-Meter Boulevard, unregulated commercial signage and heterogeneous materials have reduced spiritual legibility and increased visual chaos. This situation contradicts the Islamic principle of “proportion and moderation” in urban imagery, which emphasizes harmony and visual habitability.

In the functional dimension, the study revealed that the heavy concentration of commercial and short-term accommodation activities around the shrine has created a form of functional injustice, whereby cultural, educational, and social service spaces suitable for local residents have been marginalized. This trend has reduced the quality of life of the native population and led to their gradual departure from neighborhoods such as Chehel-Akhtaran, Oudlajan of Qom, and parts of the Gozare-khan district. With the decline of native residents, the network of social interactions, one of the foundations of Islamic urbanism, has weakened, transforming the area from a “lived neighborhood” into a “temporary consumptive space.”

In the socio-cultural dimension, it was found that the cultural-social capital of historic neighborhoods has been severely reduced due to functional transfers and episodic constructions. For instance, the emergence of commercial complexes and multi-story parking lots in place of former spaces of religious and local interaction has diminished the capacity for dialogue, coexistence, and mutual respect between pilgrims and hosts. Moreover, soft security, especially during peak hours in areas such as Eram Street and its adjoining alleys, has declined, partly due to the absence of behavioral boundaries and clear territorial demarcations.

In the environmental dimension, climate management analysis shows that a large portion of pedestrian routes within a 500-meter radius of the shrine lack shading, drought-resistant greenery, and cooling

surfaces. This issue, particularly in hot months, reduces the quality of pilgrimage experience and increases fatigue and crowding in semi-covered shrine spaces. Given Qom’s intense heat, Islamic climatic principles such as shading, microclimate humidity, and the use of low-temperature materials are not adequately observed in the current situation.

Finally, analysis of the managerial and economic dimensions revealed institutional fragmentation among the shrine authority, municipality, cultural heritage office, endowments, and police, leading to dualities in decision-making and project implementation. The absence of a unified, sacred-oriented development plan for the shrine precinct has resulted in projects such as street expansions and commercial redevelopments being executed without assessing their spiritual and identity impacts. Economically, the dominance of short-term, sales-oriented activities has overshadowed the capacities of the pilgrimage economy, such as cultural industries, sustainable pilgrimage tourism, and spiritual marketing.

Overall, the discussion shows that Qom’s pilgrimage fabric possesses strong potential to return to the pure model of Islamic urbanism. However, such a return is only possible through coordinated management, the gradual revival of historical layers, landscape organization, strengthening of spiritual experiences, and the redistribution of functions. The findings emphasize that the main issue is not the lack of projects, but rather the misalignment of projects with the sacred logic of space. This logic distinguishes Qom from an ordinary city and shapes its identity.

7. Conclusion

The overall analysis of dimensions and principles of Islamic urbanism in Qom’s pilgrimage fabric indicates that four principal axes, spatial-physical, functional, semantic-sensory, and faith-ethical, hold the highest priority for intervention in the precinct surrounding the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh (SA). These domains exert the most significant influence on pilgrims’ behavior, quality of presence, spatial perception, and psychological tranquility.

In the spatial-morphological dimension, challenges such as spatial rupture, disorder in spatial hierarchy, and reduced cohesion have disrupted pilgrims’ movement along major routes such as the Eram Pedestrian Path and shrine courtyards. The absence of clear sacred boundaries and weakened entrance

passages has diminished part of the symbolic meaning of entering the shrine. Strengthening the spatial structure and stabilizing the sacred precincts are therefore primary priorities.

In the functional domain, congestion of access routes, insufficiency of service spaces, and overlap of pedestrian and vehicular movement make pilgrims' presence difficult, increasing psychological stress and physical fatigue. Organizing radial and ring routes, separating pedestrian and vehicular flows, and expanding service spaces can significantly enhance the quality of the pilgrimage experience.

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In summary, although challenges are dispersed across various dimensions, the key to improving the pilgrimage experience at the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh (SA) lies in focusing on the following four principal axes:

- strengthening spatial and morphological cohesion of the sacred precinct
- organizing functional routes and service spaces
- enhancing the semantic, sensory, and symbolic experience of space
- deepening spiritual presence, silence, and faith–educational opportunities

These four axes constitute the fundamental infrastructure, and the success of other dimensions depends on their realization. Therefore, the overarching strategy for the shrine's surrounding fabric must concentrate on creating an orderly, tranquil, meaningful, and human-centered environment, an environment in which pilgrims'

movement is natural, their presence is conscious, and their experience becomes profound and spiritual.

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of researchers such as Farhadi and Tavangar (2022), who emphasize preserving the native population, regenerating and revitalizing historic neighborhoods, balancing conservation and development in urban management programs, and allocating uses to heritage buildings through cultural activities; Sabouri and Saboonchi (2022), who highlight preserving and supporting traditional physical structures, enlivening spaces, diversifying activities, increasing social interactions, sustaining identity, strengthening memory and perceptual roles, and enhancing the connective role of axes with the shrine; Saeedi (2022), who recommends participatory methods reflecting local characteristics and social practices to increase community engagement in protective proposals for Islamic pilgrimage sites; and Farhan et al. (2023), who consider history and heritage assets as reflections of local cultural values and as essential requirements for future urban planning practices in sacred cities. However, this study is the first to comprehensively articulate and analyze the principles and strategies of Islamic urbanism in organizing the pilgrimage fabric of the holy city of Qom.

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The percentage of authors' contributions in this article is equal.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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