

Original Article

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Rentier economy and network instrumentalization: An analysis of non-human agency in the transformation of place character within the Razavi Shrine precinct

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Abstract

The rentier capitalist economy in religious cities such as Mashhad transforms urban structures and place character by exploiting pilgrimage flows and monopolistic resources without creating productive value, commodifying the identity of lived places into profitable assets. The theoretical frameworks of actor-network theory (ANT) and object-oriented ontology (OOO) provide appropriate approaches for investigating this phenomenon. However, despite the growth of studies employing ANT and OOO, a significant gap remains in their application to urban political economy. Although various aspects have been examined, the role of non-human actors in rent-seeking within religious places appears to have been neglected. This study examines the mechanisms of place character transformation in the neighborhoods within the Razavi Shrine precinct. It aims to answer the question: "How does the rentier economy transform place character through the mediation of built form, and what role do non-human actors play in this process?" The research methodology is based on an interpretive-critical paradigm with a posthumanist orientation, employing a qualitative approach that integrates discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis through the bricolage technique. Data were collected through document analysis and in-depth interviews with 12 key informants, then integrated and analyzed using three-stage grounded theory coding combined with the bricolage technique. Findings revealed that the actor network comprises 40 actors, with non-human actors playing a dominant role. The core category of "networked instrumentalization of space to eliminate resistances" was identified, in which driving forces prevail over local resistances. The theoretical contribution of this research demonstrates that built form does not act as a passive mediator but rather as a dual actor that both participates in rent production and resists it. In contrast, non-human economic actors dominate the network, and the withdrawal capacity of objects remains limited.

Keywords

Built Form
Essence of Place
The Razavi Shrine Precinct
Network Instrumentalization
Non-Human Agency
Rentier Economy

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1. Introduction

The rentier capitalist economy represents one of the fundamental challenges facing contemporary cities (Harvey, 2020). This phenomenon, based on earning exclusive income from resource ownership without creating productive value, profoundly affects urban structures and the essence of place (Christophers, 2020). In religious cities such as Mashhad, which serve as centers of pilgrimage tourism, this influence acquires particular complexity and depth, forming intricate networks of relationships among diverse actors (Bostan et al., 2023).

Mashhad, as Iran's second-largest metropolis and one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in the Shi'ite world, provides a unique empirical context for examining the intersection of rentier economy and place essence. The presence of the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza and the annual flow of millions of pilgrims have transformed this city into a center of pilgrimage-oriented economy (Jamshidi et al., 2019). In recent decades, rapid urban development processes in the Shrine's vicinity have created profound transformations in the historical fabric and spatial structure of this area (Darbani et al., 2023; Harim-e Razavi Plan, 2020). Existing studies indicate that land prices in areas adjacent to the Shrine have increased dramatically (Moshfeghi et al., 2020). The traditional residential fabric is rapidly being evacuated and demolished, while mixed-use commercial-residential complexes, hotel chains, and modern shopping centers are quickly replacing traditional residential and cultural spaces (Bostan et al., 2023; Maroufi et al., 2025). The critical issue (practical significance) of this research is that these physical transformations, accompanied by changes in demographic composition, ownership patterns, and the region's economic structure, demonstrate the profound impacts of the rentier economy on the physical, spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions of this sacred place. However, the precise mechanisms through which the rentier economy, in interaction with sacred, cultural, and material elements, reconstructs the essence of place in this religious city remain inadequately examined.

Studies employing actor-network theory (ANT) and object-oriented ontology (OOO) have experienced significant growth in recent decades, but have predominantly focused on ecological issues (Ginn, 2022; Hinchliffe et al., 2016), smart urban technologies (Hashem et al., 2023), and urban assemblages. These approaches, emphasizing symmetrical agencyⁱ and heterogeneous networks, have provided novel

frameworks for understanding urban complexities (Farías & Bender, 2012). However, a significant research gap (scientific significance) exists in the application of ANT and OOO to analyze urban political economy issues, particularly the rentier economy and financialization processes. Existing studies have inadequately examined the role of human and non-human actors in forming rentier networks and their impact on transforming the essence of place. This gap becomes more pronounced in the context of religious cities, which possess complex layers of sacred, cultural, and economic elements. It requires a more comprehensive theoretical framework capable of explaining both the network dynamics of relationships (ANT) and the independent role of non-human objects (OOO) in producing and reproducing the rentier economy.

Focusing on the district of the Razavi Shrine precinct of Mashhad, this research examines the mechanisms through which the rentier capitalist economy transforms the essence of place. This study seeks to answer the question: "How does the rentier economy transform the essence of place through the mediation of built form, and what role do non-human actors play in this process?" The research objective is to discover and analyze actor networks in which human actors (investors, urban managers, pilgrims, and residents) and non-human actors (historical buildings, modern structures, land, financial capital, and sacred elements) interact to shape rentier processes and reproduce the essence of place.

This study employs a combination of two theoretical approaches: actor-network theory (ANT) and object-oriented ontology (OOO). By emphasizing symmetrical agency and tracing relationships among human and non-human actors, it enables the explanation of complex mechanisms through which the rentier economy operates (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005; Law, 2002). This approach is efficient in uncovering the role of material actors (land, buildings, and laws) in forming rentier networks. However, the application of object-oriented ontology is also essential (Farías & Bender, 2012; Kärrholm, 2013; McFarlane, 2011b). In the rentier economy of religious cities, non-human actors (land, historical buildings, and sacred elements) function not merely as passive substrates but as active agents in rent production and the redefinition of place essence. Traditional interpretivist approaches that focus on human-centered meanings are unable to explain the independent role of these actors in rentier mechanisms (Latour, 2005). Object-oriented ontology,

by rejecting anthropocentric hierarchies and emphasizing the ontological independence of objects (Bryant et al., 2011; Harman, 2018), enables a deeper understanding of the role of non-human elements in place transformation (Kärrholm, 2014; Mousavi Khorshidi, 2023). Therefore, the integration of actor-network theory (for tracing the network dynamics of relationships) and object-oriented ontology (for understanding the autonomous agency of objects) provides a more comprehensive explanation encompassing both the dynamics of relationships and the independent capacities of actors. This research constitutes a theoretical-applied study that, through the combined application of actor-network theory and object-oriented ontology to the empirical case of the district of the precinct of the Razavi Shrine, develops a novel analytical framework for understanding the intersection of rentier economy and place essence in religious cities.

2. Literature review

Studies on rentier economics have primarily examined its impacts on the spatial and social structures of cities. The concept of rent originated in Ricardo's classical theory. It was further developed by Harvey (1974), who introduced the idea of "monopoly rent," evolving into a more comprehensive critique in his later works (Harvey, 2020). Recent studies by Christophers (2019, 2020) and others (2025) have identified four key components of rentier capitalism: ownership and control of scarce resources, monopolistic control over access, profit generation without creating added value, and the establishment of power networks to sustain privileges, where wealth accumulation occurs through asset ownership rather than productive labor. Standing (2021) emphasized that this system weakens urban spatial structures, labor power, and democratic governance. Saito and Sasaki (2025), through a reinterpretation of Marx's theory of ground rent, described rentier capitalism as the most advanced and contradictory form of contemporary capitalism, one that destroys public spaces, undermines working-class solidarity, and, as the crisis of capital accumulation intensifies, poses an imminent threat of a shift toward techno-fascism. Dannreuther and Langworthy (2025) introduced the concept of "citizenship rent," illustrating the way gender plays a central role in reproducing asset characteristics and patriarchal structures within rentier economies. In Iran, studies by Saeedi Fard and colleagues (2020) and Nejati and colleagues (2023) have demonstrated the profound influences of rentier

economics on the spatial organization of cities.

In religious cities, the "essence of place" acquires particular complexity due to its phenomenological roots (Relph, 2010; Norberg-Schulz, 2021) (Burchardt et al., 2023). Research by Boostan (2023) and Jamshidi (2019) has shown that market logic and rentier economics transform spiritual experiences and the spatial distribution of services. However, these studies have primarily focused on human experiences, paying less attention to the role of non-human actors.

Actor-network theory (ANT) and object-oriented ontology (OOO) are two intellectual approaches that enable us to study objects as independent and active entities. These theories reject human exceptionalism, asserting that every object possesses its own unique identity and essence, which cannot be ignored or reduced to other factors. Despite significant advances in both fields (rentier economics and sense of place), a critical gap remains in understanding the role of non-human actors (buildings, infrastructures, material elements) in rentier economic processes and their effects on sense of place. ANT studies in urban contexts, such as those by McFarlane (2011) and Fariás and Bender (2012), have emphasized distributed agency, but their application to rentier economics has been limited. Similarly, OOO studies in architecture (Kärrholm, 2013, 2014) focus on the ontological independence of objects, yet their connections to urban political economy have been underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by demonstrating that built form is not a passive mediator between rentier economics and sense of place but an active agent that participates in rent production while also resisting it. This study addresses this gap and shows the way the artificial form (built form) as a mediator is not a passive platform between the rentier economy and the nature of place, but rather an active actor that participates in and resists rent-production.

3. Conceptual framework

Based on the theoretical frameworks of rentier economy, built form, and essence of place, this section presents a three-component conceptual framework that explains the relationships among rentier economy, built form, and essence of place.

3.1. Rentier capitalist economy as the driver of transformation

In this study, the rentier economy is understood as the primary driver of spatial transformations. According to existing theories, three main mechanisms operate in

urban rentier economies:

- Access monopoly: exclusive control over scarce resources, particularly land in strategic locations (Harvey, 1974)
- Profit without production: generating income from resource ownership without creating real added value (Standing, 2021)
- Power networking: forming power coalitions among different actors to maintain and expand rentier privileges (Christophers, 2020)

In religious cities, these mechanisms intersect with the sanctity of place, producing a specific monopoly rent that Harvey termed “monopoly class rent” (Harvey, 1974). This type of rent derives from the unique cultural and spiritual characteristics of place, which can be interpreted as “sacred rent.”

3.2. Built form as active mediator

In this study, built form is conceptualized as an active mediator in the interaction between the rentier economy and the essence of place. Based on actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), the material elements of the city—buildings, land parcels, and infrastructure—possess agency and play a mediating role in this process. The three fundamental roles of built form include:

- Networking: attracting and connecting different actors (investors, managers, and residents, pilgrims) through their material capacities
- Translation: converting cultural and religious values into economic opportunities and vice versa, a process that Latour (2005) calls “translation.”
- Resistance: maintaining material capacities (withdrawn) that resist rentier logic

Based on Kropf’s (2014) theoretical framework, built form is analyzed at three scales: block (access patterns, land use mix), plot (subdivision, density, use), and building (height, function, architecture). At each scale, agency is distributed among different actors.

3.3. Essence of place as the outcome of network interactions

In this theoretical framework, the essence of place is the outcome of complex interactions among rentier economy, built form, and lived experience. This concept extends beyond traditional phenomenological approaches (Relph, 1976; Norberg-Schulz, 1980) and encompasses two dimensions:

- Experiential dimension: the lived human experience

of place, including sense of belonging, place identity, and spatial meaning (Lewicka, 2011).

- Material dimension: physical characteristics and material capacities that shape experience (Carmona, 2019).

According to Actor-Network Theory, the essence of place is formed through networking and translation processes (Latour, 2005). In this process, some structures become “black boxes,” concealing complex power processes—something this study reveals through “black-boxing.” Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework resulting from the integration of the theoretical frameworks discussed in this research.

3.4. Analytical approach: functional complementarity of ANT and OOO

Theoretical application of actor-network theory (ANT)

Actor-network theory (ANT) is employed to analyze power networks and rentier economy processes (Latour, 2005). ANT, through its key concepts—networking, translation, and black-boxing (Latour, 2007)—enables tracking how agency is distributed among human actors (investors, urban managers, residents) and non-human actors (buildings, land, infrastructure). This approach is particularly practical in identifying the mechanisms underlying the formation of rentier networks (Farías & Bender, 2012).

Theoretical application of object-oriented ontology (OOO)

Object-oriented ontology is used to understand the inherent resistance capacities of objects (Harman, 2018). The key OOO concept in this study is “selective withdrawal (residual material capacity),” adapted from Harman’s notion of object “withdrawal.” Harman (2018) argues that objects are never fully revealed in their relations, and part of their essence always remains inaccessible—what he calls object “withdrawal.” This research defines “selective withdrawal (residual material capacity)” as observable material properties that resist instrumentalization. These capacities are identified based on participants’ narratives (historical authenticity, durability, cultural value) and physical evidence (architecture, spaces). In coding, the unidentified essence of objects is coded as materially resistant outcomes, such as instances where buildings resist developers and preserve historical values.

Research Conceptual Framework

The Relationship Between Rent Economy, Built Form and Essence of Place

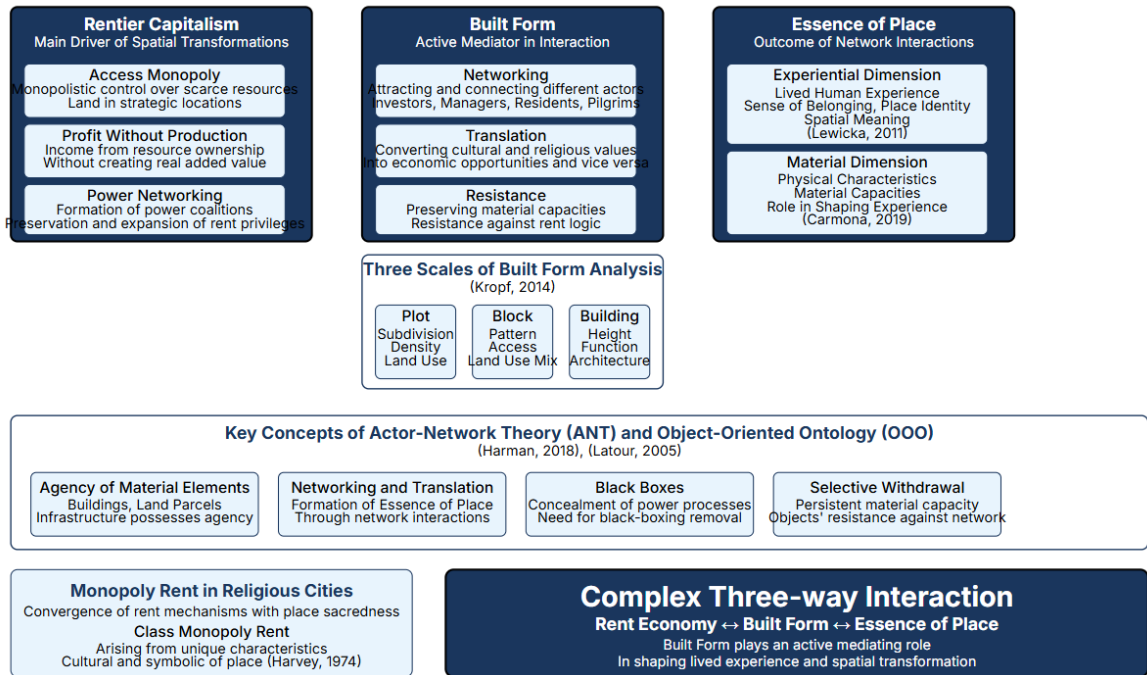


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the research

Resolving tension through division of labor, not ontological integration

The fundamental tension between ANT and OOO lies in their ontological nature. Actor-network theory is grounded in “relational ontology,” which regards objects as products of relationships (Latour, 2005), while object-oriented ontology emphasizes “object realism”. It affirms the inherent independence of objects (Harman, 2018). Rather than attempting to resolve this tension, this research adopts a functional complementarity approach: ANT is employed to analyze “power networks” and “translation” processes, while OOO is used to identify the inherent resistances and “withdrawal” capacities of objects.

Accepting constructive tension rather than claiming to

resolve it is this research’s approach, embracing it as a productive solution that enables multidimensional analysis, as Kärholm addresses this issue through the concept of “meta-theoretical approach” in his research (Kärholm, 2014). Accordingly, in different situations, one of the two theories takes analytical priority without intermingling its ontological foundations. As Kärholm (2013) demonstrated in attempting to resolve this tension through the concept of “radical topology” and in his subsequent paper (Kärholm, 2014) presented the “interobjectivity” approach emphasizing the diversity of modalities of relations between objects rather than ontological integration, this study follows the same logic.

Table 1. Theoretical framework: integrating ANT and OOO in rentier economy analysis

Theoretical concept	Operational definition	Application in analyzing the sense of place	Source
Networking	Connecting diverse actors within a unified network	Analyzing how elements of place are interconnected	(Latour, 2005b)
Translation	Aligning the divergent interests of actors	Examining the conversion of cultural values into economic ones	(Latour, 2005a)
Black-boxing (De-black-boxing)	Revealing hidden processes of power	Identifying concealed rentier structures	(Latour, 2005b)
Real/sensual objects	Distinction between the real place and its representation	Comparing the lived place with the market commodity	(Harman, 2018)

Theoretical concept	Operational definition	Application in analyzing the sense of place	Source
Withdrawal	Uncontrollable aspects of objects	Identifying inherent resistances of place	(Harman, 2018)
Territorial sorts	Fluid and transformative spatial types	Analyzing the production of new types of places	(Kärrholm, 2013)
Flat aesthetics	Non-hierarchical aesthetics	Understanding the style and allure of places	(Ansari, 2013)
Interobjectivity	Relations between objects in various forms	Multidimensional analysis of spatial interactions	(Kärrholm, 2014)
Cross-road effects	Shared effects of objects on diverse cultures	Examining similar functions of place for heterogeneous groups	(Kärrholm, 2014)
Stitching	Linking material heterogeneities within a network	Analyzing the integration of humans, objects, and spaces	(Kärrholm, 2014)
Radiance	Hidden qualities of objects that are not fully knowable	Identifying latent potentials and the transformability of place	(Kärrholm, 2014)
Facticity	Resistance arising from established structures	Analyzing rigidity and inertia in place transformations	(Kärrholm, 2014)
Modalisation	Meta-theoretical approach to diverse methodologies	Simultaneous employment of multiple approaches without forced integration	(Kärrholm, 2014)

The rentier economy, as the driver, transforms the essence of place through the mediation of built form. In this process, ANT is employed to analyze “power networks” and “translation” mechanisms, while “object withdrawal” in OOO is applied to identify the inherent resistance capacities of objects. Table 1 shows the details of the theoretical framework for tension resolution.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research methodology overview

This research adopts an interpretive-critical paradigm with a posthumanist orientation. Here, “critical” does not mean critique from a human perspective. The posthumanist critical approach enables revealing power relations in human-nonhuman networks (Braidotti, 2019). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Ahmadmohammadpour (2021), posthumanism moves away from exclusive focus on humans and attends to complex human-nonhuman networks, social contexts, and polyphonic representations. This study, based on Bruno Latour’s and Graham Harman’s perspectives, is grounded in flat ontology, which affirms symmetry between human and nonhuman actors (Harman, 2018; Latour, 2005). The research epistemology is pragmatic and critical, formed by the meaning of social structures arising from interactions between actors and social-material contexts. This approach is consistent with the interpretivist assumption of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Document analysis was conducted

based on Fairclough’s three-level framework (2003, 2023), which enables questioning how space is formed through heterogeneous networks of power, materiality, and discourse. The overall research approach is qualitative, and the bricolage technique was employed as a meta-methodology to analyze this complex network (Kincheloe, 2005). This technique enables analysis of power relations, meaning, and material-immaterial interactions. A case study (Yin, 2018) was selected as the primary research strategy. The Razavi Shrine precinct in Mashhad was chosen as the case study due to its unique characteristics (intersection of rentier economy, religious space, and urban transformations). This selection enables an in-depth examination of complex actor networks and rentier economy mechanisms.

4.2. Data collection methods

Three sources were applied to collect qualitative data: In-depth semi-structured interviews: In-depth semi-structured interviews enable flexible exploration of lived experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Purposive sampling was conducted based on specific criteria: direct experience of at least 5 years of residence or activity in the Razavi precinct, awareness of urban transformations, and willingness to participate in 45-90 minute interviews. Moreover, the Sample composition was of n=12:

- 6 face-to-face interviews: 3 urban managers, three specialists (architecture, urban planning, economics)
- 6 interviews from audio/visual archives: specialists,

former managers, designers, critics, and local residents - Diversity criteria: gender (8% female, 92% male), age (28-68 years), education (diploma to PhD), and diverse social roles

Sample size was determined based on theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014).

Document analysis: Urban documents, including comprehensive and detailed plans, official reports, historical documents, and administrative records related to Shrine precinct transformations, were collected and analyzed.

Environmental observations: Field observations of physical transformations, land use patterns, and spatial interactions in the Shrine precinct were conducted and documented through field notes and photography. All data were recorded, transcribed, and organized following ethical principles.

4.3. Analysis process

Data analysis was conducted based on the bricolage

technique (Kincheloe, 2001, 2005), combining discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. For discourse analysis, Strauss-Corbin's three-stage coding method—open, axial, and selective—was employed (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). For critical discourse analysis, Fairclough's three-level model (2003, 2023) was utilized, as explained below.

Systematic grounded theory coding (discourse analysis)

Based on Strauss-Corbin's systematic grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2014), interview analysis was conducted in three stages:

Open coding: Open coding began with careful reading of interview texts using a line-by-line analysis technique (Saldaña, 2021), and direct codes were extracted from participants' language. In the identification process, to discover semantic units and assign initial codes, and for sensitization, the research components listed in Table 2 were applied.

Table 2. Research components

Component	Operational definition	Key indicators
Rentier capitalist economy	Generating income without value production through a resource monopoly	Profit/benefit, resource ownership, rentier network monopoly
Built form (Kropf's scales)	Physical elements of the city at three scales	Block, plot, building
Essence of place (systematic approach)	Place identity from a distributed agency perspective	Fourfold structure, allure, instrumentalization, networking

Axial coding: At this stage, theoretical concepts ANT and OOO were applied as general guides for viewing and interpreting data, followed by identifying and categorizing subcategories. Identifying actor networks, determining central category dimensions, and developing a paradigmatic model to identify paradigmatic elements in subsequent stages led to determining the central category.

Selective coding: The selective coding stage, with the ultimate goal of developing a comprehensive theory, was conducted in three stages: forming triple bricolage, selecting core phenomenon, and developing a paradigmatic model. Triple bricolage was classified into three domains using conceptual content analysis of subcategories with researchers' interpretation: political bricolage, narrative, and interpretive.

Fairclough's three-level framework (critical discourse analysis)

Document analysis based on the three-level framework (Fairclough, 2003, 2023) was conducted as follows:

- Textual level: examining linguistic features and actor

representation: What vocabulary is used? How are actions represented? Who is present/absent? How are they named?

- Interactional level: analyzing meaning production and translation processes: Who produces discourse? Through what channels is it disseminated? How is it received and interpreted?

- Contextual level: connecting to social contexts and analyzing power relations: what power relations does discourse reproduce? What ideological structures does it conceal? In whose interests does it operate?

In adapting Fairclough's model to the posthumanist paradigm, "discourse" was defined beyond linguistic text to include material discourses. This approach enables examining power relations not only in language but also in materiality and space, consistent with actor-network theory (Latour, 2005).

Integrating results through bricolage

In this research, systematic grounded theory was applied to discover patterns of action and lived experience from interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2014),

while critical discourse analysis was employed to understand power structures in official documents. The bricolage approach (Kincheloe, 2005) enabled combining discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis through the bricolage technique as follows:

- Theoretical bricolage: integrating rent theory to understand spatial political economy, ANT to track actors and networks, OOO to attend to object agency—conducted in open and axial coding stages and completed in the selective coding stage
- Methodological bricolage: combining grounded theory and discourse analysis—conducted in the selective coding stage
- Interpretive bricolage: Multiple data interpretations considering historical, economic, and cultural contexts—conducted in the selective coding stage
- Political bricolage: Analyzing and revealing power structures, hidden interests, and spatial-social consequences—conducted in the selective coding stage

This approach is consistent with posthumanist philosophical positioning, as it analyzes complex human-nonhuman networks through multiple methods.

Validation based on Lincoln's (1985) four criteria

- Credibility: member checking and source triangulation (interviews+documents+observations)
- Transferability: providing sufficient detail of context and process
- Dependability: precise documentation of research stages
- Confirmability: maintaining a chain of evidence and a

decision trail

For cross-validation, findings from both methods were compared in the discussion section to determine their convergence or divergence. Analysis continued until theoretical saturation was reached, at which point intercoder agreement (80%) was within an acceptable range (Krippendorff, 2018). Figure 2 illustrates the research methodology flowchart.

Scientific justification for using interviews to code network agency

Using interviews to code network agency is grounded in ANT and OOO theoretical foundations and is not only permissible but necessary. According to Latour's symmetry principle, categorical separation between humans and nonhumans is artificial, and humans, as spokespersons for heterogeneous networks, are always translating and representing nonhuman actors. Moreover, according to Harman's theory, objects are never directly accessible, and humans often act as primary translators. Despite that, complementary methods such as document analysis are also helpful; access to objects' "sensual qualities" is provided through humans. Coding examples demonstrate that interviewees naturally introduce statistics (like 20 million pilgrims), projects (like the most significant urban intervention), and plans as active actors. This approach has been successfully employed in established studies such as Callon (1986), Latour (1996), and Law (2002). Since direct observation of nonhuman networks at the urban scale is impractical, interviewing is considered the only valid way to track these complex networks.



Figure 2. The methodological flowchart

5. Findings

5.1. Systematic grounded theory coding findings

Open coding: identifying initial concepts

Open coding of 12 interviews resulted in extracting 1893 codes, demonstrating the conceptual richness of

complex actor networks. Overall analysis showed that 80% of codes (1514 codes) related to the essence of place components (affected), 8.5% of codes (160 codes) to rentier economy components (affecting), and 5.8% of codes (110 codes) to built form

components (mediating). This distribution indicates that the lived experience of place is central in participants' discourse, while economic structures and physical intermediaries play more implicit roles.

Criteria for distinguishing codes based on ANT and OOO

For analytical clarity, codes were differentiated based on two main criteria:

- ANT codes: codes referring to relations, networking, and translation, such as "social network rearrangement," "black boxes," "social reorganization."
- OOO codes: codes referring to independence, inherent resistance, and withdrawal of objects, such as "real/sensual objects," "withdrawal," "allure."

Analysis of affected components: active objects in the network (1514 codes)

Based on ANT and OOO, the essence of place

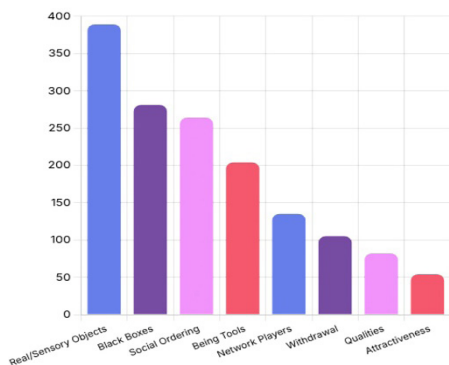


Figure 3. Affected components

This distribution shows that in the Razavi Shrine precinct, processes of "withdrawal" and "black-boxing" occur simultaneously—historical-religious elements maintain their inherent resistance (referencing OOO), while simultaneously becoming hidden in power networks (referencing ANT).

Analysis of affecting components: effective actors (160 codes)

Affecting components include the driving forces of the rentier economy:

- Profit and benefit (94 codes): economic networks possessing agency beyond human control, which can be considered as Morton's "hyperobjects."
- Rentier network monopoly (46 codes): formation of power networks with participation of nonhuman elements based on Latour's "politics of nature."
- Resource ownership (20 codes): land and property as actors with agency, functioning in the Razavi Shrine

components was identified as active actors in the network. The most important components include:

- Real/sensual objects (389 codes, 20.5%): architectural elements and building materials with independent agency actively interacting with environmental conditions. According to OOO, these elements possess "withdrawal" from complete human perception
- Black boxes (281 codes, 14.8%): hidden power structures in urban networks that, according to ANT, can be revealed through "black-boxing" processes
- Social reorganization (264 codes, 13.9%): formation of human-nonhuman hybrid assemblages and new networks of relations through "translation" processes
- Instrumentalization (204 codes, 10.8%): the role of nonhuman elements as tools in interactions, indicating Harman's "vicarious causation" in urban spaces

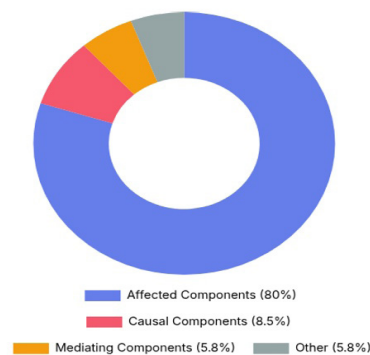


Figure 4. Overall distribution of research components

precinct context as the primary source of Harvey's "monopoly rent," determining spatial economic value through power networks

Analysis of mediating components: built form (110 codes)

Built form in this approach operates as an "active mediator" in the Latourian sense. The most critical mediating elements include: events (35 codes), buildings (17 codes), density (16 codes), blocks (14 codes), and plots (13 codes). In the Shrine precinct, "comprehensive and detailed plans" play key mediating roles—they are not merely planning tools but active actors that "translate" and "network" different interests.

Analysis of code distribution based on interview sources

Analysis of code distribution among 10 primary interview sources (1873 analyzed codes) reveals

significant patterns:

- Dominance of affected codes: In all sources, related codes to the essence of place (1646 codes, 88.8 percent of the total) have the highest frequency.
- Diversity in affecting codes: Sources P3 (56 codes), P6 (24 codes), and P1 (24 codes) show the most incredible diversity in rentier economy components
- Weakness of mediating codes: Built form components (68 codes, 3.6% of total) have the lowest frequency among all sources, with significant concentration in sources P3 (28 codes) and P6 (18 codes).

This unbalanced distribution indicates participants' discourse focuses on the lived experience of place (affected codes) rather than economic structures (affecting codes) and physical intermediaries

(mediating codes).

Axial coding

Axial coding was conducted in three key stages aimed at integrating two theoretical frameworks (ANT and OOO) to understand flat network agency in the essence of place transformation.

Stage one: theoretical classification (theoretical bricolage) of codes based on ANT and OOO

Of the 1893 final codes, analysis based on four theoretical axes showed that 58.7% of codes related to OOO concepts of "object independence and withdrawal" and 42.3% of codes related to ANT concepts of "networking and translation."

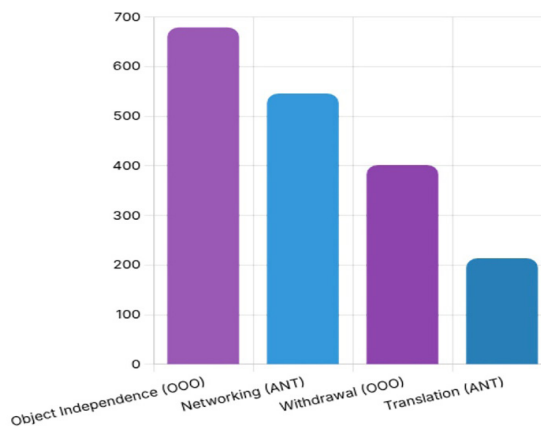


Figure 5. Theoretical classification of codes

This distribution shows that in participants' discourse, "inherent resistance" and "spatial element independence" (OOO) received more attention than network relations (ANT). This finding indicates that residents and specialists perceive the Shrine precinct space more as a collection of "resistant objects" than as a "network of changeable relations."

Of 1893 codes, 1831 related codes were organized into 24 subcategories (96.7% coverage). Subcategories were categorized into three main groups: (a) affecting subcategories: driving forces of rentier economy (406 codes, 21.4%), (b) mediating subcategories: technological-organizational intermediaries (638 codes, 33.7%), (c) affected subcategories: fundamental transformations in essence of place (795 codes, 42%).

Stage two: extracting subcategories

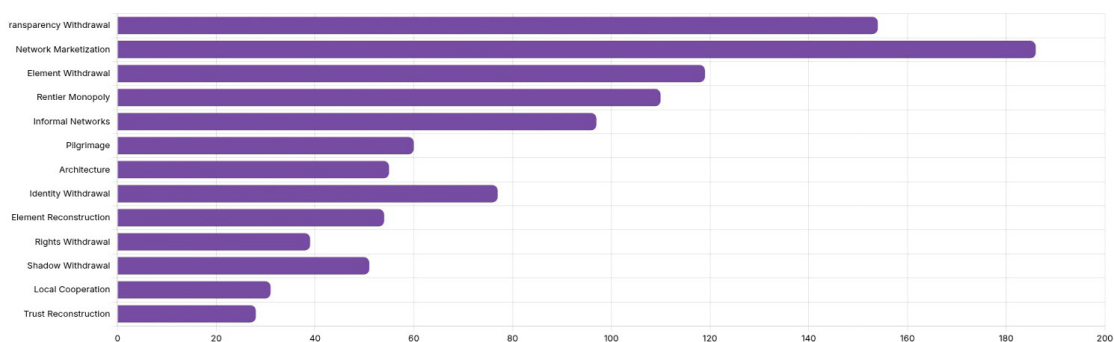


Figure 6. Subcategories of affected components

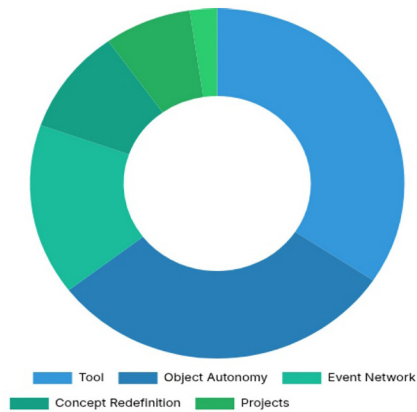


Figure 7. Subcategories of mediating components

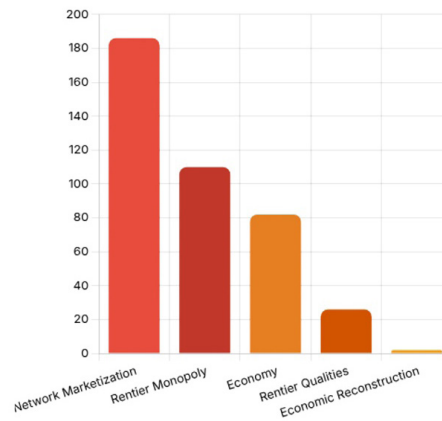


Figure 8. Subcategories of affecting components

The mediating section (33.7% of codes) shows that in the Shrine precinct, artificial tools and mechanisms play decisive roles in mediating between economic forces and spatial transformations. This finding aligns with Latour's theory of "active mediators," which,

unlike "passive intermediaries," transform meaning.

Stage three: identifying the actor network

Based on Figure 9, actors are presented by type of agency and collective frequency (top 10 actors):

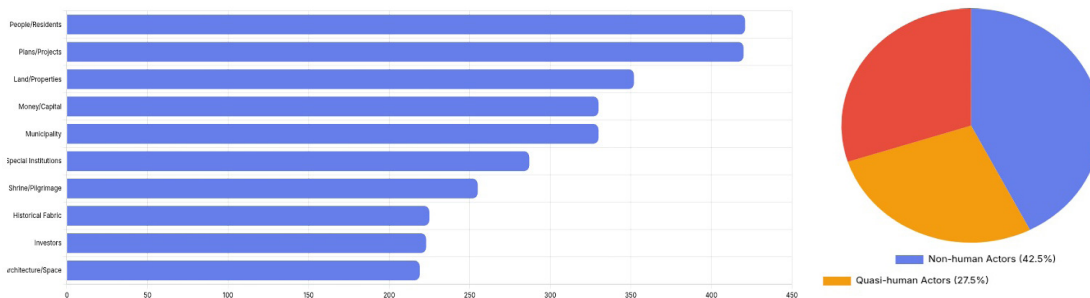


Figure 9. Leading actors

Descriptive statistics and general patterns of actor network: Cumulative analysis of 40 identified actors from 12 interviews shows that nonhuman actors, with 42.5% of the total, dominate the network, while human actors constitute only 30%. A high overlap rate of 70% (28 common actors) from a structuration theory perspective (Giddens, 1984) indicates established structures. When diverse actors (managers, residents, and specialists) repeatedly and continuously interact with a specific set of actors and reproduce them in discourse, these actors become part of a stable social-material structure (institutionalization), indicating a relatively stable power structure. However, 30% of unique actors indicate local diversity of experiences.

Ranking of the top 10 actors in Figure 9 reveals a profound paradox: People/residents have the highest quantitative presence with 421 repetitions, but are placed in a "marginal" position due to being affected by conditions. However, "plans/projects" (420

repetitions) and economic actors such as "land/property" (352 repetitions) and "money/capital" (330 repetitions) occupy the center of the power network.

Theoretical and discursive analysis of actor network: From an actor-network theory perspective, an asymmetric hierarchical network has formed in which the initial translation of "serving pilgrims" is dominated by capital accumulation logic and organized around rent. Core actors (present in over 80% of the interviews) include "plans/projects," "people/residents," "municipality and Shrine-pilgrimage," forming a continuous power structure, while distinguishing actors such as "tiyul system" and "lawlessness epidemic" reveal deeper rent-generation mechanisms. Discourse analysis shows 10 of 12 interviews emphasize a rentier economy based on proximity to the Shrine. In comparison, resistant discourse (fabric preservation) is coherently presented in only two interviews, and marginal discourses provide radical system critique.

The concept of “withdrawal” in Harman’s object-oriented ontology rests on the principle that no object is ever fully accessible in its network relations, and a real depth always remains that escapes interactions. This concept manifests in this research’s data through stark frequency differences of similar actors across different interviews, such as the “money” actor varying from 12 repetitions (management tool in

one interview) to 89 repetitions (corruption agent in another), or the “people-residents” paradox, who, despite the highest quantitative presence (421 repetitions), are marginalized. These contradictions show that each actor’s inherent reality exceeds what network analysis can encompass, thus introducing a fundamental critique of Latour’s actor-network theory, which defines everything in network relations.

Table 3. General analysis of the actor network

Actor	Common pattern	Key differences	Aggregate conclusion
Money/capital	Power-centrality in all networks; the main rent-generation factor	P1&p7: rentier and destructive; p4: transparent management tool	A hegemonic actor capable of influencing the logic of all other actors
Land/property	Centrality in added value production; focus of contradictions	P9: identity base; p2: commercial commodity	A dual actor who is both a power source and a resistance center
Plans/projects	Space control tool; benefit translation mechanism	P8: technical necessity; p6: capital accumulation tool	A mediating actor between opposing discourses that gains meaning depending on the network
People/residents	Highest frequency but lowest network power	P4: active partners; p1: passive victims	Marginal actor excluded from decision-making despite quantitative presence.
Municipality/managers	Key role in policy implementation; power intermediary	P7: lacks capacity; p4: has coherent program	An executive actor confined between upstream and downstream pressures
Astan Quds Razavi	Combined religious-economic power; legitimizer	P6: independent actor; p5: subject to rentier interests	Complex actor blending religion and economics
Historical/religious fabric	Inherent resistance to change; identity protector	P8: development barrier; p2: cultural treasure	A resistant actor representing the tension between tradition and modernity
Shrine/pilgrimage	Main legitimacy source; value generator	P10: branding opportunity; p9: spiritual center	A dual actor who is both a sacred source and a profitability tool
Laws/regulations	Control tool but flexible; tension mediator	P1: systematic violation; p4: justice instrument	Instrumental actor whose meaning is determined by a power network
Specific institutions	High economic-political power; rent-generating	P6: monopolistic; p4: controllable	Hegemonic actors organizing power networks

Stage four: determining axial category dimensions

In this research, determining axial category dimensions was conducted based on Strauss and Corbin’s “dimensional analysis of selective coding” method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The process included three key stages:

- Grouping subcategories: Subcategories were grouped based on common characteristics (theme, function), communicative power, and compatibility with network agency theories (ANT) and object-oriented ontology (OOO). For example, the “network instrumentalization” dimension was formed from combining subcategories of tools (219 codes), object and mechanism autonomy

(193 codes), event and plan network formation (101 codes), projects and structures (48 codes), and culture-building (15 codes), totaling 576 codes.

- Analysis of causal and consequential relations: Each dimension’s role in the overall phenomenon cycle was determined: “structural conditions” dimension (22.08% of codes) as causal factor, “network instrumentalization” (31.32% of codes) as mediator, “systematic elimination” (30.18% of codes) as consequence, “limited reconstruction” (5.77% of codes) and “marginal resistance” (7.29% of codes) as strategic, and “rentier interpretation” (3.37% of codes) as moderator.

- Identifying axial category dimensions: This process led to identifying six main dimensions covering 1839 codes (100% of data, without code overlap between dimensions). These dimensions provide a comprehensive explanation capability for the axial category “network instrumentalization of space to eliminate resistances,” which, with high centrality, repetition (31.32% of codes), and very high explanatory

power exceeding 80%, explains the phenomenon “effect of rentier economy on essence of place.” The axial category reproduces power relations through artificial tools and mechanisms and eliminates or limits spatial resistances. Table 4 and Figure 10 present dimensions and importance coefficients of the axial category.

Table 4. Dimensions of the axial category

Dimension	Dimension name	Combined subcategories	Code count	Percentage	Functional description	Role in phenomenon
1	Network instrumentalization	Tools, object and mechanism autonomy, event and plan network formation, projects and structures, culture-building	576	30.42%	Transforming space into a functional instrumental network through artificial tools and mechanisms to reproduce power relations	Mediating
2	Systematic elimination	Transparency withdrawal, urban element withdrawal, historical identity withdrawal, pilgrimage and spiritual elements, architecture and buildings, other element withdrawal, rights withdrawal	555	29.31%	Systematic elimination of resistant and authentic spatial elements (identity, transparency, rights) to facilitate rentier domination	Consequential
3	Limited reconstruction	Reconstruction of various elements, reconstruction of trust and discourse, network reconstruction	106	5.59%	Controlled and guided reconstruction of spatial identity and social relations	Strategic
4	Structural conditions	Social network rearrangement, rentier network monopoly, economy, rentier qualities, economic reconstruction	406	21.44%	Context-building and continuity of economic and social processes to stabilize the rentier system	Causal
5	Marginal resistance	Informal networks, local cooperation, pilgrimage network	134	7.07%	Limited and controlled resistances against spatial rentier transformations	Strategic
6	Rentier interpretation	Redefinition and translation of concepts	62	3.27%	Reinterpreting spatial concepts toward rentier interests and reality redefinition	Moderating
Total			1839	97.15% of the total 1893 codes, 24 subcategories		

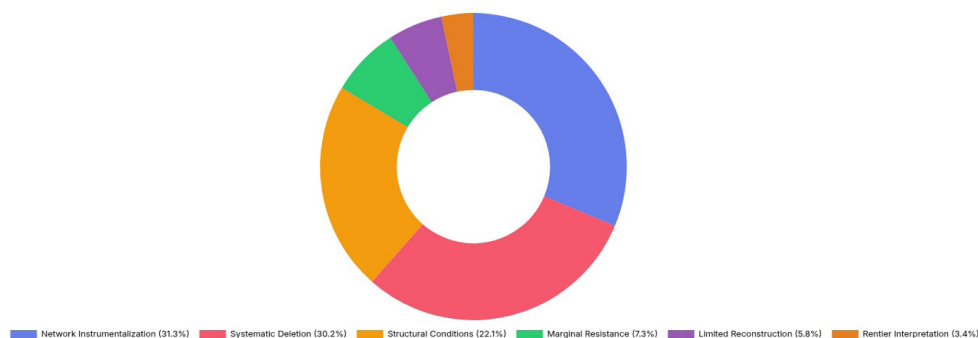


Figure 10. Dimensions of the core category

Stage five: developing paradigmatic model

Based on findings from previous axial coding stages, a paradigmatic model was developed to explain the axial category “network instrumentalization.” This model was extracted from an analysis of six main

dimensions identified in stage four and shows causal relations among them based on determined roles. Based on Table 5, the paradigmatic model was developed as follows:

Table 5. Elements of the paradigmatic model

Paradigmatic element	Constituent subcategories	Code count	Percentage	Role in model
Network conditions	Social network rearrangement (186), rentier network monopoly (110), economy (82), rentier qualities (26), economic reconstruction (2)	406	22.07%	Main driver
Core phenomenon	Tools (219), object and mechanism autonomy (193), event and plan network formation (101), projects and structures (48), culture-building (15)	576	31.32%	Intermediary/mediator
Contextual conditions	Pilgrimage and spiritual elements (60), architecture and buildings (55)	115	6.25%	Religious-physical context
Intervening conditions	Redefinition and translation of concepts (62)	62	3.37%	Moderator
Strategies	Reconstruction of various elements (54), reconstruction of trust and discourse (28), network reconstruction (24), informal networks (97), local cooperation (31), pilgrimage network (6)	240	13.05%	Action responses
Consequences	Transparency withdrawal (154), urban element withdrawal (119), historical identity withdrawal (77), rights withdrawal (39), other element withdrawal (51)	440	23.92%	Final outcome
Total	22 subcategories	1839	100%	Complete coverage without repetition

Model network relations: structural conditions → network instrumentalization → systematic elimination mediated by rentier interpretation and in the context

of architectural-religious elements, while counter-strategies have limited impact.

$$\text{Model explanatory power: density index} = (1839 \div 1893) \times 100 = 97.14\%$$

Conclusion: Based on the axial category “network instrumentalization of space to eliminate resistances,” the paradigmatic model shows that in the Razavi Shrine precinct, structural conditions include social network rearrangement (entry of new investors), rentier network monopoly (property concentration in specific groups’ hands), and rentier economy structure. These conditions, through network instrumentalization (including urban plans, development projects, and financial mechanisms), lead to systematic elimination of resistant elements: transparency (154 codes), destruction of authentic urban elements (119 codes), and historical identity rupture (77 codes).

Selective coding

Selective coding was conducted to develop a comprehensive theory by integrating discourse

analysis from previous stages and the bricolage analysis technique. This stage was organized based on Strauss and Corbin’s methodology in four main steps (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

Forming triple bricolage

The 24 subcategories were classified into three natural domains based on conceptual content analysis and researchers’ interpretation (Kincheloe, 2001, 2005):

- Political bricolage includes subcategories related to power structures, economic control, and domination tools: social network rearrangement, rentier network monopoly, economy, tools, object and mechanism autonomy, event and plan network formation, rentier qualities, and economic reconstruction. This section constitutes 919 codes (50%)
- Narrative bricolage includes subcategories reflecting

lived experience and withdrawal processes: transparency withdrawal, urban element withdrawal, historical identity withdrawal, pilgrimage and spiritual elements, architecture and buildings, other element withdrawal, and rights withdrawal. This section includes 555 codes (30.2%)

- Interpretive bricolage includes subcategories encompassing meaning-making processes and interpretive reactions: informal networks, redefinition and translation of concepts, reconstruction of various elements, projects, and structures, local cooperation, reconstruction of trust and discourse, network reconstruction, culture-building, and pilgrimage network. This section constitutes 365 codes (19.8%)

Selecting the core phenomenon

Based on centrality and explanatory power in data, network instrumentalization with 576 codes (31.3%) was selected as the core phenomenon. This process shows how urban space is transformed into a tool for rent generation.

Paradigmatic model

The Strauss-Corbin paradigmatic model was structured based on six key elements:

- Causal conditions (406 codes): driving forces of a rentier economy
- Core phenomenon (576 codes): network instrumentalization of space
- Contextual conditions (115 codes): religious-physical context
- Intervening conditions (62 codes): rentier interpretation of concepts
- Strategies (240 codes): resistances and limited reconstruction
- Consequences (440 codes): systematic elimination of resistant elements

This distribution shows that instrumentalization forces prevail over local resistances. In the Shrine precinct, despite limited efforts by residents and cultural heritage activists, the instrumentalization process continues due to economic network strength and institutional support.

Final theory: network instrumentalization of urban-religious space in a systematic approach

In Mashhad's strategic geography context, the network of economic actors, including money-capital, land-property, and exclusive rentier networks, initiates rentier space production. These primary drivers, through mediation of material and structural elements including plans-projects, plot scale changes, and building density, provide groundwork for the fundamental essence of place transformation.

Network instrumentalization process

The network instrumentalization process proceeds through three systematic mechanisms:

First: systematic elimination of resistant elements: In the Shrine precinct, this elimination occurs through multi-layered withdrawal:

- Transparency withdrawal (154 codes): lack of transparency in urban decision-making, ambiguity in defining fabric boundaries, and concealment of economic processes

- Withdrawal of resistant urban elements (119 codes): destruction of authentic architectural elements and replacement of historical buildings with commercial and residential buildings

- Historical identity withdrawal (77 codes): rupture with the past and loss of neighborhood historical continuity

Second: space instrumentalization: Precinct space transforms from a lived place to a rent-generation tool through:

- Object and mechanism autonomy (193 codes): mechanisms operating independently of human will once adopted, such as density laws, building codes, and property pricing systems

- Tools (219 codes): technical and organizational tools managing the rent process, such as article 5 commission, partnership bonds, and detailed plans

Third: nonhuman actor role: According to ANT and OOO, objects and material elements play active actor roles in this process, for example:

- Land-property (352 repetitions): Not merely an investment site but also an actor that determines the development path through its inherent resistance (historical fabric and Shrine precinct) and commodity conversion capability

- Urban plans (420 repetitions): Not only technical documents, but also actors translating and networking conflicting interests to stabilize power structures

Conclusion

Essence of place transformation from meaningful lived space to rentier commodity through systematic networks in the Razavi Shrine precinct occurs through:

- Land price increase through plot scale changes, creating unnecessary streets for the commercial-residential body, and event changes based on the proximity to the holy Shrine

- Traditional residential fabric destruction, forced resident displacement, and residential fabric replacement with commercial-religious and rentier-institutional complexes

- Change in pilgrim and resident spiritual experience

from spiritual space to commercial space

Limitations: This analysis is conducted solely within the network paradigm framework with flat ontology (ANT and OOO) and emphasizes the active role of object networks, structures, and material elements. In this approach, spatial transformations result from distributed agency in a network of actors where nonhumans play decisive roles.

5.1. Document analysis based on Fairclough's three-level framework

Critical discourse analysis of official documents (comprehensive and detailed plans, urban reports, approvals) based on Fairclough's three-level framework (2003, 2023) showed:

- Textual level: Dominant vocabulary includes "development," "improvement," "upgrading," and "service provision," positively representing "destruction" and "displacement" processes. At the same time, leading actors (investors, specific institutions) are positioned as active subjects and residents in passive or absent positions. Here, the term "sacred destruction" can be introduced as a result of "sacred rent."

- Interactional level: Discourse is mainly produced by power institutions (municipality, Astan Quds, Ministry of Roads and Urban Development) and disseminated through official administrative channels, and "translation" processes are conducted in ways that legitimize economic and ideological interests in the form of "serving pilgrims" and "respecting the Shrine."

- Contextual level: This discourse reproduces unequal power relations between capitalists and residents, conceals the "economic developmentalism" ideological structure, and practically operates in favor of rentier networks and monopolistic institutions. Comparative analysis of key documents showed "investment" mentioned more than "fabric preservation"—this linguistic inequality indicates systematic dominance of economic discourse over heritage discourse and fully aligns with interview findings (political bricolage dominance at 50%).

6. Discussion

6.1. Interpretation of main findings

This research demonstrated that in the Razavi Shrine precinct of Mashhad, rentier economy exerts systematic effects on the essence of place through the mechanism of network instrumentalization. Analysis of 1893 codes extracted from 12 in-depth interviews revealed that this process operates through complex

networks of human-nonhuman actors. Identification of 40 diverse actors, including economic elements (money-capital with 330 codes and land-property with 352 codes), structural elements (plans-projects with 420 codes, laws/regulations), and material elements (architecture-space, historical fabric), demonstrated that agency in this network operates in a distributed form but remains dominated by rentier economy elements. The research's central finding is that network instrumentalization with 576 codes (31.3%) constitutes the most important mechanism for essence of place transformation, comprising two stages: systematic elimination of resistant elements (555 codes, 30.2%) and replacement with elements compatible with rentier logic.

These findings were extracted from two independent sources: participants' lived experience (1893 codes from 12 interviews) and the formal discourse of documents. Their convergence reinforces the validity of the results. The dominance of political bricolage in interviews (50%) aligns with the dominance of economic vocabulary in official documents. The marginal position of residents in the actor network (421 codes, but containing little power) corresponds to their absence in documents, and the "rentier interpretation" category (62 codes) aligns with legitimization of economic interests through "serving pilgrims" framing in official texts.

Findings show that dominance of nonhuman economic network actors aligns with Latour's actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), emphasizing that agency is distributed and objects can be actors like humans. Data analysis showed that nonhuman actors (17 actors, 42.5%) and quasi-human actors (11 actors, 27.5%) collectively constitute 70% of the network, consistent with analyses by Fariás and Bender (2012) and McFarlane (2011) on distributed agency in urban space. However, contrary to the expectation of symmetry and balance in ANT that Latour emphasizes, apparent inequality in actor power is observed. Elements driving transformation (982 codes) significantly dominate reactive elements (680 codes). This finding aligns with Morton's (2013) analysis of economic "hyperobjects," showing that rentier systems operate as networks beyond local control, limiting resistance capacities.

Another finding demonstrates that object withdrawal processes according to object-oriented ontology theories (Harman, 2018) are active in the form of resistant material elements. However, their power in confronting commodification processes remains

limited. Analysis showed that despite the fact that 402 codes relate to withdrawal (resistant material elements), these elements lack sufficient resistance capacity against the pressure of instrumentalization (576 codes) and rentier structural conditions (406 codes). This finding aligns with Kärrholm's analysis of ontological independence of objects (Kärrholm, 2013, 2014) but reveals the limitation of this independence under conditions of economic domination.

Unlike studies by Bustan (2023) and Jamshidi (2019) that focused on human experience and local resistance in religious cities, this research's findings show that under rentier economy conditions, local resistance alone is insufficient, and deeper structural mechanisms are at work. This aligns with findings by Saedifard (2020) and Nejati (2023) on the profound effects of the rentier economy on the spatial organization of Iranian cities. However, this research has clarified the specific mechanism of this effect through networks of hybrid human-nonhuman actors at the same level. While Harvey (2020) and Christophers (2019, 2020) focused on macro-structures of rentier economy, this study shows the way these structures operate at the urban micro-level through material, human, and nonhuman actors. Based on this, the term "sacred rent" can be added to Christopher's and Harvey's classifications.

Another significant finding is the classification of subcategories into three layers: political bricolage (50%), narrative (30.2%), and interpretive (19.8%), showing how the dominance of the political layer affects other layers. This finding aligns with Saito and Sasaki's (2025) analysis of rentier capitalism as the most advanced and contradictory form of contemporary capitalism that destroys public spaces and undermines social cohesion. It also aligns with Standing's (2021) analysis, emphasizing that a rentier economy undermines cities' spatial structures and democratic governance.

This research's primary contribution lies in identifying specific mechanisms through which a rentier economy transforms the essence of place:

First: This study demonstrates the way in which systematic dominance of nonhuman economic actors over the network operates. Money-capital, land-property, and plans-projects, as the most pivotal actors (totaling 1102 codes of 1893 codes), shape the network. This finding had not been empirically demonstrated in rentier economy studies that researchers have examined.

Second: Limitation of object withdrawal capacity with selective withdrawal (resistant material elements)

was shown to be against rentier processes. Although object-oriented ontology (OOO) emphasizes object independence, findings reveal that under economic domination conditions, this independence is limited.

Third: Built form duality as both mediator and tool demonstrated an approach similar to Kärrholm's (2013) theory development. He states that building type is not a pre-existing template or social label but is constructed in everyday life through the interaction of material and immaterial actors. Built form does not act as a passive substrate between rentier economy and essence of place but as an active actor that paradoxically both participates in rent production and resists it (219 codes related to tools in mediating components).

These findings have important policy implications. Policymakers cannot merely strengthen local resistance or preserve historical fabric but must intervene in deeper economic structures shaping actor networks. Based on findings, a five-stage practical framework is proposed: First, precise mapping of power networks to identify dominant actors (money, land, and plans) and analyze their domination mechanisms. Second: establishing legal protection mechanisms to counter the systematic elimination of resistant elements and strengthen residents' position. Third: strategic strengthening of resistant agency by understanding its power limitations and focusing on identifying selective withdrawal capacities (resistant material elements). Fourth: exposing hidden instrumentalization mechanisms through process transparency and technology use to monitor capital flows. Fifth: realistic acceptance of economic forces' dominance, considering the fundamental point that greater effort must be made to direct it toward minimal damage to the essence of the place and maximum local benefit.

This study is limited to one case (the Razavi Shrine precinct of Mashhad), and generalizing findings to similar contexts should be done cautiously. Focus on network agency may underemphasize aspects of conscious human action, despite the goal to highlight overlooked nonhuman actors' roles. Additionally, subcategory classification was based on researchers' interpretation and requires independent validation in future studies. Moreover, the research's qualitative nature has limited precise quantitative measurement of power relations.

Future research can examine the generalizability of findings through comparative studies in different religious cities (Qom, Najaf, Karbala, Mecca, and

Medina). Combining quantitative network analysis methods (such as social network analysis) with qualitative analysis can provide greater precision in understanding power relations. Examining the interaction between human and network agency under economic domination conditions can link theoretical paradigms. Developing practical tools such as ANT-based geographic information systems to reduce power inequality in urban actor networks can bridge the theory-practice gap.

7. Conclusion

This research examined the impact of a rentier capitalist economy on the essence of place in the Razavi Shrine precinct of Mashhad. The research's main question was: "How does a rentier economy, through built form mediation, transform the essence of place, and what role do nonhuman actors play in this process?" This question arose from an important gap—previous studies had documented rentier economy effects, but micro-mechanisms and nonhuman actors' roles had not been systematically examined.

For the response, ANT and OOO theories were employed through analysis of 1893 codes from 12 in-depth interviews. Research data were collected from two independent sources: in-depth interviews (analyzed with grounded theory) and official documents (analyzed with critical discourse analysis). The convergence of findings ensures cross-validation. Key findings showed that a rentier economy operates through network instrumentalization (576 codes, 31.3%). This finding was confirmed from two independent perspectives. In interviews, political bricolage was dominant (50%); in official documents, "economic vocabulary" dominated "heritage vocabulary". This process involves systematic elimination of resistant elements (555 codes) and their replacement with elements compatible with rentier logic. Nonhuman economic actors, including money-capital, land-property, and plans-projects (totaling 1102 codes), play decisive roles in this process. Elements driving transformation (982 codes) dominate reactive elements (680 codes), indicating established rentier economy dominance. The triple bricolage framework revealed that political bricolage (50%) is dominant, while narrative bricolage (30.2%) and interpretive bricolage (19.8%) occupy secondary positions.

This research's main contribution is threefold. First: In the academic domain, the gap in understanding

nonhuman actors' roles in rentier processes was filled, showing how material actors operate at the network's micro-level. Identifying the network instrumentalization mechanism, systematic dominance of economic actors, limitation of objects' selective withdrawal capacity (resistant material elements), and built form actor duality are new findings not previously documented. Second: In the policy domain, five recommendations were presented: mapping power networks, strengthening legal protections for resistant elements, purposeful transformation management by accepting economic dominance reality, focusing resources on the most critical heritage elements, and developing alternative local economic networks. Third: In the methodological domain, combining ANT and OOO and the triple bricolage framework were introduced as analytical tools.

Study limitations include: single case focus, emphasis on network agency that may underemphasize conscious human action, and qualitative research nature. However, applying two independent data sources (interviews and documents) and their findings' convergence increased the validity of the results and enabled triangulation. Future research can examine findings' generalizability through comparative studies in other religious cities, combine quantitative network analysis with qualitative methods, develop paradigmatic integrative frameworks for a more comprehensive understanding of transformation processes, and propose practical tools, including digital technologies for real-time network analysis, early warning systems, and regional experience exchange networks. This study, by providing a systematic understanding of micro-mechanisms of rentier economy operation in urban-religious space, offers new insights that can serve as a basis for future studies.

Authors' Contributions

Javad Ramezannejad: research design and conceptualization, data collection and analysis, and initial manuscript writing. Dr. Mehdi Hamzenejad: scientific supervision, methodology oversight, and final version review and editing. Dr. Asghar Mohammadmoradi: scientific consultation, theoretical framework review, and final manuscript editing.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest related to this research.

End Notes

ⁱ Symmetrical agency means granting equal agency to humans and non-humans.

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