

## Research Paper

# The Separation of Holy Shrines from Peripheral Fabric Based on the Perfect Man Concept; An Examination of Place (Case Study: Shrine of Imam Reza in the Holy City of Mashhad)

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**Received:** January 2021, **Revised:** December 2023, **Accepted:** December 2023, **Publish Online:** December 2023

### Abstract

*This study endeavors to explore the predicament associated with spaces lacking distinctive character and identity, ultimately resulting in the estrangement of shrines from their peripheral surroundings. Focusing on Mashhad, renowned as the holiest city in Iran and a site of numerous interventions, this research employs it as a case study. The central inquiry revolves around establishing a coherent nexus between the notion of polarity and the intellectual foundations shaping the development of environs surrounding holy shrines. The core objective is to discern the alignment of contemporary advancements around these shrines with their initial conceptual underpinnings. Employing a qualitative approach, this research adopts a descriptive method rooted in the case study framework. The outcomes derived from statistical analysis and the application of space syntax techniques reveal that extensive interventions encircling the shrine of Imam Reza have significantly disrupted the city's connectivity with the shrine. This disruption has led to the displacement of residents, severed emotional ties with the surrounding fabric, and a perceptible attenuation of the sense of place, culminating in the erosion of the genius loci or spirit of place. Furthermore, an examination of the fabric of this separation underscores an anti-Shiite intellectual basis, demonstrating incongruence with the ideal of human communion with "the perfect man." In light of these findings, it is proposed that development initiatives in Islamic cities should prioritize considerations aligned with the intellectual foundations governing city construction. This emphasis is crucial for sustaining the inherent character and spirit of the place amidst developmental endeavors.*

**Keywords:** Perfect man concept, Spatial segregation, Space syntax.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Until a few decades ago, modest expansions of holy shrines were observed, primarily in response to the growing number of pilgrims. These developments unfolded gradually, with the aim of enhancing existing spatial relations. However, in the present era, we are witnessing haphazard and asymmetrical expansions of shrines, both historical and ongoing. Preliminary investigations indicate that these interventions have

led to a pronounced disconnect between the shrine and its surrounding context. Consequently, there has been a shift in the congregation patterns of followers around these sacred sites, resulting in a discernible diminishment of the overall sense of place. Hence, this study endeavors to gain a more nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between human beings and their environment within such urban fabrics. The investigation delves into the genesis of these locales and scrutinizes the rationale underpinning their evolution, assessing their

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alignment with the fundamental principles governing the formation of Islamic cities. Utilizing statistical and analytical methods, particularly spatial arrangement techniques capable of delineating shifts in human behavior within the environment, the research aims to elucidate instances of non-compliance with the foundational principles of Islamic city planning in contemporary development initiatives. A focal point of examination involves the evaluation of the inadequacies in development plans concerning holy shrines, highlighting instances where these plans diverge from the established principles of Islamic city formation. The empirical basis for this scrutiny is provided through a case study centered on the renovation and enhancement project aimed at the urban fabric surrounding the holy shrine of Imam Reza.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research endeavors to scrutinize the alignment of development plans for holy shrines with the foundational principles of Islamic urban formation, while concurrently examining the phenomenon of the separation of the holy shrine of Imam Reza from its encompassing urban fabric. In order to comprehensively understand this phenomenon, there is a dual necessity: a nuanced exploration of the phenomenon itself and a thorough understanding of the specific locale in which it transpires. The latter entails a meticulous investigation into the relationship between individuals, particularly permanent residents, and the designated site - the holy shrine of the Infallibles and its adjacent urban fabric. This necessitates a detailed examination of the ideologies shaping the genesis of this sacred space. Given that a substantial portion of inquiries into human responses and behaviors lends itself to qualitative and rational analyses, and considering the descriptive and qualitative nature of this study, the chosen research methodology is predominantly qualitative, utilizing a case study approach. However, it's imperative to note that this study represents a foundational theoretical exploration, delving into the nexus between Shiite and Wahhabi perspectives with the evolution of holy shrines - a topic not extensively addressed in urban literature. The research aims to elucidate the alignment of Islamic principles, specifically the concept of the perfect man, with the formation of urban spaces surrounding holy shrines, while also substantiating the divergence of recent development plans from these principles through analytical methods. The focal point of investigation in this research is the holy shrine of Imam Reza in the city of Mashhad and its adjacent

residential urban fabric, constituting the statistical population as indicated in the title.

### 2.1. Space Syntax

Space Syntax serves as an analytical instrument within the realms of architecture and urban planning, initially conceptualized by Hillier and Hansen to assist architects in simulating the social ramifications of their designs on the surrounding environment. Employing the Space Syntax methodology enables the analysis of urban spaces, their interconnections, and the overall utilization of these spaces. This approach proves instrumental in forecasting the consequences of urban transformations on urban space (Abbaszadegan, Azari, 2009: 26). While an exhaustive exploration of the calculations and fundamental principles of this technique is beyond the scope of this discourse (refer to Hillier, 2007; Hillier and Vaughan, 2007), one fundamental principle employed in this study is the notion of integration. Integration, defined as the average depth of space to all spaces in the system (Klarqvist, 1993, 11), stands as a cornerstone concept in space arrangement. Given that integration essentially signifies the spatial value of urban areas, a comprehensive understanding of it can yield pertinent social insights. For instance, the concept of integration can reveal whether spaces are isolated and predisposed to criminal activities, or it can predict the patterns of people's presence in urban spaces. Legeby (2013) underscores the impact of spatial configuration on joint presence, emphasizing that urban form decisively influences movement patterns and presence in communal spaces (Legeby, 2013: 64).

Building upon the aforementioned, the interrelated technique and concept of Space Syntax prove invaluable in comprehending the social repercussions of physical interventions in the vicinity of holy shrines and their alignment with the growth pole perspective. To achieve this understanding, an exhaustive collection of maps and documents spanning from ancient times to the present has been assembled for the urban fabric surrounding the shrine of Imam Reza in the city of Mashhad. These materials are consolidated and standardized within ArcGIS software to establish a unified scale. Subsequently, the Depth Map software is employed to generate axis lines, which serve as the foundational elements for spatial layout analysis. The integration index is then calculated and analyzed, providing insights into the intricacies of the spatial organization.

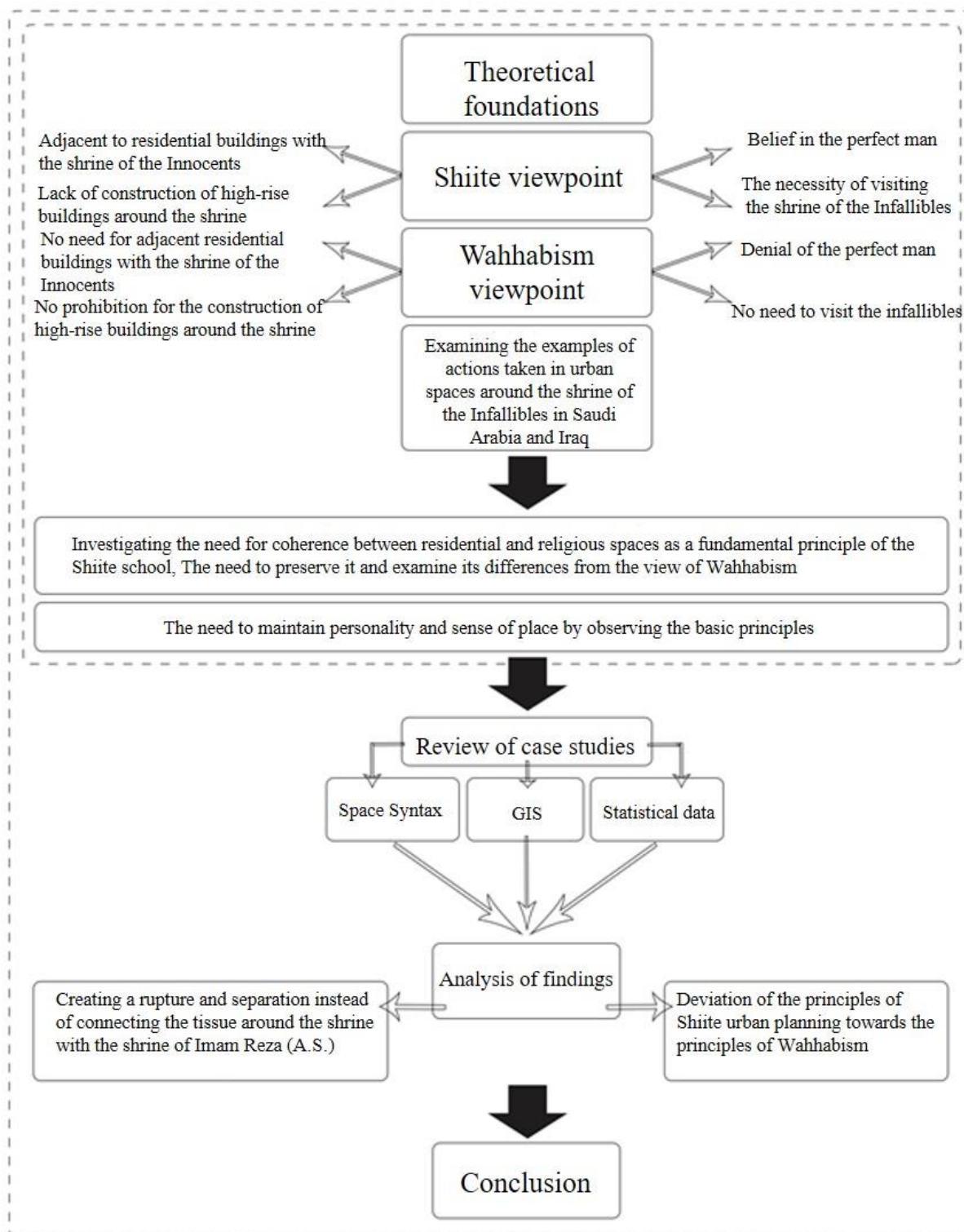


Fig 1. shows the conceptual framework of the research (authors)

### 3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In the section dedicated to the theoretical foundations of this research, the initial inquiry centers on exploring the genesis of urban spaces around holy shrines during the early Islamic period. To gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, a critical examination of the prevailing concept behind the establishment of shrines and the urban spaces enveloping them becomes imperative. An integral facet of this exploration involves delving into the dominant ideology shaping the creation of shrines and their surrounding urban landscapes, with a particular emphasis on evaluating the extent to which current physical interventions align with this ideology. One of the pivotal concepts under scrutiny is that of the perfect man. Given the undeniable influence of Shiite and Wahhabi beliefs on the formation of cities around holy shrines, a detailed analysis is undertaken to ascertain the degree of alignment of contemporary interventions around the residential fabric of these holy sites with these distinct perspectives. The structural disparities between Shiite and Wahhabi viewpoints necessitate an examination of their respective impacts on urban development around holy shrines. Subsequently, attention is directed toward themes related to the phenomenon of place and the intrinsic significance of the sense of place in conferring identity and meaning upon spaces. These considerations serve to enhance the analytical framework and offer deeper insights into the underlying reasons contributing to the shortcomings observed in these development projects. By exploring these theoretical foundations, the research aims to shed light on the complexities and intricacies surrounding the formation of urban spaces around holy shrines and the challenges encountered in realizing successful interventions.

#### 3.1. Perfect Human

The concept of the perfect man holds paramount significance in Islamic mysticism, with its origins attributed to Ibn Arabi, as noted by Salari (2014: 57). Shahani subsequently propagated these ideas among the broader audience, amplifying their influence (Haruka Endo, 2013: 17). In this segment of the research, a diligent effort is exerted to explore the concept of the perfect man from diverse perspectives and dimensions. The objective is to acquire a comprehensive understanding of this pivotal concept and to discern its intricate relationship with the establishment of religious spaces - an elemental principle governing the formation of these sacred

environments. This inquiry seeks to illuminate the multifaceted nature of the perfect man concept and its profound implications in shaping the essence and character of religious spaces.

The exploration of the essence of the perfect man within Ibn Arabi's philosophical framework can be further elucidated through the concept of the "pole," a notion originally introduced by Ibn Arabi himself. Within this conceptual framework, Ibn Arabi posits that everything possesses a polarity, and in each phenomenon, the pole assumes a central role. He articulates and introduces the poles of existence, designating Muhammad as the preeminent pole of the universe throughout all epochs (Mohammad, 2015: 229-231). Poetic expressions on this theme abound, with Hafiz, for instance, asserting that the perfect man serves as the earthly successor of God. This sentiment is encapsulated in his verse, as documented in the poems studied by Moradi and Anafjeh (2011: 39).

Parallels to the concept of the perfect man and the theory of the pole of growth extend beyond Islam into other religions, including Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. To enhance our comprehension of the correlation between this concept and the development of urban spaces around holy shrines, it becomes imperative to delineate the contrasting perspectives of Shiites and Wahhabis in this context.

#### 3.2. Shiites' view of the tombs and shrines of the prophets and Imams as perfect human beings and its comparison with the view of the Wahhabis

Following the exploration of the perfect man as the central figure in the universe in the preceding section, this segment delves into an examination of the perspectives and approaches of Shiites and Wahhabis regarding the treatment of the graves and shrines of prophets and Imams, recognized as perfect human beings. The eventual comparison of these viewpoints aims to deepen our understanding. This section contributes to our familiarity with the tradition of pilgrimage, a crucial element influencing the significance of religious cities in contemporary urban planning. Moreover, it provides insights into the relationship between these perspectives and the challenges observed in physical interventions around holy shrines.

##### 3.2.1. Shias

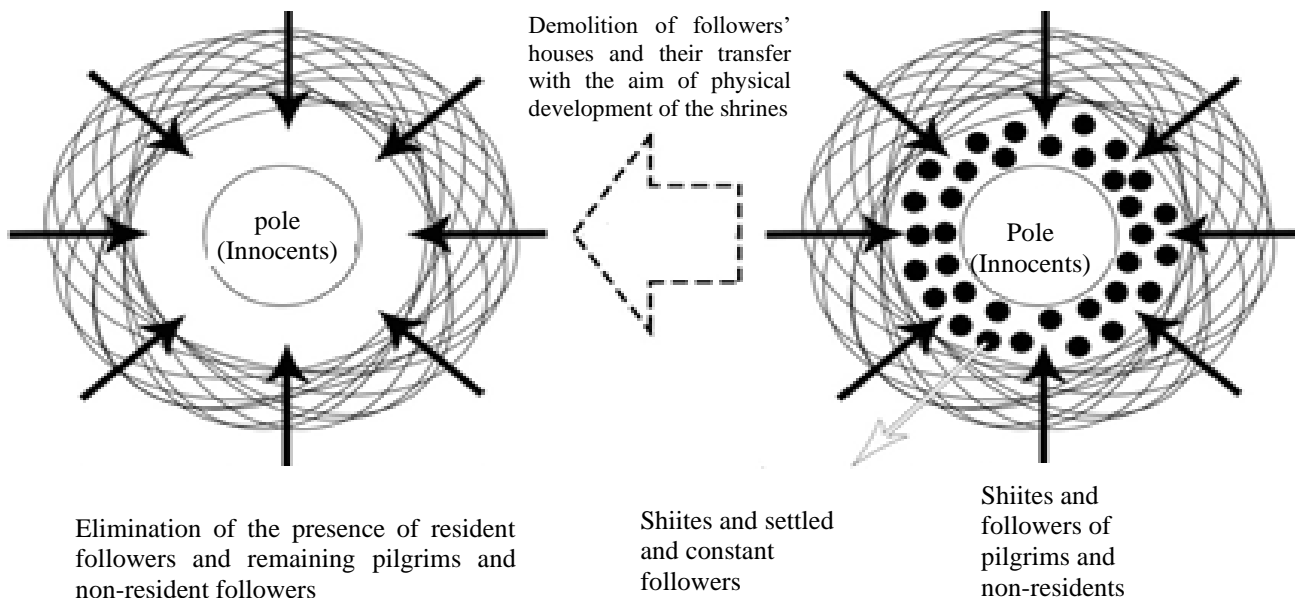
As previously noted, the discourse surrounding the perfect man has ancient origins and has permeated various religions, perspectives, and philosophies, each attributing different exemplars to this concept. Within

Islam, particularly the Shiite tradition, divine prophets and the Infallible Imams are regarded as manifest instances of perfect human beings. According to this belief, these figures do not merely perish after death or martyrdom; instead, they endure in an immortal state, serving as enduring sources for spiritual growth and bliss. This theological stance has kindled profound interest and earnest endeavors among Shiite adherents to draw closer to the shrines of the Infallibles and the residential areas surrounding them, deeming such proximity as inherently valuable. For instance, investigations conducted in the city of Mashhad reveal that historically, individuals not only aspired to be in close proximity to the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS), but this distinction was bestowed upon those deemed superior in terms of both faith and social standing.

As depicted in Figure 2, historical records reveal that in the past, Shiite followers fulfilled a dual role, functioning both as settled and transient adherents encompassing pilgrims and non-residents. Within this societal fabric, while the pilgrims benefited from the spiritual blessings associated with their presence and appeals to the Infallibles, the settled followers, as previously outlined, distinguished themselves by virtue of their devout beliefs, distinctive identities, and elevated social status, often fostering a close-knit

community. Competitions occasionally arose among these followers for proximity to the shrine of the Infallibles. However, over time and as a consequence of executed expansion plans for the physical infrastructure of the shrine and subsequent interventions, as elucidated and substantiated in subsequent sections, this established framework underwent disruption. The urban fabric in this region was dismantled, leading to the displacement of settled residents and the predominance of pilgrims and non-residents. Subsequent sections will expound upon how these transformations have precipitated an identity crisis and potential societal challenges.

It is essential to clarify that the foregoing discussion does not intend to diminish the honor and proximity of pilgrims or the merits associated with pilgrimage. Numerous historical and hadith accounts attest to the Prophet's visits to his mother's tomb, the Baqiya cemetery, and the tombs of martyrs. Additionally, the emphasis placed by the Messenger of God on visiting his own grave is a recurring theme in prophetic narrations, with the tradition of visiting the Prophet's tomb having been initially ordained by him (Farmanian, Sedaghat, 2013: 143). Contrary to Shiite perspectives, the Wahhabi viewpoint and belief present a contrasting stance on this matter.



**Fig 2.** The relationship between the infallibles as the pole of the universe with resident followers and followers of pilgrims and non-residents (writers)

### 3.2.2. Wahhabis

As previously indicated, one of the unfounded perspectives held by the Wahhabis, contrary to the Quran, the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH), the practices of the righteous predecessors, and the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt, is the rejection of the infallibility and purity of these revered figures. They label as heresy the belief in the blessings and intercessory role of the saints of God, and they prohibit the journey to visit the graves of the Prophet (PBUH) and the Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.). This viewpoint was propagated by Ibn Taymiyyah, who, by disseminating such ideas, stirred public opinion, undermined established beliefs, and accused Muslims of infidelity and polytheism due to their trust in the intercession of the Infallibles. The underlying objective of these assertions is to sever the Shiite connection with the pure Imams (Rouhi Brandagh, Moradi, 2015: 90). In adherence to Ibn Taymiyyah's teachings and contrary to the consensus of Islamic scholars, the Wahhabis denounce pilgrimage to the Prophetic shrine as an illicit heresy and a breeding ground for polytheism and exaggeration. Consequently, in Shawwal 1344 AH, extensive demolitions occurred in the Hejaz region, where buildings, domes, and structures were vandalized, and valuable properties were confiscated. This not only transpired in Medina but extended to other locations, encompassing domes, courtyards, shrines, and religious sites, with these actions being endorsed during that particular period (Sufi, Zavar, 2012).

### 3.3. Review of development plans and interventions in the shrines of the Infallibles and the surrounding urban fabric from the perspective of Shiites and Wahhabis

The Infallibles, considered the epitome of perfect human beings among Muslims, exert a profound influence as poles, significantly shaping the construction and evolution of cities housing their graves. Table 2 provides an overview of the cities where the sacred tombs of the fourteen Infallibles are situated. In the majority of these cities, specialized physical developments and enhancements have been instituted around the holy tombs under the pretext of attracting more pilgrims. These interventions extend to the urban fabric surrounding the shrines, yielding distinct effects on the city's landscape, social structure, and the tradition of pilgrimage.

As evident from the provided table, six of the holy graves are located in Saudi Arabia, six in Iraq, and one in Iran. Among these cities, both Holy Mashhad and



Medina have undergone significant physical transformations in their central areas and around the shrines of the Infallibles. These changes appear to be influencing other religious cities and holy sites, as similar developments are observed in cities like Karbala, Najaf, and Samarra. Regarding the physical measures implemented in these six cities, it is noteworthy that, except for Samarra, a comprehensive development plan has not yet been executed. However, the other cities have witnessed fundamental alterations in their historical fabric surrounding the shrines of the Infallibles. With the exception of Mashhad and Samarra, the involvement of Wahhabi influences from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is discernible in the implementation or design of these large-scale interventions, as indicated by collected documents. For instance, in Medina, all interventions were orchestrated by Saudi entities, while in Karbala, Najaf, and Kazemin, the planning consultants were from the United Arab Emirates. Regrettably, the execution of these plans has often been delegated to Iranian agents, who, paradoxically, are implementing Wahhabi-influenced projects that seek to undermine the sanctity of the holy graves of the Infallibles. The approach of the consultants associated with the Saudi and UAE courts in these projects has been characterized by the destruction of cultural and identity elements surrounding the tombs and historical fabric of the cities. Moreover, there is a discernible effort to diminish the prominence of the sanctuaries in the urban fabric, often achieved through the introduction of high-rise commercial structures. The resemblance between the initiatives in the holy city of Mashhad and Wahhabi plans raises questions. A summary of the actions taken in the historical fabric around the holy graves of the Imams in these six cities can be observed in the following table.





With a clarified understanding of the significance of establishing holy shrines, the importance of the residential fabric surrounding them, and the pilgrimage tradition as viewed by Shiites and Wahhabis, we can now delve into comprehending the rationales behind the spatial and emotional detachment of holy shrines from their surrounding fabric. This understanding is facilitated by substantiating the divergence of development plans for holy shrines from Islamic principles. To achieve this, it becomes essential to scrutinize the form and context of these sacred spaces, as rituals such as pilgrimage are enacted in these locations. Physical alterations have the potential to influence the ritual patterns by introducing modifications to the spatial aspects of these revered places.

**Table 1.** A summary of the comparison of Shiites and Wahhabis' views regarding the graves and shrines of the prophets and imams and their pilgrimage (authors)

Shī'ism	Wahhabism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Believing in the perfect human being.</li> <li>- Imams and prophets are alive and not dead after death.</li> <li>- Appealing to the Prophet and the Imams is permitted.</li> <li>- The pilgrimage of the Prophet (PBUH) and Imams cause happiness and spiritual growth of the Muslims.</li> <li>- Traveling to visit the Prophet's grave (PBUH) and the Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.) is permitted.</li> <li>- Respecting and valuing the Prophet and Imams' graves and building a courtyard, dome and shrine for them.</li> <li>- Believing in the tradition of visiting graves, ordered by the Prophet (PBUH).</li> <li>- Polytheism imagines the body and sees God as well.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is no perfect human being.</li> <li>- Imams and prophets are dead and not alive forever.</li> <li>- Appealing to the Prophet and the Imams is forbidden.</li> <li>- The pilgrimage of the Prophet (PBUH) and the Imams is illegitimate and causes polytheism and exaggeration.</li> <li>- Traveling to visit the Prophet's grave (PBUH) and the Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.) is forbidden.</li> <li>- Disrespecting the graves of the Prophets and the Imams and their destruction.</li> <li>- Disbelieving in the tradition of visiting graves while claiming to accept the Prophet's tradition (PBUH).</li> <li>- Believing in seeing God in the Hereafter.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** Summary of the physical actions of texture around the holy graves of the Infallibles (authors)

Row	City Name	Designer Consultant	Summary of Actions Taken and Ongoing	Condition	About Current and Future Interventions
1	Medina	Unknown (Wahhabis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Destruction of Baqiya cemetery</li> <li>- Destruction of the surrounding tissue</li> <li>- Construction of a traffic ring</li> <li>- Changes in the urban form, social structure, and business functions</li> <li>- Reducing the supremacy of the Prophet Mosque minaret</li> <li>- Construction of hotels and commercial centers</li> <li>- Destruction of identity elements</li> </ul>	Fully implemented	
2	Holy Mashhad	Consultant Tash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Destruction of residential tissue around and eviction of neighbors of the shrine</li> <li>- Creating a riding ring around the shrine</li> <li>- Construction of hotels and commercial centers</li> <li>- Reducing the supremacy of the minaret of Imam Reza's shrine</li> <li>- Changes in social structures and rituals</li> </ul>		

Row	City Name	Designer Consultant	Summary of Actions Taken and Ongoing	Condition	About Current and Future Interventions
3	Najaf Ashraf	Court Advisor and Department of Architecture of Shahid Beheshti University of Tehran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Construction of the Fatimid court on the ruins left by Saddam Hussein's attack</li> <li>- The project is attractive and has a high-performance</li> <li>- Improvement on the visual access to the shrine</li> <li>- No changes in the shrine's general structure</li> <li>- Reducing the shrine's supremacy</li> <li>- Reducing continuity and connection</li> <li>- Destruction of the local businesses</li> </ul>	(with redevelopment plans)	
4	Karbala	Court Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Destruction of the area between the two holy shrines</li> <li>- Construction of High-rise buildings in the historical texture</li> <li>- Destruction Forty hectares</li> </ul>		
5	Kadhimiya	Court Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Destruction of identity and historical heritage</li> <li>- Four times the increase in shrine space</li> <li>- Destruction of surrounding tissue if fully implemented</li> </ul>	Halted after a majority of the program was run	
6	Samarra	Iranian Consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expanding the shrine courtyard</li> </ul>		

#### 4. THE IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF THE SHRINE OF THE INFALLIBLES AMONG THE SHIITES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PLACE

An analysis of Table 2 and a comparative assessment of Shiite and Wahhabi perspectives not

only highlight the stark disparities between them but also underscore the paramount significance of the Shrine of the Infallibles as a celestial site where sacred phenomena, including pilgrimage, transpire. To articulate this significance more effectively, the concept of "place" will be examined in the following discussion.



The unfolding events within the historical fabric surrounding the shrines of the Infallibles are distinctly marked as unique places. This distinction arises from interventions that have occurred without due consideration of the sense of place and a phenomenological approach, altering the inherent character of these spaces. A place, in essence, is more than just a space; it embodies a distinctive character and meaning. As elucidated earlier, the primary rationale for the emergence of urban spaces around holy shrines, exemplified by the city of Mashhad, stems from the adherence to the concept of the pole and the close proximity of residential areas to the shrine. To validate the transformation in the sense of place experienced by individuals due to the alteration in the character of space, an examination of the relationship between society and space, along with its quantifiable components, becomes imperative. Therefore, to gain insights into these changes, particularly in the context of attending the shrine of Imam Reza (AS), a comprehensive understanding of the societal connection with space is indispensable. In the subsequent analysis, alterations in the patterns of human presence around this urban space are scrutinized through the application of statistical methods and spatial configuration analysis. It is crucial to recognize that a place transcends mere physical dimensions; it possesses a distinct character and significance. Consequently, employing spatial arrangement methods on maps from various periods enables a comprehensive correlation analysis, shedding light on the evolving dynamics of these sacred places.

## **5. STUDYING THE SPATIAL SEPARATION OF THE HOLY SHRINE OF IMAM REZA AND THE SURROUNDING RESIDENTIAL TEXTURE**

Upon reviewing the exemplar actions taken in the shrines of the Infallibles in various cities, the focus shifts to the case study at hand - Mashhad. Much like several other prominent cities in the Islamic world, the city of Mashhad has evolved based on the veneration of a perfect human being and the fervent desire of adherents to reside in close proximity to the shrine of the Infallibles, specifically the shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.). Throughout history, this symbiotic relationship between the shrine as the pole and the inhabitants and pilgrims (followers) living in its immediate vicinity has shaped the daily life around the shrine. Followers have engaged in diverse religious rites and rituals within these inter-residential and religious spaces, fostering a distinctive hierarchy and pattern. This

coexistence remained prevalent until the interventions of recent decades. In essence, the precincts of the shrine offered a sense of ownership to its followers, enabling them to immerse themselves in its teachings and approach life through its profound lessons. The shrine constituted a pivotal element of urban life and daily social interactions. It is noteworthy that the followers circumambulated the shrine of Imam Khomeini, fostering a unique sense of cohesion and spatial unity influenced by the intellectual foundations and concepts of Shiism. However, contemporary physical interventions have precipitated alterations in the meaning, identity, and character of the fabric surrounding the shrine. Undoubtedly, these interventions have also engendered irreversible social repercussions, reshaping the very essence of the community and its interconnectedness.

Subsequently, employing the spatial arrangement method becomes crucial to substantiate that recent development projects, in contrast to the fundamental principles of Islamic cities that aim to enhance the proximity between residents and the shrine, have resulted in separation and disconnection between the shrine and residential spaces.

Figure 7 illustrates the variations in the comprehensive correlation index within the shrine's fabric across different time periods, depicting diverse maps corresponding to distinct physical interventions implemented during those epochs. As previously explained, these maps underwent conversion into Depth Map software following the transformation of aerial photographs into maps using Arc GIS software. Within this software, axial maps, representing the closest access lines, were generated, and subsequent integration analysis with a designated radius was conducted. The integration index serves as an indicator of the value associated with each urban space, with higher values correlating to an increased likelihood of presence and, consequently, spatial cohesion, indicative of the connection between residential and religious spaces. In this map, warmer colors signify a stronger bond. Notably, during the Safavid era, preceding Shah Abbas Safavid's physical interventions, a discernible pattern of followers encircling the perfect man was evident, resulting in the formation of significant urban spaces around the shrine. However, with the construction of upper and lower streets during Shah Abbas Safavid's reign, this pattern became more linear, yet remnants of its existence persisted around the holy shrine. The Pahlavi period witnessed further disruptions in the surrounding fabric with the construction of Tabarsi Street in the north and Tehran Street in the south, altering structural equations in the vicinity. This transformation impacted the symbolic significance of

the upper and lower heads of the Imam, previously structured around pilgrimage rites and entering the Imam's shrine. Another noteworthy intervention during the Pahlavi period, particularly in the 1950s, involved the destruction of the surrounding fabric and the establishment of a green ring under the directive of then-governor Abdolazim Valian. This initiative resulted in the substantial destruction of the grand bazaar of Mashhad, giving rise to Reza bazaar in the water square. Widely opposed by residents and merchants, this plan entirely severed the emotional connection between the shrine and its surroundings, disrupting the flow of urban life that bestowed meaning and identity upon the sanctuary and its environs. Essentially, this act created a pronounced separation between the shrine and the adjacent fabric, ostensibly justified by creating space for pilgrims while, in reality, weakening market influence and spatial relations. This deliberate detachment was viewed as a threat by the Pahlavi government, fundamentally conflicting with the Shiite intellectual and semantic foundations regarding the relationship between the perfect man and the followers. As depicted in Figure 4, the shrine is depicted as entirely isolated. This undertaking conceptually resembles the exile and captivity of the Imam.

In the post-Islamic Revolution era, the phenomenon of the shrine's separation underwent two distinct stages. In the initial phase, marked by the Islamic nature of the revolution and the developments of its early years, significant attention was directed towards the shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.). Consequently, the fabric around the shrine experienced a resurgence. As evident in the 1985 connection map, the coherence and significance of the relationship between the shrine and its surrounding

fabric were reinforced in alignment with Shiite thought. Essentially, the separation between the shrine and the adjacent fabric during this period aimed to rectify the repercussions of extensive interventions in the 1950s. However, in the subsequent phase, which unfolded in the 1970s, a national project was initiated to renovate and improve the texture around the shrine of Imam Reza, covering an area of approximately 310 hectares. This project was approved by the Article 5 Commission on May 30, 1955. A critical observation of this plan reveals a misguided perspective that disregards intellectual principles and fails to consider the intellectual foundations of the followers' relationship with the Imam as a revered figure. The plan neglects the contribution of neighborhoods that hold meaning and identity in connection with the holy site, encompassing elements of the pattern of presence and rituals of pilgrimage. The plan lacks consideration for the essence of the holy place and its connection with the surrounding areas. Consequently, the phenomenon of separation manifests itself through the implementation of segments of this plan, erasing the spirit of the place that has been a defining element for these neighborhoods. The maps of 1985 and 1995 vividly depict this spatial separation. This pattern of presence, devoid of alignment with Shiite thought, aligns more with land trade and a disregard for the spiritual connection between the surrounding fabric and the shrine. In essence, these interventions obliterated the meaning and character of the surrounding fabric in relation to the shrine. Additionally, the demographic shift in the surrounding area, based on Statistics Center data, indicates a decline from 70,000 people around the shrine in 1965 to 20,000 in 1990.



**Fig 3.** Addition of a ring and two streets north and south during the first Pahlavi era & Destruction of the surrounding tissue and the creation of a green ring

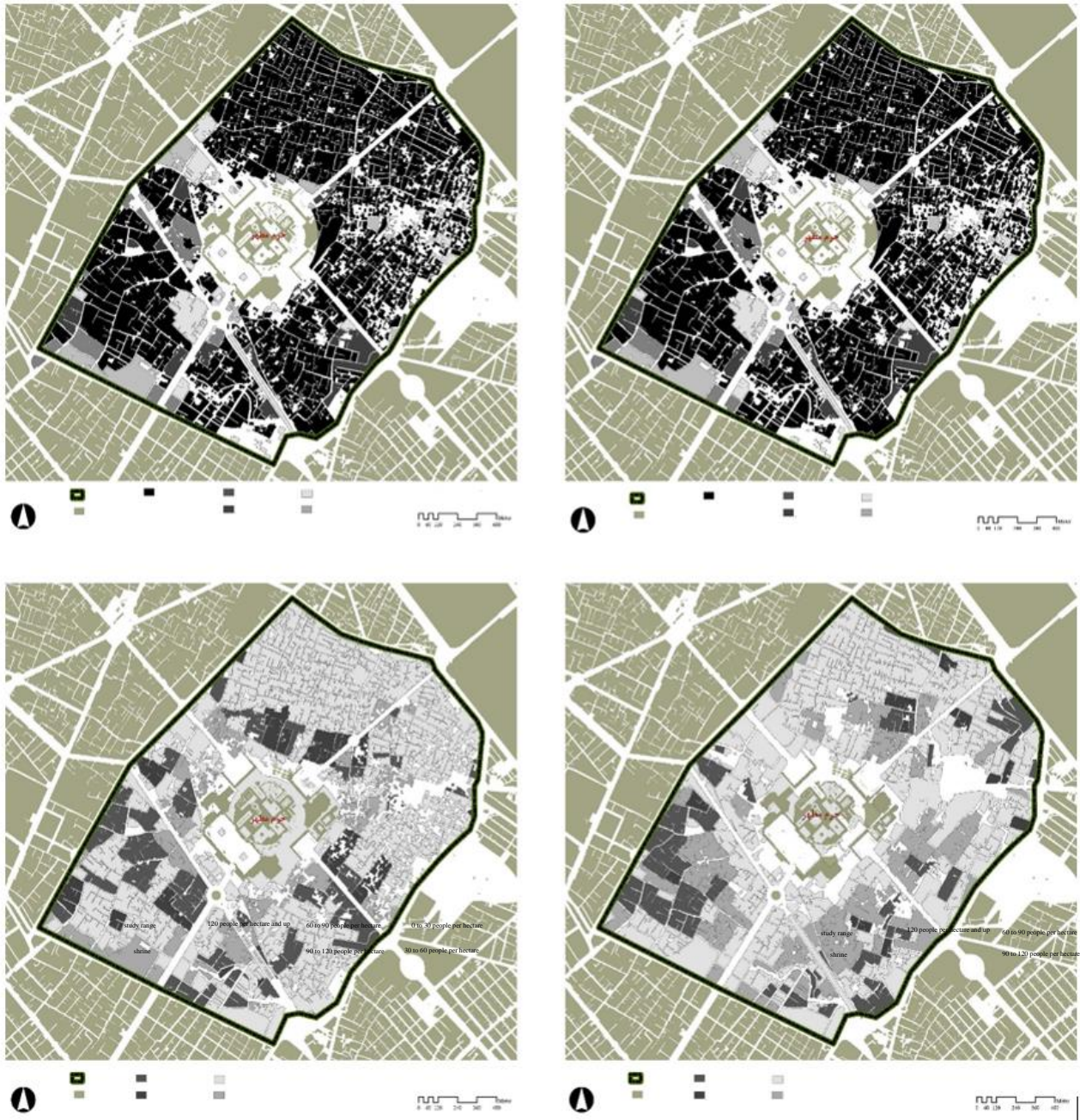
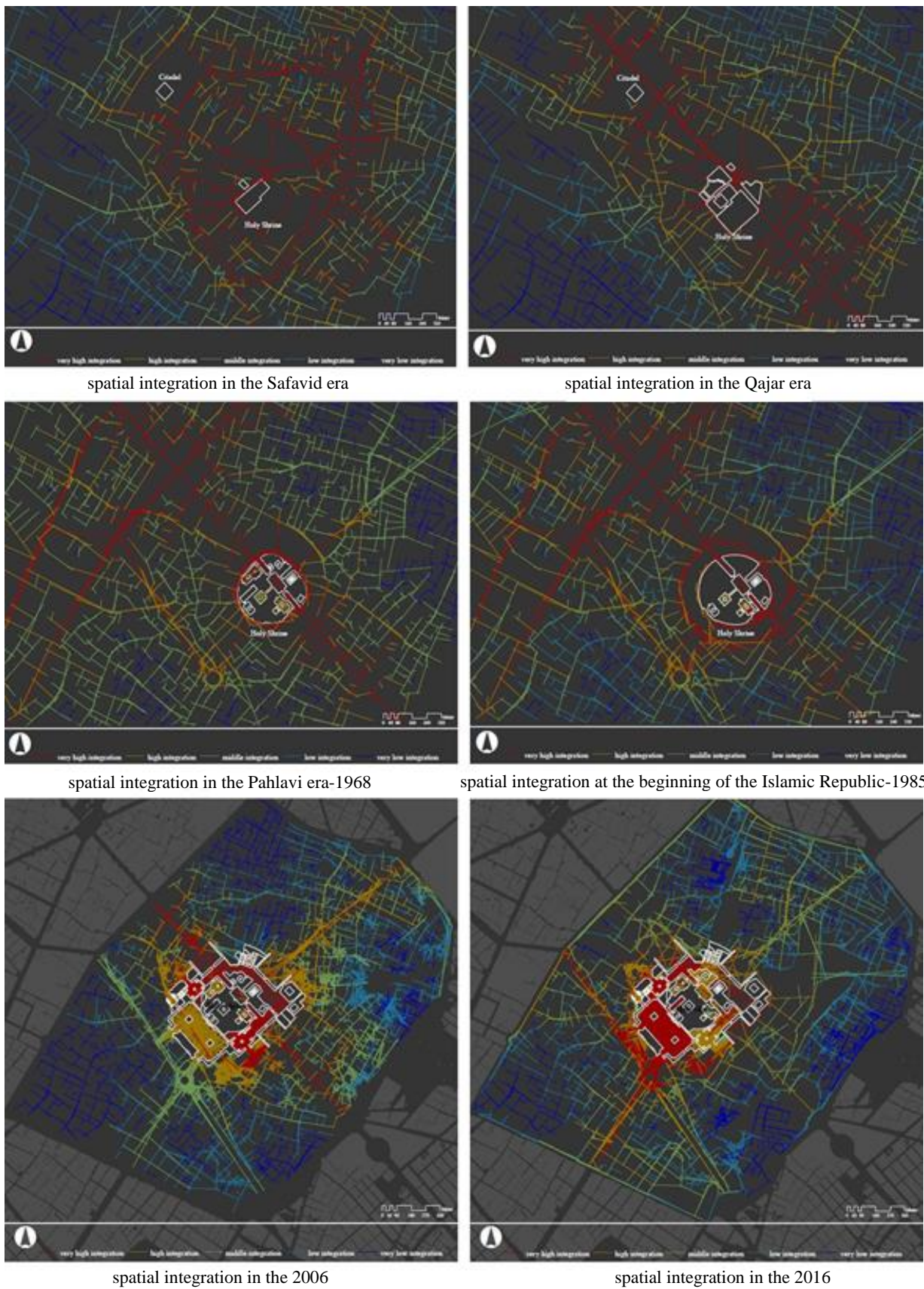


Fig 4. Population density in the texture of the shrine (Source: Authors, taken from the Statistics Organization of Iran, 2011)



**Fig 5.** Inclusive spatial integration map of the texture area around the holy shrine in different eras (authors).

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the alignment of development plans for holy shrines with fundamental Islamic perspectives, which have historically shaped the formation of urban spaces surrounding these sacred sites. The research revealed the profound impact of the concepts of the growth pole and the perfect man on the configuration of such cities, emphasizing the notion that residential spaces should be intricately connected to the holy shrine and exhibit a high level of coherence with one another. Furthermore, the study delved into the concepts of sense of place and character, positing that the formation of cities in partial development plans is inseparable from the preservation of the sense of place and identity within urban areas. However, upon conducting statistical analysis and spatial configuration through spatial arrangement, it became evident that urban development plans around the holy shrine of Imam Reza not only deviated from the fundamental principles guiding the formation of these cities - such as adhering to the growth pole concept and fostering coherence between residential and shrine areas - but, rather paradoxically, resulted in severe separation and disconnection between urban, residential spaces, and the holy shrine. This phenomenon has given rise to a crisis of homelessness and a diminished sense of spatial identity in the city of Mashhad.

In a broader context, recent interventions around holy shrines demonstrate a disregard for the ancestral notion of establishing religiously sacred cities with the primary objective of fostering emotional and spatial proximity to the perfect man (the Infallibles). Instead, these projects have predominantly aimed at economic productivity, commodifying the sanctity of the holy land. The spatial arrangement analyses around the Razavi shrine in this study reveal a decline in pervasive integration and spatial value within the surrounding texture, leading to the emergence of isolated spaces. The transformation of the texture from a residential to a predominantly commercial environment, as indicated by the maps, can be attributed to the increasing construction of housing and hotels alongside the demolition of residential buildings. This phenomenon has resulted in the forced displacement of the population residing around the Razavi shrine, causing a shift in the character and spirit of the place. Analyzing the separation phenomenon underscores the alignment of the traditional texture of Mashhad with the intellectual foundations of communication with the perfect man. Throughout various periods, especially since the advent of modernism, interventions have disrupted the

structure of the sanctuary as a sacred place. The prevailing capitalist and materialistic thinking in these development plans has neglected the sense of connection and the existential meaning of the surrounding tissue. The commodification of the sanctuary, forced relocation of residents, and a non-participatory approach represent fundamental flaws in these developments. An interesting observation is that both Mashhad and Medina have experienced similar bulldozer developments despite the contrasting Shiite and Wahhabi ideologies. This commonality arises from the roots of Wahhabi thought and the capitalist system, which fundamentally contradicts Shiite beliefs. Given that Mashhad serves as a model for other Shiite cities and holy places, it is imperative to thoroughly understand its unique qualities before any intervention. Key considerations should include sensory continuity, the preservation and reinforcement of rituals and interactions, attention to the meaning of pilgrimage, and spatial communication emanating from the reverence for the perfect man and the pole. This approach can ensure interventions in the surrounding tissues promote coherence, meaning, and the preservation of sacred identity.

### PS:

1. GIS
3. R.k. Abid, 2016: 72 and [dewan-architects.com](http://dewan-architects.com) and
- 4 Golubeva, 2011:
5. genius loci
7. Global Integration
8. According to the general census of population and housing in the years 65 to 90

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#### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Azari, A., Barati, N., Sedighi, M. (2023). The Separation of Holy Shrines from Peripheral Fabric Based on the Perfect Man Concept; An Examination of Place (Case Study: Shrine of Imam Reza in the Holy City of Mashhad). *Int. J. Architect. Eng. Urban Plan*, 33(4): 1-14, <https://dx.doi.org/ijaup.629>.

URL: <http://ijaup.iust.ac.ir>

