



## **Study on Contemporary Interventions in the Historical Fabric of Mashhad**

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### **Abstract**

City of Mashhad has an international status and is a cultural center in the Islamic world, particularly for the Shiite Muslims. This study investigates physical interventions in the historical fabric of Mashhad in contemporary century from the first Pahlavi to the post Islamic Revolution period. Research methodology is descriptive and historical study. For collecting data, all plans, documents and texts about interventions in the historical fabric of Mashhad have been surveyed. This historical research will help us for better planning and designing in the future. Physical interventions in the historical fabric of Mashhad with 5 criteria (theory of intervention, objectives of intervention, method of intervention, kind of development plan and impacts of interventions) are analyzed in several periods. Results show that urban development plans in the historical fabric of Mashhad in this century (as well as some other historical cities) can be considered a pragmatic and modernistic approach. This study has resulted to get gradual orientation toward urban reconstruction and rebuilding of the inner city in the urban development plans of Mashhad, and has paid less attention to the urban rehabilitation and urban regeneration of the existing fabric. The upgrading of the quality and method of intervention must occur in the historical fabric of Mashhad in the future.

**Keyword:** *Historical Fabric, Intervention, Urban Rehabilitation, Urban Reconstruction, Regeneration Plans*

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### **1. Introduction**

The historical fabric of a city has a valuable status and an important role in identification of a city. Mashhad is a famous religious-historical city in the Islamic World. About 9<sup>th</sup> A.D., Imam Reza (The Eight Imam of Shiite Muslims) was martyred in "Toos". The presence of Imam Reza's tomb was the basis for the formation and development of the city of Mashhad. Gradually, from this time, Mashhad was converted to one of the most important pilgrimage places in the world of Islam. Nowadays, Mashhad has an international status and is a cultural center in the Islamic world and millions of pilgrims travel to Mashhad. According to the existing documents, the formation and expansion of Mashhad until the Safavid dynasty was based on a historical pattern as a central-radial form around the holy shrine [4]. During the Safavid dynasty, the city of Mashhad was developed and main physical interventions were done in Mashhad. The objective of interventions in the fabric was to absorb more pilgrims. The first serious intervention in the center of Mashhad took place at the time of "Shah Abbas Safavi" when an east-west street was constructed through the holy shrine. This axis defined the new physical - spatial structure for the city of Mashhad and it changed the developmental pattern to the radial - linear form. The city expanded around the axis and this axis was named "Balla Khiaban" street

and "Païen Khiaban" street. After Safavid dynasty, more physical interventions in the fabric of Mashhad occurred in the Qajarid dynasty. In time of "Naser Aldin Shah", Mashhad experienced new developments. The objective of the intervention was to expand the holy shrine complex in this period. The holy shrine was restored and new open spaces (e.g. "Sahn no") was added to the holy shrine complex. The two other new urban spaces ("Bast") were added between the street and the holy shrine and the facades of the surrounding buildings were constructed [4]. This study focuses on the physical interventions in the historical fabric of Mashhad in contemporary century based on the solar calendar. Research surveyed the interventions from first Pahlavi period to the post Islamic revolution period. The main questions of the research are: What physical interventions were done in the historical fabric of Mashhad? How effective these physical interventions were on the historical fabric of Mashhad? These are the questions that the paper tried to answer them.

### **2. METHOD**

Research methodology is descriptive and historical study. Study focuses on physical interventions in the historical fabric of Mashhad in the contemporary era. For collecting data, all plans, documents and texts about interventions in the historical fabric of Mashhad have been surveyed. Physical interventions in the historical fabric of Mashhad were divided into 3 parts in the

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process of research: First Pahlavi period, second Pahlavi period and the post Islamic revolution period. Physical interventions in the historical fabric of Mashhad with 5 criteria (theory of intervention, objectives of intervention, method of intervention, kind of development plan and impacts of interventions) were analyzed in three periods.

### RE3. THE FIRST PAHLAVI PERIOD

The period of the first Pahlavi was from 1925 to 1941. In the beginning of this period, streets and squares were constructed in other Iranian old cities as well as in Mashhad [5]. These physical interventions were done by a modernistic and pragmatic approach. Objective of interventions in the historical center was to provide the vehicular access to the fabric. The first action established the circular road around the holy shrine. The radius of the circular road from the central point of Imam Reza's dome was 180 meters [3]. This issue was considered that the holy shrine complex and the adjacent commercial and residential spaces established a physical-spatial integrated whole. The reconstruction method of intervention led to the disappearance of coordination and harmony in the fabric. For example, the circular road caused the "Sarshoor Bazaar" to be divided into two segments. In relation to these physical interventions, some other urban development plans were presented. The establishment of "Shah Square" on "Balla Khiaban" street and two axes crossed through the square and these two streets were extended. This action renewed the physical - spatial structure of Mashhad and it was an intelligent action. (Fig.1, 2, 3).

### THE SECOND PAHLAVI PERIOD

The period of the second Pahlavi was from 1941 to 1979. Physical interventions in this period have been divided into two parts. The intervention in the adjacent fabric of The Holy Shrine was done following the Bor Bor's plan and the first Comprehensive Plan of Mashhad.

#### Bor Bor's Plan for the Adjacent Fabric of the Holy Shrine

In 1968 (1347 S.H.), one of the greatest interventions were planned in the historical fabric of Mashhad. This plan had been proposed by "Bor Bor Consultant Engineers and Association"[2]. (Fig. 4, 5) Between 1975 and 1976, action had been started and buildings around the holy shrine had been demolished. Green space had been established instead of demolished spaces. Circular wall had been constructed around the holy shrine complex and surrounding green space. Radius of circular wall from central point of Imam Reza's dome was 320 meters [3]. This action caused the adjacent fabric of holy shrine to be demolished, so that the holy shrine complex was converted to a monument. All propositions of Bor Bor's plan were not implemented in the adjacent fabric of the holy shrine.

#### The first Comprehensive plan of Mashhad

The first comprehensive plan of Mashhad (Khazeni) was prepared in 1960's decade and it was approved in 1971(1350S.H.). Proposition of Bor Bor's plan for the historical fabric were considered in the first Comprehensive Plan of Mashhad. The preparation of the detailed plan of Mashhad (Khazeni) was done in the framework of the first comprehensive plan and it was approved in 1981. This plan proposed the establishment of a new street (east to west) in the historical fabric and this plan proposed to widen all streets and allies in the historical fabric. The detailed plan defined two boundaries around the holy shrine. In the internal boundary, the height of buildings was 5 meters and in the external boundary, height of the buildings was 26 meters [7]. (Fig6, 7, 8) The detailed plan didn't consider the development of the city of Mashhad and the increasing number of pilgrims and travelers. The detailed plan wasn't able to prevent the dereliction of the fabric and many problems were created.

### 5. THE POST ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN IRAN

The period of post Islamic revolution in Iran is from 1979 to the present. Physical interventions in the historical fabric have been divided into two parts: Establishing an underground circular road around the holy shrine and the renovating of the surrounding fabric of the holy shrine. In the beginning of 1980's "Khanesazi Consultant Engineers" planned the underground circular road around the holy shrine. Between 1984 and 1993 the underground circular road was constructed [1]. Establishment of the underground circular road around the holy shrine caused public open spaces to be extended. Also, this action caused automobiles to enter next to the holy shrine. (Fig.9)

#### The reconstruction and the renovation plan in the surrounding fabric of the holy Shrine

In 1993(1372 S.H.), "TASH" company was appointed as the consulting engineers of the project. The area of physical intervention was part of the historical fabric of Mashhad and this area covered 300 hectares. Consulting engineers of the project declared the existing condition of the historical fabric as such: "The existing physical-spatial structure of the fabric is confused and a disarranged fabric. The whole buildings are derelict. There is no valuable architecture and the fabric doesn't provide the services and facilities"[11]. The reconstruction and the renovation plan in the surrounding fabric of the holy Shrine had proposed to demolish the whole fabric nearby. The proposed physical pattern was a large scale pattern and the plan proposed establishing new urban blocks and big plots. In addition, circular loop (Sharestan) and new radial streets toward the holy shrine complex were considered

in the access network. Pedestrian ways (Rah bag) were planned in the form of the chess network in all of the area. (Fig.10) This Plan was approved in 1995(1374 S.H.) and many problems were created in implementing the plan. Finally, construction of this project ceased.

### **The Renovation and the Rehabilitation plan in the surrounding fabric of The Holy Shrine.**

The Renovation and the Rehabilitation plan in the Surrounding Fabric of the Holy Shrine was the revised plan. This detailed plan was approved in the Excellency Council of Urban Development and Architecture of Iran in 1999 (1378S.H.). Three domains with the specific activities were indicated: a) Pilgrimage domain b) Residential-pilgrimage domain c) Residential domain. There is a circulation road between the residential-pilgrimage domain and the residential domain. The intervention method in this area has been divided in two categories (Tash Consulting Engineers, 2008).

#### **a) Direct intervention domain:**

This area covers 88 hectares that is constructed under the supervision of "Samen Development and Housing Company". This area consisted of big plots that are designated for residential and commercial land uses with high density.

#### **b) Indirect intervention domain:**

This area is constructed under the rules and guidelines of the Detailed Plan of the Renovation and Rehabilitation Plan by inhabitants in the fabric and the public investments." [12]. (See Fig. 11) Finally, in 2016, the Excellency Council of Urban Development and Architecture of Iran revised this plan. This new revised plan is named "The Rehabilitation and Harmonic Development in the Surrounding Fabric of the Holy Shrine" [8]. Right now, the Excellency Council of

Urban Development and Architecture of Iran is deciding for historical fabric of Mashhad.

### **6- DISCUSSION (Analysis of interventions in the historical fabric of Mashhad)**

In the contemporary urban development plans in the historical fabric of Mashhad, two recent urban plans are noticeable. Method of intervention in the "Reconstruction and The Renovation Plan in the Surrounding Fabric of the Holy Shrine" can be considered an urban reconstruction and not an urban conservation or urban rehabilitation. If this plan is implemented, the historical fabric would be demolished. Interventions in this plan mostly include demolishing existing fabric and people do not participate in the planning process. This plan experienced many problems in the implementing phase and construction of the project ceased. Method of intervention in the revised plan, entitled "The renovation and the Rehabilitation Plan in the Surrounding Fabric of the Holy Shrine" can be considered as the urban renovation and urban reconstruction and not urban rehabilitation. In this plan, some reality and existing condition were considered. A main point was that an integrated management was established in the historical fabric of Mashhad. Projects were constructed under the supervision of "Municipality of Samen". Analysis of physical interventions in the historical fabric of Mashhad has resulted to get gradual orientation toward the urban reconstruction and rebuilding of the inner city in the urban restoration of Mashhad, and has paid less attention to the urban rehabilitation and urban regeneration of the existing fabric. In table 1, each intervention with 5 criteria (theory of intervention, objectives of intervention, method of intervention, kind of development plan and impacts) are analyzed.



Fig.1: The circular road around the holy shrine.



Fig 2: "Naderi stream" in "Balla Khiaban" Street in Mashhad in the first Pahlavi period.



Fig3. "Balla Khiaban" and "Pain Khiaban" streets in Mashhad in the first Pahlavi period.



Fig 4: The model of Bor Bor's plan for the adjacent fabric of the holy shrine.



Fig 5: The model of Bor Bor's plan for the adjacent fabric of the holy shrine.



Fig.6: The approved detailed plan for historical fabric of Mashhad (Khazeni Consultant Engineers,1981).



Fig.7: Demolishing buildings adjacent to the holy shrine in 1976.



Fig.8: Demolishing the adjacent fabric to the holy shrine and establishing a green space instead.



Fig.9: The underground circular road around the holy shrine.



Fig10: The reconstruction and the renovation plan in the surrounding fabric of the holy Shrine (Tash Consultant Engineers, 1994).



Fig11: The renovation and the rehabilitation plan of the surrounding fabric of the holy shrine (Tash Consulting Engineers, 2008).

Table 1. Interventions in the Historical Fabric of Mashhad (by Author)

Plans of intervention	Theory of intervention	Objectives of intervention	Method of intervention	Kind of development plan	Impacts of intervention
Establishment of circular road around the holy shrine	Modernization	Vehicular access in old fabric	Urban Reconstruction	Objective plan	Segregation of holy shrine from adjacent fabric
The plan of BorBor Consultant Engineers and Association	Modernization	-The holy shrine was converted a monument. -A solution for traffic	Urban Reconstruction	Objective plan	The adjacent fabric of holy shrine was demolished
Master plan and Detailed plan (Khazeni)	Modernization	The improvement of physical-spatial and functional activities	Urban Reconstruction	Objective plan	Not considering the pilgrims and establishment of problems in future
Reconstruction and renovation plan in the surrounding fabric of The Holy Shrine(Tash)	Modernization	Allocation whole fabric for pilgrims	Urban Reconstruction	Detailed plan	-Demolition of Physical- spatial structure of old city - Depredation of identity
The Renovation and The Rehabilitation Plan in The Surrounding Fabric of the Holy Shrine(Tash)	Modernization	Allocation services and facilities for pilgrims	Urban Reconstruction and Urban Renovation	Detailed plan	-Demolition Of Physical- spatial structure of the old city -Depredation of identity

## 7- CONCLUSION

Today, urban development from inside, particularly in the central and historical fabric of cities has been reconsidered. Unfortunately, development plans in historical fabric of Mashhad (as well as other historical cities) have been based on pragmatic and modernistic approach. Regeneration plans must be noticed about principles of Iranian-Islamic urban design and architecture for renovating surrounding fabric of the holy shrine. Main physical-spatial structure of historical fabric and also the socio-economic, cultural and psychological aspects of the historical fabric must be considered in urban planning process for historical fabric of Mashhad in the future. Social capital of neighborhoods is an important issue. Regeneration plans must be noticed about people who have lived in the historical neighborhoods of the central fabric. Recommendations such as the people's participation in the planning processes and respect to the community must be considered. Finally, the upgrading of the quality and methods of intervention and feasibility of plans must be considered in the development plans for the historical fabric of Mashhad in the future.

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