



Type of Article (Research Article)

Explaining The Role Of The Central Courtyard In The Functioning Of Social-Commercial, Environmental, And Security Interactions Of The Iranian Caravanserai With A Culture-Oriented Approach

Pariya Dolat Sha: Department of Architecture, Bam.C., Islamic Azad University, Bam, Iran.

***Mohsen Ghasemi:** Department of Architecture, Bam.C., Islamic Azad University, Bam, Iran.

Mansour Nikpour: Department of Architecture, Bam.C., Islamic Azad University, Bam, Iran.

Article Einfo

Received: 2025/01/09
Accepted: 2025/07/31
PP: 57-68.

Keywords:

Central Courtyard
Iranian Caravanserai
Social Interactions
Historical Buildings
Cultural Contexts
Culture-Oriented

Abstract

The central courtyard, as one of the fundamental elements of the Iranian caravanserai architecture, plays a decisive role in shaping social and commercial interactions, improving environmental quality, and enhancing the security of these historical buildings, while constantly being influenced by cultural contexts and local characteristics. In recent years, attention to culture-oriented values in reinterpreting and revitalizing the spatial functions of caravanserais has gained significant prominence in interdisciplinary studies. This study aims to analyze the multifaceted functions of the central courtyard in enhancing the spatial quality of the Iranian caravanserai, focusing on social, environmental, and security dimensions, through a culture-oriented lens. The research method is quantitative-analytical, and data were collected through field surveys and documentary studies. In this framework, four selected caravanserais located in historic contexts were examined and analyzed. The findings reveal a significant relationship between the physical and cultural features of the central courtyard and the improvement of social-commercial interactions, environmental conditions, and spatial security in Iranian caravanserais. It was also found that the more the design and management of the central courtyard are informed by a deeper understanding of culture-oriented dimensions, the greater the potential for reviving its multifaceted functions and strengthening the social and economic roles of these buildings. In particular, the results highlight the necessity of aligning cultural considerations with spatial design principles in the process of revitalizing Iranian caravanserais. The findings indicate that adopting culture-oriented approaches along with stakeholder participation can lead to improved functional performance and the revitalization of the central courtyard's vitality in these historical structures.

Citation: Dolat Sha, Pariya. Ghasemi, Mohsen. Nikpour, Mansour. (2025). Explaining The Role Of The Central Courtyard In The Functioning Of Social-Commercial, Environmental, And Security Interactions Of The Iranian Caravanserai With A Culture-Oriented Approach. *Journal Of Socio-Cultural Changes*, 22(2; Ser. 86): 57-68.

DOI:

This Article Is Derived From The Doctoral Dissertation Of 'Pariya Dolat Sha', Titled "*Explaining The Role Of The Central Yard In The Functioning Of Social-Commercial, Environmental And Security Interactions Of The Iranian Naravansary*", Under The Supervision Of 'Dr. Mohsen Ghasemi', & With Advisory Support From 'Dr. Mansour Nikpour',

***Corresponding Author:** Mohsen Ghasemi

E-mail Address: mgh1393@yahoo.com

Tel: +989133438330

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The central courtyard, as one of the fundamental elements of traditional Iranian architecture, plays a multifaceted role in spatial organization, social interactions, climatic responsiveness, and ensuring security, serving as the beating heart of Iranian caravanserais. This space, by integrating environmental, social-commercial, and security functions, not only created a moderate and pleasant environment for travelers to rest but also provided a setting for trade, gatherings, and surveillance. Utilizing local materials, proportionate geometry, and enclosed spatial organization, the central courtyard harmonized well with the culture and norms of local communities. However, in recent decades, neglecting the reinterpretation and redefinition of these cultural and social functions has weakened the position of the central courtyard in urban identity as well as its environmental and security values. Adopting a culture-oriented approach, the present study explains the role of the central courtyard in the social-commercial, environmental, and security dimensions of the Iranian caravanserai, based on the assumption that the courtyard model, influenced by culture and tradition, has successfully responded to climatic and security needs while providing a suitable setting for social and commercial interactions.

Methodology

The present study was conducted with a quantitative–analytical approach, aiming to explain the role of the central courtyard in the social-commercial, environmental, and security functions of the Iranian caravanserai from a culture-oriented perspective. The research process was organized in two main stages: theoretical studies on caravanserai architecture and culture-oriented approaches, and field analysis of four prominent historical caravanserais in Iran. Data were collected through field surveys and documentary studies, and the caravanserais were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria such as authenticity, historical significance, cultural importance, and climatic diversity. The selected case studies, each assigned a specific analytical code, included: Zein-o-din Caravanserai in the hot and arid climate of the Yazd plateau (KZD-01), Bisotun Caravanserai in the cold mountainous climate of Kermanshah (KBS-02), Titi Caravanserai in the temperate and humid climate of Gilan (KTT-03), and Bastak Caravanserai in the hot and humid climate of Hormozgan (KBT-04). Analyses were conducted using a comparative matrix and indicators such as social-commercial interactions, environmental quality, safety, and cultural compatibility in relation to the physical characteristics of the central courtyard. In addition to quantitative analyses, a semantic approach was employed to explore the cultural and social contexts. Furthermore, to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, data and source triangulation methods were applied.

Results And Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the central courtyard in the selected caravanserais, despite being located in diverse climatic and cultural contexts, plays a key role in enhancing spatial quality, fostering social-commercial interactions, improving environmental conditions, and increasing safety and security. The comparative analysis shows that the Titi Caravanserai (KTT-03), with its well-adapted and culture-oriented design, exhibited desirable performance across all functional dimensions and is introduced as a successful model; whereas Bisotun Caravanserai (KBS-02), due to its weaknesses in social and security aspects, demonstrated the lowest performance. Overall, the alignment of physical design with climatic requirements and cultural values—particularly in indicators such as spatial proportions, vegetation, functional diversity, indoor air quality, energy consumption, and visual surveillance—was identified as a decisive factor in the functional quality of the central courtyard. The cases that adopted a culture-oriented approach were more successful in improving the quality and vitality of the space. The results of the research emphasize that the revitalization of the central courtyard in Iranian caravanserais is only possible through a comprehensive and culture-oriented approach that simultaneously addresses physical, social-commercial, environmental, and security needs. Harmonizing design with the climatic and cultural context, strengthening vitality and functional diversity, enhancing environmental quality and safety, and engaging local stakeholders are identified as key requirements of this process. The successful experience of Titi Caravanserai Caravanserai, as an inspiring example, demonstrated that redesigning based on local values and purposeful management can restore the spatial quality and multifunctional performance of historical spaces, transforming them into dynamic and sustainable hubs within the contemporary city.