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A Critical Approach to the Interventions in Historical Urban Fabrics Focusing on City Competitiveness; Case Study: Central Area Surrounding the Holy Shrine, Mashhad, Iran

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ABSTRACT: This paper reviews one of the main controversies in public policy, the concept of city competitiveness and how it responds to the issue of urban decline, accentuating the contribution of urban regeneration to competitiveness of cities through theoretical and case study review (Mashhad's central historical urban fabrics). Following a review of four main urban regeneration themes within the conditions of competitiveness, a classification of the key considerations to each theme is presented in three comprehensive dimensions. Furthermore, urban interventions in historical contexts is the issue explored in Mashhad, a city envisioned to become the cultural-religious center within the Islamic world. The research seeks to explore whether the physical-spatial interventions in Mashhad's central fabrics (considering the local existing potentials) have paved the way to the vision of a cultural-religious competitive city in the Islamic world or not. For this purpose, interventions through the city's central historical urban fabrics within the last few decades are explored in an analytic-adaptive comparison with urban regeneration's key considerations. It is finally revealed that urban decision-makers' simplistic understanding towards urban competitiveness besides specialists' negligence of the city's local context as a competitive advantage and the conversion of pilgrimage culture to pilgrimage industry has led to a top-down bulldozing authoritative approach that not only sacrifices "socio-spatial values" for "commercial values" but also makes a distance between people and their living environment in the long run. It is highlighted that offering appropriate and possible regenerative strategies for the realization of suitable urban spaces should vary based upon given contextual capabilities and talents of each part of the city which may not be equally feasible in different cities.

Keywords: City Competitiveness, Culture- led Urban Regeneration, Local Context, Mashhad, The Holy Shrine of Imam Reza.

INTRODUCTION

Today, improvements in the age of information and communication technology together with activities of transnational companies and international institutions has formed a "global capitalist economy" (Hubbard & Hall, 1998, p.159). The new economy is progressively led by international developments bringing substantial changes to cities (Spaans, 2004, p. 336). "Changed conditions for urban areas" is what Kreukels and Salet (1992) name the new social, economic and spatial changes happened to cities throughout the world. Short & Kim (1998, p. 57) believe that the globalizing economy is the impetus for cities to compete with each other in pursuit of enhanced economic status and that causes inter-urban competition.

This competition, in the last three decades, has become one of the main controversies in public policy, mostly in industrialized nations. A report by the UN-habitat pointed

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out that this increased importance is the result of a shift in the conventional economy, changing governmental capacities and local management and the pressure of the increasing population besides social issues. In the near future, these changes will, on the one hand, lead to drastic challenges, involving both city residents and leaders and on the other hand, prepare cities with unprecedented opportunities. Seizing the opportunities will end in a prosperous community, achieving its ultimate goals and objectives while putting them off will lead to a depressed community with no aspirations (UN-habitat, 2013, p. 1).

In this sense, as architecture and urban activities have historically been a manifestation of a city's prominence and its authorities' privilege, then it is no surprise that cities more than ever before rely on their physical-spatial assets to boost their economic prosperity. Moreover, a range of strategies are adopted by urban leaders to overcome urban decline by rebuilding derelict areas and developing a fashionable contemporary urban setting, capable of responding to rapid changes of the new economy. Various strategies can be acted upon by cities to overcome urban decline and even more to bring them a competitive advantage, but several researches have discussed the dialectical relation between "culture" and "urban economy", accentuating that "culture" has become a fundamental asset in economic regeneration of cities in the last few decades (Kong, 2000; Miles & Paddison, 2005; McCarthy, 2006; Yelinek, 2009; Garcia, 2004).

The objective of this research is to discuss the contribution of renewal interventions in historical urban fabrics, considering the context of city competitiveness and accentuate the significance of the local context in this process. As an empirical evidence, the research reviews the experience of Mashhad (Iran), a religious city known among the Islamic world by its historical landmark, the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza[1] which is envisioned to be a cultural core. It is beyond doubt that the city of Mashhad cannot be classified among global cities and their related determinants and classifications[2]. Discussing the concept of city competitiveness in Mashhad becomes meaningful only when considering the fact that interventions in the central district of Mashhad gains legitimacy by the plan's competitive vision: "the cultural-religious center of the Islamic world". This approach has imposed great expenses to the city in various aspects of financial, social and cultural, etc. and since it has not been revised yet (despite numerous disapproving consequences) and moreover is becoming a role model scheme for developing the rest of religious centers, the case stands among vital issues worth of scientific attention. Thus, reviewing related literature on this issue provides a theoretical framework for an unbiased critique to the implemented plan and its approach. The case of Mashhad highlights the vitality of understanding "local contextual potentials" in urban renewal projects particularly when the development aims for boosting city image. The case study seems like a laboratory, paving the way for a discussion on authoritarian, context-ignorant urban interventions in pursuit of boosting city competitiveness.

In this sense, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

• What are the different aspects of the concept of "city competitiveness" and how do historical urban fabrics and local context contribute to a more competitive city?

• Has the physical-spatial interventions in Mashhad's central fabrics (considering the local existing potentials) paved the way to the vision of a cultural-religious competitive city in the Islamic world?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology: The "methodology of this research" is based on a qualitative method containing case study review. Mashhad has been selected as a common case in pursuit of reaching a prominent cultural-religious status within the Islamic world which has caused the city to intervene in its historical urban fabrics, ignorant of inner local competitive advantages. Further details are explored by studying development processes in Mashhad's central urban fabrics searching for questions such as: what has happened during the development process, how and why has this happened?

Based on the research objectives, the two concepts of "city competitiveness" and "urban regeneration" are theoretically reviewed to reveal the contribution of urban regeneration to competitiveness of cities. Studying a number of theories on this issue has formed conceptual frameworks in different dimensions of physical-functional, socio-cultural and economic.

Data Collection: A detailed description of the fabrics' status quo has been developed based on official documents' review, suggested plan's layout review, studying aerial photos, attending various scientific/executive gatherings on the issue and inter-area photography and observation as methods for "data collection".

Result Analysis: Based on the conceptual framework formed out of the theoretical review (as a normative basis and a primary logical system for "result analysis") and explorations through the fabrics, interventions in Mashhad's central-historical fabrics have been analyzed in various dimensions by logical argumentation. Finally,

discussions are made on the issue of urban interventions in the metacontext of city competitiveness based on analysis findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

City Competitiveness: An Exploration of Different Aspects

Various studies have attempted to categorize diverse elements, indicators and factors that can explain city competitiveness. However, the whole literature on this issue has not still come into a model for common work (Balkyte & Tvaronavičiene, 2010, p. 342). It may be assessed by economic and strategic determinants (Kresl, 1995; Hassan, X2000; Huggins, 2003; RCI, 2013) or may also be assessed by soft factors such as the environment, quality of life, technology, knowledge, etc. (Balkyte & Tvaronavičiene, 2010; Raunio, 2001), the ability to absorb different kinds of flow (technological, financial and human flows) with an undisputable significance of knowledge and intellectual resources (Castells, 1996), or the ability to absorb the 'creative class"(Florida, 2002). Gospodini (2002) also takes the quality of urban space as one of the key factors having a great impact on the competitiveness of cities. She believes that the conventional relationship between urban economy and urban design has been reversed. So far, cities with higher levels of economic growth were enjoying high quality urban environments while in recent decades this relationship has been reversed in a way that high quality urban spaces attract flows of people and investments into a city, highlighting the role of urban design again in inter-city competition (Gospodini, 2002, p. 60).

The competitiveness of cities in pursuit of higher investment and the strategies they act upon to reach this goal has led to "marketing of cities" as a means to enhance their competitiveness (Paddison, 1993, p. 340). Ashworth (1994) puts place marketing as an approach incorporating marketing techniques into urban places. The city's image plays an important role in city marketing variables. It is said that the ultimate goal of city marketing is not only the city, but also its image which is formed in the minds of individuals throughout the city's history (Kavaratzis, 2004, p. 62). Beriatos & Gospodini (2004, p. 190) believe that cities more than ever before have to attract investment by either "economic attractiveness" or enhanced cultural facilities and city image improvement through transforming urban landscapes. They further highlight the two new urban landscapes in the context of cities as "commodities" and nodes of culture, leisure and amenities, and that they can respond to new urban conditions: (I) "built heritage" which is constituted of the city's historical characteristics as opposed to the short-lived modern values and (II) "innovative design of space" which is advanced, unconventional and is counter to the internationally acknowledged design styles.

Taking into consideration each city's unique background, the built heritage of a city, its image, meanings and generally speaking, its "local context" can therefore act as an inimitable competitive advantage for cities, preventing them from "sameness" and replicated measures to boost competitiveness. This approach acts as a catalyst in improving different aspects of a city and hence boosting city competitiveness, however it is yet overlooked in many cases.

Interventions in Historical Urban Fabrics Concerning City Competitiveness

Affected by contextual issues and macro-level economic, political and technological factors, a wide range of urban policies have been adopted to overcome urban decline in recent decades. This ranged from reconstructions of 1950's and rehabilitation policies in 1960's to renewal projects in 1970's. In 1980s, flagship projects, major schemes of development and redevelopment which aimed mostly to improve the economic competitiveness of cities were developed. In 1990s, a more sustainable approach, i.e. urban regeneration, was adopted. A more comprehensive form of policy and practice was enhanced and more emphasis on integrated action was given. Later on, environmental issues began to become a political issue, raising global concerns. Today, urban regeneration aims to address issues that are associated with change in the economy and employment, economic competitiveness, social exclusion, community issues, vacant and deteriorated sites in cities, new land and property requirements, environmental quality and sustainable development (Roberts, 2000; Singhal, 2009; Bahrainy, 2014).

Today, urban regeneration strategies cannot be ignorant of issues such as transnational economic network or the location of the city in connection with socio-cultural, political global networks. In this realm, issues pertaining to competitive image or identity of cities gain more importance and stand as undeniable factors of national/global status of cities.

The Contribution of Urban Regeneration to Competitiveness of Cities

Cities make endless efforts to reach a better competitive position among others in the new global economy. Ashworth & Voogd (1990) argue that the profiling of cities is becoming increasingly vital for local authorities in the acquisition of investments and that they strive for the promotion of their cities. Spaans (2004, p. 338) states that local governments establish "urban regeneration" projects wishing them to undertake the role of an impetus for growth of the whole city. Buursink (1991) believes that urban regeneration aims at restructuring the city spatially so as to develop its functional and economic potentials. He also states that as far as urban regeneration is inclined to renewing derelict areas within a city and converting those to fashionable expensive spaces of "retail trade, offices, hotels and upmarket housing", it highly pursues financial revenues (as cited in Spaans, 2004, p. 338). Roberts (2000) describes urban regeneration as "a comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change" (Roberts, 2000, p. 17).

The extensive literature on urban regeneration reveals that there is a variety of adopted strategies towards urban regeneration, varying with time (Singhal, 2009, p. 112). A diverse range of strategies can be acted upon by cities to overcome urban decline. By processing literature studied on this issue, table 1 illustrates a review of relevant considerations, divided into three dimensions: physical-functional, socio- cultural and economic.

Table 1. Some Related Urban Regeneration Considerations

Some Related Urban Regeneration Considerations

Physical-functional Dimension	**Socio-cultural** Dimension	**Economic** Dimension
• Responsive quality-led built environment • Rebuilding city center • Improvement of housing • Infrastructure improvement • High-quality urban design • Re-using brownfields • Optimizing physical capital use • Encouraging smart modes of travel • Densification of existing urban areas • Green landscaping • Using local construction materials and contractors • …..	• Community engagement and image building • Attracting quality population with appropriate skills • Improvement in education and healthcare services • Preserving unique Place Identity and distinct Image • Strengthening civic institutions Considering the effect of integral approaches in social issues • Place- making • New social facilities • …..	• Considering the creative economies • Using fiscal incentives in deprived areas • Economic diversification • Creating financial potential and investment capacity • Promoting business growth in targeted regeneration areas • Support for new and existing firms • Considering the effect of integral approaches in economic issues • …..

(Based on Singhal, 2009; Beswick & Tsenkova, 2002; Bahrainy et al., 2014)

Today, in the era of globalization and "new millennium economies" (Goksin & Muderrisoglu, 2005, p. 12), cities are warmly welcoming urban regeneration strategies to become more appealing places to "work, live, shop and recreate' (Balsas, 2004, p. 398). Some take "retail- led" strategies and create spaces for business and mixed-use mostly. Some prefer to adopt a "property- led" strategy incorporating factors like property development and maintenance, property prices, housing, housing prices and so on (Singhal, 2009, p. 113). Landry, Greene, Matarasso & Bianchini, assert that "culture-led and event based" regeneration, mostly prepare the opportunity for cities to introduce themselves to the world as unique meaningful places with an unprecedented image in the consumer age (1996, p. 1). "Entertainment-led" strategies have also proved to be beneficial to urban regeneration in the era of

"experience economy" (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Singhal (2009, p. 11) believes that entertainment-led regeneration is influenced by factors like brownfield redevelopment, attracting investment, business growth, increased revenues, employment growth, attracting people, income generation and city image. "Sports-led" regeneration, often adopted as a part of entertainment- led strategies, has also been encouraged in recent years to have social, economic and environmental regeneration outcomes. Table 2 presents different regeneration themes and their key considerations to boost urban competitiveness.

Table 2. Urban Regeneration Themes and their Key Considerations to Boost Urban Competitiveness

Urban Regeneration Themes to Boost Urban Competitiveness				
Themes	Retail- led	Property-led	Culture- led and Event- based	Entertainment and Sports–led
Some Key Considerations: Physical-functional	- Mixed use development	- Property development and maintenance	- Cultural space development - Responsive quality-led urban spaces with heritage- related flagship	- Physical infrastructure development - Brownfield redevelopment
Some Key Considerations: Socio-cultural	- City image building - Partnership development - Training and capacity building of local population	- Attracting and retaining homeowners - Partnerships enhancement	- Improving soft infrastructure - Public- private partnership - Improving city image - Community engagement - Strengthening civic institutions	- Attracting quality people - Improving city image
Some Key Considerations: Economic	- Creating financial potential and investment capacity - Business growth - Attracting private sector - Employment generation in regeneration area - Increasing consumer traffic	- Attracting public sector financing - Attracting private investment - New economic opportunities - Enhanced property prices - Housing opportunities	- Investment growth in culture-related infrastructure - Attracting business - Economic diversification - Attracting investment - Economic contribution - Higher employment - Income generation	- Attracting investment - Business growth - Employment growth - Income generation

Promoting City Image

Cities as Brands: City Branding

City Marketing process

Boosting Urban Competitiveness

(Authors' Analysis based on: Singhal, 2009; Beswick & Tsenkova, 2002; Bahrainy et al., 2014)

Each of the above themes, concentrating exclusively on one or more specific dimension(s) of city improvement, bring about positive outcomes besides a range of limitations. A city's unique "image", however, is known as a vital part of marketing cities (Zukin, 1999, as cited in Judd and Swanstrom, 1998, p. 374). Image must be reproduced or preserved in the branding process, forming a unique meaning for the city. This will act as a

catalyst to marketing of cities and consequently to help cities flourish in the fierce competitiveness circumstances (Table 2).

In this realm, urban regeneration, in all its various themes (retail, property, culture, event, entertainment, sports, etc. – led) or the more comprehensive approach pertaining to "sustainability", seems capable of reinforcing the city's potential to flourish in today's competitive conditions. However, different cities take different approaches related to urban regeneration to address their issues. Consequently, some cities thrive, by successful urban regeneration policies and reach a higher urban status in the competitiveness among other cities, while some others fail to prosper, implementing the same strategies. Here, the question is highlighted that what makes a city become a high-profile competitive one, while others remain unsuccessful and uncompetitive. Various causes may bring about the failure for cities while one among them pertaining to the topic of this research is accentuating the role of cities' "local context" in urban regeneration process, particularly when the city pursues the aspiration of playing a transnational role. The case study of this research, the city of Mashhad, has adopted a cultural vision attempting to reach a higher international status by means of cultural strategies. This vision should have brought the implementation of related considerations mentioned above (related to culture- led and event- based regeneration) while what has been implemented seems to be seeking different objectives.

"Local Context": An Obsolete Concept or a Competitive Advantage?

Nowadays, urban regeneration is implemented in cities as an industry to overcome urban decline issues by turning derelict areas into fashionable attractive places (McNeill & While, 2001, p. 298). These activities were done seemingly in pursuit of global attention and prominence. However, as URBACT (2015, p. 7) states, it should be noted that different cities' regeneration experience have resulted in the contemporary notion that cities nowadays, in the new urban economy, need to adopt more local "indigenous" approaches such as relying specifically on existing local "qualities and assets" rather than investing in outdated large-scale flagship projects which mostly end up in a zero-sum game. Porter (1998, p. 380) believes that each city, region or nation is gifted by a set of local strengthening points which provides competitive conditions for companies in that city on that specific field.

Postmodern culture has introduced cities as places to be sold. This has put cities in a rivalry situation, each of them seeking for a better differentiated advantage while sadly many of them finally find themselves replicating the analogous strategies copied elsewhere (Yelinek, 2009, p. 26). Landry, Greene, Matarasso & Bianchini, clearly explain that people love the excitement of unplanned townscapes with both old and new fabrics and buildings having a long story of that city in their heart (1996, p. 5). They also prefer those markets selling unique things which can't be found elsewhere in the city. Therefore, a city's exclusive social, economic or physical heritage and assets purports to its "difference". Landry, Greene, Matarasso & Bianchini believe that everything about a city can be "a potential resource for regeneration", these include (1996):

- Its artistic or archaeological history;
- Its built form and architectural heritage;
- Its landscape, topography, amenities, and landmarks;
- The attractiveness and legibility of its public space;
- Indigenous and recent ethnic traditions, accents and dialects;
- Local products and craft skills, manufacturing and services;
- The quality of retailing, leisure, sport, and entertainment;
- Sub-cultures, including those of the young;
- Traditions of public social life, civic traditions, festival and rituals (p. 7)', etc.

However, in some cases, urban regeneration strategies yet seem to have resulted in abrupt decision making and unplanned outcomes in pursuit of city improvement. The above mentioned potential resources for urban regeneration are overlooked in numerous cases and even modified and destructed by a simplistic thought that reconstruction can help the city to market itself more than ever before. This situation deteriorates when cities lack a set of fundamental assets, however strive for replicating apparently successful regeneration strategies implemented elsewhere in the world. Hence, when decision-making for a regeneration process, "local context" and its assets in social, physical, historical, environmental, etc. dimensions must initially be known, considered, planned and acted upon, if there is an aspiration to provide the city with a competitive advantage in the long run. The underlying opportunities and limitations of any local context, must be taken into consideration prior to setting the vision, goals and objectives of the city improvement process and acting upon it. This consciousness prevents cities from imitating the previously implemented, foreign strategies e.g. in urban regeneration and also gives prominence to unique local heritage which differentiates them from the rest of regeneration programs globally.

CASE STUDY INTRODUCTION

An Overview of the Experience of Mashhad, Iran

The case study of this research inherits a distinctive identity pertaining to its prominent religious center deep in the heart of its history. The city of Mashhad (Iran) is renowned among the Islamic world mostly due to housing the tomb of Imam Reza[3], namely the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza enjoying a rich set of historical and socio- cultural legacy as well as built heritage, specifically related to religious issues. The "pilgrimage culture" among Muslims brings millions of religious tourists to Mashhad as TASH (2000, p. 5) claims that the city has accommodated 20 million pilgrims annually in recent years and it is anticipated that this rate will reach a population of some 30 million pilgrims by the year 2020 and thus the city must be capable of accommodating the flows of people and fulfilling their requirements. Although the city has historically managed the flux of pilgrims and tourists ever since its creation, the global conditions in the last half century have imposed new challenges to the city, discomposing its historical rhythm of development. This issue is the underlying purpose to picking out the city of Mashhad and by an exclusive attention, the central urban fabrics adjacent to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza to be analyzed in this research. The city, dreaming of playing an international role in the Islamic world (TASH, 2006) has undergone various renewal plans transforming its status quo in pursuit of a competitive advantage. Unfolding the plans' goals besides what has been implemented facilitates the way to better understanding whether Mashhad's central district renewal has paved the way to a more competitive status or not.

Mashhad: The Creation and Evolution

In the first two centuries after Hijrah[4], former than the creation of Mashhad, "Noqan" had been one of the four most populated settlements in Toos region. "Sanabad"- one of the main villages within Noghan- had always been favorable to governors due to its pleasing weather conditions and nearby gardens. Ten years after Harun Al-Rashid[5]'s passing, in 818 A.D. Imam Reza travelled to Khorasan and inhabited in Sanabad village as Al-Ma'mun's successor. He was then poisoned and murdered by the Caliph's command due to his increasing popularity among Shias and political conflicts. He then was buried in the same place with Harun Al-Rashid and that caused the place to be nominated as Mashhad (meaning the place of martyrdom) or Mashhad-Al-Reza. In the third and fourth centuries after Hijrah, Shias and lovers of Prophet Muhammad's dynasty incrementally settled nearby Imam Reza's tomb (The Holy Shrine) and that resulted in the creation and ever-increasing development of Mashhad (Rezvani, 2006, pp. 214-217). Mashhad, home of Holy Shrine for more than twelve centuries, ever since its creation has been a place for both Iranian and foreign pilgrims, with diverse range of socio-cultural backgrounds to express their devotion for their Imam. This has caused the city to be engaged in cultural interactions as well as religious communications. Being the core of various admirable cultural-religious activities, the city has also always been home to great groups of scholars, literate people and religious leaders (Rezvani, 2006, pp. 88-89).

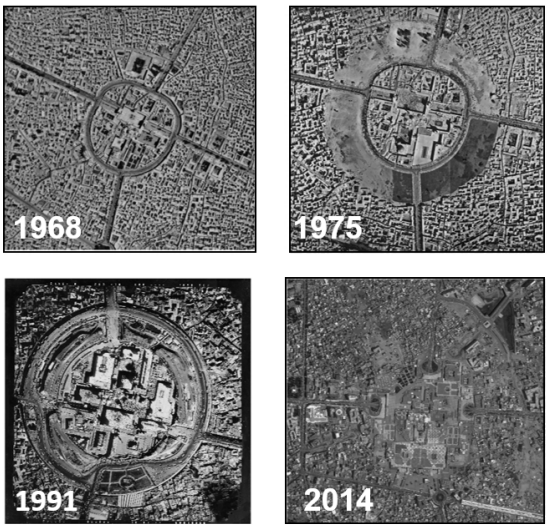


Fig. 1. A Chronological Review of the Impact of Central District's Renewal Plans on Central Fabrics Adjacent to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza

Nowadays, Mashhad is the second most populous city in Iran which is considered to be the center of culture and religion among the Islamic world (TASH, 2006, p. 20). As a response to the creation of this center on the one hand and to pilgrims' ever-increasing interests and requirements on the other hand, Mashhad has experienced various urban renewal projects to renew its declining urban system including public spaces and urban infrastructures to construct cultural-religious centers, commercial projects, green spaces, parking lots, spaces for modern infrastructure and residential complexes. As Mashhad highly relies on cultural- religious services and these services are chiefly concentrated inside the central historical district, the renewal plans have particularly influenced the central urban fabrics in which have been home to the holy tomb as long as the city's history.

The huge interventions in the central urban fabrics adjacent to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza are illustrated in the chronological review of aerial views (Fig. 1). According to the aerial views, it is clear that the expansion have proceeded far more than the previous ring outside the Holy Shrine after 1991.

RESULTS

Mashhad Central Pilgrimage District between "Competitiveness" and "Renewal"

There seems that the urban development adjacent to the Holy Shrine have always been affected by two forces: internal and external. Internal-rooted forces are mostly related to inhabitants' and pilgrims' requirements while the external-rooted forces deal with those physical-spatial interventions by governmental authorities with the aim of submitting their devotion for Imam Reza and is derived from sociopolitical issues. The long history of the city has always dealt with the two forces' interaction trying to make a balance between them. This had previously resulted in a coordination between the physical-spatial and social geometry of the fabrics causing a harmonic balanced development.

A review of various development plans (Table 3) and constructions in the last two decades reveal that, though by propitious goals, the second forces have surpassed the first resulting in inadvertent authoritarian interventions leading to new streams of constructions which have proved to be far more than the capacity of urban fabrics. Previous renewal plans produced by various organizations as well as their initial goals and types of interventions are briefly presented in table 3.

Table 3. A Review of Mashhad's Urban Renewal Plans

Title	Year	Goals	Interventions	Implementation
"Borbor" Consultants' Plan	1966	Erasing the whole surrounding fabric, enhancing the quality of permanent and temporary residence	Urban reconstruction with an evolutionary, functionalist approach.	Fully implemented.
"Khazeni" Consultants' Plan	1971	Preserving the historical urban fabrics	Urban preservation-incremental development preventing vast governmental interventions.	Was not implemented due to the Islamic Revolution (1978).
"Khane-sazi" Consultants' Studies	1983	Creating an appropriate physical image by rehabilitation	Authoritarian approach-no public engagement	
"TASH" Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Plan	1993	Responding to pilgrims' demands, setting a balance of values between the Holy Shrine and the surrounding fabrics.	Urban reconstruction with an authoritarian approach- governmental direct interventions.	Was not fully implemented due to its radical approach towards urban issues.

Revised Plan by "Urban Development and Revitalization Organization" (In Collaboration with TASH)	1999-2006	A change in managerial mechanisms, concentrating on rehabilitating the surrounding urban fabrics.	Urban preservation with a linkage to the history- Renovation and Rehabilitation.	Was implemented extensively- stopped lately.
Extending Urban Vitality in Underground Levels (Fajr-e-Tose'e, 2008)	2009	Utilizing the hidden spatial capacity of the city as a response to the permanent and temporary population, added value and economic improvements due to the underground profitable functions	Demolition and Renovation	Discontinued.
Mehrazan Strategic Program for Leadership of Harmonious Development in Areas Surrounding the Holy Shrine (Mehrazan, 2016)	2016	Preserving historical fabrics, assessing and evaluating after-effects of former plans, suggesting rehabilitation strategies	Not yet	Not yet

(Authors' Interpretation of Fajr-e-Tose'e, 2006; TASH, 2006; Fajr-e-Tose'e, 2008; Ghahremani, 2010; www.tash.co.ir)

TASH plan, as compared to other plans in recent decades regarding table 3, is the most-impacting plan that has radically transformed the fabrics surrounding holy shrine in the last two decades, leading to socio-cultural/ physical/economic changes. It can be claimed that whatever is now occurring in these fabrics (physically, socially, etc.) is a direct/indirect response to TASH plan and the whole area has been fundamentally affected by its large-scale interventions. Following debates on TASH plan, Mehrazan consultants was missioned to prepare the "strategic program for leadership of harmonious development in areas surrounding the Holy Shrine" in 2016 which has now been stopped by urban management due to multiple implementation difficulties (Architecture and Urban Planning Supreme Council, 2017). Thus, as this research concentrates on field study and seeks to evaluate what has been implemented, TASH (2006) is the most relevant document to explore. Related to this issue and to literature review, a statement in TASH (2006) report is worth of attention:

A) The presence of millions of enthusiastic pilgrims, requires the central historical district's renewal plan to convey a cultural message and thus must function in three following scales:

B) International scale: Considering Mashhad's status as the cultural-religious center among the Islamic world.

C) National scale: Considering Mashhad's status as a cultural- religious hub within the country and a center for reinforcing national unity.

D) Local scale: Moving towards reinforcing the central role of the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza and the city of Mashhad so as to establish an ecological balance in the [Khorasan Razavi] province and consolidating the unity among pilgrims, residents and immigrants" (TASH, 2006, p. 20).

Related to the statement above, the goals of the aforementioned plan (TASH, 2006) have been classified (Table 4) In to three dimensions of physical- functional, socio-cultural and economic based on the literature review.

Table 4. Classifying TASH (2006) Report's Stated Goals

Classification of the Report's GOALS (TASH, 2006)

Physical-functional Dimension	**Socio-cultural** Dimension	**Economic** Dimension
-Coordination and coherence of physical elements with those of cultural- religious value concerning the status of the Holy Shrine -Providing an appropriate space for the pilgrimage rituals -Providing the city with an unprecedented high quality space in a spatial balance with the Holy Shrine -Restructuring the district to respond to pilgrims' demands -Providing a legible easy access to the Holy Shrine and the rest of civic centers reinforcing sustainable public transportation -Renewing central district's functions -Novel physical design preserving subjective linkages to the historical fabrics	-Introducing the cultural- religious status of the Holy Shrine as one core among the Islamic world -Mashhad's central district: the main hub for the expression of religious- civic ethics -Reinforcing the Holy Shrine's status in three scales: international, national and local -Concerning the unique significance of the Holy Shrine in Mashhad's urban system -Creating a sense of willingness in residents to collaborate with the developments -Preserving valuable cultural- historical icons in the central district -Introducing and transferring national religious culture by attracting foreign Muslims -Planning the changes in urban fabrics by concentrating on the preservation of the sense of belonging to the place	-Developing tourism industry and enhancing national income -Absorbing public and private sectors' capital to reach the plan's goals

(Based on Content Analysis of TASH Report, 2006)

It must be asserted that the report's goals are far different from what has been implemented. The above stated vision declares that Mashhad will become the 'cultural-sreligious center among the Islamic world', a multicultural environment reinforcing the unity among Islamic nations, but it seems that it is far distant from the city's status quo and its existing physical, cultural, environmental, etc. infrastructures. What is being implemented is much more tended to develop the vision merely in the central district of the city, ignoring other districts. The foregoing is authorizing developers to bulldoze the central historical district ignorant of proper infrastructure requirements conforming to the city's anticipated transnational status and its corresponding political, cultural, economic and social terms. Related to this issue, it is worth to recall the consultants' point of view towards urban fabrics adjacent to the Holy Shrine (TASH, 2006, p. 71):

"Although the physical fabrics are located inside the historical district of the city hence conveying a sense of history, but they lack the prominent values of other [Iranian] historical cities such as Isfahan, Yazd, Kashan, etc. There existed only a limited number of valuable assets linked to the Holy Shrine that has formerly been destructed due to previous expansions and developments. The area's physical structure resembles the rest of Islamic cities, revealing no distinct feature. It is clear that historical memories with the urban fabrics must be well revealed, reflecting shadows of the past when rearranging the spatial patterns and physical structure of the area".

Fig. 2. A Number of Destructions in Historical Urban Fabrics Adjacent to the Holy Shrine

Fig. 3. Conflict between the New Developments and Historical Urban Fabrics Adjacent to the Holy Shrine

Fig. 4. Visual Corridors to the Holy Shrine are no more Accessible

The implementation phase caused vast areas of destruction and reconstruction (Figs. 2, 3 & 7). Considering the incremental creation of the adjacent fabrics which were affected by the mutual cultural-religious forces from and towards the core (The Holy Shrine), physical destructions were equal to destructing part of the city's cultural history and identity as well (Fig. 5). Large-scale destructions have ended up in the displacement of indigenous residents and is contrary to the plan's goals for maintaining the residents within the renewal area (Mehrazan, 2016, p. 44).

Fig. 5. (Right): New Developments Standing Beside the Historical Assets and (Left): Destructions Adjacent to the Holy Shrine

Furthermore, preserving strategic views towards the Holy Tomb, formerly influential in new developments, is now unfortunately forsaken (Architecture and urbanism Committee, 2014). The central landmark of the district, the Holy Shrine, can no more be visually accessible from various previously well- defined corridors. This has negatively affected many residents and pilgrims' sense of belonging and place attachment (Fig. 4).

Fig. 6. The Urban Fabrics Adjacent to the Holy Shrine before Implementation (Left) and after it (Right)

Mehrazan (2016) asserts that the implemented plan is highly dependent on a modernist accessibility network which has relinquished the historical fabrics and the interwoven, fine-grained historical blocks are converted into large scale superblocks with different identity (Mehrazan, 2016, p. 42). Thus, compared to the previously existing status, the suggested plan (Fig. 6) which involves a 366 hectares area of development (TASH, 2006) including some 13000 parcels highly relies on a general substantial transformation in Mashhad's central district. This context-ignorant approach conveys a sense of physical- spatial, socio- economic metamorphosis that would have not occurred if there were an open vision towards renewal of historical urban fabrics in Mashhad and other analogous case studies.

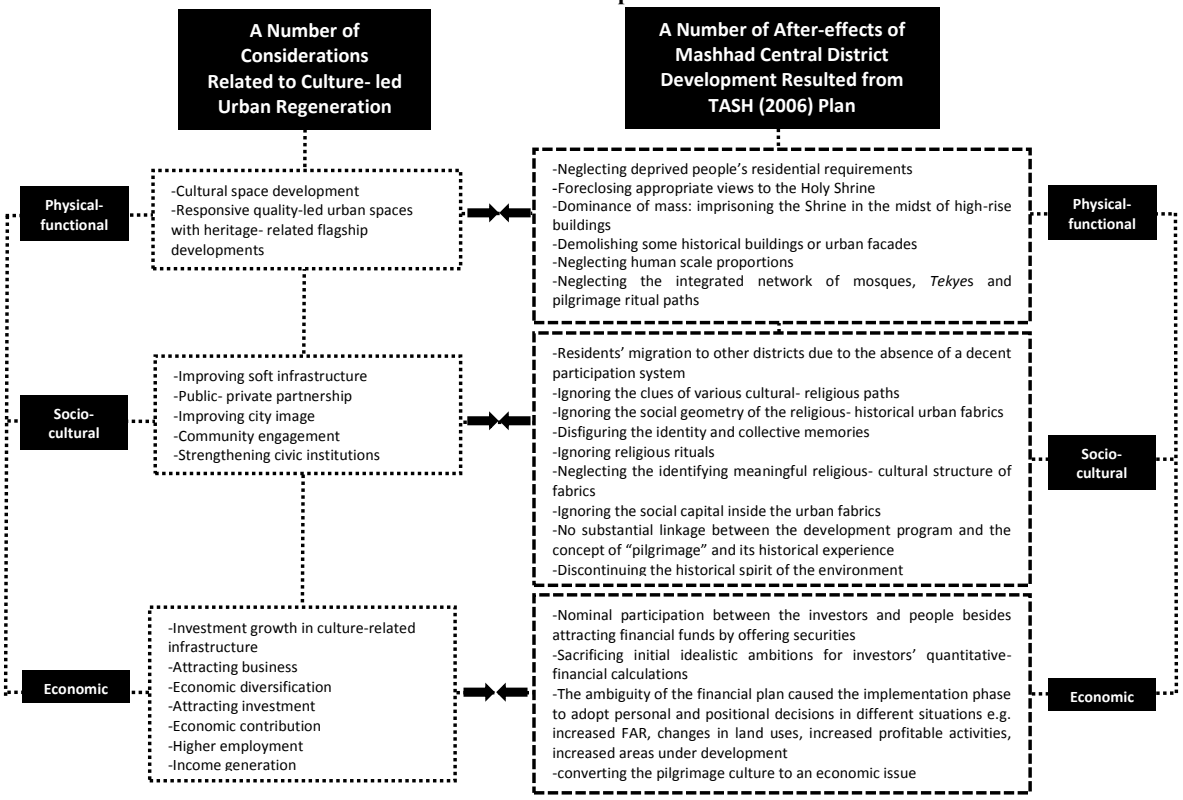
DISCUSSION

Various researches have discussed the dialectical relation between culture and urban economy, accentuating that "culture" has become a fundamental asset in economic regeneration of cities in the last few decades (Kong, 2000; Miles & Paddison, 2005; McCarthy, 2006; Yelinek, 2009; Garcia, 2004). Garcia (2004, p. 312) believes that cities have long had cultural functions, but it is only in the last few decades and the conditions of globality and service economy that cities are specifically adopting culture as a tool for urban development. This has altered the conventional notions towards culture, putting it as a competitive tool at the center of economic development. Evans (2003, p. 428) asserts that city marketing and urban branding strategies and techniques have given prominence to the convergence between culture and urban globalized economy trying to put cities in a more competitive environment. Thus, cities make endless efforts to characterize or reinforce their distinct identity. These efforts, based on kong's (2000, p. 387) classification of the main attributes of "cultural economic policy" include: investment growth in the infrastructure underlying cultural production (i.e. cultural districts), hallmark events and art- related flagship developments which highlight the city's heritage, emphasizing on the regeneration of urban public spaces and enhancing the public- private partnership. In this sense, Landry et al. (1996, p. 1) assert that "culture- led and event based" regeneration, mostly prepare the opportunity for cities to introduce themselves to the world as unique meaningful places with an unprecedented image in the consumer age (Landry et al., 1996, p. 1).

Referring to table 2, it is revealed that urban regeneration in a cultural-historical context deals with considerations such as cultural space development, responsive quality-led urban spaces with heritage-related flagship developments, improving soft infrastructure, public-private partnership, improving city image, community engagement, strengthening civic institutions,

investment growth in culture-related infrastructure, etc., all of which have been partly or completely relinquished in Mashhad's central district renewal in the implementation phase, although Mashhad had been envisioned to be a cultural city in the Islamic world. Table 5 illustrates a comparative model of a number of culture-led urban regeneration considerations (that could be appropriate for Mashhad's renewal) versus what has been implemented classified in the form of the research's conceptual framework.

Table 5. Comparative Model of Appropriate Culture-led Considerations for Mashhad Central District Versus After-effects of Implementation



It is widely known that cultural assets could not simply be reconstructed and in many cases (as for Mashhad) the physical environment is itself a reminder and regenerator of people's image and collective memory of the city and its identity. Related to this, Carmona, Heath, Oc and Tiesdell (2003, p. 196) assert that Modernism emphasized on a radical difference with the legacy of the past, observing it as a hindrance to any future progress. The Modernist clean sweep mentality caused them to change their so-called valueless cities for modern environment encompassing comprehensive large-scale development plans rather than the incremental small scale evolution of the whole history of cities. Knox and Ozolins state that each element of the built environment inherits the "zeitgeist" of its own time and thus is valuable. The togetherness of elements related to different time periods (e.g. buildings) makes the built environment "a biography of urban change" (as cited in Carmona et al., 2003, p. 196). TASH point of view, seems contrary to this type of urban development in Mashhad. Numerous gatherings and discussions were made by a number of urbanism distinguished prominent architecture and urbanism scholars throughout the country (the Architecture and Urbanism Committee) discussing such a context-ignorant approach to development which eventually resulted in a formal manifestation named "A letter to the history" (2014). Table 5 presents a number of the report's issues.

A review of table 4 reveals that the plan's goals (which respect historical fabrics and their presence) are far different from the actual interventional approach

(a totalitarian top- down approach from the side of development authorities). The goals originate from religious- cultural beliefs with respect to quality of spaces while it seems that the implementation has been affected mostly by financial issues causing authorities to expand the quantitative development in order to be capable of generating the plan's expenses. This issue may either be derived from the prolonged period of implementation or the vast areas of intervention that has forced authorities to play a vicious cycle over and over again. The gap might have been produced unintentionally due to the absence of a decent strategic approach to the plan's feasibility which causes the obligation to relinquish the initial goals and concern economic-financial issues in order to terminate the implementation.

The approach adopted in Mashhad may be interpreted by authorities' view towards historical fabrics as being the accumulation of singular valuable parcels while in fact, it is the clustering of differently valued buildings together that leads to the distinctive image of a place and people's collective memory. The "whole" created by this agglomeration weighs out some more than the singular value of each part. On the notion of "wholeness", Alexander in his 2002 book "The nature of order" clarifies that being a "whole" is the reason to our perception of anything. He further asserts that the whole cannot be divided or broken into pieces (Alexander, 2002).

Fig. 7. Aerial View of the Quarters Adjacent to the Holy Shrine after the Plan has been Implemented

According to Alexander's view of "wholeness", looking down at the urban fabrics adjacent to the Holy Shrine as "old" (rather than historical) quarters in an urgent need of reconstruction, breaks and divides the whole which was previously defined by the Holy shrine, its interwoven adjacent fabrics, landmarks and those historical-religious traditional events that altogether had ended up in the creation of people's historical memory and their image of the city (Fig. 7).

Displacing the original residents from their own quarters and converting vast areas of residence to highly profitable urban development, e.g. luxury hotels and commercial mega complexes adjacent to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza is in contradiction with the stated goals of the area's development plan. This is what Madanipour (1996) recalls as the time when the commercial value of the space surpasses its social value. Lefebvre (1991, p. 360) argues that developing countries destroy their historical assets in pursuit of any rapid advantage. In due time, however, the same countries realize the cultural value of destroyed spaces which could be profitable assets in developing tourism or leisure industries (as

cited in Carmona et al., 2003, p. 198). This has currently occurred in Mashhad where a number of new high-rise, large-scale developments affect the spatial forces of the Holy Shrine. However, it must be noted that giving high-quality services to pilgrims had initially been considered prior to economic intentions, but as far as the project was obliged to minimize receiving governmental financial aids, it had to be profitable enough to guarantee its decent implementation. This may justify the large-scale developments adjacent to the Holy Shrine.

Finally, it must be noticed that due to limitations of the study, this research has focused merely on the city of Mashhad and its evolution related to the competitive vision of the city. Further studies may go beyond this case and investigate the issue in comparable cities e.g. Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah (Saudi Arabia) which adopts a vision relatively similar to that of Mashhad, though with different ideological foundations, and thus reach a different set of findings based on the comparative analysis.

CONCLUSION

Reviewing Mashhad's experience on how to respond to the issue of urban decline in pursuing a competitive vision, a number of crucial lessons are learnt which can be helpful for future homogenous cases.

A brief look at the immense interventions throughout the central district of Mashhad conveys note that the pilgrimage approach as a religious-sacred activity has been transformed to pilgrimage industry, while in religious cities, city competitiveness cannot be solely measured by economic criteria and a city's prominent status can act as a tool for broadcasting religious tendencies to the globe by itself.

In religious cities with pilgrimage culture, historical urban fabrics which have appeared incrementally around the central religious core, together with the religious customs, rituals, traditions and icons are themselves regenerators of "pilgrimage culture". Separating the religious center from this surrounding history together which previously formed a "whole", will undoubtedly lead to its isolation. When the smaller wholes, as Alexander puts it, are demolished and divided, then the larger whole (The Holy Shrine) will be isolated from the urban structure and the local context as well. This approach may, in the short term, end up in a so-called competitiveness and investment attraction, but in the long run, will have a great unfavorable impact on the historical built, social and cultural heritage of the city. It is the presence of the religious built heritage (The Holy Shrine) within its own historical context that leads to its uniqueness, enhances "locality", helps forming urban collective memory and defines the history and identity of that city.

Based on the case study's vision and according to the city's local context, it seems that the most influential competitive advantage for the city could have been its historical, cultural and spiritual capitals and thus by a brief review of literature it is concluded that "culture-led regeneration" could have been an appropriate response either to the existing opportunities and limitations of the city or to the need for more competitive advantages. Historical built heritage together with the religious culture seems to have been the best competitive advantage for Mashhad which has been partly overlooked in its various urban development plans.

Urban development in pursuit of boosting competitiveness may end up in loss of the actual competitive potentials of a city if there is a lack of either efficient civic institutional system or pluralistic decision making tools which formalize local stakeholders' rights. In such circumstances of city competitiveness through a top-down power process, the created spaces' social value dies out in favor of its commercial value and the very spaces will stand far distant from local desires (as for the case of Mashhad).

It must be noted that using the considerations generating competitive urban areas is not similar in all cities, and it is meaningful in the framework of different sociopolitical and economic patterns based on the objective function of countries and local perspectives. On the basis of the outlook that each city has pictured according to its local context with regard to utilizing the capabilities for improving its weak points, the appropriate strategies for urban regeneration in competitive sphere may be defined. The different capabilities resulting from special geographical, natural, climate, historic, cultural, industrial, technological, security, population and life style conditions, and even the existing political and civil context affect the way cities adopt urban regeneration strategies to enhance their competitiveness. The transformation of urban spaces in the competitive condition should be directed based on the local role of the city and the local competitive potentials. Moreover, offering appropriate and possible regenerative strategies for the realization of suitable urban spaces varies based on the given contextual capabilities and talents of each part of the city while the pre-mentioned factors may not be equally feasible in different cities.

ENDNOTE

1. The eighth Shia leader
2. It is the country's economic-political structures that determine the city's international economic, cultural and political linkages. The concept of city competitiveness mainly concerns basic economic contexts while in Mashhad this issue shall also be adaptable to political-ideological requirements. Moreover, the urban management's ideological approaches are particularly influential.
3. Imam Reza was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and the eighth Shia Imam who lived in a period of Abbasid caliphs and is known as an Imam of knowledge according to the Zaydi (Fiver) Shia school and Sufis.
4. The Hijrah is the migration or journey of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Yathrib, later renamed by him to Medina, in 622 CE. The Hijrah is also often identified erroneously with the start of the Islamic calendar, which was set to Julian 16 July 622.
5. The fifth Abbasid Caliph who ruled from 786 to 809, during the peak of the Islamic Golden Age.

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