

## Research Paper

# The impacts of physical contexts of local mosques on their efficacy (Case study: a comparative study of three districts of Tehran)

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impacts of physical context on the efficacy of local mosques. The main question of this research is: "What is the relationship between physical context (including: number and space share per head of mosque in neighborhood, functional radius of mosque, the location of local mosque, local adjacent land uses and finally legibility and identity of local mosque in neighborhoods) and efficacy of local mosques? The research hypothesis is based on the assumption that there is a meaningful relation between physical context of mosques and their expected socio-cultural efficacy in urban neighborhoods. The method of the research has been analytical descriptive. In order to examine the hypothesis, variables "physical components of the mosques and their efficacy" have been assigned. Applying "the Theory of Environmental Quality", the indexes of each variable have been determined and applied in questionnaire to be evaluated in case studies. The data of the study were analyzed through SPSS software and the hypothesis was confirmed with 95% confidence level. The research results revealed that physical context of mosques can have a positive influence on their function of efficacy which consists of social solidarity, sense of belonging and sense of religious affiliation of people through the five above mentioned factors.

**Keywords:** Neighborhood, Mosques, Physical context, Environmental quality.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The experience of Iranian-Islamic cities represents the role of mosques on physical and social organizations in urban neighborhoods. It appears that this role has been changed during the contemporary era. Mosques exhibit a display of social, personal, and spiritual life of Muslims. "Daily Prayers" that is the highest form of worshipping God and is one of the five pillars of Islam is performed in mosques. The word "mosque" has been repeated in Holy Quran for 28 times and explicitly, mosques are referred to as places to worship and to have faith in God [1]. Repeating this word in Holy Quran emphasizes the importance of mosques in Islam. Mosques in Iran have also played an important role in the socio-economic, political and physical contexts for long. They have been worship venues and on the other hand, places where social life of the residents would be organized. Mosques were always places for communication across neighborhoods and cities.

Lots of people's social and economic interactions like

education (Masjid<sup>1</sup> Madreseh<sup>2</sup>) [2], resolving disputes, solving social and economic problems were occur in mosques.

They have even acted as levers to control and monitor the political authorities [3]. Therefore, it can be said that mosques could affect all aspects of Iranian community. Historically, these diverse effects could generally enhance level of living [4]. They also brought about strengthening social cohesion, promotion of public participation, social security, functional diversity and promoting sense of place [5].

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study applied descriptive and analytical methods and combination methods of qualitative and quantitative surveys. In order to gather the data, library research and field data collection methods (surveys and interviews with people) have been used. The communities and mosques of Tehran composed of the three geographic zones of North, South and Central were studied. This division was due to the socio-economic differences found in the different parts of the city. Then, a region was selected from each of these zones. Accordingly, District 2 from the northern region,

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District 6 from the central area, and District 18 from the south zone were selected. Again, three neighborhoods in these districts were selected. Based on these samples, Azmayesh Neighborhood from District 2, Sindokht Neighborhood from District 6 and NorthenValiasr from District 18 were identified.

After determining the variables, indexes for the study were identified. In this study, the function of the mosques was measured as the dependent variable through indicators such as the quantity and quality of events held in mosques and also the quantity and quality of using mosques. physical contexts were the independent variables. Applying religious written sources, scientific theories and the experiences of Islamic traditional cities, indexes were identified to evaluate each one of these categories. The indexes were determined according to the studies, culture, lifestyle and other factors. Then a questionnaire was prepared and data were collected. Finally the responds were analyzed by the SPSSsoftware.

### 3. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

Physical components are defined as a set of environmental elements which affect quality of urban

spaces. In this research, physical elements of local mosques are studied in tow levels: mosques in neighborhood and, mosques in urban comprehensive and detailed plans. Some dimensions and indexes are defined for each level. At first level, items were evaluated by questionnaire and operational research. At the second level (The position statues of mosque in urban plans), it is impossible to determine indexes or questionnaire. Hence, physical elements at this level are evaluated by author's opinion and results of master and detailed plan analysis (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). At neighborhood level, data is collected through questionnaire and researcher evaluations. Five dimensions of mosques physical characters studied in this research are as follows:

1. Number and space share per head of mosque in neighborhood
2. Functional radius of mosque
3. The location of local mosque
4. Local adjacent land uses
5. Legibility and identity of local mosque

All of these dimensions are evaluated by the related indexes and items. In Table 1-3, physical elements, dimensions, as well as indexes and items are described.

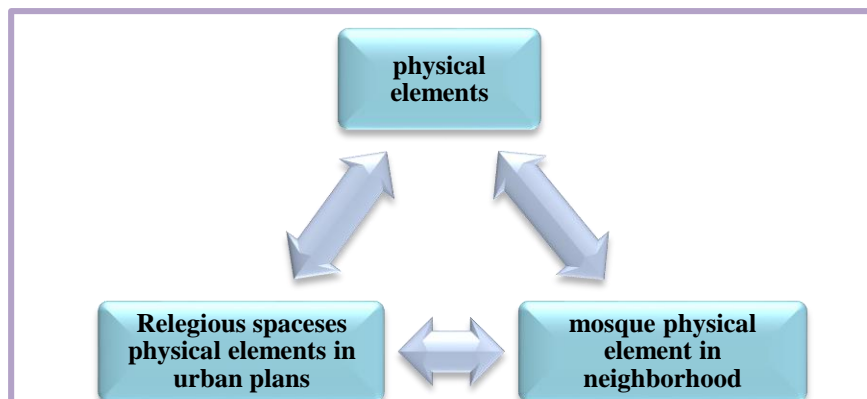


Fig. 1 The effective physical factors in efficacy of Mosques

This study applied descriptive and analytical methods and combination methods of qualitative and quantitative surveys. In order to gather data, this paper used library and field data collection methods (surveys and interviews with people). The population of Tehran to the three geographic zones of North, South and Central were considered. This division was due to the socio-economic differences found in different parts of the city. Then, a region was randomly selected from each of these zones.

Accordingly, district 2 from the northern region, district 6 from the central area 6, and district 18 from the South Zone were selected. Again, three neighborhoods in these districts were randomly selected. Based on these random samples, Azmayesh neighborhood from district 2, Sindokht neighborhood from district 6 and NorthenValiasr

from district 18 were identified.

After determining the variables, indexes for this study were identified. The five-level Likert<sup>3</sup> Scale was applied to evaluate the comments. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were assessed through using Alpha Cronbach<sup>4</sup> method. In this study, the function of the mosques was measured as the dependent variable through indicators such as the quantity and quality of activities and events held in mosques and also the quantity and quality of using the mosques. Physical contexts were the independent variables. Applying Social Capital Theory, indexes were identified to evaluate each one of these categories. The indexes were determined culture, lifestyle and other factors according to the related theories. The indexes of the two variables are mentioned inTable 3.

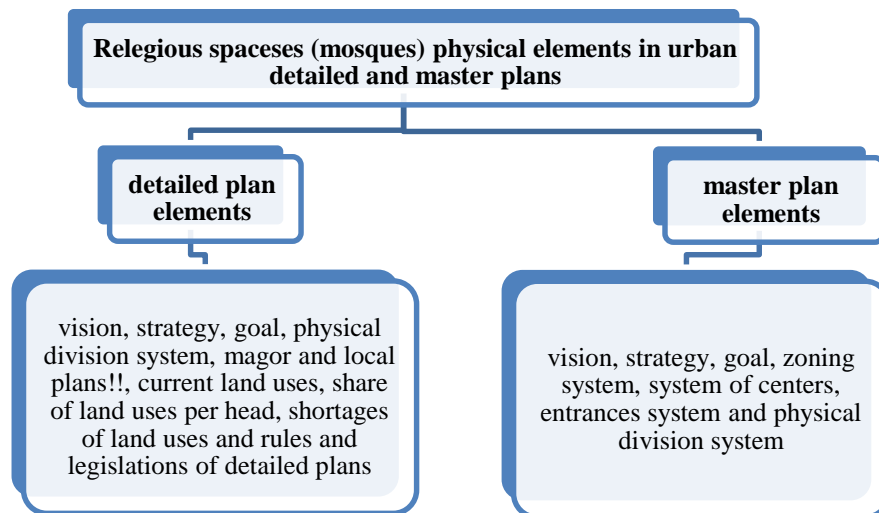


Fig. 2 Physical elements of mosque in urban detailed and master plans

Table 1 Mosque's physical variable, dimension and indexes

Items	indexes	variable	dimensions
The proportion of neighborhood mosque area to neighborhood area	Share of mosque area from neighborhood area	Number and share of mosque per head	
The proportion of number and area of mosque to population	The share of mosque space per head		
Evaluating mosque location	Location of mosque (locating adjacent local nodes, along alley, local and main streets)	Functional radius	
The distribution of mosque			
Mosque accessibility	Mosque accessibility (distance and unable people accessibility)	location	Physical status of mosques at neighborhood level
Accessibility for unable to mosque and different part of it			
Book stores and cultural production stores near to mosque	The distribution of mosque in neighborhood (distance between two mosque and symmetrical distribution of mosque)	Adjacent land uses	
Park and children play ground around mosque			
Appliances shop stores around mosque	Mosque adjacent land uses (compatibility and diversity)	Master plan	
Groceries and green groceries around the mosque			
Providing daily breed shopping near mosque	Adjacent buildings density (shorter, higher and same height buildings)	Mosque legibility in neighborhood	
School or educational spaces near mosque			
Enough space for residents socializing near mosque	vision, strategy, goal, axial system, zoning system, center system, entrances system and physical division system	Detailed plan (local plan)	The status of religious spaces at urban plan level
Green space around mosque			
Making the mosque bolder than other building	Identity and character of mosque (applying physical symbols like domes, minaret, defined entrances and lightning at night)		
Capability of using mosque for addressing			
Neighborhood reputation for its mosque	vision, strategy, goal, physical division system, master and local plans!!, current land uses, share of land uses per head, shortages of land uses and rules and legislations of detailed plans		
Having dome, minaret, appropriate entrances an façade and lightning at night			
The height of mosque in comparison with adjacent building			
At this part, since it was impossible to evaluate the indexes by questionnaire, master plan of Tehran was studied and results were presented as maps and tables.			
In order to evaluate the indexes of this part, the detailed plan of three regions were studied.			

Table 2 Mosques, Functional variable, dimension and indexes

Variable	Dimension	indexes	Items
The function of mosques in neighborhoods	Social Cohesion	- Neighborhood Links	How much do you agree with the statement that a good neighbor is one who is more intimate than your brother?
		- preparation for community participation (collective action-voluntary institutionalized action)	How much do you think people in your neighborhood are intimate with each other? To what extent are you willing to voluntarily participation solving problems of your neighborhood? How often do you participate in celebrations and ceremonies that are held in your neighborhood? How much do you help others solve their problems? How interested are you to voluntarily spend time to improve your neighborhood?

		How willing are you to contribute with local institutions (health center, neighborhood house and institutions)? To what extent do you think that group work is necessary for a better neighborhood? I am satisfied with the place where I live. In case of problems in the neighborhood I try to solve them I would sure leave this neighborhood if I were able to. I try to come back to this neighborhood for ceremonies and events wherever I am. I have good friends and neighbors in this neighborhood. People are willing to help each other in this neighborhood. Our neighborhood mosque is a convenient place for nurturing spirits of individuals. Religious centers such as mosques are convenient places for spiritually nurturing the individuals. Doing charity for God's sake is effective in solving human problems. Attendance in mosque causes more closeness to God and Quran People should say their prayers on time Religion leads to dignity and pride of all human kinds.
Sense of belonging to neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awareness of local circumstances</li> <li>- Satisfaction with the neighborhood;</li> <li>- Satisfaction with neighbors and local people;</li> <li>- Sense of responsibility for the fate of the neighborhood and its problems</li> </ul>	
Religious and spirituality in the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Closeness to God, Quran and prayer</li> <li>- Presence of spirituality in everyday life</li> </ul>	

#### 4. DISCUSSION RESULTS AND

It seems that in order to manage public spaces especially religious spaces to enhance their functions more efficiently, there has been a tendency by paying attention to the physical features of public spaces. The concept of quality of life has been considered by scholars in the different fields of sciences in the recent decades. Quality

of environment is one of these fields. The theory has offered various indexes to enhance performance of public spaces. In general there are two groups of approaches around public and religious spaces in academic studies: social based approach and physical based approach. In Table 3 some important basis of these approaches have been explained.

**Table 3** Theoretical basis, criteria and actions of social and physical approaches

Items	Social based approach	Physical based approach
Theoretical basis	Human as an active actor being social as one of human basic behavior Relation between society and space	Human as inactive actor Human as an independent unit Relation between man and space
Criteria	Qualitative and subjective	Quantities and objective
Actions	Attention to interactive relation while creating public spaces	Attention to form of public spaces (physical factors of spaces)

During the past quarter century, a number of scholars operating at the interface of the social sciences and planning and other design professions have argued that quality of any entity has both a subjective dimension as well as an objective reality. Central to this assertion is the meaning of quality of both built environments and natural environments. It seems that a better understanding of the meaning of environmental quality requires systematic study of the interrelationships between objective measures of environmental phenomena and people's responses to them [6].

The meaning of the phrase "quality of environment" differs a good deal as it is variously used but, in general; it is intended to refer to either the conditions of the environment in which people live, (air and water pollution, or poor housing, for example), or to some attributes of people themselves (such as health or educational achievement).

Urban planning and architecture disciplines put forward a different perspective of quality through product

and process. Quality, according to this statement, is the ability to be sufficient for a specific product or service [7]. According to Özsoy and Esin [8], there are two discrete meanings of quality. The first meaning is the characteristic of a person or a thing that relates, it with nature or define quality among a special category such as sort and kind. The second meaning relates to the context of physical quality level such as physical condition.

There are different perspectives on the formation of urban environmental quality. According to Lynch [9], the components of good city form and desirable qualities of successful urban place are vitality (healthy environment), sense (sense of place and identity), fit (spatial adaptation), accessibility (accessibility to people, activities, knowledge) and control. Jacobs and Appleyard mentions livability, identity and control, access to opportunities, authenticity and meaning, community and public life, urban self-reliance and an environment for all as essential goals for the future of a good environment [10]. In addition, Carmona et al. [11] acknowledge the importance of permeability, diversity,

clearness and flexibility. In summary, the quality of urban environment should respond to livability, individuality, character, aesthetics, connection, continuity, accessibility, visibility and diversity.

Earlier studies have shown that qualities of a place can be defined with both objective and subjective indicators. Objective indicators generally relate to physical attributes including livability, individuality, character, aesthetics, connection, continuity, accessibility, visibility and diversity. Subjective indicators, on the other hand, relate to psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of environment. They were inherited from human sciences and include behavior, human needs, well-being and satisfaction studies [12,6]. Design guidelines are

developed to enhance quality of environment by using diversity of measures. Performance specifications of building materials are improved for contemporary and complex set of human needs for built processes. Thus, post-occupancy evaluation studies enhance our understanding of specific use of unique physical environments [13]. The fulfillment of expectations on the subjects as the quality of life, product, material or design and the rehabilitation of environmental quality are due to the contribution of conscious users who demands for higher quality in the process. In general it can be mentioned that environmental quality can refer some index to enhance quality of public spaces as well as religious spaces.

**Table 4** Indicators presented in the context of environmental quality

Theorists	Indicators
Marans	A better understanding of the meaning of environmental quality requires systematic study of the interrelationships between objective measures of environmental phenomena and people’s responses to them [6].
Lynch	Good city form and desirable qualities of successful urban place are vitality (healthy environment), sense (sense of place and identity), fit (spatial adaptation), accessibility (accessibility to people, activities, knowledge) and control[9].
Andrews, Marans,	Quality is related to not only physical and technical needs but also it is bounded to social and psychological needs of users[12,6].
Carmona et al.	Livability, individuality, character, aesthetics, connection, continuity, accessibility, visibility and diversity [11].
Özsoy et al	Post-occupancy evaluation studies enhance our understanding of specific use of unique physical environments [13].

Table 4 summarizes a number of the ories and indicators proposed by the theorists in the field of quality of environment. It seems that among the indicators presented in these theories, parameter ssuch as the livability, individuality, character, aesthetics, connection, continuity, accessibility, visibility and diversity should be considered.

Mosques as important elements of Islamic cities have different roles, particularly creating an overall social coordination. Any mosque has two main goals from the Islamic point of view, religious purpose and social purpose. There ligious purpose is to worship God as a collective daily prayer five times a day. The social purpose of the mosque is to create unity within a community and strengthening social relations [1].

Mosques are capable of strengthening social interaction and functional networks(formal and informal) due to their social and religious functions and activities. Intensity of social interactions in formal and informal networks and enhancing social cohesion are two of its social functions.

Religious gatherings, mourning ceremonies, festivals and religious celebrations which are usually held in the form of spontaneous events after daily prayers, will encourage social interaction. On the other hand, people who meet each other in the mosques during days or ceremonies, get to know each other and establish a good communication. This communication may lead individuals to collaborate in order to solve each other’s problems. Some of the functions of mosques that can be associated with social capital components are mentioned below.

**Social cohesion:** Social cohesion is one of the key concepts in sociology and has many applications in social sciences. Unity, agreement and loyalty which stem from the interests, feelings of empathy and common practices are the components of social cohesion. Social cohesion is a feeling like being together and having a common destiny. Social solidarity is one of the most important elements that form the social life [14]. Thus, some scholars mention that the essence of social life is the sense of solidarity and helping each other [15]. Ibn-e Khaldoun believes that social cohesion is rooted from the sense of “Party Sprite”and kinship. He also contends that social cohesion brings about the sense of generating or establishing ruling regimes, however, the most effective role of social cohesion can be seen in family relation and kinship [16].

Durkheim refers to collective emotion as the generating social cohesion. He evaluates the degree of social cohesion with religious integration and believes that religious beliefs and values have great influence in social solidarity as well as creation and improvement of feeling of social responsibility [17]. Social solidarity is the result of strong communication, collective sense of belonging and accepting the norms of a society [18]. This objective will be exposed in the social interactions of individuals in a society. In one hand, social solidarity results in strengthening social interactions, and on the other hand it is reinforced by these gatherings and associations.

Urban designers and planners try to create a public space in the center of the neighborhoods in order to create a framework for social interaction, and emphasizes on the

role of urban space in creating a sense of social solidarity [19]. Religious spaces, particularly in local level, strengthen neighborhood, social and ethical relations through creating opportunities for gatherings particularly in religious events.

**Sense of belonging:** sense of belonging may have different levels: lack of sense of place, knowing where we are, belonging to a place, depending on the place, getting identity from the place, involving with the place and devotion to the place. Urban space is a place for experiencing this feeling in different dimensions. Urban space can improve social capital by creating a sense of place and a sense of belonging to it. One of the important concepts of the relationship between man and environment is considered by scholars of environmental psychology as sense of belonging [20]. There are degree and levels in relationship between man and environment.

This process starts from a feeling of satisfaction of place and ends to commitment to a place [21]. Commitment to places is a level in which people are willing to devote themselves in order to protect a place.

Although scholars of environmental psychology have paid less attention to this level of sense of belonging, but a level of this feeling that somehow creates a sense of belonging to place is essential to human to interact with the environment. With the combination of new patterns of activities with symbolic places, symbolic meanings can be created in these places. The symbolic meanings cause citizens to understand the relationship between location and activities and understand its particular identity. Organizing special events and ceremonies can also reinforce the identity of a place [22]. Religious spaces by providing context for the expression of ideas, attractiveness and vitality and provide a common ground for the creation of common historical memory can strengthen sense of belonging in the society.

As it was mentioned before, the present study examines the impact of physical contexts on function of neighborhood mosques. The three neighborhoods were randomly selected from district 2, 6 and 18 (Fig. 1). The questionnaires were filled by 165 people of these neighborhoods (55 people in each neighborhood).

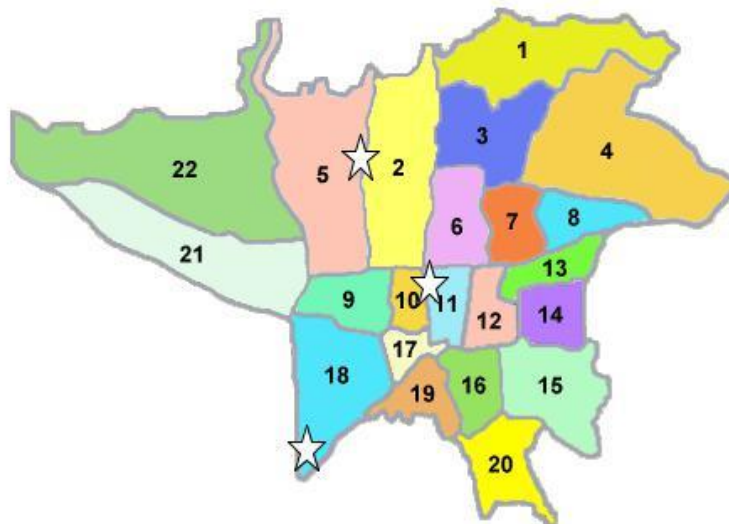


Fig. 3 Tehran and three neighborhoods of its districts [23]

The mentioned indexes in physical contexts are examined by collecting data and after studying the functional components, the relation between these two variables are surveyed. Mosques have the ability to strengthen social interactions and the development of functional networks (formal and informal) and social

capacities through various physical characteristics of mosques. These physical components are number and space share per head of mosque in neighborhood, functional radius of mosque, the location of local mosque, local adjacent land uses, legibility and identity of local mosque.

Table 5 Frequency distribution of the social components of mosques

variable	average	median	mode	Standard Deviation	Minimum value	Maximum value
Physical components	3.02	3.08	3	0.630	1	5
Azmayesh neighborhood	3.28	3.3	3	0.61	1	5
Sindokht neighborhood	2.61	2,66	2,53	0.62	1	5
Valiasr neighborhood	2,83	2,9	2,8	0.66	1	5

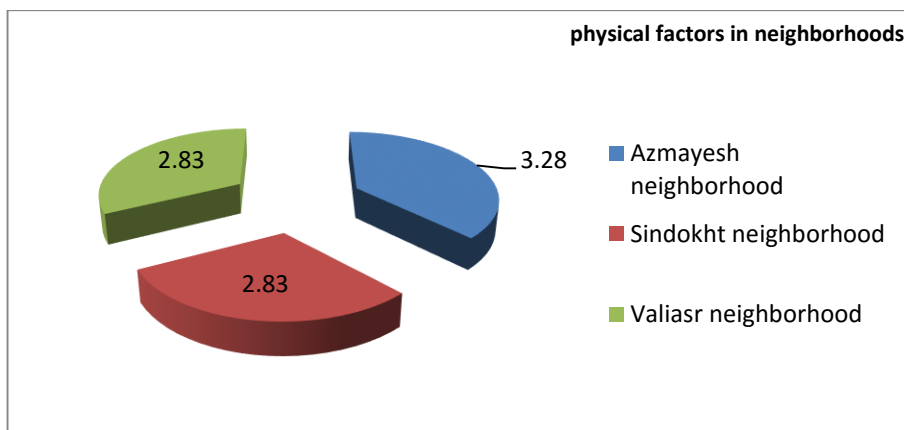


Fig. 4 Comparative evaluation results of physical factors in the three neighborhoods

Functional components are the dependent variables in this research and are studied in three main dimensions: strengthening social cohesion, strengthening the sense of social belonging and strengthening the spiritual and theological trends. To assess these dimensions, indicators

are defined on the basis of theoretical definition.

According to this research, functionality of Valiasr neighborhood mosque was the most and after that, mosques in Sindokht neighborhood and Azmayesh neighborhood, respectively, had the least functions (Table 6).

Table 5 Frequency distribution of the functional components of mosques

Variable	average	median	mode	Standard Deviation	Variance	Minimum value	Maximum value
Function of mosque	3.38	3.33	3.23	0.65	0.42	1	5
Azmayesh neighborhood	3.09	3.13	2.91	0.66	0.44	1	4.55
Sindokht neighborhood	3.47	3.38	3.50	0.64	0.41	2.41	4.69
Valiasr neighborhood	3.58	3.54	3.18	0.56	0.31	1.81	4.76

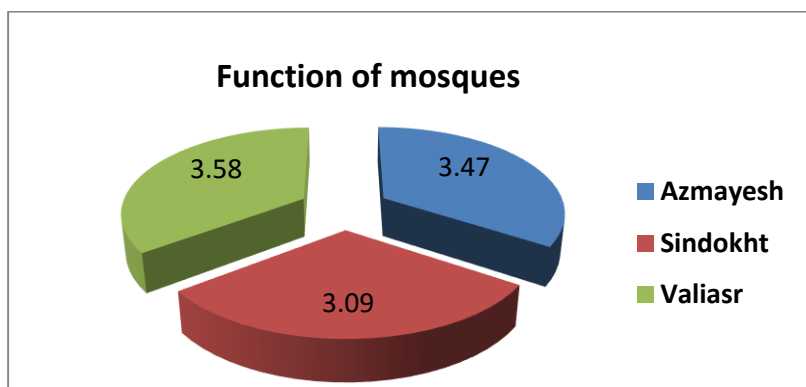


Fig. 5 Comparative evaluation results of functional factors in the three neighborhoods

According to the studies on physical factors listed above, they can affect the function and performance of mosques in urban neighborhoods influence on sense of social solidarity, sense of belonging and sense of religious affiliations of people. Results obtained from analysis of the correlation between variables indicate a correlation between the two variables in a way that the intensity of correlation is equal to 0.450 and the direction of this relationship is positive. This means that with increasing physical factors, also increases the function of mosques. More significantly, this correlation suggests that mosques

can have more influence on increasing sense of social solidarity, sense of belonging and sense of religious affiliations of people by improving of number and space share per head of mosque in neighborhood, attention to Functional radius of mosque, noticing to the location of local mosque, enhancement of Local adjacent land uses and finally increasing of Legibility and identity of local mosque in neighborhoods. Moreover, according to the level of meaningfulness that is equal with 0.00, the assumption of a significant relationship between social factors and the function of mosque has been approved.

Table 7 Correlation between physical factors and the function of mosque

Variable	Pierson R	level of meaningfulness	Summation
Physical factors and the function of mosque	0.450	0.00	163



## 5. CONCLUSION

This study applied descriptive and analytical methods and combination methods of qualitative and quantitative surveys. In order to gather the data, library research and field data collection methods (surveys and interviews with people) have been used. The communities and mosques of Tehran compassed of the three geographic zones of North, South and Central were studied. This division was due to the socio-economic differences found in the different parts of the city. Then, a region was selected from each of these zones. Accordingly, District 2 from the northern region, District 6 from the central area, and District 18 from the south zone were selected. Again, three neighborhoods in these districts were selected. Based on these samples, Azmayesh Neighborhood from District 2, Sindokht Neighborhood from District 6 and NorthenValiasr from District 18 were identified.

After determining the variables, indexes for the study were identified. In this study, the function of the mosques was measured as the dependent variable through indicators such as the quantity and quality of events held in mosques and also the quantity and quality of using mosques. physical contexts were the independent variables. Applying religious written sources, scientific theories and the experiences of Islamic traditional cities, indexes were identified to evaluate each one of these categories. The indexes were determined according to the studies, culture, lifestyle and other factors. Then a questionnaire was prepared and data were collected. Finally the responds were analyzed by the SPSS. The research results revealed that physical context of mosques can have a positive influence on the function of them which consists of social solidarity, sense of belonging and sense of religious affiliations of people through by improving of number and space share per head of mosque in neighborhood, paying attention to *functional radius* of mosque, noticing to the location of local mosque, enhancement of Local adjacent land uses and finally increasing of Legibility and identity of local mosque in neighborhoods. Therefore, in order to enhance the performance of the mosques, special attention should be paid to the social and physical context of the neighborhoods regarding social cohesion which can be defined by concepts like communication and social interaction, social participation and social trust. Clearly, efforts and activities to enhance social interaction, participation of residents, and a good communication among custodians of mosques, social trustees and residents, organizing gatherings in neighborhood spaces, and organizing events and religious rituals can be considered as ways to increase the performance of the mosques.

## NOTES

1. Masjid= Mosque
2. Madreseh= School
3. Likert Scale is a psychometric scale commonly involved in research that employs questionnaires.
4. In statistics, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (alpha) is a coefficient of internal consistency. It is commonly used as an

estimate of the reliability of a psychometric test for a sample of examinees

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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