

Research Paper

An Investigation of Relationships among Place Attachment, Place Experience, and Structured Experience in a Historic Urban Square (Case Study: Amir Chakhmagh Square of Yazd)

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Abstract

This study examines the directional associations among place attachment, place experience, and structured experience in Amir Chakhmagh Square, a historic urban square in Yazd, Iran. A cross-sectional questionnaire survey produced 225 usable responses. Following data screening, the original 73-item measurement specification was respecified as a parsimonious parcel-level structural equation model: 27 theoretically relevant items were grouped into nine balanced parcels, and the model was estimated using diagonally weighted least squares. The full hypothesized model showed close fit to the data ($\chi^2(24) = 23.69, p = .480$; CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.000; RMSEA = .000; SRMR = .049). Place attachment was positively associated with place experience ($\beta = .773, p < .001$), and place experience was positively associated with structured experience ($\beta = .504, p < .001$). The direct association between place attachment and structured experience was not statistically significant ($\beta = .221, p = .062$). A more parsimonious indirect-only model also fit the data and indicated a significant indirect association between place attachment and structured experience through place experience ($\beta = .588$; 95% bootstrap CI [.481, .692]). The findings suggest that identity-bearing physical features, everyday social use, and event-related engagement should be considered jointly in the planning and design of historic public spaces.

Keywords: Amir chakhmagh square, Place attachment, Place experience, Structured experience, Structural equation modeling, Yazd.

INTRODUCTION

Attachment theory, originally formulated by Bowlby, has become an influential framework for explaining enduring emotional bonds. Although the theory initially concerned interpersonal

relationships, it was subsequently extended to relationships between people and environments. Places may provide continuity, identity, security, and emotional support, thereby acquiring meanings that contribute to place attachment (Bretherton, 1985; Counted & Zock, 2019; Low

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& Altman, 1992). Place attachment is therefore understood as a multidimensional relationship encompassing emotional, functional, social, and physical dimensions, rather than as a response to physical form alone (Lewicka, 2011; Ujang & Zakariya, 2018).

Place experience is closely related to this bond because people interpret environments through repeated use, sensory perception, social interaction, memory, and meaning. Positive and memorable encounters may strengthen the personal and collective meanings associated with a place (Gustafson, 2001; Kim & Chen, 2019; Morgan, 2010). General place experience, however, does not fully capture experiences organized through successive or interrelated stages. The theory of structured experience distinguishes immersion, absorption, and engagement as conceptually distinct but potentially overlapping experiential states that arise under particular conditions (Duerden et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2017; Gustafson, 2001; Kim & Chen, 2019; Morgan, 2010).

Urban public spaces provide an appropriate context in which to examine these constructs because they accommodate everyday activities, social encounters, collective events, and symbolic practices. Historic urban squares are particularly informative, not because they are necessarily superior to parks, streets, or other forms of public space, but because they often combine recognizable spatial form, repeated public activity, cultural meaning, and continuity over time (Memluk, 2013; Ujang et al., 2018). These characteristics may support both place attachment and multiple forms of place experience.

Previous research has examined place attachment extensively in neighborhoods, residential areas, parks, tourism destinations, and public spaces, whereas place experience has often been studied in tourism and recreation settings. Structured experience has developed primarily within leisure and tourism research and has received comparatively little attention in urban

planning and design. In particular, few studies have examined place attachment, place experience, and structured experience within a single directional model situated in a historic public square.

Recent Iranian studies further indicate that place attachment in Tehran and broader Iranian landscape contexts is shaped by perceptual-cognitive, social, historic-cultural, physical, economic, practical-use, visual, emotional, interactional, meaning-based, and memory-based factors (Bazrafshan et al., 2021; Khaki Ghasr et al., 2024). These studies provide important contextual points of comparison. However, they focus primarily on residential and apartment environments, urban parks, or Persian garden contexts, rather than on the directional latent relationships among place attachment, place experience, and structured experience in a historic urban square. The originality of the present study therefore does not lie in presenting place attachment as a novel construct, but in integrating place attachment with place experience and structured experience within a single directional model situated in Amir Chakhmagh Square.

This gap defines the central problem addressed in the present study. Although attachment and experience are theoretically interconnected, the direction and relative strength of their associations in historic urban squares remain insufficiently understood. The study therefore addresses the following research question: What directional associations exist among place attachment, place experience, and structured experience from the perspective of users of a historic urban square?

Amir Chakhmagh Square in Yazd was selected as the case study because its historic setting, distinctive architectural character, connections to surrounding urban functions, and use for both everyday visits and collective events provide a relevant context in which to examine these associations. Selecting this case does not imply that urban squares are universally the most suitable

settings for experience, nor does the study compare squares with other types of public space.

Accordingly, the study evaluates a conceptual model comprising three hypothesized paths: place attachment to place experience, place attachment to structured experience, and place experience to structured experience. By testing these associations through questionnaire-based structural equation modeling, the study offers an initial urban design interpretation of structured experience while preserving the context-dependent character of the findings. The hypotheses are specified in Section 3.2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Place Attachment: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Development

Place attachment is a central construct in human-environment research and is generally defined as a positive bond between individuals or groups and particular settings. Contemporary scholarship treats it not as a single emotion but as a multidimensional construct encompassing affective, cognitive, functional, social, and behavioral components (Kamani Fard & Paydar, 2024). This understanding is consistent with Tuan's concept of topophilia, whereby attachment develops as environments acquire emotional and symbolic meaning through use, repeated experience, memory, and a sense of possession (Tuan, 1974). Recent urban research likewise indicates that changes in the physical and social environment may strengthen or weaken these bonds, underscoring the relevance of place attachment to planning and urban renewal (Lin & van Ameijde, 2026).

Recent studies continue to broaden this conceptualization across human geography, environmental psychology, and tourism studies. Place attachment is commonly defined as a positive emotional and psychological connection between individuals and specific places,

expressed through belonging, closeness, and identification (Cheng & Chen, 2026; Tran et al., 2026). These bonds are formed gradually through felt ownership, use, repeated experience, and environmental interpretation. Accordingly, environmental change or disruption is often evaluated in relation to the meanings users attach to a place, and proposed interventions may generate resistance or communication barriers when they threaten locally valued attributes (Cheng & Chen, 2026; Lin & Van Ameijde, 2026; Stedman, 2003; Tran et al., 2026).

Within this process, place meaning is central because attachment is not only affective but also interpretive. Place meanings are socially constructed and negotiated through material attributes, everyday experiences, shared stories, cultural boundaries, and perceived identity. Recent research on peripheral urban settlements shows that such meanings mediate how residents interpret and accept urban development scenarios (Nazaruddin et al., 2024; Stedman, 2003). This perspective is particularly relevant to historic public spaces, where attachment to a square is likely to emerge from the interaction of physical-symbolic qualities, repeated public use, and culturally shared interpretations of the setting.

Attachment processes are also grounded in previous life experiences and in the behavioral, cognitive, sensory, and social structures through which individuals interpret meaningful objects, people, and places. From this perspective, the role of experience in place attachment is primarily affective but also behavioral and cognitive: repeated use, possession, sensory familiarity, and social interaction can transform a setting into a meaningful environment (Riahi Dehkordi et al., 2021). Place attachment therefore has implications for urban quality of life as well as individual well-being, because the quality of citizens' lives is partly produced through interaction with the urban environment, especially under disruptive or crisis conditions (Riahi Dehkordi & Montazerolhodjah, 2023).

In Iranian neighborhood research, place attachment has been described as a complex outcome of residents' awareness of community characteristics and individual characteristics, generating memories, experiences, freedom, belonging, recreation, relief from fatigue, positive emotion, aesthetic appreciation of activity, comfort, security, connection with nature, and personal growth. This interpretation is relevant to the present study because historic urban squares similarly combine material attributes, social practices, memory, and repeated use, making attachment observable across a wide range of meaningful places, including homes, neighborhoods, streets, cities, sacred or cultural sites, natural areas, and recreational setting (Riahi Dehkordi et al., 2021).

Process-oriented research further explains how such bonds are formed. Arbab et al. (2018) describe place-identity formation as an incremental process involving behavioral, empathic, and existential forms of insideness that are linked to immediate, self-conscious, and less consciously articulated place experiences (Arbab et al., 2018). Extending this approach, Arbab (2023) identifies familiarity, legibility and distinctiveness, satisfaction, self-efficacy, social interaction, congruence, attachment, and memorability as interconnected components of place identification. These studies situate environmental interpretation and experience within a sequential human-environment relationship rather than treating attachment as an isolated emotional outcome (Arbab, 2023).

Research on urban public spaces also indicates that place attachment operates in conjunction with social interaction, perceived safety, visual perception, and social cohesion rather than as an isolated response (Qi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the literature has concentrated mainly on homes, neighborhoods, and cities, while attachment at other spatial scales remains comparatively underdeveloped (Tomàs, 2026). This sensitivity to scale is important for the present study: a

historic square is neither a residential neighborhood nor an entire city, but a bounded public setting in which physical form, collective events, repeated use, and symbolic meanings intersect. Place attachment is therefore treated here as a multidimensional, experience-dependent construct and is examined as a predictor of both place experience and structured experience.

Recent context-specific research further situates these dimensions within Iranian urban settings. Khaki Ghasr et al. (2024), in a study of Tehran residential environments, identify perceptual-cognitive, social, historic-cultural, physical, and economic components as relevant to residents' place attachment across apartment, shared-space, neighborhood, and urban scales. Bazrafshan et al. (2021), in a cross-cultural study of Iranian urban parks and Persian gardens, show that practical use, visual appreciation, emotions, social interactions, shared history, meanings, and memories contribute to place attachment and place identity. Together, these studies support the multidimensional interpretation adopted in the present framework while indicating that the proposed model should be positioned as a context-sensitive theoretical integration rather than as an entirely isolated formulation.

Dimensions of Place Attachment

The multidimensional structure of place attachment is commonly represented through functional, emotional, social, and physical dimensions. Functional attachment concerns the capacity of a setting to support desired goals and activities and to provide a sense of control and security (Livingston et al., 2010; White et al., 2008). Emotional attachment refers to affective bonds, identity, continuity, and the personal meanings associated with a place (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Williams et al., 1992). Social attachment develops through interpersonal relationships, shared practices, collective

memories, and sociocultural meanings situated in place (Mesch & Manor, 1998; Ujang et al., 2018). Physical attachment concerns the distinctive spatial, architectural, material, and environmental attributes through which a setting becomes recognizable and meaningful (Bonaiuto et al., 2003; Ujang & Zakariya, 2018).

Although analytically distinct, these dimensions operate in combination. A physically distinctive environment may support orientation and memory; social interaction may translate

those attributes into shared meanings; and functional support may encourage repeated use, through which emotional bonds develop. Table 1 summarizes the four-dimensional framework used to organize the place-attachment indicators in this study and explicitly links each dimension and subdimension to foundational and context-specific literature. The framework is used as an operational structure and does not imply that the dimensions are independent or expressed identically across contexts.

Table 1. Place attachment dimensions

Dimension	Operationalized subdimensions and indicators	Theoretical basis/source linkage
Functional attachment	Sense of control and security; support for desired activities and goals; place-based self-efficacy; environmental controllability.	Captures the degree to which the square enables intended use, behavioral control, comfort, and repeated activity. It is grounded in functional-dependence and goal-support approaches to attachment (Livingston et al., 2010; White et al., 2008; Williams et al., 1992), and is reinforced by Iranian evidence on practical use and economic/functional factors in attachment formation (Bazrafshan et al., 2021; Khaki Ghasr et al., 2024).
Social attachment	Sociocultural interaction; relationships in place; shared and subjective identity; collective memory.	Captures interpersonal relations, shared practices, social cohesion, and collective meanings situated in place. It is grounded in social-ties and public-space attachment literature (Low & Altman, 1992; Mesch & Manor, 1998; Qi et al., 2024; Ujang et al., 2018), and is supported by Iranian evidence on social interaction, shared history, and memories (Bazrafshan et al., 2021; Khaki Ghasr et al., 2024).
Physical-spatial attachment	Spatial scale; distinctive features; environmental legibility; historic, architectural, and material attributes.	Captures the spatial and architectural properties through which a public setting becomes legible, memorable, and symbolically meaningful. It draws on perceived environmental quality and public-space significance research (Bonaiuto et al., 2003; Memluk, 2013; Ujang & Zakariya, 2018), and on context-specific evidence regarding physical, historic-cultural, visual, and landscape attributes in Iranian settings (Bazrafshan et al., 2021; Khaki Ghasr et al., 2024).
Emotional and identity attachment	Place identity; individual identity; continuity and belonging; autobiographical and collective memory.	Captures affective bonds, identity continuity, belonging, and memory-based meaning. It is grounded in topophilia, symbolic attachment, place identity, and developmental accounts of attachment (Arbab, 2023; Morgan, 2010; Tuan, 1974; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Williams et al., 1992), and is supported by Iranian work emphasizing emotions, meanings, and memories in place attachment (Arbab, 2023; Khaki Ghasr et al., 2024; Morgan, 2010; Tuan, 1974; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Williams et al., 1992).

Place Experience

Place experience refers to the embodied, perceptual, cognitive, and affective encounter through which an environment becomes meaningful. Phenomenological accounts emphasize that place is not merely a physical location but is constituted through lived experience, interpretation, and memory (Malpas, 1999; Tuan, 1974). Empirical research similarly shows that environmental perception, activity, social interaction, and the satisfaction of needs shape how users evaluate and remember settings (Gustafson, 2001; Kaplan et al., 1998).

Experience is cumulative over time. Repeated visits and salient events may generate autobiographical and collective memories, strengthen familiarity, and contribute to identity and attachment (Backlund & Williams, 2004; Morgan, 2010). Arbab et al. (2018) reinforce this connection by situating awareness, perception, cognition, belonging, and attachment within successive levels of place identification. Similarly, White et al. (2008) show that experience-use history is associated with place identity and place dependence, indicating that environmental meaning is partly produced through sustained engagement.

The relationship between place experience and place attachment is therefore theoretically iterative, although empirical models typically test one direction at a time. In the present model, place attachment is hypothesized to shape users' place experiences because established emotional, functional, social, and physical bonds may influence attention, interpretation, revisit intentions, and memory. Historic urban squares provide an analytically relevant setting for examining this relationship because everyday activity, ceremonial events, architectural continuity, and collective meaning may coexist within a single public environment.

Structured Experience

The construct of structured experience extends the study of experience beyond general satisfaction or memory by focusing on encounters shaped by identifiable conditions, demands, and sequences. Duerden et al. (2015) conceptualize structured experience as an intentionally or situationally organized encounter that combines objective features of an activity with subjective responses. Ellis et al. (2017, 2019) distinguish three experiential states—immersion, absorption, and engagement—according to differences in attention, action, motivation, emotion, and information processing. These states are not mutually exclusive; rather, each emphasizes a distinct mode of involvement (Ellis et al., 2019; Ellis et al., 2017).

• *Immersion*

Immersion entails concentrated attention combined with an active response to immediate environmental or activity-related demands. It is characterized by focused action, rapid feedback, intrinsic motivation, and a perceived correspondence between action and context (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Ellis et al., 2017). In public space, performances, games, competitions, and participatory cultural activities may create conditions conducive to immersion.

Because immersion depends on both environmental cues and active participation, it cannot be inferred solely from users' physical presence. Spatial configuration may facilitate visibility, access, gathering, and movement, but the experiential state also depends on the activity, the participant, and the social situation.

• Absorption

Absorption involves sustained sensory or affective attention with comparatively little demand for overt action. Walking, viewing architecture, observing an event, or attending to environmental detail may support absorption when attention is sustained, and competing demands are limited (Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Langer, 2014). This mode is particularly relevant to historic squares, where material character, visual composition, and symbolic features may become objects of prolonged attention.

• Engagement

Engagement refers to attentive involvement with a narrative, system of meaning, social interaction, or unfolding sequence of events. It may intensify emotion, cognition, and motivation and may connect individual interpretation with collective or cultural narratives (Brown et al., 2007; Ellis et al., 2017; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). In an urban square, engagement may emerge through ceremonies, commemorative practices, performances, or interactions that connect present activity with the historic and social meanings of the place.

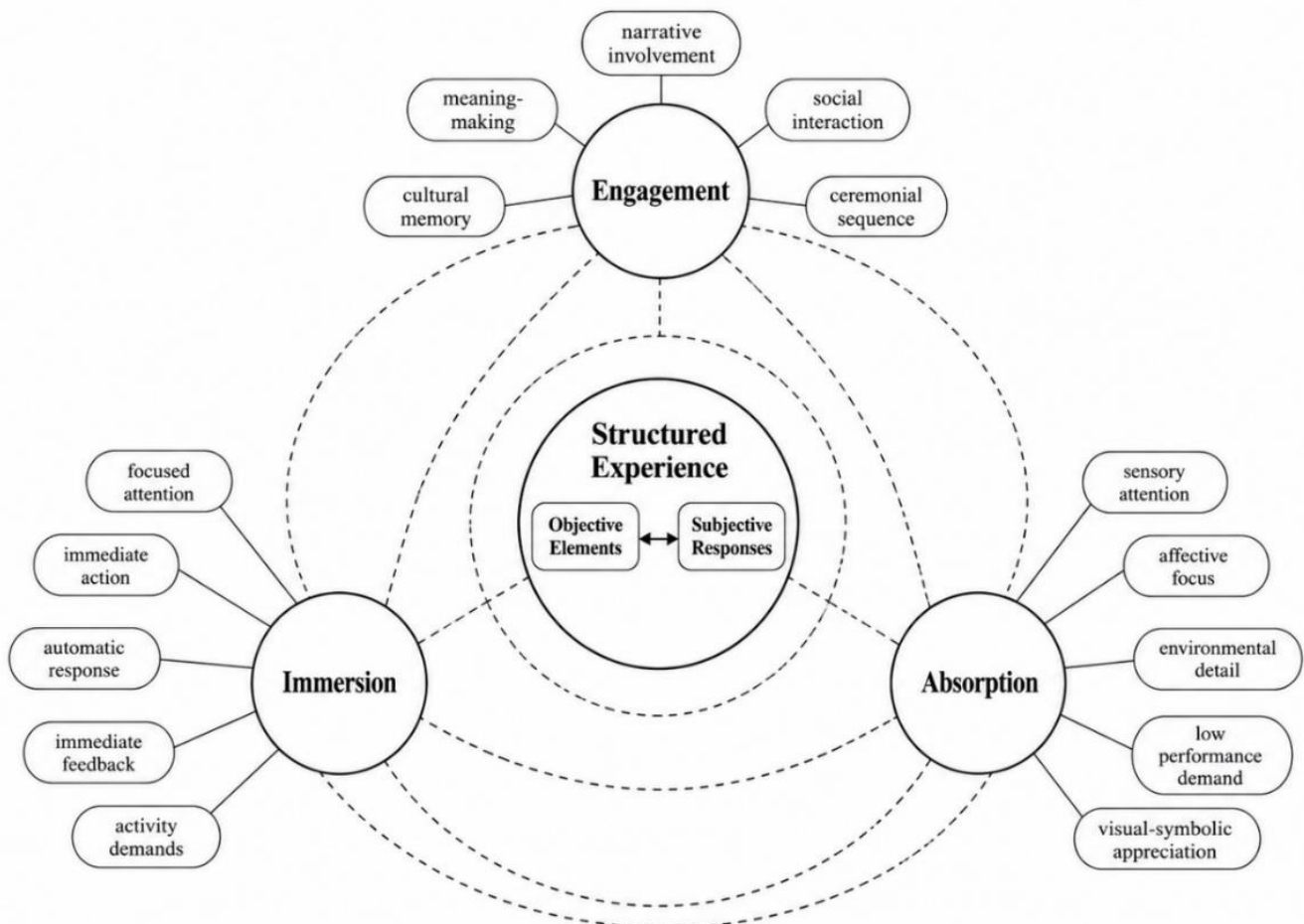


Fig 1. Structured Experience Model

Theoretical Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature identifies three related but non-equivalent constructs. Place attachment describes the bond between users and a setting; place experience concerns meanings generated through perception, activity, memory, and interaction; and structured experience denotes modes of involvement produced under identifiable experiential conditions. Although the literature supports conceptual links among these constructs, it does not establish that they are interchangeable or that their associations are necessarily reciprocal across contexts.

Two gaps are particularly relevant. First, although recent Iranian studies have clarified place-attachment factors in residential environments and Iranian park/garden contexts (Bazrafshan et al., 2021; Khaki Ghasr et al., 2024), the association between attachment and experience at the scale of a historic urban square remains insufficiently specified. Second, structured experience has developed primarily in leisure and tourism scholarship and has rarely been integrated with place attachment and place experience in urban design research. The present study therefore differs from previous Iranian place-attachment studies by examining attachment not as a stand-alone outcome or taxonomy of factors, but as one construct within a directional model linking attachment, place experience, and structured experience.

The present study addresses these gaps by testing a theoretically specified model in which place attachment predicts place experience and structured experience, and place experience predicts structured experience. This formulation preserves the conceptual distinction among the three constructs and provides the theoretical basis for the hypotheses presented in Section 3.2.

METHODS

Research Design and Case Selection

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative design to examine the hypothesized directional associations among place attachment, place experience, and structured experience. The reported empirical analysis relied exclusively on questionnaire data; observation and interviews were not included because no qualitative dataset or qualitative analysis formed part of the study. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to assess the measurement structure and the three theoretically specified paths. Given the cross-sectional design, the paths are interpreted as directional associations within the proposed model rather than as evidence of temporal causality.

Amir Chakhmagh Square was selected as a theoretically informative case of a historic public space because of its distinctive architectural character, connections to surrounding urban functions, continued everyday use, and recurring collective and cultural activities. These characteristics make the square suitable for examining how attachment and experience coexist within a bounded urban setting. The case selection does not imply that the square is universally superior to other types of public space; rather, it provides a context in which the proposed associations can be examined.

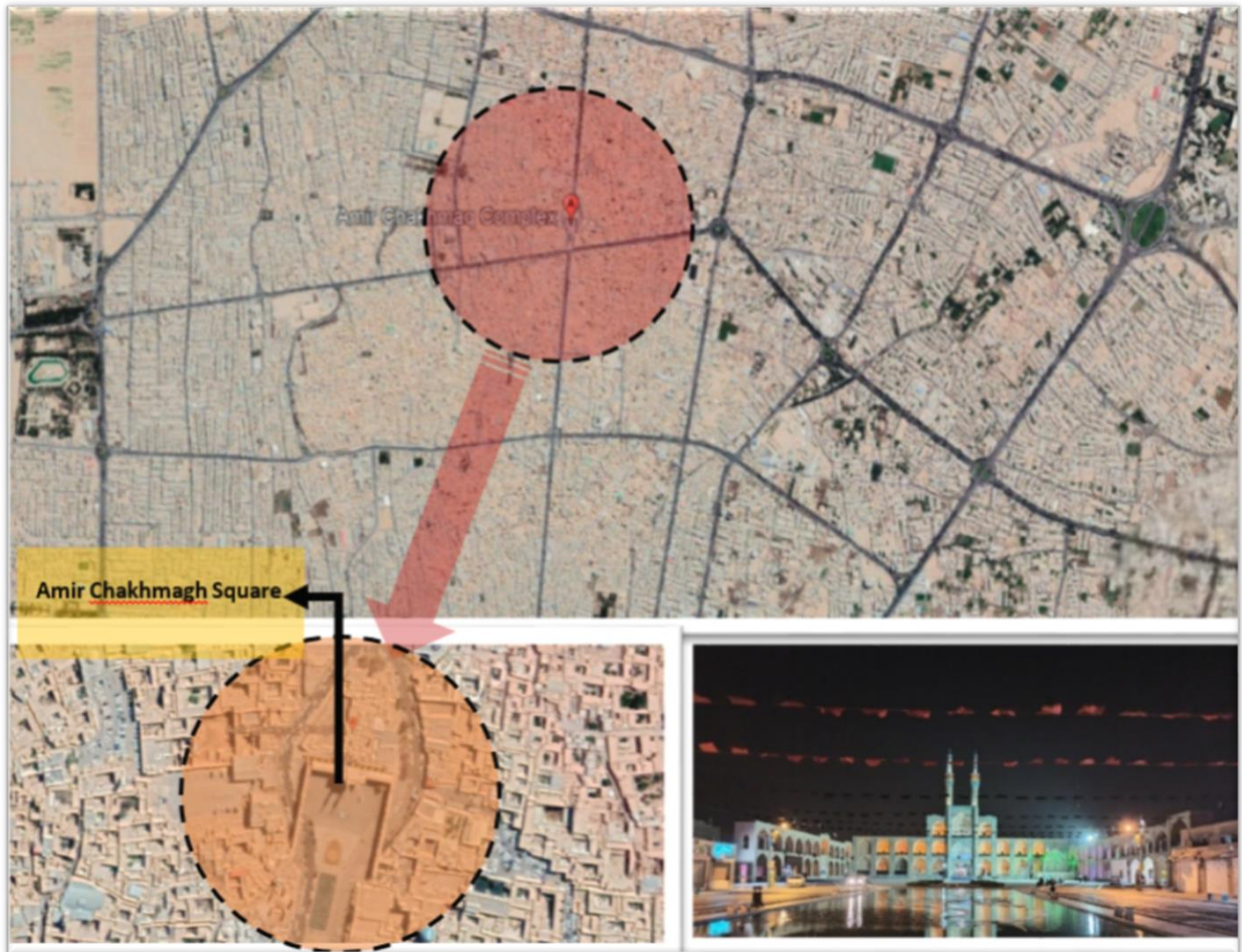


Fig 2. Location of Amir Chakhmagh Square within Yazd's historic urban fabric

Study Objective and Hypotheses

The study tested three unidirectional associations in the conceptual model: whether place attachment is positively associated with place experience, whether place attachment is positively associated with structured experience, and whether place experience is positively associated with structured experience. The hypotheses were as follows:

- I. H1. Place attachment is positively associated with place experience in Amir Chakhmagh Square.
- II. H2. Place attachment is positively associated with structured experience in Amir Chakhmagh Square.
- III. H3. Place experience is positively associated with structured experience in Amir Chakhmagh Square.

Instrument, Participants, and Data Collection

Data were collected from users and visitors to Amir Chakhmagh Square using a structured questionnaire comprising 73 items: 23 indicators of place attachment, 22 indicators of place experience, and 28 indicators of structured experience. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). Before field administration, university academics reviewed the questionnaire for face validity and content relevance. Of the 235 questionnaires distributed on site, 225 contained substantive responses and were retained for analysis, yielding a response rate of 95.7%.

The source SPSS file contained 260 records, 35 of which were completely blank and were removed. Seventeen item responses were missing across 16 participants, and one out-of-range value (11 on a 1-5 item) was recoded as missing. Thus, 18 of 16,425 item-level observations (0.11%) were missing or invalid. Missing values among the retained indicators were estimated using iterative multivariate regression imputation constrained to the original 1-5 response range. A sensitivity analysis based on item medians yielded substantively unchanged coefficients.

Participant Profile and Analytical Strategy

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all 73 items. The original 73-indicator SEM was not retained because it was excessively complex for the available sample and produced unstable, inadmissible estimates. A parsimonious parcel-level specification was therefore developed for construct-level hypothesis testing. Item distributions, internal consistency, within-construct correlations, cross-construct overlap, and theoretical coverage were considered jointly. Nine representative items were retained for each construct and grouped into three three-item parcels using an item-to-construct balance strategy, yielding nine observed parcel scores. This procedure preserved the three theoretical constructs while reducing indicator-specific error and the parameter-to-sample burden (Little et al., 2002). Because parcel formation and model respecification were undertaken in the present sample, the resulting model is interpreted as a data-informed exploratory-confirmatory model rather than as an independent validation.

The measurement and structural models were estimated in Python using semopy (version 2.3.11) and diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS). Model fit was assessed using the chi-square statistic, comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), and normed fit index (NFI). Measurement quality was evaluated using internal consistency, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The indirect association was evaluated using 1,000 nonparametric bootstrap resamples.

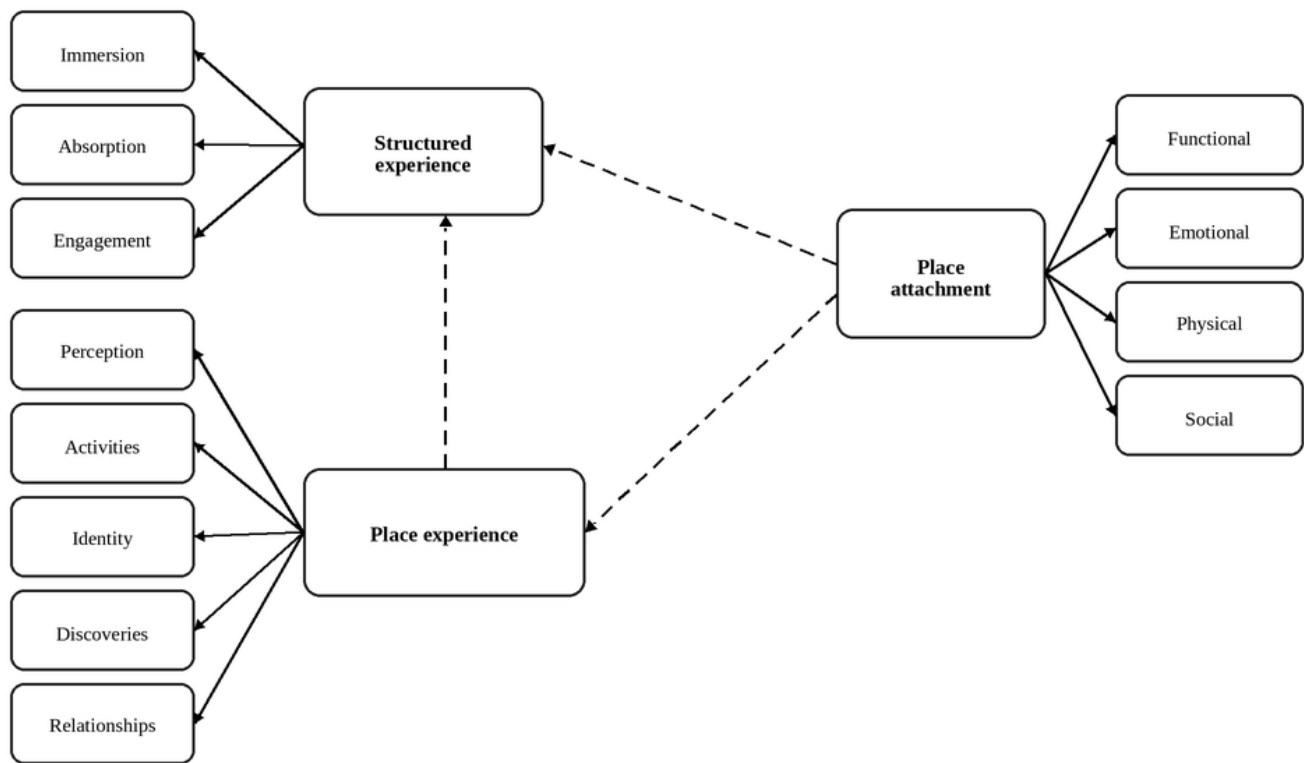


Fig 3. Hypothesized directional model and construct dimensions

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Age	15-30	34.20
	31-45	28.40
	46-60	21.80
	61-75	12.00
	Over 75	3.60
Gender	Male	43.30
	Female	56.70
Marital status	Single	21.40
	Married	71.60
Education	High school diploma or lower	12.00
	Bachelor's degree	33.80
	Master's degree	36.90
	Doctoral degree	17.30
Job	Self-employed	11.60
	Employee	44.90
	Homemaker	5.80
	Student	27.60
	Unemployed	10.20

RESULTS

Preliminary Assessment of the Measurement Data

The analysis began with data screening, an assessment of internal consistency, and tests of factorability. Although the complete 73-item instrument showed high overall reliability, the original item-level covariance model was too complex for the available sample and produced unstable estimates. The structural hypotheses were therefore retested using the respecified nine-parcel measurement model described in Section 3.4.

Internal Consistency

The complete 73-item questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .955. Construct-specific coefficients were .893 for place attachment, .880 for place experience, and .908 for structured experience. For the 27 indicators retained in the respecified model, alpha values also remained satisfactory: .811, .836, and .856, respectively. These coefficients indicate internal consistency

and are supplemented below by CR, AVE, and diagnostics of discriminant validity.

Sampling Adequacy and Factorability

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin values were .813 for place attachment, .796 for place experience, and .701 for structured experience. Bartlett's tests of sphericity were significant for all three item sets ($p < .001$), indicating sufficient common variance in the correlation matrices to support factor analysis. These diagnostics provide preliminary evidence of factorability but do not, by themselves, establish construct validity.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 5 presents item-level means and standard deviations for the complete questionnaire. Minor variation in item-level N reflects limited nonresponse. The SEM used imputed values only for the retained indicators; imputation affected 0.11% of all possible item responses, and sensitivity analyses produced the same substantive conclusions.

Table 3. Internal consistency of the questionnaire

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's α
Full questionnaire	73	.955
Place attachment (full)	23	.893
Place experience (full)	22	.880
Structured experience (full)	28	.908
Place attachment (retained)	9	.811
Place experience (retained)	9	.836
Structured experience (retained)	9	.856

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Tests for the Three Constructs

Construct	KMO	Bartlett's χ^2	df	p
Place attachment	.813	2763.82	253	< .001
Place experience	.796	2941.00	231	< .001
Structured experience	.701	4451.34	378	< .001

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for the Questionnaire Items

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Place attachment			
Personal identity	225	4.03	.839
Social identity	225	3.96	.890
Collective gathering	225	3.28	1.217
Place identity	225	3.52	1.057
Historic walls and setting	225	3.27	1.340
Paving quality	225	2.60	1.134
Spatial enclosure and openness	225	3.84	.904
Proximity of shops	225	3.16	1.098
Congruence between personal beliefs and the setting	225	3.28	1.190
Social commercial spaces (cafes and restaurants)	225	3.76	1.149
Symbols of traditional architecture	225	3.84	1.171
Water features	225	3.57	1.335
Quality of street furniture	225	3.44	1.141
Edges suitable for sitting and conversation	225	3.70	1.043
Connection between the square and the adjacent bazaar	225	2.88	1.280
Social features	225	3.07	1.351
Perceived identity	225	2.55	1.122
New social connections	225	3.37	1.119
Group visits	222	3.45	.925
Cultural diversity	225	3.98	1.087
Visual permeability of the setting	225	3.11	.955
Purpose of visit	224	2.95	1.078
Support for intended use	225	3.39	1.179
Place experience			
Experience of local Yazd cuisine	225	3.48	.936
Diversity of activities	225	3.63	1.066
Sense of security	220	3.25	1.249
Visibility and visual transparency	225	3.48	1.180
Interaction with local residents and cultural cues	225	3.68	.994
Intention to revisit	225	3.45	1.073
Environmental legibility	225	3.41	1.185
Perceived uniqueness of the square	225	3.05	1.095
Compatibility of the walls with traditional architecture	225	3.26	1.255
Compatibility of the paving with traditional architecture	225	3.01	1.324
Contribution of paving to environmental legibility	225	2.51	1.289
Recognizability of the square from a distance	225	2.21	1.195
Affective arousal in the setting	225	3.06	1.256
Regret associated with the setting	223	2.35	1.063
Desire to leave immediately	224	3.17	1.099
Intention to remain longer	225	3.56	.994
Discovery of new forms and information	225	3.34	1.095
Enjoyment during the visit	225	3.24	1.186
Excitement during the visit	225	3.48	1.040
Immersion in the setting	225	3.01	1.188

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Formation of individual memories	225	3.52	1.150
Formation of collective memories	225	3.04	.850
Structured experience			
Fulfillment of physical and comfort needs	225	3.28	.998
Spatial coherence	225	3.19	.936
Congruence between behavior and setting	225	2.93	1.091
Concurrent activities	225	2.99	.832
Active visit	225	3.27	.965
Sustained visit	225	2.97	.984
Awareness of historical context	225	3.09	1.044
Awareness of events	223	3.16	1.138
Sustained attention to events	225	3.16	1.199
Immediate thought and movement	225	3.57	1.171
Automatic movement	225	3.24	.952
Absorption in the setting	225	3.36	.925
Deep reflection	225	3.49	.983
Artistic performances and competitions	225	2.92	1.107
Recall of similar situations	225	3.30	1.025
Immediate response	225	3.39	1.194
Sense of calm	225	3.08	1.121
Inability to respond	223	2.83	1.375
Spatial imagination	225	3.05	.994
Walking and viewing the surroundings	225	2.59	.979
Cycling in the square	225	3.20	.885
Repeated visits over time	225	3.31	.930
Intense positive or negative emotion	224	3.24	.799
Complementary events	225	3.28	1.000
Perceived contribution to improving the setting	225	3.25	1.062
Situational awareness	225	3.48	.871
Clear beginning and end	225	3.40	.950
Events occurring at different time intervals	225	3.28	.834

Note. Item-level N ranges from 220 to 225 because of limited nonresponse. For the respecified SEM, one out-of-range response was treated as missing, and the 18 missing or invalid retained-item values were estimated using iterative multivariate regression imputation constrained to the 1-5 response range.

Respecified Measurement and Structural Models

The structural analysis was re-estimated from the respondent-level data using the correct item allocation: v6-v28 for place attachment, v29-v50 for place experience, and v51-v78 for structured experience. The original 73-indicator specification was not retained because it was overparameterized for the available sample and produced poor fit and

inadmissible estimates. The respecified model therefore focused on construct-level associations represented by balanced parcels.

To preserve the three-construct conceptual structure while reducing indicator-specific error, 27 representative items (nine per construct) were grouped into three balanced parcels for each construct. Table 6 reports the parcel composition. The selected items retained conceptual breadth while reducing the strongest cross-construct

redundancy; the same parcel specification was used in all subsequent models.

All parcel loadings were statistically significant and ranged from .742 to .909. Internal consistency, composite reliability, and AVE exceeded commonly applied minimum thresholds for each construct (Table 7). The square root of AVE for each construct (.783-.821) exceeded its correlations with the other latent constructs. HTMT values were .798 for place attachment-place experience, .625 for place attachment-structured experience, and .688 for place experience-structured experience. These findings support convergent and discriminant validity at the parcel level, but they do not constitute validation of every item in the original questionnaire.

Place attachment was positively associated with place experience ($\beta = .773$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. The direct association between place attachment and structured experience was positive but did not reach the .05 significance level ($\beta = .221$, $p = .062$); therefore, H2 was not supported. Place experience was positively

associated with structured experience ($\beta = .504$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. The full model accounted for 59.8% of the variance in place experience and 47.4% of the variance in structured experience.

Because the direct path from place attachment to structured experience was not statistically significant, a nested parsimonious model excluding this path was also estimated. The trimmed model retained close fit and was more parsimonious ($\chi^2(25) = 25.45$, $p = .437$; CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.000; RMSEA = .009; SRMR = .051; AIC = 38.86; BIC = 107.18). In this model, the path from place attachment to place experience was $\beta = .817$ ($p < .001$), and the path from place experience to structured experience was $\beta = .720$ ($p < .001$). The standardized indirect association between place attachment and structured experience through place experience was $\beta = .588$. A 1,000-replicate nonparametric bootstrap confidence interval excluded zero (95% CI [.481, .692]), supporting an indirect-only association in the respecified model.

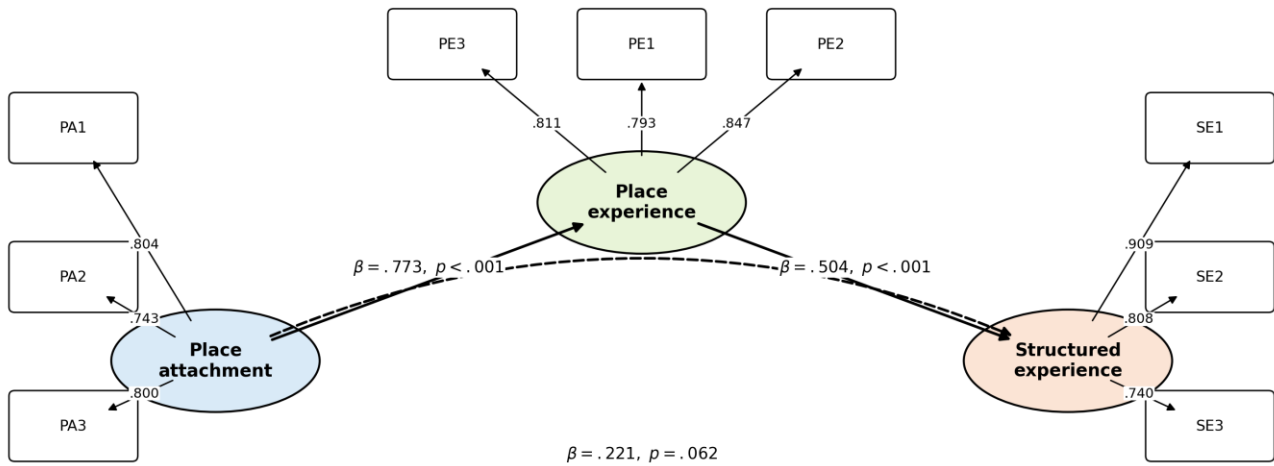
Table 6. Composition of the Retained Item Parcels

Parcel	Item codes	Content represented
PA1	v19, v16, v28	Sittable edges; traditional architectural symbolism; support for intended use
PA2	v27, v13, v15	Purpose of visit; nearby shops; cafes and restaurants
PA3	v17, v12, v10	Water features; spatial enclosure/openness; historic walls
PE1	v34, v45, v42	Intention to revisit; discovery of new forms and information; regret associated with the setting
PE2	v49, v38, v41	Individual memory formation; paving and environmental legibility; affective arousal
PE3	v50, v48, v47	Collective memory formation; immersion in the setting; excitement
SE1	v56, v58, v67	Sustained visit; awareness of events; sense of calm
SE2	v62, v70, v59	Absorption in the setting; walking and viewing the surroundings; sustained attention to events
SE3	v61, v72, v57	Automatic movement; repeated visits over time; awareness of historical context

Table 7. Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Respecified Measurement Model

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$
Place attachment	.811	.826	.612	.783
Place experience	.836	.858	.668	.817
Structured experience	.856	.860	.674	.821

Global fit indices indicated that the full hypothesized structural model closely fit the data: $\chi^2(24) = 23.69$, $p = .480$; CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.000; RMSEA = .000; SRMR = .049; GFI = .988; AGFI = .982; and NFI = .988. Figure 4 presents the standardized solution.



Solid arrows: statistically significant paths; dashed arrow: non-significant direct path.

Full model fit: $\chi^2(24) = 23.69$, $p = .480$; CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.000; RMSEA = .000; SRMR = .049

Fig 4. Standardized Solution for the Respecified Structural Model

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of the Findings

The reanalysis materially changes the substantive interpretation of the study. Place attachment was strongly and positively associated with place experience, and place experience was positively associated with structured experience. By contrast, the direct association between place attachment and structured experience was not statistically significant after place experience was included in the model. The findings therefore support H1 and H3, but not H2 as a direct association.

The association between place attachment and place experience is consistent with the proposition that attachment develops through identity, repeated use, memory, social interaction, and a setting's capacity to support valued activities (Arbab, 2023; Lewicka, 2011; Low & Altman, 1992). In Amir Chakhmagh Square, historic architectural elements, active commercial

edges, opportunities for sitting and social interaction, and repeated visits may provide the conditions through which attachment-related meanings are translated into concrete experiences of the square.

The significant association between place experience and structured experience indicates that general place experience is relevant to more organized states of immersion, absorption, and engagement. The bootstrap-supported indirect association suggests that attachment alone is not directly associated with structured experience once place experience is considered; rather, attachment becomes relevant through perceptions, memories, affective responses, and behavioral engagement with the setting. This interpretation is consistent with the theory of structured experience, which emphasizes anticipation, participation, attention, and interaction rather than treating attachment as an automatically sufficient condition (Duerden et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2017).

Table 8. Hypothesis Tests for the Full Respecified Structural Model

Hypothesis	Structural path	Standardized β	p	Decision
H1	Place attachment $\rightarrow$ place experience	.773	< .001	Supported
H2	Place attachment $\rightarrow$ structured experience	.221	.062	Not supported
H3	Place experience $\rightarrow$ structured experience	.504	< .001	Supported

Table 9. Comparison of the Full and Parsimonious Structural Models

Model	χ^2 (df)	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	AIC	BIC
Full hypothesized	23.69 (24)	.480	1.000	1.000	.000	.049	40.90	112.64
Parsimonious indirect	25.45 (25)	.437	1.000	1.000	.009	.051	38.86	107.18

The nonsignificant direct association between place attachment and structured experience also has a practical implication. A historically important and valued place may foster attachment without necessarily generating structured experience. Structured experience may additionally require event content, temporal sequencing, clear opportunities for participation, sensory cues, and purposeful programming. The results therefore support an indirect, rather than a simple direct, account of the associations among the three constructs.

Amir Chakhmagh Square remains a theoretically relevant case because its historic form, collective meanings, ceremonial functions, commercial surroundings, and everyday public use allow attachment and experience to coexist within a bounded setting. The study did not, however, compare the square with parks, streets, waterfronts, or other types of public space and therefore does not establish the superiority of urban squares.

Theoretical Contribution

The study's principal theoretical contribution is the empirical distinction among place attachment, place experience, and structured experience within a single urban design model. The revised analysis indicates that the three constructs can be represented as related yet discriminable latent variables at the parcel level. More importantly,

the findings position place experience between place attachment and structured experience, providing preliminary evidence of an indirect sequence rather than the simultaneous or reciprocal effects claimed in the original model.

In relation to recent Iranian place-attachment studies, the contribution is specifically relational and model-based: the study does not merely classify attachment factors, but examines how attachment-related meanings are associated with place experience and, indirectly, with structured experience in a historic public square.

The study also extends the theory of structured experience from leisure and tourism research to a historic public square. Structured experience is not presented as a construct developed by this study; rather, the contribution lies in adapting and testing the construct in relation to urban place processes. This application highlights the need to distinguish general positive or memorable place experience from more deliberately organized states of immersion, absorption, and engagement.

The respecified model should nevertheless be interpreted as a rigorous within-sample reanalysis rather than as a definitive validation of the measurement scale. Item screening and parcel formation were conducted using the present dataset, and the parcel-level model may obscure item-level multidimensionality. Independent replication with a larger sample and a prespecified measurement model is therefore required.

Implications for the Planning and Design of Urban Public Spaces

The indirect pattern observed in the re-estimated model supports several design propositions, although these should be understood as context-sensitive implications rather than causal prescriptions. Because place attachment was indirectly associated with structured experience through place experience, planning and conservation strategies should not focus exclusively on preserving identity-bearing features; they should also enable users to perceive, use, remember, and interact with those features. In Amir Chakhmagh Square, relevant considerations include the legibility of the historic ensemble, continuity of material and architectural character, visual connections to major landmarks, and the relationship between the square and adjacent commercial and pedestrian routes.

Second, public-space design should accommodate both everyday stationary use and collective interaction. Comfortable seating edges, shade, climatic protection, accessible walking surfaces, legible pedestrian routes, safe crossings, appropriate lighting, and flexible areas for informal gathering may support longer visits and social exchange. These provisions should not transform the square into a single-purpose event venue; instead, they should allow everyday use and periodic collective activities to coexist without creating movement conflicts or excluding users with limited mobility.

Third, structured experience requires attention to temporal programming as well as physical form. Cultural events, performances, exhibitions, commemorative activities, and participatory programs may be organized as coherent sequences with identifiable points of entry, orientation, participation, and completion. Spatial thresholds, event information, temporary installations, sensory cues, and carefully managed circulation may help users understand how to engage with an activity. Programming should

remain compatible with the historic and cultural meanings of the site and should avoid superficial staging that undermines local authenticity.

Finally, planners and designers should evaluate experience-oriented interventions after implementation. Brief questionnaires, behavioral mapping, observation of movement and stationary activity, and comparisons between ordinary and event days could determine whether an intervention improves legibility, comfort, participation, and social inclusion. Such post-occupancy evaluation would translate the present exploratory framework into an evidence-based design process and help distinguish the effects of spatial design from those of event management and visitor characteristics.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations constrain the interpretation and transferability of the findings. The study is cross-sectional and relies on self-reported responses from a single historic square; temporal ordering and causal effects therefore cannot be established. The absence of a complete sampling frame limits probability-based generalization, and all respondents were Iranian users or visitors. Although the sample of 225 enabled estimation of the final parcel-level model, it remains modest for validating the original 73-item instrument. Data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic may also have affected patterns of presence and participation.

The most important methodological limitation is that item screening, parcel construction, and model testing were conducted in the same sample. Parceling reduced model complexity and produced a stable, well-fitting construct-level solution, but it may conceal item-level multidimensionality and does not substitute for independent scale validation. Future research should preregister the retained indicators, test the parcel structure in an independent and larger sample, compare parcel-level and item-level

ordinal CFA solutions, assess measurement invariance across user groups and types of public space, and examine the indirect association longitudinally. Comparative studies of squares, streets, parks, and waterfronts are also needed before conclusions can be drawn about the relative suitability of urban squares.

CONCLUSION

Using the original respondent-level data and a respecified parcel-level SEM, this study re-examined the directional associations among place attachment, place experience, and structured experience in Amir Chakhmagh Square. The full model supported a positive association between place attachment and place experience and a positive association between place experience and structured experience. The direct association between place attachment and structured experience was not statistically significant. A more parsimonious model indicated that place attachment was indirectly associated with structured experience through place experience, with a bootstrap confidence interval that excluded zero.

The findings suggest that attachment to a historic public space becomes relevant to structured experience when it is expressed through concrete perceptions, memories, emotions, activities, and engagement with the setting. For urban design, this implies that the conservation of identity-bearing features should be coordinated with everyday usability, social interaction, spatial legibility, and carefully sequenced event programming. The findings are not statistically generalizable to all public spaces, and the revised parcel-level model requires independent replication. Nevertheless, the study provides a more stable and theoretically coherent basis for subsequent comparative research.

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