

# The Role of Socio-Cultural Components on the Performance of Mosques in Urban Neighborhoods

## (Case Study: A Comparative Study of Three Districts of Tehran)

<sup>1</sup>Sakineh Maroofi, <sup>2</sup>Ali akbar Taghvaei, <sup>3</sup>Mohammad.Reza Pourjafar, <sup>4</sup>Seyedeh Mahshid Jalalian Hosseini

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Student in Urban Planning, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor of Urban Planning, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>3</sup>Professor & H. o.D of Urban Planning & Design, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>4</sup>M.A student in urban design, Department of Art and Architecture, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.

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**ABSTRACT:** The experience of Iranian-Islamic cities represents the role of mosques on physical and social organization in urban neighborhoods. It appears that this role has been changed during the contemporary era. The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of social and cultural contexts on the performance of local mosques. The main question of this research is: "What is the relationship between social context and the performance of local mosques?" The research hypothesis is that there seems to be a significant relationship between the social factors and the performance of local mosques in urban neighborhoods. Methodology of the research has been based on analytical-descriptive method. In order to examine this hypothesis, the theoretical and practical definitions of the survey's variables, "social component of mosques and their performance in urban neighborhoods", are provided applying the theory of social capital. Afterward, the indexes of each variable are 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.

**Keywords:** Neighborhood, Mosques, Social and Cultural Context, Social capital.

## INTRODUCTION

Mosques exhibit a display of social, personal, and spiritual life of Muslims. "Daily Prayers" that is the highest form of worshipping God and 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 (Morteza, 2008). Repeating this word in Holy Quran emphasizes the importance of mosques in Islam. Mosques in Iran have played an important role in the socio-economic, political and physical context for long. They have been worship endues and on the other hand, places where social life of the residents would be organized. Mosques were always places for communication a cross neighborhoods and cities. A lot of people's social and economic interactions like education (Masjid<sup>1</sup>-Madreseh<sup>2</sup>) (Amin Zadeh, 1999), resolving disputes, solving social and

economic problems would occur in mosques. They have even acted as levers to control and monitor the political authorities (Haj Seyed Javadi, 1999). Therefore, we can say that mosques could affect all aspects of Iranian community like social, political and physical contexts. Historically, mosques have had social, cultural and political impacts in Muslims communities (Shoaie et al., 2013) that could affect diverse contexts like strengthening social cohesion, the promotion of public participation, social security, functional diversity and promoting a sense of place (Oktay, 2002). It seems that we can apply the theory of social capital to scientifically explain the social and cultural components in urban neighborhoods.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study applied descriptive and analytical methods and combination methods of qualitative and quantitative surveys. In order to gather data, we 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

\*Corresponding Author Email: [s.marooofi@modares.ac.ir](mailto:s.marooofi@modares.ac.ir)

Central were considered. This division was due to the socio-economic differences found indifferent 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, 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 Northen Valiasr from district 18 were identified. After the variables were determined, indexes for this study were identified. The five-level Likert<sup>2</sup> Scale was applied to evaluate the comments. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were assessed through using Alpha Cronbach<sup>3</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 events held in mosques and also the quantity and quality of using mosques. Social and cultural contexts were the independent variables. Applying Social Capital Theory, indexes were identified to evaluate each one of these categories. The indexes were determined according to studies, culture, lifestyle and other factors. The indexes of the two variables are mentioned in Table 1 and 2.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of social capital has been considered by scholars in the different fields of sciences in the recent decades,

Table 1. Mosques, Social variable, dimension and indexes

Variable	Dimension	Indexes	Items
Social components	NGOs and Organizations	Formation of charity organizations, educational, social and cultural centers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Residents work indifferent fields through voluntary groups in our neighborhood mosque.</li> <li>2. There is a charity organization supporting poor people in our neighborhood mosque.</li> <li>3. There is a center for benefactor women in our neighborhood mosque.</li> <li>4. There is a consulting center for families and individuals in our neighborhood mosque.</li> <li>5. There is a center for financial aid to residents in our neighborhood mosque</li> <li>6. Cultural activities and educational classes are established on a regular basis in our neighborhood mosque.</li> </ol>
	Programs, Group activities and residents' use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Types: social, religious, educational, cultural, tourism, invocation</li> <li>- Time: regularity and continuity</li> <li>- Available and accessible for all</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. our neighborhood mosque is active in organizing religious events.</li> <li>2. our neighborhood mosque is active in organizing religious tours.</li> <li>3. our neighborhood mosque welcomes and feeds worshippers in religious events.</li> <li>4. In our neighborhood mosque every day, even on Fridays Morning Prayer is performed by the congregation.</li> <li>5. The door of our neighborhood mosque is often open.</li> <li>6. Religious, scientific and cultural lectures are held in our neighborhood mosque.</li> <li>7. Frequency of use of the mosque during time ( day, week, ...).</li> <li>8. The purpose of using the mosque: For prayers, religious affairs or contribution in social and cultural activities.</li> </ol>
Local leaders and residents interact through mosques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication with the head of the neighborhood</li> <li>- connection with neighborhood House and neighborhood health center activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication with the head of the neighborhood</li> <li>- connection with neighborhood House and neighborhood health center activities</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I have known members of neighborhood councils through my neighborhood mosque.</li> <li>2. Manager or members of neighborhood councils often hold meetings in the neighborhood mosque to discuss problems.</li> <li>3. I have known the neighborhood House and neighborhood health center activists through neighborhood mosque.</li> <li>4. I think there is a good cooperation between the neighborhood mosque, community center and health center.</li> </ol>
Interacting between local inhabitants and custodians of the mosque	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contact with the prayer</li> <li>- Communication with the Board of Trustees</li> <li>- Connection with custodian</li> <li>- communication with Basij</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contact with the prayer</li> <li>- Communication with the Board of Trustees</li> <li>- Connection with custodian</li> <li>- communication with Basij</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I believe prayer is an effective and appropriate relationship between residents and the prayer.</li> <li>2. I believe prayer is an effective and appropriate relationship between residents and the Board of Trustees.</li> <li>3. I think there is a close and good relationship between the residents and the custodian.</li> <li>4. I think there is a close and good relationship between Basij members with the board of trustees, the prayer and residents.</li> </ol>
Financial position and Mosque earnings	Income, rent, Vaghf, public unding, organizations financial aid (governmental, Revenues public, non-governmental)	Income, rent, Vaghf, public unding, organizations financial aid (governmental, Revenues public, non-governmental)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Religious don ations (Khums, Zakat).</li> <li>2. Government financial aid.</li> <li>3. such as property under the direct authority of Mosque.</li> </ol>

Table 2. Mousqus, Functional variable, dimension and indexes

Variable	Dimension	Indexes	Items
The function of mosques in neighborhoods	Social Cohesion	- Neighborhood Links - preparation for community participation (collective action-voluntary in stitutionalized action)	1.How much do you agree with the statement that a good neighbor is closer than a brother to you? 2.How much do you think people in your neighborhood are intimate with each other? 3.To what extent are you willing to voluntarily participate in solving problems of your neighborhood? 4.How often do you participate in a celebrations and ceremonies that are held in your neighborhood? 5.How much do you help others solve their problems? 6.How interested are you to voluntarily spend time to improve your neighborhood? 7.How willing are you to contribute with local institutions (health center, neighborhood house and institutions)? 8.To what extent do you think that group work is necessary for a better neighborhood?
	Sense of belonging to neighborhood	- Awareness of local circumstances - Satisfaction with the neighborhood; - Satisfaction with neighbors and local people; - Sense of responsibility for the fate of the neighborhood and its problems	1.I am satisfied with the place where I live. 2.In case of problems in the neighborhood I try to solve them. 3.I would sure leave this neighborhood if I were able to. 4.I try to come back to this neighborhood for ceremonies and events wherever I am. 5.I have good friends and neighbors in this neighborhood. 6.People are willing to help each other in this neighborhood.
	Religious and spiritual trends in the neighborhood	Closeness to God, Quran and prayer Presence of spirituality in everyday life	1.Our neighborhood Mosque is a convenient place for nurturing spirits of individuals. 2.Religious centers such as mosques are convenient places for spiritually nurturing the individuals. 3.Doing charity for God's sake is effective in solving human problems. 4.Attendance in mosque causes more closeness to God and Quran. 5.People should say their prayers on time. 6.Religion leads to dignity and pride of all human kinds.

however, it can be claimed that it had existed from the very beginning of human life on earth (Tedong, Grant, 2014). Li introduces social capital as the source that exists in family relations and social organizations (Li, 2005). James Colman also explains that social capital includes a social frame work that will facilitate relationships among people. Therefore, the lack of social capital can impose additional costs in obtaining to a goal to the community (Colman, 2005). Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive. For example, a group that has in tense loyalty and confidence among its member scan accomplish much larger tasks in compare with a group among whom there are no such features (Moayedfar, 2003). The World Bank defines social capital as: Social capital is the result of the impact of social institutions, relationships and norms on the quality and quantity of social interactions (Shirvani, 2001). Contemporary sociologists have made use of the concept of social capital to examine the quantity and quality of social relations in society. Social capital is the resources and opportunities that individuals and groups can obtain, via

linking together (Bourdieu, 1986). The inherent feature of social capital is that it shapes in social relations. Economic capital is in people's bank account but social capital is within the minds of people and is found in the structure of social relations. The concept of social capital is closely related with variables such as trust, knowledge, people participation, and social cohesion (Tajbakhsh, 2005). Generally one can say that trust and relationship are two basic components in the concept of social capital which represent both qualitative and quantitative aspect so fit. Social capital has many potential functions, like increasing participation, reducing crime in society and strengthening social coherence (Share pour, 2006). Table 3 summarizes a number of theories and indicators proposed by the theorists in the field of social capital. Among the indicators presented in these theories, parameters such as the number of voluntary associations, community organizations, correlation, sense of place and participation in social and religious events, seem to be the most prominent ones. In general, it can be mentioned that social capital refers to the

Table 3: Indicators presented in the context of social capital

Theorists	Indicators
Putnam	Horizontal associations, the number of citizens who read newspapers, voters, members of sports clubs, and trust in public institutions, the philanthropic activities (Putnam,1993).
Hague	The subscription rate and Social trust (Hague et al., 2003).
SANOS <sup>4</sup>	Community participation in social networks, common objectives and values belief system, trust between social groups (Social Analysis and Reporting Division Office for National Statistic, 2001).
Colman	Family support systems, school systems, churches, horizontal and vertical organization (Colman,1988).
Pordio	Stability and size of the communication network (Bordio,1986).
Fokoyama	Religion,tradition,sharedhistoricalexperience,interactionbetween members of the Joint cultural society (Fokoyama, 1999).
Rabani horasgani	Social and economic assimilation, participation in religious events (Rabani Khorasgani,2009).
Tavallaie	Diversity of people's participation in public life and social trust (Tavallaie, 2008).

sources and capitals that people and groups can obtain through linking together (Bordio,1986, Colman,1988, Putnam,1993). A person should have relationship with others in order to obtain social capital and these “others” are the real sources of social capital. That is why the concept of social capital is closely related to the other important sociological concepts such as trust, knowledge, people participation and social cohesion (Share pour, 2006) social capital like other forms of capital requires accumulated stock and investment to produce benefit. Continuous presence in networks and communicate with others will lead to the results of social capital, such as trust and practicing norms (Elmi, 2005 ).Other positive outcomes of social capital can be tolerance, cooperation, group correlations, mercy, compassion, self-sacrifice and altruism. Trust is the most important indicator of social capital. As a result, some have equated social trust with social capital. In general, criteria and indicators of social capital are mostly those mentioned in Table 3.

Mosque as important elements of Islamic cities has different roles, but its main role is to create an overall social coordination. Any mosque has two main goals, from the Islamic point of view, religious purpose and social purpose. There legions purpose is to worship Godasa collective prayer five times a day. The social purpose of the mosque is to create unity within a community and strengthening social relations (Morteza, 2008).

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 inter actions 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 as sociated 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 (Baratalipour, 2002). Thus, some scholars mention that the essence of social life is the sense of solidarity and helping each other (Mariji, 2010). Ibn-e Khaldoun believes that social cohesion is rooted from the sense of “Party Spirite”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 (Mahdi, 1995).

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 (Cuzrol, 2008). Social solidarity is the result of a strong communication, collective sense of belonging and accepting the norms of a society (Azkia, 2001). This objective will be exposed in the social interactions of individuals in a society. On one hand, social solidarity results in strengthening social interactions, and on the other hand it is reinforced by these gatherings and associations.

Overall social cohesion arises from neighborhood relations, social relations and social trust. Urban designers try to create a public space in the center of the neighborhoods in order to

create a frame work for social interaction, and emphasizes on the role of urban space in creating a sense of social solidarity (Madanipour, 2010). 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 (Matlabi, 2006). There are degrees 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 (Forouzande & Matlabi, 2011). 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 some how 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 its activities and understand its particular identity. Organizing special events and ceremonies can also reinforce the identity of a place (Habib & Khastoo, 2014). 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.

This study examines the impact of social and cultural 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).

The mentioned indexes in social and cultural contexts are examined by collecting data and studying the functional components, while the relation between these two variables is surveyed. Mosques have the ability to strengthen social interactions and the development of functional networks (formal and informal) and social capacities through various social and religious functions and activities. Religious gatherings that are mostly organized spontaneously will encourage social interaction. On the other hand, people who regularly meet each other in the mosque during the day or through these gatherings are more likely to know each other and establish communications. This communication may be an important factor for individuals to collaborate in solving each other's problems.

The social components affecting the performance of mosques in urban neighborhoods are studied in five main categories:

The formation of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organization), voluntary organizations and centers in mosques;  
Programs and collective activities and the way residents participate in them;

The possibility of establishing communication between residents and local leaders through mosques;

The possibility of establishing communication between residents and custodians of mosques;

Financial state and income of local mosques. (Table 4 and Fig.2)

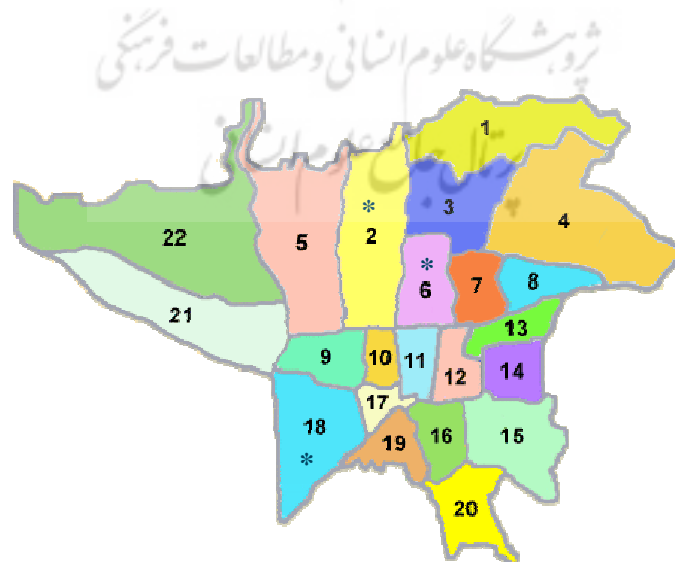


Fig. 1: Tehran and three neighborhoods of its districts (Municipality of Tehran, 2011)



Table 4: Frequency distribution of the social components of mosques

Variable	Average	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Minimum value	Maximum value
Social components	3.41	3.48	3	0.70	1	5
Azmayesh neighborhood	3.24	3.3	3	0.73	1	5
Sindokht neighborhood	3.15	3.20	3	0.69	1	5
Valiasr neighborhood	3.8	3.8	3	0.73	1	5

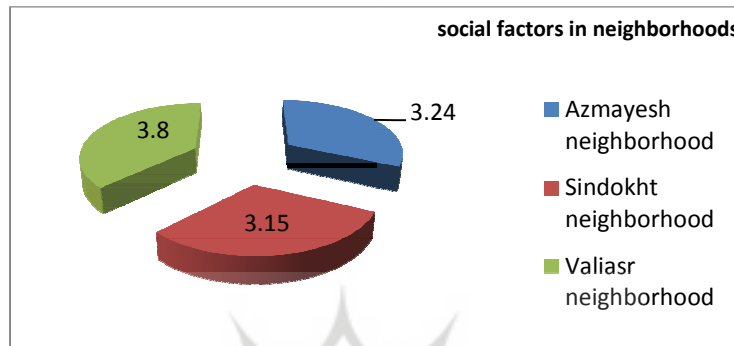


Fig.2: Comparative evaluation results of social factors in the three neighborhoods

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 the or etical definition. According to this research, the functionality of Valiasr neighborhood mosque was the greatest and after that, mosques in Sindokht neighborhood and Azmayesh neighborhood, in order, had the least functions. (Table 5 and Fig.3)

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

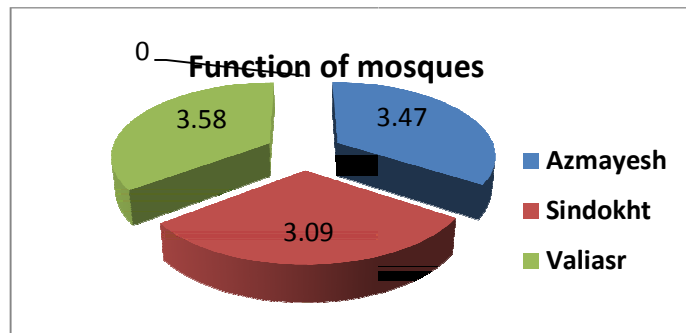


Fig.3: Comparative evaluation results of functional factors in the three neighborhoods

According to the studies on the factors listed above, they can affect the function and performance of mosques in urban neighborhoods and influence 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 strong correlation between the two variables in a way that the intensity of correlation is equal to 0.750 and the direction of this relationship is positive. This means that with the increase of social factors, the function of mosques also increases. 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 more formation of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organization), organizing public events, and establishing communication between residents and local authorities and leaders, besides having a good financial condition. Moreover, according to the level of meaningfulness that is equal to 0.00, the assumption of a significant relationship between social factors and the function of mosque has been approved.

analyzed by the SPSS. The research results revealed that social and 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 forming NGOs, public and private, group activities, interaction between local leaders and residents, communication between local inhabitants and custodians of the mosque and financial support and mosques earnings. 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, sense of belonging to community and religious affiliations. 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.

Table 6: Correlation between social factors and the function of

variable	Pierson R	level of meaning fulness	sum
Social factors and the function of mosque	0.750	0.00	163

## 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) were used. The communities and mosques of Tehran consisted of 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 Northen Valiasr from District 18 were identified. After the variables were determined, 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. Social and cultural 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

## ENDNOTES

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) 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
5. This can be explained by referring to the history of mosques in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. Mosques would act as a place for guidance and support of Iranian activities in this time. Also, in many Muslim countries, especially Pakistan, mosques are active during the day and provide Quran education programs for all ages engaged.
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