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Original Research Article

Conceptualizing the Role of Streets as Collective Spaces in the Enhancement of Qom's Urban Landscape: A Cross-Case Analysis of Shah Hamzeh Passage, Eram Pedestrian Street, and Salariyeh Square*

Hamideh Abarghouyi Fard[1**]
Meymanat Perseh[1]

1.Department of Landscape Architecture, School of Architecture, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Urban public spaces are fundamental to the socio-cultural vitality of cities. Among these, streets transcend mere traffic conduits to serve as dynamic arenas for social interaction and lived experiences. However, rapid unstructured development in Qom, Iran, coupled with a reductionist planning perspective that prioritizes vehicular mobility, has severely marginalized the social and semantic functions of its streets. Addressing this gap, this study investigates how streets can be reconceptualized as catalytic public spaces to enhance Qom's urban landscape. Employing a qualitative cross-case methodology, the research establishes a conceptual framework linking public space, streets, and social life. Three distinct spatial typologies in Qom were analyzed via field observations and documentary analysis: Eram Pedestrian Way (a modern designed space), Shah Hamzeh passage (a historic, neighborhood-centric model), and Salarieh Square (a hybrid traffic-social node). Findings reveal that the socio-spatial success of a street depends on the synergy among the three moments of the social production of space: spatial practice, representations of space, and lived space. While the historic Shah Hamzeh passage demonstrates social dynamism through the alignment of these dimensions, the top-down physical management of Eram Pedestrian Way has diminished citizens' lived experiences. To resolve these urban deficiencies, the study advocates a holistic paradigm shift, proposing a public space-oriented strategic development plan and a spatial reorganization toolkit. This framework comprises three actionable phases: (1) spatial assessment and prioritization; (2) goal-setting based on community needs; and (3) systematic planning and design to rehabilitate existing urban corridors.

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** Corresponding author: hamide.abarghouyi@gmail.com , +989126998223
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Introduction

Today, public space has become a central focus for urban managers, professionals, and scholars in urban studies as the primary setting for the formation of social life in cities. Public space constitutes the socio-spatial structure of urban life and encompasses multiple dimensions shaped by diverse social, economic, and political forces, while simultaneously being produced and sustained through the agency of urban managers, designers, and citizens (Abarghouyi Fard et al., 2022, 85).

Collective space, as a desirable state of public space, is defined by the presence of meaning, the formation of social interactions, and shared activities (Abarghouyi Fard et al., 2020, 23). Typologies of public space, based on physical and functional characteristics, include various forms such as main city squares, recreational squares, promenades, traffic squares, public parks, plazas, memorial sites, markets, streets, playgrounds, open gathering spaces, greenways, everyday spaces, and others (Carr et al., 1992, 79; Gehl & Gemzøe, 2001, 87).

Among these, streets are the principal public spaces of the city the arteries through which urban life flows. When we think of a city, the first image that comes to mind is often its streets. The intermingling of social classes, civil liberties, communication, and commerce all depend upon the vitality of streets. Indeed, the decline in the performance of public streets may ultimately lead to the decline of the city itself. Public streets and pedestrian ways are among the few spaces that allow for spontaneous public expression and unplanned political activity (Jacobs, 1992, 29; Nissen, 2008, 1132; Kohn, 2004, 3).Accordingly, addressing the social and civic role of passages and streets beyond their traffic and circulation functions is of critical importance. Whether in their modern configuration or in their traditional form as gozars (passages), streets function as transformative components that significantly influence the urban landscape and the social and civic life of the city.

In the city of Qom, the issue of collective space within streets and passages holds particular significance. Due to rapid recent urban development, collective and leisure spaces suffer from substantial deficiencies both in terms of quantity and spatial distribution, as well as in the provision of service facilities. Addressing the social dimensions of space in Qom is especially crucial given factors such as the cultural and demographic heterogeneity of neighborhoods, the city's bipolar structure characterized by center–periphery disparities and resulting social tensions (Rabbani et al., 2003, 102–105), and the impact of socio-spatial segregation between native and migrant districts on social capital (Ziari et al., 2018, 51).

At the strategic level, although objectives such as "access to safe urban environments and spaces" and "smooth, balanced, and healthy urban mobility" are separately emphasized in Qom's Vision Plan 1414, shortcomings remain. These include the one-dimensional perception of streets as purely traffic spaces and the reduction of collective space to interior environments such as libraries (Qom Vision 1414, p. 169). Meanwhile, a substantial portion of Qom's public spaces consists of streets and urban passages that generally lack desirable quality and require more comprehensive planning and intervention (Qom master Plan, 2003).

Therefore, examining the role of the street as a form of collective space in enhancing Qom's urban landscape is of considerable importance. By extending and contextualizing the theoretical literature on collective space in relation to the dependent variables of streets, social vitality, and urban landscape enhancement, this study seeks to answer the following question: How can a focus on the street as a transformative public space embedded within the urban landscape inform strategies, policies, and actions aimed at improving the historic urban landscape of Qom?

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Research Method

The present study adopts a qualitative approach based on a cross-case study methodology. In order to conceptualize the role of collective street space in improving the urban landscape, a conceptual model was first developed through library research, establishing the relationship between collective space, social life, and streets. Subsequently, based on findings derived from field observations and documentary analysis, three cases in the city of Qom—Eram/Enghelab Street, the historic Shah Hamzeh neighborhood passage, and Salariyeh Square—were examined. Drawing upon this analysis, context-specific strategies and policy recommendations for enhancing Qom's urban landscape are proposed.

Theoretical Framework

• The Theory of the Production of Space: The Process of Spatial Formation and Transformation in the Urban Landscape

Influenced by Marx's philosophical perspective on the analysis of economic structures in society, Henri Lefebvre (1991/2014) elaborates the social dimensions of space through his theory of the production of space. He argues that space is both abstract and concrete, and that the production of space occurs socially. In order to overcome the traditional dualism between real (material) space and mental (conceptual) space, Lefebvre maintains that space is a social product, and that every society produces its own distinctive spatial configuration. What must be foregrounded, therefore, is the process of production rather than the objects existing within space although process and product are inseparable (Madanipour, 1996, 341–342).

Specific spatial arrangements are the outcome of political practices, social systems, divisions of labor, and distinct modes of production (Castells, 1993). From this perspective, space is not merely the end result of social relations but the ongoing site of their formation. Planned social change becomes possible only through transformations in the modes of spatial production. In the modern world, the production of society occurs through the production of space; capital accumulation itself is realized through spatial production (Carlos, 2015).

Within this framework, Lefebvre interrelates the physical, mental, and social dimensions of space, distinguishing between abstract space and social space. Accordingly, he conceptualizes three "moments" of social space as follows:

- Spatial Practice: This dimension encompasses material and physical flows, circulations, transfers, and interactions that occur throughout space and ensure the reproduction of social relations and social life. Spatial practice gradually and continuously produces and regulates the space of society.
- Representations of Space: This refers to space as conceived by planners, professionals, architects, geographers, and developers. It is closely associated with relations of production and the order these relations impose. Representations of space constitute a conceptualized and abstract space that embeds ideology within practice. Control over representations of space implies control over how space is produced, organized, and consumed.
- Representational Spaces (Lived Space): Representational spaces—or lived space—assign new meanings to spatial practices. Lived space is the space of everyday life, where complex interactions between mental and social dimensions occur. It embodies the simultaneity of material form, social function, and hierarchical structures (Lefebvre, 1991/2014) (Fig. 1).

The process of formation and transformation of collective spaces within urban landscapes can be evaluated and interpreted through the

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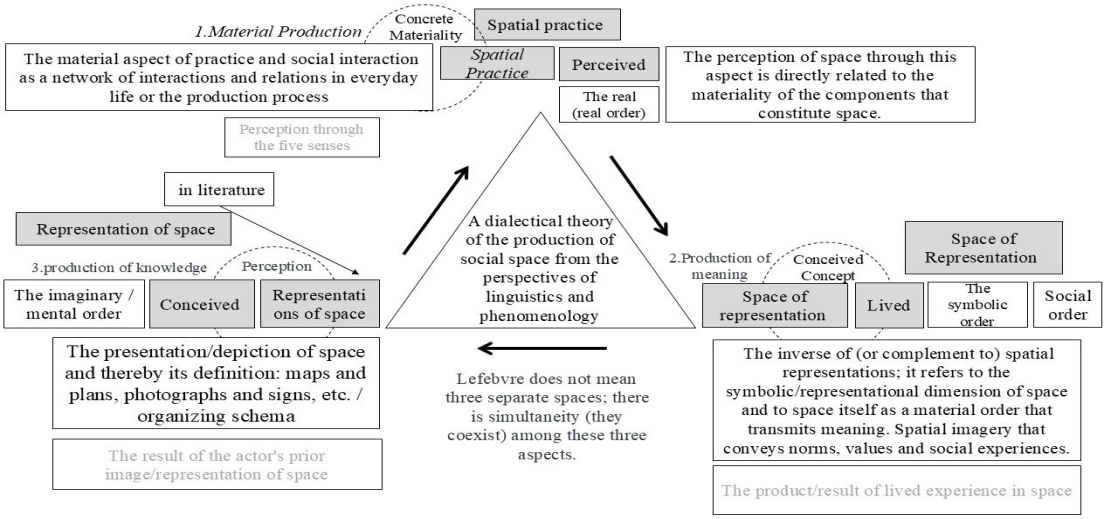

Fig. 1. The three dimensions of space spatial practice, representational space, and representations of space. Source: Author, adapted from Lefebvre, 2014.

lens of the theory of the production of space. The emergence and development of the street as a collective space may be understood as the outcome of the simultaneity of the three dimensions of space. Likewise, the gradual transformation, expansion, and role of space in shaping and transforming the urban landscape are influenced by the dynamic interplay among its physical, social, and planned dimensions.

• Collective Space as a Transformative Component in the Formation of the Urban Landscape

Today, public spaces, as a social and civic necessity, a driving force of urban economies, and a setting for both individual and collective urban experiences, have evolved into multidimensional and strategic urban arenas. Consequently, a renewed wave of interest in public space as a critical urban concern has emerged among professionals and urban managers. Over time, public space has evolved from being perceived as a mere external and physically empty setting, or simply an accessible domain representing the material manifestation of the public sphere, into a multifaceted, contested, processual, and relational phenomenon centered on human experience (Abarghouyi et al., 2023, 42).

Public spaces exist across multiple scales and levels from small-scale physical streets, squares, and parks to neighborhoods, cities, and even entire countries. Therefore, the design of public spaces within cities, even at a macro scale, can significantly influence public life at the micro scale (Liu, 2021).

Collective spaces, characterized by meaningful and symbolic qualities (Hatuka, 2010; 2012; Rishbeth, 2020, 32; Madanipour, 2003; 2006, 187; Goheen, 1998, 479) and multifunctional structures (Carmona, 2010b, 171; Lefebvre, 1991, 39; Neal, 2009: 10, 208–209), constitute one of the fundamental components shaping the city and its landscape, and possess significant potential to enhance urban quality of life.

Although the urban landscape is defined as an objective–subjective phenomenon resulting from the interaction between humans and the environment encompassing physical, functional, and symbolic dimensions most urban development studies and plans have predominantly focused on the functional (programmatic) and physical (design) dimensions. Attention to the symbolic dimension of the city has often been mediated through a dominance of physical considerations (Mansouri, 2010, 31–32).

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Similarly, discussions concerning the position and role of collective spaces in urban landscapes have frequently overlooked the multidimensional nature of the city and the character of collective space as a multi-actor system shaped by diverse stakeholders. Carmona (2010a–2014), through synthesizing and critiquing recent theories of public space, categorizes the pathologies of contemporary public spaces as neglected space, attacked space, deprived space, consumption space, privatized space, segregated space, isolated space, invented space, fearful space, and homogenized space (see Carmona, 2010a–2014). Taking a broader perspective by examining the contested nature of the city and its spaces and aligning these insights with prior pathological studies it can be concluded that, in many cases, the primary cause of the inefficiency of collective spaces lies in the orientation of power distribution and spatial allocation in favor of one of the spatial agents, such as managers, developers, or even users, within broader political, cultural, and economic processes. These power dynamics directly influence the performance, aesthetic dimensions, physical characteristics, and spatial regulations of collective spaces.

• The Street as a Collective Space

"Think of a city… What comes to mind? Its streets. If a city's streets look interesting, the city looks interesting. If they look dull, the city looks dull" (Jacobs, 1992). Among all public spaces, streets emerge as the most public of spaces. Streets are engines of economic activity, social centers, and platforms for civic participation. They bridge socio-economic divides and strengthen social cohesion (Carr, 1992); they are responsive, accessible, democratic, and multifunctional. Therefore, streets have been the most widely used public spaces throughout civilizations (Brower, 1996).

Streets play a crucial role in shaping the structure and everyday life of cities and occupy approximately one-third to one-half of urban areas. Although streets function as primary infrastructure for mobility, access, connectivity, transportation, and the provision of urban services, beyond these roles, streets of all kinds in both historic and contemporary cities constitute the most immediate and inclusive public spaces, supporting countless cultural, economic, political, and social activities.

Urban scholars increasingly emphasize the need to shift the perception of streets from mere spaces of movement to social institutions and places. Accordingly, a city's streets are considered a measure of the quality of its urban landscape. Traditionally, streets have been recognized as spaces that seek to balance the need to support livelihoods with the need to manage space for other activities. However, by prioritizing automobiles over other users, they attempt to maintain this balance (Roever & Skinner, 2016). This approach has led to major street revitalization movements worldwide, such as "Livable Streets" and "Complete Streets" (United Nations Human Settlements Program, 2013). Transforming streets to achieve social, economic, and environmental outcomes has become one of the most cost-effective and accessible strategies in recent decades, implemented by urban managers through policies such as permeable streets, pedestrianization, and similar interventions.

"By revealing poverty and inequality, city streets move toward integrating all segments of society, thereby representing the diversity of people, actions, and identities, as well as democratic interaction. In general, social streets make neighborhoods and cities more community-oriented, more civic, more inclusive, and ultimately more livable and sustainable" (Mehta & Bosson, 2021, 171; Boddy, 1992, 125).

As a collective space, the street is recognized

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as "a culturally, socially, economically, and politically diverse space ambiguous, constantly changing, interactive, full of complexities and contradictions, and endowed with multiple meanings for everyone" (Mehta, 2013, 1–2). Urban streets have become contested arenas in the mixing of different land uses and represent both challenges and opportunities for urban life (Von Schönfeld & Bertolini, 2017, 48). Streets, squares, plazas, parks, and other public spaces possess the potential to become stages upon which the drama of collective life unfolds (Carr et al., 1992, 3).

Accordingly, the street can be understood as a particular type of collective space that, by virtue of characteristics and capacities such as the possibility of personalization and a sense of occupancy, proxemics and personal distance1, feelings of comfort and pleasure, safety, environmental and physical comfort, usefulness and convenience, diversity of goods and services, sensory enjoyment, sense of belonging, countless users, multiple meanings, and territoriality (Mehta, 2013, 62–165), is capable of performing successfully as a collective space.

Criteria for the Effectiveness of the Street as a Collective Space

With the city being defined as a place of exchange, dialogue, and interaction by prominent thinkers such as Mumford (1961) and Lofland (1998), public spaces gain significant importance as settings that enable such qualities. In its weakest social form, public space provides the opportunity to experience the pleasure of being alone in a crowd without direct social interaction and to achieve a sense of emplacement through shared humanity with strangers (Mitchell, 2003, 131; Mehta, 2019, 25; Carr et al., 1992, 3; Walzer, 1986, 470; Rishbeth, 2020, 32–33). Similarly, the street, as a social space, can serve as a place for solitude, rest, and contemplation (Mehta, 2013, 2).

On the other hand, the most pronounced form of social experience in space collective space is associated with the formation of a sense of place, a sense of belonging to the community and the space, enduring social relationships, social capital, civic participation, and the symbolic recognition and shared ownership of space (Relph, 1976, 36; Ramlee et al., 2015, 363; Mehta, 2014, 59 & 2019, 29–31; Hester, 1984; Oldenburg, 1989; Madden, 2010, 190; Kohn, 2004, 11; Mansouri & Atashinbar, 2014, 16).

Given the definition of collective space as a setting in which collectivity acquires meaning and social interactions take shape, the street can be considered a suitable manifestation of the concept of collective space. The issue of spatial design in the urban realm has increasingly emphasized both human and environmental dimensions. In the past, some professionals, including architects and urban designers, focused more heavily on spatial practice and the physical dimensions of space, prioritizing personal taste, intuition, and aesthetic judgment regarding form and space. However, in recent decades, with the growing prevalence of interdisciplinary approaches, the simultaneous planning and design of the environment alongside the study and analysis of human behavior has gained attention.

Although normative definitions of collective space are not always accurate in assuming that similar spatial patterns necessarily lead to social success, certain broader principles are commonly acknowledged in defining collective space. Within this perspective, collective space where the social and civic life of the city flows dynamically is understood through three components: physical form, function, and meaning, emphasizing the relationship between humans and the environment (see Abarghouei Fard et al., 2023, 42).

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In defining the model of the street as a collective space, however, these components are articulated more specifically. Among them, the following can be mentioned:

• Designing the street as a gathering space through easy access, reducing traffic speed and volume, encouraging people to sit along the street, widening the street for movement and gathering, providing shelter and shade, appropriate street furniture, and lighting after dark.

• Making the street attractive for all users, including children, the elderly, and low-income individuals.

• Preserving gathering spaces through measures such as encouraging independent businesses.

• Making the street complete and self-sufficient by accommodating various occupations, offering unique environmental goods and services, and promoting nightlife.

• Transforming the street into a pleasant place through personalization of shopfronts and the street environment, and creating articulated and permeable facades.

• Enabling the appropriation of the street by all stakeholders, including users and business owners, and encouraging their participation in management and governance (Mehta, 2013, 188–201).

As one of the most important urban public spaces, a street can be effective only when it embodies a set of effectiveness criteria. First, the street must provide a setting for social interactions and collective life (Jayakody, 2018); a realm where diverse social groups encounter one another and where the symbols and cultural images of society can be expressed (Thomas, 1991, 210). This characteristic transforms the street into a stage upon which the drama of everyday life unfolds (Carr et al., 1992, 3). Accordingly, streets can function effectively as collective spaces when, alongside fulfilling their mobility role, they maintain and strengthen their social function in a balanced manner (Table 1).

Discussion

The city of Qom, in addition to being one of the major religious centers, has historically played the role of a transit corridor along the edge of the desert, connecting important cities in northern and southern Iran. Today, Qom has transitioned from an inward-looking, compact city enclosed within fortifications and organized around a historic core into a contemporary urban entity. The transformations associated with modern urbanization in the development of Qom and its elevation to a metropolis have followed a rapid process, shaping its current spatial structure (Ark Saeedi Nia, 1987, 143–169).

The rapid and often hasty growth of Qom in recent decades has clearly manifested itself in its physical appearance through spatial and morphological disorder. Although in the early stages of the city's formation, service centers and public amenities were largely influenced by the city's size and the extent of their service areas and the city's cohesion, limited scale, and spatial organization within an

Table 1. Summary of the criteria for the effectiveness of the street as a collective space. Source: Authors, 2025.

Effectiveness Component	Criteria for the Formation of the Street as a Collective Space
Physical	Appropriate location, physical quality, environmental comfort, physical safety
Function	Attractiveness and multiplicity of functions, functional integration
Meaning	Human scale, universal accessibility and spatial justice, inclusiveness, absence of rigid boundaries and provision of a neutral setting, balance between the collective and the individual, narrativity, reference to the past
Human–Environment Interaction	Indeterminacy, multiplicity, difference and diversity, unfinished design, patterning and fixed rhythms, expressiveness of environmental stimuli Vitality, spatial security through social surveillance

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acceptable distance facilitated accessibility at present, the city's accelerated expansion, coupled with limited financial resources and insufficient organizational capacity, has led to the fragmented and scattered development of such urban centers (Qom Comprehensive Urban Plan, 2003).

Similarly, the streets and collective spaces of Qom lack clear organization and typological definition. Accordingly, with the intention of preserving the diversity of collective spaces under study in Qom, three cases have been analytically and diagnostically examined:

• Eram Street, located within the vicinity of the Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh, at a regional and urban scale;

• Shah Hamzeh neighborhood passage, at a local scale and situated within the historic fabric;

• Salariyeh Square, located in the more contemporary part of the city.

These cases have been investigated through an analytical and pathology-oriented approach (Fig.2).

Eram Street in the Vicinity of the Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh;

From a Driving Force of Urban Development to an Obstacle to the Development of Social Life

A Collective Space Exclusively for Tourists and a Contradiction with the Concept of Collective Space as a Setting for the Meaning-Making of Society

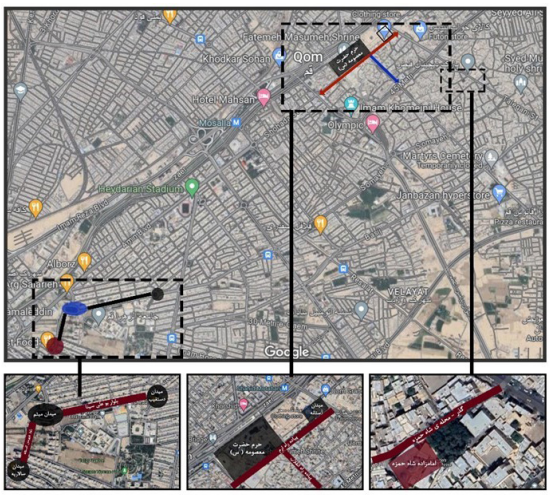

Fig. 2. Location map of the case study areas: Eram Pedestrian Walkway, ShahHamzeh Neighborhood Passage, and Salariyeh Square. Source: Authors, 2025.

The Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh is recognized as one of the driving forces behind the development of the city of Qom, which in its early stages was located outside the urban boundary. The expansion of the Astaneh neighborhood as the center of Qom dates back to 1301 AH (Hijri lunar calendar). During this period, part of the activities of the old center—Meydan-e Kohneh (the Old Square) was transferred to the new center, which gradually developed around the shrine (Saeedinia, pp. 143–163).

In the contemporary period, the significance of the Shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh in the process of Qom's growth and development has been such that, according to the Qom Comprehensive Plan, proximity to the shrine has been identified as one of the factors contributing to increased land values (Qom Comprehensive Plan, 2003).

In the course of Qom's expansion, the holy shrine and its surrounding axes have gained considerable importance due to the concentration of commercial activities. With the formation of new connecting routes and the establishment of commercial and service activities around the shrine, land uses have become increasingly concentrated at this location. This concentration has been particularly evident along the main and older axes, including Eram Street and Chahar Mardan Street (Qom Comprehensive Plan, 2003). Accordingly, one of the main programs of Qom's structural and strategic plan has been to remove unnecessary land uses from the city center and reduce congestion and density in the central area and around the holy shrine. This objective has been pursued through the construction of the "Haram-to-Haram" axis, with the intention of allocating part of Eram Street to a pedestrian-oriented corridor (Qom Comprehensive Plan, 2003) (Fig. 3).

Although the implementation of urban projects

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Fig. 3. Concentration of commercial activities around the Eram Pedestrian Walkway. Source: Authors, 2025.

aimed at improving the quality of use for users in this significant area is necessary, the conversion of Eram Street into a pedestrian corridor through the restriction of vehicular access is questionable. The pilgrimage and religious function of the area, along with its associated requirements, has generated such attractiveness in the central part of Qom that, on the one hand, it has prevented the widespread decline of this part of the city, and on the other hand, it has reinforced the dominance of central functions within the city's spatial structure (Soleimani, Kamanroudi, & Ahmadi, 2019, 20).

The findings of Mosammam et al. (2016) indicate that, compared to other streets in Qom, Eram Street is more suitable for pedestrianization due to factors such as its linkage between the two main elements of the shrine and the bazaar, the presence of diverse land uses, access to parking facilities, appropriate length and width, vitality and the substantial presence of pedestrians and pilgrims, suitable slope, and other characteristics. Similarly, Rafieian et al. (2011) highlight the positive impacts of pedestrianizing Eram Street in terms of physical, functional, and perceptual dimensions.

Nevertheless, several criticisms have been raised regarding this project, including: the negative impact of security gates located along the middle of the pedestrian route on spatial vitality; the excessive walking distance for elderly users; the inefficiency of facilities such as electric shuttle vehicles (Inspection Gates…, 2023); the intensification of vehicular and pedestrian traffic problems; the transformation of adjacent areas into parking spaces for cars and motorcycles; the removal of the shrine and the bazaar from the list of public spaces regularly used by residents of the Astaneh neighborhood due to more difficult pedestrian access; the economic stagnation of shopkeepers resulting from the restriction of their customers primarily to tourists and pilgrims; and the weakness of public transportation in providing easy access as a fundamental infrastructural issue (Emami, 2018; Listening to…, 2018). The cumulative outcome of these issues has been the exclusion of Qom's citizens from the spectrum of users of the Eram pedestrian zone, effectively limiting it to tourists and pilgrims. Accordingly, some urban managers have also acknowledged the problems associated with the Eram pedestrian project and have emphasized the necessity of reorganizing traffic within the central core of Qom (Implementation of…, 2019; The Situation of…, 2024).

The pedestrianization project of Eram Street exemplifies the negative impact of the dominance of the "representation of space" by experts and developers over lived space, through intervention in spatial practice. In this project, large-scale interventions such as restricting access without providing adequate infrastructural facilities to ensure citizens' comfort have altered spatial practice understood as the constructive interactions that produce space. Consequently, the collective space and the social life unfolding within it have been causally affected by this transformation.

Excessive commercialization and the limitation of space users to tourists, resulting in the over-touristification of the passage as a collective space, have undermined its social nature and generated traffic-related problems as well as weakened accessibility an essential characteristic of public space. Moreover, the subordination

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of the street to the shrine's entrance and access restrictions has led to the decline of the street's primary role in providing urban connectivity. Secondary outcomes, such as the weakening of existing economic forces along the street frontage due to shopkeepers being deprived of part of their regular clientele namely local citizens have further contributed to the reduction of the social role of the passage (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. The negative impact of the dominance of physical criteria in assessing the success of the public space on Eram Street. Source: Authors, 2025.

Salariyeh Square: The Transformation of a Traffic Roundabout into a Nighttime Collective Space

Salariyeh Square is located in a neighborhood of Qom that was formerly the site of the historic Salariyeh Garden. In the past, Salariyeh Garden was recognized as a prominent garden and functioned as one of the city's breathing spaces. Even older residents recall it, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, as one of the city's recreational spaces (The Tragic…, 2022).

The Salariyeh neighborhood has held a distinctive position within Qom, and the residential areas adjacent to it possess higher land values compared to other parts of the city (Qom Comprehensive Plan, 2003).

Today, the so-called "brand" identity of the Salariyeh neighborhood and the collective image held by citizens of it as a former collective space, together with the vitality of the green space within the square and the active land uses along the surrounding street frontages, have contributed to the emergence of nighttime social life within the square.

As a result, during the time span from sunset to midnight, the square transforms from a traffic roundabout located at the intersection of three main streets and fundamentally serving the role of facilitating urban circulation into a space where social life unfolds and flows (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Salariyeh Square: an example of the emergence of vibrant social life within a traffic roundabout despite the space's limited physical capacity. Source: Authors, 2025.

The emergence of Salariyeh Square as a collective space within Qom's nighttime urban landscape can be interpreted as follows: the influence of individual human actions by society has been addressed within social science theories such as structuration theory6. In the specific case of Salariyeh Square, this perspective may be understood to mean that the repeated use of a public space despite its not particularly remarkable physical characteristics by a group of individuals leads to its gaining recognition and legitimacy in the eyes of other citizens.

From the viewpoint of designers such as Jan Gehl,

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one of the key reasons for the success of collective spaces lies in their vitality and the presence of other people (Gehl, 2011, 19–23; Gehl, 2013, 98–102), since humans, as social beings, tend to seek shared spatial experiences with others. Alongside other physical and functional attributes such as environmental comfort resulting from greenery, high accessibility due to its location at the intersection of several major arteries and streets, and the presence of certain attractive service functions such as restaurants these factors have contributed to enhancing the square's nighttime role as a collective space.

The secondary and nighttime function of Salariyeh Square as a successful and well-recognized collective space within Qom's urban landscape can be interpreted through the predominance of lived space over representations of space and spatial practice. In this interpretation, the shared lived experience of citizens has transformed a traffic roundabout into a representational space of social life albeit temporally despite the fact that its spatial practice, in terms of physical form and function, possesses limited capacity, and that the spatial representation conceived by urban managers and planning experts in Qom assigns it merely the functional role of a circulation roundabout.

Given the existence of numerous similar examples of spontaneously formed collective spaces, proponents of the idea of the natural and organic emergence of urban life argue that capturing the rhythm of everyday life in public and collective spaces within a single fixed model is impossible, and that no specific physical structure or managerial approach can guarantee the creation of successful public spaces.

Shah Hamzeh Neighborhood Passage: [7]

The Transformation of the Concept of Passage from Movement to Pause in the Form of a Successful and Sustainable Neighborhood-Center Corridor

Shah Hamzeh neighborhood is located in District 1 of Qom Municipality, which, according to Ziari et al. (2018), falls within the relatively advantaged zone of Qom in terms of indicators such as health and social capital conditions that stem from the relatively high social, economic, and cultural status of its residents. Nevertheless, undeniable infrastructural problems and signs of physical deterioration are evident, including the presence of 83% unstable and deteriorated buildings and 50% of passageways with widths less than six meters, as well as dead-end alleys in the historic central fabric of the city (Soleimani et al., 2019, 20).

The Lab-e Chal neighborhood was the initial nucleus and point of formation of the Islamic city of Qom (Marsous, 2003, 73), and even today, through the holding of numerous religious rituals and ceremonies, it plays a significant role in preserving the religious identity of Qom.

The old city of Qom, as a result of its gradual development, possessed structural and physical coherence in its urban form. In such cities, narrow and sometimes covered passageways were shaped in accordance with climatic needs. In contrast, recent urban expansions intended to respond to contemporary urban demands have introduced wide streets and traffic-oriented squares lacking a coherent physical identity, leading to a decline in the legibility and clarity of urban spaces (Qom Comprehensive Plan, 2003).

Passages constitute the principal communication routes within historic urban fabrics, playing a significant role in guiding pedestrian movement and accommodating key functional elements and activities along their edges. In this way, they created places for social interaction and leisure (Sho'leh & Yousefi Mashhoor, 2019, 85). In

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historic Iranian cities, the passage, as part of the hierarchical urban structure, functioned as an element of cohesion, integrating the city and its neighborhoods into a unified whole and elevating the concept of the city from the mere physical juxtaposition of components to meaningful relationships among them (Abarghouei Fard & Mansouri, 2021, 25).

The physical and semantic connections within the public space of the passage, its identity-forming and balancing role through the coexistence of neighborhood center(s), open spaces, and movement corridors, transformed it into a public space embedded within Iranian cities. The presence of historically attractive elements, small-scale urban open spaces, rich collective memory, an appropriate relationship between mass and void, and the hosting of social and historical events have been the main factors enabling the flow of social life within historic passages of Iranian cities (Abedini & Aivazian, 2021, 85).

Shah Hamzeh neighborhood, located in the heart of Qom's historic fabric, represents one of the still-vibrant and successful neighborhoods among Iranian cities. The historic passage of this neighborhood is a credible example of the social role of historic passages as dynamic and successful collective spaces particularly neighborhood-center passages as an enduring urban tradition in Qom.

Features contributing to the social success of this historic passage include the presence of successful and well-known businesses at the city scale; valuable social destinations and places at both local and urban levels, such as the Shrine of Shah Hamzeh; the holding of religious and ritual events; and the participation of the neighborhood board of trustees in local governance (Qom | Shah Hamzeh…, 2018).

Among the characteristics and capacities that have supported this passage in performing as a collective space are constructive environmental qualities emerging from human–environment interaction, including indeterminacy, multiplicity and diversity of physical structure, patterning and fixed rhythms such as the regular holding of religious and ritual events, and an "unfinished" design rooted in the self-regulating and flexible nature of traditional neighborhoods. Furthermore, the social and cultural characteristics of the residents as the primary users of the space within a cohesive community have generated features such as social dynamism and vitality (face-to-face encounters within the passage or gathering nodes); spatial security through social surveillance by residents ("eyes on the street," in Jacobs' terms); the domestication and familiarization of space through personalization of the physical environment to meet specific needs and activity patterns; and the social endorsement and realization of symbolic collective ownership through coordinated actions of individuals in interaction with the environment.

Despite the relative success and social vitality of the passage, certain weaknesses are evident, including the lack of diverse and up-to-date environmental stimuli, as well as the need to organize vehicular movement and provide parking spaces to enhance environmental security for users issues that require municipal decision-making and intervention.

Overall, the central passage of Shah Hamzeh neighborhood represents a clear example of the interweaving of the three dimensions associated with the social production of space. In this particular case, society by producing a space aligned with its own specific nature not only engages in the spontaneous creation of distinctive spaces but also reproduces itself through the production of such space (Fig. 6).

Accordingly, the superimposition of

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Fig. 6. ShahHamzeh Neighborhood Passage: the role of the passage as a successful public space and neighborhood center. Source: Authors, 2025.

fundamental characteristics such as human scale, the organic formation of the passage, and its social role in historic Iranian cities alongside the participation of local institutions within a small-scale community framework in neighborhood governance manifests itself in the production of the social and multifunctional space of the Shah Hamzeh passage.

This condition reflects the concurrent growth and evolution of lived space in alignment with spatial practice. As a result, the structuring of the neighborhood as an independent physical–social entity in the true sense of the term has enabled the passage to transcend its conventional meaning as merely a space of access between two points. Instead, it has been elevated to a secondary role as a place of pause, gathering, and collective meaning-making that is, as a collective space.

In such a context, with the neighborhood taking shape as a cohesive whole, the influence of external factors including urban management interventions in the passage as the beating heart of the neighborhood has been minimized (Table 2).

Conclusion

The study of three street cases with a functional collective space context (1) a modern and designed pedestrian street; (2) a historical passage format; (3) a focus around a traffic focal point and urban square in the city of Qom shows that the street, as an important component of the urban landscape, has two main roles: first, a functional and primary role as a traffic organ and urban space for creating connections between two points; and second, a secondary role as a collective space, meaning a platform for the formation of social life for citizens if it possesses environmental, human, and functional capabilities. The success of the street as a collective space depends on the degree of coherence among three moments of social space production, which includes three aspects: spatial practice (material and physical flows and constructive interactions of space), lived space (the lived space resulting from daily life and user interactions), and representations of space (the conceptualized space by specialists' planning and developers).

Considering the research objective, some policies and strategies are proposed in the form of developing a strategic development plan based on public space-collective space and a toolbox for efficiently reorganizing streets and passages to improve and enhance the landscape of Qom city, focusing on the collective spaces of the streets. These two tools, within the framework of prototyping, serve as an example for executing a project to reorganize the collective space of a street in Qom as a testable model. The strategic development plan includes rules and strategies encompassing three stages:

1. Monitoring, identifying, and prioritizing streets into three categories: (1) successful streets, (2) unsuccessful streets with potential, (3) streets

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Table 2. Comparison of the reinforcing and inhibiting factors affecting the formation of collective space in the case studies of Qom. Source: Authors, 2025.

Case Study	Inhibiting Factors in the Formation of Collective Space	Reinforcing Factors in the Formation of Collective Space
Eram Street	Non-human scale of space Restricted accessibility Monopolization of space in favor of tourists Disruption of the connection between the shrine precinct and the city Lack of spaces for pause and destination points	Pedestrian orientation Attention to tourism capacity Creation of attractive commercial spaces Provision of appropriate environmental and physical comfort Consideration of the pilgrimage function of the place
Shah Hamzeh Neighborhood Passage	Unresolved issue of vehicular presence Insufficient attention to the neighborhood's tourism potential due to the presence of the Shrine of Shahzadeh Hamzeh, etc.	Development based on the preservation of historic structures Fostering community participation among neighborhood residents Creation of spaces for pause and destination points Effective presence of the semi-private sector in service of the local community
Salariyeh Square (Meysam Roundabout)	Traffic exceeding the square's capacity during peak times Insufficient pedestrian presence	Establishment of attractive active frontages Provision of adequate pause spaces within the center of the square Social mixing and diversity of users Attention to both nighttime and daytime urban life High accessibility

lacking value based on (a) global criteria related to human interaction with the environment in the success of public space in alignment with (b) lessons learned from successful historical and contemporary examples in Qom (Table 2).

2. Setting short-term and long-term goals for designing and planning the streets in the first two groups based on criteria such as performance scale, influence area, functional structure, target community to achieve success criteria for streets as collective spaces.

3. Planning, designing, and executing include planning to improve implemented designs such as pedestrian pathways to address issues like traffic problems, polarization of users, and monopolization of space through the approval of certain rules regarding land uses and accessibility, enhancing existing valuable collective spaces by addressing all deficiencies from lack of shade and greenery as the most basic issues to adopting a holistic approach to create an inclusive space in terms of audience and integrated agency of urban management-society.

Endnotes

1. The Production of Social Space.
2. Spatial Practice.
3. Representations of Space.
4. Representational Space.
5. Service facilities and activities in the city of Qom are generally located along the edges of urban thoroughfares and within the centers of residential settlements, and in some cases at a larger scale within the surrounding open spatial environments. Consequently, due to their largely dispersed distribution across the urban surface, localized concentrations can be observed in the central areas of Qom and within its public spaces. Similarly, spaces associated with leisure activities such as recreational, promenadebased, and cultural activities do not follow a specific spatial organization across the city and are instead distributed in a scattered and limited manner across different urban locations (Qom Comprehensive Plan, 2003).
6. Structure is a mental construct that represents the system of practical reasoning in the course of human action (Hasani & Mousavi, 2012: 149). According to the concept of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of practices that are recursively organized (Giddens, 1985: 168; Giddens, 1984: 25 & 64).
7. In Iranian cities, a gozar (passage) refers to the covered section of local bazaars where neighborhood service functions are located. Many neighborhoods in Qom are commonly identified by such passages, including ShahHamzeh Passage, Jadda Passage, and Haj Hossein Passage.

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