

Original Research Article

# Pathology of the Role and Position of the Street in Urban Development Plans in Iran

## Case Study: Bala khiyaban and Paean khiyaban Streets in Mashhad\*

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### ABSTRACT

The historical city of Mashhad has faced the emergence of new streets in two periods, first in the Safavid period and then in the contemporary period. For the first time, Safavid created a new structure for the city by building a street (Charbagh) connecting the gates of the city so that the role of traffic in it was secondary. This axis can be considered the most important social center of the city of Mashhad until the modernist interventions of the Pahlavi period in Mashhad. In the period until today, with the emergence of urban development plans such as the master plan, the streets were widened, and this was noticed with the advent of cars, which are known as transportation organs in the conventional reading. In recent years, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, to revive the lost meanings and roles of the street, published the regulations for the design of urban roads.

To investigate the impact of this regulation on the revival of the street's role in development plans, the current research raises two questions: 1. What is the approach of urban development plans to defining the role of urban streets? 2. To what extent has the urban street design code been effective in redefining the role of the street? Why?

For this purpose, this research investigated and compared the role of the street (Bala khiyaban and Paean khiyaban) in the historical city of Mashhad in two phases: pre- and post-interventions of the master plan, and examined the position of the street in each period. The results of the research show that the partial approach of the master plan to the city is the reason for the reduction of the role of the street to mere access passages. The modernist approach of the master plan recognizes the street as merely connecting the functional zones of the modern city. This research underscores the need for a paradigm shift in urban development plans, recognizing the city as a whole entity, to prevent the reduction of the street's role to mere access passages. Otherwise, similar regulations will not lead to significant changes in the role and status of city streets.

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## Introduction

The historical city of Mashhad has faced the emergence of new streets in two periods, first in the Safavid and then in the contemporary period. In the first period, Bala khiyaban and Paean khiyaban streets were built based on the model of Safavid Charbagh Street in Herat, Qazvin, and Isfahan, and until the intervention of urban development plans, this axis was considered a symbolic axis of the approach to the holy shrine. The expulsion of two streets from the center of the shrine, called Bala khiyaban and Paean khiyaban Street, was the design of the spatial structure of the city, which branched from the center, and the role of traffic in them was secondary. In the next period, with the emergence of urban development plans such as the master plan, the streets were widened and noticed with the advent of cars, which are known as transportation organs in conventional reading, and this process has continued until today. To redefine the role of urban roads, the Supreme Council of Architecture and Urban Planning of Iran published urban road design regulations<sup>1</sup> in 2019. Some of the goals mentioned for this regulation are:

- Updating the concepts, approaches, and methods of designing urban roads based on the principles of sustainable transportation
- Revision of the criteria for the design of the urban road network with a human-centered approach.
- Attention to the different roles of urban roads, including traffic, social, and environmental roles
- Integrating cities' communication networks and optimizing the use of different ways of travel, including walking, cycling, public transportation, and private cars (Aeeynname-ye..., 2020).

Although the strengths and positive aspects of urban street design regulations can be attributed to their attention to streets' non-traffic roles, this study examines the paradigm governing urban development plans through an analysis of modernist master plans' pre- and post-intervention. Based on this premise, the role of streets will be studied and examined. Accordingly, the following questions are raised:

- What is the approach of urban development plans in defining the role of urban streets?
- To what extent has the urban street design regulation been effective in redefining the role of the street? Why?

As an element that has the largest share among all types of urban public spaces and forms an important part of the city's spatial structure, urban roads are of great importance in the design and development of cities.

Roads have been the center of the social, cultural, and economic life of cities since their formation, but these roles have changed and disappeared to some extent with the spread of modernism. This change was considered the basis for the design of roads around the world, taking into account the numerous and wide crossing lanes for cars and the little space for pedestrians. In this way, many city streets became primarily corridors for the movement and presence of all kinds of vehicles, especially private rides. Adopting the same approach in the design of the roads of our country's cities in the past years has caused the social and pedestrian role of the streets to fade, resulting in a lack of attention to public transportation and endangering the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. The previous attitude, i.e., supplying the demand for the use of private cars, has caused excessive attention to this mode of travel in the cities of the country. The negative consequences of car-oriented planning and design of roads and the efforts made to deal with the problems caused by this design method have led to the emergence of new issues of sustainable urban transportation and, as a result, changing the priority of travel methods in recent years. Is. The latest planning approaches are also reflected in the design of the urban road network, which has led to the development of pedestrian, bicycle, and public transport-friendly streets in developed countries and limited the movement of private rides (*ibid.*, introduction). The issue of revising the "Urban Road Design Code" based on the principles of sustainable transportation has been on the agenda of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development since the end of 2016, and its implementation was assigned to the research vice-chancellor of Tehran University.

## Street From An Urban Planning Perspective

The word urbanism, which has been equated to urbanism since 1965 and the establishment of this discipline, with the suffix "build," which gives an active and external meaning, has been taken into account as a category that can be built from the outside and through an independent agent. The modern and scientific definition of the city recognizes it as a phenomenon that must be nurtured for transformation, just like the human soul. The change of the city, like the change of man and society, cannot be done except by the will of the citizens. Therefore, instead of urban construction, which is equivalent to urban planning, urbanism is used, which refers to the occupation and treatment of the city and not its construction. Based

on this thought and the transfer of modernist urban planning in the form of a comprehensive plan, the form-based approach was codified in law. In the first approved master plan of Tehran, which was prepared in 1969 by "Victor Gruen," traces of the reduction of the city as a whole to the arrangement of buildings and the search for their location are evident. The collapse of Tehran's spatial organization, including its historical and activity center and organized neighborhoods throughout history, was the result of a change in the view of the city from "an organized whole of historical life in harmony with the environment" to "a collection of buildings and streets with designated uses." Naturally, the first thing that was damaged in the change of view of the city planners was the "system" governing the components of the city and then its "face" (Mansouri, 2024, 7).

The "Farmanfarmaian -Victor Gruen" master plan is the most important document that has been influential on the development trends of Tehran in the past few decades, especially in terms of physical development. The detailed plans of the city were also prepared promptly based on the generalities presented in the technical plan of Tehran Municipality by the public. After the approval of the Article 5 Commission, they were implemented step by step. Of course, the implementation was subject to many changes and revisions. The area of development and the network of major roads and urban arteries are the most important parts of the implementation as a result of the proposals of the master plan and the detailed plans mentioned (Farivarsadri, 2009, 35).

In the new definitions of urban planning concerning the street, attention can be traced to the various functional dimensions of the street. This process was followed in the form of urban design with regional and environmental approaches, but the noteworthy point in all of these is the dominant approach (paradigm). A comprehensive examination of the multiple layers of a city will not lead to an understanding of the city as a whole. The city is a whole, which means that it has both objective (material) and subjective (non-material) aspects at the same time (subjectivity and objectivity). It is alive due to the presence of humans and is perceived by humans. According to the nature and identity of the city as a whole, knowing and studying the city requires choosing a holistic approach to understand it correctly. Among the different perspectives that study and examine the city, the system approach looks at it from an angle that recognizes it as a single entity, purposeful, and composed of interrelated components.

In other words, a reading is closer to the reality of the city and examines it from the point of view of a system approach that is closer to the overall nature of the city. The systematic approach of science is the study of wholes. In other words, the system approach considers the knowledge of each phenomenon dependent on the perception of its entirety. According to this view, the city is a whole: a system consisting of various semi-independent components, each of which has a role in achieving a specific goal, and about each other, they form a concept called the city in the mind of their audience. In the systemic approach, the whole is more than the collection of parts (Farshad, 1983, 15).

### Street From Landscape Perspective

The urban landscape refers to a process that is the result of the contact level between man and the city. Therefore, humans not only affect the urban landscape through their actions and activities in the structure of the visual landscape of the town but also the behavior and subjective understanding of the citizens through contact with the urban landscape (Lazarevic et al., 2017,4). The complexity of the dimensions of the city caused the systematic approach to be considered a scientific tool for analyzing and identifying the elements of the town. The studies conducted in the field of the spatial organization of the city are among these efforts that introduce the street as the main identifier of the city's construction. The street is considered the main element of the town and a sub-system in the spatial organization of the city. Due to the variety of its components, it is a complex system that follows the following rules:

- The street is a whole.
  - Street elements are interdependent and not independent from each other.
  - The order of the street expresses the relationship between its elements.
  - The street has sub-systems that act in a hierarchical manner (Atashinbar et al., 2013, 95).
- The street view, as the citizens' perception of the city, has various dimensions that appear in the whole street. Reading the order of the street by including all the elements of the street in one system is an interpretation of the street view and the power that shapes the street (ibid., 95).

### Research Methodology

The current research method is a historical-analytical one that studies the evolution of the street by examining the commonalities and differences in its role. This

research examines the role of the street (Bala khiyaban and Paen khiyaban) in the historical city of Mashhad in two time periods: the first period, before the master plan, and the Second period, after the master plan. Then, based on their comparison, the study examines the position of the street in each period. The data used for the first period include library data, historical works, and travelogues as intellectual documents in different periods and as historical sources in the overall narrative of events. Then, by examining the records and reports, existing historical books, and urban documents in the contemporary period, the role of the street in the post-modern period of Iran is studied.

**• First period: pre-interventions of the urban master plan**

With the efficiency of the Safavid dynasty and the officialization of the Shiite religion in Iran by Shah Ismail Safavid, the city’s growth accelerated. The main fence of the town and the main streets, known as Bala khiyaban and Paen khiyaban street, leading to the two entrance gates with the same name, were built in this period. These two streets are in line with each other; one reaches the bottom of the Shrine of the Holy Prophet, and the other reaches the top of the holy shrine of the Haram, so perhaps it is known as the bottom of the street and the top of the street (Curzon, 1982, 35).

Rezvani writes in the book “In Search of the Urban Identity of Mashhad”: “Among his [Shah Abbas Safavi’s] most important measures was the expansion of the ancient court, the reconstruction of the tomb

of Khwaja Rabi, and the construction of the “street” (Bala khiyaban and Paen khiyaban) of Mashhad. The construction of Mashhad Street was the third street construction experience in Iran after Herat and Qazvin streets. In 1016 A.H., the order to build it was issued, and its construction lasted until 1023 A.H. In these years, due to the increase in the population of Mashhad and the lack of water, by digging aqueducts and adding Golasb spring water to them, making water flow in this three-kilometer street, and planting trees on both sides of this stream, this new street It became one of the important and attractive elements of the city” (Rezvani, 2015, 227–228). In the year 1020 A.H., this street was visualized as it was intended in the initial plan. This street “was 22 cubits wide and 2800 cubits long” (Seyedi,1999, 389) (Fig. 1). Although the creation of the streets creates a noticeable change in the growth trend of the city fabric and breaks the interwoven set of houses, quays, and markets in a straight line, in the end, the overall structure of the city is still cohesive (Behravan, 2001, 114).

Examining the writings in the next period, each of which refers to the conditions of their time and the reading scene, is interesting. Armin Wamberi, a Hungarian traveler, arrived in Mashhad on the first day of December 1242. He writes in his travelogue: “In Mashhad, we moved along the long and wide street called Banyan Khayaban towards Sahn Sharif. The wide waterway meanders through the city, and trees with pleasant shade are planted on its shores, presenting a pleasant sight. This is the feature that has made Mashhad one of the most attractive cities in

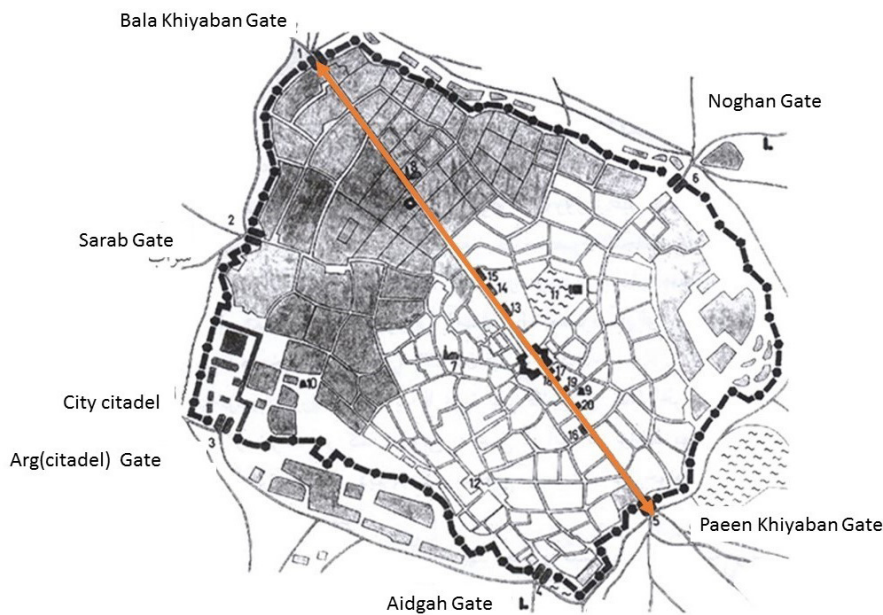


Fig. 1. Image of (Bala khiyaban and Paen khiyaban) Street of Mashhad in 1274 A.H. Sources: Seyedi, 1999.



Iran. The gathering of people representing all Asian races and followers of the Shiite religion gives the most interesting feature to the streets, which are full of the throbbing of life. Next to the mausoleum of the Imam, within a few hundred paces, is the center of the most confusing sights and sounds. A great number of men stand by their awnings or machines, or in front of shops, on both sides of the street, or in the streets, carrying their wares on their heads, shoulders, or hands, moving and making their way through the crowd. They do. This group commutes and enters or exits the city gate. At the same time, the important matter of pilgrimage goes through its flow with agility and a uniform delivery of words. Pilgrims who have completed the pilgrimage are called "Pilgrimages of Acceptance," and those who are at the beginning of the journey are called "Prayers." (Vambrey, 1993, 268).

- Colonel MacGregor of Scotland described the street (Chaharbagh) of Mashhad as follows: The characteristic feature of Mashhad is that it is a completely straight street with water running through it and trees planted on both sides of it. People bathe in this water, wash their clothes, and drink from it (MacGregor, 1989, 255).

Lord Curzon, the English statesman, spoke about the similarity of the street (Chaharbagh) of Mashhad with the Champs-Élysées, of course, from the point of view of Orientals: "There is a street (or boulevard) there, and in the eyes of the people of the East, it is the same as the Champs-Élysées. There is a channel in the middle. It is said that the edge of the canal, the floor of the street, and the bridges were built with stone in the past. On both sides of it (the canal), they have planted sycamore, mulberry, elm, and willow

trees irregularly.... on both sides of the trees is the sidewalk and then the shops in the market, which is very interesting" (Curzon, 1982, 215-216).

#### • **Second period; post- interventions of the master urban plan**

In 1350 (Solar Hijri), a master plan for the city of Mashhad, known as the "Khazeni" plan, was compiled for the first time. At the beginning of the second Pahlavi era, which coincides with a series of political and social events, the renovation plan around the shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.) was prepared voluntarily by the consultant BorBor in 52 and 53. The investigations of the BorBor plan show that the spatial and structural system determined in this plan is still based on the existence of the street, which emphasizes the existence of the key elements: streets where cars are generally considered a priority. On the other hand, Hazrati Square is based on the same radial structure on the first side of the plan (Samen Research Center, 2017, 35) (Fig. 2). With the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in 1357, the implementation of the Bor Bor project was practically stopped, and the green field remained in the area surrounding the shrine (Fig. 3). During the preparation of the second master plan of Mashhad by Mehrazan's consultant in 1372, it was stated that the center of Mashhad has a special value and importance due to the presence of the holy shrine of Hazrat Reza (A.S.), and on the other hand, it is exposed to Severe pressures are caused by population density and traffic, as well as rapid changes in form tissue. After Mehrazan's plan and the letter of the Minister of Housing and Urban Development at the time, under the leadership of the plan for the renovation and reconstruction of the fabric around the Holy Shrine of Hazrat Reza (A.S.) in 1374



Fig. 2. Cleaning the fabric around the holy shrine in 1354 based on BorBor's plan. Source: Samen Research Center, 2018.

and in an area of 360 hectares, it was prepared by TASH consultant that the approach of this complex is to destroy the existing fabric. And it calls for new physical replacements. After the resolution related to the revision of the modernization and reconstruction plan in the Article 5 Commission on May 12, 1978, a series of executive measures will be carried out within a 10-year period in context (Fig. 4), which will cause extensive changes in physical attributes and the socio-economic system of the region (*ibid.*, 45).

The urban design in Mashhad saw a significant change in the physical appearance and commercial activities when TASH proposed to widen the Bala Khaiaban and Paen Khiyaban (TASH, *Tarh andishan ...*, 1995, 56) without considering the preservation principles. These streets were the original heritage and historical axis of Mashhad. Additionally, the construction of the Sharistan ring, a 50-meter-wide thoroughfare around the shrine, was built to issue permits for commercial and high-rise residential buildings. This project aimed to draw new passages in the area, but its implementation assaulted the structure and systems governing the fabric, causing them to collide. Overall, the construction of Sharistan and the widening of the streets caused significant disruptions to the compact and small-scale context around the shrine.

## Findings and Discussion

The investigation of the focus of the study shows that the interventions carried out in the contemporary period, especially in recent years, have been mainly focused on the objective dimensions of the space, and the subjective dimensions and their meaning have been neglected (Table 1). The disintegration of the physical and active constituent elements that shaped the street in the contemporary period has disturbed the components of this system that were always aligned and played a role toward a single goal. On the other hand, the elements forming the street as a whole do not work in line with the objectives of this single whole, and each component works independently without considering the whole, which affects the overall order of the system and the relationship between the elements in general. It has transformed. In this case, the subsystems forming the street should act hierarchically in line with the overall goal of the system. For this reason, the landscape of Bala khiyaban and Paen khiyaban streets has been distorted in recent years and has lost its function and role to a great extent. In fact, during the period of tradition, the unity of the axis and the Holy Shrine played a role as a whole, which formed an organic order of relations between them, and social forces caused the formation of relations between urban components in this period. With the same reasoning,

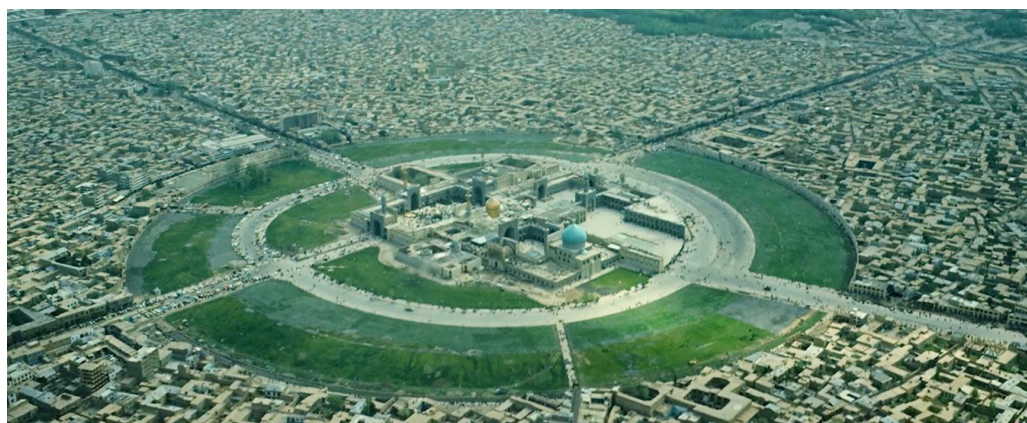


Fig. 3. Hazrati Square and Green Ring. Source: Samen Research Center, 2018.



Fig. 4. The development process of the Holy Shrine complex and the construction of an underpass around it. Source: Samen Research Center, 2018.



Table 1. Summary of the role of the street in the two phases before and after the comprehensive urban plan, based on the interventions and the characteristics of the street in each period. Source: author

	Interventions and activity characteristics of the street	The role of the street in the overall system of the city
Pre-interventions of the urban master plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The first serious intervention in the city of Mashhad with the construction of Chaharbagh Street (Bala khiyaban and Paeen khiyaban) in the Safavid period</li> <li>- Formation of the fabric of the neighborhoods around the shrine in an organic and homogeneous way</li> <li>- Existence of a hierarchical system of neighborhood, bazaar, and sacred place</li> <li>- Creating a dynamic and lively axis consisting of natural elements of water and trees</li> <li>- Two rows of plantain trees on the main street with shops, gardens, and houses along it</li> <li>- Completely straight street with the water axis in the middle, the main character of Mashhad city .</li> <li>- Bathing and washing clothes next to the water axis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The structural role as the skeleton and backbone of the city in the link between different components such as the center and the territory.</li> <li>- Emphasis on the centrality of the historical city.</li> <li>- Including major social activities related to pilgrimage.</li> <li>- Lively urban axis due to the presence of water and greenery.</li> <li>- The main gate connector of the city in shaping the territory of the historical city.</li> </ul>
Post- Interventions of the master urban plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The physical expansion of the city and the destruction of the old fence during the two periods of Reza Khan</li> <li>- The construction of Arg Street as the new city axis in the intersection with Balakhiyaban and the creation of the statue square</li> <li>- Change in the structure of the Bala khiyaban street and lower street axis by modifying the water axis canalization                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Construction of new streets in Tehran and Tabarsi</li> <li>- The construction of Hazrati Square</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Renovation of the old Safavid courtyard stone pavement with white octagonal stones and covering the stream in the courtyard</li> <li>- The advent of the car and the transformation of the street into boulevards that can be driven by cars</li> <li>-Cutting the trees on both sides of the street stream and covering the stream in 1345</li> <li>- Creating a green ring around the Holy Shrine and separating it from the city for the first time                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Construction of underpass</li> </ul> </li> <li>- The beginning of the project of renovation and reconstruction of the structure around the shrine and from the scattering of the organic system                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extensive destruction of houses and migration of native residents- Construction of buildings without regard to native architecture</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Converting residential small grains into large commercial and residential grains</li> <li>- Losing the sense of belonging of the residents-Increasing vehicle traffic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The role of car and pedestrian traffic with the priority of the car.</li> <li>-Producer of urban functional zones.</li> </ul>

in the Pahlavi period, the organic and unified system was gradually divided into several areas due to commanding forces. The result of the forces affecting the urban components in this period moves from the social forces to the governing forces. After the Islamic revolution, and especially in recent years, no single system can be found, and separate and multiple areas are formed, and less order can be read between them. In fact, in this period as well, like Pahlavi, the result of sovereign power and order shapes the landscape of the street. However, the difference with the previous period is that in the current situation, there is a conflict between the governing and social forces, which is a conflict. It has created many benefits (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2021, 76).

### Conclusion

In a historical city, the bazaar, or street, forms the main structure of the spatial organization of the town. In the contemporary period, urban roads with a focus

on transportation represent this role, so the concept of development is tied to city roads. In the process of renewing the city after the master plan of Mashhad, the role of the mentioned streets was reduced to transportation routes, which is considered one of the ineffective factors of the new urban planning. In general, by studying and examining the role of Bala khiyaban and Paeen khiyaban streets in the period before the master plan and after the master plan (contemporary period), it can be claimed that the general policy in urban development plans has ignored the role of the street as the main structure of the city in creating a connected whole and has reduced its role to a minimum by objectifying the street. The noteworthy point is that despite the sloganeering in the management and planning of cities after the Islamic Revolution, according to the available evidence, the general pattern and paradigm in the period of Pahlavi II and the period after the Islamic Revolution in the management of streets were almost similar, in such

a way that they transformed the streets from single wholes into multiple wholes and then into parts unrelated to the whole. The reason for this approach and similar policies can be found in following the comprehensive plan. The modernist approach of the master plan to the street is such that it only connects the functional zones of the modern city. This policy reached its peak in the period after the Islamic Revolution, so the street had no role other than transit and traffic. The reason for this peak can be seen as the lack of a specific approach, which is the result of the contradiction between the modernist point of view of the master plan and the ideological point of view of urban management after the Islamic revolution (concepts such as the justice-oriented city, etc.).

Suppose the reading of the historical city is based on the real and perceptive role and function of the citizens of the road network. In that case, it is possible to create hypotheses for revising the city's master plan. As long as the paradigm of the atomic world in urban development plans does not change to a holistic approach that sees the city as a single and integrated whole of interconnected parts, any regulation under it will lead to the revival of the main role of the street. It will not be in the city. Therefore, while the urban road design code is a valuable step forward for transportation engineering with today's approaches, it will not be successful in changing the role of the street to its main role in historical cities.

## Endnotes

1. One of the main challenges in the design of the urban road network is to solve the conflict between the traffic role and the social role of the road. Therefore, compiling a single reference based on the views of experts in the fields of urban planning and urban transportation can be an efficient solution to this problem. Therefore, in the various stages of drafting the revised version of the regulations, several meetings were held in the presence of experts from these two areas. After receiving and applying their opinions, the final content of the regulations was obtained. Finally, the revised version with the title "Urban Road Design Regulations" was approved in the 154th and 155th meetings of the Supreme Council of Traffic Coordination of the Country's Cities and then approved by the Supreme Council in the meeting dated 04/02/2019, when Iran's urban planning and architecture arrived. (Aeeynname-ye..., introduction).

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