

Evaluating and Analyzing the Livability Indices in Mashhad from the Views of Tourists and Pilgrims (Case Study: Samen District, Mashhad)

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Today, continued urbanization has become intertwined with social, economic, physical, and environmental issues and can be considered as a warning message on urban unsustainability. Meanwhile, other issues such as various types of pollutions, traffic, mental problems, etc. reduce the quality of life and subsequently, the livability of cities. As a result, the necessity and significance of sustainable environment and livability in cities are highly evident. Livability is a broad concept which is connected to a variety of other notions such as sustainability, quality of life, satisfaction, and healthy communities; it has been the focus of recent theories on urban planning that guides humans towards having more desirable cities for living and sustainable urban development, similar to other modern theories such as the capable city, creative city, sustainable city, and resilient city. As the spiritual capital of the Islamic world and the most prominent tourist-attracting city in Iran, Mashhad occupies a special place where it is necessary to pay attention to livability indices to attract more tourists, achieve a better ranking in terms of environmental indices and health, and offer

a secure and livable space for the city's permanent residents. The case investigated in this study is Samen District which is the financial, cultural, and tourism heart of Mashhad city due to the presence of the Holy Shrine, attracting tens of millions of both national and global pilgrims; subsequently, it requires special attention paid to livability problems. It also requires a comprehensive study to identify and analyze the livability indices in this region from the tourists' perspectives.

2. Review of Literature

Livability is a broad concept which is connected to a variety of other notions such as sustainability, quality of life, satisfaction, and healthy communities; it has been a dominant discourse since the 1970s when the limited attention paid to the health of the society sparked competition between groups over the ability to define the quality of urban life. Today, livability is the essential key that urban life lacks. The term, "livability" refers to the degree of a society's requirements based upon the needs and capacities of individuals living in that society. In a society with no livability, the needs of the population are ignored and overlooked. A livable city is where there is a connection

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between the past and the future, considering the respect given to groups of people who lived and will live there; it also battles wasting natural resources and attempts to conserve them for the sake of human survival. The physical and social dimensions of such a city cooperate together in line with the community's welfare and progress. Here, public spaces are where the people spend their social lives. Livability is also a set of features that transforms urban environment into an attractive place to live in. These features can be classified into two groups including tangible (access to urban infrastructure) and intangible (sense of place, local identity, etc.) features.

3. Method

This study serves applied purposes because the managers from various urban management organizations in Mashhad, particularly the municipality and Samen District, can use the results of this research. In terms of method, this inquiry is a descriptive-analytical study. Following a review of livability indices reflected in different studies, the Delphi technique was employed to classify the indices; subsequently, the conceptual model for the study was formed which involves the four social, cultural, financial, and environmental groups. Next, according to this conceptual model, the effects of more than one mediator variable is required to be tested in this study; therefore, structural equations (SEM) were used.

The population of the study are as follows: 1) Experts and professionals from Samen District municipality branch of Mashhad and Khorasan Razavi cultural heritage, handicrafts and tourism headquarters (n=25); and 2) The population to examine the effect of different factors on the livability of Samen District included the tourists and pilgrims (n=291). Considering the characteristics of the population, simple random sampling was used. Additionally, the required sample population for questionnaire distribution was indicated using Cochran's formula.

4. Results and Discussion

The results show that among social sub-indices, public security was found to have the highest effect on livability in Samen District. Clearly, security is the first and most important necessary condition for livability in a region; according to the views of tourists and pilgrims, the general security status of Samen District in Mashhad was assessed to be at a high level (Score: 4.19). Moreover, results also show that among cultural sub-indices, quality of pilgrimage services had the highest impact on livability in this district. As the findings showed, most of the examined tourists and pilgrims (70.1%) stated that their motivation has been pilgrimage, assessing the quality of pilgrimage services to be at a high level (Score: 4.07). On the other hand, findings suggest that among financial sub-indices, the place of residence had the highest effect on livability in Samen district. It was also obvious for accommodation conditions to follow security as the second most important aspect in livability of a regions. Additionally, findings demonstrate that among environmental sub-indices, traffic status was found to have the highest effect on livability in this district; accordingly, unsuitable traffic conditions results in wasting time and reduce the tourists' comfort levels. According to the examined tourists, the traffic status in Samen District was assessed to be at an undesirable level (Score: 2.48). Ultimately, results suggest that among the main livability indices, social and cultural indices had the highest and lowest impacts on the livability of the region, respectively.

5. Conclusion

As the second Iranian metropolitan city and the second religious metropolitan area in the world, Mashhad hosts numerous tourists and pilgrims with a variety of tastes and mentalities coming from various cities and countries with different cultures; therefore, focusing on urban livability is of substantial importance which require more attention and exploration through different aspects. Tourists would appreciate Samen District if it can reach a desirable level in terms of

financial, social, and environmental indices so that they can make use of their intended attraction to the fullest. On the other hand, the presence of tourists at a place may compromise livability, and it requires bilateral actions in line with increasing urban livability by both tourists and authorities. Given the critical approach adopted in

livability, the results of this study can respond to theoretical conflicts faced by planners and actors involved in the area of tourism and pilgrimage management in Iran and Mashhad City.

Keywords: Livability, Urban Planning, Religious Tourism, Semen District, Mashhad

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