WHAT IF? WHAT NEXT?

SPECULATIONS ON HISTORY'S FUTURES

SESSION 2B

ROUTES TO THE PAST

Authentic? History, Heritage and Matters of Veracity and Experience

SPATIAL LIMINALITY AS A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING REVITALISATION PROGRAMS IN HISTORIC IRANIAN CITIES: THE CASE OF THE IMAM-ALI PROJECT IN ISFAHAN

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This paper develops the theory of liminality as a guideline for evaluating revitalisation programs in historic cities. Since historic cities exist as a transitional phenomenon, spatial liminality is identified as a proper epistemological tool for their investigation. To do so, this article explores the association between socio-spatial vulnerability and dilapidated-abandoned buildings (DABs) through the lens of spatial liminality, which may occur as a result of implementing modern socio-spatial revitalization programs. An interdisciplinary approach was employed in this study, which recognises liminality as a condition of socio-spatial vulnerability applicable to historic cities. In this case, spatial liminality of Dilapidated Abandoned Building (DABs) in historic cities has become associated with the influx of non-local disadvantaged residents who compete for cheaper housing options while remaining in a state of limbo. The study is quantitative in nature and consists of a questionnaire survey and on-site observation. The investigation was conducted in three selected urban blocks, located in a significant urban tissue in historic Isfahan, which has gone through several revitalization schemes since the 1920s. Results demonstrate that the aftermath of revitalization programs has generated a significant association between the formation of DABs, the existence of refugee settlements and the overall distribution of liminal refugees. Such spatial liminality accompanied by the accumulation of refugees indicates that current revitalization programs have generated DABs, functioning as the liminal urban fabric. The study allows practitioners, policymakers and academicians to evaluate the negative aftermaths of revitalisation programs in historic cities, to move out of spatial liminality.

1. Introduction

Today, historic Iranian cities have become subject to an unprecedented phenomenon, initially occurring at the beginning of the 20th century when for the first time modernity was introduced in the Middle East. Here, the old city walls were demolished, and this development dramatically changed the physical-spatial configurations of historic cities.[1] It is essentially acknowledged that from the 1920s to 1960s exogenous socio-spatial movements reshaped historic Iranian cities. Ever since, traditional cities have been carved out and transformed under capitalism and modernity to accommodate vehicular access and modern infrastructure.[2] Therefore, historic cores in Iranian cities have mainly been subject to gradual decay, with an exodus of population and abandonment of buildings for more than half a century.[3] Respectively, a direct correlation between the modern urban transformation process and lack of urban identity can be identified in historic cities.[4]

As a result of unprecedented contemporary urban transformation, today large areas of historic fabric can be considered as dilapidated-abandoned buildings (DABs), while some disused areas have existed for several decades.[5] For example, in Kashan, about 12.7 percent of all historic areas are made up of DABs.[6] In Yazd, 15 percent of all historic fabric are surveyed as DABs which can attract poor communities.[7] In Isfahan, in the urban tissue located in the south of Imam Ali square (the subject of this research, see 4.1), 17 percent of the historic fabric was surveyed as DABs, while 34 percent of the existing buildings needed immediate repair, mainly accommodated by vulnerable residents who can not afford to maintain their houses[8] (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Today, the formation of DABs (mainly generated as a result of new road developments and revitalization programs) has become a major socio-spatial problem in historic Iranian cities, such as in Kashan (right), Yazd (left) and Isfahan (below). Source: author.

Inside Iranian historic cities, poor nonlocal residents and ethnic minorities are gradually occupying heritage fabric while original residents are leaving these areas.[9] For instance, the proportion of non-Iranian refugees in the urban tissue located in the south of Imam Ali Square

(the subject matter of this study, see section 4.1) forms 10 percent of its overall population.[10] Such an influx of refugees is strongly linked to the accumulation of cheaper housing opportunities inside historic areas.[11] For those whose lives are unstable in the diaspora, it is best to seek sanctuary within historic zones with minimal living facilities, which could be quite tolerable to them, either due to their original life in villages or severe poverty and homelessness[12] (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Refugee settlements within dilapidated-abandoned buildings can represent socio-spatial vulnerability inside historic Kashan (left), Yazd (right) and Isfahan (below). Source: author 2018.

1.1 Transitionality (Liminality) of Historic Environments and Their Inhabitants

As argued earlier, today the simultaneous growth of DABs and mass immigration of exogenous-disadvantaged communities (i.e. refugees) to historic areas can be respectively interpreted as a state of socio-spatial vulnerability.[13] Such transitory situations can form a deleterious phenomenon, through which inefficient revitalization models diminish the value of land, encourage emigration of original residents, and facilitates the immigration of non-Iranian disadvantaged communities. Such undesirable socio-spatial conditions have been suspended between traditional and contemporary urban contexts for some time, and this has created physical dilapidation, uncertainty, stigmatisation, racism, marginality, dissatisfaction on the part of residents, crime, and so forth.[14] Here, as a tangible aspect of socio-spatial vulnerability, refugees can be seen as people in limbo[15], involved in a state of liminality (separated from their previous condition and not yet incorporated into a new one), and therefore constitute a threat to themselves and the entire community.[16] Nonetheless, within the current literature, liminality (i.e. suspension of individuals or groups between two social statues) is essentially acknowledged as a spatial concept.[17] In this sense, spatial liminality could occur in a place (e.g. historic Iranian cities) due to the presence of liminal inhabitants such as refugees.[18]

Accordingly, in historic cities, the growth of DABs and accumulation of refugees need to be considered as a tangible sign of liminality, which reflects real-life vulnerability. Thus, the liminality of Iranian historic cities and their inhabitants can be related to the empirical evidence, i.e. measurables such as the extent of DABs and the proportion of liminal-vulnerable refugees.

Consequently, the broad aim of this paper is to provide an innovative-empirical method for understanding socio-spatial vulnerability associated with revitalization programs, by measuring the interconnection between DABs and refugees through the lens of liminality. The scope of research thus is limited to collecting and analysing such socio-spatial datasets in three urban blocks in a specific urban tissue located in the south of Imam Ali project (see section 4.1).

1.2 Socio-Spatial Revitalization of Historic Cities

Since the 18th century, several global movements have reiterated a need for revitalisation of heritage sites and cultural properties. Today, methods of urban revitalisation in historic cities may include several approaches, from mere preservation to physical intervention, or a combination of both.[19] Levels of intervention for the revitalisation of historic cities should be directed by cultural heritage value, and any intervention which would lessen/compromise cultural heritage value is objectionable.[20]

In Iranian historic cities, three major government agencies are in charge of regulating/managing heritage districts. Firstly, the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), which aims to provide and implement programs for the protection, preservation, restoration and revitalisation of cultural-historic sites and urban contexts in Iran. ICHHTO is also playing a local and central role for generating regulations and managing historic urban areas. The organisation is also responsible for providing feedback about strategic plans and detailed development/master plans, occasionally proposed by two other government agencies.[21]

Secondly, the Office for Urban Renewals and Improvements (as the executive arm of the local city council) acting under the auspices of the Ministry of State, which is in charge of developing innovative policies and decision making on everyday management of historic sites and old cities. The office's tasks include the preparation and support of NGOs, identity generation and development inside the city, by rehabilitating, reconstructing and renovating urban fabrics including historic zones. Current projects consist of micro-macro scale local revitalization programs, connecting both historic and deteriorated urban fabrics.[22]

Thirdly, the Urban Development and Improvement Company established under the auspices of the Ministry for Roads and Urban Development, which is a specialised holding corporation. The company aims to directly improve knowledge of urban management, renewal, development and the promotion of intellectual properties. It also aims to provide an assembly of passive policies/programs and community empowerment schemes, while at the same time following a series of active executive projects and providing a stimulating approach towards urban revitalization in historic areas. Accordingly, in the historic urban fabrics, the main objectives of the programs are presented in three sections including upgrading the public realm, neighbourhood revitalization and the promotion of local working groups.[23]

Not unlike ICHHTO, the other two government agencies can implement regulations and projects inside historic urban areas. Therefore, proposals can be highly influenced by organisational perspectives, and hardly correspond with each other. In practice, it seems that traditional urban fabrics as defined by ICHHTO noticeably characterise deteriorated urban fabrics as defined by other two urban agencies. Consequently, both definitions are critically entangled and barely operable. As a result, a need for representing new methods and facilitating innovative revitalization programs has become necessary.[24]

Today, revitalisation programs in historic cities have aimed to document historic contexts, provide building regulations, and define heritage buffer zones. Programs also have concentrated on pedestrianisation, place-making, façade restoration, repaving and revitalization of cultural-historic axes. Programs also focus on developing infrastructure, adaptive reuse of historic buildings, and have facilitated infill mixed-use buildings, identity generation and promotion of tourism activities[25] (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Current revitalization programs in Iranian historic cities, such as in Yazd (right), Kashan (left) and Isfahan (below) mainly have focused on enhancing physical structures rather than considering the grassroots of socio-spatial matters in neighbourhoods. Source: author.

Today, the rehabilitation of historic cities in Iran is not seen as a priority among relevant government agencies.[26] Such oversight can happen either because of the obsolete image of historic areas among the public or lack of technical-institutional capacity to come to grips with such a complex mix of problems.[27] Whether the issue is wholesale demolition or widespread neglect of DABs, the common problem is that most decision-makers identify with a development process that is alien to the cultural traditions of their societies. Here, the government agencies are rarely provided with technical approaches and institutional tools which could demonstrate the viability of appropriate models of intervention.[28] Therefore, the current revitalisation projects principally remain freestanding, bounded within physical structures and organisational-political perspectives, that lead to further devaluation of land and DABs.[29]

2. A Theoretical Framework for Revitalising Historic Iranian Cities

The dynamic of socio-spatial change produced by the Industrial Age found its physical expression in the radical transformation of the historic urban fabric in Iranian cities, despite the fact that during previous centuries changes in architectural fabric had always occurred as a result of the natural/organic evolutionary processes.[30] Such socio-spatial disruption generated an ever-widening chasm between past and future, which pulled present historic cities apart, emptying them of many essential qualities. Therefore, historic urban areas can be assumed to be entities suspended in-between pre-modern and contemporary epochs.[31] Moreover, the challenging presence of refugees in such informal refugee camps is evident in conjunction with the concept of liminality[32], which could represent the condition of permanent limbo.[33]

Here, such limbo can create vulnerability, where societies everywhere acknowledge transition in the social status of people, by symbolically noting their separation from a previous state in the social structure, and subsequent incorporation into a new social state.[34] Therefore, historic cities can be seen as liminal entities, because they accommodate uncertain conditions in life and settlement fabric.[35] In anthropology, liminality is used as a measure for evaluating vulnerability

of being limbo among human beings.[36] Correspondingly, this research suggests liminality as a proper tool for understanding socio-spatial vulnerability in the context of urban revitalization in historic cities.

3. The Application of Liminality in Urban Studies

Van Gennep first coined liminality in Les Rites de Passage (1909), translated into English as The Rites of Passage (1960). He distinguished rites that marked the passage of an individual or social group from one status to another (e.g. childhood to manhood), from those which mark transitions in the passage of time (e.g. harvesting time and New Year). [37] Emphasising the importance of transitions in any society, Van Gennep singled out 'rites of passage' as a special category, consisting of three sub-categories, namely 'rites of separation', 'transition rites' and 'rites of incorporation'. He called the middle stage a liminal period. He referred to transition rites as 'liminal rites', and the rites of incorporation 'post-liminal rites'.[38]

By analysing rites of passage, Van Gennep introduced a new approach: instead of utilising priori categories as units of his taxonomy, he abstracted these units from the structure of ceremonies themselves. He was impressed with the prominence of transitional-liminal phases within a ceremony. He noticed, within tribal rituals, that when individuals or groups are in a state of suspension (separated from their previous condition and not yet incorporated into a new one), they constitute a threat to themselves and the entire group. As such, they are outside the sphere of normal control and must be reintegrated to avoid becoming disruptive[39] (Fig. 4).
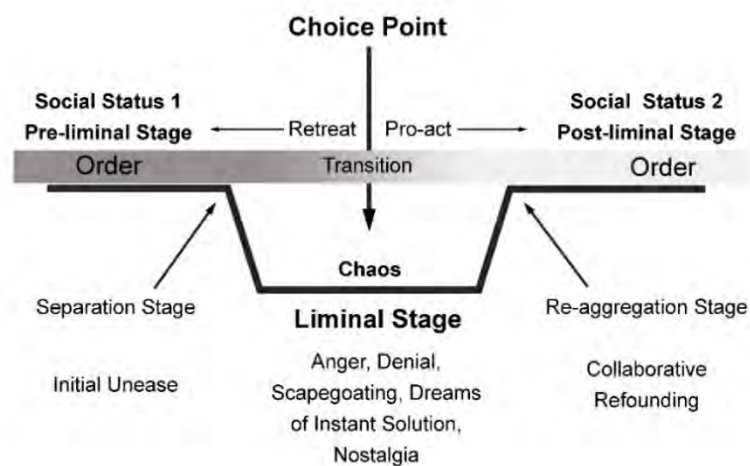
Figure 4: The three phases of liminality as described by Van Gennep (1960). Source: Author.

3.1 Place as the Third Dimension of Liminality

By coining spatial liminality, Thomassen indicates the third dimension of liminality as Place, moving beyond Van Gennep's dichotomy of Time and Event. Thomassen notes Van Gennep's specification that liminality is essentially a spatial concept; perhaps the physical passage of a threshold somehow preceded the rites that demarcate a symbolic or spiritual passage. Therefore, Van Gennep introduced his analysis of ritual transition by devoting a complete chapter to the territorial passage, and by asserting that 'a rite of spatial passage has become a right of spiritual passage'. This notion, in turn, represents an opening for 'theorising space'.[40]

A concrete manifestation of such liminal-spatial passage is the case of refugee camps, where characteristics of liminality apply to asylum seekers confined to refugee camps. Here, the loss and confusion experienced by refugees after separation from their homeland, unfamiliarity and strangeness of the refugee camps and uncertainty about the future create a social atmosphere of enigma, anxiety and timelessness for refugees, which cannot be overcome as long as they

remain in the camps. Therefore, refugees exist in a state of suspension where they have lost their former status as members of a community, but have also not been able to join members in the surrounding society in their new location. Here, 'one form of the refugee camp prototype takes the conditions of transition existing in refugee camps and attempts the transformation of refugees into new beings'.[41] Additionally, the accumulation of refugees and disadvantaged non-local residents is a widespread phenomenon experienced in many historic cities today. [42] Thus, referring to Van Gennep, Thomassen and Mortland, it is argued here that spatial liminality, in both historic areas and refugee camps, could be acknowledged as sharing several similarities.

Firstly, people who have been involved in both types of spatial liminality have inevitably turned out to be non-local migrants. Secondly, both types of refugees are living inside a segregated zone, generated by physical boundaries. For instance, at present, residents in core historic areas in Iranian cities can be seen to be semi-restricted/vulnerable, due to lack of vehicular accessibility, which is indeed comparable to physical barriers in refugee camps. Thirdly, in terms of physical qualities, both types of refugees are exposed to poor housing,[43] marginality and segregation. Fourthly, these people participate in real-life events, including compulsory and indefinitely deferred transition, to remain suspended between their previous social statuses and becoming a citizen of the new land. Fifthly, these two types of spatial liminality more or less occur on a similar scale, whether it be a real-life refugee encampment or several refugee settlements (e.g. clusters of houses) in the historic urban fabric. Finally, within a real-life liminality context, previous achievements, skills and statuses of exogenous communities, either living in a refugee camp or inside the historic fabric, no longer apply, while both are suspended.

## 4. Spatial Liminality as a Framework for Understanding Historic Cities

Thus far, this paper has identified spatial liminality as a deleterious condition of socio-spatial vulnerability, where non-Iranian disadvantaged communities tend to immigrate to historic cities, to obtain affordable housing opportunities to survive. This quality was elaborated earlier, intertwined with DABs that can create disorganisation, imbalance, a decline in socio-spatial characteristics and poverty.[44] Consequently, the argument here suggests spatial liminality as a theoretical basis for investigating the aftermath of revitalization programs, regarding vulnerability associated with DABs, the proportion of refugees and their settlements in historic cities.

Consequently, the current research aims to evaluate the liminality of places and their inhabitants within the boundaries of historic urban areas. Therefore, it contains an exploratory-interpretive case study that investigates a distinct phenomenon characterised by a lack of detailed preliminary research. To do so, the paper implements a mixture of methodologies. Firstly, a qualitative procedure is implemented for selecting reliable case studies. This, in turn, singles out three urban blocks that have gone through several significant revitalization programs since the 1920s (see section 4.1). Secondly, data collection and analysis of results, which evaluates the liminality of physical environments and their inhabitants via measuring several empirical datasets, and form the quantitative part of this research (see section 4.2). Such measurable are covering (1) the change of DABs (2008-2018), (2) the extent of refugee settlements and (3) the current proportion of refugees in selected urban blocks.

4.1 Case Study Selection

The paper aims to select an urban tissue in Isfahan by conducting a qualitative approach. As discussed earlier (see section 1) the process of demolishing historic areas for the purpose of creating vehicular accessibility was accelerated during the 20th Century in historic cities. The negative socio-spatial consequences of destructing traditional urban fabric in Isfahan (specifically regarding developments of new streets around the Friday Mosque) triggered since the 1920s to 30s. First, a straight road is imposed on the city in an arbitrary direction, cutting the main bazaar axis in two and passing usually near the Friday Mosque. Second, another straight road is cut at right angles to the first, also passing through the old centre and forming a square at the point of intersection[45] (Fig. 5).
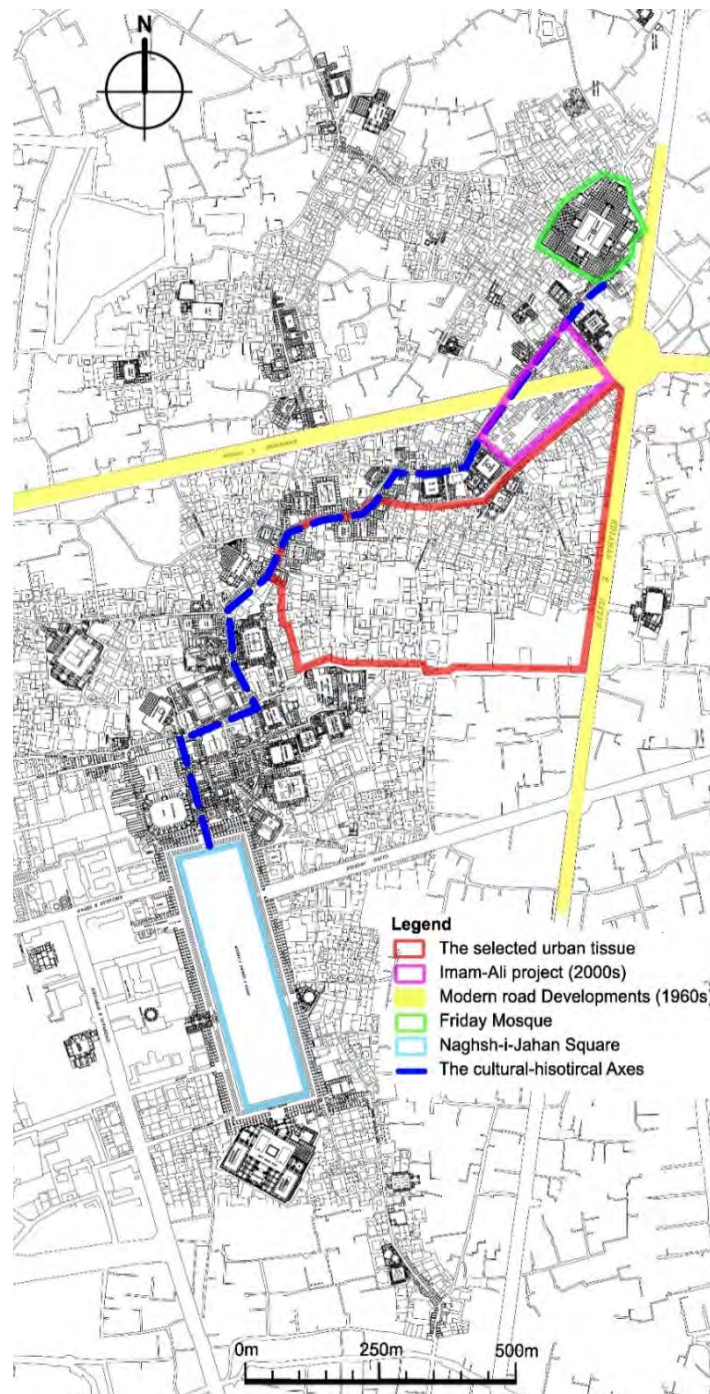
Figure 5. The strategic positioning of the selected urban tissue in historic Isfahan in relation to the 1920--1970s road developments, proposed socio-cultural axes, Naghsh-i-Jahan square, the Friday Mosque and Imam-Ali project initiated in the early 2000s. Source: generated by author.

About thirty years later Naghsh-i-Jahan Pars (NJP) consultants paid particular attention to historic cores, defined a strategic project for restoring the continuity of the cultural-historic pedestrian axes, and revitalising damaged historic areas close to the Friday Mosque (Fig. 6). The proposal recognises the necessities formally stated by scholars three decades earlier during the 1970s. In response to such issues, the NJP proposal cuts both streets at the intersection and move them to the underground level. Emam-Ali mega-project also demolished old structures in Meidan-i-Kohne, and instead introduced a large-scale pedestrian plaza at the ground level, and in conjunction with the historic-spatial arrangements corresponding to Naghsh-i-Jahan square. The

proposal made provision for underground vehicular accessibility, public transport and green spaces.[46]
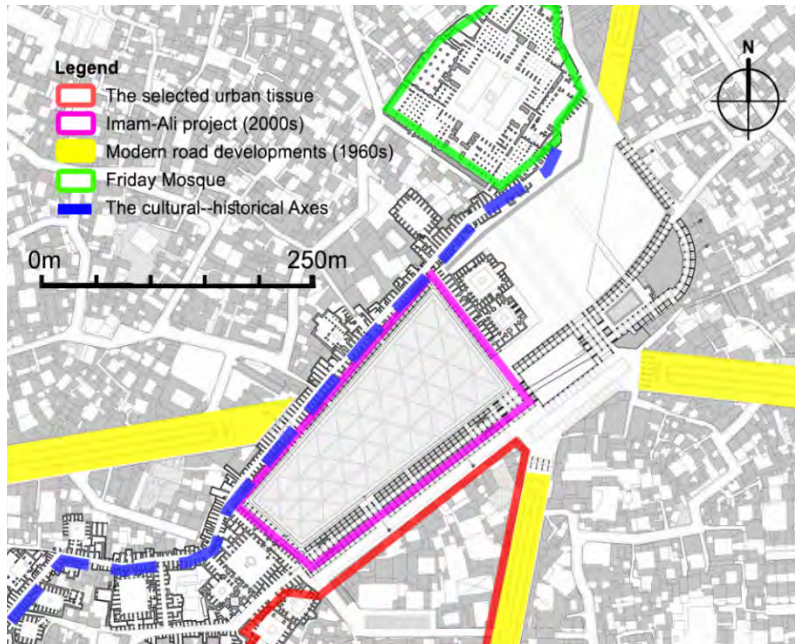
Figure 6. The ground level plan of the revitalization project by NJP in Imam-Ali Plaza (initiated in the 2000s), in conjunction with selected urban tissue (displayed by red lines) in this research project. Source: generated by author.based on NJP proposal.
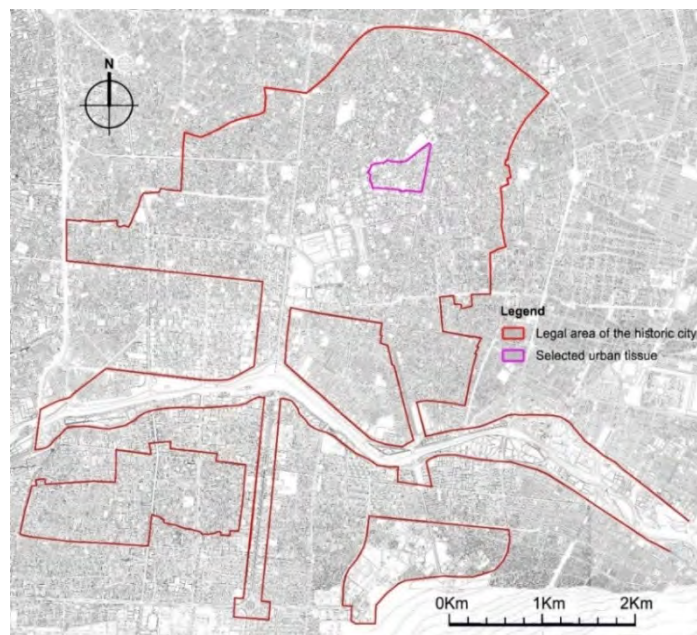
Figure 7. Historic context of Isfahan in conjunction with the selected urban tissue. Source: generated by author.

Correspondingly, in this paper, an urban tissue is selected for further studies, which has closely experienced both the road developments in the 1920s-1970s and large-scale vehicular revitalization programs of the 2000s, implemented by NJP consultants (Fig. 7). This case study can be seen as a post-mortem evaluation of large-scale revitalisation projects in the contemporary Iranian planning context. The area of DABs in this urban tissue is previously surveyed by Khod-Avand Consultants[47] (2008), which is used for further investigation in this research (Table 1).

Selected urban tissue	All dilapidated areas	All block areas (m2)	Percentage of dilapidation per block (2008)
Urban tissue in the south of Masjid-Ali	22629	197361	12%

Table 1. Calculating the overall percentage of DABs inside the selected urban tissue of historic Isfahan as per 2008 survey[48]

After selecting a reliable urban tissue, smaller urban elements that can be systematically investigated as actual case studies are selected. In historic cities, an urban block could be conceived as a group of several dwellings including semi-private and in-between spaces. Such clusters thus best represent the smallest identifiable urban component that forms traditional neighbourhoods, known as urban blocks.[49] During pilot studies conducted by the researcher (2018), in this selected urban tissue nine urban blocks were identified and numbered consecutively (see B-1 to B-9 in Fig. 8). Consequently, three urban blocks to be nominated for further study in this selected urban tissue, which should have developed a higher, medium and lower percentage of DABs per block, to capture the maximum variation of disused areas.

The selection criteria were based on two logical phases: (1) reliable size of urban blocks[50], and (2) intact quality of roads and physical structures, which can indicate public segregation, as a result of lack of vehicular accessibility. Thus, B-2 is considered as a case with a higher proportion of DABs, while B-1 and B-7 respectively are selected to represent cases with a medium and lower proportion of DABs (Fig. 8).

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Two primary methods of data collection were implemented in Isfahan (March--May 2018) by the researcher, included street surveys and field observations. As a result, two categories of data were gathered, namely spatial (factual) and demographic. Spatial data was collected via field studies along with the observation of non-participant behaviours, conducted simultaneously during street surveys. The field observations aimed to explore spatial adjacencies between DABs and refugee settlements[51], measure the proportion of DABs and examine areas accommodated by refugees in selected urban blocks (Appendix A1).

Demographic data was collected via street surveys conducted in selected blocks, while residents were surveyed as to their ethnicity (Appendix A2). Based on a method adapted from Mortland[52], this survey directly disclosed spatial liminality, generated as a result of revitalization programs since the 1920s, by measuring the conjunction between DABs and refugees in historic areas. Since the average number of properties (i.e. statistical subject matter in this research) in each sample block can reach about 60, the overall statistical target population reached about 200, wherein street surveys also needed to be conducted. In a statistical target setting with a population of about 200, the optimal sample size of about 20 properties (10 percent of the overall statistical population) seems reliable[53]. Thus, street surveys included 20 properties in selected urban blocks.

5. Results and Analysis

In all sample blocks, a close association was apparent between the formation of refugee settlements and the extent of DABs. The nature of such a correlation can be identified here as a type of coexistence, in which refugee settlement fabrics in almost all cases abut boundaries of DABs. Such spatial adjacencies may contain a partial or complete association. In many cases, refugee settlements may bridge the gap between DABs, and generate informal access between some thoroughfares, establishing socio-spatial interconnections between clusters of refugee settlements (Fig. 9).
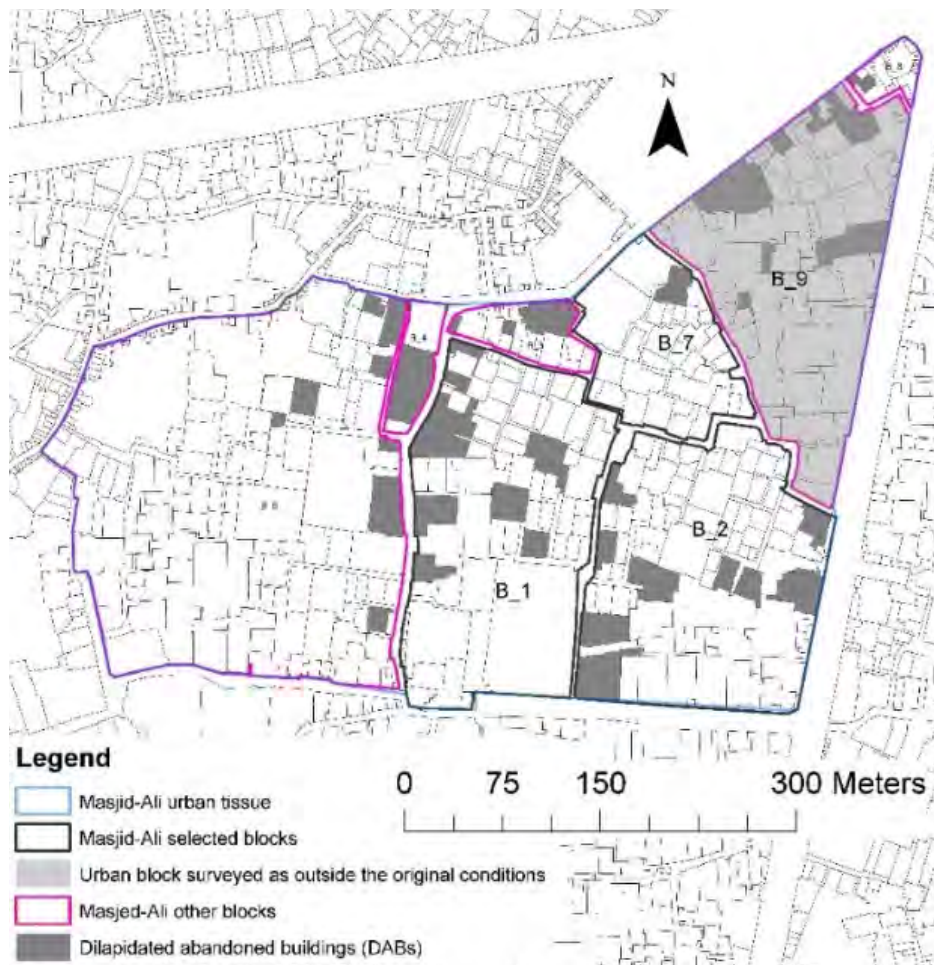
Figure 8. The map depicts a procedure for selecting three urban blocks in a pre-selected urban tissue, in historic Isfahan based on calculations by Khod-Avand Consultants (2008). Source: generated by author.

Legend

☐ Masjid-Ali Selected Blocks
☐ Masjid-Ali Other Blocks
■ Refugee Settlements
■ Dilapidated Abandoned Buildings (DABs)
■ Old Houses
■ Heritage or Public Buildings
■ Change of Land use to Industrial or Bulk Storage
■ Change of Land use to Hotels or Infrastructure
■ Newly-Built Houses (Less than five years old)
■ Multi-Storey Commercial
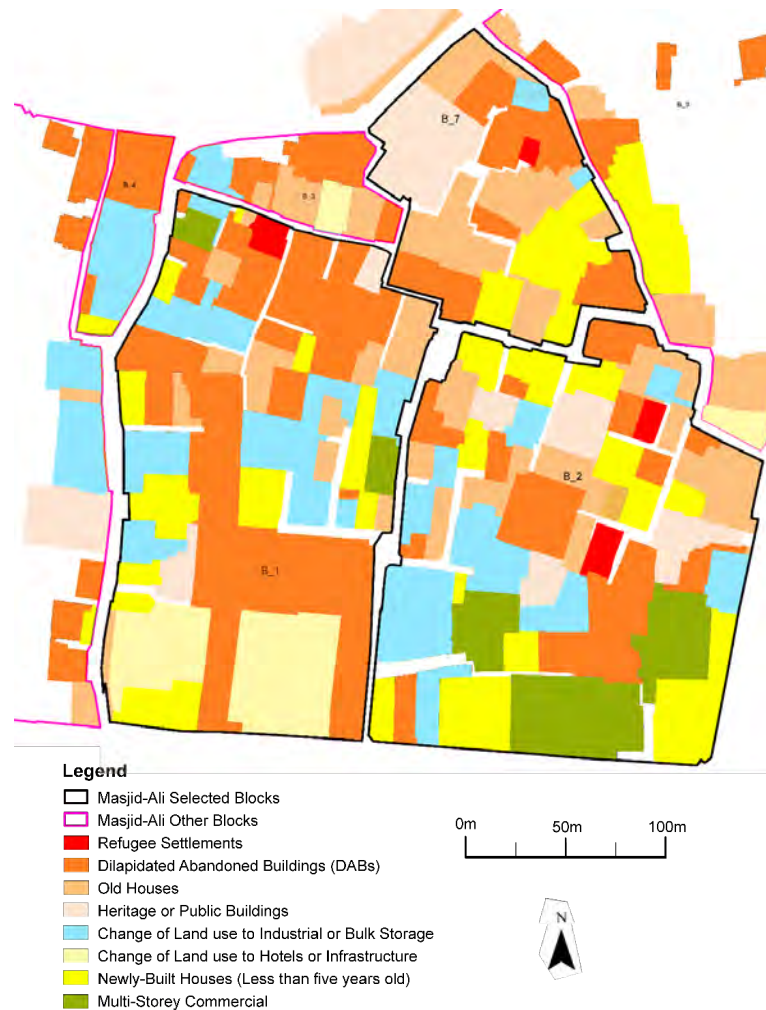
Figure 9. Mapping land use in three selected urban blocks in Isfahan, 2018 (Appendix A1). Generated by author.

5.1 DABs and the Proportion of Refugee Settlements

In all case studies, there is no clear association between the extent of DABs and the proportion of refugee settlements. In this respect, such limited observation could not lead to a broader conclusion without examining other Iranian historic cities. However, similar research in Iran suggests that a strong association can be identified between the extent of DABs and proportion of refugees in less commercially-important and low-populated historic cities.[54] Therefore, such lack of association between DABs and the proportion of refugee settlements in Isfahan can be partially attributable to the greater value of land and properties in this historic city (as the third-largest city in Iran), deriving from its strong economy that promotes the commercial use of properties in historic areas (these qualities are also noticeable in (Fig. 9). Therefore, the proportion of refugee settlements inside historic Isfahan was very low, became irrelevant to the size of DABs (Table 2).

5.2 DABs and Overall Distribution of Refugees

Refugee families formed about 25 percent of respondents in case studies. About 80 percent of the refugee population are living in two-thirds of urban blocks with the highest percentage of DABs, while only 20 percent of liminal residents have settled in the building block with the lowest percentage of DABs. This quality demonstrates the relevance of the formation of spatial liminality to the proportion of DABs in case studies, where urban fabrics with larger areas of DABs have attracted a greater proportion of refugees (Table 2).

City Levels of DABs	Isfahan		
	The overall distribution of refugees in historic urban blocks	The overall extent of refugee settlements in historic urban blocks	Surveyed blocks
High	40% (Medium)	1%	(B-1)
Medium	40% (Medium)	1%	(B-7)
Low	20% (Low)	2%	(B-2)

Table 2. Analysing the correlation between DABs, the average extent of refugee settlement fabric and the overall distribution of refugees per urban block in selected case studies in historic Isfahan (Appendices A1 and A2)

6. Spatial Liminality as a Tool for Evaluating Revitalization Programs

This article has offered a methodology for evaluating socio-spatial vulnerability accompanied by contemporary revitalization projects, by proffering a specific focus on spatial liminality in historic Isfahan. It is concluded that space can exceed time and event and generate spatial liminality, indicating real-life transitions among residents. Spatial liminality elaborated how current revitalisation policies and methods have predominantly engaged with visual-physical aspects of cities, rather than cultural and liminal grassroots of local communities. The research has verified DABs as a tangible phenomenon which has exacerbated socio-spatial vulnerability. By measuring the rate of proliferation of DABs in historic Isfahan (an average of 16 percent between 2008--2018), the research reveals the unsuccessful aftermath of contemporary revitalisation projects in Isfahan.

Spatial liminality discloses the reality of historic cities through a method that has been described as 'empirical, lived reality'[55], and pronounced influx of refugees to the subjected historic urban areas. Here, refugees are suspended between their past and future and merely want to survive, while they have no idea about cultural values in historic contexts. Liminal-vulnerable settlers, along with impoverished local owners, cannot afford to repair their homes, and this exacerbates the process of deterioration-dilapidation of buildings.

In this sense, the subject historic areas adjacent to Imam Ali project can be considered as a liminal place because they attract liminal residents. These socio-spatial conditions can be reasonably compared to liminal communities constrained in refugee camps. In both cases, subject communities are forced to live in ghettos/camps, and have entered into a suspended state of liminality in their attempted passage between their previous social status and an unknown future, seeking to become citizens of the new land.

Through the discourse of liminality, it is suggested that during liminal rites of passage, masters of ceremony (principally elders of the community), must teach rules and supervise neophytes.[56] Thus, it becomes a notable point that contrary to refugee camps, where processing centres act as masters of ceremony, inside the historic urban fabric, ritual rules and instructions regarding rites of passage – here interpreted as "rules of the game" – are unknown to neophyte refugees, who have been removed from their elders.

This lack of supervision among refugees in historic cities concurs with the argument that in the absence of masters of ceremony liminality will not be restricted to a temporary crisis followed by a return to normality, but can be perpetuated endlessly.[57] In a parallel context, inside historic areas, it can be claimed that if place initiates spatial liminality, then upcoming socio-spatial events are arguably impulsive, dangerous or even criminal, concerning drug lords or ghetto owners.

Thus, the notion of 'permanent liminality'[58], becomes not dissimilar to high levels of socio-spatial vulnerability, deprivation, residents' dissatisfaction, poverty and crime in historic areas, which has been documented by Iranian scholars since the 20th century.[59] Such permanent liminality can be initiated within the three phases of rites of passage, if any of these (separation, liminality and re-aggregation) becomes frozen, that can occur both with individuals undergoing initiation rites, and with groups participating in a collective ritual. Here, without proper re-integration liminality is pure danger. In this sense, how to end such liminality or to leave it as permanent liminality becomes crucial.[60] Thus, if stakeholders within the realm of building, construction, architecture, planning and policy-making understand the need to end such permanent spatial liminality, then the definition of spatial liminality moves beyond its early initiation in anthropology and arguably becomes a guideline for revitalizing historic cities (Fig. 10).
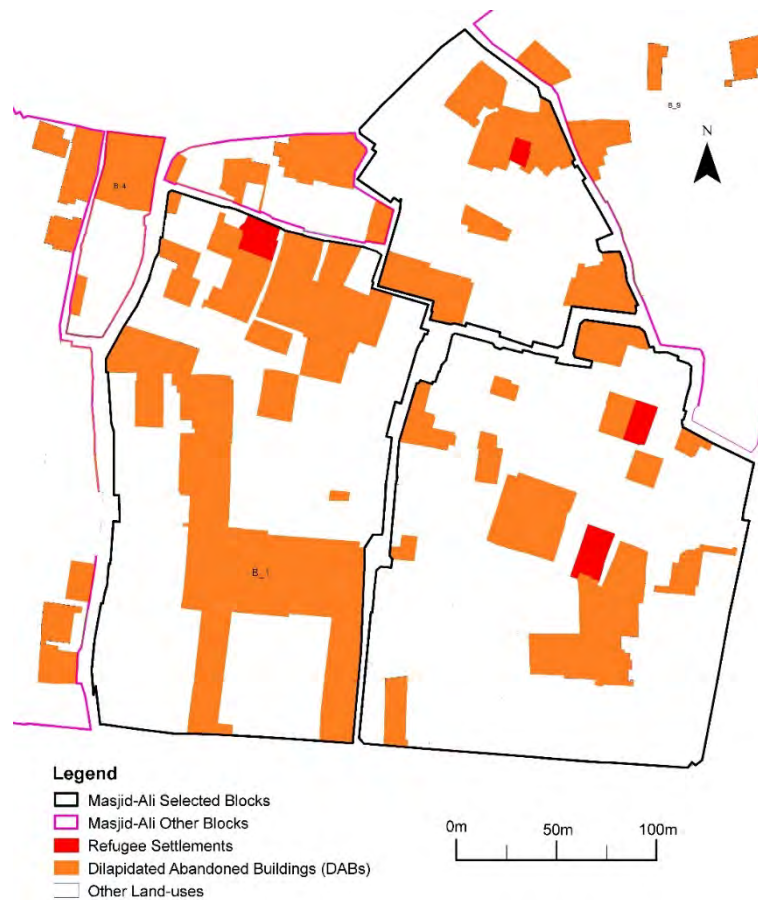
Figure 10. Mapping spatial liminality accompanied by DABs in selected urban blocks in Isfahan, 2018. Source: generated by author.

Conclusions

This article identified a gap in the knowledge in which the argument, approach and methodology that until now have been presented by contemporary urban design/planning perspectives should be enhanced and fine-tuned, before being applied to the revitalisation of historic cities. The research has emphasised the need for new epistemological tools in urban studies, suggesting that liminality can be a useful measure for evaluating revitalization programs in historic cities.

The paper has elaborated spatial liminality as a contextually grounded theory. The correlation between spatial liminality and revitalization programs in Isfahan, as identified in this study, is argued to be a significant finding that adds to the current body of architectural theory. The

discussion and findings allow practitioners, academics and policymakers to understand socio-spatial equations in historic cities in a real-life context. In this case, spatial liminality is proved to be associated with current revitalization programs, which can contribute to the influx of non-local disadvantaged residents in historic cores, not unlike refugees living in a state of limbo in refugee camps.

The paper provides empirical evidence wherein interrelations between spatial liminality and the extent of DABs in historic cities have become crucial, which can inform future revitalisation initiatives. This correlation creates a new perspective for policymakers and practitioners to consider DABs as liminal urban fabric in historic Iranian cities, which can lead to the provision of a new generation of revitalization models that specifically focus on addressing spatial liminality. The discourse raises several political, economic and multicultural aspects, while the entire situation can be seen as an unforeseen outcome of incomplete processes of modernity in historic cities of Iran.

Table 3: Appendices

Appendix A1: Spatial (factual) results: current condition of land use in sample urban blocks			
Three urban blocks in Isfahan	B-2	B-1	B-7
All surveyed areas (m2)	34004	33844	13244
Dilapidation abandonment per block by 2008	6122	5379	569
New dilapidation by 2018	4910	12068	3299
Reinstated dilapidation by 2018	1649	1466	331
Dilapidation abandonment per block by 2018	6559	13534	3630
Active urban areas per block 2018	26864	19999	9504
Area accommodating old housings per block by 2018	4388	2502	2702
Area accommodating foreign refugees or illegal migrants by 2018	581	311	110
Area accommodating single elderly or died per block by 2018	0	462	1275
Change of land use to hoteling per block by 2018	0	0	0
Change of land use to storage/irrelevant uses per block by 2018	5982	5088	325
Change of land use to infrastructure per block by 2018	0	4875	0
Change of land use to carpark per block by 2018	0	0	0
Local mosque or religious centre per block by 2018	1311	240	0
Listed Heritage building per block by 2018	1241	466	2360
Newly built houses per block by 2018	6618	4207	2360
Roads and in-between spaces	2246	1428	482
Change of land use to commercial	5078	731	0
Three urban blocks in Isfahan (%)	B-2	B-1	B-7
All surveyed areas (%)	100%	100%	100%
Dilapidation abandonment per block by 2008	18%	16%	4%
New dilapidation by 2018	14%	36%	25%
Reinstated dilapidation by 2018	5%	4%	2%
Dilapidation abandonment per block by 2018	19%	40%	27%
Active urban areas per block 2018	79%	59%	72%
Area accommodating local residents per block by 2018	13%	7%	20%
Area accommodating foreign refugees or illegal migrants by 2018	2%	1%	1%
Area accommodating single elderly or died per block by 2018	0%	1%	10%
Change of land use to hoteling per block by 2018	0%	0%	0%
Change of land use to storage/irrelevant uses per block by 2018	18%	15%	2%
Change of land use to infrastructure per block by 2018	0%	14%	0%
Change of land use to carpark per block by 2018	0%	0%	0%
Local mosque or religious centre per block by 2018	4%	1%	0%
Listed Heritage building per block by 2018	4%	1%	18%
Newly built houses per block by 2018	19%	12%	18%
Roads and in-between spaces	7%	4%	4%
Change of land use to commercial	15%	2%	0%

Appendix A2: Demographic results			
Average ratio of different ethnicities in historic Isfahan)			
Count			
		Type of residents	
		Local residents	Total
Area of DABs 2018	B-1 (40%)	6	6
	B-7 (27%)	3	3
	B-2 (19%)	6	6
Total		15	15
Count (refugees)			
		Type of residents	
		Refugees residents	Total
Area of DABs 2018	40%	2	2
	27%	2	2
	19%	1	1
Total		5	5
Ethnicity of residents, overall distribution Isfahan			
Isfahan		Local residents	Foreign refugees or illegal migrants
DABs=40%		40%	40%
DABs=27%		20%	40%
DABs=19%		40%	20%

Endnotes

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