

Original Research Article

Explaining the Indicators of Event-Oriented Urban Public Spaces with a Cultural–Ritual Approach (A Case Study in Mashhad, Iran)*

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Abstract

Problem statement: Urban spaces have undergone transformations over the years due to various forces during periods of urban change. Historically, these spaces served as venues for diverse events and carried identity values embedded in collective memory. However, contemporary urban planning has largely overlooked the design and preparation of urban spaces to host events. In addition, large-scale urban development projects in developing countries and the resulting destruction of historical textures have led to urban spaces that, besides lacking suitable structures for attracting audiences and ensuring sustainable use, remain primarily transitional. Consequently, cultural–ritual events by the public are often held in spaces lacking the essential components of functional urban environments. The central question addressed in this study is: What indicators and characteristics should desirable urban spaces in Iran possess to host cultural and ritual events effectively, thereby serving as dynamic platforms for enhancing urban quality of life?

Research objective: This research aims to identify indicators of urban spaces based on cultural-ritual events to improve the quality of event-based urban spaces. This study seeks to provide a conceptual model to understand and guide the design of urban spaces with the ability to host various cultural-ritual events.

Research method: Methodologically, this research employed a qualitative approach using thematic analysis. Data were collected through document review, observation, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews within the cultural–ritual context of Mashhad, Iran, supplemented by software-based analyses.

Conclusion: Following data analysis, a conceptual model was proposed to elucidate the indicators of event-oriented urban spaces. Urban spaces designed with a cultural–ritual perspective achieve functional and semantic maturity when their design transcends physical form and addresses citizens' perception, experience, and participation. This is accomplished through a deep understanding of the community's cultural–ritual needs, translating them into design indicators, and integrating them into spatial structures. The study thus provides a framework for urban designers, cultural managers, and planners to assess and guide this process effectively.

Keywords: *Urban Spaces, Event, Event-Oriented, Cultural–Ritual.*

Introduction and Problem Statement

In recent decades, urban space, as a fundamental element of city structure, has acquired a function

beyond its physical form, transforming into a social, cultural, and symbolic platform for urban life experiences (Carr et al., 1992; Gehl, 2011). In the context of globalization and inter-city competition, the quality and dynamism of public spaces play a crucial role in enhancing the city's image, attracting human capital, and strengthening social capital

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(Montgomery, 1998; Aelbrecht, P., & Stevens, 2018). Accordingly, many contemporary approaches in urban design focus on creating attractive, meaningful, and participatory urban spaces that facilitate social interaction, collective experience, and cultural engagement for citizens.

One of the key dimensions of urban space dynamism is hosting events, particularly cultural and ritual events. Such events elevate spaces from mere physical locations to social and collective platforms by creating memory, identity, and a sense of belonging (Richards & Palmer, 2010; Smith, 2016). In numerous cities worldwide, cultural policies and public space design are organized to enable regular event hosting, thereby transforming urban spaces into mediums for meaning-making and social cohesion (Stevens, 2014). In Iran, the tradition of holding cultural-ritual events in public spaces has a long-standing history. Spaces such as squares, streets, forecourts, and surrounding areas of shrines or mosques have historically played significant roles in hosting religious, national, and ritual events. These events have not only contributed to spatial dynamism but also promoted social cohesion, enhanced cultural capital, and reproduced collective identity. However, contemporary urban developments in Iran, with an excessive emphasis on physical functions, have largely neglected the need to strengthen cultural and event-oriented functions of urban spaces. As a result, many modern urban spaces lack attractiveness, meaning, and the capacity to host public events effectively.

Currently, in many Iranian cities, public spaces have become primarily transitional arenas for routine activities, lacking the characteristics necessary to encourage voluntary and active citizen participation. This occurs despite the high potential of Iranian cities' cultural and social contexts for hosting collective events at local and national scales. The absence of appropriate design indicators for event-oriented urban spaces has led to the organization of many events in inefficient or unsuitable environments. Under such circumstances, it is essential to revisit the design indicators and

components of urban spaces to enhance their event-readiness and, consequently, improve the quality of urban life for citizens.

Accordingly, the present study aims to "elucidate the indicators of event-oriented urban spaces with a focus on cultural-ritual events". Based on local socio-cultural contexts, it seeks to identify the design requirements for such spaces and contribute to the development of qualitative approaches for enhancing urban space quality. The central research question is: What indicators and characteristics should desirable urban spaces in Iran possess to host cultural-ritual events effectively, thereby serving as dynamic platforms for enhancing the quality of urban life?

Events introduce non-physical instruments into the physical and built elements of culture. These non-physical instruments encompass citizens' memories of urban spaces as well as the meanings generated through residents' interactions with these spaces. Events describe festivals, performances, and special ceremonies that are consciously planned and executed to mark significant occasions, distinguishing them as unique experiences separate from everyday life (Richards & Palmer, 2010).

Events are a key component in enhancing lived experiences and the semantic richness of urban public spaces. Acting as temporary social interactions, they activate collective meanings, shared memories, and a sense of belonging within the physical environment (Lundberg et al., 2022). In essence, events serve as a link between the material and immaterial dimensions of urban culture, transforming space from a purely physical function into a platform for social participation, cultural storytelling, and identity representation (Smith, 2020).

Events are often deliberately and purposefully designed to create experiences distinct from daily life. These include cultural and ritual festivals, civic gatherings, national ceremonies, and sporting or artistic events, all of which serve as platforms for social cohesion, commemorating specific occasions, or expressing collective demands (Getz & Page, 2020).

Since each event emerges from a unique interaction

between place, time, community, and narrative, its experience is only possible in its actual participatory context and cannot be replicated elsewhere (Pine & Gilmore, 2019). In this regard, the role of urban spaces in hosting and shaping high-quality events is crucial; these spaces provide physical and social settings that give meaning to the sensory, cultural, and participatory dimensions of the event experience (Richards, 2021).

Moreover, events not only reflect the cultural characteristics of the hosting community but can also facilitate intercultural interaction and cultural tourism development. By bringing together diverse groups with various cultural backgrounds, events act as catalysts for cultural dialogue and value exchange (Quinn et al., 2021). Therefore, event-orientation in contemporary urban policy is regarded not merely as a tool for attracting tourists but as a strategic approach for enhancing social resilience, strengthening local identity, and promoting sustainable urban development.

• **Typology of events**

In a recent classification by Smith (2021), urban events are categorized into nine types based on two main criteria: the level of public access and the mobility of participants. This classification is presented in Table 1.

This event typology helps to understand the diverse range of events staged in urban public spaces. Different events involve varying compositions of participants, temporary structures, and spatial dynamics. While many events overlap, and some mega-events combine multiple types, classifying events provides a useful overview of contemporary urban spaces and assists in understanding urban events based on accessibility and mobility.

Furthermore, understanding the range of events held in public spaces equips urban designers to plan interventions that enable these spaces to function more effectively as venues, allowing events to unfold efficiently while enhancing urban spatial quality.

• **Cultural, ritual, and symbolic events**

In the international literature, the term »festivalization« is used to describe large-scale events derived from a society’s cultural phenomena and traditions. The utilization of these cultural and symbolic phenomena emerges as a means to achieve economic regeneration and urban competitiveness in cities with post-industrial and symbolic economies.

In recent years, culture has gained attention as a tool to stimulate economic activities and as a framework for urban planning. This shift toward

Table 1. Typology of Urban Events. Source: Author, adapted from Smith et al., 2021.

No	Event Examples	Event Description	Event Type	Event Title / Terms
1	Parades, marches, and cycling races	Audiences watch performers from the edges of spaces.	Edge-Watching	Parade
2	Street parties, protest marches, “Open Streets” project in Barcelona	Audiences and participants move together in public spaces.	Collective Movement of Audiences and Participants	Street Party, Protest March, Open Streets
3	Concerts, open-air cinemas, light shows	Performances take place at a fixed point on the edge of public spaces.	Fixed Performances in Open Spaces	Outdoor Concert, Open-Air Cinema, Light Projection Show
4	Music festivals in parks with multiple stages	Large fenced open spaces with paid entry.	Enclosed Spaces with Limited Access	Ticketed Festival, Music Festival
5	Street markets, temporary bazaars	People move among stalls and kiosks.	Open-Air Markets and Temporary Spaces	Open-Air Market, Street Market, Food Fair
6	Large tents, temporary cinemas, and temporary sports halls	Use of temporary structures for performances or exhibitions.	Temporary Structures in Public Spaces	Temporary Structure, Event Tent, Pop-Up Venue
7	Gatherings in parks and squares for special events	Public gatherings for specific moments or protests without temporary structures.	Spontaneous Gatherings	Spontaneous Gathering, Vigil, Flash Mob
8	Mobile exhibitions near retail stores	Marketing installations are placed on vehicles, held in public locations.	Marketing and Mobile Exhibitions	Experiential Marketing Installation, Mobile Pop-Up, Roadshow
9	Street performances in Covent Garden, London, and Las Ramblas, Barcelona	Artists and speakers provide informal performances in urban spaces.	Informal and Street Performances	Busking, Street Performance

a broader conceptualization of culture—including public culture and event planning—reflects the increasing role of culture in urban development (Gaetan & Zaheer, 2017). In this context, festivalization encompasses the use of festivals, ritual ceremonies, mourning rituals, commercial and entertainment events, among others, to generate both economic and symbolic capital. Event staging, particularly large-scale events, plays a crucial role in facilitating this process. More broadly, events and culture are employed to frame the contemporary city, emphasizing that festivalization is not merely an instrumental process involving new economic modalities but also a broader urban framing, positioning the city as a space for living and consumption (Smith, 2016).

Richards and Palmer (2010) interpret urban festivalization as the effort to transform the city into a continuous festival. In a media- and social media-dominated world, the separation between the city's image and its material urban form is increasingly challenging. Instead of promoting a single event at a specific time, cities increasingly market themselves as venues where events are continuously happening. For example, Manchester has recently been promoted as an event destination under the slogan “something always happening”, inviting visitors to experience “a short, event-oriented itinerary.”

In the early 2000s, when no major mega-events were being promoted, smaller events and routine cultural, retail, and entertainment facilities were repackaged as themed or seasonal events and named throughout the year to attract tourists. Festivalization refers to this broad process, highlighting how and why urban culture, urban space, and urban policy have transformed in recent decades. It is better understood as a city-wide process in which events, in combination with each other and with other forms of consumption, entertainment, and leisure, are used to celebrate traditions and rituals (Smith, 2016).

• Impacts of Events on Urban Spaces

urban public spaces can be considered as entanglements of human circulation and non-human matter, hosting the “interweaving of moving objects” and “circulation

of populations.” Events intensify movements and flows, thereby activating public spaces. festivals as a “composite constellation generated within a context of indeterminate fluidity.” This fluidity alters the spatial dynamics of public spaces, influencing how people move, what activities they perform, whom they encounter, and the duration of their stay. Consequently, event spaces exemplify environments that are continuously in motion and constantly reconstructed. Considering events from the perspective of mobility helps us understand their fluid and dynamic nature, highlighting their potential to disrupt the status quo and emphasizing their importance as ceremonial, transgressive, or transformative occasions, enabling participants to navigate pivotal moments.

Although events involve circulation and movement, they are also accompanied by symbolic, regulatory, financial, and physical barriers that limit access to diverse behaviors in public spaces. Perhaps the most fluid, dynamic, and mobile events in public spaces are unsanctioned events, such as protests, demonstrations, or spontaneous gatherings. However, these are increasingly regulated and securitized, as protests and demonstrations now require permits or equivalent authorization. Events spilling beyond their designated sites are also increasingly monitored and managed, as evidenced by event zoning and dedicated access routes to and from transit paths.

In addition to altering spatial dynamics, events and event programs can reshape the identity and imagery of urban public spaces (Stevens & Shin, 2014; Giovanardi et al., 2014; Hannam et al., 2016; Smith, 2021). Symbolic expectations shape assumptions about who and what public spaces are for, and events have become important means to challenge entrenched assumptions, particularly in sites with contested meanings. Memorial squares, formal parks, and ceremonial streets are not necessarily the most welcoming places, as they tend to be associated with state authority and control. Events can be used to reclaim these spaces—for example, Helsinki's Senate Square was reclaimed for citizens through an event program, rendering it less rigid and state-centric (Lehtovuori, 2010; Smith, 2021).

In other cases, events address a lack of meaning. The committee responsible for managing the Champs-Élysées in Paris introduced new events to counteract the street's banality, providing "highly meaningful experiences against unstructured flows." Organizing planned events in public spaces can support various public policy goals, but event planning is subject to criticism for several reasons. Official occasions are often considered less favorable compared to spontaneous gatherings and are viewed as relatively artificial forms of presence. Instead of reducing fixed meanings or well-known applications to prevent use of some public spaces, they may also reinforce these through physical, symbolic, and financial restrictions. Commercial events are associated with the commodification of public space, particularly when sites are leased to event organizers, especially for ticketed events. Even free-entry events may be exclusive, as most city-center events target participants who are willing and able to spend. Highly programmed spaces are linked to consumption-oriented environments, and it is important to acknowledge their uniqueness.

In the media-driven era, especially with the dominance of social media, events are also utilized by municipal authorities to enhance the visibility of public spaces and thereby attract new users or audiences (Schmidt & Nemeth, 2010; Smith, 2016; 2020; 2021). Installing sponsor logos, alongside hospitality, retail, and commercial facilities, contributes to the commercialization of public space. This becomes particularly evident when public spaces are employed for product promotion and experiential marketing events. For instance, Leeds (UK) publishes an "Event Spaces Guide", listing streets and squares in the city center that can be reserved for promotional events.

Alongside concerns about reduced publicness, events in public spaces can degrade the environmental quality of parks, streets, and squares. When events occur outdoors and near residential areas, noise and disturbance for neighbors are common. The amplified music, crowd noise, and exit congestion—when thousands leave simultaneously from spaces not designed for such flows—pose additional challenges. Park events, in

particular, can damage turf due to high foot traffic, facilities, and vehicle movement, meaning that affected areas may be inaccessible for months after a large event (Smith, 2016; 2020; 2021; Smith et al., 2021).

Superficial participation of residents in decision-making regarding events is also a critical issue. Events typically require permits or planning authorization, yet procedures are often ignored, bypassed, or expedited to ensure proposals are approved. For example, organizers of recent Christmas events in central Edinburgh lacked planning permission. Importantly, for many individuals, the negative impacts noted above are outweighed by positive social experiences gained from participating in events. For some, the venue enhances the event experience, strengthens attachment to the hosting space, and may even encourage repeat visits. This illustrates why events staged in public places are inherently contested. Public perceptions vary regarding the purpose of public spaces, and even if consensus exists that organized events are appropriate, there is unlikely to be agreement on which types of events should occur and how regularly (McGillivray et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Synthesis

To establish a theoretical framework for identifying the design indicators of event-oriented urban spaces with a cultural-ritual approach, it is first necessary to synthesize the key concepts and theories, as presented in Tables 2 and 3. Subsequently, theoretical dimensions are outlined in Table 4, leading to the formulation of the research framework.

In recent years, urban public spaces have been redefined in urban theory not merely as physical settings for daily activities but as social, cultural, and experiential arenas. Urban events, particularly cultural and ritual events, play a pivotal role in activating spaces, generating meaning, and enhancing lived experiences. Contemporary theories of spatial production, place attachment, and social capital illustrate that space is shaped and reproduced through collective actions, social interactions, and cultural representations. From this perspective, events act as effective cultural and social instruments that link the material and immaterial

Table 2. Summary of Key Concepts and Theoretical Definitions. Source: Authors.

Core Concept	Theoretical Definition	Key References
Urban public space	A physical space that is openly accessible to the public, providing a setting for social interaction, civic engagement, and collective experience	Gehl (2011), Carr et al. (1992)
Cultural-ritual event	A planned social occurrence with cultural-religious roots, temporarily staged in public spaces to activate collective experience, meaning, and memory	Richards & Palmer (2010), Smith (2016)
Event-oriented urban space	Public space with physical-social attributes capable of hosting and generating experiences from urban events, enhancing interaction, participation, and social dynamism	Stevens (2007), Quinn (2023)
Urban quality of life	A sense of well-being, satisfaction, participation, and attachment derived from individual and collective perceptions of urban space	(Richards, 2023)

Table 3. Related Theories and Approaches. Source: Authors.

Theoretical Component	Theoretical Proposition	Theoretical Reference
Social production of space	Space is not merely physical; it is produced through interaction, events, and meaning-making	(Karich, 2024)
Place experience and sense of belonging	Events enhance place experience and spatial attachment	(Smith et al., 2021)
Culture and urban policy	Events serve as instruments of cultural policy, urban marketing, and sustainable development.	(Richards, 2023)

Table 4. Theoretical Dimensions for Developing Design Indicators of Event-Oriented Urban Spaces. Source: Authors.

Theoretical Dimension	Extractable Indicators	Related Concepts
Physical-spatial	Spatial openness, temporary infrastructure, audio-visual equipment	Flexibility, accessibility, visibility, and appropriate scale
Socio-cultural	Gathering capacity, symbolic elements, identity markers	Participatory potential, collective memory, place attachment
Functional	Temporary installation capability, crowd management, emergency routes	Multipurpose use, event management, and safety
Aesthetic-perceptual	Lighting, street furniture, and meaningful environmental graphics	Legibility, visual identity, and experiential space
Urban governance	Permit access, engagement with local institutions, and participatory planning	Policy adaptability, institutional interaction, and public participation

dimensions of the city, providing platforms for participation, memory-making, identity reconstruction, and social resilience enhancement.

Urban public spaces, leveraging cultural-ritual events as socio-cultural stimuli, can improve urban quality of life and develop social capital by enhancing lived experiences, strengthening place attachment, increasing civic participation, and reproducing spatial meaning. Designing event-oriented spaces requires physical, functional, and social indicators that ensure hosting capability, dynamism, diversity, and cohesion.

From this viewpoint, event-oriented urban spaces are conceived as environments characterized by indicators and features across three dimensions-physical-spatial, functional-managerial, and socio-cultural-which, through hosting cultural and ritual events, can enhance urban quality of life and foster spatial identity. Accordingly, the present study’s theoretical framework

integrates concepts such as collective experience, spatial meaning-making, spatial fluidity, and cultural policy, aiming to elucidate the relationships between variables including spatial characteristics, event types, social participation, and urban quality of life. This framework emphasizes the potential of events in spatial reproduction while critically addressing challenges such as commodification of space, unequal access, and political intervention, thus offering a practical-critical approach to urban design.

Literature Review

In the field of urban studies, numerous studies have addressed the concepts of urban spaces and event-oriented urbanism. Some of the key contributions are summarized below.

Richards (2024), in his study “Events and Urban Space: A Challenging Relationship?”, examines the interplay

between urban events and public space. The research highlights the tensions between preserving space as a living resource and utilizing it for revitalization purposes, and outlines three potential future scenarios for urban events: conflict and competition, growth and coordination, and digitalization and virtualization. Karich (2024), in the study “Citizen Participation and Acceptance in the Context of Urban Events”, investigates public participation and acceptance during and after urban events, analyzing their social impacts. Richards (2023), in “The Impact of Global Expo Events on Event-Oriented Cities”, explores the effects of event-oriented urbanism, particularly in cities hosting World Expo events. The study analyzes the influence of events on place branding, tourism flows, residents’ perceptions, and urban architecture and development. Smith et al. (2021), in “Hosting Urban Events in Public Spaces: A Design Perspective”, examine methods for adapting public spaces to better accommodate urban events, demonstrating that retrofitting some urban public spaces for event hosting is practical, feasible, and effective from a design standpoint. Quinn et al. (2021), in “Festival Events, Public Space, and Cultural Indicators: Public Policy Approaches”, investigate how cities such as Barcelona, Dublin, Glasgow, Gothenburg, and London incorporate festival events into cultural policies and strategies. Using secondary research and a wide range of policy and implementation documents, the study critically analyzes the effects, production of strategies, and execution of events. Findings indicate that while the studied cities have a long history of festival strategy development, this has not yet translated into dedicated attention to public space policy. In Iran, relatively few studies have directly addressed the design of urban spaces with a focus on cultural–ritual events, though some relevant research exists: Mohammadi & Minaei (2023), in a study titled “Analyzing the Impact of Events on the Formation of Collective Memory in Urban Spaces with a Focus on Socially and Religiously Inclusive Spaces” (Case study: 30 Tir Street, Tehran), examined the factors influencing the creation of memorable urban spaces with an event-oriented

approach. Saghatoleslami & Rohi Mirabadi, 2020, in their research entitled “Analysis and Comparison of the Level of Event-Orientation in Public Urban Spaces” (Case study: District 12, Tehran), investigated the criteria affecting event-orientation in public urban spaces in District 12 of Tehran. Furthermore, Norai and Setari (2018), in the study “Analysis of Event-Orientation in the 15 Districts of Isfahan Metropolis with an Emphasis on Event Infrastructure”, explored the infrastructure of events in the 15 districts of Isfahan and analyzed the obstacles to transforming Isfahan into an event-oriented city. Regarding studies focused on Mashhad, where interviews were conducted locally: Saghatoleslami & Rohi Mirabadi, 2020, in their article “Analysis of Urban Spaces around Sacred Sites in Relation to the Needs and Behavioral Patterns of Pilgrims” (Case study: Imam Reza Street, Mashhad), examined the alignment of urban spaces around sacred sites with the needs and behavioral patterns of pilgrims, providing criteria, recommendations, and guidelines for planning and designing these spaces. Montazeri et al. (2020), in the article “Assessment of Public Urban Spaces in Interaction with Collective Rituals” (Case study: Imam Reza Street, Mashhad), investigated urban spaces in relation to collective rituals and proposed practical recommendations in this regard. Despite these studies, none have specifically and systematically identified indicators for designing urban spaces with a cultural–ritual event approach using qualitative thematic analysis. Therefore, the present study is considered innovative, aiming to fill this gap and to develop localized indicators for the design of event-oriented urban spaces.

Research Methodology

The present study employed a qualitative research approach, complemented by a combination of other quantitative–qualitative methods to advance the research objectives. In this methodology, a close relationship exists between data collection and data interpretation. Given the qualitative nature of the research, an initial understanding of the realities under study serves as a preliminary comprehension, which

is subsequently expanded through the integration of new and contradictory information. Accordingly, it is essential that theoretical studies are clearly defined and that the research perspective and approach are explicit. As mentioned, the aim of the study is to identify design principles and components of urban spaces based on cultural–ritual events. To answer the research question, in the qualitative phase, data were collected from documentary and textual sources, both domestic and international, particularly in the theoretical background related to events. Following qualitative content analysis, a table of criteria and sub-criteria was developed based on the theoretical propositions and updated findings. The methodology of the present study is grounded in a qualitative approach using Thematic Analysis to extract and localize design indicators for event-oriented urban spaces with a cultural–ritual perspective. In the first step, an initial conceptual framework was developed through a review of theoretical studies and international scholarly sources related to urban events, festivalization, and public spaces. However, considering the specific cultural context of Iran, these indicators were regarded as “initial concepts” rather than final criteria.

In the next phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two primary groups:

1. Experts in urban design and cultural studies.
2. Citizens familiar with organizing or participating in cultural–ritual events in public urban spaces with strong cultural and religious backgrounds (e.g., Mashhad).

Although these spaces were not officially designated as study sites, participants’ subjective and experiential perspectives were referenced with respect to real locations, such as the urban areas surrounding the holy shrine of Imam Reza during mourning ceremonies or religious festivals. Thus, the final indicators are not merely direct translations of global concepts but are the result of a synthesis of theoretical frameworks and local experience. This phase aim to systematically collect and analyze interview texts to design a model illustrating the relationship between the principles and components of event-oriented urban space design and

cultural–ritual events. Based on the initial conceptual model derived from theoretical foundations, relevant indicators were identified. Accordingly, semi-structured interview guides were prepared for both groups: 70 interviews and field conversations with the public, and another set for 20 experts and specialists in urban design, cultural studies, and event management. Data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA 2020 software through Thematic Analysis, which involved three stages: open, axial, and selective coding.

Open coding: Keywords related to criteria and characteristics of cultural–ritual event-oriented urban spaces were extracted. Through comparison of similarities and differences, secondary themes emerged from the combination of similar concepts.

Axial coding: Relationships among secondary themes were examined to form primary themes, each representing the organization, sequence, and interactions of a set of secondary themes within a subcategory, with specific implications.

Selective coding: The main category was identified, and its relationships with other categories were analyzed. At this stage, a set of propositions emerged, describing the links between the research objectives and primary and secondary themes.

At the conclusion of this inductive, bottom-up process, a theoretical framework was developed, representing a model of event-oriented urban spaces with a cultural–ritual perspective, integrating design principles, components, and their interrelations.

Findings and Discussion

In this stage, the conducted interviews were meticulously analyzed. The outcome of this phase involved distilling and summarizing the vast amount of data obtained from the interviews into keywords and concepts that were common across the questions. Open coding brought themes and concepts from the depth of the data to the surface. In total, 479 coded statements were extracted from approximately 90 in-depth interviews with both citizens and experts.

During axial coding, the researcher confronted an organized set of statements, keywords, and initial themes resulting from the detailed analysis of the interviews in the open coding stage. At this stage, the focus is on identifying core concepts rather than on raw data. New codes or concepts may also emerge during this stage, and interviews continued iteratively until theoretical saturation was achieved. In public interviews, theoretical saturation was reached at the 50th interview, but to ensure robustness, interviews continued until 70 interviews were completed. In expert interviews, saturation was achieved at the 15th interview, yet discussions continued until 20 interviews were conducted. The main task in axial coding was to review and organize the initial concepts and categories. As a result, sub-themes or sub-criteria of the study were identified; in this phase, 49 axial codes were derived from the open coding statements. Selective coding involves selecting the main themes, systematically linking them with other categories, and refining categories that require further development. Based on the results of open and axial coding, interviews were transformed into statements, which were then grouped into categories. Shared categories were assigned a code, forming subcategories and main categories, which ultimately contributed to the conceptual model. This final stage of Thematic Analysis organized the main themes systematically, established their relationships in a conceptual framework, and refined themes that needed improvement or further development.

Accordingly, the final conceptual model of the study, presented in the results, illustrates the key indicators for designing event-oriented urban spaces with a cultural-ritual approach. The indicators extracted from the findings fall into six main categories: Physical (Built Environment), Functional, Social, Visual, Environmental, and Economic. Each of these indicators serves as a primary criterion for event-oriented urban spaces and includes corresponding sub-criteria, as detailed in [Table 5](#).

Each criterion and sub-criterion interacts with and influences the others. The development of a thematic

map or theme-based framework was conducted following the completion of open, axial, and selective coding. In thematic analysis, integration of categories plays a central role, and systematic procedures are applied for this purpose.

In this research, a theme-based diagrammatic model was used to present the relationships among criteria, between criteria and event-oriented urban spaces, and among the criteria themselves. This diagram serves as the basis for the final conceptual model of the study, illustrating how the indicators interact to guide the design of urban spaces capable of hosting cultural-ritual events effectively.

Conclusion

Considering the significance of urban public spaces as platforms for social, cultural, and ritual interactions, the present study developed a conceptual framework for designing and evaluating event-oriented urban spaces based on cultural-ritual indicators.

Since all criteria in the formation of event-oriented spaces are interconnected, improving one dimension affects the others. For instance, enhancing physical and functional infrastructures (such as amenities and accessibility) directly increases social participation. Greater public presence at events also strengthens the local economy through tourism and expenditures. Similarly, the addition of green spaces and the optimization of environmental conditions enhances visual quality and user satisfaction, which in turn supports the social continuity of events and public engagement. Moreover, events themselves can act as catalysts for urban investment and physical revitalization.

In general, each criterion lays the groundwork for the others: for example, social vitality in events motivates the provision of better physical infrastructure, while enhancing visual identity attracts collective participation and strengthens the urban economy. Consequently, simultaneous attention to all social, economic, physical,

Table 5. Six Main Indicators Derived from the Research (Criteria and Sub-Criteria). Source: Authors.

Physical (Built Environment)	Social	Functional	Visual	Environmental	Economic
Cohesion and Unity	Identity	Connectivity	Enclosure	Sustainability	Economic Value
Continuity and Simplicity	Sense of Belonging	Flexibility	Aesthetics	Climatic Issues	Branding
Legibility	Inclusivity	Continuity and Integration	Visual Richness	-	Regeneration and Economic Growth
Permeability	Presence	Efficiency and Effectiveness	-	-	Employment Creation
Proportions	Diversity of Events	Contextualization	-	-	-
Hierarchy	Human-Centeredness	Attractiveness	-	-	-
Structuralism and Spatial Organization	Role and Mental Image	Innovation and Creativity	-	-	-
Spatial Determination	Vitality and Dynamism	Safety	-	-	-
Spatial Diversity	Security	Justice-Oriented	-	-	-
Contrast	Behavioral Anchoring	Urban Rights and Regulations	-	-	-
Climatic Comfort	Cultural Revitalization and Preservation	Urban and Event Space Management	-	-	-
Environmental Calmness and Comfort	Social Interactions	-	-	-	-
Urban Infrastructure and Street Furniture	Public Participation	-	-	-	-
Accessibility and Transportation	-	-	-	-	-
Mixed-Use and Adjacency	-	-	-	-	-
Pedestrian-Oriented Design	-	-	-	-	-
Bicycle-Oriented Design	-	-	-	-	-
Spatial Production and Revitalization	-	-	-	-	-

environmental, functional, and visual dimensions leads to the creation of diverse, sustainable, and attractive event-oriented spaces.

Therefore, urban spaces hosting cultural and ritual events require holistic consideration of all these dimensions. The interdependent nature of these criteria implies that no single aspect should be addressed in isolation; rather, their concurrent enhancement improves spatial quality and encourages public participation. For instance, a cohesive physical and functional design not only attracts human presence but

also activates the local economy and contributes to a city’s brand identity.

Overall, the integrated and intelligent application of these dimensions in urban design and planning forms the foundation for high-quality event-oriented urban spaces. Based on the conducted studies, it became necessary to identify the key components of urban spaces grounded in cultural–ritual events. Urban design projects aim to create environments optimized in spatial, physical, visual, environmental, and economic aspects. Accordingly, field studies, public surveys, and

in-depth interviews were conducted to identify the components of event-oriented urban spaces. Following systematic qualitative analysis, the conceptual model presented in Fig. 1, illustrating the criteria and sub-criteria of cultural–ritual event-oriented urban spaces, was developed as the main outcome of this research.

• Conceptual level (center of the conceptual model)

Overall goal: To create and enhance urban spaces capable of hosting cultural–ritual events, which are responsive across social, functional, environmental, economic, visual, and physical dimensions.

• Strategic level (layer of criteria)

Core approach: Focus on social and cultural

interactions within the context of urban rituals and ceremonies. The space should serve as a platform for expressing collective identity, civic engagement, and cultural cohesion through events.

• Operational level (layer of sub-criteria)

implementation approach: emphasis on the practical applicability and impact of each sub-criterion.

Physical Sub-Criteria: Assessment of the structural, infrastructural, physical, and technical capacity of the space to support events. Adequate structures, standards, proper management, technical support, human-scale design, and citizen participation are essential for the success of event-oriented spaces. Spaces should be designed



Fig.1. Conceptual Model of the Research on Event-Oriented Urban Spaces with a Cultural–Ritual Approach. Source: Authors.

to be ready in terms of technology, scale, and participation.

Social sub-criteria: Evaluation of the space's potential to empower social interactions, foster place attachment, enhance social cohesion, security, collective participation, and express urban identity. Successful event-oriented spaces should facilitate shared emotions and collective memory.

Functional sub-criteria: Assessment of the space's flexibility and adaptability for hosting diverse events at different times and scales, without being limited to a single use. Spaces should support change, expansion, or concentration according to the type of event.

Visual sub-criteria: Evaluation of aesthetic quality and sense of place, as visual perception, unity, and spatial attractiveness are crucial for creating a meaningful experience. Event-oriented spaces should possess high visual quality to naturally attract and engage people.

Environmental Sub-Criteria: Assessment of environmental and climatic compatibility, sustainability, and ecological considerations. Urban events should have minimal negative environmental impact, especially those held outdoors.

Economic sub-criteria: Analysis of the long-term economic impacts, including added value, employment generation, local business promotion, and urban branding. Urban events have high potential to stimulate local economies and enhance city identity through tourism, local purchases, and job creation. In contemporary cities with complex and multidimensional contexts, designing and revitalizing urban spaces capable of hosting cultural-ritual events is not only a functional necessity but also an identity and social imperative. The study demonstrates that the design of event-oriented urban spaces requires a comprehensive, integrated, and multi-dimensional approach, where each indicator interacts with other dimensions.

These spaces are not merely physical platforms, but arenas for reproducing collective identity, developing social capital, and reinforcing

citizens' cultural memory. Only through the coordinated integration of social, functional, environmental, economic, visual, and physical dimensions can a space be achieved that both hosts events and embodies sustainable cultural and social values.

Finally, this research aims to fill the gap in localized urban design literature in Iran. Unlike many global models that rely solely on international experiences without cultural adaptation, the proposed framework is grounded in international theoretical foundations while being refined through the analysis of local experiences and expert insights. Findings indicate that indicators affecting the quality of cultural-ritual event spaces are strongly tied to the cultural, religious, and symbolic context of the space and cannot be directly generalized to heterogeneous settings. However, the final model can serve as an adaptable framework for other Iranian or Islamic cities with similar cultural contexts.

Distinctive Features of the Research: Use of qualitative methodology, thematic analysis, focus on local experience, and avoidance of reliance on translated sources. From this perspective, the study provides an innovative contribution to the literature on contextualized and culturally grounded urban space design.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the conduct of this research.

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