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The Role of Historic- Religious Monuments in the Future Economy of Mashhad City

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Introduction:

Historic-Religious monuments are very strong factors for connecting people to their cultural past. Historic-Religious textures are places for accumulation of memories and beliefs and have a special place in keeping cultural values of a community. Thus, these textures are the most appropriate locations for understanding the different aspects of indigenous culture and beliefs of people of a city or a country. (Amel Bafande Mehdi, Youssef Poor Vahid, 2011) Historic-Religious monuments in addition to transfer the past spiritual values can also be effective in the dynamism of the present and future economy of the city.

Mashhad, which has over a thousand years of history because of special religious status and considerable historic monuments, has more than twenty million visitors each year that the income of this issue has become one of the main economic pillars of the city. Wisely planning can convert this beneficial business into a sustainable source of income for the city.

Method:

Methods used in this study is an analytical-descriptive and data collection has been done by use of library resources and field work.

Research Background:

Several studies in the form of books, articles and theses on religious monuments in the city of Mashhad has been done, such as Ebrahimi Abdul Hamid 1987, Afchangy A. 2005, Momeni Mostafa 2008, etc. But the number of studies conducted about the place of historic monuments in the economy of Mashhad is not considerable, which can include a study conducted by MirzaBeigi Z. 2005.

Geography

Mashhad city is located in 59, 27' E and 36, 22' N. This holy city is the capital of Khorasan Razavi province and is in the north east of Iran. The distance between Mashhad and Tehran is 954 km and it is the second largest metropolis of Iran and one of the largest holy cities in the world.

Map 1: Geographical location of Mashhad



Source: Saber moghadam, F, Hesari P. An Overview of Holy Mashhad Tourism. Mashhad, 2008

Demographics

Based on the 2006 census, the total population of Mashhad is 2,427,316 with a 2.5% annual growth rate. This holy city hosts over 20 million pilgrims and tourists annually.

History of the region

Toos

In ancient times the region of Toos stretched to well over 16000 square kilometers and include four cities, Noghan (present day Mashhad), Taberan (present day Toos), Radkan and Torogbaz. Based on archeological findings and written documentation, Toos was well known into existence even before Alexander the Great and was known as Susia.

Religious Significance

What is an Imam?

Generally speaking, Imam means leader. A more specific meaning of Imam is defined by the shi'ite sect of Islam and refers to the leaders appointed by God.

Who was Imam Reza?

He was the seventh direct descendent of the holy Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) and the eight Imam of Shi'iet sect. After the martyrdom of Imam Reza (pbuh) in 203 AH/818 CE , he was buried at Sanabad Village. Pilgrims began to visit his tomb and the central part of the village of Sanabad was established (Gonzalez, I.M., 2010, pp20-23).

Mashhad

According to historians, overtime the number of pilgrims increased and the village of Sanabad became known as the city of Mashhad al-Reza meaning the place of martyrdom of al-Reza (pbuh).

Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage is a journey or search of great moral or spiritual significance. Typically, it is a journey to a shrine or other location of importance to a person's beliefs and faith. A person who makes such a journey is called a pilgrim. (Clift, Jean Dalby; Clift, Wallace 1996, p24).

Religious tourism

Religious tourism, is a form of tourism, whereby people of faith travel individually or in groups for pilgrimage, missionary, or leisure (fellowship) purposes. The world's largest form of mass religious tourism takes place at the annual Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

According to the World Tourism Organization, an estimated 300 to 330 million pilgrims visit the world's key religious sites every year. (Washington Post.com).

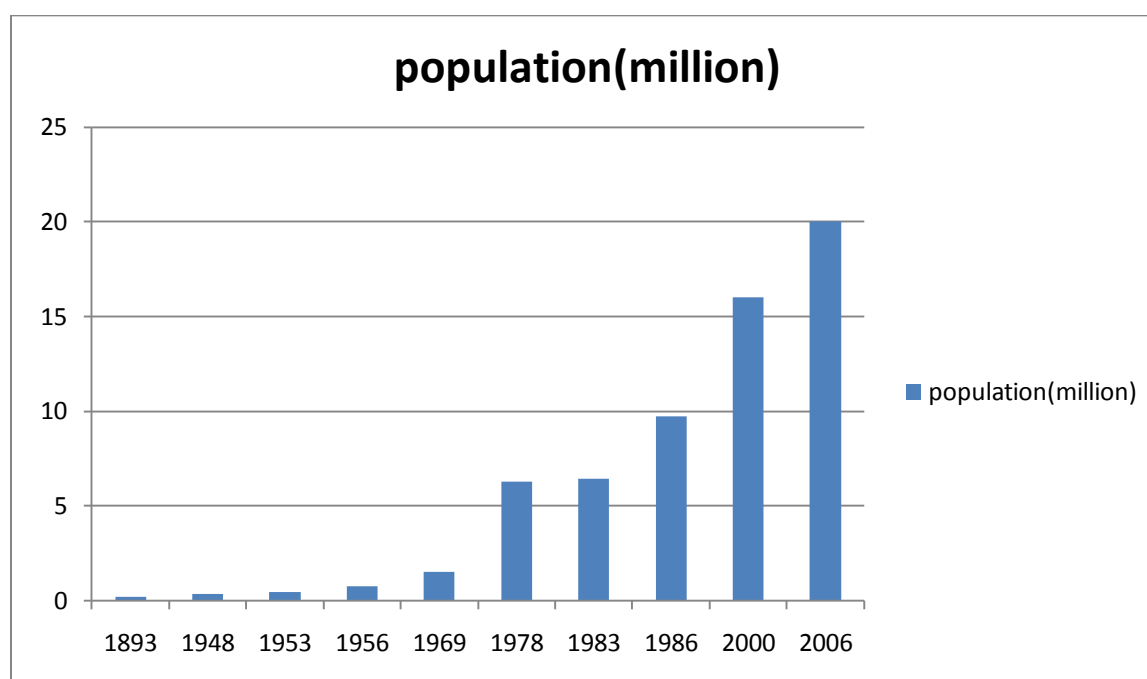
Place of religious monuments in economic planning of the city of Mashhad

Despite the various historical-cultural sites, the shrine of Imam Reza (pbuh) is the fundamental attraction in Mashhad that due to its importance and religion-pilgrimage role affects the religious-cultural structure and tourism function of the city of Mashhad. Furthermore, based on

the annual rate of pilgrims visiting this city the Mashhad economy is said to be service economy. Number of pilgrims and those interested to visit the set during the last century has been consistently increased. Table 1 shows the trend of increasing number of pilgrims over the years.

Table 1: Number of pilgrims at the shrine during consecutive years

year	2006	2000	1986	1983	1978	1969	1956	1953	1948	1893
million population	20	16	9.74	6.44	6.28	1.5	0.74	0.42	0.35	0.1



Source: Project of reconstruction and renovation of the area around the shrine of Imam Reza (pbuh), 2003

According to statistics obtained from the Population and Housing census, which was held in 2006, the number of pilgrims of the city of Mashhad with 2.5 million populations was 20 million people or six times more than the city population, and it is estimated this number would increase to 30 million up to next five years. So every three years each Iranian will visit Mashhad. The holy Shrine in the central part of the city allocated an area with over 180000 square meters to

itself. This space, along with other buildings and related spaces cover an area equivalent to 350000 square meters.

Image No. 1: Holy Shrine of Imam Reza(pbuh)



Short and long term plans to develop and manage all current affairs of the massive set is in hands of Astan Qods Razavi. The religious institution in corporation with Mashhad Municipality and Cultural Heritage Organization are the three heads of the decision makers' triangle for organizing the central part of city of Mashhad. Despite the coordination between the mentioned institutions, any of them acts independently and eventually informs each other of their plans and decisions.

In the last decade due to erode of the central area texture of Mashhad, the urban managers have been implemented plans for renovating and improving this texture. The scale of actions and operations were such large that the municipality was forced to request for help from Government, all of the active institutions and of course the people and the private sector. Credits required for the project is estimated approximately \$ 9 billion. \$ 3 billion will be funded from the public and private sector.(Implementation Institution of Renovation and Reconstruction of the texture surrounding the holy Shrine, 2011)To attract public assets, the municipality with permission from the government and in coordination with Central Bank has been sold securities at the national level that has been welcomed by people. The bright economic future of the service sector in Mashhad due to the great interest of the people to visit the holy shrine on the one hand and capital accumulation in this city on the other hand, would justify the trust and interest of people for investing in the project. Although the presence of at least 300,000 pilgrims in each day, imposes many costs such as garbage collecting and the affairs related to cleaning the streets

and thorough fares which hold many pilgrims, health care costs for pilgrims, travel costs of them in the city etc. on the economy of the city, but the economic benefits resulting from the presence of pilgrims at Mashhad is such that the service sector in the economy of Mashhad is completely revolves around providing service to pilgrims and travelers. Providing residential areas, construction of appropriate hotels are the most beneficial service economic departments of the city that provides too many related jobs in different parts. Profitability of this part is to some extent that according to statistics today 50 percent of the country's Hotels are located in Mashhad.

Besides official residential centers in the city, some people rent the extra rooms in their own houses to the pilgrims, and earn a substantial income in peak days. Another way of pilgrims' settlement is to stay in places that are managing by religious and charitable institutions. Accommodation costs in these centers are very low and even sometimes are free. The studies of planners and economists suggest that much of the pilgrims and travelers to the city of Mashhad are low-income people of the community, so urban managers decided to pay more attention to the low-income tourists and construction of affordable residential units. The following chart shows the need for attention to low-income pilgrims housing.

Figure 1: The need for attention to low-income pilgrims housing



These cheap accommodation units can be provided by several ways which include:

- Organizing and running more control over the situation of people who rent their homes to pilgrims.
- Using Husaaynies (Mosques)
- Using empty classrooms in the schools in their holiday seasons
- Constructing a Hotel which provides the possibility of staying pilgrims with their family or in a group form according to the basic standards of tourism.
- Constructing residential towns in the city entrances

The main mechanism that can make a huge volume of passengers be settled, is construction of residential towns in entrance areas of the city with the name of Zaer Shahr. (The city of Pilgrim) So at the end of the plan in each day about 600,000 pilgrims can be accepted in the city. (Implementation Institution of Renovation and Reconstruction of the texture surrounding the holy Shrine, 2011) Since the municipality alone cannot afford costs of establishing these centers, so have been measured arrangements to be able to meet these costs by assistance of other organizations involved in organizing the pilgrims and also the private sector. So a part of these costs will be funded by Astan Quds Razavi, a part of them by government, and some another part by the municipality. But to attract people and private sector's participation, the municipality has been considered some incentives for them such as granting of tax relief in annual taxes, establishment of cheap construction and operation license etc. Table 1 shows the role and position of each of the organizations in supplying cheap accommodation facilities for pilgrims.

Table 1: The role and position of stakeholders involved in low-income housing pilgrims

	Participation in the Implementation	Financial Supports	Monitoring	Guidance	Policy
Government	★	★	★	★	★
Municipality	★	★	★	★	★
Astan Quds Razavi	★	★	★	★	★
Endowments And Charity Affairs	★	★			★
Public Institutions	★	★			
Charities	★	★			
Religious Institutions	★	★			
Community Groups	★				

Source: summary of pilgrims' affordable housing management project report, Mashhad Municipality, April 2010, Page 5

Presence of individuals, organizations and various groups in implementation of such a huge project makes the need on the coordinate and integrated management absolutely necessary. Pay more attention to supply the needed infrastructure is also another point which cannot be met without coordination in planning. Unfortunately, since there was no simultaneity in establishment of the Tourism Master Plan for Reconstruction and Renovation of the deteriorated texture, some demands of the tourism master plan in future developments of Mashhad has not been regarded. It also another point that can be considered in order to implement the plans better. Tourism economy is consists of a host of economical actions that like spun webs, shapes a flow of supply and demand (Weaver 2000) and makes various economic sectors be involved. Tourism is an extended business, which includes hundreds of enterprises that some of them are huge, but a large portion of them are small. There enterprises are including airlines, different shipping lines, travel agencies, accommodation facilities, restaurants and meeting and conference centers (Elliot James, 2000). In Mashhad, different parts of people earn income from pilgrims and passengers. In an extensive field study done in 2005 the proceeds obtained from travelers and pilgrims entering different parts of the city's economy were estimated that were include the accommodation cost, food, recreation, transportation, medication and treatment, and miscellaneous costs. The results of this study shows that the total resident costs of each individual pilgrim in that year in Mashhad with regard to lasting 5.43 days was \$53,87 which in

case of assuming the entry of 12 million pilgrims in that year, the income of Mashhad has been estimated \$ 646 million from entering pilgrims to the city. (Afchangy 2000) The table below shows revenue of each economic sector in 2000 from entering pilgrims.

Table 2: revenue of each economic sector from entering any individual pilgrim in city of Mashhad in the year 2000

Business sector	revenue income (Rials)	percentage of each sector's share
Shop keepers and merchants	220853	40.9
Residential units	145134	26.9
Transportation within city	34328	6.3
Sub urban transportation	45099	8.3
Drug and treatment	18331	3.4
Recreation	34094	6.3
Miscellaneous	40866	7.5
Total revenue	538705	100

Source: Afchngy Abbas, 2000, Mashhad, city of pilgrims -the adjacent town with emphasison pilgrimage-tourism approach, MA thesis, Semnan

Calculating the announced inflation rate by the Central Bank and increasing the number of pilgrims and passengers to 20 million in 2006, total revenue of Mashhad from pilgrims in 2006 was equivalent to 32140 billion Rials. By numeration of the dollar exchange rate at the time, the city revenue from entering passengers and pilgrims can be equivalent to 3.21 billion dollars.

Conclusion:

Holy city of Mashhad with a population of about 2.5 million people and with historical, recreation, abundant cultural and religious attractions is one of the significant economy centers of the country. The city which has a special place in religious and belief memory of the country people and Muslims of the region and the world, owes its current economic situation to the shrine of Imam Reza (pbuh). Currently in each year about 25 million passengers and pilgrims visit the city. Relying on statistics over the past hundred years this process has had a rising trend and this can be predicted that in the future this trend continues. Calculations also show that the future economic of the city is entirely tied to the religious-historical monuments. For better

management and provide more services to pilgrims and travelers following strategies are recommended.

- 1 – Necessary to increase the effectiveness of programs and earn the maximum economic benefit for the city, existence of integrated urban management and consistent decisions of various managers in the city.
- 2 -Paying attention to tourism master plan in setting Pilgrim settlement programs and construction of residential spaces seems necessary.
- 3 - Developing more precise criteria for historical-religious texture preservation as precious and unique heritage for the future of the city is necessary.
- 4 – Attracting more private sector participation by granting financial incentives and tax exemptions.
- 5 – Increasing current service agencies monitoring could lead to improve quality of services.
- 6 - Observance of standards required in building cheap residential facilities would cause pilgrims to stay longer in the city.

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