

Role of heritage in Qom's economic development

Iranica Desk

In the narrow alleys of old Qom, where mud-brick walls and ornate windows whisper stories of forgotten times, one can truly hear the heartbeat of history. This city is not merely a collection of buildings; it serves as a mirror reflecting the identity and culture of a people who have thrived for centuries beneath the shadows of turquoise domes.

The historical fabric of Qom, akin to a gem nestled in the heart of the city, is regarded not only as an essential part of national heritage but also as a valuable investment for a brighter future. Each brick of these ancient walls has borne witness to the laughter and tears, hopes and disappointments of generations who have traversed these alleys.

Architectural heritage and its economic potential

As one of the oldest cities in Iran, Qom boasts unique historical textures that embody authentic Iranian-Islamic architecture. These textures encompass old houses, caravanserais, traditional baths, and covered bazaars, each showcasing the artistry and creativity of our ancestors. However, these structures are not just silent edifices; each house carries a narrative of love, struggle, and life within its walls.

Experts believe that the historical fabrics of Qom have the potential to attract both domestic and international tourists, positioning the area as a major tourist destination. The presence of significant religious sites, such as the shrine of Hazrat Masoumeh (PBUH), combined with these historical textures, presents a unique opportunity for cultural tourism development. This not only bolsters the local economy but also creates valuable job opportunities, according to IRNA.

Moreover, the historical texture can serve as educational and research platforms for students and researchers in architecture and urban planning. These spaces are living resources for studying traditional construction methods, indigenous techniques, and concepts of sustainable architecture. By preserving and revitalizing these structures, we can establish a model for sustainable urban development. The use of local materials, designs adapted to the climate, and an emphasis on social spaces in these areas provide exemplary practices for other urban regions.

Challenges facing heritage preservation

Despite these potentials, experts warn that the historical fabrics of Qom face serious threats. Deterioration and destruction, driven by climate change, earthquakes, and illegal demolitions, jeopardize the future of these treasures. Uncontrolled urban development and new constructions, often disregarding historical values, have led to a loss of harmony and authenticity in these buildings. The neglect and destruction stem from a lack of public awareness and insufficient cooperation among various institutions. These issues not only threaten the historical identity of Qom but also adversely affect the quality of life and the sense of belonging of its citizens.

Strategies for preservation and revitalization

Experts assert that a comprehensive and coordinated plan is essential for the preservation and effective utilization of Qom's historical district. Establishing clear laws to protect these areas and prevent illegal demolitions should be a top priority. Attracting both private and public investment for the restoration and reconstruction of these constructions can significantly contribute to their revival. Additionally, offering



financial incentives and tax exemptions to investors can further motivate revitalization efforts.

Organizing workshops and exhibitions to enhance public awareness about the historical significance of these buildings and to encourage public participation are also crucial steps. Furthermore, stakeholders emphasize that creating special tourism routes within the historical texture of Qom could attract tourists and generate sustainable income for these areas. Collaborating with local communities in the preservation and revitalization process can foster a sense of responsibility and attachment to this heritage among the people.

The historical area of Qom represents an unparalleled treasure of the art, culture, and history of this land. Each brick in these walls holds a story from the past and a hope for the future. The preservation of this invaluable heritage is a collective duty that can only be fulfilled through the collaboration of the people, officials, and private institutions. By leveraging successful domestic and international experiences and implementing effective strategies, we can create a bright future for the historical structures of Qom. The 315-hectare historical fabric of Qom, approved in 2020 with regulations announced in 2021, continues to face multiple challenges. Among these are issues arising from disagreements between the municipality, cultural heritage organizations, and urban development authorities regarding the needs of residents in these areas. Conflicts over the implementation of regulations and



differing interpretations of the laws have further complicated the situation.

According to cultural heritage officials in Qom, there are over 100 registered historical sites within this area, each over a century old and contributing to the city's rich history. These officials have also suggested that the houses and historical buildings in the city be repurposed for various uses, such as galleries, handicraft shops, and other economic activities. Such initiatives could help revitalize these

areas and attract the attention of both locals and tourists, similar to successful implementations in Yazd.

Cultural heritage officials assert that the world views historical monuments as valuable opportunities rather than threats. This perspective is particularly relevant in Qom, which hosts over 20 million pilgrims annually and can play a key role in economic and social development. Qom's Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning and Architecture Majid Matinfar, emphasized the

current situation, noting that the urban area of Qom spans 13,000 hectares, of which 2,016 hectares are informal settlements, 1,600 hectares are dilapidated areas, and 315 hectares comprise the historical fabric, located within the dilapidated zone. He mentioned that it is possible to reduce the area of the historical texture to half its current size. However, the lack of attractiveness in these areas has led to residents showing little interest in living there, resulting in neighborhoods gradually becoming deserted or turning into residences for the immigrant majority.

Referring to actions taken, he added that there are approximately 400 registered valuable sites within the historical and dilapidated fabric of Qom. In recent years, the Qom Municipality has restored 17 out of 22 historical axes, which included façade and flooring renovations. Additionally, a specific boundary has been designated to protect historical houses from damage.

However, Matinfar emphasized that the current construction regulations in these areas, which only permit the construction of a single ground floor without any setbacks, do not offer economic incentives to property owners. Director General of the Roads and Urban Planning Department of Qom, Hossein Zanjirani, also addressed future plans for organizing these areas. He stated, "Due to opposition from cultural heritage authorities regarding the previous scheme for organizing the historical district, a new plan is currently under study. For this purpose, a new consul-

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tant has been selected, and the final studies and plans for organizing the dilapidated and historical buildings are expected to be approved within the next six months."

Ultimately, the preservation and revitalization of these structures represent not only a cultural and historical obligation but also an opportunity for sustainable economic and social development that can contribute to the identity and flourishing of this city in the future. Furthermore, the importance of cooperation among the people, officials, and public and private institutions in the preservation and revitalization of Qom's historical monuments becomes increasingly evident. With active citizen participation and a focus on public awareness, a sense of responsibility can be nurtured, encouraging individuals to value and protect this historical heritage. Additionally, creating special tourist routes within the historical fabrics of Qom could attract domestic and foreign tourists, generating employment opportunities and sustainable income for local residents. One of the main challenges facing the historical structures of Qom is the lack of proper organization and restoration, essential for preserving historical identity and enhancing the attractiveness of these areas for living and tourism. Implementing detailed plans for reconstruction and improving living conditions, alongside establishing necessary amenities and infrastructure, can transform neighborhoods and historical buildings into vibrant and appealing sites without compromising their historical identity and characteristics.

In summary, with strategic planning, effective use of existing resources, and comprehensive collaboration, it is possible to safeguard the historical fabrics of Qom from current threats and leverage them as advantages for the city's future. This invaluable heritage can preserve Qom's historical and cultural identity while serving as a driving force for sustainable social, economic, and tourism development.