

# Research Paper: The Formation of Cultural Areas of Cemeteries, a Sustainable Approach in Peri-Urban Rural Settlements (Case Study: Mashhad Metropolitan Area in Northeastern Iran)

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Rapid urban development has led to many physical-spatial difficulties and challenges around cities. Physical-spatial analysis of cemeteries adjacent to peri-urban rural settlements provides the capacity for physical development to form cultural areas around the cities. These cultural areas, with high potential for religious and historical tourism development, offer a functional-spatial connection between the city and its surroundings. This research tries to identify the cultural areas around the Mashhad metropolis to develop urban sustainability in this metropolis and its environs.

**Methods:** The research method is descriptive analytics with a practical approach. Data were analyzed using ArcGIS software and spatial analysis models such as density patterns, Inverse Distance Weighting (IDW) interpolation, and multi-distance spatial cluster analysis (K Function).

**Results:** The research findings indicate that the physical distribution of the mausoleums in the peri-urban areas of Mashhad and the spatial analysis of surrounding rural settlements have provided the possibility of forming cultural sites centered on functional-spatial features of the cemeteries. The physical development of the Mashhad metropolis and the population growth of rural settlements surrounding the cemeteries provide a high potential to develop these cultural-memorial sites. Due to the proximity of these cultural areas to the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), a kind of cultural tourism boom in these leisure spaces. The spatial-spatial analysis results indicate the determination of two cultural areas around the Mashhad metropolis: the cultural clusters of Khaje Rabi, Khaje Murad, Khaje Abasalt, and Behesht Reza can be identified as the first area due to their proximity to the Holy Shrine. The cultural clusters of Yasir and Naser, Behesht Rezvan, and Imamzadegan Panjtan as the second cultural- memorial sites

**Conclusion:** Functional-structural developments in Mashhad's peri-urban settlements and the physical and spatial proximity of cemeteries in the metropolitan area of Mashhad provide an excellent opportunity to form cultural-memorial areas. Forming the cultural regions of the cemeteries around the metropolitans is considered a sustainable approach to the connection between urban and rural settlements through the development of cultural tourism.

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## 1. Introduction

The transformation of recent decades and the accelerated trend of urbanization versus rural emigration, especially in third-world countries, has a different nature and led to problematic changes both qualitatively and quantitatively in rural communities (Saeidi, 2008: 96). On the other hand, with these developments, many villages around the city have faced difficulties due to their establishment and function, which have different diversity. By literature review on peri-urban areas, we came across research by Nazir et al. (2010) titled “Instability of rural settlements and the future of marginalization in Khorasan Razavi.” The results showed that if marginalization is not organized within the urban settlement’s limits or the functional role and physical quality improvement of rural settlements are not taken into account, this will lead to destroying small rural settlements around urban areas and the formation of informal settlements, the effects of which will create instability in the regional system. Shayan and Hadizadeh (2010) analyzed the necessity of organizing villages in metropolitan areas emphasizing the Mashhad metropolis. They noted that poor management and planning are the main factors causing problems in urban areas without a specific strategy for managing and monitoring. These issues are becoming more critical every day in the cities’ territory. Therefore, integrated management and strict supervision it is necessary for peri-urban lands. The result of another research titled “Land market forces and the role of government in sprawl” by Ting Wei Zhang (1996) on Chinese cities showed that 5.8 million hectares of agricultural land were lost or its use changed between 1986 and 1996. Urban structures have covered one-fifth due to horizontal expansion and dispersion patterns. He believes that the developers of the urban banks are the urban poor who could not own land in the city and were forced to settle in the outskirts and edges of the cities due to economic compulsion. We are faced with a socio-economic settlement system that should be studied and analyzed with the approach of linking urban and rural development.

## 2. Literature Review

Regarding urban spaces, one of the places and uses of urban services is the establishment and spatial distribution of cemeteries. Cemeteries, as one of the cultural areas, were once an essential part of human habitats and one of the primary elements of cities. These cultural areas, established to commemorate the status of the

deceased, have had different styles and contexts in historical periods. Cemeteries are one of the most stable elements of the settlement structure. Based on the classification presented for the historical, cultural, and social landscape, it may be possible to count the cemeteries in the category of original landscapes due to their stable role in the past and present society. These memorable landscapes play a significant role in preserving the memory of the past (Faizi & Razzaghi Asl, 2013: 23). Also, the European Landscape Convention considers historical, cultural landscapes such as cemeteries as the most basic and diverse part of cultural heritage and states that protect cultural and historical landscapes. So, attention should be paid to the environmental, natural, and human connections of these Views are essential. What facilitates the formation of the cultural-historical flow of the cemetery is the feeling of longing (nostalgia) and the increasing attention to heritage in general. Returning to the past is seen as a demand for tourism, combining all the different forms of art, architecture, education, and cultural heritage (Momtazpour, 2011: 9).

One of the solutions to the problems resulting from the abandonment of the cemetery space is strengthening people’s presence through tourism. Creating suitable infrastructures and welfare facilities attract more people and tourists, and developing ideas that match the spirit of the place can attract more people (Irani Behbahani & Vahidzadegan, 2012: 12). Cemetery tourism is a small form of tourism with special interest to cultural areas (Zahedi et al., 2014: 132). Bitter tourism has been proposed in the last two decades, and authors in this field have presented their research works with several titles. Bitter tourism can be seen as the development related to places and sites or cultural, heritage, and historical phenomena that contain traces of human life’s sadness, sorrow, tragedy, and bitterness. Bernard (2014) defines grim tourism as follows: “This form of tourism represents the more frightening side of tourism that appeared in the early 19th century” (Dann & Seaton, 2001). Grief tourism may be defined as a particular type of cultural tourism, including travel to places that document or remind of Death. Therefore, grief tourism should be considered from the following perspectives: 1. The quality or magnitude of the works of the deceased person or persons, 2. The character, history, and interpretation of an event or site related to death, and 3. motivations and needs (education, respect, adventure, excitement, recreation) and effects (psychological, social, economic) (Tanas, 2013: 23). Death is also a cultural asset commonly found in contemporary tourism psychology. The changing nature of consumers leads tourism to explore new spaces that are often familiar but relatively poorly documented and

studied (Wanbrooks, 2010: 41). In fact, many elements and phenomena that exist in culture can become a tourist attraction, and it is the duty of planners, policymakers and tourism providers to identify this ability.

On the one hand, the needs of tourists, on the other hand, to make proper use of these capabilities. As a part of the historical and national identity of a society, historical cemeteries are one of the elements that can play a role in the list of tourist attractions in a destination. Accordingly, this research seeks to examine the effects of the settlement structure on forming the cultural areas of the cemeteries in the peri-urban regions of Mashhad.

### 3. Methodology

This research aims to understand the structural changes of the settlement system around the metropolis of Mashhad and the space for the formation of the cultural areas of the cemeteries in the peri-urban development. The method of narrative review and document study was used. The analytical process with satellite images (RS) and the analyzes obtained from the geographic information system (GIS) was used to investigate the changes in the settlement structure in the period 1976-2016. Then, using density models, IDW interpolation, and multi-distance spatial cluster analysis, the effects of functional-structural transformations of the settlement system on the formation of the cultural area of the peri-urban cemeteries of Mashhad have been investigated. On the other hand, to analyze the shape of the cultural areas of cemeteries in the peri-urban spaces of Mashhad, variables such as access to tourist attractions, historical attractions, the leading road network, the Holy Shrine, cultural centers, and urban and rural settlements are considered. have been measured. In this connection, multi-distance spatial cluster analysis (the K- nearest neighbor function) is one of the practical tools for spa-

tial recognition of spatial patterns, which can be used to determine the clustering status of phenomena and evaluate different geographical distances. In fact, by using the K-nearest neighbor function, the accumulation and dispersion of point complications can be measured based on different distances or spatial scales. In most analyses of the distribution pattern of difficulties and phenomena in the geographical space, it is necessary to choose the appropriate ranking. Also, some threshold distance or distance range is required in many cases to perform the analysis. By analyzing spatial distribution patterns in multiple spatial distances and scales, the arrangement of the patterns usually changes from one distance to another or from one scale to another, which reflects the existence of specific spatial processes in spaces and scales. They are different. The nearest neighbor function K shows how the spatial clustering or the distribution of the centrality of complications changes with the size of the neighborhood unit.

It should be noted that there are different types of K functions. One of the functions is the L(d) function. In this way, the relation K can be calculated as follows.

#### 1) Relationship

$$L(d) = \sqrt{\frac{A \sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1, j \neq i}^n K_{i,j}}{\pi n(n-1)}}$$

In this term, d is the distance, n is equal to the total number of geographical features in the used layer, A represents the total area of the range, and  $K_{(i,j)}$  is the weight. If there is no need to modify the corners of the layer, then if the distance between i and j is less than d, the weight will be equal to one; otherwise, it will be equal to zero. The corner correction method somewhat changes  $K_{(i,j)}$ .

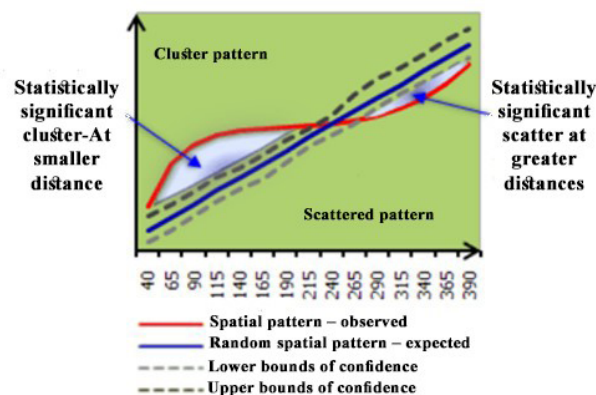


Figure 1. Schematic model of multi-distance spatial cluster analysis

Another method used in this research is an interpolation IDW. This method refers to the process of quantitative estimation, for points without data, with the help of nearby and known facts. This process is carried out due to the limitation of point data and the necessity of compiling a map of an entire area to prepare equal-value maps.

In this method, the nearest place has more weight than the distant places. In this method, a criterion called cut-off may be used for the maximum distance or points that can be considered. The mathematical relationship of this method is as follows.

2) relationship

$$Z_j = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \frac{Z_i}{h_{ij}^B}}{\sum_{i=1}^n \frac{1}{h_{ij}^B}}$$

In this relationship,  $Z_j$  is the estimated value at point J,  $Z_i$  is the value at point I,  $i$  is the index for the adjacent issues,  $j$  is the index for the points to be estimated, and  $h_{ij}$  is the distance between the points to be estimated. ( $j$ ) and adjacent points ( $i$ ),  $B$  is the weighting power.

#### 4. Findings

To understand and analyze the system of spatial settlement of settlement centers in this research, firstly, the typology of the spatial pattern of peri-urban cemeteries and then the system of rural settlements as the spatial basis of the formation of the cultural areas of cemeteries are examined.

##### The spatial pattern of the cemeteries:

By recognizing and analyzing the types of cemeteries in the Mashhad metropolis, three types of cemeteries can be identified and analyzed. In this connection, these three types are examined in this order.

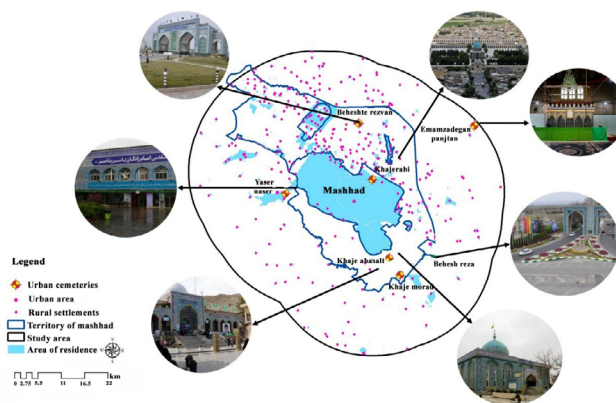
The type of Imamzade and Bekaa Mubarak type: this type of architecture is a sacred and ritual memorial that is connected with the solid historical background of the subject of the cemetery in Shiism and is used today as one of the common models of architecture in the cemetery. Pilgrimage to Imamzadeh and the blessed Bekaa, as well as the pilgrimage to the graves, has a long history in the religious culture of Iran. The characteristic of this model is the creation of a symbolic and symbolic building mixed with religious beliefs and cultural values and the recreation of a sacred and blessed space that simulta-

neously incorporates the function of pilgrimage as a collective and social activity. As a result, in designing and organizing such memorial-pilgrimage monuments, creating communal spaces for social interaction is also very important (Masoodi Asal et al., 2015: 120). Imamzadegan of Panjtan in the north, Imamzadegan of Yasir and Nasser in the west, and Khaje Abaslat and Khaje Murad in the southeast of Mashhad belong to this category.

Cemetery type: important monuments are among the first cemeteries. Using four-arched or tower-like and evolutionary forms of these designs as emblematic and symbolic buildings is one of the basic patterns in creating cemeteries. The most important feature of this pattern, seen in the architecture of famous and prestigious cemeteries, is their distinctive form, which reflects glory, majesty, and steadfastness and plays a role as a significant element in the landscape (Mulasalehi, 2014). Behesht Reza in the southeast and Behesht Rezvan in the north are cemetery models.

Type of Iranian garden: Iranian garden is another typical pattern in the design of the cemetery, whose various dimensions of identity, meaning, function, and social play a role in creating a successful memorial and pilgrimage space. The coexistence of the Iranian garden and Paradise, along with the strengthening of the natural elements and their value in Iranian-Islamic culture, creates a symbolic space while having a religious and spiritual identity, allowing the connection with nature in a beautiful space with a pleasant and lively atmosphere as a recreational area in the city. Creating a relaxed space for individual reflection along with the large natural space that combines tourism with pilgrimage and commemoration has contributed to the prosperity of these areas. At the same time, cemeteries in this complex guarantee the cultural orientation and spirit that dominates the space. Functionally, according to social traditions, the Iranian garden has been a suitable space for spending leisure time and interacting with others. Excursion in nature and forest has been an example for Iranian poets, which is connected with the tradition of pilgrimage to graves and religious tourism. Also, the pattern of the garden, by creating wide open spaces for holding public ceremonies, has a suitable adaptation to the functions related to the cemetery (Muntaraz al-Qaim & Kushki, 2018: 52). Khaje Rabi Garden in the north of Mashhad is one of the examples of Iranian garden that has both religious and tourist functions.





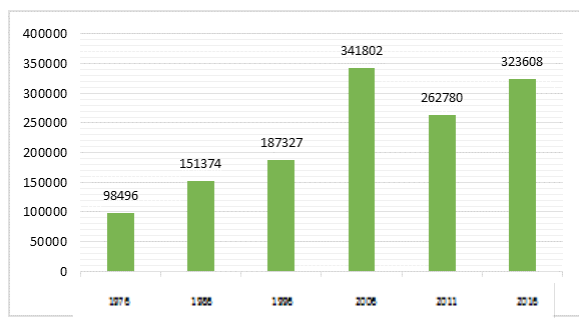
**Figure 2.** The location of the cemeteries in the peri-urban areas of Mashhad

JSRD

Analysis of the spatial pattern of peri-urban rural settlements system:

The spatial analysis results of rural settlements in the suburban areas of Mashhad show that there are 319 rural settlements with a population of over 323,608 people. The trend of developments indicates that the population of these settlements has increased sharply since 1996. As statistical information shows, in 2006, the population of villages in the suburbs of Mashhad reached the highest figure of 341,802 people. Meanwhile, in the 2011 census, the rural population around Mashhad decreased. This factor is due to the physical expansion of Mashhad city and some surrounding villages' annexation into the urban space. But in 2015, with the increase in migration to Mashhad due to droughts and unemployment, it increased and reached 323,608 people. Figure 3 shows the changes in the population of the rural settlements in the suburbs of Mashhad in 2015-2016.

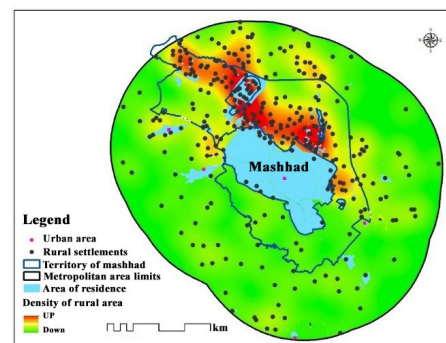
The pattern analysis of the distribution of rural settlements in the peri-urban areas of Mashhad shows that rural settlements are located in a high-intensity cluster in the north and northwest of Mashhad. This description is significant in these areas due to the existence of arable lands and the population background.



**Figure 3.** The population of rural settlements in Mashhad during the period 1976-2016

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Population changes in the peri-urban areas of Mashhad have been analyzed from 1976 to 2016 to understand the surrounding rural settlements of the Mashhad metropolis. The results show (Figure 5) that the spatial flows of the population in the 40 years are happening from the peri-urban areas of Mashhad and at a great distance to rural settlements in the vicinity of Mashhad (urban edge). The result of the last few censuses showed a new phenomenon in the metropolitan of Mashhad. It seems that the rapid growth of the physical development of Mashhad has provided attractions for the expansion of peri-urban settlements in the metropolitan functional jurisdiction. As a result, the population has increased in the metro area. Growth rate analysis of the Mashhad metropolis shows that the population has flowed from the western regions to the north and southeast of Mashhad since 1976. This process is always going on in rural settlements as well. This way, the population in the Mashhad metropolis is increasing significantly with population growth. Factors such as rising housing prices in Mashhad city, the reasonable price of housing in suburban satellite settlements, and the development of metropolitan transportation connections with the surrounding area have led to the rapid growth of the physical population in the surrounding territories.



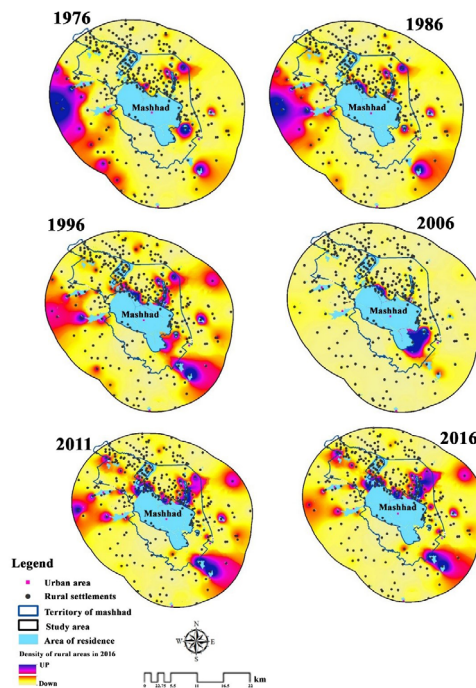
**Figure 4.** Density of rural areas in peri-urban areas of Mashhad

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The spatial developments have led to an increase in the centralization of the Mashhad metropolis on a regional scale. The economic changes in the national and regional scale due to the rise in the cost of living over the years have played a significant role in moving the middle class from Mashhad city to suburban settlements. The statistical trends of the spatial displacement of the population in the Mashhad metropolitan area show that by the mid-decade of 1996 until now, considerable physical growth has occurred around the city of Mashhad in the Tous, Mehrgan, Khaje Rabi, and Elahiye. This physical-spatial development shows the tendency of the population to settle outside the Mashhad city.

The highest annual population growth rate in Mashhad city is related to the period of 1976-1986 with 7.41 per-

cent. From 2011 to 2016, the annual population growth of Mashhad decreased, the same as other parts of the country, and reached 1.02 percent. In recent decades, this city has become a metropolis with uneven and unbalanced growth. The population of this city increased from 700,000 people to 3,000,000 people in 40 years (1976-2016), with a growth of 328%. At the same time as the population increased, the city's physical also rose from 7,800 hectares to 34,000 hectares, with an average annual expansion of 2.5%. Between 1966 and 1976, after the land reforms and extensive migrations from the village to the city, the physical growth of Mashhad reached the highest level (9.3%). The slightest physical development occurred in 2007-2012 (0.9 percent). The rate of physical growth of Mashhad city in 2012-2017 was about 2.7% (Table 1).



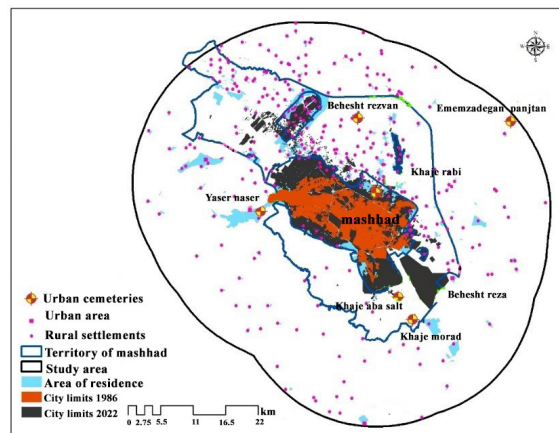
**Figure 5.** Changes in the population of rural settlements in the peri-urban areas of Mashhad in the period 1976-2016



**Table 1.** The process of physical development of Mashhad during the period 1976-2016

urban land per capita (square meters)	Urban density (people per hectare)	Area (hectares)	population (people)	Year
109	92	7800	716.000	1976
127	79	18500	1.463.000	1986
139	72	26100	1.887.000	1996
124	81	28866	2.427.000	2006
104	95	30000	2.766.000	2011
112	89	34345	3.062.000	2016





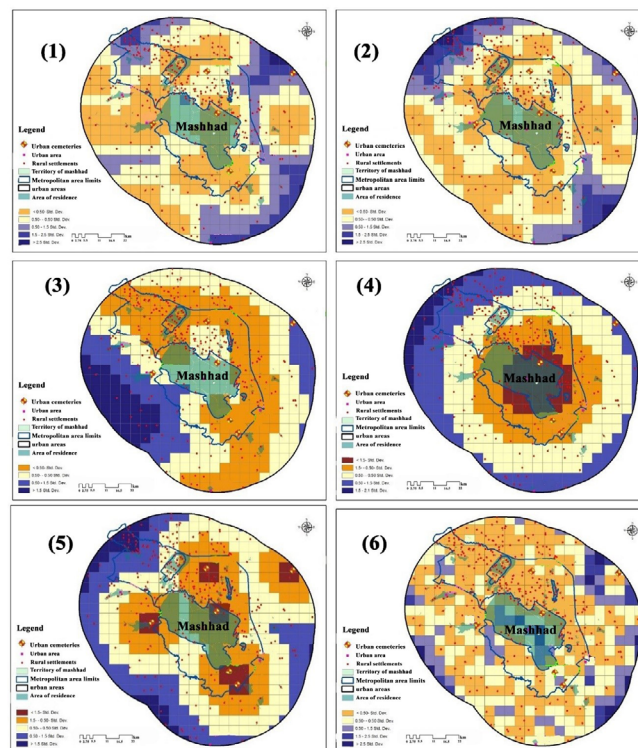
**Figure 6.** Physical development of Mashhad city in the period 1986-2016

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This research investigates the formation of the cultural areas of cemeteries in the peri-urban regions of Mashhad. Variables such as access to tourist attractions, historical attractions, the leading road network, the Holy shrine of Imam Reza, cultural centers, and urban and rural settlements have been measured. Regarding access to tourist attractions, the results show that, except for Imamzadegan, five other cemeteries have good access to tourist attractions. Regarding the access to the historical attractions, the surveys indicate that due to the spatial distribution of these attractions in the suburbs of Mashhad, spatial access is desirable in all the cemeteries. Examining the access of the mausoleums to the main communica-

tion networks (highway) shows that the mausoleums of Behesht Reza, Khajeh Murad, Khajeh Abaslat, and Behesht Rezvan have good access. But the mausoleums of Imam Zadeqan Panjtan, Khaja Rabi, Yasir, and Nasser have lower access to the main roads.

Investigations show that only Khajah Rabi's tomb has good access to the Holy Shrine. Also, the cemeteries have good access to cultural centers and rural settlements. Figure 7 shows the accessibility of the mausoleums to the investigated variables.



**Figure 7.** Access to (1) tourist attractions, (2) historical attractions, (3) main road network, (4) Motahar Razavi shrine, (5) cultural centers, and (6) urban settlements and rural

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To investigate the pattern of the cultural areas of the tombs in the suburban regions of Mashhad, multi-distance spatial cluster analysis (K- nearest neighbor function) has been used. The results show that the pattern of collections of Khaje Rabi, Khaje Abasalt, Khaje Murad, and Behesht Reza is cluster type. But the distribution pattern of Yaser and Nasser collections, Imamzadegan Panjtan, and Behesht Rezvan tends towards a scattered way.

As seen in Figure 9, the cultural areas of the hermitages have been formed in the peri-urban spaces of Mashhad. On the one hand, the physical development of the metropolis of Mashhad; on the other hand, the population growth of rural settlements in geographical proximity has affected these cultural-memorial areas. The cultural regions formed with the focus on the Holy Shrine can boost tourism in the cemeteries as one of the particular forms of cultural tourism. Based on this and according to the K- nearest neighbor model results, the complexes of Khaje Rabi, Khaje Murad, Khaje Abasalt, and Behesht Reza, due to their proximity to the Holy Shrine, were identified as a cultural-memorial area with a cluster pattern. Also, Imamzadegan Yasir and Nasser, Behesht Rezvan, and Imamzadegan Panjtan were identified as cultural-memorial areas with a scattered pattern.

## 5. Discussion

Mausoleums are considered one of the influential elements in the formation and spatial concentration of urban and rural settlements. In this way, the protection of historical tombs due to their historical-cultural, local-regional, and sometimes national identity will play a significant role in the formation of spaces with developmental uses, especially with the function of leisure and tourism. In this regard, one of the examples of the formation of cultural areas using the surrounding hermitages is in the city of Milan, Italy. The cultural areas around the city of Milan through the symbiosis of the Milan Mausoleum as a collective and independent urban open space, a cultural and social phenomenon and the meeting point of two opposite concepts, i.e., death and life, and as one of the most historical urban elements and spaces of identity. The city and urban culture have provided the ability to create the necessary platform for expanding and continuing the sense of belonging, identity, and formation of the national and civil society. In this way, the uses of the tombs with the ability to develop and cooperate with the help of tourism provide the title of cultural-historical landscapes in forming cultural areas around big cities.

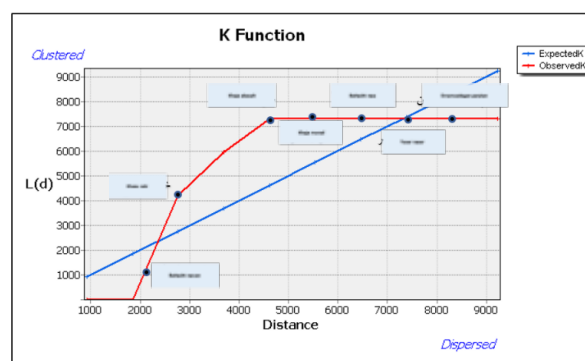


Figure 8. Measuring the pattern of the cemeteries using the K nearest neighbor model

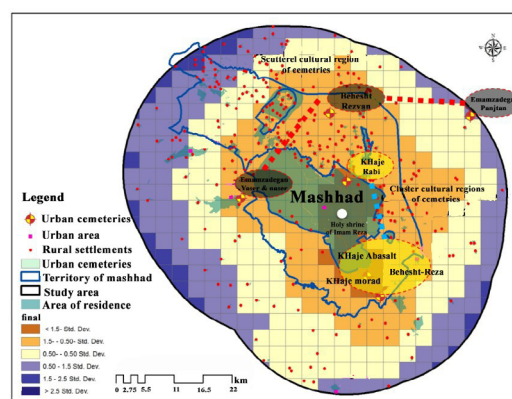


Figure 9. The formation of the cultural areas of the tombs in the peri-urban spaces of Mashhad





On the one hand, this formation and development of the space around the megacities has provided physical-spatial stability in the rural settlements around the cities by improving the sense of place and memory and reducing many physical and socio-economic anomalies. By analyzing the changes in the residential system's structure and the location of peri-urban tombs, this research explains the formation process of the cultural areas of the cemeteries in the peri-urban spaces of Mashhad. For this purpose, the mausoleums of Behesht Reza, Khaje Murad, and Khaje Abaslat in the southeast of Mashhad, Yasir and Nasser in the west of Mashhad, Behesht Rezvan, Khaje Rabi and Imamzadegan Panjtan in the north of Mashhad city were spatially analyzed. The results indicate 319 rural settlements with over 323,608 people in the peri-urban areas of Mashhad. The spatial flows of the population in the 40 years, from the peri-urban areas of the metropolitan Mashhad and at long distances to the nearby rural settlements and in place proximity to Mashhad (urban edge), is happening. In other words, factors such as the high housing price in Mashhad city, the more reasonable price of housing in peri-urban satellite settlements, and the development of transportation connections between the metropolis and the surrounding area have led to the attention of the areas around the Mashhad. This issue has led to the rapid growth of the physical-spatial area around Mashhad. Also, the population of the Mashhad metropolis in the 40 years (1976-2016) has been accompanied by a growth of 328%, and increased from 700,000 to 3,000,000 people. Functional-structural developments in the settlement system in Mashhad's peri-urban spaces and the spatial-spatial proximity of cemeteries in the metropolitan area of Mashhad provide a favorable opportunity for the formation of the cultural-memorial regions. The investigations show that the most desirable focus is the cultural pattern of Khaje Rabi, Khaje Abaslat, Khaje Murad, and Behesht Reza areas with cluster concentration.

Further, the distribution pattern of Yaser and Naser areas, Imamzadegan Panjtan, and Behesht Rezvan, with the scattered pattern, play a complementary role in cultural spaces. The results of this research, with the study of Nedai Toosi and Farkhunde Kish (2018), identify spatial requirements for developing creative and competitive tourism-cultural clusters in the metropolis of Tehran in the formation of cultural-tourism groups. The following suggestions are significant to form the cultural areas of the cemeteries in the peri-urban spaces of Mashhad.

- Spatial planning of the cultural areas of peri-urban tombs in physical terms and equipping the cultural infrastructure to attract religious-historical tourists.

- Creating a platform for private sector investment with the participation of the residents of the surrounding areas to develop tourism with a cultural-historical approach

- Planning the infrastructure and development service system in the cultural centers of peri-urban cemeteries to increase the per capita services for citizens and religious tourists.

- Using the indigenous model of Mazar Bagh to promote Iranian-Islamic identity, greenery, and green space in the tombs.

- Rethinking the cultural landscape of the cemetery and designing memorial gates to improve the readability and identity of the cemetery complex

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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