

**Islamic Republic of Iran**

Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts & Tourism Organization

**ICHHTO**



**State of Conservation report of Masjed-e Jame-Isfahan**

**World Heritage Site**

*UNESCO*

*World Heritage Convention*

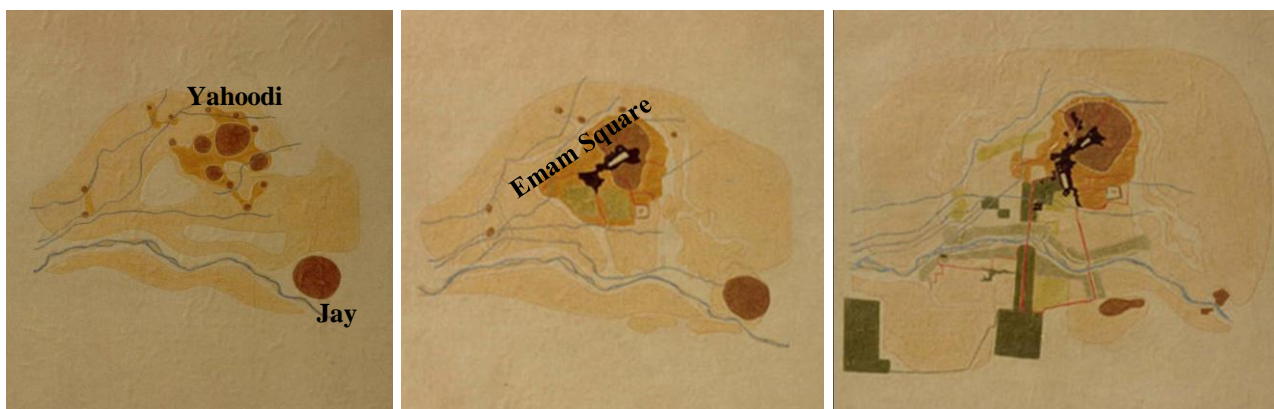
*Tehran 2015*

*In the name of God*

## Introduction

Urban development is an inevitable flow in today's world, meanwhile a major issue in historic cities. Growing societies, increase in population, the need to advance the conditions of life for residents, etc. has led to development of cities not only in recent decades but also from centuries ago. However these developments have mainly targeted the historic districts of cities where a large number of people reside with relatively low welfare conditions due to the lack of considerations and absence of technologies emerged for a better improvement together with respecting the historic character and qualities of the setting.

Isfahan as a major city in Iranian plateau has had various development phases in its history not only related to the recent time but also from the very first centuries of its existence.



**Figure 1. City Structure before Islam (left)- City Structure In 11 A.D Century- SALJOOGHI (middle) - City Structure in 17 A.D Century- SAFAVI (right)**

Along the city development, numerous outstanding structures and ensembles formed within the boundaries of Isfahan city, one of which, considering outstanding universal values, is Masjed-e Jame which itself comprises of several development phases coincided the development phases of Atiq Square in its setting.

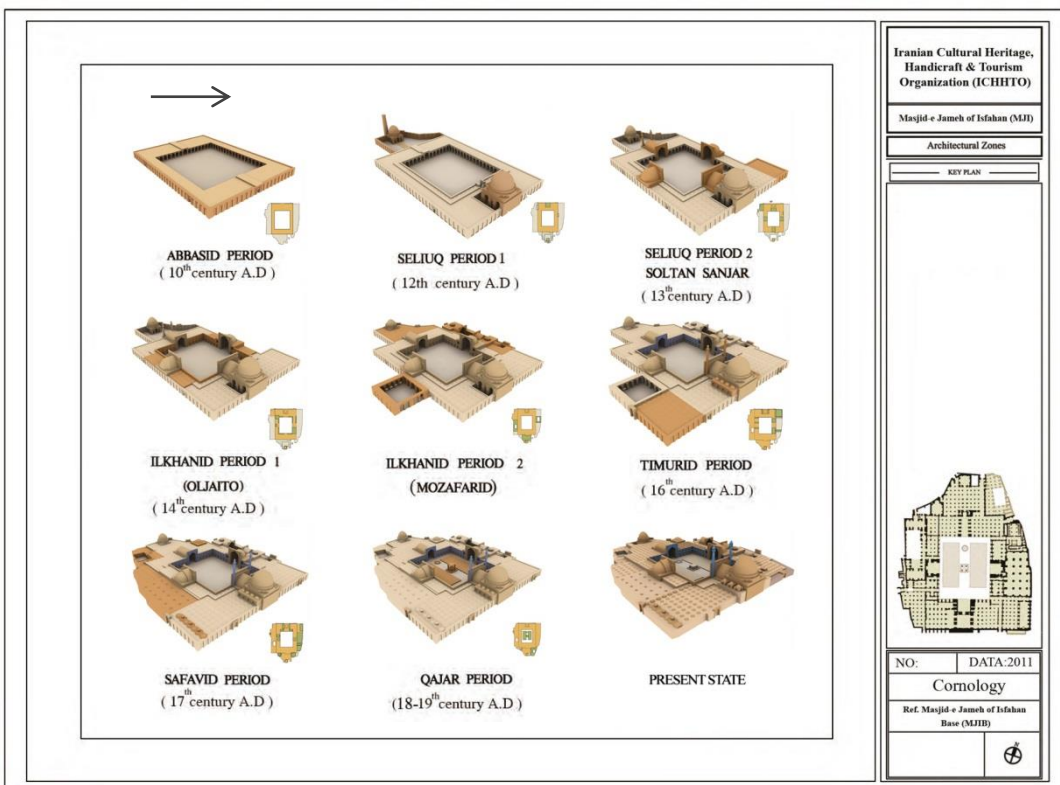


Figure 2. Development sequences of Masjed-e Jame over time

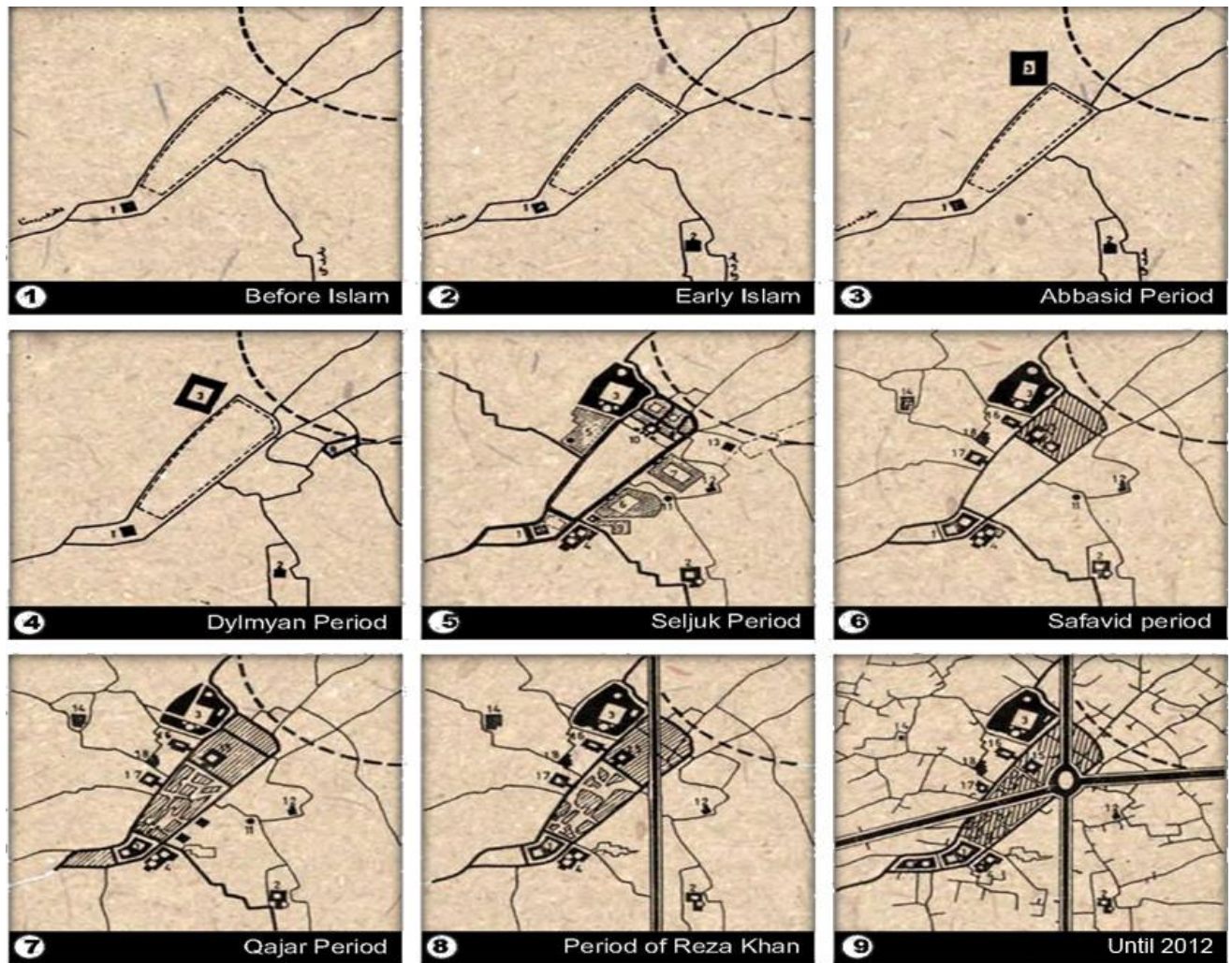


Figure 3. Development sequences of Emam ali (atiq) square over time

### Masjed-e Jame World Heritage Site

Construction of Masjed-e Jāme' of Isfahan led to the integration of rural centers in Sepahan area. As a result, the generation of the primary nucleus of Isfahan took place in the middle of second century AH (9th century).

Since then Masjed-e Jāme' of Isfahan has reflected future developments occurring in later periods of time. Beside the mosque, the first square of Isfahan was built and gradually bazaars and other public structures engulfed it. Furthermore, the residential neighborhoods beside the mosque expanded and multiple passage ways and public walks took shape with their branches penetrated from mosque entrances into the

neighborhoods. Gradually, they were specified by a free (organic) growth of city planning components.

In the third century AH (10th AD) Masjed-e Jāme' of Isfahan reached its second phase of growth resulting out of urban expansion which was: its reconstruction and wider development. In this way the primary mosque belonging to the second century AH (9th century AD) was replaced by a newer mosque which was built in a larger area after correcting the direction of its Qiblah. Since then, Masjed-e Jāme' of Isfahan has always played the role of a center for religious, cultural and social activities in Isfahan during the reign of Al-I Buyid, Seljuq, Ilkhanid and Timurid dynasties. Even the selection of Isfahan as the government base of Iran during the Safavid rule (11<sup>th</sup> century AH coincided with 17th century AD) followed by the construction of a new Friday mosque just off a new city square and the distancing of the government base from the old Friday mosque, its prestige could not be decreased at all. Therefore, it still keeps its religious and cultural power in the heart of people. And due to popularity as well as its traditional administration by local people, Masjed-e Jāme' of Isfahan enjoys quite specific cultural, social and religious values. During the course of its history, the mosque has been the location of multiple developments as well as the origin of many significant religious and social events so that all important religious and social ceremonies of Isfahan are held here.

*Masjed-e Jāme'* of Isfahan contains millennium of architectural experiences in particular Iranian mosque style (*Masjed-e Irani*). For this reason, many historical styles of architecture in Iran and its neighboring countries can be identified in it. Among its features are: generating many types of brick piers decorated with geometrical designs (brick columns with different cross sections including two, three and four sectioned forms obtained by combining circles, covering *Taq-o cheshmehs* in various implementation methods, *four Ayyāns* style with various decorations for each one, huge domes built in creative methods including double connected shells, symmetrical and decorated facades all around the court yard, ten portals each opening into a passageway located outside the mosque. All these constituents generate a unique complex in their final composition so that they can be rightfully called the continuous history and the architectural encyclopedia of Iran even for some other regions such as Central Asia.

In addition, after the developments of *Masjed-e Jāme'* of Isfahan in the 5th century AH (12<sup>th</sup> century AD), the former hypostyle mosque was transformed into a *Chahar Ayyāni* ["four Ayyāns"] mosque and this novel method was adopted in the Iranian mosque design in comparison with the hypostyle (*Shabestani*) style which referred to as Arabic style.

The combination of *four Ayyāns* and a dome chamber evolved in Isfahan was soon repeated in *Jāme'* Mosques in nearby towns. From this point, the plan became standard for Friday mosques erected all over Iran (Blair, 1977). This pattern also was transmitted to other Muslim countries. Even in some formerly existing mosques, alterations were made in order to turn them into *Chahar Ayyāni* mosques. Therefore, the most principal architectural value of *Masjed-e Jāme'* of Isfahan is that it has played the role of a prototype in the architectural history of the east.

This style serving as the Iranian mosque design is in effect a unique creation among Friday mosques of the world, later becoming a prototype for building other mosques in Iran and the Central Asia.

Schroeder for instance, gives a wonderful description of the building, "*[it] is the most beautiful structure in Persia. In each of these aspects [aesthetics, geometry and mechanics] the building is remarkable*". He thoroughly explains the aesthetic and geometrical features of the monument showing the sophisticated application of the Golden Ratio. His geometrical analysis proves that the architect of the building has taken a pentagon, which is generated between the sides of a grand equilateral triangle the apex of which is the peak of the dome, as a symbol for the ratio; and the proportions of the Golden Section determine the dimensions of each single element in the structure, such as the peak of the dome, the height of the whole zone of transition from the base to the dome, the peak of the octagonal arch, the peak of the lower main arch, the height of the lower side-arches and the height of the window (Hejazi, 2004).

Decorative layers and surfaces are always considered as important principle of architecture. From the beginning, illustrating human figures in Islamic mosques was not permitted. Instead usage was made of other shapes such as abstract nature or geometrical shapes but in an ornamental manner. In *Masjed-e Jāme'* of Isfahan many

surfaces and spaces have been decorated by different ornamental methods belonging to various historical periods which are discussed briefly here.

In the 4th century AH (11th century AD), the annexations of *Al-I Buyid* era were in the form of double and triple sectioned columns with a brick façade decorated with delicate brick motifs such as *Gol andazi* [bas relief] or *Goud va Barjasteh Kari*. In the 5th century AH (12th century AD) which coincides with the *Seljuqs* era, decorative surfaces were executed by mixing geometrical shapes and masonry ["*Bannaiee*"] script with letters vertically written. In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8th centuries (14th century AD) coincided with Mongol *Ilkhanids*, the prevalent decoration method has been largely generating stucco work surfaces accompanied by various styles of writing. In particular, *mehrab* construction and its decoration have been done with stucco work using abstract motifs of nature. *Mehrab-e Uljeitu* is a masterpiece of this art.

In the 9th century AH (15th century AD) coincided with the *Timurids* rule, usage has been made of claddings in *Rasmi bandi* method as well as decoration of surfaces with colorful tiles especially in facades around the court yard. In the 10th and 11th century AH (17th and 18<sup>th</sup> century AD) coincided with *Safavids* rule, following the decorative styles of *Timurids* era continued accompanied by *Muqarnas* works in the eastern *Ayvān* as well as the delicate and skillful usage of a combination of tiles and bricks in the entire *four Ayvāns* located around the court yard.

On the whole, architectural decorations in *Masjed-e Jāme'* of Isfahan represent a collection of decorative arts throughout the history of the city as well as architectural developments occurred in the mosque. Some of these decorations were repeated later in other mosques and some have unique patterns such as colorful tiles belonging to the *Timurids* era. However the important point is the usage of a blend of decorative arts, in particular a combination of bricks and tiles which is unprecedented and has led to an attractive and exceptional unity and integrity for *Masjed-e Jāme'* of Isfahan all through its history.

Masjed-e jame Isfahan as a World Heritage Site, is a shared heritage of mankind which exhibits an important interchange of human values, over a span of time within Isfahan



cultural area, on developments in architecture, technology, monumental arts and town planning. The architecture and the layout of the Jāme' Mosque of Isfahan exhibit an important interchange of human values and influences originating from palace architecture as early as the *Achaemenids* and *Sassanids* periods in pre-Islamic Persia. Furthermore, its integration into the urban fabric through its many gates and entrances that weave it with the city's activities has been instrumental in subsequent town-planning of the ancient city of Isfahan.

The architectural and artistic concepts and solutions of the Jāme' Mosque became a major reference for the later development of mosque architecture, indeed, from the early Islam to the *Qajar* reign. This was particularly the case of the *four-Ayvān* ground plan from the *Seljuqs* period. Indeed, the Jāme' Mosque of Isfahan can be considered the most significant and influential witness to history of monumental art, architecture and technology of Jāme' Mosques in the Islamic world. As the architectural prototype of domed mosques with *Ayvāns* in the Iranian style, *Masjed-e Jāme'* of Isfahan has served as a model for mosques not only within the Iranian plateau but also beyond, such as Central Asia. Moreover, the technology of constructing (*Tarkin*) ribbed domes, representing unique engineering skills, was here used for the first time and the Jāme' Mosque is still regarded as the most perfect domed brick structure of its type.

The whole property and its components are located on one portion of land providing its structural and functional integrity. *Masjed-e Jāme'* of Isfahan is directly linked to the very old, long Bazaar of Isfahan which starts from the mosque itself snakes through a number of historic places and terminating within the bazaar and terminates in the World Heritage Site of *Meydan-e Imam*. Since it has continuously been in use, maintained and regarded as a highly respected mosque by the ordinary people as well as the authorities, regionally and nationally, who consider its protection and conservation a religious duty, it has fully retained its integrity and authenticity throughout the centuries and until today.

Thus *Masjed-e jame* and its setting were a focal point for Isfahan city and its residents where plenty of social services and activities were offered for centuries. Later with the construction of Emam square (*Naghsh-e jahan*) in safavid era, this district gradually secluded, yet retained its cultural and spiritual centrality in Iranian cultural life until today.

Thus from qajar period the functional and physical qualities of Atiq square altered. In Pahlavi era, Atiq Square as the historic setting of Masjed-e jame was confounded by a new road network. All these alterations led to a drop in the quality of life and welfare in the setting of Masjed-e jame while keeping a detracting process. These circumstances have had a negative impact not only on the life of residents but also on the status of Masjed-e jame as the focal point of the district.



**Figure 4. Conditions of Atiq square before implementation of the rehabilitation plan**

Therefore, for regaining the prestige, dignity and respect of the area, for improvement of district and slummed area and for preserving the values of Masjed-e jame and its setting, a major plan has considered in which the rehabilitation of Atiq square and reorganizing of Masjed-e jame's setting proposed.

Masjed-e jame ↓



Figure 5. Atiq square before and after implementation of the rehabilitation plan

The plan deliberates boundaries of which embody sections of the property's buffer zone.

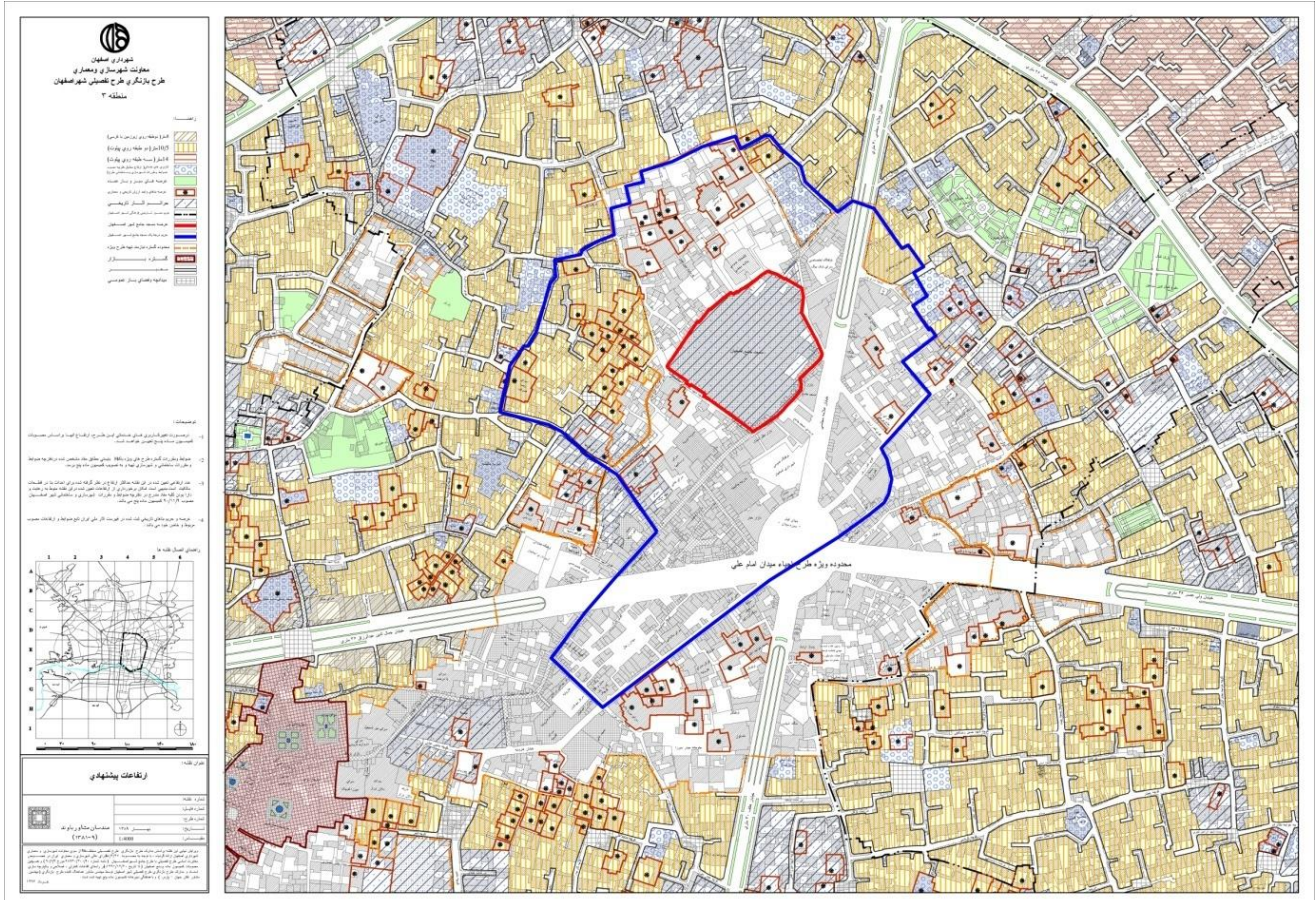


Figure 6. Masjed-e jame Core and Buffer zones

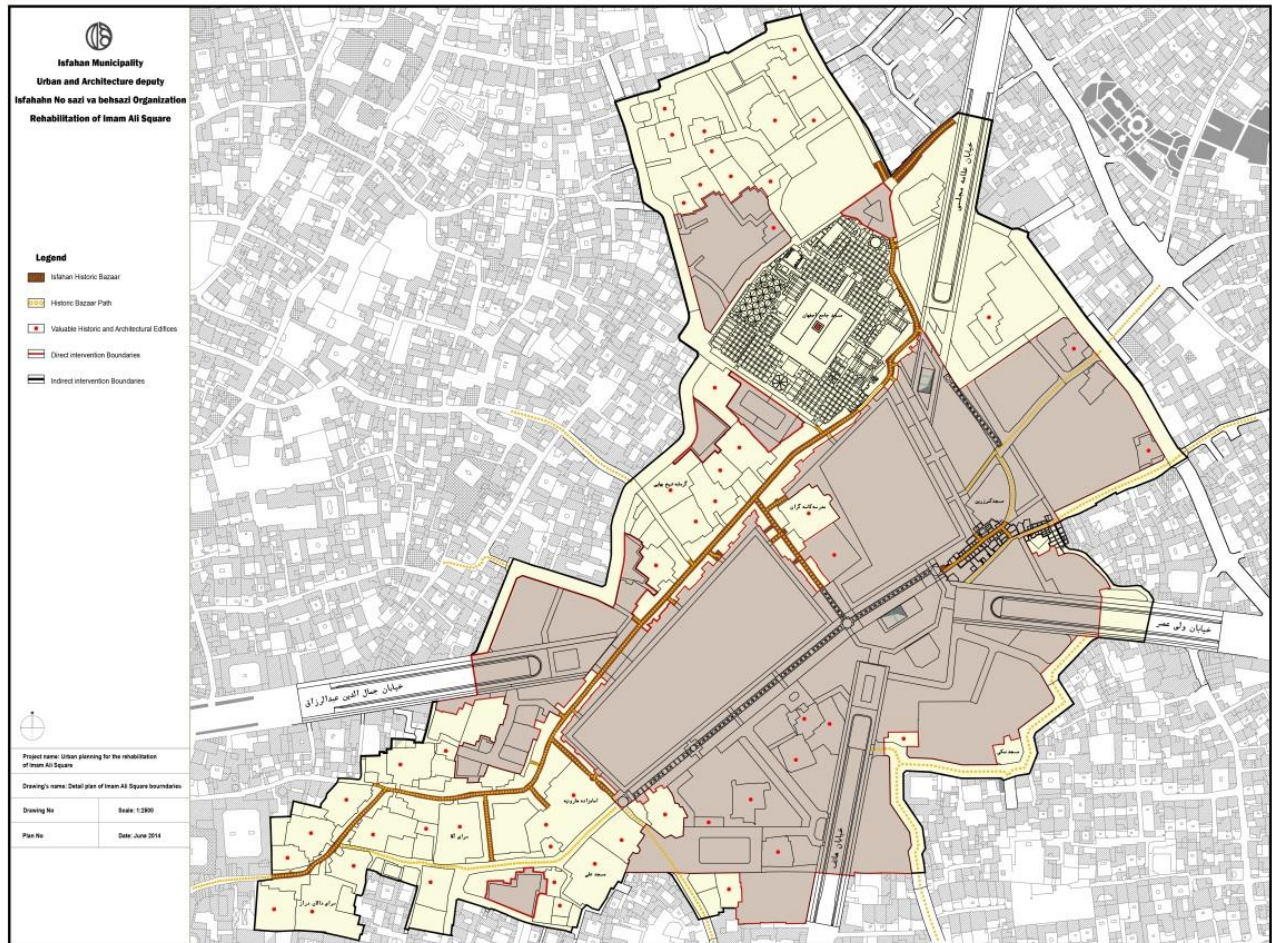


Figure 7. Boundaries of the rehabilitation plan

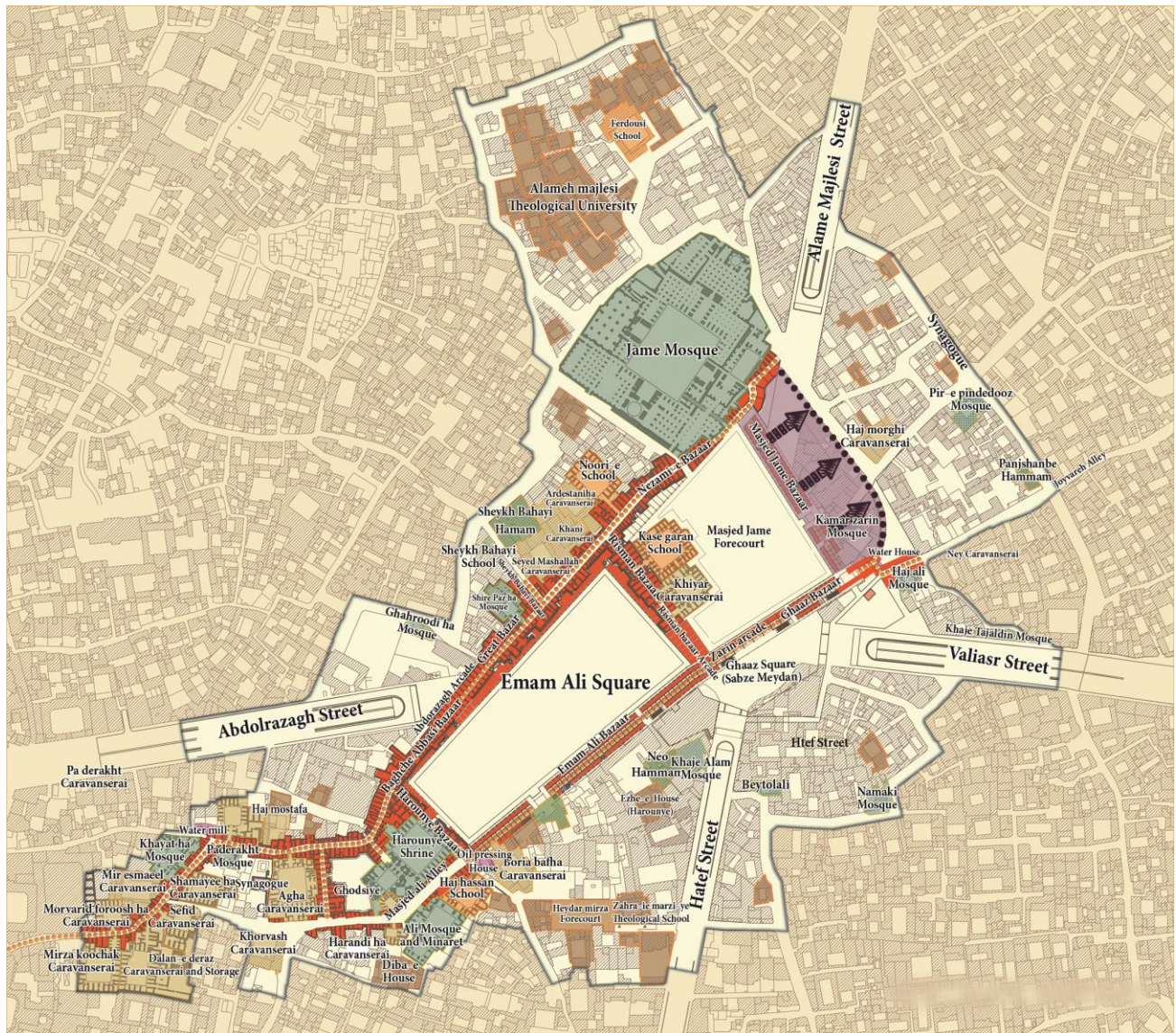
## Responses to the statements of the decision 38 Com 7B.15

### **3. Notes the progress made in the revision of the Meydan-e Atiq project in response to the committees request;**

The project of Atiq square has revised several times according to the requirements of district, international and national standards, laws and regulations and World Heritage Center’s comments to have the smallest negative impact on the outstanding universal values of Masjed-e jame as well as their promotion.

However the eastern and southern side of the northern section, as it mentioned in the last “State of Conservation” in 2014, is considered to be rehabilitated with a safeguarding

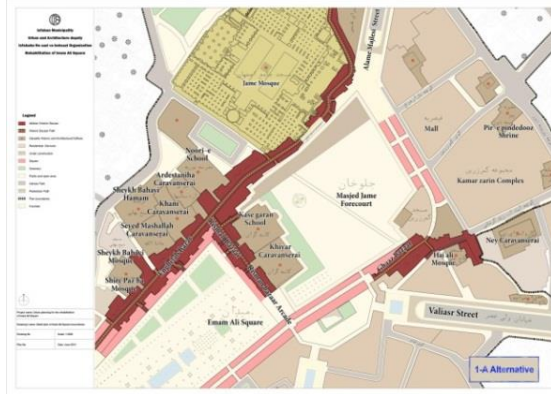
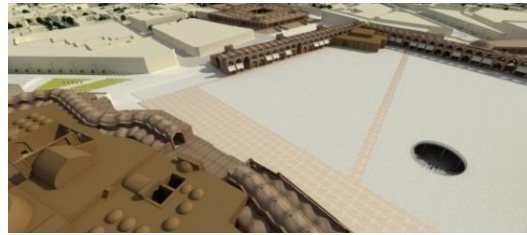
approach towards Masjed-e jame immediate vicinity, historic bazaar and Khiyar caravanserai.



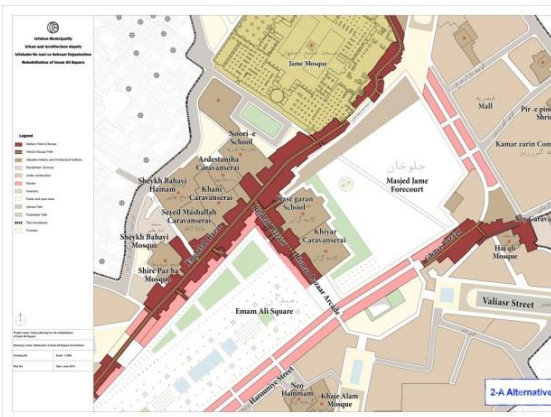
**Figure 8. The plan's boundary and significant historic- cultural structures in its vicinity**

The first two alternatives devised on the northern side of the northern section, foresee no structural connection between the new galleries and the historic walls of the mosque to prevent further load transmitting or vibrations. The third one however purposes a light decorative line of elements concealing the direct view of street from the square. The following drawings depict the latest alternatives for implementation of rehabilitation plan within Masjed-e jame entrance zone in the northern section of Atiq square.

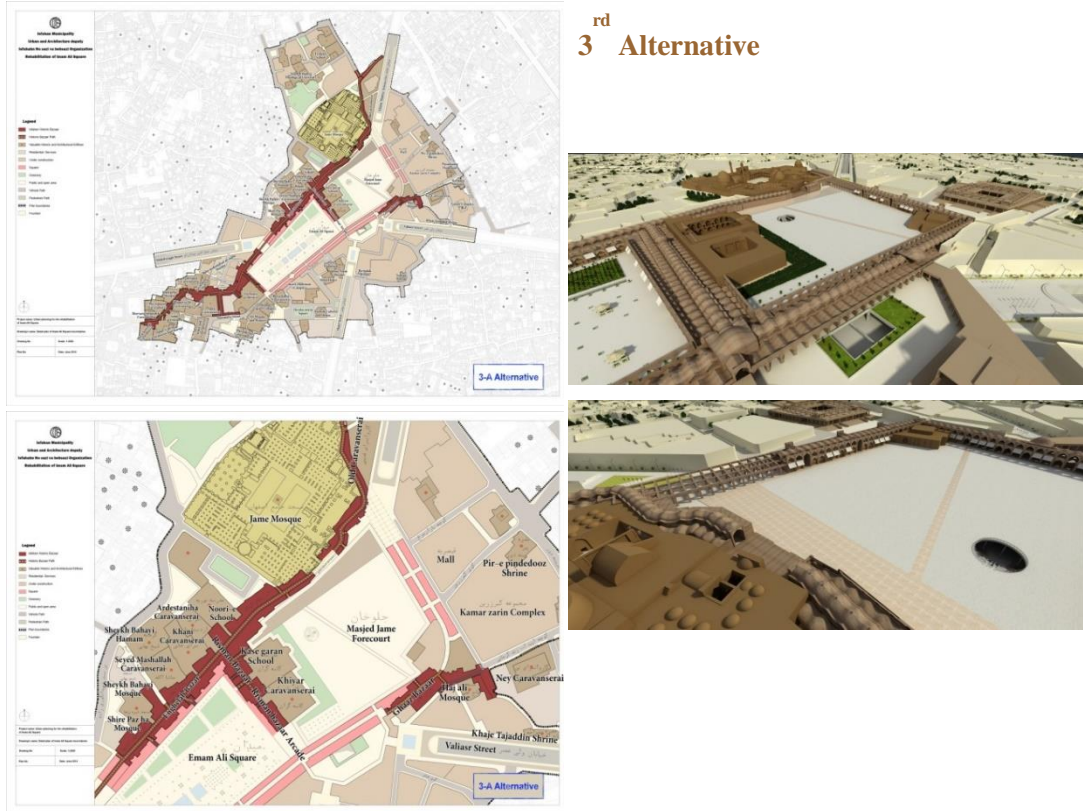
1<sup>st</sup> Alternative



2<sup>nd</sup> Alternative



### 3<sup>rd</sup> Alternative



**Figure 9. Alternatives for implementation of rehabilitation plan within Masjed-e Jame entrance zone**

The implementation of plans for this section has been therefore suspended until the proposed alternatives and plans approve. The southern section of Atiq square, including reorganizing and rehabilitation, has been implemented based on the adopted plans.

Some of the other measures carried out within safeguarding, awareness rising, involvement of stakeholders and locals and reorganizing frameworks are shown below:



**Figure 10. Eastern side of the Southern Section- Ongoing rehabilitation process (left), Outcome of rehabilitation plan (right)**



**Figure 11. Western side of the Southern Section- Outcome of rehabilitation plan (right)**



**Figure 12. Harounye house- before and after restoration work**





**Figure 13. Masjed-e Ali passage- before and after reorganizing works**

Based on the missions of World Heritage Center, the plan for rehabilitation of Atiq square has also tried to encourage participation of the local population, beneficiaries and authorities in different aspects of the world heritage site and the rehabilitation project, as well as devising public awareness-building activities.



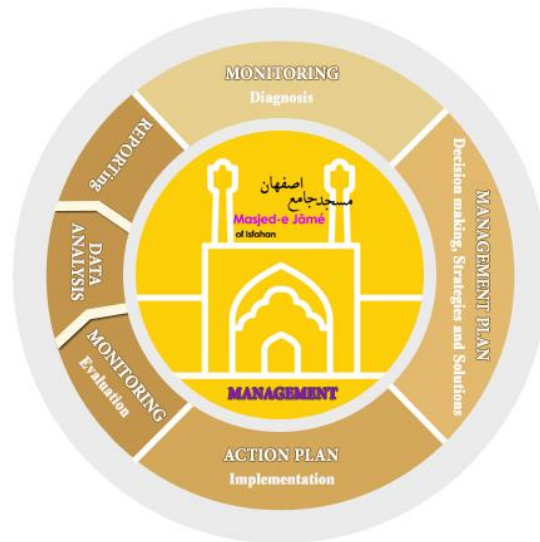
**Figure 14. Public awareness-building activities**



Figure 15. Involving governmental sectors and participation of authorities

**4. Request the state party to develop, adopt and implement an integrated conservation and management plan, as well as to elaborate mechanisms for monitoring urban development;**

A management plan, strategies and solutions for Masjed-e Jame is defining based on a value-led approach to be responsive to the factors possibly affecting Outstanding Universal Values of Masjed-e Jame and its setting, also to gradually diminish all the existing factors, as well as preventing emersion of future negative aspects. These factors, however, have considered to be based on the list devised in section II of the periodic reporting as 13 major factors each World Heritage Site can be threatened by, known as primary and secondary factors.



Considering the international frameworks, field surveys, monitoring results and questionnaires from locals and stakeholders, existing/possible impacting factors on OUV of Masjed-e Jame and its setting has been identified and created a base to develop an integrated management plan through decision making, strategies and solutions. However the management plan is followed by an action plan determines implementation priorities and their timings. These plans will be evaluated by ICHHTO experts and professionals to get the approval and be adopted within the buffer zone of Masjed-e Jame as soon as its finalization.

**5. Reiterates its recommendation to the State Party that Heritage Impact assessments are carried out for any future developments in the buffer zone, such as further rehabilitation of the surrounding historic bazaar, to ensure that any developments do not impact adversely on the property and its wider setting;**

Any implementation of plans and projects, as well as interventions in the buffer zone of Masjed-e Jame, alike all the other heritage places in Iran, according to national legislations and policy, are contingent upon the decision of ICHHTO as the organization in charge of World Heritage Sites safeguarding, followed upon series of evaluations and impact assessments and can only be operational after being adopted. As it is ongoing on the northern section, towards Masjed-e Jame immediate vicinity, historic bazaar and Khiyar caravanserai. However, for achieving this goal, several experts has had assigned to assess the plans and their impact on qualities of different aspects of Masjed-e Jame and its wider setting and especially on the Outstanding Universal Values of the site to prevent any adverse consequence.

**6. Welcomes the invitation by the State Party to host the ICOMOS advisory mission, to consider how the request of the Committee at the time of inscription have been addressed;**

Hereby, Iranian cultural heritage, handicraft and tourism organization welcomes any ICOMOS advisory mission for assessing the conservation state of Masjed-e Jame and its revised plan in 2015.

**7. Also requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Center, by 1 December 2015, a report, including a 1-page executive summary, on the state of conservation of the**

**property, including progress made in the implementation of the above recommendations, for examination by the Committee at its 40<sup>th</sup> session in 2016.**

Due to the significance of Masjed-e Jame's outstanding values as a cultural, historic and religious monument, all plans and projects needs to be carefully evaluated and thereafter approved by cultural heritage base of Masjed-e Jame, its technical committee and ICHHTO in order to achieve the best outcome based on the principle of minimal intervention in full respect to the authenticity and integrity of Masjed-e Jame. The activities within the buffer zone of Masjed-e Jame, thus, will be presented to the World Heritage Center in the form of a brief report including a 1- page executive summary by the mentioned deadline.