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Article

Pilgrimage Tourism and Hospitality in Makkah and Madinah: A Global Analysis Through the Lens of Islamic Epistemology and *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*

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Abstract

This paper examines the position of Makkah and Madinah in the global hospitality industry through the dual lens of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and Islamic epistemology. Using empirical data drawn from official statistics (Ministry of Hajj and Umrah), policy documents (Saudi Vision 2030 reports), and critical scholarship, the study analyses how rapid commercial development has transformed the hospitality landscape of the holy cities. It shows how luxury hotel construction has displaced local communities, particularly from historic neighbourhoods surrounding the al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, relocating them to peripheral urban areas. The concept of epistemicide is employed as a critical theoretical lens, underscoring how Islamic traditions of hospitality are being overwritten by global capitalist logics. By integrating *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* with tourism theories such as destination lifecycle, carrying capacity, and experiential tourism, this study contributes to religious tourism scholarship by offering a normative yet transferable framework for evaluating hospitality in sacred destinations. The findings highlight the need to balance capacity expansion with equity, spirituality, and sustainability in the future development of Makkah and Madinah.

Keywords: Makkah; Madinah; tourism capitalism; *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*; epistemicide; holy cities

1. Introduction

Religious tourism, or spiritual pilgrimage, involves travel motivated not only by devotion but also shaped by broader dynamics of commodification, globalisation, authenticity, and identity construction. MacCannell (1973) first highlighted how pilgrimage experiences are intertwined with commodification and staged authenticity. Cohen (1988) further developed this by analysing the social construction of tourist identities. More recently, Olsen (2020) has shown how globalisation continues to reshape religious tourism practices in contemporary contexts. Unlike traditional tourism categories that are neatly separated, contemporary scholarship shows significant overlaps, as religious tourism often intersects with cultural, heritage, and even wellness tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Within this context, Makkah and Madinah stand out not merely as theological centres but also as urban spaces undergoing rapid commercialisation, crowd management challenges, and debates over sustainable development.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 (SAV 2030) frames the development of Makkah and Madinah within a wider neoliberal agenda that prioritises economic modernisation, diversification, and global competitiveness. While these goals expand infrastructure and capacity, scholars question whether they risk subordinating religious and spiritual heritage to market logics of neoliberal urbanism (Yadav, 2019; Özerdem, 2025). This tension between heritage preservation and economic modernisation lies at the heart of debates about pilgrimage tourism today. According to the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, Saudi Arabia (MHUSA) (2019), the number of annual pilgrims surpassed 10 million before the pandemic. Although COVID-19 temporarily disrupted these flows, post-2021

recovery has seen a rapid return to pre-pandemic levels, with projections indicating even greater growth under the SAV 2030 initiatives (SAV 2030, 2025).

Megaprojects around the al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, the Grand Mosque in Makkah, have led to the demolition of historic neighbourhoods such as Ajyad and Jarwal, erasing centuries of cultural memory. For lower-income pilgrims, the transformation has also meant restricted access to affordable lodgings close to the al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, pushing them to more distant, less serviced areas (Ascoura, 2013). These dynamics reveal how urban restructuring simultaneously expands capacity while marginalising heritage and vulnerable communities. Rather than posing a simple binary between logistical needs and Islamic values, this study recognises that these dimensions can intersect and even reinforce each other. Efficient crowd management, for instance, can be interpreted as fulfilling the *maqāṣid* of preserving life, while sustainable infrastructure development aligns with protecting property and the environment. Thus, the research question is reframed to explore how pilgrimage hospitality can balance and integrate these dimensions, rather than treat them as mutually exclusive.

This article aims to critically reassess the development paradigm of religious tourism in Makkah and Madinah through the lens of Islamic epistemology and the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* framework. By examining phenomena such as the commodification of sacred spaces, unequal access, and the marginalisation of local populations, the paper argues for a restructuring of development to ensure greater balance, sustainability, and spiritual orientation. The analysis emphasises ethical tourism, social inclusivity, and the preservation of the spiritual integrity of the holy cities amid economic globalisations.

Recent scholarship shows that Vision 2030 has transformed the discourse on religious tourism, emphasising diversification and integration with global markets (Salaam Gateway, 2025; Gulf News, 2018). Parallel to this, recent literature in Islamic tourism studies highlights a growing convergence between faith, heritage, and sustainable development. For example, Battour and Ismail (2016) analyse halal tourism practices in relation to heritage preservation, while more recent bibliometric research (Kurniawan et al., 2025) demonstrates that sustainability concerns are becoming increasingly central in Muslim-majority tourism studies. In this study, Islamic epistemology serves as an evaluative framework structured around three interrelated criteria: alignment with *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, preservation of spiritual authenticity, and protection of community welfare. The concept of epistemicide is employed not metaphorically but analytically, identifying how these criteria are marginalised when capitalist imperatives overwrite Islamic narratives of hospitality.

Religious tourism, particularly within Islam, revolves around sacred travel for spiritual purposes such as performing rituals and visiting holy sites (Timothy and Olsen, 2006). Unlike recreational tourism, it centres on acts of devotion and existential reflection. For Muslims, no cities are more spiritually significant than Makkah and Madinah, epicentres of Islamic unity and monotheism (Nasr, 2006). These cities attract millions annually for Hajj and Umrah, making them the world's most visited religious destinations (UNWTO, 2023; Seroji, 2024). In response, Saudi Arabia has rapidly expanded tourism and hospitality infrastructure under its SAV 2030 blueprint (SAV 2030, 2025; Pratiwi and Muslikhati, 2024). Developments such as luxury hotels and commercial zones reflect the growing influence of tourism capitalism (Alamoudy, 2018; 2013).

While such expansion addresses logistical demands, it raises serious concerns about the sanctity of sacred spaces. Megaprojects like Abraj al-Bait and other large-scale commercial ventures have led to heritage erosion, community displacement, and the commodification of pilgrimage experiences (Ascoura, 2013; Alamoudy, 2018). The tension between increasing accessibility and preserving spiritual integrity is becoming more pronounced. This situation prompts critical questions: Can pilgrimage tourism retain its spiritual essence within a capitalist framework? How can development align with *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, especially principles of social justice? This article adopts Islamic epistemology to reassess religious tourism development in Makkah and Madinah, seeking alternatives rooted in Islamic values.

Focusing on ethical tourism, inclusivity, and sustainability, the paper highlights the dilution of values such as humility (*tawādu'*), moderation, and divine blessing (*barakah*) in the current

development paradigm (Ascoura, 2013; Nasr, 2006). Local communities are increasingly marginalised, and spiritual symbolism is being replaced by commercial narratives. Hence, Islamic tourism must be reframed not merely as ritual movement, but as a discourse linked to justice, heritage preservation, and the ethical application of Islamic principles (Salim, 2015; Shinde and Olsen, 2020). By integrating critiques of Western epistemic dominance and the concept of *epistemicide* (Santos, 2014), the article proposes a value-driven model for sacred city development, aligned with the global Muslim ummah's aspirations.

2.2. Research Objectives

Based on the aim outlined above, the central research question is as follows:

- How have globalisation and modern capitalism shaped the development of pilgrimage tourism in Makkah and Madinah?
- To what extent can the principles of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* provide an alternative framework for more just, inclusive, and spiritually sustainable development?
- How can Islamic epistemology be integrated with mainstream tourism theories to evaluate hospitality in sacred destinations?

To address this question, the study sets out the following objectives:

- Examine the dynamics of globalisation and modern capitalism in shaping pilgrimage tourism in Makkah and Madinah.
- Analyse the implications of luxury hospitality development for social equity, heritage preservation, and spiritual authenticity.
- Evaluate the relevance of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and Islamic epistemology as normative frameworks for assessing hospitality development.
- Propose a conceptual model that integrates Islamic perspectives with mainstream tourism theories for the sustainable and inclusive development of sacred destinations.

The proposed Islamic tourism development model is envisioned to include elements such as *waqf* (Islamic endowments), Islamic cooperatives, grassroots community participation, and spiritual oversight by recognised religious authorities within the *maqasid* framework (Auda, 2007; Kahf, 2003). By articulating these objectives, the study not only seeks to understand the current realities of development in Makkah and Madinah, but also aims to contribute to broader policy discussions within the Muslim world on how holy cities ought to be governed, with dignity (*adab*), justice, and *barakah*, so that they continue to serve as living centres of Islamic civilisation, rather than mere symbols of luxury and economic dominance.

While previous studies on Makkah and Madinah have examined economic modernisation, urban transformation, and the commodification of pilgrimage, recent empirical and critical work further documents how large-scale hospitality investments and urban megaprojects reshape both skyline and social life (Qurashi, 2017; Bianchi, 2018). Media and policy debates about developments such as the Abraj al-Bait complex also highlight contested impacts on heritage and local communities. This study addresses the gap by framing these developments through Islamic epistemology and the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, thereby bridging religious ethics with mainstream tourism theory.

3. Theoretical Underpinning

This study is anchored in two interrelated theoretical foundations: Islamic epistemology and the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* framework. Together, they provide the philosophical and normative basis for evaluating pilgrimage tourism development in a manner that is holistic, critical, and ethically grounded in Islamic traditions. These theories are not merely conceptual backdrops but serve as epistemological structures and analytical tools to interpret the meaning of development and its implications for justice, spirituality, and community wellbeing. Although *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* is rooted in the Islamic tradition, it can be understood more broadly as an ethical framework comparable to other global paradigms such as human rights, sustainable development, and social

justice. Just as secular ethical frameworks emphasise universal human wellbeing, *maqāṣid* serves as a normative lens for evaluating the balance between economic gain, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Thus, Islamic epistemology is not only relevant for Muslim societies but can also contribute meaningfully to global tourism discourse that prioritises inclusive and ethical development.

3.1. Islamic Epistemology as an Alternative Knowledge Framework

Islamic epistemology refers to a knowledge system rooted in divine revelation (the Qur'an and Sunnah), supported by reason and experience, all guided by transcendental values. In contrast to many strands of modern Western epistemology that are often secular and dualistic, Islamic epistemology emphasises the integrated relationship between knowledge, faith, ethics, and society (Al-Attas, 1995; Nasr, 2006). Its status is not merely philosophical: in Islamic intellectual history, it serves as a foundational worldview, shaping both law (*sharī'ah*) and ethics. This epistemology is accepted as authoritative in principle across the Muslim world, though in practice, interpretations vary by context and school. The transformation of the cities of Makkah and Madinah can also be analysed through the Destination Lifecycle Model (Butler, 1980). According to this model, both holy cities experienced the exploration and development stages in the early 20th century and are currently in the consolidation phase, characterised by the growth of luxury hotel investments, global chains, and large-scale infrastructure development. If left unchecked, there is a risk of entering the stagnation phase, where the spiritual identity and heritage of local communities could be eroded due to excessive commercialisation.

In the context of pilgrimage tourism and hotel development in the holy cities, Islamic epistemology provides an alternative evaluative framework. It resists the logic of global capitalism, which prioritises market performance and financial profit, by insisting that development must also safeguard the sanctity of the al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, uphold social justice, and protect vulnerable groups such as low-income pilgrims and local communities. Assessment is therefore not confined to material infrastructure or logistical convenience but extends to spiritual meaning, *barakah*, and the *tawhīdic* function of sacred spaces. In this way, Islamic epistemology advances a model of tourism development that is theocentric, humane, and oriented toward both spiritual enrichment and social wellbeing.

The concept of epistemicide, introduced by Santos (2014), highlights the marginalisation of non-Western knowledge systems, such as Islam, by the dominance of modern Western knowledge in tourism discourses. This is particularly relevant when pilgrimage tourism is reduced to a commodified economic product rather than a spiritual experience. Thus, Islamic epistemology is employed as the foundation for constructing a knowledge model of tourism development that is theocentric, humane, and sustainable.

3.2. *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* as a Normative Evaluation Framework

Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah is an important normative framework in the Islamic intellectual tradition. It does not originate directly from the words of the Prophet Muhammad but rather emerged from the independent juristic reasoning of classical scholars such as al-Ghazālī and al-Shāṭibī. Both emphasised that Islamic law is not solely intended to regulate ritual worship, but also to safeguard the essential interests of human beings: religion (*dīn*), life (*nafs*), intellect (*'aql*), lineage (*nasl*), and property (*māl*).

These objectives are derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah and were systematised by classical jurists such as al-Ghazali and al-Shatibi. Contemporary scholars, including Auda (2007) and Kamali (2008b), have extended them to cover modern concerns such as human rights, minority rights, social justice, and environmental protection. While *maqāṣid* enjoys wide recognition, its interpretations differ across schools of thought and historical contexts, meaning that its application to issues like the displacement of local communities is a modern development rather than an explicit classical

formulation. Thus, *maqāṣid* functions as a normative guideline rather than a fixed legal ruling, providing a flexible evaluative tool in tourism and urban policy.

In this study, the *maqāṣid* framework is used to:

- To evaluate hospitality development in Makkah and Madinah in terms of preserving religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*).
- To protect life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) by ensuring crowd safety and adequate infrastructure.
- To preserve intellect (*ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*) by safeguarding spaces of religious knowledge and education.
- To critique the loss of lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*) through displacement of communities and weakening of intergenerational continuity in sacred spaces.
- To advocate for economic and social justice in relation to property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*), linking preservation of property not only to individual wealth but to collective access to worship spaces and equitable participation in pilgrimage.

This application of *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* to tourism and urban development in Makkah and Madinah remains relatively underexplored in the existing literature. By positioning *maqāṣid* not only as a legal-ethical framework but also as a tool for evaluating hospitality and city planning, this study makes a novel contribution to both Islamic studies and tourism research.

3.3. Relationship Between Theoretical Foundations and Research Objectives

These theoretical foundations directly inform the primary aim of the study:

Aim: This study aims to examine the development of hospitality in Makkah and Madinah through the combined frameworks of Islamic epistemology and *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*.

Contribution: Its contribution lies in bridging these frameworks with mainstream tourism theories, thereby offering a culturally grounded yet globally relevant analytical approach.

Islamic epistemology provides the analytical lens by framing how knowledge is produced and evaluated in Islamic civilisation, while *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* supplies the normative grounding that specifies ethical priorities such as equity, safety, and spiritual integrity. Rather than challenging the dominance of secular development narratives, this study seeks to broaden the discourse by introducing Islamic epistemology and *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* as complementary perspectives that enrich global debates on sustainable and ethical hospitality.

4. Maqasid al-Shariah and Islamic Hospitality: Understanding the Concept and Framework

Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah refers to the overarching objectives underpinning Islamic law, which aim to safeguard human welfare in five fundamental areas: religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property (Salim, 2015; Dali et al., 2017). Known collectively as *al-daruriyyat al-khamsah*, these five foundational objectives underpin the Islamic moral-legal framework and are essential for preserving human dignity and a holistic existence. *Maqāṣid* is not merely a legal concept but a normative philosophical framework that guides all dimensions of life, including development, economics, society, and tourism. Etymologically derived from the Arabic root *qasada*, meaning “intention” or “goal,” the term reflects the ultimate aims of Islamic rulings in realising justice, human well-being, and sustainable prosperity in both this world and the hereafter (Kamali, 2008a, 2008b; Auda, 2007).

In the context of hospitality development in the sacred cities of Makkah and Madinah, the application of *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* serves as a foundational ethical framework to ensure that growth is not driven solely by material or commercial imperatives but also addresses the spiritual and social needs of the global Muslim community. Particularly in pilgrimage tourism, such as Hajj and Umrah, *maqāṣid* plays a central role in harmonising physical needs, including accommodation, logistics, and safety, with spiritual dimensions such as blessing, devotion, and inclusivity. Without the proper internalisation of *maqāṣid* principles, development risks becoming exclusionary, overly materialistic, and detrimental to the sanctity of worship spaces. For example:

- *Hifz al-dīn* (protection of religion) calls for the safeguarding of religious spaces from excessive commercialisation that undermines their spiritual value.
- *Hifz al-nafs* (protection of life) mandates that development prioritises safety and does not displace or marginalise local communities.
- *Hifz al-māl* (protection of property) stresses equitable distribution of costs and benefits, ensuring that all pilgrims, especially those from lower-income groups, have access to essential services and facilities.

Thus, the *maqāṣid* framework functions not only as an ethical evaluative tool but also as an epistemological foundation for structuring pilgrimage tourism in ways that are just, sustainable, and grounded in Islamic values.

In the modern era, scholars have expanded the scope of *maqāṣid* to address contemporary concerns. Auda (2007) highlights the inclusion of issues such as social justice and systems reform. Kamali (2008b) further emphasises the role of *maqāṣid* in safeguarding human rights and minority protections within plural societies. More recently, Dali et al. (2017) extended the application of *maqāṣid* to sustainability debates, including environmental protection and ethical governance. This illustrates the flexibility and contextual adaptability of *maqāṣid* to contemporary systems. Indeed, *maqāṣid* has been adopted as a guiding principle in various public policy initiatives, sustainable development agendas, and Islamic economic models premised on ethics and equity.

Islamic hospitality development must align with the principles of justice, balance, and the preservation of moral values, all of which are core to *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (Auda, 2007; Dali et al., 2017). This means that hospitality services and accommodation should prioritise moderation, privacy, and an environment conducive to worship and spiritual reflection. Salim (2015) emphasises the importance of integrating *maqāṣid* into every stage of urban and tourism planning in the holy cities, from hotel architecture and tourism management to interactions between pilgrims and host communities.

Accordingly, *maqāṣid al-Shariah* operates as a framework for sustainable development that balances economic, religious, and social considerations. Its application can mitigate the risks of social disparity and the marginalisation of communities, which are common issues in contemporary development projects (Shinde and Olsen, 2020). The *maqāṣid* approach demands inclusive growth that respects the rights of all stakeholders and ensures fair distribution of resources and benefits. In the context of pilgrimage tourism, inclusive growth refers to development that benefits not only international investors and affluent pilgrims but also local communities and lower-income worshippers. This includes ensuring affordable accommodation options, improving accessibility for the elderly and persons with disabilities, and creating employment opportunities for residents of Makkah and Madinah.

Ultimately, Islamic hospitality rooted in *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* not only enhances the spiritual and moral aspects of urban development but also contributes to the socio-economic sustainability of Makkah and Madinah. In doing so, it reinforces the status of both cities as authentic, ethical centres of Islamic tourism, in alignment with the aspirations of SAV 2030 (SAV 2030, 2025; Pratiwi and Muslikhati, 2024).

5. Data and Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach that prioritises a deep understanding of the meanings and values underlying the development of pilgrimage tourism in Makkah and Madinah. This methodology was selected because issues such as the sanctity of worship spaces, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, and spiritual inequality are less amenable to analysis through purely quantitative tools and therefore require approaches beyond quantitative measurement to examine the underlying power structures that shape hospitality development in the holy cities. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

5.1. Research Design

The research is structured around a critical literature-based framework employing discourse analysis grounded in Islamic epistemology. The methodological approach goes beyond compiling textual references, instead interpreting them through a critical epistemological lens (Al-Attas, 1993; Santos, 2014). This study employs critical discourse analysis to interrogate how policy documents, media narratives, and academic writings construct visions of pilgrimage tourism.

5.2. Data Sources and Collection Techniques

Data was gathered through an intensive literature review, covering three primary categories:

- Official policy documents, such as reports from the UNWTO, SAV 2030, the MHUSA, and statements by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB).
- Peer-reviewed academic literature from international journals, including the *Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* and *Islamic Perspectives on Management and Organisation*.
- Islamic theoretical and philosophical works related to Islamic epistemology, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, social justice, and spirituality.

In this study, Islamic epistemic validity is operationalised by drawing on Al-Faruqi's (1982) notion of the unity of knowledge, while also adapting the framework to evaluate whether hospitality policies and practices align with the ethical priorities outlined in *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*. Thus, validity is assessed not only in terms of coherence with Islamic sources but also in their capacity to safeguard justice, equity, and spiritual integrity in the context of pilgrimage tourism.

5.3. Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analysed using inductive and interpretive content analysis, employing a thematic hermeneutic approach through critical and repeated reading of selected texts. Four major themes were identified:

- the commodification of sacred space.
- marginalisation of communities.
- inequalities in pilgrim access.
- the neglect of *maqāṣid* values under global capitalist pressure and epistemic erasure.

A hermeneutical approach was employed to extract embedded meanings within religious texts and development policies. The resulting thematic model was then interpreted within the framework of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), namely protection of religion, life, and wealth, and integrated into broader Islamic epistemological discourse to construct an alternative evaluative model of pilgrimage tourism development. For example, themes of crowd safety and health correspond to the protection of life, while heritage preservation and community access reflect the protection of religion and wealth. This alignment enhances methodological clarity by grounding the thematic analysis in normative Islamic objectives.

5.4. Methodological Justification

The chosen methodology is consistent with the Islamic intellectual tradition of *ijtihad*, which is not merely descriptive but also normative and transformative. In this context, Islamic epistemology functions not only as a value reference but also as an analytical tool and methodological structure to assess development validity through the principles of *tawhid* (divine unity), justice, and spiritual blessing (Al-Attas, 1980; Auda, 2007; Dali, et al. (2017).

6. Makkah and Madinah Are the Two Holiest Cities

Makkah and Madinah are the two holiest cities in Islam, central to the spiritual lives of Muslims worldwide. Makkah, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad, houses the Kaaba, the *qiblah* for Muslim prayer, while Madinah, home to al-Masjid al-Nabawi and the Prophet's tomb, was the site

of the first Islamic polity established under the Constitution of Madinah, which emphasised justice, intercommunal cooperation, and protection of minority rights (Nasr, 2006). Together, these cities embody both tradition and transformation: Makkah has served as a pilgrimage destination since the time of Prophet Ibrahim, evolving into the focal point of the annual Hajj (Seroji, 2024), while Madinah represents the earliest model of Islamic socio-political organisation. Unlike conventional tourist destinations, pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah is motivated by devotion and spiritual aspiration rather than leisure (Timothy, 2015; Vukonić, 2002).

Infrastructure and hospitality development must therefore be approached with reverence for their sanctity. As Maddrell and Sidaway (2010) note, spiritual engagement in sacred places like Makkah and Madinah transforms personal identity and deepens collective solidarity, making tourism here both a physical journey and a spiritual passage. Yet the sacredness of these cities also presents challenges. The dramatic rise in visitor numbers each year requires extensive infrastructure but also places pressure on heritage and local communities (Ascoura, 2013; Alamoudy, 2018). Authorities must therefore balance physical expansion with the preservation of spiritual values, ensuring development aligns with *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, safeguards social justice, and secures equitable access for all pilgrims without marginalising the less affluent or erasing centuries-old Islamic heritage.

7. Context and Development of the Hospitality Industry in Makkah and Madinah

The hospitality industry in Makkah and Madinah has undergone a significant transformation since the early twentieth century, in tandem with the growing number of pilgrims performing Hajj and Umrah from across the globe. As the two holiest cities in Islam, the demand for accommodation, logistics, and support services has increased sharply each year. According to the MHUSA (2022), over ten million visitors performed religious rites in the holy cities in 2019 alone, before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the early 1980s, the Saudi Arabian government has made substantial investments in the redevelopment of areas surrounding the al-Masjid al-Ḥarām and the al-Masjid al-Nabawi. These efforts include massive projects such as the construction of the Abraj al-Bait Towers in Makkah, alongside earlier master-planning visions for hotel expansion (Al-Hathloul and Mughal, 2001). These initiatives are driven by the goal of strengthening Saudi Arabia's position as a global religious tourism destination, thereby making tourism a major source of post-oil national revenue (Henderson, 2010; Gulf Cooperation Council Statistical [GCC-Stat], 2021).

While rapid development has stimulated economic growth, it has also generated notable social and cultural disruptions. Urban restructuring has displaced traditional communities, erased heritage sites, and increased the cost of living for residents (Ascoura, 2013). Historic neighbourhoods and local businesses have been supplanted by high-rise buildings and international retail chains. Economically, the hospitality sector has boosted employment, invigorated the private sector, and attracted foreign investment (Peterson 2018; World Bank, 2023). Yet, the dominance of external investors and the corporatisation of *waqf* assets raise critical concerns about distributive justice and the equitable management of resources meant to serve the global Muslim community. By corporatisation of *waqf* assets, this study refers to the process whereby historically community-managed religious endowments have been restructured into state-controlled companies or integrated into modern investment vehicles. In Saudi Arabia, this often involves the consolidation of *waqf* properties into entities managed under the General Authority of Awqaf or joint ventures with private sector developers, thereby shifting their orientation from community-based welfare to revenue-generation and commercial return.

From a geographical perspective, Makkah and Madinah lie in the Hijaz region of northwestern Arabia, each with distinct physical characteristics. Makkah's mountainous valley and limited land area have led to vertical hotel construction to accommodate pilgrims, while Madinah's plateau allows more expansive development with emphasis on green spaces. However, these developments bring challenges such as environmental degradation, soil erosion, and water scarcity. Sustainable

geographic planning guided by Islamic law is crucial to protect ecological balance and spiritual sanctity (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000; Ascoura, 2013).

An Islamic epistemological approach emphasises a holistic view of development, balancing material and spiritual needs. It critiques the marginalisation of traditional Islamic knowledge by dominant global narratives (Santos, 2014). Development should be measured by *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* principles, prioritising preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Hospitality growth must align with humility, moderation, and social justice while critically assessing the impact of global capitalism that threatens Islamic values and the identity of these cities (Henderson, 2010). From the perspective of public perception, pilgrims' and local community views offer vital social insights. Many pilgrims' welcome modern infrastructure that facilitates worship and accommodation. However, concerns exist over the loss of spiritual atmosphere and Islamic simplicity as commercial interests grow. Local communities face marginalisation and cultural erosion, causing social tensions and risking the continuity of heritage. In this study, the term continuity of heritage encompasses both built heritages, such as historic mosques, neighbourhoods, and architectural forms, and intangible practices, including communal rituals, devotional traditions, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Thus, development must be inclusive, culturally sensitive, and rooted in Islamic values to ensure all stakeholders feel valued and protected.

The context of hospitality development in these two sacred cities reflects a tension between national economic interests and the spiritual and social values of Islam. This trajectory calls for a reassessment of current development paradigms to ensure that the holy cities are not reduced to mere tourism products within the framework of global capitalism (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000).

8. Hospitality Industry development in Makkah and Madinah: A Critical Islamic perspective

The expansion of the hospitality industry in Makkah and Madinah has become a focal point in academic discourse, particularly within the fields of religious tourism, urban development, and Islamic economics. Despite the technical and economic insights provided by existing literature, there remains a marked deficiency in critical engagement with Islamic perspectives, social justice, and the spiritual identity of these holy cities. The swift growth of the hospitality sector in these sacred urban centres is striking evidence of the rise of tourism capitalism. Substantial investments in international hotels, luxury shopping centres, and modern infrastructure have significantly altered the traditional fabric of Makkah and Madinah (Henderson, 2010; Al-Hathloul and Mughal, 2001). This boom has stimulated economic growth, created jobs, and reinforced the local economy's reliance on religious tourism (Shinde and Olsen, 2020; Seroji, 2024; GCC-Stat, 2021).

Helal and Eldamaty (2024) analyse the rapid urban expansion of Makkah from 2000 to 2020, demonstrating how large-scale tourism-driven infrastructure projects have reshaped spatial patterns, extended city boundaries, and displaced long-standing communities to peripheral zones. While their GIS-based study offers valuable empirical insights, it does not critically interrogate the extent to which such redevelopment aligns with Islamic normative values or the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*. This linkage resonates with wider debates in Islamic urbanism, as explored not only by Aljohani et al. (2021) but also by Hakim (2007), and Mortada (2003), who emphasise the integration of faith, community, and spatial justice in the development of Muslim cities.

Building on this foundation, Aljohani et al. (2021) provide an SDG-aligned assessment of Madinah's urban sustainability, examining green spaces, housing affordability, and heritage protection. Their GIS-based analysis highlights tensions between rapid development and Islamic ethical frameworks. The shortage of green spaces not only affects physical well-being but also contradicts *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* objectives such as protecting life and intellect (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*, *ḥifẓ al-'aql*), both central to an Islamic urban vision. Scholars like Kamali (2008a; 2008b) have linked Islamic values with hospitality management, emphasising *tawādu'* (modesty), moderation, and justice in hotel design and services. Yet, these discussions remain underdeveloped and insufficiently embedded in wider discourses on epistemology and tourism justice. Despite quantitative growth, inequities persist

premium accommodation excludes lower-income pilgrims, undermining justice and equality under *Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah* (Ascoura, 2013). Evidence therefore suggests that hospitality development in Makkah and Madinah must balance economic expansion with Islamic values and social equity.

The hospitality industry in Makkah and Madinah has undergone profound changes in recent decades, largely shaped by Saudi Arabia's broader economic diversification agenda under Vision 2030. Official statistics from the MHUSA (2019) and the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) (2022) indicate that Makkah has more than 300,000 hotel rooms across different categories. Combined annual Hajj and Umrah pilgrim numbers now exceed 10 million, the majority of whom are not accommodated in luxury hotels but in mid-range and budget lodgings, rented apartments, or dormitory-style housing. This demonstrates that although criticisms of luxury development and social exclusion have validity, the broader reality is more complex. Capacity expansion has occurred across multiple accommodation tiers, yet the scale and visibility of luxury projects have created symbolic and material tensions.

The challenge is therefore not merely between luxury and non-luxury provision, but in finding a balanced model that accommodates growth while preserving equity and spiritual integrity. The tension between luxury hospitality and spiritual simplicity can also be understood through the lens of experiential tourism (Uriely, 2005). For some religious travellers, the value of the experience lies in the serenity of worship, simplicity, and community connection, whereas luxury hospitality often delivers a commodified, status-oriented experience. This contradiction creates a tension between authenticity (genuine pilgrimage experience) and commodification (commercially packaged luxury experience). Consequently, the analysis of hospitality in the holy cities must consider not only the quantity of capacity but also the quality of pilgrims' spiritual experiences.

While this expansion has increased overall capacity, scholars have argued that the concentration of luxury hotel projects, particularly those immediately surrounding the al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, has reshaped the city's skyline and produced symbolic and material forms of displacement. The demolition of historic neighbourhoods such as the Ajyad area to make way for large-scale developments has been documented and widely criticised for eroding tangible heritage and marginalising long-standing local communities. Taken together, these empirical observations suggest that commercial growth in the holy cities has measurable social consequences: capacity has expanded, but so too have risks of social exclusion and the erosion of the cities' spiritual character.

The commodification of sacred spaces, privileging luxury and opulence, undermines humility and moderation central to Islamic ethos, while profit-driven development often neglects the needs of lower-income pilgrims. Rapid urban expansion has marginalised local communities and erased spiritually significant heritage (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000; Ascoura, 2013). These dynamics highlight the clash between global capitalist models and the *Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah* framework, which prioritises social justice, religious preservation, and communal well-being. By contrast, much Western discourse (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000; Hall and Page, 2014) privileges capitalist tourism and investment strategies, often neglecting spiritual sensitivities. A key gap lies in applying *Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah* to hospitality and tourism: while Salim (2015) notes its potential in urban planning in Makkah, its use in tourism remains underexplored. This imbalance fuels epistemicide, the erasure of Islamic knowledge by dominant global narratives (Santos, 2014), especially in Makkah and Madinah, where Western-centric models often prevail uncritically.

Hence, a more inclusive paradigm is required, one that is Islamically grounded, that is, rooted in *Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah* principles of justice, preservation of heritage, and protection of community welfare. Empirical data illustrate the magnitude of hospitality sector growth: the Saudi Tourism Authority (SAT) (2024) reports over 300,000 hotel rooms in Makkah, 35% rated five-star, and approximately 150,000 rooms in Madinah with an increasing share of high-end properties. As of 2019, annual pilgrim numbers to Makkah and Madinah exceeded ten million, comprising approximately 2.5 million Hajj pilgrims and over 7.5 million Umrah visitors (MHUSA, 2019). Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a temporary decline, recent statistics indicate that by 2022/2023, the numbers have rebounded, with projections under Vision 2030 aiming for up to 30 million Umrah pilgrims

annually (SAT, 2024). Sector investment has grown by 7–9% annually since 2015, consistent with SAV 2030's economic diversification aims (Alshuwaikhat and Mubarak, 2019; World Bank, 2023).

From a carrying capacity perspective, Makkah and Madinah face extraordinary challenges. The presence of over 10 million Hajj pilgrims and tens of millions of Umrah visitors each year places significant pressure on physical capacity (accommodation, transportation), social capacity (tolerance between wealthy and low-income pilgrims), and ecological capacity (water and energy use, as well as waste management) (Saveriades, 2000). While the development of luxury hotels has increased commercial capacity, it often overlooks social capacity, particularly the marginalisation of local communities and access for low-income pilgrims. This framework helps explain why quantitative growth does not necessarily translate into qualitative balance within Islamic hospitality.

These critical deficiencies refer to gaps in the literature that insufficiently integrate Islamic epistemology into tourism studies, shortcomings in policy that prioritise commercial growth over community welfare, and weaknesses in practice where implementation often neglects inclusivity and heritage preservation. The analytical framework developed in this study incorporates three dimensions: theoretical, through the integration of Islamic epistemology and *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*; methodological, via critical discourse and thematic analysis; and empirical, grounded in case studies of hospitality development in Makkah and Madinah. Its purpose extends beyond balancing physical development with spiritual integrity; it seeks to articulate a vision for sacred city development anchored in justice, spiritual heritage, and long-term sustainability for the Muslim community. In doing so, the study contributes to a restructuring of Islamic hospitality and tourism, positioning it as an ethical, value-driven enterprise rather than merely an economic activity. In sum, a pressing need exists for comprehensive research that embeds Islamic epistemology and *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* into the evaluation of hospitality development in the holy cities, ensuring growth remains not only quantitative but also spiritually and socially sustainable.

9. The position of Makkah and Madinah in the Global Hospitality Industry

Makkah and Madinah play a highly significant role in the global hospitality industry, particularly within the religious tourism segment. These two holy cities not only attract millions of Muslims each year but have also emerged as major focal points for tourism investment across the Islamic world. According to the UNWTO (2023), Makkah and Madinah are among the top destinations receiving the highest number of international visitors within the spiritual tourism category, surpassing other leading religious sites such as Vatican City and Varanasi.

In terms of hospitality capacity, Makkah boasts more than one thousand three hundred registered hotels with thousands of rooms available each Hajj and Umrah season, making it one of the cities with the highest accommodation capacity in the world (GASTAT, 2023). Madinah maintains a capacity of around seven hundred hotels, most of which are situated within proximity to the al-Masjid al-Nabawi. Five-star hotels such as the Makkah Clock Tower, Swissotel, and Conrad Makkah represent part of multi-billion USD investments in luxury hospitality, initiated since the early 2000s and accelerated under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 strategy (post-2016).

From a geopolitical and economic perspective, the status of Makkah and Madinah as a "monopoly of spiritual tourism" renders them strategic assets in Saudi Arabia's post-oil economic transformation plan. Under the framework of SAV 2030, investments in tourism and hospitality infrastructure are viewed as key to economic diversification efforts (SAV 2030, 2025; Alshuwaikhat and Mubarak, 2019). The government has also implemented regulatory reforms, such as the introduction of the hotel rating system in 2014 and the deployment of smart technologies, including biometric check-ins and AI-based crowd management systems, rolled out between 2018 and 2021.

Despite their dominant standing, the growing concentration of investment in luxury hotels and exclusive services has deepened inequality between affluent visitors and ordinary pilgrims, especially those from developing nations. Recent data suggest that around 70% of pilgrims from high-income countries are accommodated in four- and five-star hotels, whereas most pilgrims from South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa continue to rely on budget hotels, rented apartments, or hostel-style

accommodations (MHUSA, 2019). This disparity is not entirely new: socio-economic stratification has long existed in pilgrimage, but the scale and visibility of luxury developments in the last two decades have significantly widened the gap. Scholars note that while some demand arises from a growing affluent Muslim middle and upper class, much of the expansion of luxury hotels reflects strategic commercial and political interests aligned with Vision 2030, foreign investment priorities, and the symbolic projection of modernity (Henderson, 2016).

At the same time, capacity expansion has not been limited to luxury hotels. Mid-range and budget accommodations, including serviced apartments, dormitories, and seasonal hostels, have also grown to cater to pilgrims from lower-income backgrounds. According to SAT (2024) and GASTAT (2023), approximately two-thirds of licensed rooms in Makkah and Madinah fall within three-star or below categories. This shows that while luxury projects dominate the skyline and global imagination, they coexist with more modest hospitality infrastructure. Nevertheless, the visibility and symbolic weight of luxury hotels often overshadow these other forms, shaping external perceptions of development in the holy cities. This disparity raises ethical concerns over the governance of sacred spaces, as economic priorities increasingly overshadow the Islamic principle of equality.

Makkah and Madinah thus become sites of ideological tension between free-market imperatives and spiritual values, visible in the pricing of hotels near the al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, where rooms during peak Hajj can exceed USD 1,500 per night, and in the displacement of long-standing local communities relocated to peripheral districts to make way for megaprojects. As noted earlier, although most pilgrims are still served by non-luxury infrastructure, the global image of Makkah and Madinah is increasingly shaped by luxury hospitality developments. This disjuncture between lived reality and projected image underscores the symbolic politics of the holy cities within the global hospitality industry. Profit-driven narratives must be critically re-examined through the framework of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and Islamic epistemology to preserve the sanctity of the holy cities in the face of material expansion (Salim, 2015; Auda, 2007). Empirical evidence also shows that Hajj participation strengthens solidarity and tolerance across social groups (Clingsmith et al., 2009).

Beyond infrastructure and economic debates, pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah also generates profound social transformations within the Muslim ummah. Empirical research shows that performing the Hajj significantly increases practices of global Islamic observance while reducing reliance on more localised customs. It also strengthens belief in equality across ethnic and sectarian lines, enhances favourable attitudes toward women's education and employment, and fosters interfaith tolerance rather than hostility (Clingsmith et al., 2009). These findings highlight that, despite the inequalities in hospitality provision, the pilgrimage experience itself continues to function as a powerful social equaliser, reinforcing the *maqāṣid* principles of preserving religion, life, and dignity at the collective level.

10. Islamic Epistemology and the Challenges of Hospitality Development in the Holy Cities

10.1. Islamic Epistemology as the Foundation of Development

The development of hospitality and tourism in Makkah and Madinah must be understood through the lens of Islamic epistemology, which centres on knowledge derived from divine revelation, Islamic scholarly tradition, and the higher objectives of Islamic law. The main challenges are not only technical or infrastructural but also reflect a deep clash of values between global capitalist development models and Islamic principles such as justice, moderation, and spirituality. The rapid spread of luxury hotels, large commercial centres, and the redesign of sacred urban spaces has raised concerns among Islamic scholars about the spiritual loss within development processes (Al-Hathloul and Mughal, 2001; Alamoudy, 2018). This concern corresponds with what Santos (2014) describes as epistemicide, which is the silencing of knowledge systems that do not align with modern capitalist rationality. In Makkah and Madinah, epistemicide appears in the marginalisation of Islamic values, particularly the neglect of preservation of religion through the erasure of heritage sites, and

protection of property, as local communities lose affordable access to spaces for worship and livelihood.

Central to Islamic epistemology are the values of balance, public benefit, and justice. However, these are often overlooked in practice. Major development projects have frequently led to the destruction of heritage areas and the displacement of local communities without proper consultation or sensitivity to their spiritual and cultural identity (Ascoura, 2013; Seroji, 2024). This indicates the need for a development model that respects economic efficiency while upholding spiritual and social integrity. Islamic epistemology also calls for a unified framework where development is connected to worship and social justice (Nasr, 2006). Hospitality in the holy cities should embody humility, provide equal access to religious spaces, and prioritise the needs of vulnerable groups. The objectives of Islamic law, including the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, serve as essential ethical standards to assess the legitimacy of development (Salim, 2015).

Nevertheless, the current policy landscape reveals structural weaknesses. Programmes such as SAV 2030 adopt a largely technocratic and secular approach in transforming Makkah and Madinah (Henderson, 2010; SAV 2030, 2025; Pratiwi and Muslikhati, 2024). Although Islamic expressions are often used in policy discourse, they frequently function symbolically rather than substantively. For example, hotel and retail projects around the al-Masjid al-Ḥarām are often branded as 'Islamic' using Qur'anic verses or Arabic-Islamic motifs in marketing, yet their pricing and operations prioritise luxury consumption over accessibility for ordinary pilgrims. The real challenge, therefore, is epistemological. There must be a shift in conceptual thinking so that market-driven logic no longer defines the trajectory of development. Instead, an approach rooted in Islamic knowledge, spiritual heritage, and ethical law should be applied at every stage of planning and execution. This is vital not only to safeguard the sanctity and identity of the holy cities but also to shape a tourism model that is genuinely just, sustainable, and centred on spiritual values.

10.2. *The Removal of Spiritual Elements from Development Narratives*

Within the context of hospitality and tourism development in Makkah and Madinah, there is a marked tendency to prioritise physical and economic dimensions, thereby marginalising the spiritual essence that fundamentally defines these sacred cities. The rapid and capitalistic nature of development frequently overlooks the profound spiritual values that have long constituted the identity and primary attraction of both cities (Nasr, 2006). The proliferation of luxury hotels, shopping centres, and other commercial facilities has transformed the cities from centres of worship and spirituality into capitalistic tourism destinations. This raises profound questions concerning the authenticity of what is termed 'Islamic development,' by which we refer specifically to state-led megaprojects under Vision 2030 that appropriate Islamic symbols and rhetoric, while in practice being driven primarily by economic diversification and global competitiveness agendas (Santos, 2014; Said, 1978).

A development narrative grounded in Islamic spiritual values ought to prioritise a balance between physical infrastructure growth and the preservation of deep spiritual dimensions. However, in practice, the developmental discourse is overwhelmingly dominated by economic agendas and infrastructure expansion, with insufficient regard for the spiritual ramifications that may undermine the authentic character of these sacred cities (Salim, 2015; Auda, 2007). The exclusion of spiritual elements also adversely affects the experiences of pilgrims and visitors whose intentions are primarily devotional. They may struggle to perceive the presence of the Islamic spirit amidst increasingly commercialised and materialistic environments (Timothy, 2015; Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010). Therefore, it is imperative to develop a model of development that is Islamically grounded, integrating *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* principles of justice, preservation, and welfare with contemporary urban planning tools. Such a model would balance capacity expansion with heritage conservation, ensure affordability alongside infrastructural modernisation, and prioritise community inclusion rather than displacement (Salim, 2015; SAV 2030, 2025).

10.3. "Epistemicide: The Erasure of Traditional Islamic Narratives"

The concept of epistemicide refers to the systematic eradication or marginalisation of unique traditional knowledge systems when confronted with the dominance of modern and globalised knowledge paradigms (Santos, 2014). Within the context of hospitality and tourism development in Makkah and Madinah, epistemicide happens as traditional Islamic narratives and values that have historically supported the construction and governance of these sacred cities are increasingly sidelined or overshadowed by profit-driven capitalist development discourses. The rapid development prioritising luxurious infrastructure and the commodification of sacred spaces results in the neglect of vital elements of spiritual and cultural life, as illustrated by the demolition of the Ajyad Fortress in 2002 to make way for the Abraj al-Bait complex, which prioritised commercial returns over heritage preservation.

Consequently, these sacred spaces, once emblematic of spirituality and simplicity, have become exclusive zones largely accessible to privileged groups (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000). This shift reflects epistemicide, where global development models dominate and marginalise authentic Islamic epistemologies. Decisions are often driven by economic logic with little regard for Islamic ethics and values (Santos, 2014; Salim, 2015), eroding cultural and spiritual heritage and raising questions of legitimacy and sustainability (Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010; Ascoura, 2013). To counter this, a robust Islamic epistemological framework is needed, grounded in social justice, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, and preservation of religious and cultural values, to safeguard authenticity and ensure sustainable, ethical development (Salim, 2015; Auda, 2007).

11. Development of the Holy Cities with an Islamic Approach

The development of Makkah and Madinah as holy cities requires not only physical and economic progress but also strict adherence to requires not only physical and economic progress but also strict adherence to core Islamic principles and ethical foundations derived from *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, rather than relying on selective or symbolic invocations of authenticity. An Islamic development approach demands alignment with *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, ensuring dignity, moderation, social justice, and preventing exploitation within the hospitality and tourism sectors. Development policies must be reformed to prioritise Islamic principles alongside social justice and environmental sustainability. Governments should integrate *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* in planning processes and promote inclusive participation from local communities and pilgrims (Al-Faruqi, 1982; Kamali, 2008a; Dali et al., 2017). Even within Saudi Arabia's predominantly top-down planning system, consultative mechanisms could be expanded through structured community engagement forums, partnerships with organisations such as Tabung Haji (TH) Malaysia, and digital platforms that allow pilgrims to provide feedback on services and facilities.

Waqf and Islamic cooperatives are essential economic tools that can specifically support hospitality and tourism development in Makkah and Madinah. Their resources can be directed towards financing mid-range hotels, subsidising accommodation for lower-income pilgrims, and maintaining heritage guesthouses that preserve the cities' spiritual identity (Kahf, 2003; Chapra, 1992). An Islamic hotel evaluation index could be developed to assess hospitality establishments along three key dimensions: compliance with *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* values such as justice, accessibility, and preservation of community welfare; provision of affordable accommodation alongside luxury services to reduce inequality; and contribution to heritage conservation and spiritual ambience (Henderson, 2010; Yusuf and Salleh, 2018). Unlike conventional halal certification, which focuses primarily on food and ritual compliance, or sustainability labels that stress environmental standards, this index would integrate ethical, social, and spiritual benchmarks.

Its implementation in Saudi Arabia could be piloted through collaboration between the MHUSA, the General Authority of Awqaf, and academic institutions, before being adapted for other Muslim-majority destinations. Academic institutions and international Islamic organisations, including the IDB and the OIC, can play a facilitative role by providing expertise and financing

models that strengthen *waqf*-based hospitality projects and cooperative-led accommodation schemes, ensuring that sacred tourism development remains inclusive and ethically grounded (GCC-Stat, 2021; Nasr, 2010; El-Gamal, 2006).

12. Discussion and Recommendations

12.1. Discussion: Significance and Implications for the Development of the Holy Cities

12.1.i. Theoretical Implications

The development of the holy cities has therefore become both an opportunity and a challenge for the Muslim world, raising questions about inclusivity, justice, and sustainability in the planning of hospitality. As highlighted earlier, while criticisms of luxury-focused development are valid, most pilgrims continue to rely on non-luxury infrastructure such as budget hotels, rented apartments, and dormitory housing. Official statistics from the GASTAT (2023) and SAT (2024) indicate that nearly two-thirds of licensed hotel rooms in Makkah and Madinah fall within three-star or below categories. This suggests that the issue is not one of absolute exclusion, but of imbalance: luxury projects dominate the skyline and global image, whereas non-luxury facilities still accommodate most pilgrims. Recognising this nuance helps ensure the debate is framed in terms of equity and proportionality, rather than as a simple binary between capitalism and spirituality.

From a theoretical perspective, this study challenges the dominance of Western development paradigms by advocating for the integration of Islamic epistemology and the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* framework into development discourse (Dali et al., 2017; Kamali, 2008a). The study highlights the epistemic issue, namely, the marginalisation of traditional Islamic knowledge by global development narratives (Santos, 2014), as a critical matter, thus calling for an inclusive development model sensitive to local contexts. This development framework should be balanced not only materially but also spiritually, socially, and ethically, especially in religious contexts such as Makkah and Madinah (Nasr, 2010).

In this context, terms such as “Islamic development model,” “humane approach,” and “holistic planning” should not remain abstract. Within the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* framework, these concepts can be explicitly anchored in three core principles: preservation of religion as the safeguard of spiritual authenticity, preservation of life as the protection of pilgrims’ welfare and dignity, and preservation of wealth as the pursuit of fair and sustainable economic management. By mapping them onto the *maqāṣid*, their meaning becomes analytically precise and avoids rhetorical vagueness. Rather than exemplifying a seamless balance between Islamic values and capitalist imperatives, the case of Makkah and Madinah illustrates the ongoing negotiation and tension between these competing forces.

12.1.ii. Policy Implications

Policy lessons from the case of Makkah and Madinah highlight the need for stronger governance mechanisms to balance commercial expansion with heritage protection, while ensuring inclusivity in hospitality planning. As highlighted earlier, although luxury-focused development dominates the skyline, official statistics (GASTAT, 2023; SAT, 2024) indicate that nearly two-thirds of licensed hotel rooms fall within three-star or below categories, serving most pilgrims. This suggests that policy interventions should not only critique luxury projects but also strengthen and protect the non-luxury segment that already supports most visitors.

To achieve this, policy frameworks must adopt integrated and participatory planning models that involve not only state actors and investors but also religious authorities, local communities, and international Muslim organisations (e.g., IDB, TH Malaysia). These actors possess the institutional capacity to channel resources toward more inclusive outcomes, such as *waqf*-based hotels, cooperative financing, and subsidised accommodation quotas. At the same time, there is a need to differentiate between short-term feasible interventions (e.g., targeted subsidies, pilgrim insurance, multilingual guidance centres) and long-term aspirational goals (e.g., International Ummah Waqf

Fund [IUWF], institutionalised cooperative hotel models). Such a distinction ensures that recommendations are both practical and forward-looking, striking a balance between immediate needs and sustainable reform.

Crucially, each recommendation can be mapped to the principles of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*:

- Targeted subsidies for low-income pilgrims reflect the protection of life, by safeguarding access to basic needs during pilgrimage.
- Pilgrimage insurance (*takaful*) reflects protection of wealth by mitigating financial risk in cases of emergency.
- Multilingual guidance centres reflect the protection of intellect by ensuring pilgrims receive clear religious knowledge and guidance in their native languages.
- *Waqf*-based hotels and cooperative financing models align with the protection of religion and relation to property, by preserving equitable access to sacred spaces while ensuring sustainable economic management.

By explicitly grounding these recommendations in *maqāṣid*, the policy dimension becomes not only pragmatic but also normatively Islamic, strengthening the study's contribution to both theory and practice.

12.1.iii. Social Dimensions

Socially, the expansion of luxury hospitality has widened inequalities between wealthy and lower-income pilgrims, particularly those from South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, non-luxury accommodations remain the backbone of pilgrimage infrastructure. This indicates that the real challenge is not exclusion but imbalance. The marginalisation of local communities, through displacement and the erasure of historic neighbourhoods, further complicates the social sustainability of development. The demolition of the Ajayad Fortress in 2002 to make way for the Abraj al-Bait complex is perhaps the most prominent example of heritage erasure, which UNESCO and several Muslim-majority states protested. More recently, neighbourhoods such as Jarwal and parts of Shamiyyah have seen large-scale displacement of long-standing residents, replaced by commercial hotel and retail projects (Alshuwaikhat and Mubarak, 2019).

These dynamics underscore that pilgrimage tourism in Makkah and Madinah cannot be reduced to economic performance. It involves questions of identity, belonging, and justice. Local communities play a vital role in maintaining the cultural and spiritual fabric of the cities; their displacement represents a form of social and epistemic loss. Globally, the case of Makkah and Madinah illustrates the tension between capitalist-driven tourism models and faith-based value systems. While luxury development projects shape the international image of the holy cities, most pilgrims experience them through modest, non-luxury facilities. This disjuncture provides a valuable comparative lesson: sacred destinations elsewhere (e.g., Vatican City, Varanasi) also grapple with balancing spiritual authenticity and economic imperatives. In Vatican City, the balance between preserving sacred heritage and accommodating millions of annual visitors has led to strict zoning and heritage protection policies (Shinde & Olsen, 2020). Meanwhile, in Varanasi, redevelopment initiatives around the riverfront ghats have generated both revitalisation efforts and concerns over displacement and loss of heritage, particularly as documented in recent heritage conservation studies (Pati and Husain, 2023). These parallels suggest that Makkah and Madinah are part of a wider global pattern where sacred cities grapple with reconciling mass tourism pressures with heritage and spiritual authenticity.

The position of Makkah and Madinah offers broader lessons for Muslim-majority societies seeking to balance spiritual authenticity with economic growth. The holy cities illustrate both the opportunities and risks of embedding Islamic values within global tourism industries. Certain elements are potentially transferable, such as the mobilisation of *waqf* for financing affordable accommodation projects, the use of cooperative models to enhance inclusivity, and the application of *maqāṣid*-based evaluation frameworks in planning. Other features, however, remain unique to the Saudi context, including the centralised governance structure, the scale of pilgrimage flows, and the

geopolitical significance of the two holy mosques. Distinguishing between these transferable and context-specific elements helps ensure that lessons from Makkah and Madinah are adapted thoughtfully, rather than uncritically transplanted, to other Muslim-majority settings.

The global lesson here is twofold: first, that ethical and faith-based perspectives can enrich international debates on sustainable hospitality; and second, that development models must be sensitive to context. Elements such as *waqf*-based financing or cooperative pilgrimage schemes may inspire Muslim-majority countries, but other elements remain unique to the Saudi state-led system.

12.2. Recommendations: Marginalisation of Local Communities

The rapid development of the hospitality and tourism sectors in Makkah and Madinah has brought significant economic benefits; however, the distribution of these gains has been uneven. Local communities are often marginalised because of development policies that prioritise tourists and foreign investors, leading to increased living costs, displacement, and social fragmentation (Al-Hathloul and Mughal, 2001; Shinde and Olsen, 2020; Alshuwaikhat and Mubarak, 2019). More concerning is the fact that the voices of local communities are rarely considered during the planning process. Key decisions are frequently made without meaningful consultation with the original residents, who possess deep knowledge of the local cultural and social context (Henderson, 2010; Smith, 2001). This undermines the social and cultural sustainability of these sacred cities. As custodians of spiritual values and local identity, the role of local communities is critical. Therefore, development must be grounded in Islamic values such as social justice, moderation, and inclusivity (SAV 2030, 2025). Community participation in development governance must be strengthened.

To address socioeconomic inequalities in the implementation of Hajj and Umrah, a framework based on *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* should be established. This includes the provision of targeted subsidies for pilgrims from poorer countries through reduced visa, flight, and accommodation costs, made possible through cooperation between the Saudi government, international *zakat* (obligatory almsgiving in Islam) and *waqf* institutions, and Islamic travel agencies (Auda, 2007; Kamali, 2008a; 2008b). Other recommendations include the allocation of special accommodation quotas near the main mosques for low-income groups, the elderly, and persons with special needs. This could be achieved through the development of *waqf*-funded hotels or government-regulated affordable housing policies (Alamoudy, 2018; Salim, 2015; Dali et al., 2017). In addition, the implementation of *takaful*-based pilgrimage insurance schemes should be considered to protect pilgrims from health risks or death during the pilgrimage (Shinde and Olsen, 2020). Free multilingual religious guidance centres are also proposed to enhance pilgrims' understanding and experience, especially for those with limited educational backgrounds.

Finally, the role of international *waqf* and *zakat* must be institutionalised strategically to fund essential services such as food, accommodation, transport, and healthcare. The establishment of a professionally managed IUWF could make the pilgrimage experience more inclusive and reflective of the *maqāṣid*-based values of justice, moderation, and collective wellbeing (SAV 2030, 2025). There is also evidence that such recommendations are institutionally feasible: TH Malaysia has, for decades, successfully managed pilgrim savings, travel logistics, and accommodation for millions of Malaysians; and the IDB has a proven record of financing large-scale infrastructure and social projects across Muslim countries. These precedents demonstrate that the recommended measures are not merely aspirational but grounded in proven institutional capacity.

In this context, recommendations such as targeted subsidies for pilgrims from poorer nations, reserved accommodation quotas near holy mosques, regional pilgrimage insurance, free multilingual guidance centres, and the activation of international *waqf* and *zakat* are essential steps toward a more just, inclusive, and *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*-oriented model of Hajj and Umrah hospitality. This approach emphasises the balance between the physical and spiritual needs of pilgrims while ensuring that development in the holy cities is not confined to the logic of tourism capitalism. With integrated and ethical implementation, Makkah and Madinah can become models of Islamic development that uphold spiritual integrity, social justice, and the collective well-being of the community. The

Islamically grounded recommendations presented in this paper are not intended as absolute prescriptions but should be viewed as a case study illustrating how religious values can serve as an alternative lens in hospitality development. Analytically, these principles align with global efforts to balance tourism growth with sustainability, social inclusiveness, and economic justice. Consequently, Makkah and Madinah are not only spiritual destinations but also unique laboratories for exploring how religious norms can interact with mainstream tourism frameworks.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that not all recommendations are equally feasible in the short term. More immediate and practical measures include targeted subsidies, reserved accommodation quotas, and multilingual guidance centres, which can be implemented through existing institutions and regulatory frameworks. By contrast, larger-scale initiatives such as the establishment of an IUWF or a regional *takaful*-based insurance scheme may remain longer-term aspirational goals that require extensive coordination across states and organisations. Distinguishing between short-term actionable steps and long-term visionary proposals helps to present a more realistic and staged roadmap, ensuring that the recommendations are both ambitious and grounded in institutional capacity. To further clarify these recommendations, Table 1 below distinguishes between short-term actionable steps and long-term aspirational proposals.

Table 1.

Category	Recommendations	Institutional Basis and Feasibility
Short-term (feasible)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Targeted subsidies for poorer pilgrims. ii. Reserved accommodation quotas near holy mosques. iii. Multilingual guidance centres (physical and online). 	Can be implemented via existing agencies (e.g., MHUSA, TH Malaysia).
Long-term (aspirational)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. IUWF. ii. Regional <i>takaful</i>-based pilgrimage insurance. iii. Large-scale <i>waqf</i> hotel networks. 	Require cross-border cooperation, high-level policy coordination, and multilateral funding mechanisms (e.g., OIC frameworks).

13. Conclusions

The development of the hospitality and tourism industries in Makkah and Madinah represents a complex and multidimensional process shaped by rapid growth in pilgrimage flows. This transformation has generated significant physical, economic, and social changes while simultaneously raising critical questions about inclusivity, justice, and the preservation of spiritual authenticity. The key takeaway is that development in the holy cities cannot be understood solely in economic or physical terms; it is fundamentally a contested space where Islamic values and capitalist imperatives coexist in tension. A second key point is that inequality in access does not amount to exclusion: while luxury projects dominate the skyline and global image, most pilgrims continue to rely on non-luxury infrastructure, highlighting the need to address imbalance rather than absolute deprivation.

Beyond policy implications, this study makes a distinct academic contribution by applying Islamic epistemology and the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* framework to the field of tourism and hospitality studies. By mapping concepts such as an “Islamic development model” and “holistic planning” onto the *maqāṣid* principles, preservation of religion, life, and wealth, the analysis moves beyond rhetorical appeals and provides a more analytically precise approach. This opens space for a broader theoretical conversation in tourism studies, challenging Western-centric paradigms and foregrounding Islamic perspectives as legitimate frameworks for sustainable and just development.

At the global level, the experience of Makkah and Madinah offers valuable lessons but must be interpreted with caution. Transferable elements include the mobilisation of *waqf* for financing affordable accommodation, cooperative models that enhance inclusivity, and the use of *maqāsid*-based evaluation frameworks in planning. However, other features remain unique to the Saudi context, such as the scale of pilgrimage flows, the centralised governance structure, and the geopolitical significance of the two holy mosques. Distinguishing between these transferable and context-specific dimensions ensures that the lessons drawn are adapted thoughtfully, allowing Makkah and Madinah to serve as both a spiritual centre for the community and a case study in navigating the tensions between faith-based values and global hospitality imperatives.

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