IJMECIE International Journal of Mechanical, Electrical and Civil Engineering
E-ISSN: 3047-4531
P-ISSN: 3047-4523

Research Article

Islamic Architecture vs Islamicate Architecture : A Critical Review of Concepts, Identity, and Spatial Manifestation

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Abstract: The terminological debate between "Islamic architecture" and "Islamicate architecture" has become a central concern in studies of architecture rooted in Islamic values. Although often used interchangeably, the two terms carry different theoretical and contextual nuances. This study aims to explore the conceptual similarities and differences between Islamic architecture and Islamicate architecture through an interpretative qualitative approach by examining both classical and contemporary literature, as well as architectural spaces that represent the two terms. The analysis reveals that Islamic architecture refers more to the historical products of classical Islamic civilization, while Islamicate architecture is a contemporary approach that seeks to embed Islamic values into the design process, regardless of traditional architectural forms. This study emphasizes the importance of terminological clarity in developing an architectural identity grounded in values and spirituality. The implication is that conceptual approaches to Islamic and Islamicate architecture can enrich contemporary architectural discourse in an inclusive and contextual manner.

Keywords: Concept; Identity; Islamic Architecture; Islamicate Architecture; Spatial Manifestation

1. Introduction

The debate surrounding the definitions of Islamic architecture (as the historical product of Muslim civilization) and Islamicate architecture (as a contemporary approach embedding Islamic values into the design process) has reemerged over the past decade. Recent historiographic studies reveal that the term "Islamic architecture" itself is problematic, as it emerged from a colonial-Orientalist framework, thereby requiring a methodological repositioning to reinterpret its objects beyond classical typological and patronage narratives (Kana'an & Shalem, 2024). At the same time, architectural pedagogy discourse demands a more critical conceptual framework to ensure that spiritual values are not reduced to mere ornamentation (Hasnan et al., 2024).

This terminological ambiguity is exacerbated by the massive trend of contemporization: on the one hand, many modern works labeled as Islamic merely replicate historical elements; on the other hand, the "Islamicate architecture" movement seeks to assert the ethos of tawhid (divine unity), simplicity, and sustainability without necessarily exhibiting traditional forms (Ahamad & Yasmoon, 2024). Studies on cultural identity in European religious buildings even highlight how these labels influence design strategies and the reception of local communities (Awaliyah, 2023).

The aspect of identity becomes increasingly complex when modern mosque architecture functions as a space for negotiating Islamic meaning within multicultural societies. Cross-national research in Europe confirms that the integration of modern aesthetics and traditional symbols produces a dynamic expression of Muslim identity—often more "Islamicate" than

Received: August 26, 2025
Revised: September 09, 2025
Accepted: September 23, 2025
Online Available: September 25, 2025
Curr. Ver.: September 25, 2025

"Islamic" in the historical sense (Putra et al., 2025). A similar phenomenon is also reflected in community initiatives that use architecture to reinforce social cohesion and inclusivity (Awaliyah, 2023).

Therefore, conceptual clarity between Islamic and Islamicate architecture is crucial not only for academic discourse but also for professional practice and architectural education. The value-based pedagogical approach proposed by Hasnan et al. (2024) emphasizes the need to incorporate ethical-spiritual dimensions from the early stages of design, while the new historiographic framework offered by Kana'an and Shalem (2024) opens interdisciplinary dialogues to reconstruct Muslim architectural identity in a more inclusive and contextual manner.

The lack of clear definitions and boundaries between Islamic and Islamicate architecture has caused significant conceptual confusion in architectural discourse, both academically and professionally. In practice, these terms are often used interchangeably without clear distinctions, resulting in overlapping understandings in the teaching, interpretation, and application of architecture rooted in Islamic values.

Academically, this ambiguity hinders the development of a strong and structured theoretical framework. Many scholarly works use the term "Islamic architecture" to refer to buildings from the classical Islamic civilization era, while also applying it to contemporary works that display Islamic symbols—despite their vastly different historical, philosophical, and methodological contexts. This blurs the boundaries between past cultural products and present-day design approaches that seek to represent Islamic values in new ways (Hasnan et al., 2024; Kana'an & Shalem, 2024).

In professional practice, this ambiguity leads to design disorientation, especially when architects are expected to deliver architecture that embodies an "Islamic spirit." In many cases, this expectation is reduced to the use of geometric ornamentation or Arabic calligraphy, without a deep understanding of core Islamic principles such as simplicity, order, environmental harmony, and the integration of function and spirituality. Designs that merely adopt visual symbols without considering core Islamic values risk producing works that lack depth and meaning (Ahamad & Yasmoon, 2024).

This epistemological gap also affects architectural education, where students struggle to distinguish between historical approaches (Islamic architecture) and normative-conceptual approaches (Islamicate architecture). Yet each approach entails different methodological and ethical consequences in spatial design. This disorientation risks obscuring the scholarly identity and professionalism of Muslim architects who seek to authentically implement Islamic principles in their work (Putra et al., 2025).

Hence, a systematic effort is needed to clarify and differentiate—while simultaneously bridging—the meanings and boundaries between Islamic and Islamicate architecture, so that both can mutually enrich the conceptual and practical frameworks of inclusive, contextual, and transformative architectural practice.

Based on the aforementioned background, the research questions formulated in this study are: a) What are the differences and similarities between Islamic architecture and Islamicate architecture? b) How are Islamic identity and values manifested in architectural space through these two approaches? This study aims to: a) Examine the theoretical concepts of Islamic and Islamicate architecture; b) Analyze Islamic identity and values as manifested in space within both approaches.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

Islamic Architecture, Islamicate Architecture, and the Concept of Identity

Classical Islamic architecture developed from the 7th century and reflects a cultural synthesis from the Byzantine, Persian, and other worlds (Hasnan et al., 2024). Its distinctive features include domes, minarets, muqarnas, and multifoil arches. These elements are not merely aesthetic but also serve structural and symbolic purposes. For instance, the dome symbolizes the heavens, while the minaret signifies religious presence in the urban landscape. Islamic architecture is designed to reinforce the Muslim community's relationship with God (tawhid) through sacred spaces and geometric aesthetics that reflect cosmic order. The mosque landscape, incorporating gardens, water, and geometric patterns, also functions as a social center, embodying the concept of paradise and ensuring that worship is experienced collectively. Therefore, Islamic architecture is rich in symbolic, spiritual, and social functions.

Islamicate architecture refers to modern architectural designs that embed Islamic principles—such as tawhid, sustainability, and simplicity—into the conceptualization and construction process without necessarily replicating classical forms (Hasnan et al., 2024). A practical

example would be contemporary mosques that use modern materials and eco-friendly technologies while reflecting spiritual values in their spatial organization. In other words, Islamicate architecture employs a contemporary value-based approach.

Islamicate design emphasizes values such as social justice, communal well-being, and environmental awareness. Sharia-based norms (such as privacy, qibla orientation, and spatial hierarchy) serve as design principles rather than mere ornamentation. Contemporary Islamicate architecture also embraces principles of sustainability and the human-environment relationship, such as natural ventilation, balanced lighting, and the use of local materials. This is known as the integration of Islamic ethics into the design process.

The identity of classical Islamic architecture is conveyed through geometric ornamentation, arabesques, and calligraphy—symbols that reinforce the spiritual presence in public and worship spaces. Modern Islamicate architecture adopts a more abstract symbolic approach while remaining rooted in spiritual values—for example, through the use of lines, light, and privacy-oriented spaces as expressions of tawhid. This reflects what is referred to as visual identity, spatial experience, and symbolic meaning.

Theory of Spatial Manifestation in Islamic Culture

In Islamic tradition, space is considered sacred when it fosters spiritual reflection and evokes a sense of "closeness to the Divine." Elements such as the mihrab, qibla orientation, and natural lighting serve as tools for manifesting transcendence. Simplicity and harmony are reflected through symmetry and proportionality, creating spaces conducive to contemplation. Moreover, human-environment harmony is reinforced through gardens, water, and natural circulation within buildings. The manifestation of space in Islamic culture is thus related to the concepts of sacred space, transcendence, simplicity, and harmony.

3. Proposed Method

This study employs a descriptive interpretative qualitative approach aimed at understanding the meanings, concepts, and symbolism embedded in the two primary terminologies: Islamic architecture and Islamicate architecture. This approach was chosen because the main focus of the research is not on quantitative measurement, but on interpreting the context, identity, and Islamic values manifested in architectural space—both as a historical cultural product and as a result of contemporary design.

Qualitative research is exploratory and interpretative in nature, making it more suitable for understanding complex and contextual phenomena such as symbolic meanings, expressions of religious values, and narratives of identity in architecture. The descriptive approach is used to detail the various architectural manifestations categorized as "Islamic" and "Islamicate," while the interpretative approach aims to analyze the meanings embedded within design elements, spaces, and symbols from an Islamic perspective. This study relies on secondary data from various credible and academic sources, including:

a. Literature Review, covering: Classical literature (e.g., works on Islamic architecture from the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Andalusian periods); contemporary literature discussing Islamicate approaches in modern architecture, Islamic architectural education, and Islamic discourse in urban spaces; and recent international journal articles such as the Journal of Islamic Architecture, Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering, and International Journal of Islamic Architecture.
b. Visual Documentation, including: a) Photographs, architectural plans, and visual documentation of mosques, madrasas, or other buildings representing either classical Islamic or contemporary Islamicate approaches; b) Architectural visuals from selected case studies analyzed as symbolic representations of Islamic values.
c. Case Study Analysis, including: a) Case studies of historical buildings (e.g., the Great Mosque of Córdoba, the Alhambra Mosque, and the Prophet's Mosque); b) Case studies of contemporary buildings (e.g., the post-tsunami Baiturrahman Grand Mosque in Aceh, the Al-Jabbar Grand Mosque, and contemporary projects by modern Muslim architects such as Rasem Badran and Emre Arolat); and c) Emphasis on socio-cultural context, aesthetics, and spiritual functions.

Two analytical techniques are employed: discourse analysis and symbolic interpretation. Discourse Analysis is used to examine how the terms "Islamic architecture" and "Islamicate architecture" are constructed in literature, media, and academic discourse. This analysis explores the narratives, linguistic structures, and ideologies behind these terms, including how

each is interpreted in global and local contexts (Fairclough, 2013). Meanwhile, Symbolic Interpretation in Architecture is applied to interpret the meanings embedded in architectural forms, ornamentation, spatial organization, lighting, orientation, and other spiritual elements. This interpretation connects those symbols to Islamic values such as tawhid (divine unity), balance, purity, and the human connection to God (Bunt, 2022; Hasnan et al., 2024). Through this combined methodological approach, the study aims to illustrate not only the formal characteristics of each architectural category but also the accompanying semantic and epistemological dimensions.

4. Results and Discussion

The comparison between Islamic architecture and Islamicate architecture in this manuscript can be observed through five key components: (1) terminology and analytical framework; (2) Islamic case studies; (3) Islamicate case studies; (4) main comparative findings; and (5) critical analysis. Based on the terminology and analytical framework, at least three aspects differentiate Islamic architecture from Islamicate architecture: the point of departure, visual identity, and value emphasis. These distinctions are elaborated in the table 2.

A comparative presentation of architectural projects labeled as "Islamic" (e.g., the Great Mosque of Córdoba, the Alhambra Palace) and those oriented toward "Islamic-inspired" or "Islami" architecture (e.g., contemporary mosques designed by modern Muslim architects). An analysis of spatial elements, structure, symbolism from both approaches, and detailed explanation — comparative findings: "Islamic Architecture" vs. "Islami Architecture" :

Table 1. Terminology & Analytical Framework.

Aspect	Islamic Architecture	Islamicate Architecture
Point of Departure	Historical legacy under Islamic civilization (7th–19th century CE)	Contemporary design expressing values, ethics, and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*
Visual Identity	Calligraphic ornaments, *muqarnas*, domes, and polylobed arches	Minimalist, abstract, emphasizing integration of function and spirituality
Value Emphasis	Representation of political and cultural glory	Simplicity, sustainability, inclusivity (UMJ Journal)

The comparative framework includes physical morphology, spatial organization, symbolism, environmental technologies, and social roles.

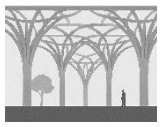
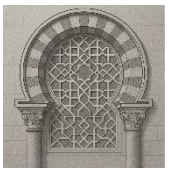
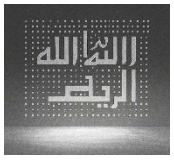
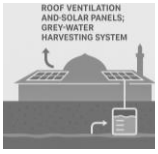
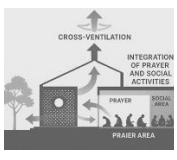
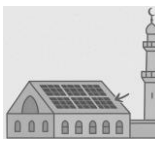
"Islamic" Case Studies are:

a) The Great Mosque of Córdoba (Spain, 8th–10th century)
   1) Morphology: Forest of columns and double arches; monumental scale.
   2) Symbolism: Triumph of the Umayyad Dynasty; geometric-stone motifs integrating Roman and Visigothic influences.
   3) Spatial Organization: Open hypostyle hall; Patio de los Naranjos as a transitional zone.

b) The Alhambra Palace-City (Granada, 13th–14th century)
   1) Morphology: Nasrid-style palatial-fortified complex with muqarnas and polychrome tile work.
   2) Passive Technology: Acequia canals and reflective pools for cooling.
   3) Socio-political Role: Administrative center reinforcing dynastic legitimacy.

Key Characteristics: Strong emphasis on decorative and political expression; passive technologies used pragmatically but not yet linked to modern ecological discourse.

Table 2. The comparison between Islamic architecture and Islamicate architecture.

Aspect	Islamic Architecture		Islami Architecture		
Point of Departure	Historical legacy under Islamic civilization (7th–19th century CE)		Contemporary design expressing values, ethics, and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*		
Visual Identity	Calligraphic ornaments, *muqarnas*, domes, and polylobed arches		Minimalist, abstract, emphasizing integration of function and spirituality		
Value Emphasis	Representation of political and cultural glory		Simplicity, sustainability, inclusivity (UMJ Journal)		
Case Studies	The Great Mosque of Córdoba (Spain, 8th–10th century)	The Alhambra Palace-City (Granada, 13th–14th century)	Sancaklar Mosque, Istanbul	Al-Irsyad Mosque, Bandung	Cambridge Central Mosque, UK
					
Morphology	Forest of columns and double arches; monumental scale	Nasrid-style palatial-fortified complex with muqarnas and polychrome tile work.	Embedded within the hillside topography	Cubic mass inspired by the Kaaba	Laminated timber "forest" structure
					
Symbolism	Triumph of the Umayyad Dynasty; geometric-stone motifs integrating Roman and Visigothic influences	Passive Technology: Acequia canals and reflective pools for cooling.	Sunken prayer hall enhances spiritual focus (*khushu*); undecorated concrete material emphasizes piety	perforated calligraphy of the *shahada* all ows natural lighting	roof ventilation and solar panels; grey-water harvesting system
					
Spatial Organization	Spatial Organization: Open hypostyle	Socio-political Role: Administrative	Dome omitted and simplicity	cross-ventilation; integration of	narrative of *green deen*—

Aspect	Islamic Architecture	Islami Architecture
	hall; Patio de los Naranjos as a transitional zone.	center reinforcing dynastic legitimacy.	(Sirkeci Mansion).	prayer and social activities	ecological justice as an act of worship
Key Characteristics	Strong emphasis on decorative and political expression; passive technologies used pragmatically but not yet linked to modern ecological discourse	Simplified typologies, explicit use of green technologies, and emphasis on social-community programs (classes, cafés, gardens) as extensions of the mosque's function.

Table 3. "Islami" (Contemporary) Case Studies.

Project	Architect/Year	Essence of "Islami" Approach
Sancaklar Mosque, Istanbul	Emre Arolat, 2012	Embedded within the hillside topography; dome omitted; sunken prayer hall enhances spiritual focus (*khushu*); undecorated concrete material emphasizes piety and simplicity (Sirkeci Mansion).
Al-Irsyad Mosque, Bandung	Ridwan Kamil & Urbane, 2010	Cubic mass inspired by the Kaaba; perforated calligraphy of the *shahada* allows natural lighting; cross-ventilation; integration of prayer and social activities (Academia).
Cambridge Central Mosque, UK	Marks Barfield + M. Winter, 2019	Laminated timber "forest" structure; roof ventilation and solar panels; grey-water harvesting system; narrative of *green deen*—ecological justice as an act of worship (cambridgecentralmosque.org).

Key Characteristics: Simplified typologies, explicit use of green technologies, and emphasis on social-community programs (classes, cafés, gardens) as extensions of the mosque's function.

Table 4. Key Comparative Findings.

Dimension	*Islamic*	*Islamicate*	Design Implications
Formal Expression	Ornamental, historical, symbols of political glory	Minimalist, abstract, spiritual-ethical symbolism	Ornamentation should reinforce meaning, not merely serve nostalgia
Space & Circulation	Centralized (hypostyle/courtyard)	Flexible, adaptive, multifunctional	Spatial modules should adapt to community needs
Environment & Technology	Traditional passive systems (water, shading)	Passive + active (PV panels, rainwater systems, smart HVAC)	Integrating green technology does not compromise spirituality

Dimension	*Islamic*	*Islamicate*	Design Implications
Socio-Cultural Role	Representation of authority	Inclusivity, community well-being	Mosque as a hub for education and intercultural dialogue
Theological Values	*Tawhid* reflected through calligraphic ornamentation	*Tawhid* embodied through ethics: simplicity, environmental stewardship	Design as a form of *dakwah* through sustainability and spatial justice

Critical Analysis

a) Decoration vs. Dematerialization
   - The Great Mosque of Cordoba and the Alhambra affirm identity through layered visual symbolism.
   - Sancaklar and Al-Irsyad Mosques reinforce the value of tazkiyatun-nafs (spiritual purification) through quiet, distraction-free spaces.

b) Sacred–Public Transition
   - Ancient mosques strictly separated worship areas from political spaces; contemporary mosques present a hybridity of functions (e.g., co-working spaces, galleries) as forms of social *waqf* (endowment).

c) Ecological Paradigm
   - Historically: Local climatic strategies were applied but not articulated as environmental theology.
   - Contemporary: Sustainability emerges as a spiritual manifesto-amr ma'r≈´f nahy munkar (enjoining good, forbidding harm) in response to environmental degradation.

d) Global vs. Local Aesthetics
   - The Alhambra blends Andalusian and Moorish styles; the Cambridge Mosque adopts English Gothic fan vaulting — demonstrating that Islami architecture is dialogical rather than ethnically exclusive.

A paradigm shift is evident: from Islamic architecture that emphasized political-cultural imagery to *Islami* architecture that prioritizes the universal values of Islam — simplicity, *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all creation), and sustainability. Contemporary design principles should: 1) Reinterpret symbols rather than merely imitate them; 2) Create inclusive and adaptive spaces; 3) Integrate ecological strategies as acts of worship; 4) Reposition the mosque as a center for knowledge and community well-being. This approach does not reject the legacy of classical "Islamic" architecture, but rather transforms it into an architectural language relevant to the socio-ecological challenges of the 21st century. Analysis of Spatial, Structural, and Symbolic Elements in Two Architectural Approaches:

a. "Islamic" Architecture – as the historical and visual legacy of classical Islamic civilization.
b. "Islami" Architecture – as a contemporary expression emphasizing Islamic spiritual and ethical values in a modern context.

Spatial Elements Analysis

a. Islamic Architecture (Classical)
   Main Prayer Hall (Musalla) : Typically designed as a hypostyle hall (repetitive rows of columns), spacious, and centered on the *mihrab*. *Example*: The Great Mosque of Córdoba — low ceilings and double-tiered columns create a rhythmic spiritual atmosphere. Open Courtyard (*Sahn*) : Serves as a transitional space from the outer world into the sacred prayer area (for contemplation and purification). Often includes an ablution fountain and symbolic gardens. Gender-Specific Spaces : Male and female prayer areas are symbolically divided, usually with low partitions or designated separate sections.
b. Islami Architecture (Contemporary)
   Flexible Main Hall : Not necessarily hypostyle; prioritizes fluidity and openness, adapted to urban settings and community needs. *Example*: Al-Irsyad Mosque — column-free

space with minimalist design emphasizing the *qibla* direction. Seamless Indoor–Outdoor Transition: Designed to blur the boundaries between sacred and social spaces (e.g., terraces, gardens, open-air amphitheaters for *dakwah*). Multi-Functional Spaces : Incorporates community halls, galleries, and learning centers as forms of intellectual and social *waqf* (endowment).

Structural Analysis

a) Islamic Architecture (Classical). Traditional Structures: Relied on stone, brick, and hardwood; characterized by massive construction techniques; Large domes and arcades functioned both structurally and symbolically. Modular System: Structural units were repeated to expand spatial coverage (e.g., the columns of Córdoba). Ornament as Structural Component : *Muqarnas* (decorative stalactites) served as transitional elements between domes and ceilings, combining structure with ornamentation.

b) Islami Architecture (Contemporary). Modern Structural Systems: Utilizes reinforced concrete, lightweight steel, and laminated timber (glulam); Applies sustainable construction technologies (e.g., passive cooling roofs, zero-carbon materials). Expressive Yet Simple Structures, for e*xample*: Cambridge Central Mosque — the laminated timber "tree" structure forms both the roof frame and a symbolic representation of *tawhid* (oneness, centrality). Structure as Meaning, Not Ornament: Structures are not excessively decorated but reflect values of transparency, sustainability, and simplicity.

Symbolic Analysis

a. Islamic Architecture (Classical). Ornamental Symbolism: Calligraphy (Qur'anic verses), geometric patterns, and arabesques express divine order and infinity. Symbols of Power: Monumental scale, grand domes, and lavish ornamentation reflect the authority and identity of Islamic kingdoms (e.g., the Alhambra). Qibla and Mihrab: The *mihrab* is often elaborately adorned and serves as the primary visual and spiritual focal point, marking the direction of prayer.

b. Islami Architecture (Contemporary). Narrative Symbolism: The representation of tawhid and simplicity is conveyed through open spatial layouts, manipulation of natural light, and use of natural materials. Example: Sancaklar Mosque — embedded into the earth as a symbol of humility and vertical connection to the Divine. Social-Spiritual Symbolism: Design becomes a physical expression of the maqāṣid al-sharīʿah (objectives of Islamic law): protection of life, intellect, and the environment. Light as a Divine Symbol: Natural lighting is used as a sacred element (inspired by Qur'an, Surah An-Nur: 35), not merely a technical lighting solution.

Table 5. Analytical Summary.

Aspect	Islamic (Classical)	Islami (Contemporary)
Spatial Elements	Hierarchical, monumental	Flexible, community-adaptive
Structure	Massive, repetitive, ornamental	Lightweight, ecological, expressive
Symbolism	Visual, calligraphic, imperial	Functional, spiritual, socio-ecological

Classical Islamic architecture emphasized grandeur and the cultural identity of a civilization, while modern Islami architecture seeks to express Islamic values through sustainability, simplicity, and spatial inclusivity in contemporary contexts.

Discussion

Islamic Architecture as a Historical and Cultural Product : A representation of beauty, authority, and past civilizations.

Islamic architecture, particularly that which flourished between the 7th and 19th centuries CE, is not merely an artistic style or a form of religious building. It is a tangible reflection of the spiritual, social, political, and aesthetic values that shaped Islamic civilization across diverse regions, including the Middle East, North Africa, Andalusia, Persia, Central Asia, and the Malay Archipelago. This architecture is not homogeneous, but dynamic—rooted in local contexts while unified by shared Islamic values and aesthetic principles

Representation of Beauty (Al-Jamāl)

a. Islamic Aesthetics and Spirituality

Beauty in Islamic architecture is not solely visual, but symbolizes the harmony of God's creation (*tawhid*). The use of geometric patterns, arabesques, and Qur'anic calligraphy

functions as a form of *dhikr* (remembrance of God). Aesthetic expression avoids explicit depictions of human or animal figures, adhering to the principle of aniconism in Islam.

b. Examples of Application:
The Shah Mosque in Isfahan (Iran), with its intricately tiled, symmetrical mosaics, exemplifies mathematical perfection as an act of praise toward the Creator. The Alhambra Palace in Granada integrates water, light, and ornamentation into a serene and contemplative spatial composition.
"God is beautiful and loves beauty" (Hadith, narrated by Muslim) — this hadith encapsulates the spiritual spirit of beauty that permeates the spaces and decorations in Islamic architecture.

Representation of Power (Al-Mulk)

a. Architecture as a Political Instrument and Symbol of Dynastic Identity
Many monumental Islamic buildings were commissioned by caliphs, sultans, or *amirs* as symbols of legitimacy and political authority. Grand mosques, palaces, madrasahs, and minarets served as markers of Islamic state presence in a given region.

b. Examples:
- The Umayyad Mosque in Damascus: built by Caliph al-Walid I to rival Byzantine churches, signifying the supremacy of the Umayyad Dynasty.
- The Great Mosque of Samarra (Iraq), with its spiral minaret: expresses Abbasid power through its vast scale, symbolizing both spiritual and political ascendancy.
- The Taj Mahal: not only a monument to love but also a cultural and spiritual symbol of the Mughal Dynasty's imperial authority.

Islamic classical architecture became the visual embodiment of political power and civilizational grandeur, blending religious and governmental symbolism into unified spatial forms.

Representation of Past Civilizations

a. Architecture as a Record of Intellectual and Civilizational
Every building reflects the achievements in technology, geometry, cosmology, and philosophical thought developed during the Islamic Golden Age. Spatial design took into account the direction of the *qibla*, air circulation, natural lighting, and social function. The presence of madrasahs and libraries within mosque complexes illustrates the integration of religious and worldly knowledge in a single spatial system.

b. Examples:
- The Al-Azhar Complex (Cairo) and Al-Qarawiyyin (Fez): centers of worship and education that produced renowned scholars and scientists.
- The Maragheh Observatory: a 13th-century example of the integration of science and architecture within an Islamic scholarly complex.

Islamic architecture served not merely as a space for worship, but as a record of civilization — functioning as centers of knowledge, diplomacy, and culture.

Table 6. Key Characteristics of Historical Islamic Architecture.

Aspect	Distinctive Features
Structure	Domes, minarets, arcades, hypostyle halls
Ornamentation	Qur'anic calligraphy, geometric patterns, arabesques
Building Materials	Stone, brick, marble, carved wood
Spatial Planning	Symmetrical, centered on the mihrab/qibla
Additional Functions	Madrasahs, caravanserais, hammams (public baths), markets
Symbolic Meaning	Tawhid (Divine Unity), submission, divine order, dynastic glory

Classical Islamic architecture is a manifestation of the rich cultural complexity of past Islamic civilizations, merging visual beauty, spiritual symbolism, and political structures within a unified spatial form. Monumental buildings were not merely physical artifacts, but messengers of civilization, witnesses to power dynamics, and affirmations of the collective identity of the Muslim world across regions.

Therefore, understanding historical Islamic architecture means tracing the intellectual, aesthetic, and ideological imprints that shaped the Islamic world for over a millennium.

Islami Architecture as an Ethical and Contextual Approach: Application of the principles of *tauhid*, simplicity, and sustainability

In contrast to the symbolic and historical focus of classical "Islamic" architecture, contemporary Islami architecture is not solely concerned with the physical form or visual aesthetics of buildings. Rather, it emphasizes how Islamic values are ethically, contextually, and functionally embedded in architectural design. This approach arises from the awareness that architecture is part of ibadah (worship) and amanah (trust)—not only to fulfill human needs but also to maintain harmony with nature and the surrounding society.

The Principle of Tauhid in Islami Architecture

a. Tauhid as a Conceptual Unity
   Tauhid (the oneness of God) is the most fundamental principle in Islam and forms the foundation of all ethical approaches in Islami architecture. It emphasizes the unity between humans, nature, and the Creator, which is reflected in: Harmony between form and function, avoiding a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane; Architectural design that avoids excess, embodying *tawadhu* (humility); Spaces that are not meant to dominate nature but to coexist harmoniously with it.
b. Design Implementation:
   Mosques and Islamic homes are designed without excessive luxury, prioritizing calm, well-lit, and spiritually focused spaces. Spatial layouts are fluid, oriented toward the qibla, with a strong spiritual center.
   "Tauhid in Islami architecture is a unifying principle—not merely a theological symbol, but a design foundation that integrates function, value, and sustainability."

Simplicity as a Spiritual Expression

a. Zuhud in Architectural Form
   Simplicity (*zuhud*) is a core Islamic value that discourages excess (*israf*) and waste (*tabdhir*). In *Islami* architecture: The exterior appearance need not be grand, but should emphasize functionality, comfort, and beauty within modest means; Interiors are designed with minimal decoration, maximizing natural light, cross-ventilation, and the use of local materials.
b. Examples of Implementation:
   - Sancaklar Mosque, Turkey: an underground design without ornamentation, enhancing focus and humility.
   - Contemporary Islamic homes: wide openings for natural light and airflow, avoiding costly materials, favoring environmental friendliness.
c. Simplicity also reflects:
   - A sense of social responsibility: refraining from lavish construction in impoverished surroundings.
   - Ethical spatial distribution: prioritizing shared, collective spaces over oversized private ones.

Sustainability as an Environmental Trust

a. Nature as a Trust from God
   In Islam, humans are appointed as khalifah (stewards) of the Earth. Therefore, Islami architecture is obligated to: Respect natural cycles, Minimize carbon footprints, and Avoid resource exploitation.
b. Green Islam Principles in Architecture:
   - Use of local and renewable materials.
   - Passive systems: natural lighting, cross-ventilation, green roofs, building orientation based on wind and sun.
   - Water management: recycling systems, rainwater harvesting, and natural filtration methods.
c. Example of Implementation:
   Cambridge Central Mosque (UK) with : Laminated timber (glulam) structure - low-carbon material; Passive cooling and zero-energy design, and Inner garden as an element of green deen (spiritual ecology).

Table 7. Ethical Characteristics of Islami Architecture.

Aspect	Characteristics
Spiritual	Oriented toward qibla, harmonious spatial flow, contemplative
Social	Inclusive, providing communal and dakwah spaces
Ecological	Natural materials, energy efficiency, minimal environmental impact
Functional	Adaptive, flexible, responsive to local climate and culture
Aesthetic	Simple, non-excessive, meaning-oriented rather than decorative

Contextual Analysis: Islami Approach in Local Contexts

The *Islami* architectural approach does not imitate Middle Eastern forms, but adapts to: a) Tropical climates (e.g., high roofs, cross-ventilation); b) Local cultures (e.g., use of Nusantara motifs conveying tauhid); c) Community socio-economic conditions (e.g., affordable costs, citizen participation in construction). Example: Village mosques in Indonesia built through community initiatives—designed with Islami principles: energy-efficient, simple, functional, and socially centered.

Islami architecture as an ethical and contextual approach does not merely shape physical spaces, but instills Islamic values in the way humans live, build, and care for the Earth. The application of *tauhid*, simplicity, and sustainability is not expressed through visual style alone, but in a design process that is: Ethical, Socially just, and Ecologically conscious**.** Thus, Islami architecture is not a "building style," but a faithful and responsible design philosophy—committed to the well-being of both humanity and the environment.

Convergence and Fundamental Differences between "Islamic" and "Islami" Architecture

The evolution of architecture in the Islamic world has followed two major approaches—complementary yet distinct in orientation. On the one hand, "Islamic architecture" is rooted in classical heritage and visual tradition, while "Islami architecture" represents a contemporary value-based and ethical design perspective. This analysis seeks to explore their common ground, while also highlighting their essential distinctions in terms of concept, expression, and design purpose.

Point of Convergence: Spirituality and Sacredness as Architectural Foundations

a. Both Approaches Center on *Tauhid*
   Both "Islamic" and "Islami" architecture take tauhid (the Oneness of God) as the central orientation of spatial and formal design. This is evident in the consistent orientation toward the qibla and in the creation of spaces that support humility, reflection, and inner peace.
b. The Sacred Nature of Space Is Preserved
   Whether in historical mosques like the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus or modern ones like the Sancaklar Mosque in Turkey, there is shared awareness that the mosque is a sacred space, not merely a functional building. Sacredness is conveyed through controlled visual experience, openness to natural light, and the absence of distracting elements.
c. Architecture as a Form of Worship
   Both approaches view design and construction not as mere technical acts, but as expressions of trust (amanah) and worship (ibadah). This gives rise to great care for: a) Accurate *qibla* orientation; b) Thoughtful layout of ablution areas; c) Sacred transitions from public to prayer spaces. These commonalities affirm that spirituality and sacredness are the soul of Islamic architecture, both in its inherited forms and its contextual reinterpretations.

Fundamental Differences: Formal Approach vs. Functional and Value-Oriented Approach

a. Formal Approach ("Islamic" Architecture)
   - Based on Historical Styles and Visual Symbols. Tends to emphasize forms associated with Islamic civilization: Domes, arches, minarets; Calligraphy, arabesques, geometric motifs. The main goal is to reflect civilizational glory, political identity, and cultural heritage.
   - Focus on Symbolic Representation: Rich visual beauty serves as passive da'wah; Monumentality conveys power and pride of the Muslim community.

- Normative and Representational: Follows established norms rooted in Abbasid, Ottoman, Mughal, or Andalusian traditions.

b. Functional and Value-Oriented Approach ("Islami" Architecture)
   - Grounded in Ethics, Values, and Socio-Cultural Context. Does not rely on fixed forms but seeks to answer questions like: Does the building provide spiritual comfort?; Does it meet the community's social and environmental needs?; Does it reflect Islamic ethics in justice, simplicity, and care?
   - Symbolism Is Meaning-Based, Not Merely Visual: Domes are not a necessity; Islamic expression may emerge through: Natural light as a divine metaphor; Use of local materials as ecological responsibility; and Communal spaces as expressions of ukhuwah (brotherhood) and social benefit
   - Context-Responsive: Form adapts to climate, culture, community needs, and affordability. Example: Contemporary mosques in Europe designed to harmonize with local cultures without compromising Islamic values.

Table 8. Points of Convergence and Differences.

Aspect	"Islamic" Architecture (Classical)	"Islami" Architecture (Contemporary)
Shared values	Tauhid, spirituality, sacredness	Tauhid, spirituality, sacredness
Design orientation	Historical-symbolic representation	Ethical and contextual representation
Formal expression	Domes, minarets, geometric patterns	Flexible; form follows meaning
Ornamentation	Calligraphy, arabesques, visual richness	Minimal; focused on light & materials
Social function	Center of elite worship & politics	Center of spirituality and community development
Relationship to nature	Climate-adaptive (passive)	Integrated sustainability principles

"Islamic" and "Islami" architecture share a common spiritual foundation but differ in essential approaches. One celebrates the visual heritage of the past, while the other seeks to embody Islamic values in new, ethical, and context-sensitive forms.

"If Islamic architecture is a heritage of form, then Islami architecture is a living heritage of values that continue to evolve."

Both approaches complement each other in the long journey of Islamic civilization. In today's context, *Islami* architecture opens new paths of reflection on how faith, space, and social responsibility can merge in grounded and meaningful design.

Implications for Contemporary Architectural Education and Practice

The development of *Islami architecture*—which emphasizes *tauhid* (divine oneness), simplicity, sustainability, and social justice—has significant implications for how we educate and train future architects. Architecture must not be taught solely as a technical or artistic discipline; it must also be understood as an ethical, spiritual, and contextual practice with direct impact on people and the environment. Therefore, the *Islami* approach calls for a stronger integration of values in both architectural education and professional practice.

Architectural Education: Instilling Values as the Foundation of Design

a. Value-Based Curriculum. Architectural education often emphasizes formal aspects (composition, proportion, visual aesthetics), yet tends to lack: Ethical awareness toward social and environmental contexts; Integration of spiritual values and local culture in the design process.
   The Islami approach encourages curriculum development that includes: a) Islamic professional ethics: viewing design as a *khalifah's* (steward's) responsibility; b) Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) of buildings and space: guiding spatial planning for worship, public areas, and sacred transitions; and c) Understanding *maqāṣid al-syari'ah* as the foundation of design: the protection of life, intellect, lineage, wealth, and the environment.
b. Relevant Courses and Modules: *Islami Architecture and Design Ethics*, *Spirituality and the Built Environment*, *Sustainability in Islamic Perspective* and *Case Studies on Contemporary Mosques and Community Spaces*.

"Teaching how to draw and design is not enough—students must be encouraged to read space meaningfully and design with ethical and spiritual awareness."

Professional Practice: Design as Trust and Worship

a. Transforming the Designer's Paradigm. An architect is not merely a provider of visual or technical services, but: a social change agent; a guardian of cultural and environmental values; a bearer of trust (amanah) to create spaces that bring benefit (*maṣlaḥah*) to the ummah.
b. Ethically Grounded Design Practice. Professional practice should promote: a) Material and technology selection based on sustainability and Islamic principles of moderation (*wasatiyyah*) and environmental stewardship; b) Participatory design approaches, particularly for mosques, schools, and community projects; c) Social sensitivity toward marginalized users: persons with disabilities, women, children, and the elderly.
c. Examples of *Islami* Practices in Design. Architects design mosques without lavish ornamentation, focusing instead on acoustic quality, natural lighting, and universal accessibility. Housing projects incorporate green spaces not merely for aesthetics, but to foster social interaction and serve as platforms for ecological da'wah.

The Role of Educational and Professional Institutions

a. Universities as Agents of Transformation
Universities should function as social laboratories, where Islamic architectural values are tested, applied, and developed. Architectural design studios must address real-world challenges, such as: Designing environmentally friendly mosques, Developing Islami housing in high-density urban areas, Revitalizing traditional markets through Islamic ethical values.
b. Collaboration Between Academia and the Professional World
Strategic collaboration is needed between universities, religious councils (e.g., MUI), mosque boards, environmental NGOs, and architectural firms to realize Islami architecture that is not only symbolic but also transformative in nature. Challenges in Implementation should be seen in table.

Table 9. Challenges in Implementation.

Challenge	Explanation
Curriculum fragmentation	Spiritual values are often dismissed as irrational and excluded from design pedagogy.
Western aesthetic dominance	Young architects tend to chase "modern appearances" without ethical awareness.
Theory–practice disconnect	Students understand Islami values in theory but fail to apply them in studio work.
Lack of contextual literature	There is a scarcity of academic references and textbooks on Islami architecture within the Indonesian context

Strategic Recommendations

a. Curriculum Revitalization
   - Integrate materials on spirituality, Islamic sustainability, and ethical spatial design into both core and elective courses.
b. Contextual Design Studios
   - Encourage studios to focus not just on form, but on process, meaning, and the social contribution of space.
c. Workshops and Multidisciplinary Collaboration
   - Involve Islamic scholars (fuqaha'), anthropologists, and environmental activists as guest lecturers or project partners in design processes.
d. Development of Islamic Architectural Literature
   - Produce academic references and teaching modules rooted in the Indonesian context, so that Islamic values feel relevant and relatable to local students.

The implications of the Islami architectural approach are clear: education and practice must shift from pure formalism to value-based, meaningful, and responsible design.

The core values of tauhid, justice, simplicity, and sustainability are not only important for creating visually pleasing spaces, but also for crafting spaces that are wise, just, and beneficial—for both humanity and the environment. If design is a form of worship (ibadah), then architectural education is a path to shaping designers who are not only skillful but also God-conscious (muttaqin) and socially impactful.

6. Conclusions

"Islamic architecture" and "Islami architecture" reflect two evolving approaches within the Islamic civilization, rooted in different historical and conceptual foundations. While Islamic architecture typically refers to classical physical and visual products of Islamic dynasties—such as the Umayyad, Abbasid, Ottoman, and Mughal empires—characterized by geometric forms, Qur'anic calligraphy, and highly symbolic ornamentation, it mainly emphasizes the representation of glory, political identity, and visual expression of faith and power.

In contrast, Islami architecture as a contemporary ethical approach seeks to interpret Islamic values into design through contextual, functional, and sustainable means. Rather than mimicking historical forms, it prioritizes meaning, function, and the social-ecological impact of architecture. It draws on principles of tauhid (Divine Oneness), simplicity, social justice, and ecological stewardship, aiming to produce spaces that are not only aesthetically pleasing, but spiritually and socially beneficial (maslahah) to both humans and the environment.

Despite their differences, both approaches share the same Islamic core values that sanctify space, function, and the dignity of humankind as part of God's creation. Their common ground lies in the orientation toward spirituality, sacredness of space, and the ultimate goal of creating harmony between humanity, the Divine, and the natural world.

In the realm of academic discourse and professional practice, the precise use of terminology becomes crucial. Misapplication of the terms "Islamic architecture" and "Islami architecture" may result in a reductionist understanding—limiting contemporary Islamic architecture to a mere stylistic mimicry, devoid of its ethical and spiritual essence. Thus, ongoing clarification and conceptual development are vital, both within scholarly discussions and design pedagogy.

Ultimately, distinguishing yet integrating these two paradigms enriches the discourse of Muslim contemporary design—bridging historical heritage with current needs and global challenges, through the creation of spaces that are aesthetically inspiring, socially functional, and spiritually meaningful.

Recommendations

Further research is needed on how Islamic values are embodied in contemporary architectural design through cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approaches, as well as efforts to strengthen architecture curricula based on spiritual principles.

Based on the preceding discussion, it is evident that Islami architecture, as a contemporary approach, holds significant potential to serve as a bridge between Islamic spiritual values and the challenges of modern design. However, to deepen its understanding and comprehensive application, several strategic steps must be taken in both academic research and architectural education.

Further Cross-Cultural and Interdisciplinary Research

There is an urgent need for in-depth studies on how Islamic values are realized in today's architectural design, particularly through cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approaches. This is crucial given the diversity of Muslim communities across various countries with differing geographical, social, economic, and cultural contexts.

a. Such research will enrich our understanding of the variety of *Islami* architectural expressions across the Muslim world—from Indonesia and Malaysia to Europe and Africa.
b. Interdisciplinary collaboration with anthropology, sociology, religious studies, environmental science, and building technology is essential to address the complexity of designing Islamic spaces in the modern era.
c. These studies will also contribute to the decolonization of architectural epistemology, placing Islamic values not as supplementary elements but as core frameworks in the design and planning process.

Strengthening Architecture Curricula with Spiritual Values

Contemporary architectural education tends to prioritize technical and aesthetic aspects, while spiritual, ethical, and ecological dimensions remain underrepresented. Therefore:

a) A reorientation of architectural curricula is necessary to integrate Islamic spiritual values such as *tauhid*, simplicity, spatial justice, and sustainability across all courses—both theoretical and studio-based.
b) Strengthening the curriculum does not mean replacing existing content, but infusing it with values and meaningas guiding principles in the design process.
c) The development of new learning modules, local-global case studies, and collaboration with Islamic institutions and *Islami* architecture practitioners is strongly recommended.

Design Practice as Da'wah and Moral Trust

Another strategic recommendation is to encourage architects and students to view architectural design as a form of spatial da'wah and moral responsibility, rather than merely professional output.

1) This includes a paradigm shift: design success should not be measured solely by aesthetic form, but also by the extent of social and spiritual benefit it provides to users and their environment.
2) Hence, future *Islami* architecture must be encouraged to become more participatory, human-centered, ecological, and transformative in its approach.

Closing Statement

Through collaborative efforts between researchers, educators, practitioners, and communities, the embodiment of Islamic values in contemporary architectural design can move beyond discourse and become a tangible movement—producing spaces that are meaningful, just, and sustainable, as part of the Islamic civilization's contribution to the modern world. Design is not merely about form — it is about adab (ethics), hikmah (wisdom), and amanah (responsibility) before God, humanity, and the Earth.

Acknowledgement

This publication is one of the results of the Architecture Study Program's monthly academic atmosphere activity in June 2025, which took the form of a scientific discussion at the Faculty of Science and Technology, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi. The topic of the activity was "Fundamental Concepts of Islamic Architecture vs. Islami Architecture in Design." The author wishes to express heartfelt gratitude to the Rector of UNPAB, the Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology, and the invited speakers for their contributions to the success of this scientific discussion.

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