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Identifying and Prioritizing the Sociological Components of Local and National Rituals in Iran's Territorial Cohesion

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study is to identify and prioritize the sociological components of local and national rituals regarding Iran's territorial cohesion.

Methods: In terms of purpose, this is an applied study; methodologically, it employs a mixed-methods approach (combining qualitative and quantitative research) within an inductive-deductive paradigm. The statistical population for the qualitative phase consisted of sociology experts; a purposive sampling method was used, resulting in a sample size of 22 individuals. The population for the quantitative phase comprised experts and managers in the cultural and social sectors from organizations such as the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the Cultural Heritage Organization, and municipalities. In the qualitative phase, data obtained from interviews were analyzed using MaxQda 2020 software and coding techniques, while the quantitative phase and final analysis utilized the Fuzzy Delphi method.

Results: Based on qualitative data from exploratory interviews, the sociological components of local and national rituals regarding territorial cohesion were identified; these factors were subsequently ranked through quantitative analysis.

Conclusions: The results indicate that national identity, ethnic and cultural cohesion, the participation of social and cultural institutions, and Iran's historical and civilizational capacities are the most significant sociological components of local and national rituals in the context of territorial cohesion.

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Introduction

Local and national rituals refer to a set of laws, regulations, procedures, and traditions that are established at the local level (such as a city or province) and the national level (across the country) to regulate behaviors, social relations, and economic and cultural activities. These rituals are usually formulated on the basis of shared principles and values accepted by the organization or society concerned, and they are effective in maintaining order, balance, and justice in that organization or society. They can include legal, ethical, social, religious, or political laws and regulations. They may also include procedures and processes for decision making, implementation, and monitoring of the performance of individuals and organizations. These rituals are developed to create commitment and adherence to rules, to guarantee the rights and obligations of individuals, and to ensure justice and balance in society. The main purpose of these rituals is to create a legal and ethical framework for the behavior and performance of individuals and society. They are usually formulated by governments, international organizations, nonprofit organizations, religions, communities, and even families. They act as a practical guide for individuals and organizations and determine how one should behave and what decisions should be made. Legal and ethical rituals are defined through the laws, regulations, principles, and values expected by society. Individuals and organizations must observe and adhere to these rituals in order to help maintain the order and security of society and contribute to its development and progress. In short, local and national rituals play an important role in shaping the behavior and performance of individuals and organizations, maintaining the order and security of society, and ensuring justice and balance in society. One of the important and fundamental social and cultural dimensions of a society is cohesion and solidarity within it. Cohesion means harmony and proportion among the members of a society, and solidarity means cooperation and positive relationships among different individuals and groups. Local and national rituals are effective in increasing cohesion and solidarity in a society. These rituals include laws, regulations, values, beliefs, and traditions that, by setting a framework for the performance and behavior of individuals, contribute to cohesion and solidarity in society. Elements such as the fair distribution of resources, respect for human rights, the promotion of shared social and cultural values, the strengthening of public trust, and the promotion of flexibility in human relations can all help strengthen cohesion and solidarity in society. In general, local and national rituals that promote human and social values and principles

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and respect the rights and freedoms of all individuals can help increase cohesion and solidarity in society and lead to its growth and progress. Local and national rituals help people identify and strengthen their collective identity. This shared identity can increase the sense of belonging and solidarity among the members of society. Cultural rituals and ceremonies act as spaces for people to gather and create new social networks. These networks can lead to the exchange of information, resources, and social support. Local and national rituals play an important role in transmitting cultural values and beliefs. This transmission allows new generations to become familiar with their cultural and social heritage. Rituals are usually based on cooperation and social interaction. These interactions can strengthen mutual trust and lead to more cooperation. Local and national rituals can promote positive social behaviors, such as mutual aid, respect for others, and participation in collective activities. Rituals can strengthen a sense of responsibility toward society and its other members. This sense of responsibility can lead to more active participation in social and cultural affairs. By creating a space for social interaction, transmitting values, and strengthening collective identity, local and national rituals can contribute to the territorial cohesion of the country. These functions not only strengthen social relations but also contribute to sustainable cultural development.

Iran, as a land with a civilizational history of several thousand years, possesses a wide diversity of local and national rituals, ceremonies, symbols, and traditions that have been formed and reproduced within historical, cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic contexts. These rituals, from national ceremonies such as Nowruz, Ashura, and rituals related to historical-religious identity to the local rituals of various ethnic groups, such as festivals, mourning ceremonies, ritual music, and life-cycle ceremonies, have always played a role beyond purely symbolic functions and have acted as social mechanisms for creating, strengthening, and sustaining territorial cohesion and national solidarity. In recent decades, however, rapid social change, the expansion of globalization processes, the development of new media, changes in cultural life patterns, institutional centralization, and the emergence of social, cultural, and generational gaps have confronted the cohesive function of rituals with challenges. On the one hand, some local rituals are exposed to oblivion, commodification, or reduction to tourist attractions; on the other hand, national rituals are sometimes redefined within official and ideological frameworks, which can weaken their organic link with the lived experience of different social groups. This situation raises fundamental

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questions about the relationship of rituals to cohesion, unity in diversity, and the management of cultural diversity in contemporary Iran. From a sociological perspective, rituals not only reflect social structures and value systems but, as meaningful collective actions, themselves play an active role in producing social capital, strengthening the sense of place attachment, reconstructing collective identity, and reducing social conflicts. In a multiethnic and multicultural society such as Iran, local rituals, if recognized and intelligently integrated into the national discourse, can help strengthen territorial cohesion; but if ignored or symbolically excluded, they may become a factor deepening identity gaps and a sense of marginalization. Despite the importance of this issue, existing studies have often either focused on national rituals in a general and abstract way or studied local rituals purely from an ethnographic and descriptive perspective. There is a considerable research gap in the sociological analysis of the link between local and national rituals and their interactive role in shaping Iran's territorial cohesion, particularly an analysis that can simultaneously attend to the structural, symbolic, and agentic dimensions of rituals and examine them in the context of contemporary social change. The research question is therefore as follows: What are the sociological components of local and national rituals in Iran's territorial cohesion, and what is the priority of each?

Theoretical Background

Rituals cannot be regarded merely as outward or performative behaviors; rather, they carry deep, multilayered meanings that are linked to value systems, religious beliefs, social structures, and even power relations in society. In this sense, rituals constitute a kind of symbolic language through which society represents itself and reproduces its fundamental values. Every movement, utterance, or object used in a ritual may carry a specific meaning that can be fully understood only within the cultural framework of that society. The analysis of rituals therefore requires attention to their historical, social, and cultural contexts (Yirenkyi, 2019). The concept of rite is used in many sociological and anthropological texts as an equivalent of ritual, although some approaches distinguish between the two. Rites usually refer to the performative and practical aspects of rituals, that is, the set of acts, movements, and behaviors carried out within a ritual. In other words, if we regard a ritual as a semantic whole, rites form its practical and concrete components. These rites may include acts such as prayer, dance, mourning, celebration, sacrifice, or even silence and contemplation. What distinguishes rites from other everyday behaviors is not only their

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repeatability and regularity but also the special symbolic and semantic weight attributed to them (Boyer & Liénard, 2020). To arrive at a precise and analytical understanding of the concept of ritual, it is necessary to distinguish it from neighboring and sometimes overlapping concepts such as habit, tradition, and culture. Although these concepts are used synonymously or interchangeably in many texts, at the theoretical and analytical level they have fundamental differences, and ignoring them can lead to ambiguity in understanding social phenomena. Ritual, as a symbolic and rule-governed action, stands at a point between these concepts and shares some features with each, but at the same time has an independent identity and a distinct function (Chaachouay & Zidane, 2022). Habit can be regarded as the simplest and most individual form of repetitive behavior. Habits usually form as a result of repeating a behavior over time and often lack symbolic load or deep collective meaning. They belong more to individual psychology than to sociology. For example, the particular way a person chooses to drink tea or begin the day is a habit. Although these behaviors may be common in a society, they do not necessarily carry shared meaning or social value, and changing them usually has no considerable social consequences. In contrast, rituals, even if simple in appearance, have a layer of meaning that links them to cultural and social structures. Changing or removing a ritual can lead to collective reactions and even identity crises, because rituals form part of collective memory and identity. Tradition is a concept closely related to ritual, but broader and at the same time more abstract. Tradition refers to a set of beliefs, values, norms, and behavioral practices inherited from the past and continued over time. Traditions may be manifested in various forms, including language, art, dress, and, of course, rituals. In other words, rituals are one of the concrete and performative forms of traditions. Every ritual usually has its roots in a tradition, but not every tradition is necessarily performed in ritual form. For example, respect for elders is a cultural tradition, but only in some situations, such as formal ceremonies or special occasions, may it be performed symbolically in a particular ritual form. Here, the ritual acts as the concrete embodiment of the tradition and moves it from the mental and value level to the practical and observable level. Culture, in its broadest sense, refers to the whole way of life of a society and includes a set of beliefs, values, symbols, language, knowledge, art, laws, and social behaviors. Culture is a general framework within which rituals, traditions, and even habits acquire meaning. From this perspective, rituals are part of culture, but they cannot be equated with the whole of culture. Culture is like a complex, multilayered system in which rituals

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play the role of focal points or salient moments, moments in which cultural values and beliefs are represented in a condensed and symbolic way. For this reason, studying rituals can be an effective way to gain a deeper understanding of the culture of a society, because rituals often reveal the part of culture that is less explicitly expressed in everyday life (Pedersen & Rytter, 2018; Singh et al., 2021).

Empirical Background

Clarifying the conceptual aspects examined in this study requires reviewing some of the empirical studies conducted in this field and examining the results of related studies so that they can serve as a suitable criterion for the research orientation. Accordingly, this section attempts to present some of the most important and most relevant of these studies.

Khajehi and Biet (2023), in a study entitled "From Ritual to Performance: Ta'zieh in Iran Today," stated that ta'zieh, as a practice and experience, lies at the intersection of ritual and performance, lamentation and collective memory, and literature and folklore. Focusing on the spectator's experience, the article addresses the liminal position and the varied functions of ta'zieh in present-day Iran. The study is based on observations collected during fieldwork in the autumn of 2017 in Tehran (the Grand Bazaar), Isfahan (Falavarjan), and Kashan (Nush Abad). For comparison, the authors turn mostly to Abbas Kiarostami's video installation presented at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 2003, which challenges common assumptions about the aesthetic and religious impact of ta'zieh. This contrast allows them to clarify how contemporary Iranian performing arts, by renewing ancient narrative forms, contribute to shaping individual as well as collective emotions.

Zaluchu (2024), in a study entitled "Cultural Religious Tradition and Social Integration of Community," stated that Fondrakö is the local wisdom of the Nias ethnic community and has two functions. First, it is a religious oral scripture that teaches the values and philosophy of the ancestors. Second, it is the highest consensus institution of the traditional community, which sets and decides the socio-religious rules to guarantee social order. The article explains that social differentiation has occurred in the modern era. The philosophical values of Fondrakö have survived to this day and are experiencing an expansion of rites. The argument developed in this article is that primitive culture does not simply disappear in modern society; it merely experiences

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adaptation and a reduction of emotional intensity in new forms. The social rules of primitive religion are not always contradictory and can run parallel to civilization.

Hasan (2023), in a study, stated that the anthropology of rituals and symbolic practices examines the intricate tapestries of human rituals and symbolic practices through the lens of anthropology. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as structural functionalism, symbolic anthropology, and interpretive anthropology, it examines how rites in different societies contribute to social cohesion, identity formation, and the negotiation of power dynamics, illuminates the enduring relevance of rituals in shaping human behavior and social structures, and offers valuable insights both for anthropological research and for a broader understanding of cultural phenomena.

Jacobs (2018), in a study entitled "Rituals, Repertoires, and Performances in Postmodernity," stated that the study of rituals has been central to cultural sociology since its earliest days. While Durkheim's theory has been the main reference point for the study of ritual, newer approaches emphasize contingency, strategic action, and historical contingency. This chapter examines these recent developments, focusing in particular on the work of Swidler, Bourdieu, Collins, and Alexander. Swidler and Bourdieu stress how ritual events facilitate strategic action as well as social integration. Collins and Alexander focus on the contingency of the ritual event and try to explain why some rituals are more successful than others. Using the 2016 Olympic Games as an empirical case, the chapter considers the relative advantages and disadvantages that each approach offers for the cultural sociology of ritual events.

Collins and Hanneman (2012), in a study entitled "Modelling the Interaction Ritual Theory of Solidarity," stated that the interaction ritual chain model began as an attempt to ritualize the theory of social stratification on the basis of new research in microsociology. By 1970, much research from traditional survey methods and social studies had accumulated on cultural and attitudinal differences among social classes. Collins (1975) proposed that much of the evidence relates to Durkheim's dimension of organic and mechanical solidarity. On the one hand, the culture of higher social classes is cosmopolitan, abstract, relativistic, and tolerant, which corresponds to the Durkheimian ethic of highly differentiated social structures. On the other hand, the culture of the working classes and of rural and isolated communities is localist, traditionalist, and symbolic, emphasizing close ties and distrust of strangers, characteristics related to low Durkheimian social differentiation. Collins also concluded that these patterns could be derived from patterns of micro-

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interaction in everyday life, which had recently been examined by Goffman under the heading of "interaction rituals." He proposed that Goffman's "front stage" performance in the formal rituals of everyday life produces the display and cultural attitudes of the higher classes, whereas the informality of the "backstage" characterizes the lower classes, which are subordinated or excluded by formal rituals.

Babaei Mohammadi and Nourbakhsh (2021), in a study, stated that religion can create a network of trust and participation among individuals and is one of the factors generating social capital. On this basis, using survey data from the national social capital measurement project in 2005 and 2015, the study examined the relationship of macro-level social capital among religions (Shia, Sunni, and religious minorities) in the country. The components of social capital in this study were specified by two elements, trust and social relations. The findings were analyzed using the comparative method and as a secondary analysis. The analyses showed that in the 2005 survey there was a significant relationship between religion type and the index of perception of the performance of the ritual, the index of perception of the goodness of society, and the index of evaluation of the future; but in the 2015 national survey these indices had no significant relationship with religion type, and respondents from different religions had similar macro social capital. Overall, macro social capital was in a better state in the 2005 survey than in 2015.

Heidari et al. (2021), in a study, stated that after the emergence, intensification, and spread of modernity, the relationship between religion and religiosity, on the one hand, and development, on the other, has been one of the most enduring and most intense cultural, scientific, policy-making, and everyday challenges. In Iran too, with the occurrence of the two revolutions, the Constitutional Revolution and the Islamic Revolution, and the emergence of liberal religious thought and religious fundamentalist currents, this challenge has emerged and intensified. In Iran, the relationship between religion and modernity and the related debates and challenges have mostly been analyzed and studied at the level of insight or at the level of micro surveys. The aim of the present study was therefore to examine the relationship between the level of social and cultural development and the degree of ritual religiosity at the provincial level. The research method was documentary, of the secondary analysis type. First, the level of social and cultural development of the various provinces and the degree of their ritual religiosity were calculated; then the relationship between the two variables was examined. Provinces were clustered on the

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basis of social and cultural development indicators and religiosity with the k-means cluster method. According to the results, at the individual level, with the exception of Razavi Khorasan and Kurdistan, all the provinces that ranked higher on cultural and social development indicators ranked lower in the degree of ritual religiosity. At the aggregate level, too, provinces with low and medium levels of development had higher religiosity than developed provinces; but the difference in religiosity between less developed and moderately developed provinces and between moderately developed and developed provinces was not statistically significant.

Kazemi Garashi et al. (2018), in a study, stated that this research was conducted to examine the role and effect of religiosity on youth social capital among second-secondary students in Larestan County. The theoretical framework of the research was designed using the religiosity theories of Glock and Stark. The research method was survey and of the descriptive-explanatory type. The statistical population of the study was all 4,371 second-secondary students of Larestan County. The sample size was 374, who were tested through multistage cluster sampling. The data collection instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire, whose validity (content and face validity) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) were calculated, yielding .80 for the social capital variable and .86 for the religiosity variable. The results showed that there is an effective relationship between the belief dimension and each of the dimensions of social capital, although this relationship is weaker in the dimensions of trust and participation. There is also an effective relationship between the emotional dimension and each of the dimensions of social capital, although this relationship is weaker in the participation dimension. Likewise, there is an effective relationship between the consequential dimension and each of the dimensions of social capital, although it is weaker in the dimensions of trust and participation, and the ritual dimension has a stronger relationship with each of the dimensions of social capital than the other dimensions of religiosity. The regression test showed that the religiosity variable was able to predict 33.5 percent of the social capital variable.

Rahmani and Farahzad (2014), in a study, stated that mourning rituals are a key part of Shia culture. Regardless of their religious functions, these rituals have many social implications and functions. Ritual ceremonies can be studied as symbolic rituals that express and provide a basis for communicative actions. This article attempts to examine the Muharram ritual as a communicative and interactive ritual among ritual actors. For this purpose, approaches of symbolic anthropology,

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and especially the theories of Victor Turner, were used. The Muharram mourning rituals and their ritual symbols, with their referential power and density of meaning, play an important role in the production and exchange of meaning in the social life of Shia believers. What occurs through these ritual experiences is a kind of construction of the Shia social world and the groundwork for and legitimation of social and cultural change in Shia society. In other words, the ritual experience in mourning is a communicative action in the construction of the social world and group identity of believers. This ritual and communicative process is historical and takes shape through history and according to historical conditions.

Emamjomezadeh et al. (2013), in a study, stated that social cohesion, as one of the dimensions of social capital, is considered one of the indicators of social, cultural, and political development in countries. One of the major groups of society whose participation in the process of governing it and in political, social, and cultural development seems necessary is young people. The study of the political culture of young people, who are one of the largest population groups in developing countries, is of particular importance for political stability and the dynamism of society. The purpose of this article is to examine the effect of mass media on the social cohesion of young people in Tabriz. The research method for collecting and analyzing data is the survey method. The study was conducted on 384 girls and boys in Tabriz. A questionnaire was used to collect data; its validity was assessed by the face validity method and its reliability by Cronbach's alpha, and the data were analyzed with SPSS 16 under the Windows environment. By dividing social cohesion into four variables (inclination toward social values, sense of social belonging, inclination toward social order, and social participation), together with three types of mass media (print media, electronic media, and digital media), significant correlations were observed between media consumption and respondents' social cohesion.

Material and Methods

Participants and Procedure

This research is based on mixed-methods research, with qualitative and quantitative components, within an inductive-deductive paradigm. The research method is Fuzzy Delphi. In this method, the subjective data of experts are converted into approximately objective data. The basis of the Delphi method is a structured process for collecting and summarizing the knowledge obtained from a

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group of experts (Neal & Biberman, 2003). The advantage of the Fuzzy Delphi method lies in attending to each of the opinions and integrating them to reach group agreement (Kuo & Cheng, 2008). The statistical population of this study consisted of university professors and experts in the field of sociology. In view of the aim of the study, sampling was purposive, using the snowball technique, with a total of 22 participants. The sample size was determined using the principle of theoretical saturation. In the qualitative phase, interviews were conducted face to face with open-ended questions, and the components were then identified using the coding process. To ensure the accuracy of coding and concept extraction, the codes obtained from the interviews were returned to the interviewees so that the extracted codes could be confirmed by them. The aim was to arrive at the interviewee's main idea. The statistical population of the expert and manager section was experts and managers in the cultural and social sectors in organizations such as the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the Cultural Heritage Organization, and municipalities. Sample adequacy was examined and confirmed with the KMO test. The data collection instrument was an interview in the qualitative phase and a questionnaire in the quantitative phase, whose validity and reliability were confirmed using the CVR index, Cohen's kappa test, and test-retest. To measure the CVR index, the necessity of the questioned concepts was assessed. The results of the formula for all indices were higher than .73, which indicates appropriate content validity. In the Cohen's kappa test, given the significance value and the value of the test statistic, which is above 60 percent, the required reliability is indicated. The content validity of the questionnaire of this study was confirmed using the expert opinions of four individuals knowledgeable about the research topic.

Table 1. Sample Adequacy Assessment

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.933
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	82.639
	df	162
	Sig.	.000

Table 2. Cohen's Kappa Reliability Test

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error	Approx. T	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.662	.120	6.536	.000

It should be noted that, because the present study is mixed-methods research with an exploratory approach, the qualitative study must be carried out first and the quantitative study afterward.

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Accordingly, the qualitative data were examined using experts' opinions up to the point of data saturation and the attainment of theoretical adequacy, and the quantitative study was then carried out. In the qualitative phase, the qualitative data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using MaxQda 2020 software and the coding method, and in the quantitative phase and final analysis the Fuzzy Delphi method was used. Using the qualitative data obtained from the exploratory interviews, the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion were identified, and these factors are then prioritized through the quantitative study.

Results

Demographic Findings

Gender	Education	Occupation	Work experience (years)	Gender	Education	Occupation	Work experience (years)
Male	PhD	Faculty member	10	Male	PhD	Faculty member	15
Male	PhD	Faculty member	15	Female	PhD	Faculty member	9
Male	PhD	Faculty member	16	Male	PhD	Faculty member	3
Male	PhD	Faculty member	14	Female	PhD	Faculty member	16
Male	PhD	Faculty member	10	Male	PhD	Faculty member	15
Female	PhD	Faculty member	10	Male	PhD	Faculty member	11
Male	PhD	Faculty member	21	Female	PhD	Faculty member	11
Male	PhD	Faculty member	10	Male	PhD	Faculty member	12
Male	PhD	Faculty member	13	Male	PhD	Faculty member	12
Female	PhD	Faculty member	9	Male	PhD	Faculty member	14

Findings of the Qualitative Phase

In the qualitative phase, interviews were conducted face to face with open-ended questions, and the effective factors were then identified using the coding process. In explaining how the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion were extracted, it should be noted that this was done by examining the interview texts with the help of MaxQda 2020 software and coding them. On this basis, an interview comprising five main questions was conducted after the necessary explanations had been given to the members of the sample. The text

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of the interviews was then analyzed. To ensure the accuracy of coding and concept extraction, the codes obtained from the interviews were returned to the interviewees so that the extracted codes could be confirmed by them. The aim was to arrive at the interviewee's main idea.

Table 3. Axial and Selective Codes

Main category	Concept	Final codes
Components	National identity	Sense of belonging to Iran
		Pride in cultural heritage
		Strengthening collective identity
		Reproduction of national values
	Preservation and transmission of cultural heritage	Transmission of rituals to the new generation
		Safeguarding indigenous traditions
		Preservation of local language and dialect
		Revival of fading customs
	Social solidarity	Increased social participation
		Fostering empathy among people
		Strengthening social trust
		Expanding the spirit of cooperation
	Ethnic and cultural cohesion	Respect for ethnic diversity
		Peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups
		Cultural interaction among ethnic groups
		Acceptance of cultural differences
	Role of religious beliefs and values	Strengthening religious values
		Participation in religious rituals
		Creating unity based on shared beliefs
		Respect for the sacred
	Participation of social and cultural institutions	Support from cultural institutions
		Role of education
		Media activity in introducing rituals
		Participation of nongovernmental organizations
	Social capital and public participation	Increased mutual trust
		Voluntary public participation
		Development of local social networks
		Sense of social responsibility
	Historical and civilizational capacities of Iran	Drawing on historical background
		Attention to national symbols
		Preservation of historical monuments related to rituals
		Introduction of cultural luminaries
	Cultural functions of rituals	Strengthening national unity
		Reproduction of social norms
		Creation of collective memory
		Transmission of cultural values
		Strengthening the sense of cultural security
		Increased territorial cohesion
	Geographic and climatic diversity	Diversity of cultural climates
		Dispersion of local settlements
		Influence of environmental characteristics on rituals

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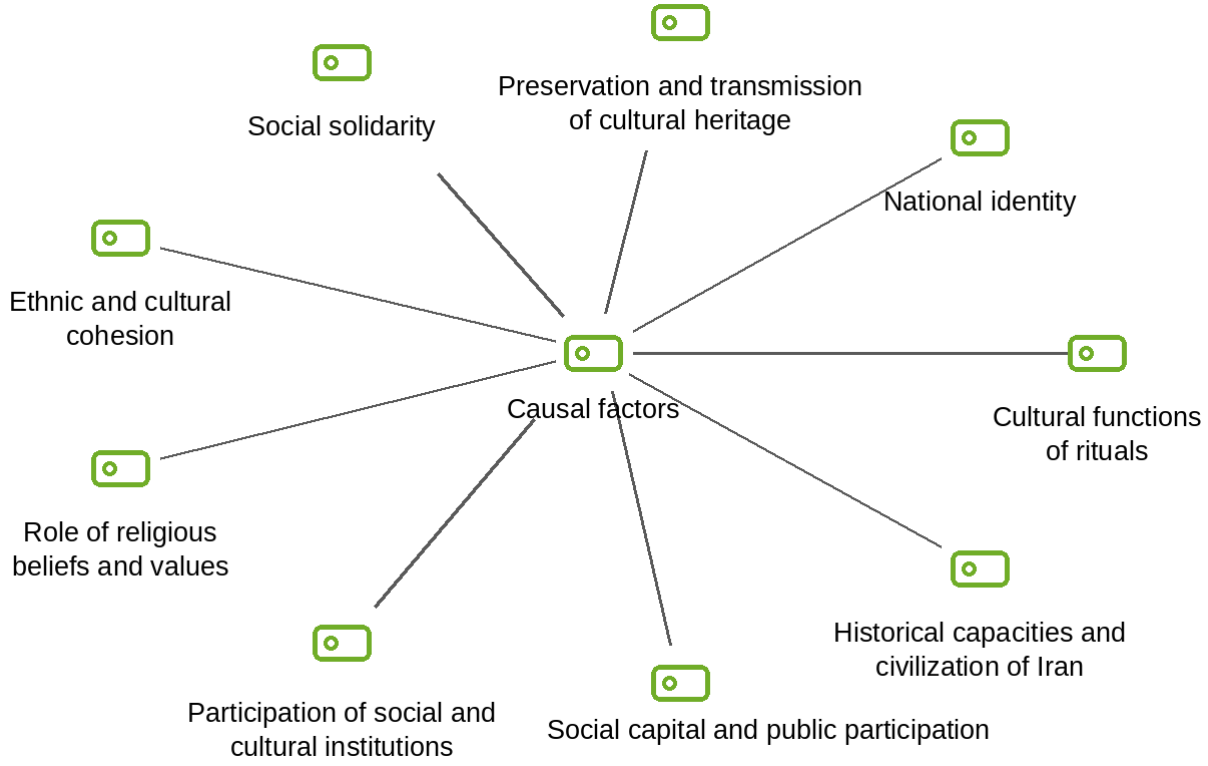


Figure 1. MAXQDA Output

Findings of the Quantitative Phase

Definition of Linguistic Variables

After the interviews with the members of the sample, the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion are designed in the form of a questionnaire in order to obtain experts' opinions on their degree of agreement with the factors; the experts express their degree of agreement with the importance of the factors through the verbal variables very low, low, medium, high, and very high. Because individuals' different characteristics affect their subjective interpretations of qualitative variables, defining the range of the qualitative variables allows experts to answer the questions with the same mindset. These variables are defined as triangular fuzzy numbers according to Figure 2 and Table 4.

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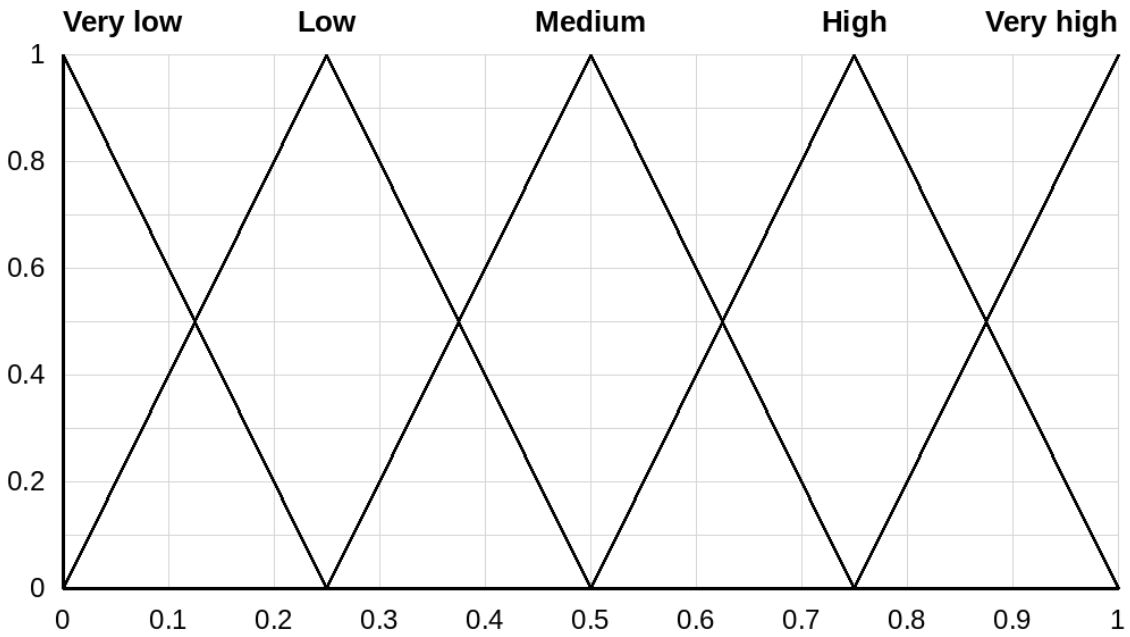


Figure 2. Definition of the Linguistic Variable

Table 4 also shows how the verbal variables are converted into triangular fuzzy numbers and defuzzified numbers.

Table 4. Triangular Fuzzy Numbers

Linguistic variable	Triangular fuzzy number	Defuzzified number
Very high	(0.75, 1, 1)	0.75
High	(0.5, 0.75, 1)	0.5625
Medium	(0.25, 0.5, 0.75)	0.3125
Low	(0, 0.25, 0.5)	0.0625
Very low	(0, 0, 0.25)	0.0625

The defuzzified numbers in Table 4 were calculated using the Minkowski relation in the form of Equation 1 (β is the upper limit of the triangular fuzzy number, α is the middle limit of the triangular fuzzy number, and m is the lower limit of the triangular fuzzy number).

Equation 1:

$x = m+(\beta-\alpha)/4$

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First-Stage Survey

At this stage, the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion, identified through semi-structured interviews, are given to the experts in the form of a questionnaire, and, according to the proposed options and the defined linguistic variables, the results of examining the responses recorded in the questionnaire are analyzed in order to obtain the fuzzy mean of the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion. The following equations are used to calculate the fuzzy mean.

Equation 2

$A_i = (a_1^{(i)}, a_2^{(i)}, a_3^{(i)}), i = 1, 2, 3, \ldots, n$

Equation 3

$A_{ave} = (m_1 , m_2 , m_3) = (1/n\sum(i = 1..n)a_1^{(i)} , 1/n\sum(i = 1..n)a_2^{(i)} , 1/n\sum(i = 1..n)a_3^{(i)})$

In these equations, A_i represents the view of the i-th expert and A_{ave} represents the mean of the experts' views. After the questionnaires were collected, the number of responses given to each component was counted and analyzed; in the first-stage survey, the results of counting the responses given are as shown in the following table.

Table 5. Results of Counting the Responses in the First Stage of the Survey

Sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion					
Variables	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
National identity	1	1	2	5	86
Preservation and transmission of cultural heritage	0	1	2	6	89
Social solidarity	0	2	0	4	88
Ethnic and cultural cohesion	0	2	1	2	82
Role of religious beliefs and values	2	3	0	5	83
Participation of social and cultural institutions	1	3	4	3	85
Social capital and public participation	2	3	4	2	84
Historical and civilizational capacities of Iran	3	2	1	4	81
Cultural functions of rituals	0	3	2	1	81
Geographic and climatic diversity	1	0	1	3	80

After the number of responses given to each factor has been determined and the triangular fuzzy mean for the factors has been calculated using the Minkowski formula, the defuzzified numbers for each component are calculated. The results of the fuzzy mean and defuzzification of the components are as follows.

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Table 6. Mean of Experts' Views From the First-Stage Survey

Variables (components)	Fuzzy mean Triangular (m, α, β)	Defuzzified
National identity	(0.850, 0.662, 0.962)	0.891
Preservation and transmission of cultural heritage	(0.771, 0.578, 0.878)	0.883
Social solidarity	(0.842, 0.580, 0.949)	0.915
Ethnic and cultural cohesion	(0.817, 0.512, 0.875)	0.873
Role of religious beliefs and values	(0.803, 0.591, 0.870)	0.871
Participation of social and cultural institutions	(0.796, 0.542, 0.841)	0.899
Social capital and public participation	(0.862, 0.521, 0.912)	0.920
Historical and civilizational capacities of Iran	(0.870, 0.641, 0.916)	0.935
Cultural functions of rituals	(0.804, 0.541, 0.9251)	0.896
Geographic and climatic diversity	(0.869, 0.631, 0.912)	0.883

After the first stage of the survey, a second stage is also required so that the results of both stages can be compared and the result determined.

Second-Stage Survey

In the second-stage survey, the results of counting the responses given to the identified components are as shown in the following table.

Table 7. Results of Counting the Responses in the Second Stage of the Survey

Sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion					
Variables	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
National identity	2	1	0	5	86
Preservation and transmission of cultural heritage	1	0	0	5	80
Social solidarity	3	2	4	5	83
Ethnic and cultural cohesion	2	0	1	2	86
Role of religious beliefs and values	1	3	2	3	87
Participation of social and cultural institutions	4	2	2	4	82
Social capital and public participation	1	3	0	6	85
Historical and civilizational capacities of Iran	0	2	0	3	82
Cultural functions of rituals	2	1	0	3	80
Geographic and climatic diversity	2	1	0	4	88

After the number of responses given to each component in the second stage has been determined and the triangular fuzzy mean for the components has been calculated using the Minkowski formula, the defuzzified numbers for each component are calculated. The results of the fuzzy mean and defuzzification of the components in the second stage are as follows.

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Table 8. Mean of Experts' Views From the Second-Stage Survey

Variables	Fuzzy mean Triangular (m, α, β)	Defuzzified
National identity	(0.813, 0.511, 0.871)	0.989
Preservation and transmission of cultural heritage	(0.840, 0.548, 0.926)	0.938
Social solidarity	(0.802, 0.533, 0.923)	0.941
Ethnic and cultural cohesion	(0.876, 0.613, 0.941)	0.950
Role of religious beliefs and values	(0.835, 0.525, 0.874)	0.929
Participation of social and cultural institutions	(0.800, 0.565, 0.900)	0.940
Social capital and public participation	(0.823, 0.547, 0.910)	0.931
Historical and civilizational capacities of Iran	(0.810, 0.574, 0.919)	0.939
Cultural functions of rituals	(0.821, 0.592, 0.883)	0.918
Geographic and climatic diversity	(0.895, 0.569, 0.915)	0.953

After both stages of the survey have been carried out, the difference between the defuzzified means of the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion must be examined and analyzed. The examination of the difference between the defuzzified means of the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion in the first and second stages is shown in the following table.

Table 9. Difference Between the Defuzzified Means of the First and Second Stages of the Survey

Variables	Defuzzified mean, first stage	Defuzzified mean, second stage	Difference between the defuzzified means of the first and second stages
National identity	0.891	0.989	0.098
Preservation and transmission of cultural heritage	0.883	0.938	0.055
Social solidarity	0.915	0.941	0.026
Ethnic and cultural cohesion	0.873	0.950	0.077
Role of religious beliefs and values	0.871	0.929	0.058
Participation of social and cultural institutions	0.899	0.940	0.041
Social capital and public participation	0.920	0.931	0.011
Historical and civilizational capacities of Iran	0.935	0.939	0.004
Cultural functions of rituals	0.896	0.918	0.022
Geographic and climatic diversity	0.883	0.953	0.07

Given the views presented in the first stage and their comparison with the results of the second stage, if the difference between the defuzzified means in the two stages is less than 0.1, the survey process is stopped. Since the difference between the defuzzified means of the experts' views in the two stages was less than 0.1, the experts reached consensus on the sociological components of

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local and national rituals in territorial cohesion. This means that the experts held almost the same view of the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion identified in the study. In view of the above, the priority of the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion is shown in Figure 3.

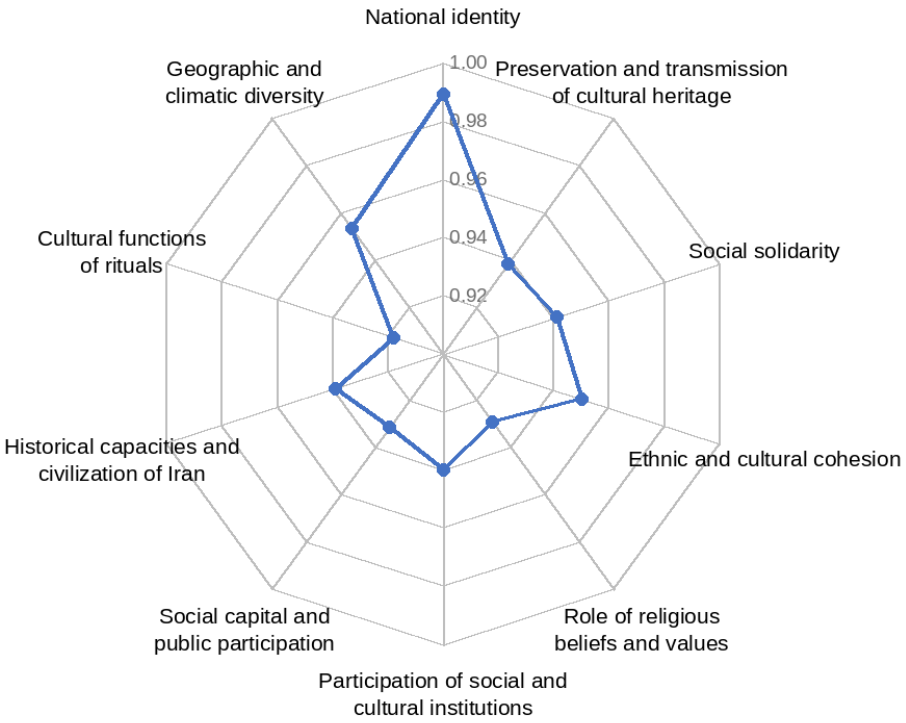


Figure 3. Prioritization of the Sociological Components of Local and National Rituals in Territorial Cohesion

Discussion

Local and national rituals, as one of the most important manifestations of the culture and identity of every society, play a fundamental role in preserving, reproducing, and transmitting cultural values, norms, and beliefs from one generation to the next. By providing a basis for the transmission of cultural heritage, these rituals familiarize new generations with the history, traditions, customs, cultural symbols, and shared values of society. The continuation of this process, while maintaining historical and cultural continuity, provides the ground for the persistence of national and local identity and prevents cultural rupture between generations. From this perspective, rituals are not merely a set of

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rites and ceremonies but social mechanisms for reproducing culture, strengthening collective memory, and consolidating shared identity. Local and national rituals have always been formed on the basis of participation, cooperation, and interaction among the members of society. The presence of individuals with different social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in a shared space provides a suitable opportunity for creating social connections, expanding interpersonal interactions, and strengthening social relations. These interactions prepare the ground for increased mutual trust, empathy, convergence, and the formation of stable networks of communication. In fact, participation in organizing and performing rituals leads individuals to regard themselves as members of a larger society and to cooperate with one another toward collective goals and interests. Such a process leads to strengthening social capital and increasing cohesion among the different groups of society. The present study was therefore carried out with the aim of identifying and ranking the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion using the Fuzzy Delphi method. First, the sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion were extracted through interviews with experts. Then, by designing a questionnaire with specified scales, managers' opinions on these factors were asked. Finally, the opinions were analyzed using the fuzzy method and the factors were ranked. The sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion include national identity, preservation and transmission of cultural heritage, social solidarity, ethnic and cultural cohesion, the role of religious beliefs and values, the participation of social and cultural institutions, social capital and public participation, the historical and civilizational capacities of Iran, the cultural functions of rituals, and geographic and climatic diversity. The results showed that national identity, ethnic and cultural cohesion, the participation of social and cultural institutions, and the historical and civilizational capacities of Iran are the most important sociological components of local and national rituals in territorial cohesion. The importance of national identity indicates that shared rituals, by highlighting shared cultural and historical elements, can strengthen the sense of belonging to a single land among different groups. The placement of ethnic and cultural cohesion among the important components also shows that rituals can act as a basis for interaction and convergence among different ethnic and cultural groups and, while recognizing the existing diversity, provide the ground for the formation of shared identity and belonging. On the other hand, the importance of the participation of social and cultural institutions shows that realizing the cohesive functions of rituals is not limited to the presence and participation of individuals; organizations and cultural, social, and local institutions also play an effective role in preserving, organizing, and transmitting these rituals. The coordinated

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participation of these institutions can increase the effectiveness of cultural programs, expand public participation, and make it possible for different social groups to take part in joint activities. Likewise, the standing of the historical and civilizational capacities of Iran indicates that the country's historical and civilizational heritage can be used as a shared resource for creating links between generations and different groups. Alongside these main components, the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage, social solidarity, the role of religious beliefs and values, social capital and public participation, the cultural functions of rituals, and geographic and climatic diversity are other effective dimensions identified in the study. Together, these components show that the role of rituals in territorial cohesion is multidimensional and is not limited to the cultural domain; it also encompasses social, historical, religious, geographic, and participatory dimensions. In other words, when individuals connect with one another through shared rituals, in addition to the transmission and reproduction of cultural elements, there is an opportunity to create trust, empathy, cooperation, and social interaction. It can be concluded that local and national rituals have the capacity to link the cultural and ethnic diversity present in the country within the framework of a shared identity. This matters because territorial cohesion does not mean eliminating cultural and ethnic differences; rather, it requires creating the ground for coexistence, interaction, and cooperation among different groups while preserving their cultural characteristics. Local rituals can represent cultural and geographic diversity, and national rituals can emphasize shared elements and values; the combination of these two capacities creates a suitable ground for strengthening social and cultural bonds at the level of the territory. The findings of the study show that strengthening national identity, together with respect for ethnic and cultural diversity, increased participation of social and cultural institutions, and the purposeful use of the country's historical and civilizational capacities, can provide the ground for more effective use of local and national rituals to strengthen territorial cohesion. Rituals can therefore be regarded as part of a society's cultural and social capital, which, with appropriate planning, broad participation, and attention to cultural and geographic diversity, can strengthen the bonds among individuals and social groups and increase the sense of belonging to the land. The results of the present study confirm that local and national rituals, beyond their symbolic and occasional functions, have important identity-related, social, and cultural functions and can play a role in strengthening territorial cohesion. National identity, ethnic and cultural cohesion, the participation of social and cultural institutions, and the historical and civilizational capacities of Iran, as the most important components identified, show that the link between cultural heritage, social participation, and shared identity can be a basis for

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strengthening cohesion among the diverse groups of society. Systematic attention to local and national rituals and the use of their capacity in cultural and social policymaking can therefore help preserve cultural heritage, strengthen social capital, increase public participation, and consolidate social and territorial bonds.

Research Recommendations

On this basis, the following recommendations are offered:

Developing a National Program for the Revival and Recreation of Local and National Rituals

Given the role of rituals in strengthening territorial cohesion, it is recommended that the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the governorates, develop a comprehensive program for identifying, documenting, recreating, and supporting local and national rituals. While preserving the authenticity of rituals, this program should also make it possible to adapt them to the needs and conditions of today's society so that their continuity and dynamism are ensured.

Strengthening the Participation of the Younger Generation in Planning and Performing Rituals

Given the strategic role of the younger generation's participation in the sustainability of rituals, it is recommended that the ground be prepared for young people's active presence in the process of designing, managing, and carrying out cultural ceremonies. Assigning executive responsibilities, forming volunteer cultural groups, holding training workshops, and using the capacity of universities and nongovernmental organizations can increase the new generation's sense of belonging to cultural heritage and the continuity of rituals.

Developing Digital Infrastructure for the Protection and Promotion of Rituals

Given technological developments and the role of new media, it is recommended that a national digital archive system of local and national rituals be created. Producing multimedia content, live broadcasting of ceremonies, designing databases, and using official social networks can, in addition to documentation, provide the ground for broader introduction of rituals at the national and international levels and prevent the oblivion of intangible heritage.

Strengthening Cultural Interactions Among Provinces and Ethnic Groups

Given the role of cultural interactions in increasing social convergence, it is recommended that interprovincial festivals, cultural weeks, ritual exhibitions, and cultural exchange programs be held continuously. The participation of ritual groups from different provinces in these events, while

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introducing the cultural capacities of regions, will provide the ground for mutual understanding, reduction of cultural distances, and strengthening of territorial cohesion.

Using the Capacity of the Educational System to Transmit Ritual Culture

Given the importance of transmitting values and cultural heritage to future generations, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, and universities pay attention to teaching indigenous and national rituals through educational programs, extracurricular activities, cultural camps, and the production of educational content. Familiarizing school and university students with the cultural diversity of the country can play an effective role in strengthening national identity, increasing respect for cultural differences, and developing a culture of coexistence.

Supporting the Culture Economy and Developing Creative Industries Related to Rituals

Given the role of the culture economy in the sustainability of rituals, it is recommended that responsible agencies support the production of cultural products, handicrafts, indigenous arts, and businesses related to local rituals. Providing financial facilities, creating permanent bazaars, supporting cultural entrepreneurs, and linking rituals with cultural tourism will, in addition to preserving cultural heritage, increase employment, regional economic prosperity, and the participation of local communities.

Creating a Coordinated Mechanism Among Cultural Institutions for Managing Rituals

Since one of the identified challenges is the dispersion of responsibilities and weak coordination among the responsible agencies, it is recommended that a Coordination Council for Local and National Rituals be formed, with the participation of representatives of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting organization, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Interior, municipalities, universities, and representatives of local communities. This council could be responsible for policymaking, planning, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of programs related to local and national rituals and prevent parallel implementation, waste of resources, and lack of coordination among agencies.

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Data availability statement

The datasets generated and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the institutional ethics committee. All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in the study, and data collection procedures ensured complete anonymity and confidentiality.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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