

International Journal of Urban Management and Energy Sustainability (JUMES)

Homepage: <http://www.ijumes.com>



CASE STUDY RESEARCH PAPER

The Concept of Fitrat in Architecture and Its Elucidation in Islamic Culture

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 2024-04-20

Revised 2024-10-14

Accepted 2024-12-19

Keywords:

Beauty, Fitrah, Islamic architecture, Islamic philosophy, Perfection, Western philosophy

ABSTRACT

Fitrah, as the pure and divine innate nature of humans, is a key concept in Islamic worldview that plays a central role in explaining human identity and ultimate purpose. This truth stems from the transcendent realm and the divine origin, which inspire human aspirations and higher instincts. Therefore, understanding and preserving human fitrah is a prerequisite for attaining a virtuous life and forming the foundation of individual and social happiness. This importance extends not only to religious and ethical domains but also to culture and art. This research aims to examine the relationship between the concept of fitrah and architectural art, analyzing how Islamic architecture has been shaped by inspiration from human fitrah. The study employs a descriptive-analytical method with a comparative approach, investigating the concept of fitrah in Western and Islamic philosophy. By analyzing prominent examples of Islamic architecture, it explores the role of fitrah in their formation. Data collection has been conducted through library and documentary methods. The findings indicate that Islamic architecture arises from the divine fitrah of humans and aligns with their spiritual inclinations. Features such as monotheism, beauty, simplicity, balance, and spirituality, which define this architecture, all manifest the natural dispositions of humans within the context of art and construction. Therefore, a profound understanding of fitrah can serve as a valuable source of inspiration for creating architectural works that elevate human dignity and virtues.

DOI: [10.22034/IJUMES.2024.711844](https://doi.org/10.22034/IJUMES.2024.711844)

Running Title: *The Concept of Fitrat (Natural Disposition) in Architecture and Its Elucidation in Islamic Culture*



NUMBER OF REFERENCES

29



NUMBER OF FIGURES

03



NUMBER OF TABLES

00

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most key concepts in the Islamic worldview system is the concept of fitrah. Fitrah, in literal sense, means nature, essence, or creation, and in Islamic terminology, it refers to the special divine creation and monotheistic creation of humans, which has the ability to recognize God and incline towards His pure essence. Numerous verses and traditions highlight the importance and exalted position of fitrah in Islamic ontology and anthropology (Motahari, 1393:27). The central role of fitrah in human life elevates it beyond mere theoretical discussions and makes it one of the important indicators in practical and applicative fields. Art and architecture are among the domains that have a deep connection with human fitrah. Genuine and authentic art has always sought to manifest the lofty and innate aspirations of humanity through lasting works. Architecture, as the art of organizing space and creating human environments, has long been interacting with the needs and innate desires of humans (Locke, 2004:62). Islamic architecture is a prominent example of the manifestation of fitrah in art and construction. This architecture, which has spread across a vast geographical area from east to west of the Islamic world, despite diversity in form and style, shares a unified and common spirit. Many scholars believe that the origin of this unity lies in the rootedness of Islamic architecture in monotheistic fitrah and religious values. From this perspective, Islamic architecture is more than just a product of climatic and cultural conditions; it is an embodiment of Islamic truths and knowledge in a physical form (Nasr, 2011:78). Given the importance of this topic, the present article aims to examine the concept of fitrah in Islamic thought and compare it with Western philosophy, to explain the role of fitrah in the formation of Islamic architecture. The main research question is how teachings related to fitrah have provided the theoretical and practical foundation for Islamic architecture and what features derived from human natural dispositions are embedded in this architecture. The hypothesis of the arti-

cle is that Islamic architecture is the product of the connection between divine human fitrah and the spiritual wisdom of Islam, embodying qualities such as monotheism, aesthetics, order, balance, and perfection. To answer this question, first, the concept of fitrah will be examined from the perspectives of Western and Islamic philosophy, highlighting their differences and similarities. Next, the views of Muslim thinkers on the relationship between fitrah and art will be explained. Then, with a focus on Islamic architecture, the argument will be made about how human fitrah has played an effective role in shaping this architecture. Finally, a conceptual model for realizing fitrah-based architecture in the contemporary era will be presented.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Fitrah in Western philosophy

Contemplation of innate dispositions and intrinsic, immutable qualities of humans has a long history in the evolution of human thought. Philosophers have long sought to discover the truth about humanity and define its inherent and essential features. From this perspective, the discussion of fitrah, though expressed in various terms, has also been addressed in Western philosophies. Here, we briefly review the viewpoints of some prominent thinkers regarding fitrah. Plato and Aristotle: In ancient Greece, Plato and Aristotle were among the first to refer to innate matters within humans. Plato believed that the human soul existed before its attachment to the body in the realm of ideas and directly perceives forms and meanings. Accordingly, innate ideas such as goodness, beauty, and justice are presumed to exist within the soul (Burckhardt, 2004:224). Aristotle also believed in principles and foundational truths of innate nature within human reason, upon which knowledge and reasoning are based (Russ, 1988:75). Modern philosophers: In the modern era, Descartes, John Locke, and Hume addressed the topic of innate ideas. Descartes emphasized discovering certain and innate truths such as the existence of God and the mind, considering them to be intrinsic

(Gül, 2017). In contrast, Locke rejected any innate knowledge or ideas, proposing the theory of the mind as a blank slate (Locke, 2004:57). Hume further denied the possibility of innate ideas, attributing knowledge to sensory experience (Kapelstone, 1998:28).

The concept of Fitrah, often translated as natural disposition or innate nature, has roots not only in Islamic thought but also in Western philosophical traditions. In classical philosophy, the idea of an innate human nature is prominently discussed in relation to virtue, morality, and the purpose of human life. Aristotle, for instance, believed that humans possess an entelechy, or an inherent potential, that guides them toward eudaimonia or flourishing. He argued that understanding human Fitrah involves recognizing the natural inclinations toward reason and virtue that are embedded within human nature (Aristotle, 2009). This emphasis on natural inclinations aligns with the broader Greek philosophical view that human nature is oriented toward certain ethical and rational ideals. Later philosophers, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, integrated these classical ideas with Christian theology, positing that natural law, which is inscribed in human Fitrah, serves as a guide for moral behavior. Aquinas asserted that human beings have an innate capacity for morality and that this natural law is accessible to reason, suggesting that human Fitrah inclines individuals toward the good and the divine (Aquinas, 1947). This notion underscores a belief that by understanding human nature, one can uncover fundamental moral principles intrinsic to every person, a view compatible with Islamic ideas of Fitrah as well. In modern philosophy, the Enlightenment further emphasized the role of rationality and innate moral sense in shaping human nature. Immanuel Kant argued that the human Fitrah contains a moral law that is discoverable through reason, emphasizing the importance of autonomous moral agents. Kant's concept of the categorical imperative underscores that humans are naturally inclined toward moral duties that are universally valid,

thus framing Fitrah as an inherent moral law within each person (Kant, 1785). These Western perspectives, while differing in context, share the core idea that human nature carries an intrinsic moral and rational framework guiding human behavior. In sum, Western philosophy offers a diverse yet interconnected understanding of Fitrah as an innate natural law or moral disposition present within every human. From Aristotle's virtuous potential to Kant's moral law, the concept underscores the importance of recognizing inherent qualities in human nature as a foundation for ethics and morality. Although these perspectives differ in their metaphysical assumptions, they converge on the idea that understanding human Fitrah is essential for understanding human purpose and morality within both individual and societal contexts.

Fitrah in Islamic thought

In Islamic wisdom, fitrah holds a prominent position and has been discussed from a broader and more comprehensive perspective than Western philosophy. In the Quran and traditions, fitrah refers to the pure and divine nature with which humans are born: "So set your face upright for the religion, inclining to truth. [It is] the nature Allah has supplied for humanity. There is no change in Allah's creation." (Roman: 30). The emphasis in Islam on the monotheistic fitrah of humans reflects the intrinsic spiritual and divine aspect of human nature in contrast to the material dimension (Javadi Amoli, 2008:172). Muslim philosophers such as Avicenna and Mulla Sadra have also addressed the concept of fitrah. According to Avicenna, the human soul possesses innate intelligibles so that as soon as reason appears, it is independent of acquisition (Ardalan and Bakhia, 2001:205). Mulla Sadra also regards fitrah as existing beyond the essence, related to the being and existence of humans. He considers innate dispositions as not merely mental concepts but as belonging to the realm of existence and the ontological truth of humans (Sadruddin Shirazi, 2002). Thus, innate dispositions encompass both prior knowledge and inherent tendencies of humans toward

truth and virtue. Another significant difference between Islam and Western philosophy is the comprehensive view Islam has regarding the dimensions of human existence. Muslim scholars see fitrah as an aspect related to all facets of human beings, including reason, spirit, and body, while most Western philosophers have limited innate qualities to the realm of reason and mind. According to Islam, fitrah is intertwined with the very nature and essence of human existence, paving the way for true knowledge and inspiring the will and desire towards good and happiness (Gharabar, 2005:62). In Islam, the concept of Fitrah refers to the innate and intrinsic nature of humans, which holds a fundamental place within religious and philosophical thought. According to the Quran, humans possess a Fitrah of monotheism and recognition of God, which is inherently present within their nature. It is natural for the human Fitrah to incline toward faith and closeness to God (Quran, Luqman, 47). This Fitrah not only functions as an innate awareness and understanding of the truth but also forms the basis for human rectification and guidance on the path of righteousness (Neshaburi, 1984). Therefore, in Islam, Fitrah is considered both a mechanism for awakening and knowing the divine and a foundation for reforming and nurturing individuals towards spiritual growth. In Islamic philosophy, Fitrah as seen in the writings of Ibn Sina and other Islamic thinkers—is regarded as a divine essence or primordial nature that can reach its perfection through proper education and spiritual discipline. Ibn Sina describes Fitrah as an innate state within humans that, with proper training and purification, can achieve its ultimate goal, which is knowledge of and submission to God (Ibn Sina, 1991). This perspective highlights that Fitrah is not only a basis for understanding but also a guide to attain moral and spiritual perfection, emphasizing its central role in Islamic spiritual development. From the perspective of Imam Khomeini (RA), Fitrah is the divine disposition embedded in the human soul, originally pure and free from the impurities of sin. He believed that Fitrah naturally inclines toward

goodness and truth, and with correct upbringing and education, this inclination can be liberated to lead to divine knowledge and ethical virtue (Khomeini, 1989). According to this view, proper religious education and moral cultivation rooted in Fitrah enable humans to become closer to the divine reality and realize their ultimate purpose. In sum, Fitrah in Islamic thought is a fundamental concept that plays a vital role in understanding, nurturing, and achieving human perfection. It signifies that humans have an innate tendency toward truth, God, and moral goodness, which can be realized through appropriate guidance and spiritual discipline. Accordingly, Fitrah represents the core connection between humans and their Creator, serving as the foundation for their journey toward ultimate happiness and spiritual fulfillment.

Architecture and fitrah

Considering the above, the relationship between fitrah and architecture can now be examined. As an art and craft that organizes human living space, architecture naturally relates to innate human features and needs. From this perspective, three levels of connection between architecture and fitrah can be posited:

- Architecture and nature: This is the most fundamental level of interaction between architecture and fitrah, manifesting in harmony with natural elements. Traditional architecture, utilizing light, water, earth, plants, and other natural materials, strives to create an environment compatible with human nature. A prominent example is indigenous architecture that harmonizes with the climate or courtyards featuring elements like water pools and trees (Pirnia, 2013).
- Architecture and instinct: At this level, architecture responds to certain innate instincts and needs of humans. Security, protection, social interaction, territoriality, and other innate desires are reflected in the physical features of spaces. Spaces such as central courtyards, Iwan, shrine, and inner chambers in traditional Iranian architecture exemplify these needs (Haeri, 1999).

Architecture and sublime fitrah: At the highest level, architecture can reflect and embody the higher and spiritual aspects of human nature. Innate passions for beauty, truth, spirituality, and proximity to the divine can manifest in elevated architectural forms. Religious architectures like mosques, hospices, and grand churches exemplify this profound connection between the physical and spiritual dimensions of humans (Burkhardt, 2004). (Fig. 1)

Therefore, the relationship between architecture and fitrah encompasses a range from fulfilling material needs to responding to spiritual impulses. Among these, Islamic architecture is a prime example of the divine fitrah manifesting in creating human environments. The concept of Fitrah deeply influences architectural principles in many Islamic cultures, as it emphasizes harmony between human nature and the built environment. Architecture inspired by Fitrah seeks to reflect the natural inclinations of humans toward tranquility, balance, and spiritual connection. Islamic architecture often incorporates elements that resonate with this innate disposition, such as open courtyards, natural light, and flowing water, which evoke

a sense of serenity aligned with human inner instincts (Omidian & Gharipour, 2019). These design features aim to create spaces that facilitate spiritual reflection and personal harmony, aligning physical environments with the natural disposition described by Fitrah. Furthermore, the idea that architecture should serve the natural and spiritual needs of humans is rooted in the Islamic understanding that human beings are divinely predisposed to seek connection with God through their surroundings. Classic Islamic architecture, exemplified by mosques and prayer halls, is deliberately designed to foster a sense of closeness to the divine, embodying principles of harmony with nature and human orientation toward spiritual awareness (Ersoy, 2015). Elements such as mihrabs facing Mecca and minarets that reach toward the sky are symbolic expressions of aligning with the innate Fitrah towards the divine realm, emphasizing that built spaces should nurture and reflect innate human tendencies. Contemporary architectural practices, influenced by Islamic principles of Fitrah, emphasize sustainable and natural materials that resonate with humans' natural inclinations to harmony with the en-

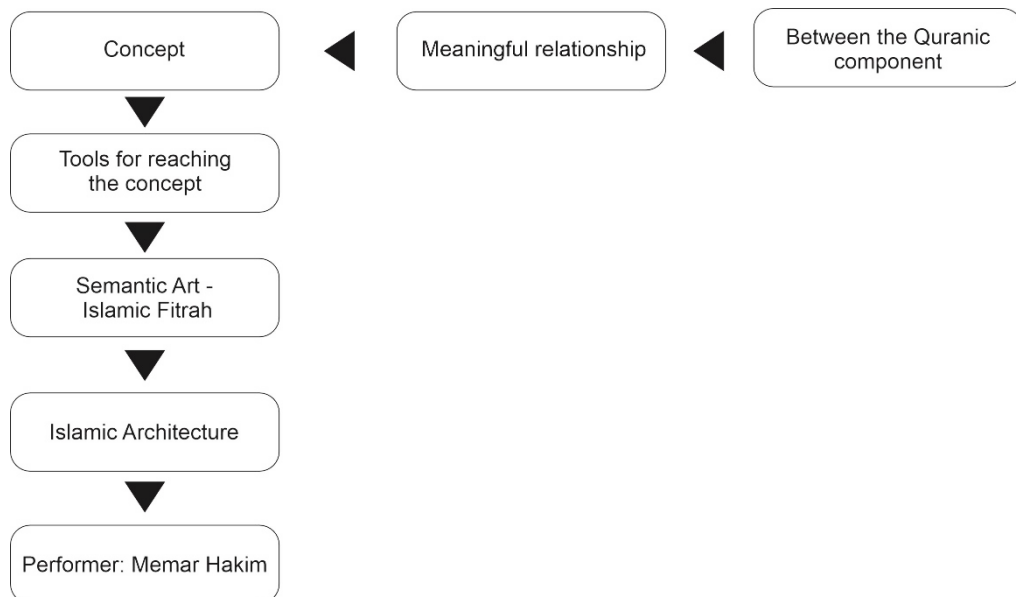


Figure 1: The relationship between the Quranic component and the wise architect, source: authors

vironment. These designs prioritize organic forms, eco-friendly materials, and natural ventilation, reinforcing the connection between built environments and human Fitrah. Scholars argue that architecture that aligns with the natural dispositions of human nature can promote psychological well-being and spiritual growth, encouraging a symbiotic relationship between humans and their environment (Gharipour & Omidian, 2021). The goal is to create spaces that are conducive to nurturing the innate qualities of peace, reflection, and connection with the divine. In sum, architecture influenced by Fitrah aims to mirror the natural internal tendencies of humans toward harmony, spirituality, and balance. By designing environments that resonate with human nature, architects can foster spaces that support psychological comfort, moral development, and spiritual fulfillment. This approach underscores the importance of understanding human innate dispositions in creating meaningful, holistic environments that enhance both individual well-being and collective harmony within Islamic culture.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Islamic architecture: Embodiment of fitrah

Islamic architecture is fundamentally an embodiment of the concept of Fitrah, reflecting the innate human inclinations toward spirituality, harmony, and connection with the divine. The design of mosques, madrasas, and other Islamic structures aims to facilitate spiritual reflection and align with the natural dispositions of the human soul. Features such as the orientation toward Mecca (Qibla), the presence of courtyards, domes, and minarets are not merely aesthetic but serve to trigger intrinsic spiritual responses that resonate with humans' innate tendencies (Gül, 2017). These architectural elements create environments that nurture the inner qualities of serenity, humility, and the pursuit of divine closeness, thus embodying the Fitrah within physical space. Moreover, Islamic architecture often emphasizes symmetry, harmony, and

fluidity hallmarks that reflect the innate human desire for balance and order. The intricate geometric patterns and calligraphy serve to transcend materiality, encouraging contemplation and spiritual upliftment. These patterns are not arbitrary; they mirror the underlying order of the universe, which aligns with the idea that Fitrah seeks harmony with the divine cosmos (Ghallab & Al-Mansour, 2020). The spatial organization aims to foster a sense of wholeness, mirroring the innate human tendency to seek completeness and connection with the divine order of existence. The spiritual symbolism embedded in Islamic architectural elements also encapsulates the embodiment of Fitrah. For example, the calligraphic inscriptions of Quranic verses serve as constant reminders of divine truths that support human innate recognition of their divine origin. The minaret, as a soaring structure calling to prayer, emphasizes the aspiration to reach toward divine realms an expression of the natural human inclination toward divine proximity (Archnet, 2021). These architectural expressions function as physical manifestations of Fitrah, inspiring observance and spiritual awakening in adherents. In contemporary times, Islamic architecture continues to embody Fitrah through sustainable and human-centered design. Emphasis on natural light, ventilation, and environmentally friendly materials aim to harmonize built environments with humans' natural inclinations towards comfort, tranquility, and divine connection. Such designs reinforce the idea that architecture should serve not only functional needs but also nurture the innate spiritual and psychological dispositions of human beings, highlighting the enduring bond between Fitrah and Islamic architectural practices (Karim & Elshater, 2020). Ultimately, Islamic architecture functions as a sacred mirror of Fitrah, fostering environments where spiritual growth and innate human qualities can flourish simultaneously.

Islamic architecture, formed over a vast geographical area and over several centuries, exhibits significant formal diversity yet shares

core principles rooted in Islamic ideological foundations. According to many scholars, the spirit and common language of this architecture arise from Islamic truths and monotheistic fitrah (Nasr, 2011). Analyzing the key features of Islamic architecture reveals its deep alignment with human innate dispositions. Principles such as monotheism, sanctity, beauty, balance, and perfection that define this architecture reflect natural human tendencies within an Islamic worldview (Akbari, 1986). The most central manifestation of fitrah in Islamic architecture is the constant focus on the presence of God and the connection to the origin of existence. Muslim architects aim to evoke a sense of divine presence and to connect humans with the divine through spaces such as mosques, schools, khanqahs, and tombs. Elements like mihrab, dome, minaret, and Qur’anic inscriptions symbolize

this profound spiritual connection (Tabatabai, 2015). Geometric and vegetal decorations also symbolize order, harmony, and unity prevalent in the universe. Arabesque motifs moving from multiplicity toward unity represent monotheism and the oneness of the divine essence. Avoidance of imagery and figural representation also stems from this monotheistic feeling and the desire to avoid worldly determinations (Descartes, 1996). Additionally, emphasis on simplicity, purity, and the luminous quality of spaces are other features of Islamic architecture that embody the pure human fitrah. Simplicity and contentment, combined with beauty and delicacy, are distinguished qualities that invite humans to self-purification and overcoming material attachments. The frequent presence of light and water symbolizes outer and inner purity and reflects brightness and life (Nasr, 2011). (Fig. 2)

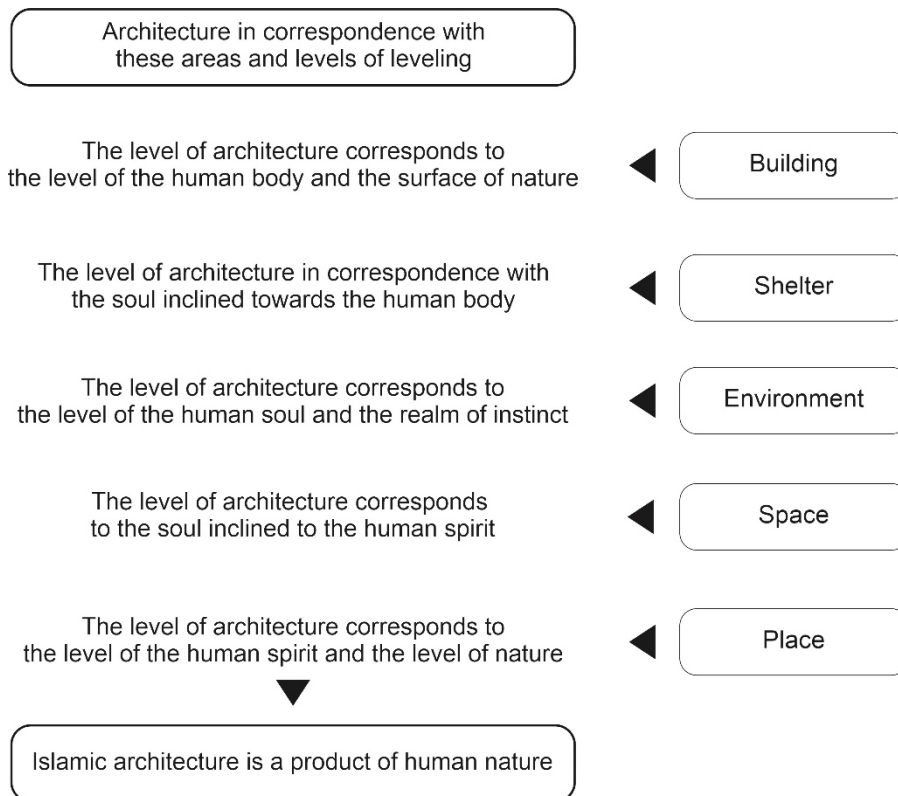


Figure 2: Architecture is structured in accordance with the human existential plane and levels, source: authors

As the diagram shows, Islamic architecture has been developed within the context of a meaningful art rooted in two main pillars: Qur'anic concepts and human fitrah. Essentially, this architecture is the meeting point of human inner innate dispositions and the revelatory teachings of religion, manifested through the wise architect (Balkhari Chaei, 2005). In other words, the tradition of Islamic architecture is the product of a profound connection between the divine nature of human fitrah, religious art, and spiritual wisdom. It is worth noting that the alignment of Islamic architecture with human fitrah does not imply limiting it within a pre-defined framework or denying the role of free will and creativity of the architect. Rather, this meaningful art provides an appropriate platform that enables innate tendencies to be expressed and flourish. From this perspective, the diversity and multiplicity of styles and types of Islamic architecture, while maintaining overall unity and coherence, indicate the fluidity of fitrah within various cultural and historical forms (Motahhari, 1993). (Fig. 3)

As can be observed, Islamic architecture has been shaped in accordance with the triadic structure of existence (God, humans, and nature), with each type of building reflecting one of these realms. At the top of this hierarchy is worship architecture, centered around the mosque, serving as the manifestation of God's presence and the connection between humans and the divine. Then comes residential architecture such as houses and schools, which address both the material and spiritual needs of humans. Ultimately, indigenous architecture that is harmonious with the natural environment, like caravanserais and water reservoirs, results from a thoughtful interaction with climatic elements (Haeri, 1999). Thus, Islamic architecture strives to consider the truth of human beings in all their dimensions and create spaces that are compatible with their fitrah and noble status. This architecture, rooted in divine anthropology and based on the principle of ontological multiplicity, views the world as a connected spectrum. Therefore, in Islamic architectural works, material and spiritual elements, appearance and

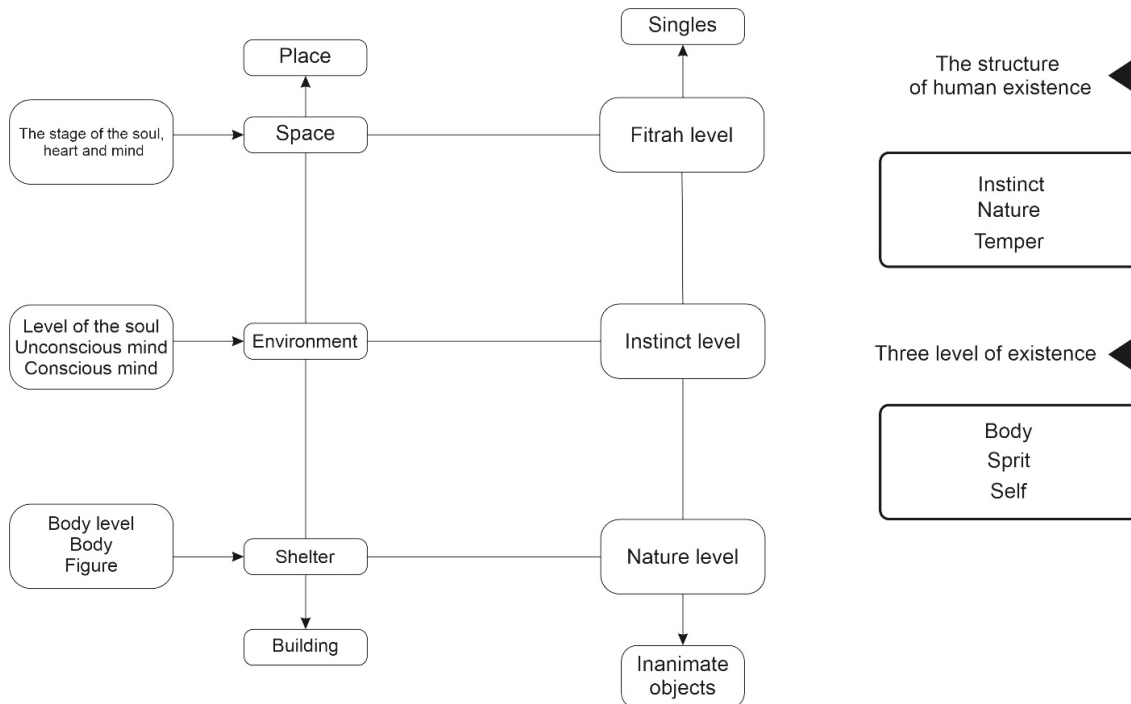


Figure 3: The human existential plane and its stratified levels, source: authors

inner reality, form and meaning are intertwined, demonstrating an all-encompassing unity (Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 2001).

CONCLUSION AND RESULTS

This article aims to explore the concept of fitrah as the divine essence of human beings and its role in shaping Islamic architecture. The research findings indicate that, from an Islamic perspective, fitrah is an existential truth that transcends mere mental concepts and manifests both in cognition and in human tendencies. Architecture, as the art that shapes the form of human life, naturally relates to human innate dispositions and can serve as a platform for the blossoming of spiritual talents. Islamic architecture exemplifies the profound connection between art and fitrah. This architecture, reflecting a monotheistic worldview and Islamic values, employs geometry, form, and space to manifest transcendent realities. Qualities such as divine focus, spirituality, aesthetic beauty, balance, and simplicity—which define Islamic architecture across the Islamic world—stem from the pure human fitrah in light of divine revelations. An examination of the levels and elements of Islamic architecture reveals its relationship with human existential dimensions. Just as humans have multiple yet interconnected facets, architectural works also possess a spectrum of material and spiritual functions, maintaining hierarchical order while demonstrating broader unity. Such comprehensive architecture embodies divine fitrah and the intrinsic dignity of humanity. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the dimensions of human fitrah and how to respond to its multifaceted needs is essential for fitrah-oriented architecture. Surely, revisiting Islamic architectural heritage from this perspective and creatively drawing inspiration from it can open new horizons for contemporary architecture. An architecture that is aligned with fitrah and aims to elevate human dignity will not only provide a solid structure but also serve as a vessel for a pure and elevated life. Based on this, it is necessary to further explain the relationship

between fitrah and the physical form in research and education, fostering constructive dialogue among thinkers and architects to facilitate its practical realization. A long and challenging journey lies ahead, but the seeds planted today will undoubtedly bear sweet fruit in the future. In conclusion, recognizing and elucidating the connection between fitrah and architecture—especially within the framework of Islamic wisdom and inspired by the valuable heritage of Muslim architecture—is an important and essential step toward recreating the spiritual identity of modern architecture. Architecture that aims to support humans in the flourishing of their divine fitrah must establish a close bond with the truth of existence and the origin of being. Such a fundamental architecture, beyond form and function, possesses meaning and a higher purpose. It should create the possibility for divine attributes to manifest in creation and provide a foundation for the growth and perfection of yearning souls. The model for such an ideal resides in the traditions and enduring works of Muslim architects, which arise from Islamic thought and the essence of faith culture. Hopefully, by gaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between fitrah and architecture and drawing inspiration from the rich store of Islamic art and wisdom, we can take small but meaningful steps toward reviving human-centered and meaningful architecture one that honors the noble nature and pure fitrah of human beings and provides a sanctuary for the ascension of the soul and the ascent of thought. We look forward to the rebirth of holy art and architecture from the horizon of Islamic culture and civilization.

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