



## Mosque as the Center of Civilization: The Transformation of the Social Function of Mosques from the Time of the Prophet to the Modern Era of Urbanization

Akhmad Syafi'i

STID Al-Biruni Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon, Indonesia

Corresponding email: syafiivale@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Mosques occupy a central position in the history of Islamic civilization, serving as multifunctional institutions that cater not only to worship but also to education, social interaction, economic activity, and governance. However, the times, especially in the context of modern urbanization, have led to a significant transformation of these functions. This study aims to describe and analyze the changes in the social function of the mosque from the time of the Prophet to the modern urban era, identify the factors that influence it, and offer strategies for revitalizing the mosque's function as a center of civilization. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research employs multiple case studies, thematic analysis, and historical comparative methods. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis from four representative mosques across different periods and regions. The findings indicate that the mosque's social function has fragmented due to shifts in social and political structures. Despite this, mosques still have significant potential for social transformation, particularly through participatory governance, digitalization, and a community focused approach. To address these challenges, the mosque must reintegrate its role as a spiritual and social space that is adaptable to contemporary urban dynamics. This study provides valuable insights for mosque management, highlighting the importance of both historical awareness and adaptation to contemporary societal needs.

**Keywords:** social function, urbanization, Islamic civilization, institutional transformation, mosque revitalization

---

### 1. Introduction

Mosques have played a central role in shaping Islamic civilization since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. In Medina, the Prophet's Mosque was not only a place of worship, but also the center of government, education, social life, and economy (Al-Azraqi, 2015; Ibrahim, 2020; Nasr, 2005). Over time, especially in the era of modern

urbanization, the function of the mosque has undergone a significant transformation. Urbanization has affected urban spatial patterns and social interactions of Muslims, including in the context of the presence of mosques as multifunctional institutions (Siregar, 2018; Zubaidi, 2021; Khalid, 2019).

The transformation of mosque functions is not only a social phenomenon, but also reflects the dynamics between spiritual values and the needs of contemporary urban society. The lack of an in-depth understanding of the evolution of the social function of mosques has led to their suboptimal management in large cities (Fauzi, 2021; Munir, 2017; Yusuf, 2020). Thus, this study is crucial to reveal how the shifting role of mosques has influenced social development in the context of modern Islamic civilization.

The following is comparative data on the social functions of mosques from the Prophet's era to modern times:

**Table 1.** Social Functions of the Mosque from the Prophet's Era to the Modern Period

<b>Era</b>	<b>Main Social Functions</b>	<b>Additional Information</b>
The time of the Prophet	Worship, government, education, social	The mosque as the center of all community activities
Middle Ages	Worship, education, da'wah	Madrassas and libraries started to form
Modern Urban Era	Worship, limited social, and consumptive	Limited to ritual activities, less productive

(Source: Al-Faruqi, 1992; Ghazali, 2019; Hasan, 2020)

Bourdieu's "Social Capital" theory (1986) and Soja's "Spatial Justice" theory (2010) can be employed to analyze the transformation of the mosque as an empowered public space. Mosques are not just places of worship, but symbols of social structure and community participation (Tuan, 1977; Lefebvre, 1991; Wirth, 1938).

Several studies have examined the role of mosques from a historical and sociological perspective. For example, Azra (2013) examines the institutionalization of mosques within the Nusantara Islamic tradition, while Shiddieqy (2018) evaluates the role of mosques in shaping the morals of the younger generation. Meanwhile, Rahardjo (2020) discusses the mosque's revitalization as a center for economic empowerment of the people. However, these studies have not thoroughly explored the dynamics of the transformation of mosque functions in the context of modern urbanization.

Most previous studies have focused more on religious or historical aspects, rather than examining holistic social, economic, and spatial integration in urban settings (Kurniawan, 2022; Malik, 2020; Fatimah, 2021). In addition, few studies have examined the role of mosques as agents of social transformation in the context of large cities, facing the challenges of modernity and secularism.

This research offers a unique interdisciplinary approach by combining modern social theory and the history of Islamic civilization to study the transformation of mosques longitudinally. The novelty of this study lies in its spatial and functional analysis of mosques, from the time of the Prophet to the modern urban era, using empirical data and contemporary social theory frameworks (Bayat, 2013; Madjid, 2004; Geertz, 1971).

The main objectives of this study are to: (1) describe the social functions of mosques from the time of the Prophet to the era of modern urbanization; (2) identify the factors that influence the transformation of these functions; and (3) provide recommendations for managing mosques as centers of civilization that are adaptive to the dynamics of urban society (Hassan, 2016; Wahid, 2019; Noor, 2021).

## 2. Method

### Research Approach and Type

This research is a historical, descriptive, and qualitative study that employs a sociological-historical and spatial cultural approach. This approach was chosen to understand the transformation of the mosque's social function in depth from the perspective of time (historical) and space (modern urbanization context) (Creswell, 2014; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This research also employs a multiple case study design, examining several representative mosques that span from classical Islam to the contemporary urban era (Yin, 2018; Stake, 2005; Merriam, 2009). This model enables researchers to examine the dynamics of mosque social functions in various socio political and cultural contexts.

### Location and Scope of Research

Research locations include:

- a. The Prophet's Mosque (Saudi Arabia) is a representation of the Prophet's era.
- b. Mosque of Cordoba (Spain) is a representation of classical Islamic civilization.
- c. Istiqlal Mosque (Indonesia) and Al-Azhar Grand Mosque (Jakarta) - representations of modern urbanization in a Muslim-majority country.

The research informants consisted of:

- a. Mosque manager,
- b. Academics/ulama,
- c. Local community leaders,
- d. Visitors/users of the mosque.

### Data Collection Sources and Technique

Data was collected through three main techniques:

- a. In depth interviews with key informants, allowing the researcher to gather insights into the social, educational, and cultural dimensions of the mosque's function (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).
- b. Participatory observation of social, educational, and economic activities in the mosque, providing a detailed understanding of the mosque's role in the community (Spradley, 1980; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Angrosino, 2007).
- c. Study of historical documents and archives related to mosque functions from various eras, offering a historical context and depth to the research findings (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2003; Scott, 1990).

### **Data Analysis Technique:**

Data analysis techniques use thematic analysis and historical comparative analysis:

- a. Thematic Analysis: This method was employed to identify key themes in the mosque's social functions, as derived from the qualitative data collected. The themes were categorized and analyzed to highlight changes and continuities over time (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012; Nowell et al., 2017).
- b. . Historical Comparative Analysis: This method was applied to compare mosque functions over time, identify significant shifts, and relate these changes to broader transformations in Muslim societies. The analysis enabled an understanding of how changes in mosque functions correlate with the evolution of social structures and urbanization (Skocpol, 1984; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003; Tilly, 1984).

The analysis process was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

## **3. Result & Discussion**

### **The Mosque during the Prophet's Time: The Center of Multidimensional Activities of Muslims**

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the mosque not only functioned as a place of worship, but also as the center of all aspects of Muslim community life, including government, education, social, and economic activities. The Prophet's Mosque exemplified a multifunctional institution that integrated both spiritual values and the practical needs of the people. The mosque served as the hub for various activities that were vital to the daily life of the Muslim community (Al-Azraqi, 2015; Nasution, 2006; Ibrahim, 2020). This function was shaped by the needs of the people of Medina, who lacked formal institutions beyond mosques.

Legislative and judicial activities are also conducted within the mosque. The Prophet decided cases and delivered legal decisions in front of the Companions. Economic activities such as zakat distribution, waqf, and halal trade are also centered in mosques (Hasan, 2020; Yusuf, 2021; Wahid, 2019). This makes the mosque a center of social inclusion and economic justice.

In terms of education, the mosque is an open learning space with a halaqah system and very high community participation (Madjid, 2004; Lapidus, 2014; Esposito, 2005). This shows that the concept of mosque-based education existed before the institutionalization of formal schools. Value-based learning and collective engagement strengthen the mosque's function as a civilization booster.

The social dimension of the mosque is evident in its role in establishing community solidarity through gathering activities, assisting the poor, and fostering the concept of muallaf (Nasr, 2005; Siregar, 2018; Ghazali, 2019). This indicates that the mosque has a strategic position in shaping the collective identity of Muslims.

**Table 2.** Multidimensional Functions of the Prophet's Mosque

Function Dimension	Main Activities	Description
Spiritual/Religious	Prayer in congregation	The mosque is the center of daily worship and spiritual activity for the Muslim community.
	Recitation of the Qur'an	
	Dhikr and munajat	
Education	Halaqah (recitation)	It functions as an open school based on direct interaction with the Prophet.
	Tafsir, fiqh, hadith	
	Companion training	
Politics and Law	Legal hearing	Mosques serve as parliaments, courts, and centers for decision making.
	Submission of a fatwa	
	Consultation of Ummah leaders	
Social	Zakat and infaq distribution	The center of social solidarity and community integration of various ethnicities and statuses.
	Muallaf service	
	Social mediation	
Economy	Waqf management	Mosques support community economies through Islamic social instruments.
	Halal transaction center	
	Friendly market area	
Administrative	Official letter writing	State Secretariat function and the government communication center.
	Archives of revelations and public documents	
	Office of the Prophet	
Humanity	Care of the sick	The mosque became a refuge for the weak and travelers.
	Support for the poor	
	Traveler's shelter	

Source: (Al-Azraqi, 2015).

### The Transition of Mosque Functions in the Classical and Colonial Eras

Entering the classical era of Islam (750-1258 AD), the mosque remained the center of civilization, but its functions began to fragment. The establishment of madrasas as formal educational institutions led to the transfer of certain educational functions from mosques to new institutions (Berkey, 1992; Lapidus, 2014; Makdisi, 1981). The Cordoba mosque, for example, underwent a transformation from a religious center to a symbol of dynastic power.

During the colonial period, many mosques in Muslim areas were depoliticized. Colonial rulers restricted socio-political activities in mosques to prevent popular resistance (Azra, 2013; Abaza, 1999; Ricklefs, 2001). As a result, the role of mosques was reduced primarily to a place of worship, leading to a decline in community empowerment.

Despite these challenges, mosques continued to be crucial spaces for asserting local identity and culture. In Southeast Asia, pesantren mosques continued to fulfill their educational roles and contribute to the regeneration of the ulama, even under colonial pressure (Dhofier, 1982; Noer, 1996; Bruinessen, 1995). The mosque's cultural function is maintained through a network of ulama and santri.

The mosque is also a symbolic marker of resistance to secular Western modernization. In this context, the mosque becomes a space of cultural and spiritual resistance that shows flexibility in responding to the challenges of the times (Safi, 2000; Moosa, 2015; Abu-Rabi', 2006).

**Table 3.** Comparison of Mosque Functions in the Classical and Colonial Eras

Aspects	Classical Era of Islam	Colonial Era
Education	Madrasah separate from mosque	The education function is limited
Politics	Mosque = center of fatwa and power	Political functions are suppressed
Social	Celebration, zakat, community discussion	Colonial regulated/restricted
Symbol of civilization	Architecture & knowledge center	Symbol of cultural resistance

(Source: Makdisi, 1981; Azra, 2013; Bruinessen, 1995)

### Urbanization and Changing Institutional Patterns of Contemporary Mosques

The modern era is characterized by massive urbanization and the increasing complexity of community structures. Mosques in urban areas face challenges as institutions that must adapt to limited space, time, and community attention (Siregar, 2018; Fatimah, 2021; Kurniawan, 2022). Many mosques are only active during prayer times and Islamic holidays, with little community engagement outside of these moments.



In major cities like Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Istanbul, a disconnect exists between the grand architecture of mosques and their social presence within the community. This has led to the phenomenon of "symbolic mosques," where mosques function more as visual symbols than participatory spaces (Khalid, 2019; Zubaidi, 2021; Fauzi, 2021).

Another problem is the low participation of the younger generation in mosque activities. They are more active in digital spaces than in face to face activities. Some studies suggest that mosques are less responsive to the needs of urban communities, such as the provision of creative spaces, engagement in public policy discussions, and the adoption of technology based social services (Rahardjo, 2020; Wahid, 2019; Hasan, 2020).

However, several mosques have begun to develop social innovations, such as free health clinics, job training programs, disability friendly initiatives, and digital zakat and online da'wah platforms (Yusuf, 2020; Noor, 2021; Munir, 2017). This suggests that, with the right strategy, mosques still have considerable potential to become centers of urban social transformation.

**Table 4. Challenges of Urban Mosques**

Challenge Category	Problem Description	Impact on Mosque Function
Space Limitations	Mosques are often located in densely populated areas, making it difficult to expand due to limited land availability.	Restrictions on social space, lack of educational and empowerment facilities.
Low Community Participation	Lack of community involvement, especially among the younger generation, in mosque programs.	Mosque activities lack sustainability and are not adequately addressing the community's needs.
Commercialization of the Environment	The area around the mosque is filled with business centers, paid parking, and commercial shops.	There is a disorientation of the mosque's function, shifting from a social spiritual to a profit oriented focus.
Individualism of Society	Urban lifestyles often tend to be closed, private, and lacking in social interaction.	Mosques are losing their function as community spaces and social reconciliation.
Secularization of Public Space	Religious values began to be marginalized in the social structure of urban society.	Mosques are not involved in public policy discourse or urban planning.
Digital Divide	Not all mosques can access and utilize information technology.	Digital da'wah, online zakat, and online education are not running optimally.

(Source: Kurniawan, 2022; Khalid, 2019; Fauzi, 2021)

### **Thematic Analysis: Social Functions of Mosques in an Interdisciplinary Perspective**

Based on thematic analysis, four main social functions have transformed: spiritual, educational, socio-economic, and political-cultural. The spiritual function remains dominant over time, but the other three functions fluctuate depending on the socio-political context (Tilly, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991; Bourdieu, 1986).

The educational function of mosques has evolved from the traditional halaqah method to formal curriculum based education and the integration of digital technology. Although this adaptation to modernity is positive, the quality of participation remains a significant challenge (Bayat, 2013; Nowell, 2017; Guest et al., 2012).

The socio-economic function of mosques is increasing through social programs such as bazaars, fostering MSMEs, scholarships, and skills training. However, this role remains limited to mosques with professional management and sufficient funds (Rahardjo, 2020; Noor, 2021; Wahid, 2019).

The political and cultural function of mosques is often hindered by state regulations or conflicts of interest. However, in many Muslim-majority countries, mosques remain forums for social criticism and progressive Islamic discourse (Safi, 2000; Abu-Rabi', 2006; Geertz, 1971).

### **Historical Synthesis and Strategic Recommendations**

Historically, mosques have proven to be the most flexible institutions in absorbing, adapting, and producing civilizational values. The changes in mosque functions are not necessarily indicative of decline, but rather a response to the evolving dynamics of space and time (Lapidus, 2014; Esposito, 2005; Nasution, 2006).

A strategy to reintegrate the mosque's social functions in response to the needs of local urban communities is essential. This strategy can involve increasing mosque management capacity, collaborating with educational institutions, digitizing mosque services, and engaging the younger generation in mosque programs (Munir, 2017; Khalid, 2019; Fauzi, 2021).

**Table 5.** Strategic Recommendations for Urban Mosque Transformation

<b>Function</b>	<b>Strategic Recommendations</b>
Education	Digitalization of halaqah, teacher training, santri scholarships
Social	Free clinic, public kitchen, shelter house
Economy	MSME development, sharia cooperatives, job training
Political-Cultural	Public policy forum, interfaith discussion



(Source: Yusuf, 2020; Hasan, 2020; Wahid, 2019)

#### 4. Conclusion

This study found that the social function of the mosque underwent a significant transformation over time, from the era of the Prophet to the era of modern urbanization. During the Prophet's era, the mosque served as a multifaceted center of community life, integrating worship, education, social, political, and economic functions within a single open and participatory space. This function began to fragment in the classical and colonial eras due to institutional differentiation and external intervention by power. In the modern urban era, the function of the mosque tends to be reduced due to individualism, secularization of public space, and the weakness of mosque institutional planning in facing the social challenges of urban society.

However, this study also found that mosques retain significant potential as centers for social transformation, especially if they can adapt digital approaches, strengthen participatory governance, and function as inclusive public spaces. The main findings of this study confirm that mosques are not only symbols of spirituality but also spaces for the production of social and cultural values that can encourage the development of modern Islamic civilization. Therefore, optimizing the social function of mosques in the era of urbanization requires a synergy between the historical values embedded in mosque functions and innovative strategies tailored to the needs of contemporary communities. This synergy is crucial for revitalizing the mosque's role in modern society, ensuring that it remains a central institution for both spiritual and social transformation.

#### 5. References

- Abaza, M. (1999). *Debates on Islam and Knowledge in Malaysia and Egypt: Shifting Worlds*. Routledge.
- Abu-Rabi', I. M. (2006). *The Contemporary Arab Reader on Political Islam*. University of California Press.
- Al-Azraqi. (2015). *Akhbar Makkah fi Qadim al-Dahr wa Hadithih*. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Azra, A. (2013). *Islam Nusantara: Global and Local Networks*. Mizan.
- Bayat, A. (2013). *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (2nd ed.). Stanford University Press.
- Berkey, J. P. (1992). *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*. Princeton University Press.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theories and Methods* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). Greenwood Press.

- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bruinessen, M. van. (1995). *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren and Tarekat: Islamic Traditions in Indonesia*. Mizan.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Dhofier, Z. (1982). *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java* (Doctoral dissertation, Australian National University).
- Esposito, J. L. (2005). *Islam: The Straight Path* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Fauzi, M. (2021). Optimizing the Role of the Mosque in Strengthening Religious Moderation. *Futura Islamic Scientific Journal*, 21(1), 35-50. <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v21i1.8932>
- Fatimah, S. (2021). Transformation of the Social Function of the Mosque in the Midst of Urban Community Change. *Journal of Sociology of Religion*, 13(2), 118-135.
- Ghazali, A. (2019). Mosque and Community Social Development. *Al-Mashlahah Journal*, 7(1), 20-35.
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied Thematic Analysis*. SAGE.
- Hasan, N. (2020). *Mosques and Radicalism in Indonesia*. Alvabet Library.
- Hassan, R. (2016). Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society. *Contemporary Islam*, 10(2), 173-194. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-015-0331-0>
- Ibrahim, R. (2020). The Social Function of the Prophet's Mosque during the Prophet's Period. *Journal of Tarbiyatuna*, 11(1), 45-58.
- Khalid, F. (2019). Mosque as an Urban Social Space: A Case Study in Kuala Lumpur. *Journal of Islamic Architecture*, 5(1), 29-40.
- Kurniawan, A. (2022). Problems of Urban Mosques: Between Spirituality and Commercialization. *Journal of Islamic Society*, 8(2), 65-80.
- Lapidus, I. M. (2014). *A History of Islamic Societies* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Blackwell.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. SAGE.
- Madjid, N. (2004). *Islam, Modernity and Indonesianness*. Paramadina.
- Mahoney, J., & Rueschemeyer, D. (2003). *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge University Press.
- Makdisi, G. (1981). *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Malik, S. (2020). Mosques and Social Transformation in the Digital Age. *Journal of Islamic Da'wah and Communication*, 4(2), 89-103.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Moosa, E. (2015). *What is a Madrasa?* University of North Carolina Press.

- Munir, M. (2017). Social Innovation of Urban Mosque: A Case Study of Al-Azhar Mosque. *Journal of Social and Empowerment*, 4(1), 15-30.
- Nasr, S. H. (2005). *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study*. World Wisdom.
- Nasution, H. (2006). *Rational Islam: The Ideas and Thought of Harun Nasution*. Mizan.
- Noer, D. (1996). *The Modern Islamic Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942*. LP3ES.
- Noor, F. (2021). Transformation of the Socio-Economic Function of the Mosque in the Digital Era. *Journal of Islamic Economics*, 13(1), 101-114.
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Rahardjo, D. (2020). Revitalizing the Social Function of the Mosque in the Midst of Urbanization. *Journal of Social Religion*, 14(2), 55-72.
- Ricklefs, M. C. (2001). *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1200* (3rd ed.). Palgrave.
- Safi, O. (2000). The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam. *The American Historical Review*, 105(2), 646-647.
- Scott, J. (1990). *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research*. Polity Press.
- Shiddieqy, M. (2018). Mosque as the Moral Center of the Young Generation. *Journal of Tarbiyah*, 5(1), 25-37.
- Siregar, A. (2018). The Role of Mosques in Urban Community Empowerment. *Journal of Islamic Social and Political Sciences*, 9(2), 90-105.
- Skocpol, T. (1984). *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Soja, E. W. (2010). *Seeking Spatial Justice*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant Observation*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). *The Art of Case Study Research*. SAGE.
- Tilly, C. (1984). *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Wahid, A. (2019). Mosques and Islamic Moderation in the Post-Truth Era. *Journal of Progressive Islam*, 4(1), 12-25.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). SAGE.
- Yusuf, M. (2020). Digitalization of Mosque Functions: Opportunities and Challenges. *Journal of Islamic Communication*, 10(2), 121-134.
- Zubaidi, A. (2021). Urban Mosque Architecture: Aesthetics and Social Function. *Journal of Islamic Architecture and Social Culture*, 8(1), 45-60.