

Article

Spiritual Affect and Spatial Experience: Vernacular and Generic Architecture Through Sufi *hāl* Concepts

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Abstract

This study examines the emotional and spiritual orientations that emerge through the in-situ experience of vernacular and generic architectural spaces and investigates whether these orientations can be interpreted theologically through the *hāl* concepts of the Sufi tradition. A concurrent embedded mixed-methods design was employed with 24 architecture students who experienced both settings in Çamlıhemşin, Rize province, northeastern Türkiye. Following each spatial experience, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and a nine-dimensional semantic differential instrument, developed through the systematic mapping of *hāl* concepts onto psychological emotion categories, was administered. The quantitative data were analyzed using a three-way repeated-measures ANOVA, and the qualitative data through content analysis. The findings indicate that the vernacular experience is associated with markedly stronger and more positive spiritual-emotional orientations than the generic experience across all dimensions and spatial conditions. In the qualitative analysis, spiritual feeling emerged as a prominent theme in the vernacular experience without any religious practice, whereas spiritual indifference was the dominant theme in the generic experience. Overall, the study reveals that architectural space is a context capable of carrying spiritually differentiated orientations, and that Sufi *hāl* concepts offer a productive hermeneutic framework for the theological interpretation of the spatial effect of nature-integrated vernacular architecture.

Keywords: Sufi *hāl* concepts; vernacular architecture; spiritual affect; architectural experience; Islamic thought



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1. Introduction

The production of homogeneous built environments, which has accelerated in the global age, leads individuals and societies to become detached from the natural and cultural context to which they belong, and deepens the individual's sense of alienation in spatial and existential terms (Relph 1976, p. 128; Harvey 1992, p. 103; Augé 1995, p. 85; Bektaş 1996, pp. 5–7). The rapid descent of Pruitt Igoe, regarded as the symbolic failure of standardized mass housing ideals, into a process of social disintegration and abandonment demonstrated that built environments which fail to generate a sense of belonging weaken the human–space bond (Jencks 1991, p. 9). This capitalist order of life, which compels human beings to live in high-rise buildings removed from nature and place, has not only driven the individual into loneliness but has also eroded the relationship established

with God and the sacred (Sururi et al. 2020, pp. 14–15). Owing to rapid construction, many people living in crowded urban centers intuitively carry a sense of deficiency in their lives. This feeling is thought to relate to the construction of artificial environments from which nature has been largely excluded (Nasr 1997, p. 17).

This alienating effect of generic architecture is not merely a cultural intuition, but a phenomenon documented at the empirical level (Romanova 2018). It has been shown that exposure to the built environment produces rapid changes in physiological and psychological indicators such as heart rate, stress level, and attention capacity, while prolonged exposure can leave lasting traces on neuroplasticity and cognitive processes (de Paiva and Jedon 2019, pp. 568–69). In cities where high-rise structures detached from place are concentrated, anonymization, social isolation, and psychological health problems are seen to increase markedly (Romanova 2018). Spatial factors such as housing quality, interior arrangement, and user control produce direct effects on individuals' depression, anxiety, and general mental health; inadequate spatial design increases cognitive fatigue and impairs psychological well-being (Riva et al. 2022). According to Pallasmaa (2021, pp. 79–80), the generic architectural products rapidly proliferating today, with their examples reduced to ordinariness and similar types, weaken multisensory experience and erode the existential bond that the individual establishes with space.

In the face of this picture, vernacular architecture is becoming a field of research that is attracting renewed attention. Vernacular architecture is the building tradition that emerges from local knowledge, craft, and available resources rather than from standardized professional design, embodying a place-rooted response to topography, climate, and culture (Sümerkan 1990, p. 27); the timber houses of the Eastern Black Sea region, built into their forested and sloping terrain, are a characteristic example. As examples of cultural heritage, vernacular architectural structures offer a distinctive source of knowledge for contemporary architectural production by integrating physical factors such as climate, form, material, and spatial order with cultural design values (Yang et al. 2024). Vernacular architectural spaces support physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of well-being through their biophilic design relationship, historical atmosphere, and cultural integrity (Sarıdaş and Eyyamoğlu 2025, p. 1420). Within this framework, it is emphasized that the design process of vernacular architecture rests on a holistic system of knowledge aimed at producing spaces compatible with the individual's psychological balance and spiritual experience, whereas generic architecture, by focusing for the most part on physical and technical dimensions, often neglects these spiritual dimensions (Fazeli and Negarestan 2023, pp. 133–34). Indeed, field research conducted in vernacular dwellings in India revealed that the great majority of users reported higher happiness, belonging, and spiritual satisfaction in these structures, and that plan organization, open spaces, and natural materials were the principal factors shaping this experience (Sadhu et al. 2025, pp. 457–60). Given that the rapid construction processes of globalization pose a risk of cultural homogenization and epistemological colonization for vernacular architecture (García-Esparza 2015, p. 871), the systematic investigation of this field carries particular importance both for the preservation of cultural heritage and for human well-being.

The relationship between architecture and spirituality is an increasingly prominent axis of research in the interdisciplinary literature. Beyond being a technical and functional discipline, architecture is treated as a cultural and spiritual practice that develops the individual's inner experience, search for meaning, and spatial awareness (Bórmida et al. 2022, pp. 212–13). The architectural organization of houses, temples, and sacred sites is directly associated with the individual's spiritual experience and ritual practices; architecture is defined not merely as the production of a physical structure but at the same time as a spiritual and symbolic process of space production that arises as a result of the human

effort to order and make sense of the cosmos (Tjahjono 2025, pp. 153–55). Although it is known that in many cultures the dwelling is regarded as a microcosm and that architectural order reflects cosmological systems and social values, modern urbanization and the increasing commodification of architecture are systematically weakening these spiritual dimensions (Tjahjono 2025, p. 152). As a form of expression reflecting a society's cultural values, religious beliefs, and worlds of symbolic meaning, architectural space externalizes the perception of sacredness and the symbolic representation of the human–nature–divine relationship through spatial organization (Barrie et al. 2016, pp. 1–3). While Pallasmaa (2021, p. 75) defines the fundamental task of architecture as re-establishing the existential relationship between the human being and the world and strengthening the individual's experience of 'belonging to the world,' Nasr (1997, pp. 4–7) regards environmental destruction and the existential void produced by artificial environments as an expression of the spiritual poverty within humanity's inner world. The dimension of spirituality that is influential in human behavior toward nature and the environment positively supports the continuity and sustainability of the natural environment and lays the ground for the emergence of ecological built-environment designs in harmony with nature (Irawan 2022, p. 8). Beyond the dimension of the ecological built environment, this relationship also carries a dimension in which spirituality, meaning, hope, peace, and inner tranquility, capable of arising through the relationship established with architectural space and nature rather than through religious practices, are experienced (MahdiNejad et al. 2020).

The concept of the 'generic city' proposed by Koolhaas (1995, pp. 1238–39) for cities that are becoming increasingly anonymous, monotonous, and standardized, with a weakening relationship to the past, defines the identity-less building typologies produced by the global age. By commodifying the concept of place, this process of standardization erodes the historical, cultural, and emotional bonds between place and people (Arefi 1999, p. 180); by leading to the weakening of place identity in cities and to spatial homogenization, it deepens the phenomenon of placelessness that Relph (1976) characterized as 'placelessness' (Relph 1976; Freestone and Liu 2016, p. 17). From the perspective of critical regionalism, Frampton and Foster (1983, pp. 16–30) developed, against this process, an understanding of resistance that foregrounds contextual elements such as vernacular topography, climate, culture, and material.

Nevertheless, the existing literature on the relationship between space, nature, and spirituality remains limited in three respects. The spiritual dimension of spatial experience has been documented predominantly in the context of places of worship (Bermudez et al. 2017; Daelemans 2020; MahdiNejad et al. 2020; Salimi et al. 2016); by contrast, the capacity of everyday vernacular residential environments to generate spiritually oriented affect has not been sufficiently investigated. Although findings exist indicating that vernacular architecture supports human well-being and the bond established with nature (Sadhu et al. 2025; Saridaş and Eyyamoğlu 2025), empirical studies that test vernacular and generic architectural experience in a direct and comparative manner are quite limited. At the theological level, a more fundamental gap is in question. Islamic thought offers a powerful ecotheological framework that reads nature as a divine manifestation (*tajallī*) and grounds the relationship among the human being, nature, and God through principles and practices such as *tawhīd* (divine unity), *khilāfa* (vicegerency), *amāna* (trust), and *tawba* (repentance) (Almirzanah 2020; Ardoğan 2012; Erol 2025; Islam et al. 2024); the Sufi tradition, in turn, has developed the *hāl* concepts that name the subjective and experiential living of this relationship (Ibn 'Arabī 2008; al-Kalābādhī 2021; al-Qushayrī 2021). Although it has been shown that Sufi concepts can be used instrumentally in analyzing environmental and experiential phenomena (Irawan 2022; Kuehn 2023), this ecotheological framework and the *hāl* concepts have not yet been brought together on an empirical basis in interpreting the

spiritual orientations evoked by the experience of architectural space integrated with its natural environment.

al-Kalābādī (2021, pp. 86–190), distinguishing the states (*ḥāl*) from the stations (*maqām*), systematizes them as the fundamental categories of the science of Sufism and defines these concepts as temporary spiritual states that arise in the process of spiritual training in connection with the individual's relationship with God. While al-Qushayrī (2021, p. 125) defines the *ḥāl* as an experience that descends upon the Sufi's heart independently of the will, according to Ibn 'Arabī the states are knowledge of God and divine effusion (Ibn 'Arabī 2006, pp. 277–81). In the Sufi tradition, the *ḥāl* concepts are used as a technical term expressing both the individual's inner life and the involuntary spiritual experiences that Sufis undergo in the process of spiritual wayfaring (*ṣayr-u sulūk*). It has further been established that the *ḥāl* arises at a heart-centered level of consciousness and, in relation to concepts such as *maqām* (mystical station) and *vārid* (spiritual influx), explains the dynamic structure of Sufi experience (Erginli 2006, pp. 154–55). Moreover, it has been shown that the transfer of the *ḥāl* is a form of psychospiritual interaction occurring within the master–disciple relationship (Ertuğrul 2024, p. 886). In addition, studies have been carried out demonstrating that Sufi concepts can be used as functional instruments of analysis in categorizing environmental practices (Irawan 2022, p. 8). In this study, in which a similar approach is carried over into the context of architectural experience, no claim is advanced that the participants underwent *ḥāl* experiences belonging to the advanced degrees of Sufi spiritual wayfaring; rather, the *ḥāl* concepts are treated as a descriptive linguistic resource for the emotional and spiritual orientations evoked by architectural experience, proceeding from their layers of meaning at the lexical and semantic level. Within this framework, the concepts function as a hermeneutic instrument of reading rather than as a claim to ontological experience; the affective intensities and inner orientations disclosed by spatial experience are evaluated within a shared horizon of meaning together with the descriptions of the *ḥāl* in the Sufi literature.

Within this framework, the study aims to examine the differentiation in the emotional and spiritual orientations that the experiences of vernacular and generic architectural space produce in individuals, and to interpret this differentiation from a theological perspective through Sufi *ḥāl* concepts by way of their meanings at the lexical level. Accordingly, two research questions were formulated: “Does the direct experience of vernacular and generic architectural spaces produce differing emotional and spiritual orientations in individuals?” and “Can this differentiation be interpreted within a theological framework through Sufi *ḥāl* concepts?” By testing these two questions with complementary qualitative and quantitative data, the study seeks both to offer an empirical contribution to the space–spirituality relationship and to provide a distinctive conceptual ground for the interdisciplinary dialogue between architecture and Islamic thought.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Spatial Experience and Spirituality

Beyond being a physical shelter, the built environment is a field of experience that shapes the individual's emotional and spiritual orientation (Zumthor 2006, p. 7). Biophilic design components such as natural light, vernacular material, and the integrity of the landscape support the individual's physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being during the experience, while the cultural heritage character of the structure deepens this effect with a sense of belonging and meaning (Saridaş and Eyyamoğlu 2025, pp. 1418–20). This effect is not limited to the dwelling alone; sacred spaces in the public realm likewise transform the individual's mode of self-perception through aesthetic experience, temporality, and multiple perspectives (Deibl 2020, pp. 12–13). In addition to being a physiological process

of perception, spatial experience takes place within a structure composed of assumptions, habits, and cultural practices bound to the act of seeing. The act of seeing, occurring within a particular cultural and historical context, is identified with the 'sacred gaze' that is held to carry a spiritual meaning (Morgan 2005, p. 3). Research on sacred spaces shows that architectural elements directly shape spiritual experience. In church spaces, the balanced coexistence of the principles of stimulation, coherence, orientation, control, and restoration endows the space with a healing quality, and multisensory experience supports spiritual and bodily recovery (Daelemans 2020, pp. 14–15). Elements such as geometry, light, color, sound, and ornament in religious spaces strengthen the sense of spirituality and direct the individual from the multiplicity of the external world toward inner stillness (MahdiNejad et al. 2020, p. 1648). The association of the circular form of the dome with the celestial order and of the cubic form of the *Ka'ba* with the central structure of sacred geography reveals that architectural meaning arises not from physical form alone but from the interaction of ritual and perceptual participation (Jin 2022, p. 19). The configuration of elements such as the dome form, natural light, and water within a symbolic language facilitates the encounter with the transcendent and enables the structure to produce an experiential sacredness rather than a dogmatic representation (Placci 2022, pp. 12–13). Through the integration of eco-theological principles into the design process, sacred space is transformed into a structure that experientially conveys the sanctity of creation (Chiotti 2022, pp. 22–23).

Religious belief systems play a determining role over spatial order, proportion, color, and symbolic language. In Islamic architecture, geometric order, simplicity, and an inward-oriented spatial experience function as an architectural expression responding to the human search for spiritual tranquility (Salimi et al. 2016, p. 29). The common feature of these studies is that they have documented the spiritual dimension of spatial experience predominantly in the context of places of worship. Graham, however, carries this framework beyond places of worship by arguing that all the fine arts, architecture included, can convey the spiritual reality of the human being (Graham 2025, pp. 9–10). In the built environment, spiritual experience appears in the dimensions of humanity, sensoriality, and sustainability, and strengthens the potential of space to produce existential depth (Birch and Sinclair 2013, p. 87). Similarly, 'learning by doing' educational practices based on students' acquisition of in situ experience in religious space contribute to the apprehension of the intangible values of religious space and to the development of skills of architectural interpretation (Gil-Mastalerczyk 2022, pp. 29–31). These studies suggest that spiritual experience is not peculiar to places of worship and awaits investigation in the everyday built environment as well.

2.2. The Human Being, Nature, and the Built Environment in Islamic Thought

Architecture is an interdisciplinary intellectual field shaped around the act of building and establishing relationships with many domains such as music, cinema, photography, literature, philosophy, theology, psychology, medicine, and astronomy (Altan 1993, p. 83). In the Islamic tradition, the act of building is grounded in the Arabic root '*amara*, meaning "to render prosperous, to make flourish," from which the term *mi'mār*, "the one who develops and builds," is derived (Wehr and Cowan 1979, pp. 753–54). From the moment the human being began to exist in the world, he has been intertwined with the acts of building and developing; these acts turn into the practice of architecture as the art of domesticating and humanizing time and space (Wehr and Cowan 1979, pp. 753–54). The concept of 'domesticating' that stands out in this description coincides with the idea of 'dwelling in a place, taking up residence' on which Heidegger frequently dwells (Heidegger 2009, pp. 143–46). The Arabic root '*s-k-n*' corresponds to the concepts of *maskan* (dwelling), *iskān* (settlement), and *sukūn* (residing); this etymological commonality suggests that there is a

linguistic-level bond between settling in a place and inner peace (Wehr and Cowan 1979, p. 418). The human being's capacity to dwell in a true sense in a place is closely related to finding *sukūn* in that place (Norberg-Schulz 1980, pp. 5–10). A building act of this character resembles *ibdā'*, the act of God's creation from nothing in Ibn Sīnā's theory, in the context of disclosing the essence of existence (Atay 1974, p. 42). Al-Ghazālī grounds the act of creation attributed to God, the source of existence, through the metaphor of the "architect." He likens the architect's drawing of a house upon an empty, white surface and bringing it into existence to the divine act of creation (al-Ghazālī 2010, p. 21). Akkach expands this metaphor and describes the architect as a creator who first conceives a copy of the Preserved Tablet (*Lawḥ-i Maḥfūz*) and then sets about building it (Akkach 2005, p. 31). Ibn 'Arabī, in turn, carries the process to the ontological plane: the white paper, with its capacity to receive countless images, resembles *al-hayūlā* (prima materia); all possibilities have coalesced upon this ground as an undifferentiated whole prior to formal differentiation (Ibn 'Arabī 2006, p. 119). To bring existence/things from the dimension of knowledge to the dimension of power, that is, to build, God says "*Kun/Be!*" (al-Mehri 2010, p. 380) for every drop of ink that He lets fall from the pen of existence onto His own empty, white ground. The command "*Kun/Be!*" grants "possibility" (*imkān*) to everything that can possibly be, and thus everything finds "place" (*makān*) upon this conceived empty and white ground.

Modern science, with its rationalist and materialist stance, attempts to explain the human condition; yet it remains limited with respect to the spiritual dimension of existence and divine meaning (Schuon 1984, p. 34). It is possible, however, to look upon existence by apprehending the wisdom in its depths, to grasp this as an expression of the emotions, and to find an 'aesthetic' in it (Coomaraswamy 1977, p. 13). In Islamic thought, this conscious gaze takes concrete form through the realization that art and knowledge, form and essence, are integrated through the principle of *tawḥīd* (Necipoğlu 1995, p. 80). Chorbachi questions whether the craftsman who designed the geometric compositions in traditional Islamic architecture conceived of this process as *baṣṭ* (expansion), *qabḍ* (contraction), or the 'Breath of the Merciful' (Chorbachi 1989, p. 754). This question points to the risk of attributing mystical meanings to architectural production without documented evidence (Grabar 1980, p. 27). Despite this, examining architectural experience from a mystical and cosmological perspective carries the potential to produce new interdisciplinary insights (Akkach 2005, pp. 23–30). These perspectives remove architecture from being a technical field of production and place it at the center of the sensory and existential relationship that the human being establishes with space.

In Islamic thought, there is a cosmic relationship among God, the human being, and nature. The universe is treated as a manifestation of God's self-disclosure (*tajallī*), and this approach makes it possible to regard nature not as an instrumental but as a domain of being possessing intrinsic value (Almirzanah 2020, pp. 1–2). Islamic ecotheology grounds this view on five fundamental principles: *tawḥīd*, which situates nature as part of the divine order; *khilāfa*, which sees the human being as a responsible steward; *amāna*, which regards nature as a trust to be protected; *adāla*, which observes the balance between generations; and *istiṣlāḥ*, which is grounded in the public good (Islam et al. 2024, p. 179). Nature is not the absolute property of the human being but a domain of responsibility; approaching the environment with the principles of justice, trust, and mercy both contributes to the preservation of ecological balance and constitutes the normative foundation of Islamic environmental ethics (Ardoğan 2012, pp. 122–23). Sufism deepens this cosmological framework at the level of individual experience. Ecological Sufism, by arguing that at the root of the modern ecological crisis lies the severance of the human being's bond with the sacred, issues a call to re-establish the God–human–nature relationship within a holistic ethics (Sururi et al. 2020, pp. 14–15). It has been shown that ecological *dhikr*¹, and the practices of seclusion

(*khalwa*) and contemplation in nature, strengthen emotional regulation and ecological empathy, and that the conception of ecological behavior as worship renders environmental actions enduring through intrinsic motivation (Fahmi and Aswirna 2025, pp. 9–10). Even *tawba* (repentance) is treated, beyond the forgiveness of individual sins, as a transformative mechanism of ecological consciousness that orders the human–nature relationship; the absence of *tawba* is associated with ecological catastrophes, and its presence with ecological balance and ethical responsibility toward nature (Erol 2025, pp. 7–9). It is argued that the teaching of Sufism can orient the fragmented ontology of the modern human being toward a holistic and sacred-centered cosmology (Rahmi and Taufik 2024, p. 49). Similarly, it has been shown that Sufi aesthetics can be reproduced through bodily-sensory experiences in contemporary media such as performance art, photography, video, and architectural production (Kuehn 2023, pp. 32–33). This theoretical background suggests that Sufi concepts can be used as functional instruments in the interpretation of spatial experience as well, beyond their original contexts.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

In this study, a concurrent embedded mixed-methods design was adopted (Creswell and Clark 2017, p. 73); the quantitative data were positioned as the primary and the qualitative data as the complementary data source.

3.2. The Application of the Semantic Differential Technique

To determine the participants' emotional and spiritual orientations toward their architectural experiences, the Semantic Differential Technique (Osgood et al. 1957, pp. 76–85) was used. The study makes no claim to developing an independent psychometric scale. The adjective pairs constituting the poles of the form were determined at the end of a three-stage process.

In the first stage, to be able to evaluate the participants' emotional–spiritual responses to the experience of architectural space within a theological framework, the *ḥāl* concepts in the Sufi literature were first investigated systematically. To determine the *ḥāl* concepts to be used in the study, fundamental Sufi sources were examined, namely Kalābādhī's *al-Ta'arruf li-Madhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf* (al-Kalābādhī 2021, pp. 86–190), Qushayrī's *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya* (al-Qushayrī 2021, pp. 125–74), and Ibn 'Arabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (Ibn 'Arabī 2008, p. 149). As a result of the systematic survey of the *ḥāl* concepts contained in these sources, a total of 24 bipolar *ḥāl* concept pairs were obtained: 'Bawn × Kawn, Bawādih × Hujūm, Jalāl × Jamāl, Jam' × Farq, Fanā' × Baqā', Firāsa × Ḍalāla, Ghayba × Ḥuḍūr, Ghayz × Ḥilm, Khalwa × Jalwa, Haraka × Sukūn, Khawf × Rajā', Hayba × Uns, Khushū' × Kibr, Ḥuzn × Nash'a, Iṭmi'nān × Qalaq, Qabḍ × Bast, Qaswa × Nafas, Qurb × Bu'd, Maḥw × Ithbāt, Ṣaḥw × Sukr, Satr × Tajallī, Talwīn × Tamkīn, Yaqīn × Shakk, and Dhikr × Ghafla.'² Throughout the study, these concepts are employed at the lexical-semantic level as a descriptive vocabulary for naming spatially evoked affective orientations; no claim is advanced that participants underwent the classical Sufi states (*aḥwāl*) in their technical, ontological sense.

In the second stage, the identified *ḥāl* concept pairs were evaluated by nine experts in the fields of *kalām* (1), Sufism (2), *hadith* (1), *tafsīr* (1), psychology of religion (2), Islamic philosophy (1), and sociology of religion (1) in terms of their suitability to the potential psychological and emotional effects that vernacular and generic architectural experience might evoke. The concept pairs were submitted to each expert's independent evaluation. Although the absence of a representative of architecture in the expert group is a limitation, since the primary aim of the evaluation was to determine the *ḥāl* concept pairs capable of expressing vernacular and generic architectural experience at the lexical level, the group

was structured toward this aim. The nine bipolar *hāl* concept pairs that received the approval of at least five experts were included in the study (Table 1).

Table 1. Expert-Approved *Hāl* Concept Pairs and Their Theological Meanings.

No	<i>Hāl</i> Concept	Meaning	Experts (n = 9)
1	<i>Qurb</i>	Certitude (<i>yaqīn</i>). A state of nearness to God, of feeling close to Him.	9
	<i>Bu'd</i>	Remoteness from God, a state of not feeling love or affection toward Him.	
2	<i>Baṣṭ</i>	Expansion and a state of tranquility. The soul's reception of <i>fayḍ</i> (divine effusion), the heart's reception of <i>ilhām</i> (inspiration).	8
	<i>Qabḍ</i>	Distress, constriction, the soul being sorrowful and anxious. A barren state of the intellect and the heart.	
3	<i>Tajallī</i>	Apparent, the state in which human desires and pleasures vanish, and the manifestations of God are witnessed.	7
	<i>Satr</i>	Veiled, hidden, the state of there being a barrier between the servant and God.	
4	<i>Tamkīn</i>	Settling in a place, establishing oneself, stability.	7
	<i>Talwīn</i>	Shifting from one state to another, being colored, changing, being indecisive, acting spontaneously.	
5	<i>Sukūn</i>	Spiritual ease, stillness.	7
	<i>Ḥaraka</i>	Discomfort, the state of not feeling at ease in one's place.	
6	<i>Dhikr</i>	The heart finding peace through being with God and being delivered from forgetfulness.	7
	<i>Ghafla</i>	Forgetting God, the heart's heedlessness of God.	
7	<i>Khalwa</i>	A state of seclusion in a specific place at designated times; a voluntary condition of solitude chosen apart from creation.	6
	<i>Jalwa</i>	Engagement with creation; a state of solitude amidst the crowd.	
8	<i>Ḥilm</i>	Gentleness, calmness, <i>sakīna</i>	6
	<i>Ghayḥ</i>	Anger, rage, wrath	
9	<i>Jam'</i>	Unity. Contemplation of all things existing through God. A state of perceiving existence as the singular reality in which all distinctions converge and become one.	5
	<i>Farq</i>	Separation. Seeing creation, the state of perceiving creation without perceiving God, the state of discerning multiplicity.	

In the third stage, the mood-assessment instruments POMS (Profile of Mood States) (McNair et al. 1971), BRUMS (Brunel Mood Scale Questionnaire) (Terry et al. 1999), PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Scales) (Watson et al. 1988), UWIST (Mood Adjective Checklist) (Matthews et al. 1990), and BMIS (Brief Mood Introspection Scale) (Mayer and Gaschke 1988) were examined, and Willcox's (1982, pp. 274–76) feeling wheel was determined to be the most suitable model owing to its layered classification structure. Under the guidance of two academics with expertise in English language and literature and in architecture, each *hāl* concept was matched with the third-, second-, and first-degree emotion categories on the Willcox wheel; the nine bipolar adjective pairs constituted the endpoints of the form (Table 2).

Table 2. The Mapping of *Hāl* Concepts onto Psychological Emotional States.

No	<i>Hāl</i> Concepts	Expert Mapping WILLCOX	Tertiary Emotion	Secondary Emotion	Primary Emotion
1	<i>Qurb</i>	Intimate	Trustful	Happy	Positive
2	<i>Bu'd</i>	Distant	Distant	Angry	Negative
3	<i>Ḥilm</i>	Calm	Peaceful	Joy	Positive

Table 2. Cont.

No	<i>Hāl</i> Concepts	Expert Mapping WILLCOX	Tertiary Emotion	Secondary Emotion	Primary Emotion
4	<i>Ghayz</i>	Angry	Angry	Angry	Negative
5	<i>Tamkīn</i>	Satisfied	Satisfied	Joy	Positive
6	<i>Talwīn</i>	Displeased	Disappointed	Sadness	Negative
7	<i>Baṣṭ</i>	Happy	Happy	Happy	Positive
8	<i>Qabḍ</i>	Sad	Sad	Sad	Negative
9	<i>Dhikr</i>	Interested	Interested	Happy	Positive
10	<i>Ghafla</i>	Indifferent	Indifferent	Sad	Negative
11	<i>Tajallī</i>	Free	Joy	Joy	Positive
12	<i>Satr</i>	Pressured	Pressured	Angry	Negative
13	<i>Sukūn</i>	Peaceful	Calm	Happy	Positive
14	<i>Ḥaraka</i>	Worried	Anxious	Fear	Negative
15	<i>Jam'</i>	Fascinated	Fascinated	Joy	Positive
16	<i>Farq</i>	Bored	Bored	Unhappy	Negative
17	<i>Khālwa</i>	Accepted	Accepted	Happy	Positive
18	<i>Jalwa</i>	Excluded	Rejected	Sad	Negative

Note: Each of the nine adjective pairs was placed on a 9-point Likert scale, with '1' representing the negative, '5' the neutral, and '9' the positive pole. The mappings are established at the lexical-semantic level: the English labels represent not the classical Sufi valence of the *hāl* term in question, but the connotative range rendered through Willcox's (1982) feeling wheel.

3.3. The Research Site and Experience Design

To be able to examine comparatively the differentiations of vernacular and generic architectural environments on individuals' emotional and spiritual orientations, vernacular and generic architectural examples located within the same geographical and environmental context were selected as the experience site. As the vernacular architectural experience site, the Hacı Yunuszade Halil Efendi Mansion and its immediate surroundings, located in the Yukarı Çamlıca Neighborhood of the Çamlıhemşin district of Rize province in the Eastern Black Sea Region, were determined; and as the generic architectural experience site, the Onal House and its surroundings, located on İnönü Avenue in the center of the Çamlıhemşin district, were determined. In order to evaluate the typological (vernacular–generic) and spatial (indoor–outdoor) dimensions of architectural experience separately, the participants took part in four different spatial experience conditions: Vernacular Architecture Outdoor Experience (VOE), Vernacular Architecture Indoor Experience (VIE), Generic Architecture Outdoor Experience (GOE), and Generic Architecture Indoor Experience (GIE) (Figure 1). This structure constitutes a 2 (architectural type: vernacular/generic) $\times$ 2 (spatial type: indoor/outdoor) factorial experience design.

3.4. Participants

In homogeneous samples, data saturation can be reached with 12–15 participants (Guest et al. 2006, pp. 59–82). In this study, 24 participants (10 women, 14 men) were selected from among volunteer undergraduate students in the department of architecture, aged 18–25, who had not previously visited Çamlıhemşin. The rationale for preferring architecture students is that this group possesses a perceptual sensitivity toward spatial experience and that their capacity to express their observations verbally is relatively high.

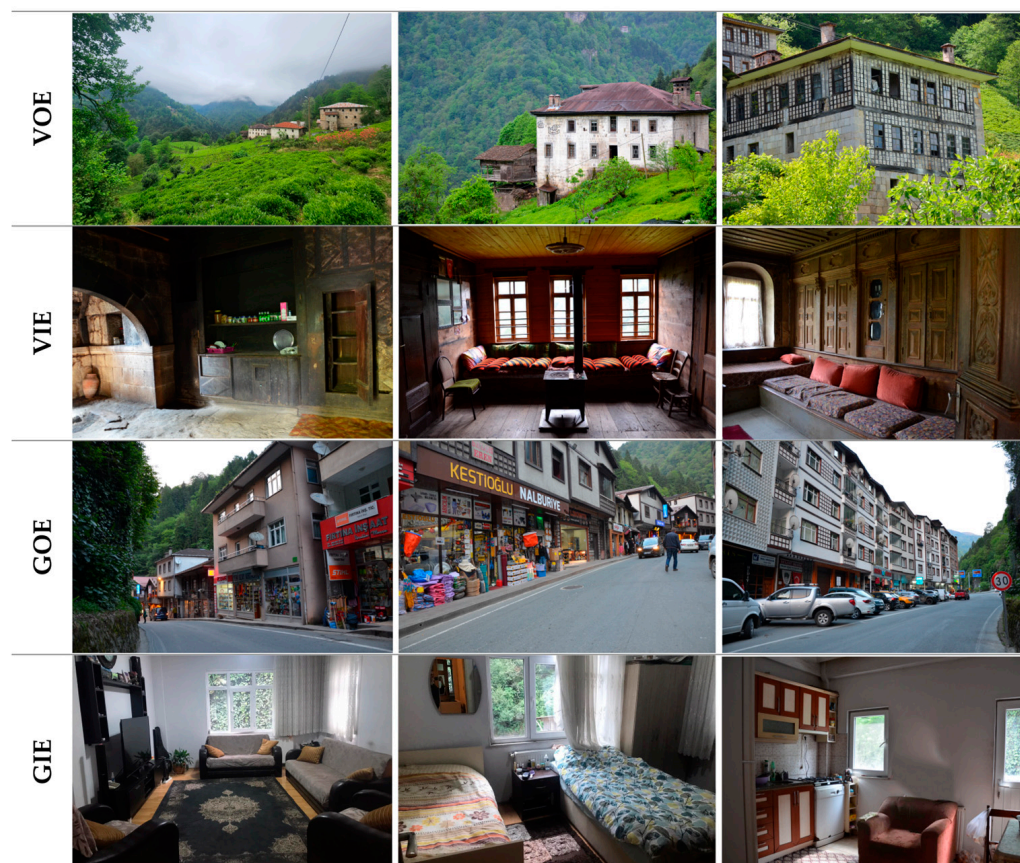


Figure 1. The Experiential Space of Vernacular and Generic Architecture (Author's Archive).

3.5. Data Collection

The study was carried out in four phases with four groups of six. To control for the order effect and to ensure impartiality, balanced counterbalancing was applied. Half of the participants ($n = 12$) began the experience with the generic architecture (GOE → GIE → VOE → VIE), and the other half with the vernacular architectural environment (VOE → VIE → GOE → GIE). Each participant carried out the experience individually; the researcher observed from a distance and made no directive intervention. A free exploration period of 40 min was allowed for each architectural space; across the four sessions in total, the in-situ experience time was approximately 160 min. Following the experience, a two-stage data collection was applied. In the first stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants, and in the second stage the participants were asked to respond to the semantic differential test concerning their experiences. Each participant evaluated the four experience conditions separately, and a total of 96 evaluation forms were generated. Since each of the nine adjective pairs was rated on a 9-point continuum, 36 data points per participant ($4 \text{ conditions} \times 9 \text{ items}$) and 864 data points across the study ($24 \text{ participants} \times 36 \text{ data points}$) were included in the analysis process.

3.6. Data Analysis

At the descriptive level, the mean and standard deviation were reported for each condition and dimension. The semantic differential scores were treated as interval-level data in accordance with the semantic differential tradition (Osgood et al. 1957); a parametric approach was adopted, taking into account the interval-level treatment of the scores and the robustness of repeated-measures ANOVA to moderate departures from the normality assumption at an adequate sample size. In the inferential analysis, a three-way repeated-measures ANOVA was applied to test the main effects of architectural type, spatial type,

and emotion dimension on the affect ratings, as well as their two-way and three-way interactions. For the nine-level emotion factor and the interactions involving this factor, the sphericity assumption was assessed with Mauchly's test, and in the case of violation the Greenhouse–Geisser correction was applied; the architectural and spatial main effects, which have a single numerator degree of freedom, and their interaction did not require a sphericity correction. Significant interactions were analyzed descriptively through the condition means and the profile plot. Effect sizes were reported as partial eta-squared (η^2p) for the ANOVA effects, and, for the paired comparisons concerning the architectural and spatial main effects, as Cohen's d_z with 95% confidence intervals based on the noncentral t distribution (Lakens 2013). The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. The analyses were carried out with the Jamovi software (version 2.3.21).

The semi-structured interview texts were examined through the method of qualitative content analysis with MAXQDA 2022 (Schreier 2012, pp. 1–19; Mayring 2015, pp. 10–14). The coding was carried out in four stages: (1) the identification of meaning units, (2) the generation of initial codes, (3) grouping under the categories of emotional and spiritual orientation, and (4) the finalization of the categories. Frequency distributions were reported through the MAXQDA code frequency outputs. For coding reliability, the codings of six participants (S5, S9, S13, S16, S20, S24), constituting 25% of the sample, were re-coded by an independent researcher using the same category definitions. Full agreement was achieved in 40 of a total of 49 unique text segments; the inter-coder reliability level was calculated as Cohen's kappa $\kappa = 0.79$, indicating strong agreement according to Landis and Koch (1977, p. 165).

4. Results

4.1. Semantic Differential Scores and Three-Way Repeated-Measures ANOVA Results

The semantic differential scores of the 24 participants across the nine emotion dimensions concerning their indoor (VIE, GIE) and outdoor (VOE, GOE) experiences in vernacular and generic architecture are visualized in Figure 2. The graph shows that in the vernacular architectural conditions the scores cluster above the neutral point (5) across all emotion dimensions, whereas in the generic architectural conditions they lie around or below the neutral value.

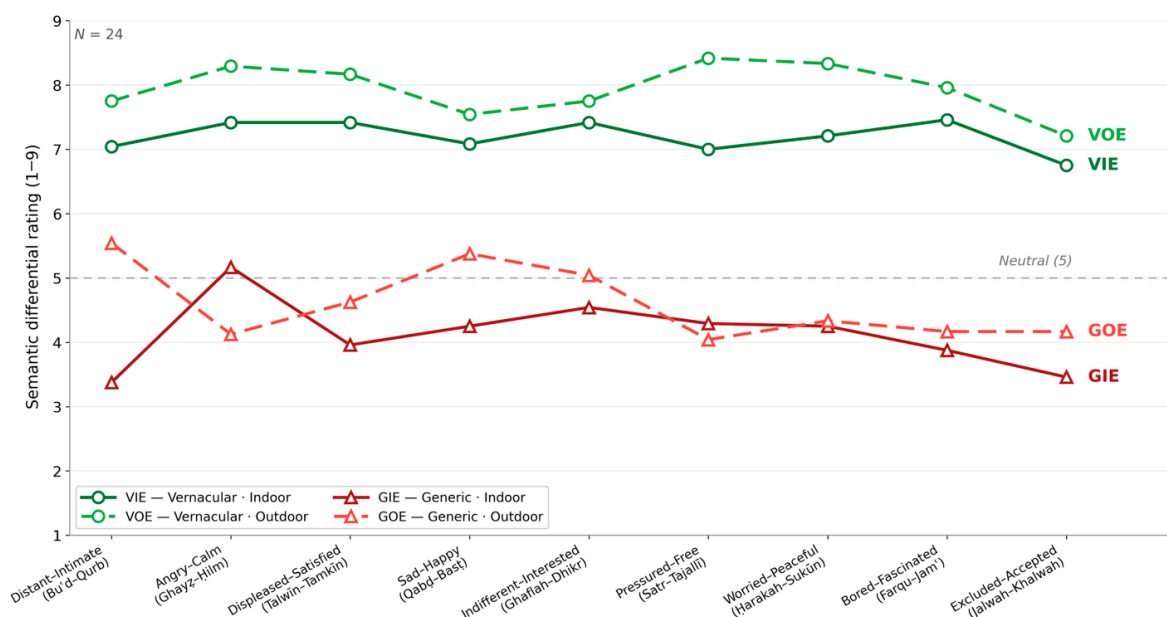


Figure 2. Semantic differential scores of the 24 participants concerning their indoor and outdoor experiences in vernacular and generic architecture (Author's archive).

The descriptive findings show that in the vernacular architectural conditions the scores cluster markedly above the neutral point (5), whereas in the generic architectural conditions they cluster around or below it. The overall mean of the vernacular experience ($M = 7.57$, $SD = 1.06$) is clearly higher than that of the generic experience ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.14$); this pattern is consistent in both the indoor (vernacular $M = 7.20$; generic $M = 4.13$) and outdoor (vernacular $M = 7.94$; generic $M = 4.60$) spatial conditions. The three-way repeated-measures ANOVA revealed that architectural type had a very large and significant main effect on the effect ratings, $F(1, 23) = 93.74$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.80$ (Table 3). The vernacular condition produced more positive orientations than the generic condition across all measured dimensions, and the paired effect size was very large, $d_z = 1.98$, 95% CI [1.27, 2.66] (Table 4).

Table 3. Three-Way Repeated-Measures ANOVA Results for the Affect Ratings by Architectural Type, Spatial Type, and Emotion Dimension.

Effect	<i>F</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i> (GG)	η^2_p
Architecture (A)	93.74	1, 23	<0.001	—	0.80
Space (B)	8.07	1, 23	0.009	—	0.26
Emotion (C)	3.55	8, 184	<0.001	0.004	0.13
A × B	0.39	1, 23	0.537	—	0.02
A × C	2.64	8, 184	0.009	0.018	0.10
B × C	3.26	8, 184	0.002	0.008	0.12
A × B × C	7.99	8, 184	<0.001	<0.001	0.26

Note. p = uncorrected; p (GG) = Greenhouse–Geisser corrected (applied only to effects involving the nine-level emotion factor; epsilon = 0.69 [C], 0.77 [A × C], 0.65 [B × C], 0.76 [A × B × C]). Effects with a single numerator degree of freedom (A, B, A × B) do not require a sphericity correction (“—”). η^2_p = partial eta-squared (criteria: 0.01 small, 0.06 medium, 0.14 large). Values in bold indicate the comparison with the largest effect size.

Table 4. Paired Effect Sizes for the Architectural and Spatial Main Effects.

Comparison	Group 1 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Group 2 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Mean Diff.	d_z [%95 CI]
Vernacular vs. Generic (A)	7.57 (1.06)	4.37 (1.14)	3.20	1.98 [1.27, 2.66]
Outdoor vs. Indoor (B)	6.27 (0.97)	5.66 (0.84)	0.60	0.58 [0.14, 1.01]

Note. M = mean (participant-level condition means); the vernacular–generic comparison is aggregated over space and emotion, and the outdoor–indoor comparison over architecture and emotion. d_z = standardized mean difference in the paired scores; CI = confidence interval. Criteria: 0.2 small, 0.5 medium, 0.8 large. Values in bold indicate the comparison with the largest effect size.

The effect of spatial type is significant but smaller in magnitude, $F(1, 23) = 8.07$, $p = 0.009$, $\eta^2_p = 0.26$; outdoor experiences ($M = 6.27$) produced somewhat higher scores than indoor experiences ($M = 5.66$) ($d_z = 0.58$). The main effect of the emotion dimension is also significant, $F(8, 184) = 3.55$, $p < 0.001$ (Greenhouse–Geisser corrected $p = 0.004$), $\eta^2_p = 0.13$. The architecture × space interaction was not found to be significant, $F(1, 23) = 0.39$, $p = 0.537$; this indicates that the difference between vernacular and generic is in a similar direction indoors and outdoors. By contrast, the architecture × emotion interaction, $F(8, 184) = 2.64$, $p = 0.009$ (GG $p = 0.018$), $\eta^2_p = 0.10$; the space × emotion interaction, $F(8, 184) = 3.26$, $p = 0.002$ (GG $p = 0.008$), $\eta^2_p = 0.12$; and, in particular, the architecture × space × emotion three-way interaction were found to be significant, $F(8, 184) = 7.99$, $p < 0.001$ (GG $p < 0.001$), $\eta^2_p = 0.26$. The three-way interaction indicates that the magnitude of the vernacular–generic difference varies according to both the emotion dimension and the spatial type: this difference reached its widest extent on the pressured–free dimension outdoors ($\Delta = 4.37$), whereas the narrowest differences were observed at approximately $\Delta = 2.2$ (e.g., sad–happy outdoors).

4.2. The Thematic Distribution of the Affective Responses

The qualitative content analysis of the semi-structured interview data carried out through MAXQDA 2022 (Schreier 2012; Mayring 2015) shows that the participants associated their vernacular and generic architectural experiences with differing emotional and spiritual orientations. In the vernacular architectural experience, a total of 145 references were coded, and no negatively oriented theme emerged. All of the coded references are distributed across positively oriented emotional and spiritual categories: happy (31%, $f = 45$), satisfied (20%, $f = 29$), spiritual feeling (17%, $f = 25$), longing (11%, $f = 16$), and peaceful (10%, $f = 15$) were the most frequently coded themes, constituting 90% of the total references. Among the lower-frequency themes are calm and free (each 3%, $f = 4$), excitement and interested (each 2%, $f = 3$), and intimate (1%, $f = 1$). In the generic architectural experience, a total of 83 references were coded, and positively oriented themes remained at only 4% (trust 2%, $f = 2$; happy 1%, $f = 1$). Of the coded references, 96% are concentrated in negative or neutral categories: spiritual indifference (28%, $f = 23$), displeased (27%, $f = 22$), and neutral (20%, $f = 17$) were the most frequently coded themes, constituting 75% of the total references. Among the lower-frequency negative themes are worried and bored (each 7%, $f = 6$), mixed feelings (2%, $f = 2$), and excluded, pressured, and uneasy (each 1%, $f = 1$) (Table 5).

Table 5. The Thematic Distribution of the Affective Responses to the Vernacular and Generic Architectural Experience.

Vernacular Architecture				Generic Architecture			
Theme	%	Ref. (f)	Associated <i>Hāl</i> Concept	Theme	%	Ref. (f)	Associated <i>Hāl</i> Concept
Happy	31%	45	<i>Bas̄</i>	Spiritual Indifference	28%	23	<i>Ghafla</i>
Satisfied	20%	29	<i>Tamkīn</i>	Displeased	27%	22	<i>Talwīn</i>
Spiritual Feeling	17%	25	<i>Tajallī</i>	Neutral	20%	17	<i>Ghafla</i>
Longing	11%	16	<i>Dhikr/Qurb</i>	Worried	7%	6	<i>Haraka</i>
Peaceful	10%	15	<i>Sukūn</i>	Bored	7%	6	<i>Farq</i>
Calm	3%	4	<i>Hilm</i>	Mixed Feelings	2%	2	<i>Talwīn</i>
Free	3%	4	<i>Tajallī</i>	Trust	2%	2	<i>Tamkīn</i>
Excitement	2%	3	<i>Bas̄</i>	Happy	1%	1	<i>Bas̄</i>
Interested	2%	3	<i>Dhikr</i>	Feeling Energetic	1%	1	<i>Haraka</i>
Intimate	1%	1	<i>Qurb</i>	Excluded	1%	1	<i>Jalwa</i>
				Pressured	1%	1	<i>Satr</i>
				Uneasy	1%	1	<i>Haraka</i>
Total	100%	145		Total	98%	83	

Note: The frequencies (f) indicate the number of coded references, not the number of participants; more than one category may be coded from a single participant's interview text (Schreier 2012). The percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number; owing to rounding, the total may not equal 100%.

4.3. Selected Participant Statements

Table 6 presents participant statements selected to concretize the thematic distribution. In the vernacular architectural experience, the participants' statements took shape around themes such as existence, belonging, peace, the relationship with nature, and spiritual feeling. In the generic architectural experience, by contrast, the participants predominantly reported ordinariness, constriction, a lack of spiritual orientation, and numbness (Table 6).

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings converge on a consistent pattern in which vernacular and generic architectural experiences elicit markedly divergent emotional and spiritual orientations; the following section interprets this pattern through the lexical horizon of the Sufi *hāl* concepts.

Table 6. Examples of Quotations from Selected Participants (n = 8/24).

No	Vernacular Architecture	Generic Architecture
S3	"I felt something about my own existence. We came from the earth, and it felt as if there were feelings connected to that place we came from. A bright feeling."	"Frankly, I felt a bit stifled, a bit cold and a bit closed off."
S5	"When I first saw it, I thought it was like a place in paradise. When I saw the stone houses standing there amidst the orange and pink flowers and tea gardens, a sense of peace washed over me. It was a place that reminded you of yourself. It made you realise how much you had neglected yourself. Because time slows down here. It feels as if there is more time to think, to feel ourselves. I questioned life, where I belonged, my purpose. It created such a spiritual feeling."	"It merely meets our housing needs. It does not nourish us spiritually."
S7	"I didn't think about God. I didn't feel anything about Him. Just... It was as if I belonged there. It was as if that place was a part of me, as if I knew it."	"There was a feeling of crampedness, there was a lot of stuff, I just thought about how they lived. I felt nothing."
S8	"In terms of approaching God in relation to your own existence, you become a bit more knowledgeable and a bit closer to religion. Perhaps because I've become a bit more introverted... So yes, being immersed in nature and further removed from artificial elements has awakened a different spiritual feeling."	"I can't relax in crowded places. I need to be somewhere quieter for my spirituality and emotions to intensify."
S9	"In nature, we only see the good, we take the good. Bees mind their own business. Trees stand there beautifully. Dogs are on their own. Everyone has their own order, and you inevitably become good there too."	"There is a void within a person, a sadness at not being able to make time for oneself. We cannot hear our inner voice amidst all these other voices."
S13	"It made me feel something about my existence. I even wrote a poem. I usually do that when I feel peaceful. I wanted to leave myself a beautiful memory of experiencing that place."	"It's very ordinary. It doesn't evoke any feelings; it feels like any other place."
S20	"Being there, I felt something about my own existence. That singularity, that loneliness, made me feel something spiritual. I could call it an inner communication with nature and existence. I was filled with a sense of gratitude. There was a spiritual atmosphere. And there, you establish a connection with God. That is, an experience, a communication, an exchange takes place between God's existence and your own existence... I can't quite put it into words, but a relationship is formed."	"It was an ordinary feeling because we could call it familiarity. Familiarity, that is, acceptance, really. Apart from that, there was a sense of unease, of course."
S22	"I felt as if I were in an environment where I had no worries. It felt like a place I had known for a long time."	"The generic architecture reminded me just how stifling a place I live in."

5. Discussion

In the study, the vernacular architectural experience produced a significantly stronger and more holistic positive affect and spiritual orientation in the participants than the generic architectural experience. Although the indoor or outdoor character of the space made a significant contribution, this contribution remained secondary to the distinction of architectural type; the pattern takes shape along the axis of the contrast between vernacular and generic. Although marked affective differentiations between ordinary functional structures and architectural examples that support contemplation have been reported before (Bermudez et al. 2017, pp. 133–34), it has not been shown that this effect can be observed systematically in the everyday vernacular residential environment as well, without requiring religious practice or controlled laboratory conditions. Given that modern architecture, under the influence of consumer culture and globalization, focuses more on formal aesthetics while progressively losing spiritual meaning (El Hussein and El Hussein 2012, pp. 718–19), and that generic architecture often neglects the psychological and spiritual dimensions of architecture (Fazeli and Negarestan 2023, pp. 133–34), the present findings coincide with these observations. Moreover, it is also shown that this differentiation can be interpreted within a theological framework through Sufi *ḥāl* concepts: the space-derived affective patterns coincide consistently with the lexical contents of the *ḥāl*

domains extending from *tajallī* to *ghafla* and reveal at the empirical level that architectural experience carries a dimension of spiritual meaning.

The interaction between architectural space and the user exhibits a three-layered structure, namely sensory, experiential, and associative, and the built environment directly affects human psychology (Raghani et al. 2022, p. 250). It has been observed under controlled conditions that architectural spaces supporting contemplation generate meditation-like phenomenological states (Bermudez et al. 2017, pp. 133–34), and it has been documented that multisensory design elements in church spaces lay the ground for spiritual awareness (Daelemans 2020, pp. 13–15); however, both studies were carried out in the context of worship. The present study surpasses this limitation. The vernacular architectural experience produced, through both its qualitative and quantitative data, a consistent positive effect and spiritual orientation in the participants. This finding, also supported by the higher spiritual satisfaction reported by users in vernacular dwellings in India (Sadhu et al. 2025, pp. 457–60), shows that the effect in question can be produced in the everyday vernacular environment as well, independently of religious function. Furthermore, the study's findings coincide with Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan 1995, pp. 179–80) and with the meta-analytic findings showing that natural environments produce stronger restorative effects than urban environments (Menardo et al. 2021; Hartig et al. 1991, p. 22) and are also supported by evidence that deeper spiritual experiences are had in rural spaces (Jepson and Sharpley 2015, pp. 1172–75) this restorative contribution of the natural environment, the disentangling of the source of the observed difference gains importance. The study's comparative design is decisive in interpreting this differentiation. Since both spatial examples were selected within the same geographical and climatic context, the observed difference cannot be attributed solely to environmental factors such as climate, landscape, or nature; the shared natural geography largely holds these factors constant. The remaining explanatory variable is the architectural tradition. The more nature-integrated position of the vernacular structure, in turn, is not an independent confounding variable but a defining characteristic of the vernacular tradition. For this reason, integration with nature is not a factor limiting the finding but a constitutive dimension of the phenomenon under examination: the spiritual orientation of the vernacular experience cannot be separated from the togetherness of architectural form and natural context.

Spaces that evoke contemplation produce brain activation patterns associated with meditation-like states of consciousness (Bermudez et al. 2017, pp. 124–25). Architectural design elements, too, strengthen this contemplative experience (Raghani et al. 2022, p. 251). As Pallasmaa (2021, pp. 79–80) emphasizes, the fundamental task of architecture is to re-establish the existential relationship between the human being and the world and to strengthen the individual's experience of belonging to the world; in the relationship that the human body establishes with architectural space, not only the senses but the human being's entire existential perception is affected and undergoes transformation. In the present study, this ground has been named not with a purely phenomenological concept but with the term *hāl* of the Sufi tradition. In this context, the concepts of *hilm-ghayz*, *tajallī-satr*, and *sukūn-haraka* that stand out in the vernacular architectural experience can, in their lexical-semantic meanings, be used as functional hermeneutic instruments for naming the positive orientations that this experience evokes. On the other hand, in generic architecture, the concepts of *qurb-bu'd* and *khalwa-jalwa* can likewise serve, at the same lexical-semantic level, as interpretive resources for naming the negative orientations that this experience produces, namely the patterns of spiritual blindness and inner disquiet. These findings coincide with findings showing that urbanization, by transforming the meaning of symbolic spaces, deepens spiritual rupture (Wibisono and Huringiin 2026, p. 58).

In the vernacular architectural experience, all the 145 coded references are concentrated in positively oriented categories; no negatively oriented theme was coded. The happy and excited themes corresponding to the *basī* domain constitute 33% of the references, while the satisfied theme in the *tamkīn* domain ranks second at 20%. The spiritual feeling and free themes corresponding to the *tajallī* domain constitute 20%; the longing, interested, and intimate themes corresponding to the *dhikr* and *qurb* domains constitute 14% in total; the peaceful theme in the *sukūn* domain constitutes 10%; and the calm theme in the *hilm* domain constitutes 3%. The most striking finding from a theological standpoint is that the spiritual feeling theme ranks third at 17%: this theme, beyond general emotional responses, points directly to existential awareness and the experience of divine manifestation (*tajallī*) and shows that the vernacular architectural experience is lived not merely as an aesthetic experience but as one containing spiritual depth. This pattern is understandable when one considers that spirituality mediates the effect of interaction with nature on psychological well-being (Kamitsis and Francis 2013, p. 140), that certain spaces nourish inner awareness and the production of meaning (Day 2002, pp. 271–73), and that people often undergo the experience of sacredness through particular spaces (Counted 2018, p. 170). A striking difference emerges when compared with the findings that biophilic design in religious spaces strengthens spiritual awareness (Durukan et al. 2025, p. 2910): in the present study there is no religious practice whatsoever; this is a distinctive finding pointing to the possibility that spiritual feeling can be nourished by architectural quality independently of a religious context. The proposition that, in order for the built environment to support spiritual experience, it must integrate the dimensions of humanity, sensoriality, and sustainability (Birch and Sinclair 2013, p. 85), and that peace with the earth requires peace with the heavens (Nasr 1997, p. 14), reveals that the harmony that vernacular architecture establishes with nature carries not only an ecological but also a theological meaning.

The thematic profile of the generic architectural experience exhibits a symmetrical contrast with the vernacular experience. Of the 83 coded references, 48% are concentrated in the categories corresponding to the *ghafla* domain: the spiritual indifference (28%) and neutral (20%) themes constitute the dominant appearance of this domain. The displeased and mixed feeling's themes corresponding to the *talwīn* domain constitute 29% of the references; the worried, uneasy, and feeling energetic themes corresponding to the *haraka* domain constitute 9%; and the bored theme in the *farq* domain constitutes 7%. By contrast, positively oriented themes remain at only 5%. This distribution shows that the two architectural conditions produce diametrically opposed theological orientations in the individual. The observation that modern human beings have lost the sanctity of nature (Nasr 1997, p. 19), and the determination that at the root of the deterioration of human–nature harmony lies the disruption of communication with God (Nasr 1997, p. 20), provide a strong theological background for the predominance of *ghafla*. When one considers that the commodification of architecture systematically weakens spiritual dimensions (Tjahjono 2025, p. 152) and that urbanization transforms the cultural meanings of symbolic spaces (Wibisono and Huringiin 2026, p. 58), the predominance of *ghafla* in the generic architectural experience is not merely an individual response but the affective-level reflection of a structural process. Pallasmaa (2021, pp. 79–80) argues that generic architecture, by weakening multisensory experience, erodes the existential bond; and Relph's (1976) concept of 'placelessness' defines the situation in which the de-identified built environment leaves the individual unable to produce meaning from space. The predominance of the spiritual indifference and neutral themes in the generic architectural experience can be regarded as the concrete correlate of these two conceptual frameworks.

The participant statements concretize these patterns at the level of individual meaning. The first cluster that stands out in the vernacular experience is existential awareness

and spiritual manifestation: while S20 expresses that a relationship formed between God's existence and his own existence, S3 conveys an illuminating sense of existence, and S13 a desire to leave that experience to himself as a memory. Together with the studies indicating that the spiritual bonds individuals establish with spaces develop in affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions (Counted et al. 2024, p. 68), and that people often undergo the experience of sacredness through spaces (Counted 2018, p. 170), this study renders visible the relationship between architecture and theology. In the belonging and dwelling cluster, S7 conveys that he felt the space to be a part of himself, and S22 that he experienced a carefree familiarity; both statements coincide with the *tamkīn* and *sukūn* domains and are in harmony with the framework according to which spiritual experience requires the integration of humanity, sensoriality, and sustainability (Birch and Sinclair 2013, p. 85). In the cluster of spiritual opening through integration with nature, the statements of S5, S8, and S9 are situated in the *sukūn*, *dhikr*, *qurb*, and *jam'* domains; S9's description of the order in nature coincides with the observation concerning healing silence (Day 2002, p. 210). Nasr's (1997, pp. 40–41) definition of vernacular architecture as a ground where nature and dwelling meet unites these three clusters under a single theological proposition: vernacular space is a ground of experience on which the individual can re-establish his relationship both with nature and with the divine.

By contrast, the participant statements concerning the generic architectural experience confirm the negatively oriented thematic profile at the individual level. While the statements of spiritual non-nourishment and desensitization by S5 and S13 provide the experiential correlate of Nasr's (1997, p. 17) determination that artificial environments produce existential deficiency, the experiences of closure and constriction by S3 and S22 coincide with Nasr's (1997, p. 4) observation concerning dwelling spaces remote from the spirit. S9's inability to hear the inner voice is the concrete individual-level correlate of *farq*, and S8's experience of being unable to achieve spiritual concentration amid the crowd that of *jalwa*. The whole of these participant statements shows that the theological contrast between vernacular and generic architecture is not an abstract interpretation but a lived reality.

6. Conclusions

In this study, it has been confirmed consistently through both quantitative and qualitative data that vernacular architectural space positively shapes the individual's spiritual awareness and that, through nature, material, and cultural memory, it can reunite the individual with himself, with the environment, and with God. This approach also reveals that there is a certain level of resemblance between architectural experience and the Sufi accounts of the *ḥāl*. For both domains render visible, in different contexts, the temporary, intense, and transformative emotional states that arise in the subject's inner world; the aesthetic, rhythmic, and perceptual qualities of space produce a sensory-spiritual resonance reminiscent of the conceptions of the *ḥāl* in Sufi experience. In this respect, architectural experience can be read, without establishing a direct identity with the descriptions of the *ḥāl* in the Sufi literature, within an analogical proximity of meaning and experience to them.

The fact that the pressured-free dimension produced the widest differentiation in the vernacular outdoor space indicates that the *tajallī-satr* tension crystallizes most sharply in open space. Evans and McCoy (1998, p. 91), in speaking of the five dimensions that determine the healing quality of architectural space, associate the restoration dimension with spatial conditions that offer direct contact with nature, silence, and the possibility of withdrawal. This definition provides a spatial ground that explains the predominance of the *sukūn* and *baṣṭ* orientations observed in the vernacular outdoor space. Norberg-Schulz's (1980, pp. 5–11) phenomenological observation that dwelling in a true sense in a place is

closely related to finding stillness (*sukūn*) in that place, together with Wehr and Cowan's (1979, p. 418) etymological finding revealing that the Arabic root 's-k-n' carries both the concepts of dwelling (*maskan*) and inner peace (*sukūn*), places this restorative effect on a foundation that is not only psychological but also theological.

The fact that the spiritual indifference theme settles into the most dominant code position in the generic architectural experience can be read as the concrete individual-experience-level correlate of Nasr's (1997, pp. 17–19) determination that artificial environments produce existential deficiency and that modern human beings have lost their bond with the sanctity of nature. This pattern supports at the empirical level Fazeli and Negarestan's (2023, pp. 133–34) emphasis that generic architecture often neglects the psychological and spiritual dimensions and can at the same time be regarded as an experiential confirmation of Tjahjono's (2025, p. 152) finding that modern urbanization systematically erodes the microcosmic character of the dwelling. In this framework, the predominance of *ghafla* in the generic architectural experience is read, beyond an individual affective response, as the affective-level manifestation of the eroding effect that the mode of architectural production has on the individual's spiritual orientation.

Furthermore, this study has shown, at the empirical level, that architectural space can either nourish or dull spiritual awareness, and that this effect can be observed systematically in the everyday vernacular residential environment as well, independently of a religious context. At the theological level, it has been demonstrated that Sufi *ḥāl* concepts can be used not merely as a vocabulary belonging to the Sufi literature but as a functional hermeneutic instrument in the interpretation of contemporary architectural experience. These two findings together serve to strengthen the interdisciplinary dialogue between architecture and Islamic thought and offer a distinctive conceptual ground for the intersection of religion and space studies.

In this study, vernacular and generic architecture were represented by a limited number of examples within a single geographical context; the homogeneous sample composed of undergraduate architecture students restricts generalizability. The fact that the participants' individual religious and spiritual backgrounds were not systematically assessed also entails the assumption that the *ḥāl* interpretation has equal validity for all participants. Future research could extend these findings through multi-site comparative designs in different geographies, mixed samples, and controlled designs testing the moderating effect of individual religious background.

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Notes

- ¹ Ecological *dhikr* is the conscious participation of the human being in the remembrance that all beings created by God perform at every moment. This remembrance is at the same time a universal one; the person who realizes such a remembrance abides in perpetual remembrance (*dhikr dā'im*). Having become one and integrated with existence, he participates in this remembrance that continues moment by moment. Human beings (Qur'ān, 32:15), the angels (Qur'ān, 7:206; 21:20), and all created beings other than the human being, namely the mountains and the birds (Qur'ān, 24:41; 34:10; 38:18; 38:19), the thunder (Qur'ān, 13:13), and the seven heavens and all who are in them (Qur'ān, 17:44; 62:1), remember God unceasingly.
- ² The meanings of the twenty-four binary opposing *hāl* concepts are as follows. *Bawn*: withdrawing from creation (*al-khalq*) to be with God × *Kawn*: turning away from God to be with creation (*al-khalq*). *Bawādih*: showing neither positive nor negative emotion, neutral × *Hujūm*: the dominance of either a positive or a negative emotion. *Jalāl*: subjugation, coercion, wrath × *Jamāl*: beauty, comeliness (*husn*), calmness, tranquility. *Jam'*: unity, the contemplation of all things as existing through God, a state of perceiving existence as the singular reality in which all distinctions converge and become one × *Farq*: separation, seeing creation (*al-khalq*), the state of perceiving creation without perceiving God, the state of discerning multiplicity. *Fanā'*: a condition wherein all base traits and behaviours depart from the servant and cease to exist × *Baqā'*: the coming and continuation of good traits and behaviours in the human being. *Firāsa*: to look, to gaze, to perceive and feel in ways others cannot through the power of intuition, a state of sensitivity and responsiveness × *Dalāla*: the state of adopting principles contrary to reason, the senses, and truth, a condition of being lost. *Ghayba*: losing oneself without awareness of the surroundings or the self, a state of heedlessness × *Hudūr*: the awareness of being in the presence of God. *Ghayz*: anger, rage, wrath × *Hilm*: gentleness, calmness, serenity (*sakīna*). *Khalwa*: a state of seclusion in a specific place at designated times, a voluntary condition of solitude chosen apart from creation × *Jalwa*: engagement with creation, a state of solitude amidst the crowd. *Haraka*: discomfort, the state of not feeling at ease in one's place × *Sukūn*: spiritual ease, stillness. *Khawf*: to fear, to feel apprehension, to refrain, a state of anxiety and insecurity × *Rajā'*: hope, not losing hope in God. *Hayba*: reverential fear (*khayba*) × *Uns*: intimacy (*ulfa*), cordiality, warmth. *Khushū'*: a state of inner calm and humility reflected outward through one's movements, a respectful stillness × *Kibr*: seeing oneself as superior, engaging in behaviours that belittle others. *Huzn*: sorrow, grief, unhappiness × *Nash'a*: happiness, joy. *İtmi'nān*: being at peace, tranquility of the heart × *Qalaq*: constriction of the heart (*qabḍ al-qalb*), distress. *Qabḍ*: distress, constriction, the soul being sorrowful and anxious, a barren state of the intellect and the heart, the manifestations of divine majesty (*tajalliyyāt al-jalāl*) × *Bast*: expansion and a state of tranquility, the soul's reception of *ḥayr* (divine effusion), the heart's reception of *ilhām* (inspiration), the manifestations of divine beauty (*tajalliyyāt al-jamāl*). *Qaswa*: inner constriction × *Nafas*: relief, the subtle state that enters the human heart, the state of the heart's expansion. *Qurb*: certitude (*yaqīn*), a state of nearness to God, of feeling close to Him × *Bu'd*: remoteness from God, a state of not feeling love or affection toward Him. *Maḥw*: abandoning evil, eliminating, erasing, removing × *Ithbāt*: inclining toward good, revealing it, bringing it into existence, and sustaining it. *Ṣaḥw*: the state of sobriety, returning to consciousness and awareness × *Sukr*: spiritual intoxication, the state of ecstasy. *Satr*: veiled, hidden, the state of there being a barrier between the servant and God × *Tajallī*: apparent, the state in which human desires and pleasures vanish and the manifestations of God are witnessed. *Talwīn*: shifting from one state to another, being coloured, changing, being indecisive, acting spontaneously × *Tamkīn*: settling in a place, establishing oneself, stability. *Yaqīn*: the settling of immutable knowledge in the heart, the realization that there is no true agent (*fā'il*) other than God × *Shakk*: speculation and doubt, a state in which the heart remains in hesitation and indecision. *Dhikr*: the heart finding peace through being with God and being delivered from forgetfulness × *Ghafla*: forgetting God, the heart's heedlessness of God.

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