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Assessment of urban cultural conservation in the old city of Basra

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Abstract

This research aims to evaluate urban cultural conservation in the Old City of Basra, combining the tangible and intangible dimensions of the conservation process, with a focus on the role of memory and nostalgia in supporting the continuity of spatial identity. The Old City of Basra was chosen due to its historical, architectural, and social value. It houses prominent landmarks such as the Ashar River, the Two Minarets Mosque, and the Chaldean Church of Mar Thoma, in addition to the traditional urban fabric of Alaziqa and Shanashel, which constitute essential elements in evoking collective memories and strengthening spatial belonging. The study adopted a descriptive-analytical approach, including the development of a questionnaire directed at a deterministic sample of (85) residents and visitors from the area, with the aim of measuring their perceptions and attitudes toward the reality of urban cultural conservation and their level of attachment to historical landmarks. The results of the statistical analysis, using SPSS and Cronbach's alpha coefficient, showed that the measurement tool has high reliability, and that there is a close relationship between the continuity of historical monuments and the sustainability of spatial identity, as memory and nostalgia play a pivotal role in enhancing the value of monuments and in stimulating community participation in cultural urban conservation processes in the old city of Basra. The importance of this research stems from addressing a knowledge gap related to the lack of systematic integration of the immaterial dimension (memory and nostalgia) within cultural urban conservation assessment methodologies. This opens up prospects for adopting more comprehensive policies and practices that balance the material and moral dimensions of the city. The research concluded with a set of recommendations aimed at enhancing the symbolic and functional presence of historical monuments and linking them to daily activities and urban corridors, thus ensuring the sustainability of the spatial identity of the old city of Basra.

Keywords: Urban cultural conservation, memory, nostalgia, spatial identity, old Basra

1. Introduction

The Old City of Basra is one of the most important historic urban centers in Iraq, owing to its rich architectural and cultural heritage. Its prime location on the Ashar River, its distinctive architectural structure of Shanashel and Alaziqa, along with prominent landmarks such as the Two Minarets Mosque and the Chaldean Mar Thoma Church, form an integrated urban fabric that transcends the physical dimension to symbolic and social dimensions rooted in the collective memory of its residents. Old Basra is not merely a traditional urban complex; it is a living repository of memories, stories, and events that have shaped the identity of the place over generations. Collective memory, with its nostalgia for the past, contributes to shaping spatial belonging and supports the continuity of the heritage values that distinguish the city. However, weak urban conservation policies and declining community attachment to historical monuments have led to the erosion of this tangible and intangible heritage, threatening the urban identity of Old Basra.

A knowledge gap exists regarding the weak integration of the intangible dimension—memory and nostalgia—into assessment tools for urban cultural conservation. Ignoring this dimension deprives conservation policies of a fundamental element that links the past and the present. Hence, the importance of this research in assessing cultural urban conservation in the old city of Basra emerges from a perspective that integrates the tangible and intangible dimensions. It employs field and statistical measurement tools to monitor the extent of residents' and visitors' attachment to heritage sites and how this attachment is reflected in the sustainability of the city's spatial identity.

1.1 Literature review

1.1.1 Issues of Urban Conservation and Collective Memory. The Case of the Asia Minor Post-refugee Urban Neighbourhood Germanika at Nikea, Piraeus, Greece (Tousi *et al.*, 2023).

This research addresses the topic of urban conservation based on collective memory, focusing on the refugee neighborhood in Nikia, Piraeus, through a field study of the urban fabric and buildings. It demonstrates that the true value of a place is not limited to its architectural aspect, but extends to the social and cultural connotations it carries, linked to the residents' identity. The study emphasizes the need to preserve these neighborhoods in a way that enhances the continuity of spatial connections and memories.

1.1.2 Urban Heritage And Conservation In The Historic Centre Of Baghdad (Al-Saffar, 2017).

This research examines methods for preserving the urban fabric of Baghdad's historic center, focusing on combining physical and moral conservation, engaging the local community to ensure the sustainability of spatial identity, and addressing the challenges facing the integration of conservation with urban development.

1.1.3 Impact of Intangible Heritage on the Environment of Traditional Bazaars in Baghdad: AlRusafa Historical Core (AlBayati.,2023)

This thesis also explored the role of intangible heritage in traditional markets, highlighting the importance of social practices, traditional crafts, and daily activities in preserving the spirit of the place, emphasizing that protecting the traditional market requires attention to both buildings and activities, given their direct impact on the continuity of collective memory.

1.1.4 Current Trends in Urban Heritage Conservation: Medieval Historic Arab City Centers (Shehata, 2022).

This research explores recent trends in urban conservation, demonstrating a shift from focusing solely on physical elements to adopting a comprehensive approach that integrates social and cultural aspects, balances conservation and urban renewal, takes into account the uniqueness of each site, and engages the local community in shaping its future vision.

Although these studies have varied in their approach to urban conservation issues, most have focused on the material aspects or general contexts of conservation. The systematic link between collective memory and nostalgia as tools for assessing cultural urban conservation, particularly in the context of the old city of Basra and its distinctive urban fabric, remains an area in need of further research, which this research seeks to address.

1.2 Research question, problem and Objective

1.2.1 Research Problem: Despite the richness of the ancient city of Basra in its architectural and cultural heritage, it faces a decline in urban conservation, as attention is focused on the material aspect of heritage buildings, while neglecting the intangible dimension represented by collective memory and nostalgia for the past, which threatens spatial identity and weakens the residents' connection to their environment.

1.2.2 Research Objective

This research aims to develop a comprehensive framework for measuring the level of urban cultural conservation in the

old city of Basra, by integrating physical indicators related to buildings and urban structure with non-material indicators represented by collective memory and social activities. The research also seeks to clarify the impact of this integration in strengthening spatial identity and ensuring its sustainability.

The research hypothesizes

The research assumes that strengthening the residents' connection to the urban environment by integrating indicators of collective memory and nostalgia into the process of evaluating urban cultural conservation contributes to raising the level of effectiveness of conservation efforts, which leads to strengthening the spatial identity in the old city of Basra.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Urban conservation

Regardless of its age, heritage is an essential part of local culture, a crucial basis for cultural tourism, an important factor for community prosperity (Badawy & Shehata, 2018) ^[7], and an integral part of the collective memory of local communities. Any development project for such urban areas must carefully consider the symbolism of the urban fabric and the surrounding buildings. The definition of heritage, along with the scope of the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites, has evolved since the Venice Charter of 1964. There has been a shift among international organizations and conservation authorities to view heritage as urban areas rather than simply as a single monument. This shift has been accompanied by increasing efforts to involve local communities in the maintenance of urban heritage conservation plans (Al-Saffar, 2017) ^[5]. At the same time, conservation initiatives seek to promote strategies that not only ensure the continued contribution of heritage to the present and future by managing change in a thoughtful and intelligent manner that responds to the historical environment and collective needs, but also include the conservation of essential elements of social environments. "Preserving historic buildings and places 2.contributes to greater creativity and economic development, as well as improving the quality of life and social well-being of various segments of society. However, a key issue in heritage conservation remains how it is used and its vital relationship to culture and identity" (Yung & Chan, 2012). ^[33]

2.2 Nostalgia

Nostalgia is defined as: "an emotional longing or remorseful memory of a past event"¹. The term nostalgia did not exist in ancient times, but first appeared with the Swiss physician Johannes Höffler (1688/1934) to refer to the negative psychological and physical symptoms that appeared in Swiss mercenaries who worked in foreign countries (Natali, 2004) ^[20]. Traditionally, nostalgia has been viewed as an organic disease and a mental disorder. However, we argue that nostalgia is a positive, socially relevant emotion that serves key psychological functions (Omar, 2019) ^[22]. According to Susan Stewart, nostalgia is a "social illness" and a "repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of each repetition." (Stewart, 1993) ^[28]. Skoda describes nostalgia as a word used to capture a rose-tinted view of the past, a past

¹ Oxford English Dictionary

whose distortions we often silently acknowledge but which remains deeply embedded within us. Nostalgia is not memory in the literal sense. In some ways, it is mourning the passing of time and regretting that things will never be the same again (Skoda, 2023) ^[27]. One of the most important causes of nostalgia is the poverty of the present. Temporal comparison suggests that nostalgia must be driven by a perceived deprivation of the old self. Nostalgia involves a judgment that the past was better. The intended target of nostalgia is necessarily a past perceived as better than the present. This supports the idea that nostalgia essentially involves a negative evaluation of the present and a more positive evaluation of the past. Robert C. Roberts claims that in nostalgia, "there is an unfavorable comparison that makes the present painful." (Roberts., 2003) ^[23]. Sometimes nostalgia doesn't necessarily entail a negative evaluation of the present or a positive evaluation of the past. Nostalgia can simply be a vivid recollection of past memories, accompanied by complex emotions that can be positive, negative, or a mixture of both a term coined Proustian nostalgia. Thus, it can be perfectly accurate to call one's longing for the superior past 'nostalgia', but it is inaccurate to call nostalgia 'longing for the superior past' (Howard., 2012) ^[12].

As Svetlana Boym has emphatically stated, nostalgia is "a historical emotion It is concomitant with modernity itself." (Boym., 2001) ^[34]

As Sweeney "nostalgia" has its roots in two Greek words (Sweeney, 2020):

- **Nostos:** meaning return to the homeland
- **Algos:** meaning pain or suffering.

Nostalgia also enhances a sense of meaning in life, as

longing for the past acts as a buffer against challenges to meaning. Reliving nostalgic experiences even improves psychological well-being and reduces stress in individuals who experience a fundamentally low sense of meaning in life. Nostalgia is more than just an emotional longing for the past. It serves as a valuable psychological tool that can help people create and maintain a sense of meaning in life.

2.2.1 Classification of Nostalgia

Svetlana Boym presented a two-part concept of nostalgia:

- **Restorative nostalgia:** emphasizes the idea of (nostos) and aims to reconstruct the "lost homeland."

It considers itself the ultimate truth and tradition (Boym., 2001) ^[34].

- **Reflective nostalgia:** In contrast to restorative nostalgia, reflective nostalgia arises from "the sensation of pain" and focuses on "longing, loss, and the incomplete process of remembering." (Boym., 2001) ^[34].

Restorative nostalgia revolves around reconstructing the past and constructing symbols.

On the other hand, Reflective nostalgia, revolves around preserving the remains of the lost homeland and imagining different time zones.

2.3 Memory

"Memory can be defined as: the ability of individuals to retain and retrieve information from the past." (Aliyev *et al.*, 2022) ^[4]. The idea of memory is the ability to retrieve and perceive the past. Memory links the past to the present, allowing us to establish our individual and collective selves (Barakat & Ali, 2023) ^[8].

2.3.1 There are different types of memory

Individual memory	Collective memory	Social memory	Urban memory
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- **Individual memory:** Halbwachs emphasizes the importance of social contexts for memories, asserting that individual memory is closely linked to collective memory. Individual forgetting acts as a defense mechanism against information overload, with the possibility of forgotten memories resurfacing unexpectedly (Wetzel, 2020).
- **Collective memory:** It is not merely a social scientific abstraction or a pure metaphor. It is the fundamental condition for individuals' capacity to remember (Nicolosi, 2023) ^[21]. It arises from the memories of diverse individuals expressed within a social context. Therefore, it is capable of ensuring a fundamental function for social integration. The concept of collective memory, introduced by Aldo Rossi in *Discourse on Architecture*, also points to the complementary nature of the city image, which is composed of a dialogue between material and immaterial values, an aggregation of values that refer to the collective imagination: "The city itself can be said to be the collective memory of its people, and like memory, it is linked to things and places (Rossi *et al.*, 1982).
- **Social memory:** It is the broader field of communicative capacity that encompasses the various collective memories of different groups, competing for the relevance and credibility of their discourses. It serves as a source of "grafting" for communities and is influenced by cultural contexts, making it a process of selection and reconstruction (Nicolosi, 2023) ^[21].
- **Urban Memory:** Urban memory can be defined as the collective perception of the urban spatial environment, embodying the city's historical culture and spatial imagery. It is shaped by collective experiences and evolves over time, encompassing the essence of the urban environment, with its primary value lying in its legacy and continuity (Huang & Huang, 2024) ^[13]. Hofmannsthal first introduced the concept of "collective memory" in 1902.

2.4 Memory and Nostalgia

Nostalgia also enhances self-esteem by highlighting positive aspects of one's past. It allows individuals to focus on valuable parts of their identity and past experiences, fostering a more positive self-image (Wildschut *et al.*, 2006) ^[32]. Some ancient Greek philosophers considered

memorization a practical practice, or the "art of memory" (*l'ars memoriae*), that could be cultivated by humans. The "art of memory," developed in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, demonstrates a close relationship between the memory of an urban cultural community and the spatial forms that symbolize it. These spatial forms may be individual buildings or more complex elements, constituting cultural landmarks that support the process of identification and belonging (Aliyev *et al.*, 2022) ^[4]. And according to Malpas, memory is always associated with a sense of loss, not in the sense that it entails a desire for the irretrievable, referred to as "reconstructive nostalgia." Rather, he means it is a reminder of what has passed, of what is no longer present as it once was, but if it still exists, it exists in a different way. Consequently, nostalgia associated with memory is an essential part of how people interact with the external environment (Malpas, 2012) ^[17]. Individual buildings contribute to the development of distinctive markers within the urban sphere, anchoring memories and perceptions in (places), and contributing to the development of a functional and structural understanding of the city. Therefore, place constitutes memory in addition to perceptual and sensory experiences

2.5 The relationship between memory and place

Ruskin sees memory as the sixth lamp in architecture. Memory falls into the first category because it becomes memorial or monumental, constructed in a more stable manner and thus inspired by metaphorical meaning. The concept of memory architecture is to understand the relationship between the physical world and the meaning (Barakat & Ali, 2023) ^[8]. The relationship between memory and place is of paramount importance, as places often represent triggers for memories and are deeply intertwined with the process of remembering.

Halbwachs believes that memory is not only preserved, but is constantly reconstructed from the present. In fact, it is the group to which an individual belongs that provides the tools for reconstructing the past. The selectivity of memory, ultimately, is nothing more than the ability to order the meaning of the past according to the representations, worldviews, symbols, or concepts that allow social groups to reflect on the present (Nicolosi, 2023) ^[21].

Halbwachs has three main points (Lavabre, 1998):

- The past is not preserved but reconstructed from the present.

- The past can only be remembered because of the social frames of reference that individuals possess.
- Memory has a social function: the past is invoked to justify current social aspects.

2.6 Place Identity

Place identity is a symbolic aspect of place attachment that reflects the presence and essence of a specific location. It plays a vital role in shaping people's perceptions of and relationships with that place. It is influenced by various factors, including stories, memories, history, physical characteristics, and social and cultural elements, which collectively contribute to a place's unique character and significance (Aguspriyanti *et al.*, 2023) ^[2]. Place attachment can also enhance satisfaction of basic psychological needs such as meaning, self-esteem, and belonging (Huo *et al.*, 2025) ^[14]. Urban identity is linked to formal characteristics and physical symbols, as an expression of intrinsic meanings and past cultural values, and Schulz mentions: "Architectural space can be defined as the designation of human existential space." (Brenner *et al.*, 1972) ^[10]. According to Kant, the concept of space is an external, intuitive sensation, unlike time, which is an internal sensation. Space is similar to the concept of beauty, relying more on intuition than measurement, although its interpretation is linked to mathematics and geometry, such as proportions and the golden ratio, which generate aesthetic relationships. It can only be understood from a human perspective (Al-Taie.,2025) ^[6]. David Canter presented three elements in defining identity. He indicated that the components of identifying a place are represented by the relationship between actions, concepts, and physical attributes. He emphasized that a place cannot be fully identified without knowing the type of relationship between these three components. The relationship between memories and place identity is thus linked to the aesthetic value of a historic area, which gives it distinctive characteristics that distinguish it from other locations. This characteristic has the potential to become a competitive advantage for a particular place. A place gains greater significance when the values derived from its past or history persist, and these values will also shape its future significance. see (Figure 1) Which explains the relationship between nostalgia, memory, and spatial identity.

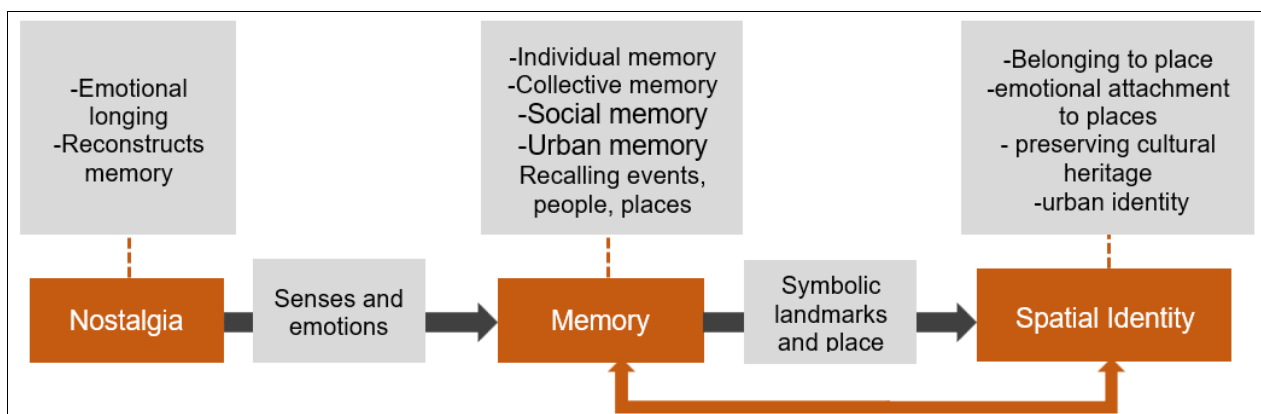


Fig 1: A conceptual framework that explains the relationship between nostalgia, memory, and spatial identity

The figure explains that Memories are retrieved through feelings of nostalgia, symbols, and references (old buildings, alleys, streets, events). Nostalgia is then influenced by a memory associated with a place or event, and spatial identity is produced through memories, as nostalgic memory strengthens the connection to spatial identity and belonging.

3. Methodology

This section explains the methodological framework used, which relies on a dual methodology that combines the quantitative dimension (through a questionnaire distributed to residents of old Basra) and the qualitative dimension (through semi-structured interviews and field observations). This section outlines the nature of the sample, the data collection tools, and the foundations for analyzing memories to employ them in applying the conceptual model within the spatial-social environment of old Basra and the Ashar River. This section explains the methodological framework used, which relies on a dual methodology that combines the quantitative dimension (through a questionnaire distributed to residents of old Basra and non-residents of the area) and the qualitative dimension (through semi-structured interviews and field observations). This section explains the nature of the sample and the foundations for analyzing memories to employ them in applying the conceptual model within the spatial-social environment of old Basra.

The research includes three axes:

Questionnaire

Interviews

Questionnaire: The questionnaire was administered to a small group of the study population to verify the clarity and

applicability of the questions. This contributed to the modification and development of some of the formulations before final distribution. The questionnaire was used to analyze the experiences of residents of the Old Basra area and link these experiences to the themes of the research model (nostalgia and memory). The questionnaire was designed to capture residents' memories, feelings, assessments of the current situation, and suggestions regarding the conservation of buildings and places of cultural value. Responses were distributed across various age and professional groups. The questionnaire was conducted in the field at selected locations within the Old Basra area, where individuals were interviewed and responses were collected, both in paper and electronic format, to ensure the quality of responses. The questionnaire questions were formulated to allow respondents to express their experiences and memories associated with the place, either through closed questions that can be analyzed quantitatively, or open questions that seek to capture the qualitative dimension of their experiences. The sample results were incorporated into the analysis tools to develop scientific indicators that reflect residents' relationship with the place, analyze the presence of concepts of memory, nostalgia, and spatial belonging among them, and their reflection on their attitudes towards heritage revival. This sample aims to reach generalizable results within the study framework, by covering the widest possible spectrum of the population who have a direct connection to the place, whether through residence or functional and social interaction with it. In order to verify the statistical validity and reliability of the questionnaire items, the Cronbach's Alpha equation was extracted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-v.26). The results were as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha equation results and accompanying statistical data.

Cronbach's Alpha	standard deviation	Average
0.870	8.893	48.87

It is noted from Table 1, that the value of Cronbach's alpha reached (0.87), which indicates the presence of a very high internal consistency in the responses of the sample members to the questionnaire paragraphs and statistically indicates the validity of the research tool and its internal stability.

Interviews

During the researcher's multiple visits to the study site, he interviewed 20 elderly people, aged between 60 and 88 years, residents of old Basra or those passing through it. He asked them about their relationship with the place, about the most important events such as war, celebrations, and daily life that left a specific memory for them. They were asked to describe the charm of the Al-Ashar River in the past and the charm of the area, the most important buildings and those present in the area. They also discussed the charm of the area and presented old photos. This concentrated demographic segment was chosen for their direct experience with the historical and cultural fabric of the city. Despite the small sample size,

4. Case study

4.1 Old Basra

The origin of the city of Basra dates back to the Chaldean era and it was called (Tardam) which was characterised by

its flowing water, trees and the magnificence of its buildings. With the passage of time it was destroyed and nothing remained of it except a palace and a place of guard or protection for the non-Arabs, so it was called Al-Khariba by the early Arabs) Abbasi,n.d).

In the early period of the Ottoman era until 1914, the city of Basra was formed during the Ottoman period in the old Basra region (currently) and formed the new urban core of the city after its transfer from the city of Zubair, the old urban center. Then the new core appeared at the end of the Ottoman rule, competing with the old core, and began to develop gradually, so that urbanization reached it through political decisions and by virtue of its distinguished geographical location, as the port was established in it, which necessitated linking the old and new cores by a road that was established along the Ashar River in 1910 (Markarian, 2018)^[18]. see (Figure 2)

The streets and Alazqa in the Ottoman period were characterized by being winding and narrow, and did not follow a specific geometric pattern. This is attributed to a large number of factors, including traditional means of transportation, religious, climatic, and natural factors. Sources indicate that the unified directions of the street network and the general movement spaces of the city of Basra were perpendicular or identical to the main rivers

such as the Ashar and the Khandaq, as practical necessity dictates that the rivers be dug perpendicular to the Shatt al-Arab, as well as the subsidiary canals derived from the

rivers in a direction perpendicular to the river, so that a perpendicular network of graded canals is formed (Markarian., 2024)^[19].

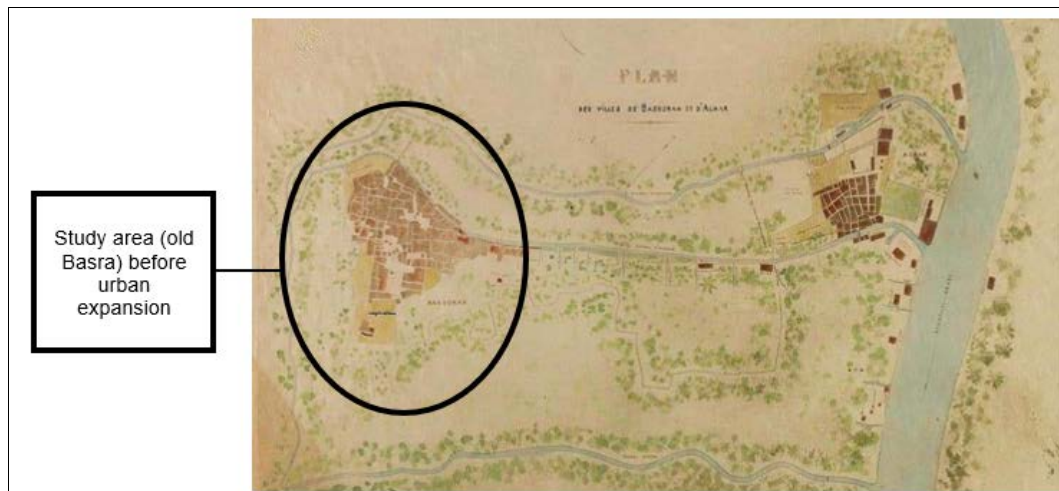


Fig 2: A plan of Basra during the Ottoman era, showing the two urban nuclei of the city, Basra and Al-Ashar, surrounded by a wall, as drawn by Ernst Emil Herzfeld in 1905

4.2 Old Basra (study area) is divided into four sections: see (Figure 3)

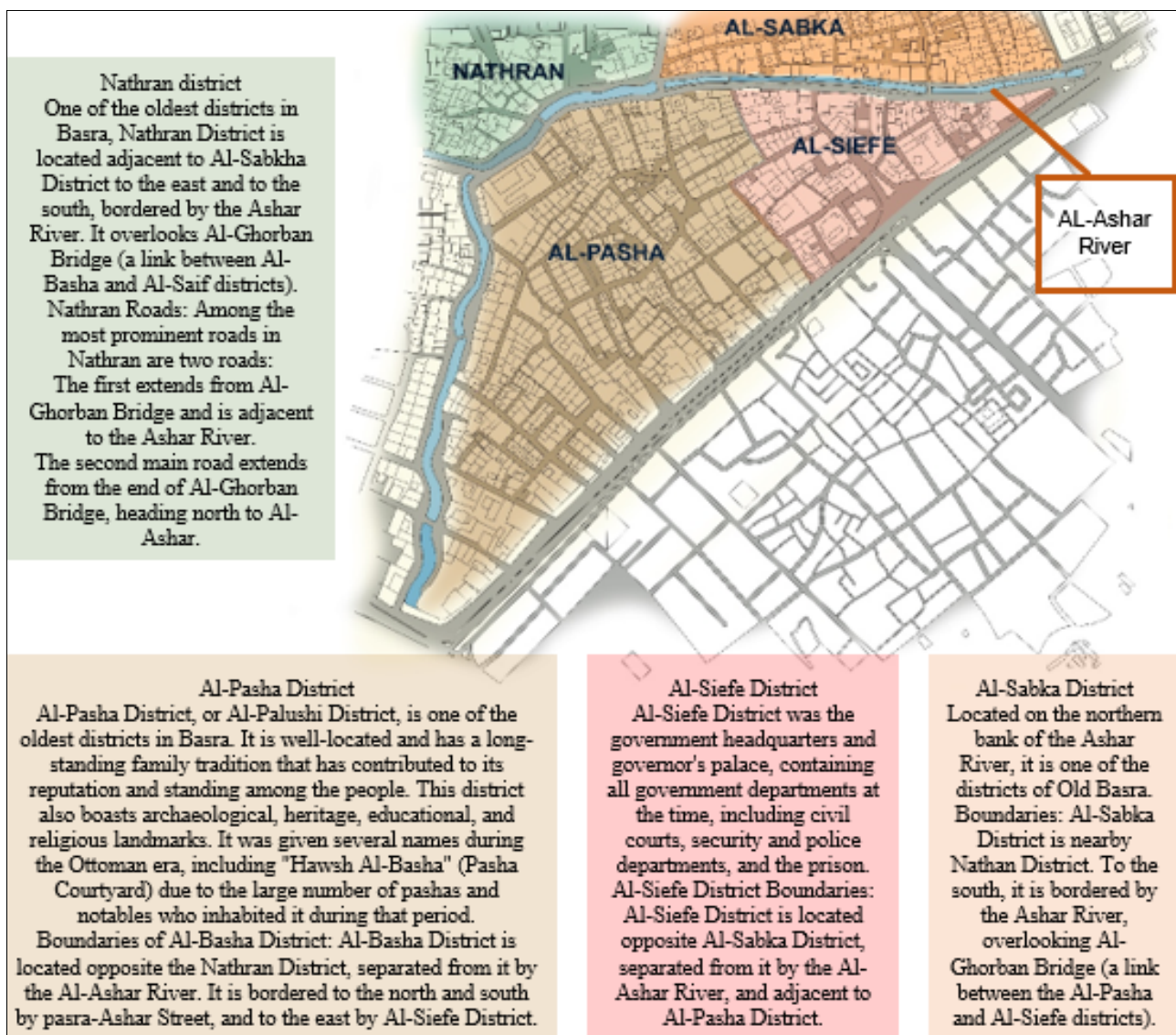


Fig 3: A plan showing the four districts of Old Basra and the AL-Ashar River (drawn by the researcher)

4.3 Streets and Alaziqa (Alleys)

The internal alleys are characterized by high building density and narrow lanes, restricting movement. Meanwhile,

buildings located along the main axes appear to be in relatively better structural condition, due to continuous use or partial maintenance. It was also noted that some historic

buildings have been reused for administrative purposes. During the visits, it became clear that there is a discrepancy between the various parts of the urban fabric in terms of restoration. Some buildings in the Sabkha and Basha neighborhoods still retain their heritage elements, such as pointed arches and wooden windows, while others have been demolished, damaged, or neglected. see (Figure 4)








Fig 4: A plan showing the Streets and Alaziqa s in old Basra. (drawn by the researcher)

4.4 The most Important Buildings in the Study Area

The heritage buildings in the study area constitute an essential part of the local identity. They are not merely architectural elements; they constitute the fundamental component of the memory of ancient Basra and the Ashar River, reflecting the social and cultural transformations they have undergone. These buildings vary in their religious, social, and cultural significance, and include mosques, churches, and houses. Their condition ranges from good to dilapidated and dilapidated, reflecting the historical and cultural depth of the ancient city of Basra. Table 2, presents the most important heritage buildings in old Basra, including their locations, construction periods, and state of restoration. These buildings are key markers of the city's historical and cultural identity. These buildings (such as the Mar Thoma Chaldean Church (built in 1986) and the Greek Consulate (1920s), Al-Nabras Elementary School, Sheikh Khazal Palace, Basra Palace Hotel, and Sayed Hamed Al-

Naqeeb's house) are not merely architectural structures; the varying state of restoration of these buildings affects feelings of nostalgia and perceptions of place identity. Restored sites, such as the Sheikh Khazal Palace, serve as visual affirmations of cultural continuity and pride, strengthening emotional and psychological connections to the city's past. In contrast, unrestored buildings, such as Mr. Hamid al-Naqeeb's house, symbolize fragility and loss, leading to a growing community desire to protect and preserve the tangible heritage of old Basra. Table 2 thus supports the conclusion that tangible heritage sites are integral to strengthening a place's identity, as these links to the past provide enhanced memory and intergenerational communication. These findings underscore the importance of integrating heritage conservation into urban development policies to preserve the identity of old Basra amid ongoing change.

Table 2: table showing the most important buildings that represent the region's identity, their locations, and the periods of their construction (Source: Basra Antiquities Inspectorate)

No.		Original building name	Current building name	time period	location	Last time it was restored
1		Sheikh Khazal Palace	Palace of Culture and Arts	Late Ottoman era	Al-Sabka	2020
2		Basra Palace Hotel	-----	Late Ottoman era	Al-Sabka	1980s
3		Mar Thoma Chaldean Church	Mar Thoma Chaldean Church	1886	Al-Pasha	being restored
4		Sayed Hamed Al-Naqeeb's house	-----	1930s	Nathran	Not restored
5		Al-Nabras Elementary School	-----	1920s	Al-Pasha	Not restored
6		Greek Consulate	Basra Antiquities Inspectorate	1920s	Al-Siefe	2018
7		Almendil house & bridge	Association of Fine Artists	1924-1927	Al-Sabka	2018
8		Ottoman governor's palace	-----	Late Ottoman era	Al-Sabka	Not restored

4.5 The structural condition of buildings in Old Basra

The Old Basra area exhibits a diverse urban landscape, with buildings varying in their structural condition and the extent to which they retain their original features. Some heritage buildings still stand despite the deterioration of their facades

and interiors, while a number of other buildings, particularly wooden shanashils and residential buildings, have been demolished or radically altered due to neglect or modifications inconsistent with the traditional architectural identity. see (Figure 5)

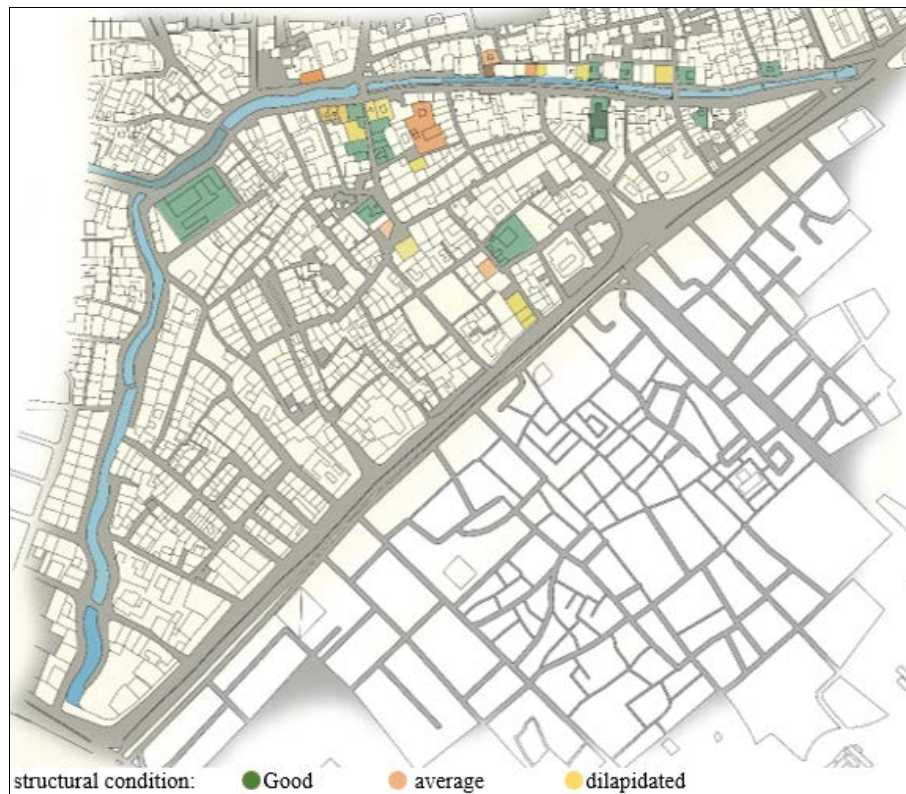


Fig 5: A plan showing the distribution of the structural condition of buildings in old Basra. (drawn by the researcher)

4.6 The most important buildings that represent the identity of the old Basra region

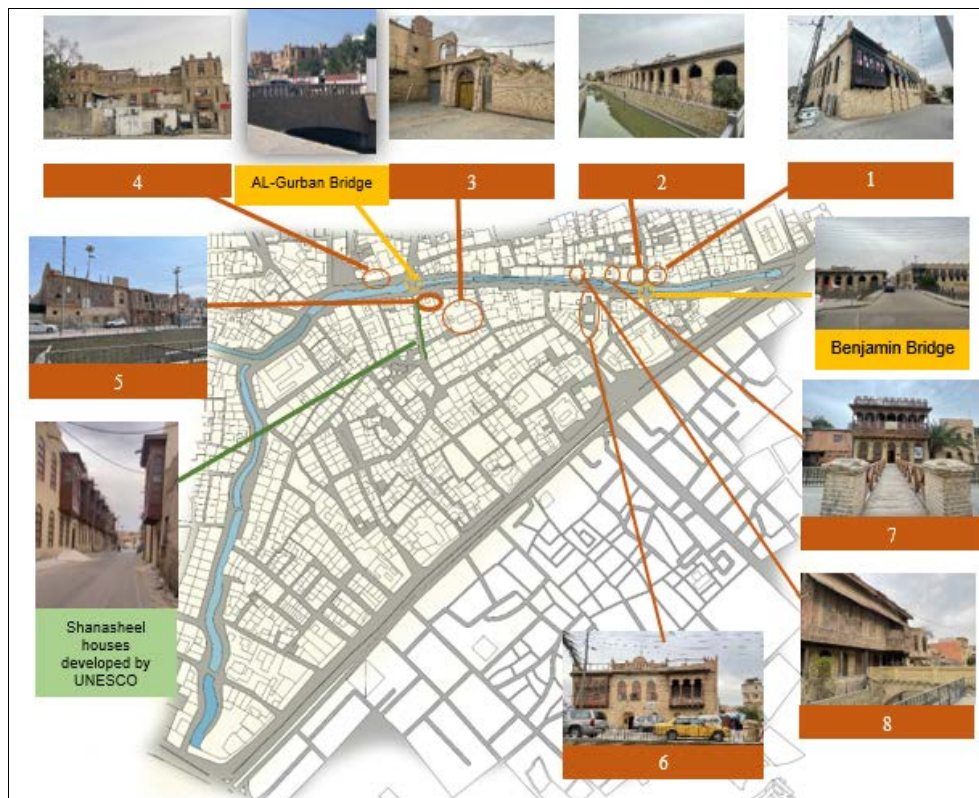


Fig 6: A plan showing the The most important buildings that represent the identity of the old Basra region

5. Results and Discussion

In order to identify the sample members' responses to each question, the frequencies and percentages for each response were extracted on the five-point Likert scale, and then the

arithmetic mean and standard deviation were extracted for all sample members' responses. The following is an analysis of the sample members' responses according to the questionnaire questions:

How often do you visit the historical heritage sites in your city?

Table 3: shows the sample members' responses regarding the number of times they visit historical heritage sites.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very little	44	51.8	51.8	51.8
	Somewhat little	24	28.2	28.2	80.0
	A lot	6	7.1	7.1	87.1
	Somewhat a lot	7	8.2	8.2	95.3
	Very much	4	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Note from Table 3, that the majority of sample members indicated that they visit historical heritage sites very rarely, with 44 individuals representing 51.8% of the sample. This was followed by 24 individuals who answered that they visit these sites somewhat infrequently, constituting 28.2% of the total sample. Those who answered "often," "somewhat

often," and "very often" totaled only 17 individuals, representing only 20% of the total respondents.

How important are old streets, historic buildings, and heritage sites to your sense of identity?

Table 4: shows the sample members' responses regarding the importance of old streets, historical buildings and heritage sites.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Somewhat unimportant	1	1.2	1.2	1.2
	Important	14	16.5	16.5	17.6
	Somewhat important	16	18.8	18.8	36.5
	Extremely important	54	63.5	63.5	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 shows that the majority of the sample members are very interested in historical heritage sites, as 54 participants (63.5%) indicated that heritage buildings and sites are important for a sense of identity, followed by 16 participants (18.8%) who stated that they were somewhat interested in historical buildings and sites, while those who chose important were 16.5% (14 people), while those who were

not interested were 1.2% (1 person). This result indicates a high interest in historical buildings and sites among the sample members.

Are there any particular heritage buildings or streets in Old Basra that hold sentimental value for you?

Table 5: shows the responses of the sample members regarding specific heritage buildings or streets in old Basra that hold emotional value.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, very much	4	4.7	4.7	4.7
	No, somewhat	15	17.6	17.6	22.4
	Yes	21	24.7	24.7	47.1
	Yes, somewhat	17	20.0	20.0	67.1
	Yes, very much	28	32.9	32.9	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 shows that the largest percentage of sample members expressed a strong emotional value associated with specific heritage buildings or streets in Old Basra, with 28 participants (32.9%) answering "yes strongly." They were followed by 21 participants (24.7%) who answered "yes," and then 17 participants (20%) who answered "yes somewhat," reflecting varying degrees of attachment to the city's architectural heritage. In contrast, 15 participants

(17.6%) reported feeling no clear attachment, while only 4.7% (4 out of 85) were not attached at all. These results clearly reflect an awareness of the importance of historical architecture as a vehicle for memories and nostalgia, and a source of strengthening identity and spatial belonging.

Are there certain times of the year that can make you feel nostalgic?

Table 6: shows sample responses about some times of the year that can make you feel nostalgic.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, somewhat	8	9.4	9.4	9.4
	Yes	23	27.1	27.1	36.5
	Yes, somewhat	22	25.9	25.9	62.4
	Yes, very much	32	37.6	37.6	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 shows that the vast majority of the sample believes that certain times of the year evoke feelings of nostalgia. 32 participants (37.6%) stated that they feel this way

"strongly," the highest percentage of responses. This was followed by 22 participants (25.9%) who answered "somewhat yes," and then 23 participants (27.1%) who

chose "yes." In contrast, only eight individuals (9.4%) expressed that they did not feel nostalgia across the seasons. These results reflect the psychological and temporal impact of recurring times of the year, such as holidays, occasions, and seasons, in evoking memories and strengthening the connection to the past. This indicates the importance of

temporal rhythm in activating collective memory and shaping the emotional identity of city residents.

Have you ever felt nostalgic for an era you never even lived in?

Table 7: shows the sample members' responses regarding nostalgia for a time period they did not live in.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, very much	3	3.5	3.5	3.5
	No, somewhat	15	17.6	17.6	21.2
	Yes	17	20.0	20.0	41.2
	Yes, somewhat	17	20.0	20.0	61.2
	Yes, very much	33	38.8	38.8	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 7, shows that a large percentage of the sample acknowledged feeling nostalgic for a time period they did not actually experience. 33 participants (38.8%) indicated that they felt "yes strongly," followed by 20 participants (23.5%) who answered "yes," and 17 participants (20%) who said "yes somewhat." In contrast, 15 participants (17.6%) did not feel this type of nostalgia, while only three (3.5%) stated that they did not feel it at all.

These results indicate that the participants' connection is not based solely on personal experience, but extends to

imaginary perceptions or collective representations of a past they did not experience. This reinforces the hypothesis that memory is sometimes shaped by narratives from previous generations or inherited mental images. This supports the power of nostalgia to influence identity and belonging, even among those who did not actually experience those historical periods.

Do you have fond memories of the Ashar River in the past?

Table 8: shows the responses of the sample members to the beautiful memories of the Ashar River.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, somewhat	27	31.8	31.8	31.8
	Yes	14	16.5	16.5	48.2
	Yes, somewhat	13	15.3	15.3	63.5
	Yes, very much	31	36.5	36.5	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Based on Table 8, it appears that the majority of the sample had fond memories associated with the Ashar River, reflecting the status of this natural landmark in the collective memory of the residents of ancient Basra. Thirty-one participants (36.5%) answered "strongly yes," which is the highest percentage, followed by 14 participants (16.5%) who answered "somewhat yes," and 13 participants (15.3%) who answered "yes," indicating that more than two-thirds of the sample expressed varying degrees of positive memories

of the river. In contrast, 27 participants (31.8%) showed a somewhat reserved attitude, answering "somewhat no," with no one answering "strongly no." This indicates that the river does not evoke strong negative feelings among the sample. On the contrary, it appears to have an emotional presence in the memory, even if the degree of nostalgia for it varies.

Do you think nostalgia can sometimes distort memories and make the past seem better?

Table 9: shows the responses of the sample members regarding the fact that nostalgia can sometimes distort memories and make the past seem better.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, very much	5	5.9	5.9	5.9
	No, somewhat	16	18.8	18.8	24.7
	Yes	24	28.2	28.2	52.9
	Yes, somewhat	21	24.7	24.7	77.6
	Yes, very much	19	22.4	22.4	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 shows that the sample's opinions regarding the effect of nostalgia on distorting or embellishing memories varied. The majority of participants expressed their belief that nostalgia can sometimes distort memories or make the past seem better than it was. The largest percentage of participants answered "yes somewhat," with 24 (28.2%), followed by 21 (24.7%) who answered "yes strongly," reflecting a general tendency among participants to

acknowledge the impact of nostalgia on their perception of the past. The remaining 19 (22.4%) answered "yes," reinforcing the same trend, albeit to a lesser extent. Conversely, a smaller number of participants expressed reservations about this hypothesis; 16 (18.8%) answered "no somewhat," while only five (5.9%) completely rejected it, answering "no strongly." These

results indicate a relative awareness among the sample that nostalgia is not always an accurate reflection of the past. Rather, it can lead to a biased image of the past, either by exaggerating its positive aspects or distorting its facts. This holds important implications for understanding collective

memory within the framework of studies of identity, belonging, and nostalgia.

Do you think it is important to preserve the historical character of Basra, even as the city grows and changes?

Table 10: shows the responses of the sample members regarding the conservation of the historical character of Basra.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, somewhat	1	1.2	1.2	1.2
	Yes	15	17.6	17.6	18.8
	Yes, somewhat	10	11.8	11.8	30.6
	Yes, very much	59	69.4	69.4	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Based on Table 10, it is clear that the majority of sample members believe it is important to preserve the historical character of Basra even as the city grows and develops. Fifty-nine out of 85 respondents answered "strongly yes," representing a significant percentage (69.4%), reflecting a collective awareness of the importance of preserving the spatial specificity and architectural and heritage identity of the old city. The "somewhat yes" category came in second place with 11.8% (10 participants), followed by "yes" (17.6%) (15 participants), indicating near-unanimous

agreement on the importance of this issue, with varying degrees of conviction. Those who opposed the idea of preserving the historical character were a small group; only one participant answered "somewhat no," representing a percentage not exceeding 1.2%.

As you wander around the old Basra area, do the alleys, the river and the mashrabiya fill you with nostalgia for the way of life in the past?

Table 11: shows the responses of the sample members regarding their wanderings in the old Basra area. Do the alleys, river and shanashil give you nostalgia for the way of life in the past.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, somewhat	5	5.9	5.9	5.9
	Yes	20	23.5	23.5	29.4
	Yes, somewhat	16	18.8	18.8	48.2
	Yes, very much	44	51.8	51.8	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 11 shows that the majority of respondents believe that the urban transformation in the old Basra area, including its alleys, river, and landscapes, takes them back to a past lifestyle and evokes feelings of nostalgia. Forty-four participants, representing 51.8%, expressed their belief with a "strong yes," the largest percentage, indicating a close connection to the old urban environment and its physical and social components. Sixteen individuals, representing 18.8%, responded "somewhat yes," and 20 individuals, representing 23.5%, responded "yes." This confirms that approximately 94% of participants have a positive response to varying degrees to this transformation, considering it a catalyst for restoring traditional lifestyles.

Interviews

To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of nostalgia on place identity in old Basra, a sample of 20 elderly people, aged 60 to 88, were interviewed. The majority were teachers, schoolteachers, artists, and one historian. This focused sample was carefully selected for their invaluable lived experiences in old Basra. This age group is particularly important because they possess firsthand memories and vivid experiences of the city's historic urban fabric, including its heritage buildings, famous bridges, and social life along the Ashar River. These participants provide rich qualitative data that is difficult to obtain from younger age groups, given the challenges the researcher faced in locating elderly residents within this demographic. The depth and specificity of their narratives proved invaluable in capturing collective memory and attachment to place. This

sample size, despite its modest size, offers a rich and representative view of the social memory of old Basra. Their participation provides a bridge connecting the past to the present, highlighting nostalgia as a fundamental force in preserving the city's cultural and spatial identity. Thus, the depth and authenticity of their memories underscore the relevance and importance of this focused sample to the study's objectives.

In addition to the results of questionnaire and Interviews

the majority of participants expressed a clear interest in preserving specific heritage elements with symbolic and emotional dimensions. Some responses also indicated a desire to preserve the social customs associated with the place. These results demonstrate that individuals' attachment to a place is not limited to its physical aspect, but extends to the rituals and social relationships that form within it. This reinforces the idea that heritage conservation should not be limited to the rehabilitation of buildings, but also includes the role of memory and empowering the local community to participate in reviving this heritage. Therefore, this question can be considered an important indicator of what urban and heritage revitalization strategies in Old Basra should focus on.

The results indicate that most participants had a clear perception of heritage landmarks, not only as spatial sites but as symbols closely linked to life experience. This supports the idea that nostalgia is not merely an emotional longing, but rather is linked to deep-rooted historical spatial knowledge. The participants' precise knowledge supports

the fact that memory plays an effective role in shaping place identity. The results showed that the majority of participants possessed a thorough knowledge of the city's historical and urban components. Prominent sites, such as the Crows' Bridge and Benjamin's Bridge, were repeatedly mentioned, representing functional and social symbols that transcend everyday memory. Participants' answers to a question about their knowledge of the names or functions of buildings and streets visible in historical photographs also revealed varying levels of awareness of the urban heritage of ancient Basra. Some participants expressed precise knowledge of some prominent buildings, such as Sheikh Khazal Palace and the Dhu al-Manaratain Mosque, while others expressed ignorance of the functions or names of some lesser-known landmarks. These findings indicate a decline in inherited knowledge of the original uses of a place, reflecting an urgent need for visual documentation and identification tools that reconnect society with its spatial memory and enhance the presence of these landmarks in public consciousness.

Accordingly

it was found that there is a clear link between the participants' feelings of nostalgia and belonging and the urban environment of the old city of Basra. The results showed that the majority view heritage buildings and neighborhoods as vital elements that contribute to shaping the city's identity and evoking collective memory. The data also revealed the role of times and rituals associated with place in evoking a sense of belonging, reflecting the importance of the emotional dimension in perceiving urban space. Accordingly, these data emphasize the need to incorporate the concepts of memory and nostalgia into urban conservation policies, as they are cultural tools that enhance the sustainability of spatial identity and deepen society's relationship with its urban heritage. These results indicate that nostalgia for the past in old Basra is not a fleeting individual feeling, but rather represents a collective force that can be harnessed in cultural urban conservation assessments and the activation of the symbolism inherent in heritage sites, such as alleyways, shanasheel, and old bridges.

6. Recommendations

Based on the results of the survey and field interviews, which revealed varying levels of awareness of the importance of preserving the tangible and intangible dimensions of ancient Basra, the following recommendations can be formulated:

- Strengthen the physical conservation of heritage buildings Data indicate that a large percentage of participants expressed concern about the deterioration of historic buildings. This calls for a comprehensive program to maintain and restore these buildings using materials and methods compatible with their architectural character, while imposing strict controls on interventions that distort the urban fabric.
- Preserve the intangible dimension of heritage The emotional attachment and collective memory of residents to ancient sites is an essential element in heritage sustainability. Therefore, it is recommended to organize periodic events such as festivals, heritage markets, and handicrafts, in addition to documenting

folk tales and stories that represent the memory of the place through digital and print media.

- Improve public spaces as a driver of social life The decline in social activity in historic streets and squares is linked to poor infrastructure and a lack of attention to public spaces. Therefore, it is recommended to rehabilitate these spaces in a way that preserves their visual and historical identity, and to provide elements that support community activity, such as lighting, seating, and signage.
- Raising Community Awareness and Participation Resident participation in conservation decisions is limited. This calls for launching awareness programs and integrating heritage topics into school curricula, in addition to forming local committees that represent the community in developing plans and monitoring their implementation.
- Supporting Scientific Research and Documentation The study revealed an urgent need for an updated database of heritage buildings and sites, including associated cultural practices. It is recommended to support academic studies and collaborate with local and international bodies to develop innovative methods for urban and cultural conservation.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the state of urban cultural heritage conservation in the Old City of Basra, emphasizing the importance of preserving its tangible and intangible assets. The analysis reveals that the city's historic urban fabric, its revolution, and its collective memory are under significant pressure due to urban democracy, neglect, and the absence of partial conservation policies. Despite some commitment to the restoration of heritage sites, the community often relies on comprehensive planning frameworks, community collaboration, and participation.

The findings indicate that effective preservation of heritage requires multidimensional cultural diversity—combining architectural restoration, no longer adaptive, the security of personal data, and the revitalization of public buildings—while ensuring the preservation of cultural and social narratives. Public participation, particularly through the experiences of residents and their Brazilian connections to the place, emerges as an important factor in conservation work. The study concludes that protecting Basra's heritage is not merely a technical or architectural endeavor, but a sociocultural endeavor that must connect the past and the future. For heritage efforts to succeed, comprehensive policies, the availability of national services within the community, and ensuring their existence require a sense of ownership. Only through these comprehensive challenges can the ancient city of Basra preserve its historical identity while adapting to contemporary civilization.

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