

## Promoting the Cultural and Urban Identity of the Holy Cities: The Case Study of Al-Najaf, Iraq”

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### **Abstract**

One of the essential foundations that help strengthen the cultural identity of holy cities cultural identity is to preserve their physical and cultural components, tangible and intangible, that distinguish them from other cities.

It was introduced as a temporary or permanent case to address some service aspects in the holy cities, which made the city lose the architectural features that distinguish it—losing the place's spirituality and the city's memory. The study examines the main reasons that led to losing cities' identity by introducing renewal projects as a temporary or permanent situation to address some aspects of the service in the holy cities. Thus, losing the place's spirituality and the town's memory.

The research aimed to preserve the identity of the sacred cities by setting standards for development projects that should respect the specificity of Najafi architecture. The research results were calculated based on the principles of urban sustainability. One of the most critical conservation criteria is to know the quality of the implemented and proposed projects through field surveys and studies dealing with these projects.

The research came up with several recommendations. First, preserve the architectural elements that characterize Najafi architecture. Second, Respect the context and not deviate from it. Third, knowing the model and standards for renovation and restoration projects, the original model must be simulated.

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By dividing the research into several parts, it dealt with clarifying the most important planning and design foundations that preserve the heritage values of the ancient cities by reviewing the essential foundations for planning in Islamic cities, which led to formal formations of the main landmarks with certain characteristics that reflected the nature of life in Islamic cities through their relations with each other. While the other parts dealt with the study of urban development projects in the old city and subjecting them to the most important standards of urban sustainability, and then verifying whether these projects are considered under urban sustainability.

**Keywords:** Cultural identity, Urban identity, Holy cities, Al-Najaf, Al-Ashraf

## **1. Introduction**

As a model of urban society, cities are an ancient phenomenon. They reflected this in the functional foundations of society, which differ from one culture to another and from one place and time to another. The functions of the city in 1950 differ from 2000. It is noted that Najaf has been, since the burial of the immaculate remains of Imam Ali Aben Aby Talib (peace be upon him), in its pure soil. One of the holy religious centers to which the eyes of Muslims look up in the east and west of the country.

Most of the visitors are Muslims and Orientals. However, non-Muslims who were pushing them to travel to the country in the horizons of various factors occasionally visited it. They visit from time to time, including tourism, curiosity, study, tracking, and risk. However, these interests and goals developed over time and became, with the British occupation of the country in the wake of the First World War, political and economic interests and purposes because the occupation authorities wanted to establish their feet in Iraq. Linked to the wheel of the sprawling British Empire, but soon its dreams were wrecked in the magnificent rock of Najaf for the leading role it was playing in Iraq and the Islamic world. Najaf plays a significant role due to the presence of scholars and the fluctuating awareness that has not been extinguished among the inhabitants of this holy shrine in every age and time. The research aims to develop an evaluation strategy to assess the sustainability of urban renewal initiatives for the centers of holy cities to enhance their cultural identity and preserve the richness of the environment. Although its identity is not lost, cultural renewal is one of the methods used in recent years to redevelop historical centers to restore and improve the quality of urban life by enhancing and developing the unique characteristics of the place. In the local context, the importance of urban cultural revitalization in improving physical environmental conditions and living standards still needs to be realized.

Moreover, previous studies addressing the local context revealed that many urban redevelopment projects still needed to fully address the problems of urban degradation but instead created dilemmas concerning heritage preservation. Therefore, there was a need to address deficiencies in local practices, ensure the quality of urban neighborhood projects, and define the dimensions of sustainable urban projects and how to implement them. The research confirmed that urban design is integral to the urban regeneration process. Therefore, it investigates how heritage neighborhoods are developed in historic downtown areas and describe design techniques used in the broader urban renewal process.

Many global, regional, and local studies have dealt with historical centers, especially the sacred ones, and the ways to develop them. Many scholars discuss Islamic cities, and the city of Najaf Al-Ashraf has a share of them on the intellectual, ideological, and historical levels. Some studies dealt with urban planning and the possibilities of developing city centers. The most important urban development projects in the city center of Najaf were discussed according to sustainability criteria, and these projects were evaluated according to urban environment quality standards.

## **2. The Arab Islamic city and the characteristics of its urban structure**

The traditional Arab Islamic city reflected the desires and privacy of the Arab Islamic community and was a clear expression of its various societies' religious and cultural transformations. This resulted in its urban structure in which its environmental and social characteristics, spiritual values, and ideological and religious principles were formed for the meanings and cultural and religious symbols [1].

The continuity of the Arab-Islamic city in contemporary Arab societies raises many fundamental and urgent questions, which as follows:

Does the phenomenon of the "Arab Islamic city" still exist with an adequate force considering the challenges of the scientific and information revolution facing our Arab and Islamic society as it was in the past?

Does this phenomenon have new patterns that express modern Arab-Islamic society? That is, has it been transformed because of technological challenges in forming its vocabulary into a city that does not bear any graphic pattern of the patterns of the Arab and Islamic cities [2]?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to address the patterns of the Arab-Islamic city and the characteristics of its urban structure to extract the most important indicators, which were represented by three leading indicators:

- The land uses indicator.
- The urban fabric indicator.
- The urban elements indicator.

Besides four secondary indicators, which included the indicator of the (mosque, the markets, and the locality. the Residential and street network) as the essential elements of urban design as a physical vocabulary [3]

While singularity is essential in urban design as a cultural term because it represents the direct relationship with society, it is the main focal point in expressing its society, aspirations, development, and distinction. The city itself formed a human vision expressing that expressed the individual's self and the surrounding self that makes up the individual's subjectivity. The uniqueness of urban production within the city became inseparable in expressing society's civilizational values with the city's uniqueness [2].

This exclusivity occurs in the intellectual characteristics, the scientific schools represented by AL-Hawza, the cemetery of Wadi Al-Salam, the formal characteristics of the natural morphology represented by the Najaf plateau, and the Najaf Sea. Besides the architectural characteristics represented by the structuring of the fabric and the emptiness and alleys permeated by it, mixed with a harmonious combination, forming a highly integrated ecosystem supported by the fine details that make up the distinctive architectural vocabulary of the city of Najaf. Therefore, uniqueness expresses a feature, characteristic, or group of characteristics that distinguishes something and makes it unique from others, giving it a unique existence, or a separate thing with continuous existence, indivisible, and thus can be identified and defined accurately essential of things.

### **3. General composition of Islamic cities**

The general formation of Islamic cities is not specific and neutral, and it is harmonious in parts and practical. It is possible to realize the dynamic and active sensory progression of different forms, solid and hollow, luminous and shaded, hot and cold. An essential characteristic of the Islamic city is the lack

of strictness of the structure itself by not presenting the state of autonomy for its structures. It appears as a coherent unit. Signs that defined its identity, such as those that distinguished the Islamic city [4]:

- 1- Immunization (the fence)
- 2- Niche market or mixture
- 3- Privacy
- 4- Autonomy (partial)

Where the formation of the urban body in Islamic cities depended on three systems that related to each other according to the context in which a person could form a structure:

First: The natural order, which is the system that develops through the data of nature (the city's topography and climate) within complete adhesion, includes the random and linear systems.

Second: The Geometric Order This system takes different forms, including cities with a circular center and cities with a partial centering.

Third: Harmonic order: Cities are established according to concepts in a way that helps the continuity of city walls, known as favorable structures in space and in a state of harmony with cosmic laws within a concept that preserves centrality.

The basic formula that controls the physical organization of the Islamic city is based on development from the inside out, in contrast to the western cities, as it controls the growth process through an arrangement from the outside to the inside. [5]

Islamic architecture has been concerned with the spatial formation of the mass within Islamic privacy. However, Western civilizations see that sculpture as the creation of mass in a vacuum. In Islamic cities, houses take on several sizes and shapes. It is an introverted form and always revolves around the open courtyard, decorating interior elements such as the inner courtyard facade. The houses are adjacent and next to each other, forming the main facade of the street (alley). The street front shall be a flat wall (unless it contains shops), and the only opening is the entrance to the door [6].

#### **4. The formal characteristics of Islamic cities**

Many architectural proposals and studies varied in determining the visual and formal characteristics. In contrast, several studies showed properties by including them within the context of the urban form within the physical compounds. They were classified into the following: (building age, style, elements, materials used in construction, and proportionality between the sizes of Buildings). As

for the formal characteristics of the urban context, its classifications varied into human scale, mass, space, proportionality, modest building height, skyline, details, and finishing materials, where the formal characteristics are represented in a context model of adjacent buildings distinguished by their characteristics compatible with each other and with it all included:

The spaces between the buildings, the regression towards the back, the ratio of the openings and the facade features, the formal treatment of the blocks, the location and treatment of the entrances, the finishing materials and texture, the scale of the buildings, the style and the design of the external spaces, see table 1. Physical compounds can be classified as part of the level of spatial organization (the whole) or properties that express the basis (formation of the form). [7]

**Table 1 shows the classification of formal characteristics.**

<b>Within physical compounds (shape-forming properties)</b>	<b>Within the urban context (level of space organization) (all)</b>	<b>Within compatibility of adjacent buildings (segment level)</b>
construction age	The human scale	The spaces between
the pattern	mass and void	Reversing backwards
Elements	proportionality	Percentage of openings and contours of the facades
The materials used in construction	modest building height	Formal processing of blocks
The proportionality between the sizes of the buildings	skyline	Entrance site and processing
	Details and finishing materials	Finishing materials and texture
		Building Scale
		Style
		outdoor space design

## 5. Design Elements of the Holy City

The Holy City is formed from a set of contents and concepts, such as shrines in Islamic cities, under the relics of holiness and symbolism of Islamic societies' fall. It often represents the urban and historical center of the city. The holy cities are a model for Islamic cities to contain all the urban features of cities and all the vocabulary of Islamic urban centers.

## **6. Mosque or shrine**

The mosque symbolized the new Islamic state that came to rule these cities, and there was a tendency to choose the middle of their locations to achieve this functional goal. Religious institutions of the previous countries often occupied these places, so some became comprehensive mosques. With stability, mosques were established in these cities. The framework of the rules and jurisprudence is related to conquest by force or reconciliation. The most prominent examples are the Jami Mosque in Damascus and the Mosque of Cordoba. As for the name (the shrines), it refers to the holy graves of Muslims, they are the graves of which a significant person belongs to Muslims, such as the personal shrine of the Prophet Muhammad (may God's prayers and peace be upon him and his family), one of his family, or one of his chosen companions or followers whose virtues testify to them in a distinct biography from the rest. Their peers and most of these shrines were the reason for the growth of the cities in which they were concentrated and their transformation into large cities [8].

## **7. Urban Fabric and The Holy Site**

Many key aspects have characterized the planning of the urban fabric of the Islamic city:

1- Narrow streets "to estimate their roads and streets so that they are proportional and not narrow" and the open internal courtyards.

2- The congregational mosque is in the middle of the Islamic city "to build a mosque in the middle of it to get to know all its people." It was customary for the Emirate's house to be next to or close to it, given their functional complementarity.

3- Markets " estimates its markets to get their needs closely."

4- Fences to secure the city and preserve its privacy [5].

UNESCO defined holy sites as "places of profound importance and sacred religious ties that must be preserved and protected from all forms of violence, desecration of their character and integrity, and focus on publicizing them, accessing them, taking part in them, preventing conflicts around them, resolving them, reconstructing them, reviving them, expropriating them and excavating them." The organization acknowledged that some sites worldwide have "exceptional universal value" and should form part of the common heritage of humanity. The Holy Land is home to many religions. The Organization put in the Convention for protecting the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972 a definition of sacred sites in Article 1, where Article 1 stipulates. However, holy places are "places of

religious significance to different religious communities and include places of worship, cemeteries, and shrines, and include the immediate surroundings of these sites when these parts are an integral part of the site and may be described as specific places designated by a religious community in agreement with public authorities relevant by the diverse heritage and the recognition that a single site may be sacred to over one community. In architecture, the sacred was associated with shapes, symbols, and numbers representing the ratio and proportion between blocks and space and minor details. The golden ratio is one of the sacred proportions, as well as sacred geometry and matter [9].

## **8. Urban design standards by the principles of urban sustainability**

1- Environmental Dimension:

a-physical (the built physical environment).

b- Cultural (religion, traditions, customs).

c- Climate (reduce consumption, recycle, improve, replace, reuse)

2- The social dimension (comfort, satisfaction, visual impact, health and safety, identity).

3- Economic dimension (efficiency, cost impact, flexibility, accessibility, diversity) [10].

It is clear from the above that urban design can achieve sustainable urban renewal by changing the existing built environment, considering the economic, social, and environmental aspects at the beginning of the planning process. The principles of urban design that are reliable in the research will be the major topics that achieve the objectives of urban design to create the built environment, namely:

1- Sense of place and history: It denotes a place with its own identity and evolution that responds to and enhances the locally distinctive context and landscape.

2- Continuity and Contouring: Clarity of form: It refers to a place where gregarious and private spaces are distinct.

3- Quality of Public Domain: Feeling of luxury and comfort: Refers to a place with outdoor public spaces that are attractive, successful, lively and pleasant to use.

- 4- Mobility: Connectivity and permeability: Refers to a place with a convenient, efficient, and secure environment that is easily accessible for pedestrians and public transport users.
- 5- Legibility: Ease of understanding: Indicates the place has a clear image after evolution and easy to understand.
- 6- Adaptability: Ease of change: Refers to the rehabilitating of salvageable properties and a place that can be easily changed.
- 7- Diversity: Ease of choice: Indicate a place with a various options and jumbled uses.
- 8- Efficiency refers to the development that appropriately uses resources, including land.
- 9- Safety and security refer to where users feel as safe as possible.
- 10- Services provision: refers to the suitable and high-quality service infrastructure provided by the recent development proposal.
- 11- Green Design reduce the negative effect on our environment. [12]

From defining the fundamental aspects of “urban design” in the treatment of urban spaces, which range from the broader urban context through the design of the site itself, to the use and details of materials, we can cover only the main aspects and which will help to enhance the cultural and urban identity at the local level, and thus apply these theoretical principles and then identifying indicators to measure the level of sustainability of urban renewal projects. Whereas, sustainability indicators are the tools used to measure changes in the physical, economic and social structures of a particular metropolitan area [11]. Principles of urban design socially affect people’s lives through their translation into development and influence the pattern of uses, activity, and movement in a place and the experiences of those who visit, live or work there through the physical expression of urban design represented by the shape of buildings, structures and squares. [9] Table 2 shows the final list of revised indicators developed for the assessment strategy and what is expected of these actions is to ensure that indicators built from the literature and validated by experts are valuable, reliable, and capable of evaluating the sustainability performance of urban renewal projects about urban design.

**Table 2 shows the final list of evaluation indicators that represent urban design performance criteria.**

Urban design Principle	Criteria for urban design	Indicators for urban design
Sense of place and history	Context	The physical properties of evolution and its relationship to the properties of the ocean
	Detailed Design	Suitability of the physical character, the configuration of buildings, and landscape design, appearance, density, height, and mass.
Continuity and enclosure	Layout	Possibility to propose the creation of streets and spaces friendly to people
	Privacy and Amenity	If the place provides a level of comfort
Quality of the public realm	Public Realm	The public/private area is open, safe, and pleasant, designed to preserve the natural environment for kindness and purpose
	Open spaces and Parking	The possibility that open spaces and parking lots are safe and attractive
Ease of movement	Inclusivity	Ease of use and access to the development area.
	Connections	The quality of the walkways (streets, sidewalks, etc.) and the mass transit system for pedestrians and users. Measures how recent development relates to the surrounding areas
Legibility	Distinctiveness	What range of the new proposals creates a sense of place?
Adaptability	Adaptability	Measure flexibility to respond to future changes in the way of life and demography without compromising substantial modifications to the structure of buildings and how buildings are affected by the change.
Diversity	Variety	The possibility of integrating a group of activities to measure the success of developments
Efficiency	Green construction	measure the construction that minimizes the consumption of energy, water and other natural resources and uses them effectively
Safety and Security	Sense of safety	It measures the place's safety, security, and welcomeness.
Services provision	Compactness	Measure the possibility of adjacent places where there are general facilities.
Green Design	Environmental improvement	Shows the passive design process to improve the use of sunlight and air movement in lighting, heating and cooling, guaranteeing that evolution is sustainable design, planning and density.

## 9. Choose a case study and application

Due to the complex and diverse research topics, this research data were collected using qualitative and quantitative methods, and different inquiries were reached as required in the research questions using different data collection methods. Because the case study research method is not defined in a particular way to collect data to make use of a comprehensive set of information and adequately address research topics and variables. Based on the qualitative and quantitative approach used in the current study,

literature review, field notes, case study analysis, and mixed questionnaire survey were used to collect relative data. Regarding qualitative data, it focused on:

- 1- Interviews: where verbal data is analyzed and transcripts of recorded interviews are often made.
- 2- Observations that focus on producing a description of what was observed and converting documents such as images and reports into text.

While the questionnaire is a method for collecting quantitative data.

The process of forming an evaluation strategy for renewal projects at the local level was carried out through two main steps:

First: a comprehensive literature review was conducted with relevant concepts dealing with sustainable urban renewal and urban design.

Second: An organized questionnaire survey was conducted with experts in the relevant fields to assess the status of the Iraqi heritage context, and arrive at the definition of sustainability criteria, arrive at an accurate evaluation strategy.

And to assess the reliability of the developed strategy. The outcome of this process will be a strategic model consisting of criteria and indicators that chart a sustainable approach to urbanization in the Iraqi context. This strategy aims to form a basic knowledge of what constitutes sustainable heritage renewal. This process was done through:

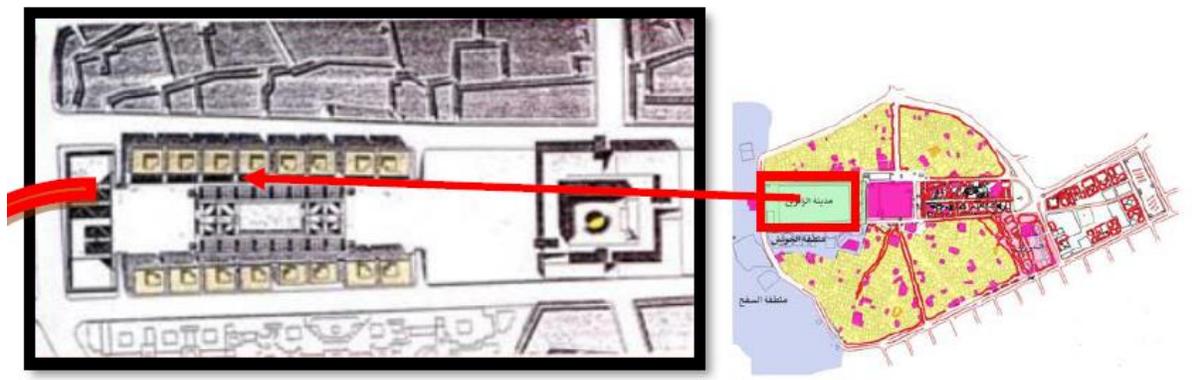
1. Show the background of the historical city centres in Iraq
2. Reviewing the background, application, and limitations of urban renewal processes in Iraq
3. Apply the developed evaluation strategy to selected case studies
4. Evaluate the local urban renewal projects' practices by collecting evaluation results from experts and evaluating the applicability and reliability of the strategy developed at the local level.

## **10. Procedures and methods for data collection**

The research methodology included a preliminary review of the literature and fieldwork, followed by a case study analysis and survey. A mixed questionnaire was conducted for experts in the field of research. After establishing the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for research, the researcher has selected and identified appropriate cases to apply the conceptual framework of the current

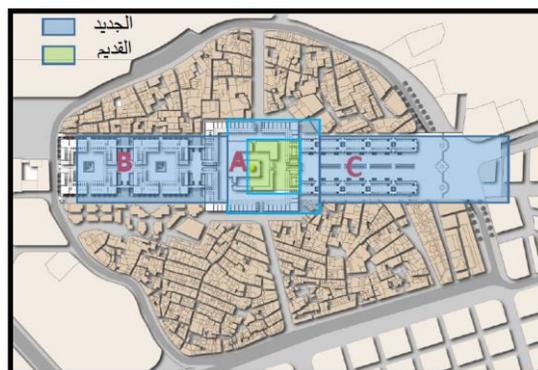
study. The primary strengths of case studies lie in their ability to take into account a great deal of local detail at the same time as comparable information in general, and their flexibility in practice similarities and differences between experience and policy and to pose questions for future research. Four cases were selected after an in-depth review of urban redevelopment projects in the holy city of Najaf. These cases represent redevelopment or renewal projects undertaken or proposed to redevelop the historic city centre.

The first case: is the city of visitors as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 the city of visitors . Source: proposal of city of visitors.**

The second case: is the proposal of Dr Raouf Al-Ansari as shown in Figure 2.



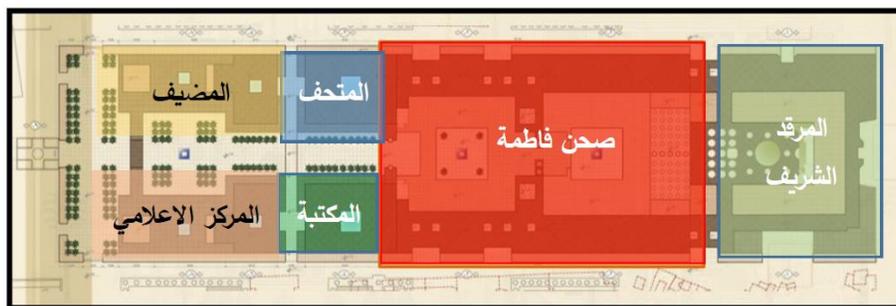
**Figure 2 the proposal of dr raouf al-ansari .Source: proposal of Dr Raouf Al-Ansari.**

The third case: is the urban renewal project for the centre of the city of Najaf, the old city (Diwan UAE Company) as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3 the proposal of (Diwan UAE Company) source: proposal of (Diwan company).**

Fourth case: Beheshti University study as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4 the proposal of Beheshti University. source: proposal of Beheshti University.**

The projects were selected because they could provide examples for evaluating urban redevelopment practices at the local level and embody lessons learned from local renewal approaches. They were adopted as a unit of analysis for the research and were selected the evolution of renewal policies at the local level and to evaluate the effectiveness of the evaluation strategy developed through the current research. Furthermore, these projects may provide examples of good practices for assessing an integrated regeneration approach and related measurement of sustainability. Depending on the research design, the analysis phase of case studies (questionnaires) will help obtain expert opinions on the validity of the developed evaluation strategy that will be adopted in the evaluation of urban renewal projects in the Najaf historical environment

## 11. Search results

The questionnaire included four projects, each of them located within the old city. Among these projects, what is partial, that is, concerned with a specific area of the old city of Najaf, such as the visitors' city project and the consultant project Raouf Al-Ansari, including those that included the city as a whole, such as the Diwan project and the Beheshti project. The questionnaire also included urban design vocabulary that helps evaluate the performance of these projects by achieving the most significant

percentage of this vocabulary. The degree of importance and relative importance of the five projects was calculated to find out which of these projects was able to achieve the most significant percentage of the principles of sustainable urban design. The research reached the results listed in the following table.

**Table 3 shows the degree of the Importance and the Relative Importance Index, and the calculated and tabulated chi-square value, which verifies the validity of the tool for the four projects.**

The project	Importance Degree(I)		decision	Admission score	Relative Importance Index (RI)	arrangements
Visitor City	20	32.5	Ignores	—	—	—
Raouf Al-Ansari	29	32.5	Ignores	—	—	—
Diwan	39	32.5	acceptable	37	34.26%	2
campus architecture	39	32.5	acceptable	39	36.11%	1
Total				108	100%	

From the results of the analysis of the questionnaire, it was found that the architecture of the (Haram project) is the project that achieved the most significant percentage in applying the principles of urban design chosen in the research. Where got a 48% which is considered a tiny percentage compared to international projects. However, it is considered the best existing (proposed) project understudy in developing and renovating the city of Najaf.

To know how to achieve these principles, it is necessary to look at the urban design vocabulary that was addressed in the research to compare the percentages achieved in the elected projects because it is considered a tool for measuring the quality of urban design and thus measuring the quality of projects. As it is clear from the previous results that the comprehensiveness item achieved the most significant percentage in all projects. Thus, the research hypothesis has been achieved by finding a mechanism to measure the quality of projects by realizing the vocabulary of sustainable urban design in them. Moreover, this mechanism represented by the urban design vocabulary discussed in the research serves as a reliable basis for future projects and guidelines for project supervisors and residents. The goal of the research is to determine the extent of its quality and access to the application of the principles of sustainable urban design.

## 12. Conclusion

After we reach the results of the application, the conclusion of the research will be presented, which consists of two main parts:

First part:

1-The research, through theories and concepts of urban design and its relationship to the urban revival process, attempted to identify the relevant principles and aspects of urban design that must be considered in urban renewal projects to create sustainable cities.

2- The research found that urban design is a very effective way to achieve sustainable development, and thus the role of urban design in urban neighborhoods leads to sustainable results.

3- Defining a list of urban design standards and corresponding indicators to apply the considerations to the local context through a questionnaire.

4- Due to the limited time and the specificity of the place (the case study) as it is a sacred historical city, the researcher decided to include the physical (physical) urban design standards related to the local context. Where a reasonable amount of controllable indicators has been selected. Based on the literature and international standards concerned with urban heritage, in addition to a series of analysis processes, several discussions, and a questionnaire for experts.

5- Try to search through the preceding to find an evaluation to assess how these concepts are applied to local practices. Developing a mechanism for evaluating projects through urban design vocabulary is the main achievement of the current research.

Second Part:

1- This mechanism will provide a straightforward means for designers and stakeholders to assess the quality of design and performance of proposals for urban neighbourhood projects and produce effective management for decision-makers to review and reform urban neighbourhood policies and strategies in Iraqi cities, in general, and historic cities, in particular.

2- The projects will be evaluated according to their achievement of the principles of sustainable urban design, so the project will be considered quality when it achieves a high percentage of the principles of urban design.

3- The project is not considered successful if it gets a higher degree than the projects prepared for comparison. Its application of design principles more than others does not make it among the quality of the project. Instead, the quality of the project is measured by the percentage of its achievement of design principles

4- Through the evaluation mechanism (proposed), which is based on evaluating the quality of urban design and the performance of urban neighbourhood projects, it is possible to expect sustainability in these projects. The main will help raise awareness among project stakeholders about the sustainability aspects of urban design and encourage them to achieve long-term sustainable projects, in addition to using the model as a tool to guide design and evaluation. Consequently, the advanced mechanism will help achieve sustainable urban renewal in the future and encourage the use of sustainability aspects in urban design at the local level.

5- By adopting these types of mechanisms, the design or evaluation process will be more accessible and more systematic, as renovation projects will be directed towards more sustainability. This mechanism is flexible and applicable at different levels and in different types of projects. The components of the evaluation model can also be expanded to include more quantitative indicators .They can be modified according to the nature of the project that we need to evaluate.

6- The preservation and renewal of historic cities is a long-term task that should be based on up-to-date information and an in-depth understanding of the city's urban structure. Also, this task cannot be successfully implemented as a separate "project," without a more general planning framework. It cannot be achieved once and for all. Instead, it must result from a continuous process and implement through programs and projects that reflect priorities and objectives that respond to changing needs and resources.

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### تعزيز الهوية الثقافية والعمرانية للمدن المقدسة: النجف حالة دراسية، العراق

**الخلاصة:** من الأسس الجوهرية التي تساعد على تعزيز الهوية الثقافية للمدن المقدسة الحفاظ على مكوناتها المادية والثقافية، الملموسة وغير الملموسة، التي تميزها عن المدن الأخرى. تم تقديم بعض الجوانب الخدمية لمعالجة حالة مؤقتة أو دائمة في المدن المقدسة، مما جعل المدينة تفقد السمات المعمارية التي تميزها، وفقدان روح المكان وذاكرة المدينة. تبحث الدراسة في الأسباب الرئيسية التي أدت إلى فقدان هوية المدن من خلال إدخال مشاريع التجديد كحالة مؤقتة أو دائمة لمعالجة بعض جوانب الخدمة في المدن المقدسة. وبذلك تفقد روحية المكان وذاكرة المدينة.

يهدف البحث إلى الحفاظ على هوية المدن المقدسة من خلال إخضاع المشاريع التنموية لمعايير الاستدامة الحضريّة التي تحتم احترام خصوصية العمارة النجفية والحفاظ عليها. ومن أهم معايير الحفاظ، معرفة جودة المشاريع المنفذة والمقترحة من خلال المسوحات والدراسات الميدانية التي تتناول هذه المشاريع.

خرج البحث بعدة توصيات. وهي أولاً: الحفاظ على العناصر المعمارية التي تميز العمارة النجفية. ثانياً: احترام السياق وعدم الخروج عنه. ثالثاً: تتطلب معرفة نموذج ومعايير مشاريع التجديد والترميم، يجب محاكاة النموذج الأصلي.

يتكون البحث من عدة أجزاء، منها ما تناول إيضاح أهم أسس التخطيط والتصميم التي تحافظ على القيم التراثية للمدن القديمة من خلال مراجعة الأسس الجوهرية للتخطيط في المدن الإسلامية، والتي تؤدي إلى تكوينات شكلية للمعالم الرئيسية. وكذلك الخصائص التي تعكس طبيعة الحياة في المدن الإسلامية من خلال علاقاتهم مع بعضهم البعض. بينما تناولت الأجزاء الأخرى دراسة مشاريع التنمية العمرانية في المدينة القديمة وإخضاعها لأهم معايير الاستدامة الحضريّة، ومن ثم التحقق مما إذا كانت هذه المشاريع تعتبر ضمن الاستدامة الحضريّة.