

# Place Identity and Urban Uniqueness: Insights from the Al-Rusafa Area, Old Baghdad, Iraq

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## Abstract

This research delves into the exploration of place identity and uniqueness in the Al-Rusafa area of Old Baghdad, Iraq. It aims to understand how the intertwining of historical and cultural elements contributes to the distinctive urban identity of this historic locale. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study commenced with an extensive literature review to establish a robust theoretical framework. This was followed by empirical research, including surveys and interviews with experts, to gather insights into the lived experiences and perceptions that shape the place identity of Al-Rusafa.

The findings of this research illuminate the intricate relationship between Al-Rusafa's historical legacy and its contemporary urban identity. The study reveals that the area's unique character is deeply rooted in its rich historical and cultural tapestry, which continues to influence current urban dynamics and perceptions. It also underscores the role of architectural heritage and social narratives in shaping the identity of urban spaces.

Conclusively, this study not only enriches the understanding of urban identity in the context of historical cities but also provides valuable insights for urban planners and conservationists. It highlights the importance of preserving cultural and historical elements in urban development, ensuring that the uniqueness of places like Al-Rusafa is maintained and celebrated.

**Key Words:** Urban Development, Place Identity, City Uniqueness, Urban Planning, City Branding.

## Introduction

In the heart of Old Baghdad, the Al-Rusafa area stands as a testament to a rich and intricate urban identity that is deeply rooted in its historical, cultural, and architectural heritage. The Al-Rusafa area, with its distinctive characteristics, provides an insightful context for exploring the complex dynamics that shape place identity and uniqueness in urban landscapes.

The concept of urban identity is a reflection of an area's unique character, embodying its historical depths, cultural richness, architectural splendor, and social narratives. In historical cities like Old Baghdad, the interplay of these factors is especially pronounced. These cities face the dual challenge of embracing modernity while preserving their historical and cultural essence. The evolving urban landscape of Al-Rusafa, marked by both its venerable past and its current transformation, presents a rich field for studying these dynamics. In this context, this study examines the critical challenge of preserving this unique identity amidst the pressures of

modern urban development and change. Its aim is to deepen the understanding of urban identity in historic cities and offer practical insights for preserving the unique character of such places in the face of modern development.

Its objectives are as follows.

1. To identify and analyze the key elements that contribute to the sense of place and uniqueness in the Al-Rusafa area.
2. To explore the interplay between historical, cultural, and architectural aspects in shaping urban identity.
3. To provide insights and recommendations for urban planners and policymakers focused on preserving the unique identity of historic urban areas.

## Theoretical Framework

### Place Identity

The concept of "place identity" is defined as the layered meanings of a place that are conveyed and negotiated across generations, potentially undergoing partial transformation and erosion. This concept encapsulates a continuous series of connections between people and their environment (Toboso-Chavero et al., 2019) and forms the initial impression for visitors moving within the space. According to al Sayigh (2017), place identity is a multifaceted concept coined the term, describing it as comprising an individual's subjective dimensions within a physical structure, shaped by a complex interplay of conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral skills (Al-Sayigh, 2017; Al- Badrani, 2008)

In urban environments, significance of the identity of place is emphasized in differentiating one place from another (Aboud, 2021)

Al-Badrani (2008) notes its role in fostering positive self-evaluation by focusing on the positive aspects of a place and minimizing the negative elements (Al- Badrani, 2008). Hauge (2007) discusses its contribution to cognitive processes related to group homogeneity and individual uniqueness (Hauge, 2007), influencing personal and spatial perception. Indeed, place identity also functions as a marker of individual identity, reflecting a person's connection to a place and playing a pivotal role in preserving social memories and cultural values of built environments with architectural and historical significance (Alsaliq & Alshami, 2015; Ginting et al., 2018)

This paper recognizes the importance of understanding place identity in the context of urban planning. It highlights how this understanding reflects the interaction between human values and spatial characteristics. Recognizing place identity is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and is influenced by key elements such as location, spatial composition, and architectural design. Indeed, the identity of a place is discerned through its unique characteristics, which not only distinguish it from other places but also influence the comprehensive and mutual interaction between people and their physical environment (Hauge, 2007; Al- Badrani, 2008). Such interaction is significant in shaping how individuals perceive themselves and engage with their urban surroundings.

For historical centers, place identity represents a living history encapsulated in the architecture and spaces, carrying both the tangible and intangible dimensions of place (Alkinani, 2019) The concept, however, is subject to ongoing debates and ambiguities, particularly concerning its relationship with various environmental psychology concepts such as place attachment and satisfaction (Peng et al., 2020)

Nevertheless, it goes through several formative processes as identified by Nanda (2019), beginning with the perception of place meanings, which involves assigning significance to the physical spaces and areas of a place (Nanda, 2019).

**Table 1:** An explanation of the elements of the place perception process

Source: Clark et al., 2020; Al-Rebaye, 2020

Concept	Description
Sensory Perception of Place	It is the symbolic signal that a place can send to individuals
Excellence in Understanding Place	It is the organized mental representation of individuals
Place Continuity Constants	It is the ability of public spaces to maintain their urban and social ties for long periods, and it is one of the physical characteristics of the place's predictability, stability, and permanence.
Historical Knowledge of the Place	It is knowledge of the material and social assets related to the history of the place.
Narratives of Place	Stories of place that resonate between individuals

The second process in forming place identity is 'attachment to place'. It involves the development of emotional connections to a location. This process is characterized by its complexity and multi-faceted nature, encompassing a range of human-place connections, including emotional, cognitive, belief-based, behavioral, and action-oriented aspects (Alrobae & Al-Kinani, 2019) This process contributes significantly to the shaping of place identity by fostering deep and nuanced ties between individuals and their environments.

**Table 2:** Elements of the place attachment process

Source: Al-Sayigh, 2017a; Bouanani Arabi, 2023a; Al-Rebaye, 2020a

Concept	Description
Historical Connection to the Place	It is the long-term emotional connection to a specific place and the meaning that is attributed to that connection
Dependence on Location	This is the reason for the basic value of the place and achieving the desired goals (i.e., that individuals are connected to places that support their goals)
Collective Memory of Place	It is the community members' sharing of memories related to the place
Urban Reminders of Place	How powerful are the memories and stories related to the place
Feeling of Loss of Place	As happens in Palestine, the people feel fearful about the possibility of losing their identity
Genius of Place (Spirit of Place)	The distinctive and unique tangible aspects of the place

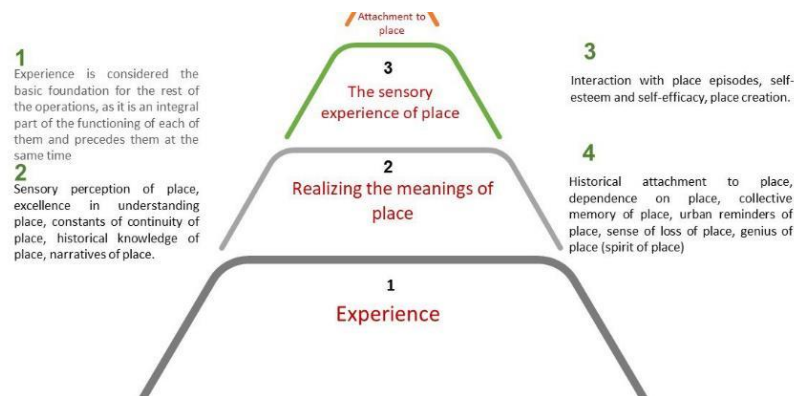
Formation of place identity involves a sequential process beginning with perception, followed by experience, and ultimately leading to attachment. Initially, the perception of a place sets the foundation for how an individual interprets and understands their environment. This is followed by the experience of the place, which is pivotal in shaping its identity. The experience emphasizes the human aspect, particularly focusing on the individual's unique interactions within that environment and the collective memory formed. Alrawi & Noori (2023) highlight how these personal and shared experiences are crucial in the creation and perception of a place's identity. Finally, the stage of attachment occurs, where the quality and nature of these experiences influence the development of a strong emotional connection to the place. Negative experiences might hinder this attachment, while positive ones facilitate it, underscoring the importance of experience in the formation of place identity.

**Table 3:** Elements of the place experience process

Source: Al-Sayigh, 2017a; Rudwan, 2020a; Al-Rebaye, 2020a

Aspect of Place Engagement	Description
Interact with Place Rings	It is the social interaction that the members of a community have with each other towards the place.
Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy	It is linked to an individual's ability to achieve, his self-confidence, and feelings of self-worth.
Create the Place	Paying attention to public places and redesigning or planning them as they are the heart of the community.

The engagement of an individual in activities or experiences within a place is a crucial part of the place identity formation process. This process, as Nanda (2019) describes, begins with experiencing the place, which then influences one's perception of its meanings and the formation of a connection to it. The decision to participate in city events and select specific experiences is a direct result of this initial experience and the subsequent perceptions and connections formed. This decision-making involves evaluating and comparing these experiences, often leading to a deeper involvement in urban development. Such engagement underscores the importance of experiential aspects in shaping place identity, where the direct experiences with a place form the basis for further connections and involvement (Nanda, 2019).



**Fig. 1:** Place identity processes

Source: Author

## Uniqueness

The concept of "uniqueness" in the context of urban studies refers to a city's distinctive qualities. It is seen as an essential characteristic for cities to stand out in a globalized world, primarily achieved through architectural innovations that resonate with both local and global communities (Abdel-Muttalib, 2020; Saadoun, 2016). Uniqueness in urban forms encompasses both tangible and intangible elements like city life, events, and daily experiences that embody historical, ideological, religious, and cultural values (Elshater & Abusaada, 2022; Piłat-Borcuch, 2015). These elements enhance the reputation of a city and contribute to its distinct identity. Urban planning must consider these aspects to maintain and develop the unique character of a city's (Badawy et al., 2023; Qassab, 1985; Soedwihajono, 2020). In fact, the preservation of these unique attributes is crucial for sustainable development and the enhancement of the attractiveness of a city (Arruda et al., 2016; Leshchenko, 2021). The research suggests that leveraging unique physical and cultural features of a city is key to successful urban planning and development (Rasool & Dewachi, 2023)

## City Marketing

City marketing, often also referred to as "city branding," is a strategic approach in the urban context. As Teixeira (2008) says, a clear and coherent image a city enhances the authenticity of urban experiences and fosters symbolic interactions. In a competitive global landscape, city branding serves as a critical tool for urban management and strategic planning (TEIXEIRA, 2008). It emphasizes the unique cultural and imaginative aspects of cities, aiming to reinforce identity and distinction among the urban spaces. Highlighting the unique attributes of a city, from architectural designs to cultural offerings, forms a compelling narrative that influences people's decisions to visit, invest, or relocate (Arruda et al., 2016). This approach intertwines cultural and economic factors, translating cultural uniqueness into tangible, material benefits.

The reflection of various cultural influences in urban monuments and plans is significant, as different people introduce their cultural and architectural styles into city life (Leshchenko, 2021). The economic elements, both tangible like regional materials and financing, and intangible like regional techniques and traditional crafts, are pivotal in shaping

historical cities. They influence social and cultural practices and drive the growth and exchange of goods (Leshchenko, 2016). Translating local uniqueness into a globalized context through cultural expressions can foster global images that boost local economies via tourism, services, and products, attracting people to live or work in the city (Kavaratzis, 2008). City branding, therefore, is a strategic approach, not just limited to slogans, but involving an integrated strategy for city repositioning, transformation, or affirmation, focusing on unique characteristics including architecture, lifestyle, and culture (Arruda et al., 2016)

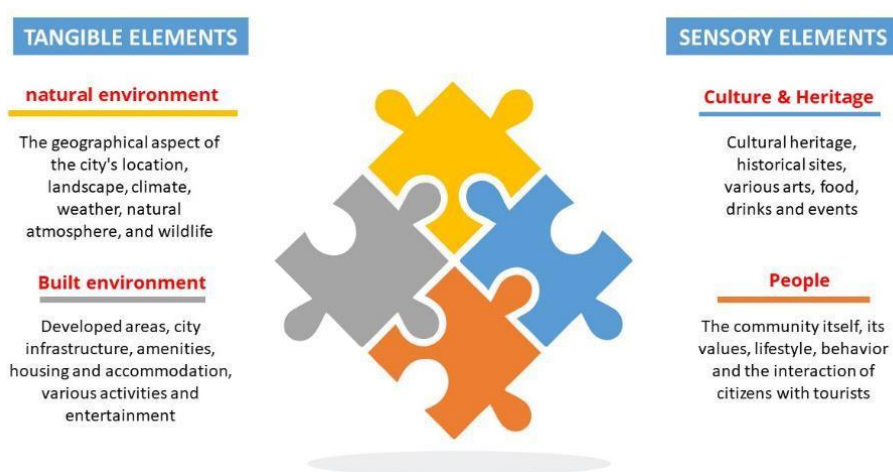
Successful management of cultural tourism increases the attractiveness of archaeological heritage and can generate significant funds that can be used to finance studies, preservation and maintenance and to display this archaeological heritage to the public (Soufiane et al., 2021)

### Elements of Uniqueness of the Cities

The elements contributing to the uniqueness of a city can be categorized into two groups: tangible material assets, like the natural and built environments, and intangible elements. The key aspects include:

1. **Natural Environment:** This emphasizes the city's geographic location, climate, and natural features. An example is the Algarve coast in Portugal, renowned for its beautiful scenery and moderate climate.
2. **Built Environment:** This focuses on developed areas, infrastructure, amenities, and iconic structures like the Sydney Opera House and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.
3. **Culture and Heritage:** This encompasses cultural heritage, historical sites, arts, cuisine, events, etc., as exemplified by Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad and the ancient city of Babylon,
4. **People:** The societal aspect highlights lifestyle, behavior, and interaction between locals and tourists.

According to Sutriadi, Rashad & Ramadhan (2020), and Al-Sayed (2018), these elements play a crucial role in shaping the unique identity of a city (Al-Sayed, 2018; Sutriadi et al., 2020).



**Fig. 2:** Elements of the city's uniqueness  
Source: Sutriadi et al., 2020

### Review of Literature

The exploration of place identity and its multifaceted dimensions offers valuable insights into how individuals and communities interact with their environments. Recent studies have delved into various aspects of this concept, from urban identity in smart heritage areas to



the sustainability of urban park communities and the role of place branding in local development. Each research contributes unique perspectives on the psychological, cultural, and environmental factors that shape our connection to places. The following review synthesizes these diverse studies, highlighting their findings and the implications for urban planning, heritage conservation, and community development.

Among them, Geng et al. (2023) stand out. They thoroughly explore urban identity within Smart Heritage, emphasizing its multifaceted nature covering spatial, social, cultural, and economic aspects. However, Alpak et al. (2023) shift the focus to place identity in urban park communities, discussing how emotional, social, and environmental elements contribute to their sustainability. To this diversity, Bernardo et al. (2023) introduce a 'Place Identity Contents scale' to understand the dynamic nature of place identity in urban settings.

O'Sullivan et al. (2023) take it further. They highlight the challenges of rapid urbanization on place making, advocating for biophilic design as a sustainable solution. Vinodhini & Emmanuel (2023) take a different dimension. They analyze place identity along highways, focusing on how visual cues shape travelers' perceptions and memories. Adding to this Kostopoulou et al. (2023) delve into the psychological and emotional dimensions of place-identity, examining historical, cultural, and environmental factors. In more detail, Ozoliņa (2022) explores place branding in Latvia, considering its role in urban and rural development and the importance of capturing a place's unique identity.

History has also been explored. In fact, Al-Saffar (2020) discusses urban identity challenges in historic cities, focusing on the need for citizen involvement in preserving urban heritage. Nanda (2019) adds to this and studies 'Place-Identity' in heritage cities like Puri, India, highlighting the dynamic nature of identity in the face of modernization. Cross (2015) offers insights into the formation of place attachments, proposing a framework based on various individual, group, and cultural processes.

In contrast, Seamon (2013) adopts a phenomenological approach to place attachment and urban identity, integrating specific experiences into broader conceptual frameworks. Hay (1998) adds to this when he investigates the 'sense of place' in a developmental context on New Zealand's Banks Peninsula, focusing on factors like rootedness and cultural influences. Moreover, Twigger-Ross & Uzzell (1996) employ Breakwell's identity process model to study place attachment in the London Docklands, revealing how different residents perceive their local environment. Collectively, these studies provide a nuanced understanding of place identity and attachment, emphasizing their importance in urban planning, heritage conservation, and environmental psychology.

In this exploration of place identity and attachment across various studies offers profound insights into how environmental, cultural, social, and psychological elements intertwine to shape our connection to places. These diverse perspectives, ranging from urban development and heritage conservation to individual and community identity, underscore the dynamic and multifaceted nature of place identity. This synthesis not only deepens our understanding of the subject but also highlights the importance of considering these factors in future urban planning, policy-making, and sustainable development initiatives.

### **Urban Uniqueness: A Framework for Assessing Place Identity**

Table 4 presents a structured approach to analyze the distinct characteristics and identity of urban environments. By categorizing indicators into primary and secondary types, it facilitates a deep understanding of the complex nature of cities. This framework evaluates diverse aspects of urban distinctiveness, including architectural, cultural, socio-economic, and historical elements. It serves as a comprehensive tool for comparing and understanding various urban landscapes, while considering their unique attributes and place identity, as shown in the Table 5.

**Table 4:** A Framework for Assessing Place Identity

Source: Author

Primary Indicator	Secondary Indicator	Detailed Explanation
Architectural Uniqueness	Iconic Structures	Analysis of unique architectural features contributing to the city's identity and appeal.
Cultural Heritage	Local Narratives	Examining stories, traditions, and cultural practices that define the city's historical and cultural identity.
Urban Development	Public Spaces	Evaluating the design, usage, and impact of public spaces on urban life and identity.
Socioeconomic Dynamics	Community Engagement	Assessing how community activities and interactions reflect and shape the city's character.
Historical Significance	Historical Landmarks	Studying the preservation, presentation, and influence of historical sites on the city's uniqueness.

### Research Methodology

This study focused on obtaining expert insights into the urban identity and uniqueness of the Al-Rusafa area in Old Baghdad. The primary data collection method involved a structured online questionnaire, which was administered to a select group of professionals in architecture and urban planning.

**Data Collection Tool:** The questionnaire was designed to gather detailed perspectives from experts in the field. It featured a series of questions based on the Likert scale format, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." This 5-point Likert scale allowed for a nuanced understanding of the experts' opinions on various aspects of urban identity and uniqueness in Al-Rusafa.

**Participant Selection and Distribution:** The survey targeted a specific subset of professionals with relevant expertise. Invitations were sent to specialists in architecture and urban planning, with a total of 25 experts responding and participating in the study. The survey was conducted in December 2023, ensuring timely and relevant data collection.

**Data Collection Process:** The questionnaire was distributed via email and professional networks, tapping into a well-connected community of experts in the relevant fields. The process was designed to be straightforward and accessible, encouraging in-depth and thoughtful responses from the participants.

**Data Analysis:** The responses from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively to interpret the scale-based answers. The analysis focused on identifying patterns and consensus among the expert opinions, providing a clear picture of the collective viewpoint on the subject matter.

**Ethical Considerations:** Ethical standards were rigorously maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed about the research objectives and their consent was obtained for participation. Anonymity and confidentiality of the responses were ensured to uphold the integrity of the research process.

**Methodological Rigor:** This methodology, with its focus on expert opinions and structured data collection using the Likert scale, provided a robust framework for understanding the nuanced aspects of urban identity and uniqueness as perceived by professionals in architecture and urban planning. The precise nature of the questions and the methodical analysis of the responses ensured that the findings were both reliable and insightful.

## Overview of Old Baghdad, Al-Rusafa

### Al-Rusafa: Heart of Baghdad's Urban Identity and Historical Richness

Al-Rusafa, forming the eastern half of Baghdad, Iraq, is more than a geographical location; it is a symbol of profound urban identity and historical depth. This case study examines how Al-Rusafa's distinct character and rich history contribute to the broader narrative of urban uniqueness in Baghdad, positioning it as the true heart of the city.

#### Historical and Cultural Context:

Al-Rusafa's history, stretching back centuries, is evident in its intricate urban fabric, which beautifully blends traditional layouts and modern grid patterns. This area, known for being the central business and commercial sector of Baghdad, comprises 24 unique districts. Each district showcases a rich tapestry of diverse cultures, nationalities, and religions, reflective of its historical legacy. Landmarks like Al-Rashid Street and the city's oldest traditional markets, both covered and open strip markets flanked by shops and inns, serve as living testimonies to Al-Rusafa's past.

#### Architectural Significance and Urban Fabric:

The architectural layout of Al-Rusafa, characterized by a mix of traditional Iraqi styles and modern influences, plays a crucial role in defining its urban identity. This blend is not just in the buildings but also in the streets and markets, forming the commercial core of old Baghdad. The area is bordered by significant landmarks such as the Mohammed Al-Qasim highway, the Tigris River, the Al-Bab Al-Sharqi area, and Bab Al-Muadham, all contributing to its unique urban landscape.

#### Contemporary Challenges:

Despite its rich heritage, Al-Rusafa faces challenges in preserving its identity amid modern development. This study explores these challenges, focusing on how Al-Rusafa's identity can be maintained and enhanced amidst the pressures of urbanization and modernization.

#### Community Perspective:

The perspectives of Al-Rusafa's inhabitants and local experts are central to understanding its identity. Their views offer invaluable insights into how the area's identity is perceived, experienced, and valued, forming a crucial component of this case study as shown in the Table 6 and the Fig. 3.






**Fig. 3:** Study area boundaries

Source: Author



**Table 5:** The most important streets of the study area  
Source: Author

No.	Street Name	Description	Illustrative Images
1	Al-Rashid Street	Morphologically divided into five distinct areas due to the construction of bridges since 1939, which segmented Al-Rashid Street into parts: Al-Sink, Al-Murabba'a, Al-Souq, Al-Haidar Khana, and Al-Maidan.	
2	Al-Jumhuriya Street	A commercial and institutional street featuring high-rise buildings along its length. It includes several notable squares within its stretch (Al-Khilani Square, Al-Wathba Square, and Al-Amin Square).	
3	Al-Nahr Street	Runs parallel to Al-Rashid Street to the east and the Tigris River to the west. This narrow street is pedestrian-only, with shops, old buildings, and inns occupying the space within a few meters of the riverbank. Occasionally, open spaces along the street provide direct views of the river. The street is lined with numerous mosques and includes a collection of old inns.	

### Comprehensive Analysis of Survey

In the quest to comprehend the intricate fabric of urban identity, This study delves into various dimensions that collectively forge the essence of a city. It explores five critical aspects: Architectural Uniqueness, Cultural Heritage, Urban Development, Socioeconomic Dynamics, and Historical Significance. Each of these domains offers a unique lens through which the identity and character of a city can be discerned and appreciated.

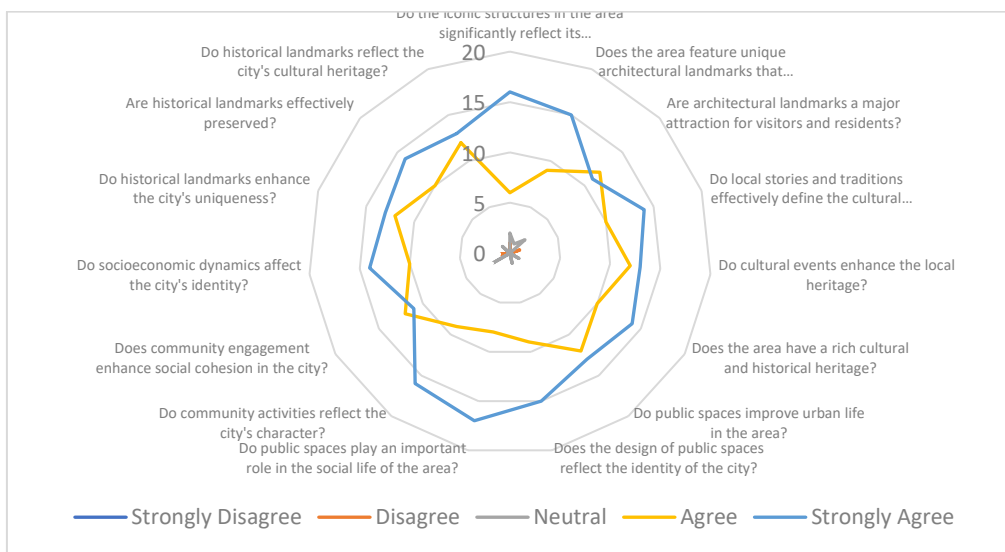
Through a methodical approach, employing both quantitative and qualitative analyses, this research has engaged with a diverse range of respondents to gather insights on how these elements are perceived and valued. The analysis is structured to provide an overarching view followed by a detailed examination of each aspect. This includes assessing the impact of iconic structures on architectural uniqueness, the role of local narratives in shaping cultural heritage, the significance of public spaces in urban development, the influence of community engagement in socio-economic dynamics, and the importance of historical landmarks in defining historical significance.

The scores derived from the survey serve as a quantitative backbone, complementing the qualitative narratives that emerge from the voices of those intimately connected with the city. Together, these findings paint a comprehensive picture of the city identity, revealing the multifaceted interactions between physical structures, cultural narratives, social dynamics, and historical legacies.

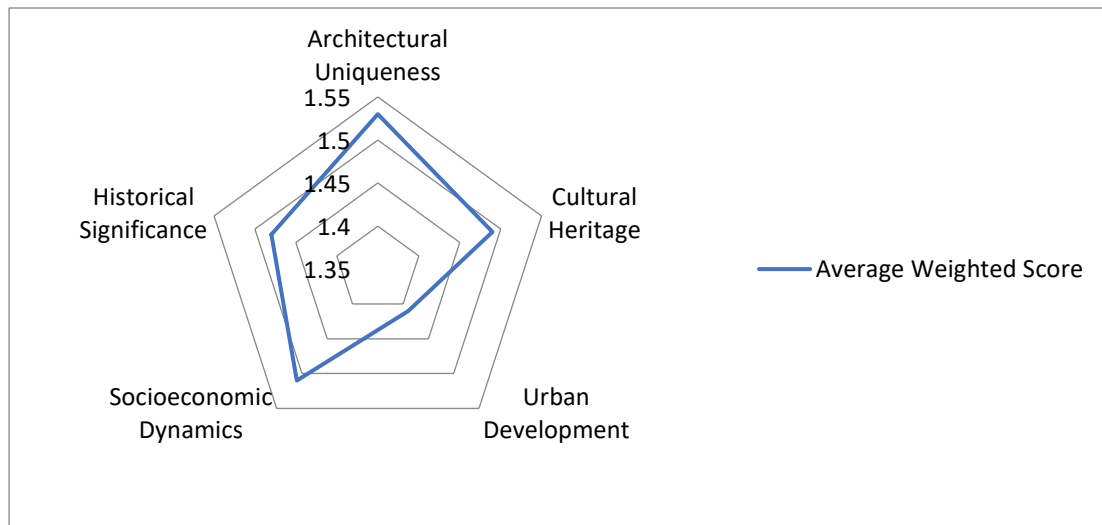
What follows is an in-depth analysis of each of these pivotal themes, unfolding the rich tapestry of urban identity that is woven through the streets, stories, and spirits of the city as presented in the Table 6 and the Fig 4,5.

**Table 6:** Comprehensive Analysis of Survey  
Source: Author

	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Weighted Average
Architectural Uniqueness - Iconic Structures	Do the iconic structures in the area significantly reflect its architectural uniqueness?	0	1	2	6	16	1.52
	Does the area feature unique architectural landmarks that contribute to its identity?	0	0	1	9	15	1.44
	Are architectural landmarks a major attraction for visitors and residents?	0	0	2	12	11	1.64
Cultural Heritage - Local Narratives	Do local stories and traditions effectively define the cultural identity of the area?	0	1	0	10	14	1.52
	Do cultural events enhance the local heritage?	0	0	0	12	13	1.48
	Does the area have a rich cultural and historical heritage?	0	0	1	10	14	1.48
Urban Development - Public Spaces	Do public spaces improve urban life in the area?	0	0	0	12	13	1.48
	Does the design of public spaces reflect the identity of the city?	0	0	1	9	15	1.44
	Do public spaces play an important role in the social life of the area?	0	0	0	8	17	1.32
Socioeconomic Dynamics - Community Engagement	Do community activities reflect the city's character?	0	0	0	9	16	1.36
	Does community engagement enhance social cohesion in the city?	0	0	2	12	11	1.64
	Do socioeconomic dynamics affect the city's identity?	0	1	0	10	14	1.52
Historical Significance - Historical Landmarks	Do historical landmarks enhance the city's uniqueness?	0	0	0	12	13	1.48
	Are historical landmarks effectively preserved?	0	0	1	10	14	1.48
	Do historical landmarks reflect the city's cultural heritage?	0	0	0	12	13	1.48



**Fig. 4:** Comprehensive Analysis of Survey  
Source: Author



**Fig. 5:** Average Weighted Score  
Source: Author

### Analysis of the Survey

#### Architectural Uniqueness - Iconic Structures

Overall Insight: Respondents show a strong agreement that architectural uniqueness and iconic structures define the elements of the area's identity and attraction.

#### Detailed Analysis:

- Reflecting Architectural Uniqueness (Score: 1.52): Iconic structures are widely perceived as significantly reflecting the area's architectural uniqueness.
- Contribution to Identity (Score: 1.44): There is a strong consensus that the area's unique architectural landmarks contribute notably to its identity.
- Attraction for Visitors and Residents (Score: 1.64): Architectural landmarks are considered major attractions, though slightly less unanimously compared to other aspects of architectural uniqueness.

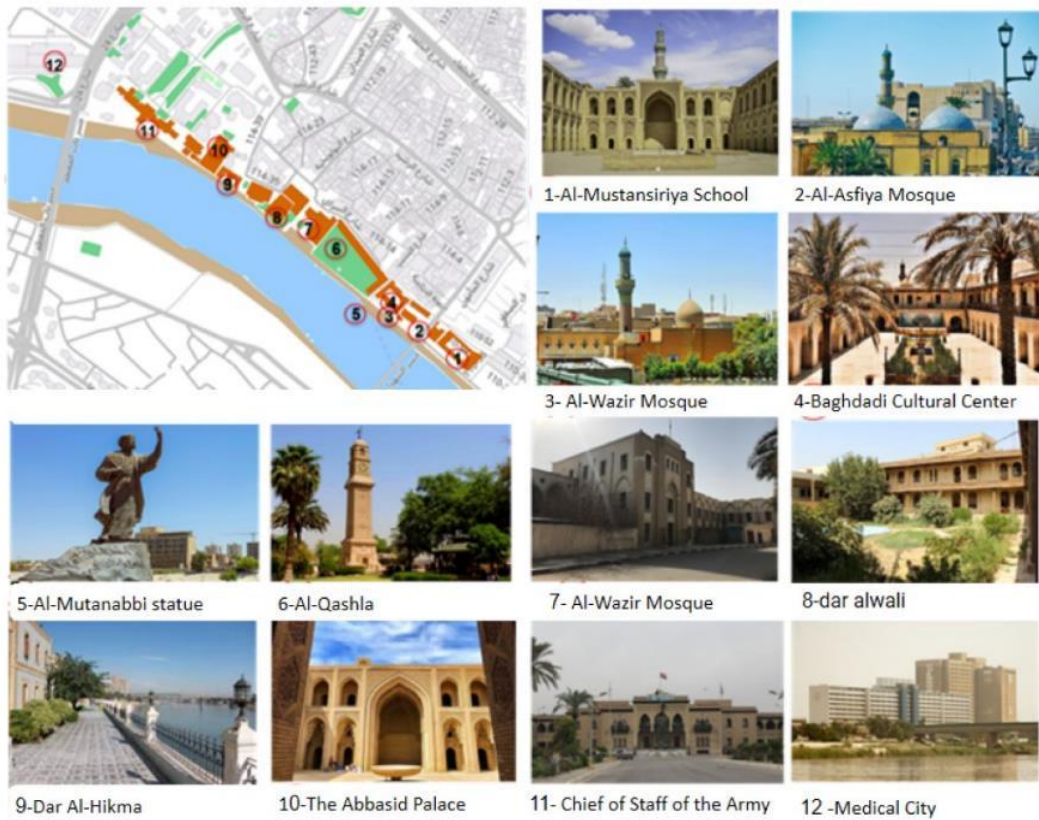
#### Cultural Heritage - Local Narratives

Overall Insight: The area's cultural heritage, shaped by local narratives and events, is highly valued and seen as a key component of its identity.

#### Detailed Analysis:

- Defining Cultural Identity through Stories and Traditions (Score: 1.52): Local stories and traditions are recognized as effective definers of cultural identity.
- Enhancement by Cultural Events (Score: 1.48): Cultural events are strongly perceived as enhancing local heritage.
- Rich Cultural and Historical Heritage (Score: 1.48): There is a shared belief in the richness of the area's cultural and historical heritage.

### Historical sites in the study area overlooking the Tigris River



**Fig. 6:** Architectural Uniqueness - Iconic Structures

Source: Author

### Urban Development - Public Spaces

Overall Insight: Public spaces are unanimously considered pivotal in urban life, reflecting the city's identity and social dynamics.

Detailed Analysis:

- Improvement of Urban Life (Score: 1.48): Public spaces are agreed upon as crucial elements that improve urban life.
- Reflection of City Identity (Score: 1.44): The design of public spaces is widely seen as a reflection of the city's identity.
- Role in Social Life (Score: 1.32): There's a very strong consensus on the importance of public spaces in the social life of the area, receiving the lowest score, indicating the highest level of agreement.



**Fig. 7:** Urban Development - Public Spaces

Source: Author



### Socioeconomic Dynamics - Community Engagement

Overall Insight: Socioeconomic dynamics and community engagement are recognized as influential factors shaping the city's character and social cohesion.

Detailed Analysis:

- Reflection of City's Character by Community Activities (Score: 1.36): Community activities are strongly perceived as reflecting the city's character.
- Enhancement of Social Cohesion (Score: 1.64): There's agreement that community engagement plays a significant role in enhancing social cohesion.
- Impact on City's Identity (Score: 1.52): The influence of socioeconomic dynamics on the city's identity is recognized.



**Fig. 8:** Socioeconomic Dynamics - Community Engagement

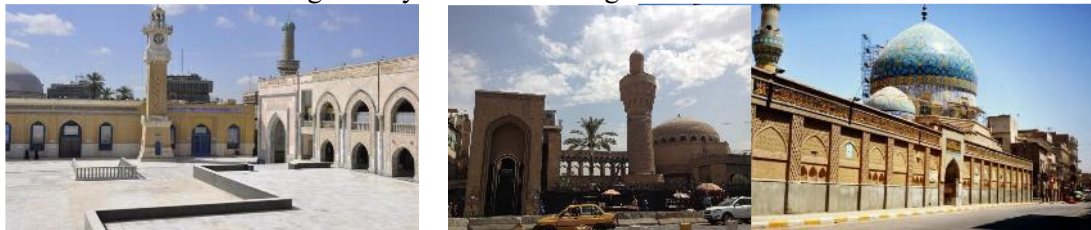
Source: Author

### Historical Significance - Historical Landmarks

Overall Insight: Historical landmarks are unanimously regarded as crucial elements that enhance the city's uniqueness and reflect its cultural heritage.

Detailed Analysis:

- Enhancement of City's Uniqueness (Score: 1.48): The role of historical landmarks in enhancing the city's uniqueness is strongly acknowledged.
- Effective Preservation (Score: 1.48): There's a high level of agreement that historical landmarks are effectively preserved.
- Reflection of Cultural Heritage (Score: 1.48): Historical landmarks are unanimously viewed as reflecting the city's cultural heritage.



**Fig. 9:** Historical Significance

Source: Author

### Conclusion

This study, centered on the Al-Rusafa area of Old Baghdad, sought to unravel the intricate layers of urban identity and uniqueness. While the foundational statement of this research may echo its initiation, the journey of this inquiry has illuminated several nuanced aspects of urban identity not previously articulated.

### Key Contributions

1. **Empirical Validation of Theoretical Constructs:** The research provided empirical evidence supporting the theoretical framework of place identity, especially in the context of a historically and culturally rich urban setting like Al-Rusafa. It offered tangible insights into how architectural uniqueness, cultural heritage, and urban development intricately interweave to form a distinct urban identity.



2. **Comparative Urban Analysis:** By juxtaposing Al-Rusafa's identity with other urban contexts, this study contributed to a broader understanding of urban identity formation. It highlighted how specific historical, cultural, and architectural elements shape the uniqueness of urban areas.
3. **Framework for Urban Planning and Heritage Conservation:** The findings offer a structured approach for urban planners and heritage conservationists, emphasizing the importance of integrating community engagement and cultural narratives in urban development strategies.
4. **Implications and Future Research:** The study underscores the dynamic nature of urban identity, influenced by both tangible and intangible factors. It suggests that future research could further explore the role of policy and governance in preserving and enhancing urban identity, especially against the backdrop of rapid urbanization. Additionally, investigating the impact of technological advancements and globalization on the cultural and historical aspects of urban areas could provide valuable insights.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the discourse on urban planning and heritage conservation, reinforcing the intricate balance between modernization and the preservation of unique urban identities. It serves not just as an academic inquiry but as a guide for practical urban development strategies, ensuring that cities like Al-Rusafa can navigate the path of modernization while retaining their distinctive historical and cultural essence.

### Recommendations

The outcomes of this investigation into the factors influencing urban identity and uniqueness offer several actionable recommendations for urban planners, architects, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in city development and preservation:

1. **Prioritizing Heritage Conservation:** Given the strong consensus on the importance of architectural uniqueness and historical landmarks, urban development plans should integrate strategies for preserving these elements. This can include the designation of heritage sites, the implementation of conservation laws, and the promotion of adaptive reuse of historical structures.
2. **Community-Centric Urban Planning:** The significant role of public spaces and community activities in enhancing social cohesion and reflecting a city's character necessitates a shift towards more inclusive and participatory urban planning. Engaging local communities in the planning process can lead to the creation of spaces that are not only functional but also resonate with the cultural and social fabric of the area.
3. **Balancing Modernization with Cultural Preservation:** As cities evolve, it is crucial to balance modern infrastructure development with the preservation of cultural narratives and historical context. This balance can be achieved through policies that encourage architectural innovation while respecting traditional designs and cultural landscapes.
4. **Fostering Cultural Narratives:** Encourage initiatives that promote local stories, traditions, and cultural events. This can be facilitated through funding cultural projects, organizing heritage walks, and supporting local art and cultural groups.
5. **Policy and Governance for Place Identity:** Policymakers should consider the establishment of frameworks and guidelines that support the maintenance and promotion of place identity. This involves considering the cultural, historical, and architectural aspects in urban governance and policy-making.
6. **Research and Development in Urban Identity:** Encourage further research into the impact of policy, governance, and rapid urbanization on the cultural and historical aspects of cities. This research should aim to provide deeper insights into the dynamic nature of urban identity and guide future urban development strategies.

These recommendations aim to support the development of cities that not only thrive in their modernity but also maintain their unique historical and cultural essence, thereby enriching the urban experience for residents and visitors alike.

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