

# Creative Place-making as a Critical Approach to Promoting Cultural Third-Places: Insights from Al-Mutanabi Street in Baghdad, Iraq

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## Abstract

The concept of 'third place' has gained widespread recognition as a common theme in urban areas worldwide, as cities undergo transformations and attract increasing numbers of people for both residential and work purposes. This paper introduces the 'cultural third place' concept based on merging the cultural dimension of sustainable development (SD) in urban third places depending on creative place-making as an approach to accomplish cultural characteristics in places. The research proposes a theoretical framework with three domains representing the main criteria and fifteen indicators for evaluating a local case study: Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad. The framework is examined through a questionnaire survey administered to inhabitants and visitors of the Al-Mutanabbi street.

The research concludes affirming the essential role of cultural third places in improving the quality of life and stimulating possible interactions between people sharing knowledge and culture, thereby promoting sociability and solidarity among the citizens. Services in the site within the physical domain and the optional activities obtained the highest degree in the evaluation compared to necessary uses in the street, while the meanings aspect recorded the highest score for cultural preservation and vitality of the street.

**Keywords:** Third-places, Cultural dimension, Sustainable development (SD), Creative place-making, Cultural third-place, Al-Mutanabi Street, Iraq.

## Introduction

Cultural places constitute an integrated system of components, including tangible elements such as historical and archaeological buildings, and intangible components such as customs, traditions, values, and rituals that represent the culture of a society. These components have contributed to giving these spaces their unique character and identity, in addition to their natural and built environmental values. However, there is a great concern about the accelerated competition between cities caused by globalization, which affects the preservation of heritage and cultural expressions that play a role in consolidating the sense of place (Herbig, 2017). Furthermore, the development and evaluation of heritage sites require a comprehensive approach that takes into account the different tangible and intangible aspects related to these spaces, which enhances and creates authenticity and a sense of belonging to the place and increases the

attraction of visitors to meet their different needs (Santa-Cruz and López-Guzmán, 2017). Cultural spaces represent a continuous system from the past to the present. Additionally, the formation of these spaces is subject to historical, political, economic, and social factors that have contributed to their formation (Herbig, 2017).

Victorovna (2021) defines cultural spaces as spaces that aim to create interactive spaces known for their social capacity-building qualities, establishing connections, and promoting cultural and knowledge exchange for different user groups. These spaces act as central hubs for intellectual exchanges and social interactions within any urban environment that can be classified as a 'cultural third place' (Oldenburg, 1989; 2007). Presence of such places enhances the value and quality of the urban environment, and supports the well-being of its users, thereby promoting cultural sustainability (Herbig, 2017).

## Review of Literature

Earlier research has focused on examining the social, economic, and environmental aspects of the concept of third place (Jeffres et al., 2009; Abu Yousuf, 2013; Dolley and Bosman, 2019). However, they are yet to fully explore the cultural dimension of this concept. This review examines the architectural studies that have dealt with the concept of third place on the one hand, and the cultural dimension of sustainability on the other.

This study proposes that incorporating these cultural features into third places can promote and enhance the achievement of the cultural dimension of sustainable development (SD) in urban environments. There are several studies that examine the concept of third place through the relations with people.

Abu Yousuf (2013) has examined the integration of third places as a strategy for urban renewal while emphasizing the potential of these spaces to enhance the social fabric of cities, foster community connections, and achieve a sense of place. This is attained by creating sustainable, welcoming, and vibrant third places that are more inclusive and conducive to living.

Jeffres et. al (2009) highlight the importance of preserving third places in communities as a means to enhance the overall quality of residents' lives. The study emphasizes the role of these spaces in promoting social interaction, fostering community participation, and strengthening community bonds. The presence of third places positively influences the quality of community life. The study sheds light on the significance of investing in and nurturing these social environments as a strategy to enhance community well-being, social capital, and overall satisfaction.

Ebrahimi (2013) employing a historical hermeneutic approach, indicates that third places are prevalent in Iranian cities, and certain types of architecture, such as public, religious, and residential spaces, where they share fundamental similarities with the definitions of third places in historical Iranian cities. However, there are also some differences due to cultural, religious, and climatic factors in each region. The study emphasizes that the presence of historical third places enhances partnership and fraternity bonds among community members and plays a significant role in shaping those places. Additionally, the research examines the influence of religion and strong cultural and ethnic ties on the components of third places, such as the presence of continuous water, the creation of special and simple defined spaces, respecting elders, providing dedicated furniture in public areas for their comfort, and focusing on architectural and aesthetic dimensions in every detail. These historical third places fulfil the community's aspirations, connect them to their past, and enhance their sense of belonging and well-being.

According to the cultural aspect of sustainable development, previous studies have dealt with culture in urban and architectural environments, but have not addressed culture in the third places. Fakhruddin et. al (2022) have examined the role of folktales and narratives as powerful enabling factors in evoking and revitalizing 'spirit of place' in cities, preserving their cultural identity, and contributing to cultural sustainability.

Loach et. al (2017) have studied the cultural dimension of sustainability in museum architecture. They have also addressed the concept of cultural sustainability and its role as a strategy for the survival of museums and libraries. The paper emphasizes the need for these

cultural institutions to adapt and respond to the changing societal needs and technological advancements while preserving their cultural heritage and identity. The study discusses the key components of cultural sustainability for museums and libraries, including the preservation and interpretation of collections, community engagement, inclusivity, and innovation.

Memmott and Keys (2015) have also studied the cultural dimension of urban spaces. The study highlights the concept of fulfilling social well-being as one of the criteria for achieving cultural sustainability in the built environment. Additionally, it indicates that the cultural characteristics of buildings are a subset of the cultural characteristics of urban spaces. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the dynamics of architectural traditions and their temporal characteristics within different realms of cultural change processes. The study emphasizes the importance of considering values and cultural characteristics to achieve well-being and quality of urban life, saying that design should be community-centric, considering their values and cultural differences.

Skorupka (2017) has examined the level of comfort of third places and their adaptability. Accordingly, previous studies have identified the key spatial characteristics and physical factors that contribute to the success of places such as the relationships between the internal and the external spaces, accessibility and ease of navigation, the provision of safety and security measures, as well as their accommodation and amenity. However, the cultural aspects of third places have not been adequately explored.

This research proposes that incorporating these cultural features into third places can promote and enhance the fulfillment of the cultural dimension of sustainable development in urban environments, and achieve cultural attributes for third places.

**The research has the following objectives:**

1. Defining the cultural dimension of sustainable development.
2. Defining the concept of third place and its objectives.
3. Defining the spatial characteristics of third places (physical dimension).
4. Exploring the concept and criteria of creative place-making (meaning dimension).
5. Building a theoretical framework (including the physical and meaning dimension) for evaluating culturally rich third places.

## **The Theoretical Framework**

### **Cultural Dimension of Sustainable Development (SD)**

The essence of societies is constituted by their cultural values, which highlight the necessity of integrating and incorporating culture into the heart of sustainable development discourse. During the last few decades of the twentieth century, cultural considerations have emerged as an integral part of the social dimension of sustainability (Ratna and Piracha, 2007). However, in more recent times, culture has been recognized as an independent component that plays an important role in driving sustainable development (Loach and Rowley, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to link culture with the other three dimensions of sustainable development: social-economic, environmental, in order to obtain the desired results. Culture has gained significant importance in the sustainable development discourse since it has the potential to positively influence the societies and individuals, promoting their well-being and quality of life (Fakhrulddin et al., 2023).

The concept of cultural sustainability is characterized as a form of development that demonstrates respect for the cultural values and assets of a society (Duxbury et al., 2015). It rests on the belief that the present generation can responsibly utilize cultural heritage without impeding the ability of the future generations to understand and appreciate its significance and value (Stenou and UNESCO, 2002). Nonetheless, the central concept of cultural sustainability can be summarized into two primary aspects, which are safeguarding cultural heritage and identity, and fostering cultural vitality and its persistence (Al Yaseen et al., 2020).

## The Concept of Third-place

'Third place' is a key objective in urban planning, which aims to create successful urban spaces within cities (Jeffres et al., 2009). The concept of third place was developed by sociologist Oldenburg in 1989, and refers to any place other than homes (first place) and work (second place) (Oldenburg, 1989). Third places have become an integral part of sustainable urban planning (Dolley and Bosman, 2019). They are understood as public places on neutral ground where people want to gather and interact voluntarily, regularly, and informally (Goosen and Cilliers, 2018). Although third places are not necessarily permanent places within the urban areas, they aim to create interactive spaces known for their characteristics that support social ability and create connections, and act as central hubs for local social interactions within any urban environment (Akhavan, 2021).

Third places emerge spontaneously in familiar and informal environments, where informal gatherings and conversations take place between people of different social classes, whether friends or strangers. Third place is defined by the effectiveness of communications and conversations that takes place within it (Oldenburg, 2007). The roots of this term can be traced back to the Arabic origins, indicating that it is a Western term with Arabic roots. Third place was known hundreds of years ago and is similar in its characteristics to what Oldenburg referred to, such as gathering places and Arab markets during the 'Jahiliyyah' period. These markets were considered meeting places for informal gatherings, as well as for buying and selling goods. Various events such as speeches, poetry, and shows took place within them (Oldenburg, 1989). The Okaz Suq is a prime example of a third place in the Arabian Peninsula, which was the first third place for the Arabs seventy years before the Hijra (Wright, 2012). In fact, the Al-Marbad market on the outskirts of the Arabian Peninsula in the city of Basra became a gathering place for various segments of the Arab society, where ideas and conversations have been exchanged, in addition to literary and poetic gatherings (Akhavan, 2021).

According to Oldenburg (2007) in his book 'The Great Good Place', the key features of third places are determined as follows: 'neutral ground'; where people can gather and interact informally, as well as 'accessibility and accommodation'; as these places are accessible and accommodate all members of the community (Oldenburg, 2007). Another feature of the third places is that they provide a 'playful atmosphere' for gatherings, and are 'regular places' managed by a group of employees organizing events and providing services that support the well-being of the users. A third place 'encourages conversations', and is a 'home away from home', with a 'low profile', as it is located in areas that are convenient and central to the community in addition to its safety being monitored visually and by cameras. Finally, a third place is a 'leveler', or a place that achieves equality and justice between all the segments of a society. If these features are present in a space, then it can be considered a third place (Oldenburg, 1989;2007).

## Objectives of Third-place

Successful places are "high-quality places where people desire to live, work, and engage in activities and events" (PPS and Metropolitan Planning Council, 2008). In addition, creating a third place is a process and a means of achieving an important goal defined as creating places that users perceive as high quality through their feelings of attraction and belonging to them (Laven et al., 2019). The stronger this feeling is, the more successful and good those places become. Quality places stimulate the creative aspects and artistic activities of the users, support community heritage, are environmentally friendly, provide users with a sense of safety and security, and have spaces that support mixed (multiple) uses and support public transportation (Swapan, 2013). Providing these characteristics in urban areas results in good, welcoming places that help to engage in new experiences and events.

Accordingly, a third place represents a means to achieve the goal of creating interactive and high-quality places. Thus, urban designers strive to achieve many objectives through these spaces and stimulate activities that enhance the quality of the place. Among the most prominent objectives are:

- **Urban objectives**

Improving and revitalizing the urban environment through the presence of third places, as well as reviving historical centers, and utilizing arts to enhance the urban landscape (Hussein and Al-Sliq, 2019).

- **Economic objectives**

Promoting economic developments, as good spaces will attract visitors and tourists, which support and promote local investment and economy (Throsby, 2001; Lew, 2007).

- **Social objectives**

Third places attract users, promoting social interactions and strengthen the bonds between members of a society. In addition, they eliminate class differences and empower the community by providing spaces for exchanging opinions and viewpoints to make decisions (Jeffres et al., 2009; Al-Alwan and Al-Kawaz, 2013).

- **Cultural objectives**

Preserving local identity and supporting cultural diversity for users, achieving cultural continuity while maintaining the values of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Fakhrulddin et al., 2023; Duxbury et al., 2015).

- **Environmental and health objectives**

Successful and attractive places for users are often environmentally friendly and sustainable, supporting pedestrian and bicycle movements and aim to promote a healthy and sustainable lifestyle. In addition, third places promote the use of public transportation to reduce environmental pollution problems, as well as investing in natural resources such as water, plants, etc. as an attraction factor for these spaces (Skorupka, 2017; Marcus, 2018).

### **Third Place Spatial Characteristics**

There are many perspectives on how to achieve successful place design, with many theorists highlighting the factors that contribute to place success, such as Skorupka (2017) Marcus (2018), and Lynch (1960). By examining these perspectives, common criteria for achieving a successful third place can be identified as in the Fig. 1. These characteristics constitute the physical dimensions of the third places manifested as in Table 1.

#### **1. Linkages and sequencing:**

Connected urban spaces generate a physical and visual experience for the users through a series of positive places, in addition to ease of access to the intended destination (Gehl, 2010). It is important to test the user's experience as a whole instead of isolated parts by observing their movements in the urban environment. Several theories support connected spaces, such as the open space theory and the urban mosaic theory (Thwaites, 2005; Huynh et al., 2008).

#### **2. Legibility**

Kevin Lynch (1960) in his book "The Image of the City" identifies the elements that increase the clarity of the city and enhance the mental maps of its users. The most important elements he identified were edges, nodes, pathways, landmarks, and districts (Lynch, 1960). The availability of legibility in the built environment supports the success of third places and attracts the users and visitors to them (Taylor, 2009).

#### **3. Comfort and personalization**

One of the key indicators of success of third places is people's feelings of comfort, familiarity, and belonging to the place. In addition, individuals should feel ownership of the space they use without having to purchase a commodity to ensure their stay, which enhances their

connection to the place without restrictions or compromising their privacy (Al-Alwan and Mehdi, 2015; Rupp et al., 2015).

#### **4. Safety and security factors**

Safety and security are among the most important elements that must be available for the success of the urban environment, as they are essential human needs that determine the success or failure of a place. In addition, the presence of crime means sacrificing social communication in the place, as crime acts as a deterrent and disincentive for social interaction (Hillier, 1973; Basu et al., 2022).

#### **5. Flexibility and adaptability**

Successful places are characterized by their ability to adapt and change to meet the needs of users. Therefore, a successful third place should be able to adapt to different uses and meet all the people's needs, whether cultural, aesthetic, or functional. Additionally, adaptability gives a place the qualities of permanence, longevity, and reuse that meet the aspirations of society (Estaji, 2017; Gifford, 1996).

#### **6. Permeability and movement**

This means the ease of movement through, in, and to space, meaning that it should be penetrable (Sun et al., 2018). Moreover, it focuses on the movement from the street to the place, the permeability of movement axes to it, and the ease and pleasure of experiencing this movement (Pafka and Dovey, 2017).

#### **7. Spatial relationship**

The relationship between architecture and outdoor space is of utmost importance, as the connection between interior and exterior is the essence of architecture (Goosen and Cilliers, 2018). Oldenburg also described the importance of architecture as a driver of outdoor space and *vice versa*. He argues "Does the building and its function attract people to the space, or is it the space itself? Or do they work together in attracting people" (Van and López 2007).

#### **8. The experiential landscape**

The quality of spaces and places is linked to experiencing and testing them rather than just admiring their appearance and external beauty. As a result of the user's engagement in this experience, the place is evaluated, and if the results are positive, the place is considered successful and *vice versa* (Thwaites, 2001).

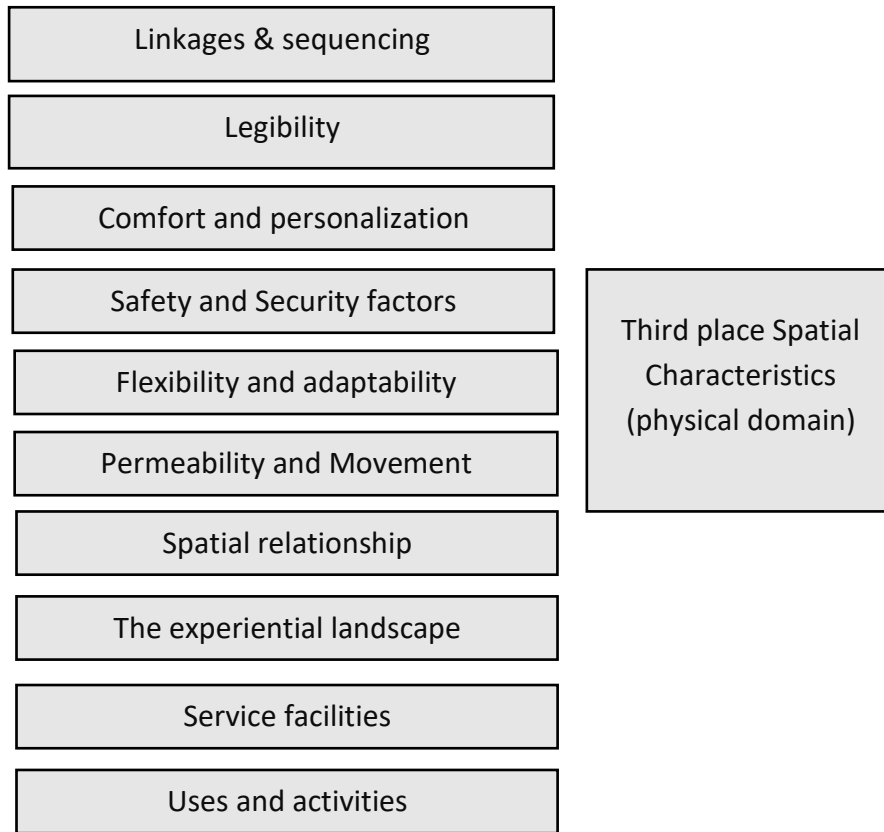
#### **9. Service facilities**

The presence of services in the built environment supports its success, as people are attracted to places that provide them with amenities such as sanitation, maintenance, cleaning, and electricity supply (Giles et al., 2016).

#### **10. Uses and activities**

The presence and diversity of activities and events are a factor of attraction for visitors and users and are among the most important factors that contribute to the success of a place. A successful place is an active place filled with activities, rituals, and people. Therefore, the place should be suitable for a variety of activities regardless of their type, whether they are essential, optional, or social activities (Montgomery, 2003; Gehl, 2010).





**Fig. 1:** Third place Spatial Characteristics (physical dimension)

Source: Authors

Many previous research studies have dealt with the third-place concept and have identified its characteristics and types (Jeffres et al., 2009; Goosen and Cilliers, 2018; Dolley and Bosman, 2019; Akhavan, 2021). However, cultural third places resulting from integrating the cultural dimension in the third place have not been addressed. The concept of 'cultural third place' shown in the Fig. 2, supports the achievement and promotion of cultural sustainability in the urban environment.



**Fig. 2:** Cultural third place diagram

Source: Authors

For urban third places to achieve cultural sustainability, it is assumed that they should accomplish the physical dimensions (spatial characteristics), considering the hierarchical sequence of human needs in public places (Gehl, 2010). Social uses and activities are identified as the second dimension of cultural sustainability, where the presence of such events and activities and their diversity indicate the success of the cultural place, such as conversation and cultural dialogues, cultural industries, reading, and viewing, in addition to celebratory activities and shopping bazaars, etc. These activities are divided into essential, optional, and social aspects (Gehl, 2010; Skorupka, 2017). It is also believed that for the third places to possess cultural characteristics, they must hold significance and worth. Consequently, the presence of meaning involves safeguarding heritage, local identity and preserving the diverse cultural assets and aesthetic values of the places, which promotes cultural continuity and fosters a sense of

attachment to the place (Montgomery, 2003). Therefore, the aspect of meaning and interpretation constitutes the third and most crucial dimension of third places to achieve cultural sustainability (Montgomery, 2004). This dimension is best manifested within the concept of 'creative place-making' discussed in the following section.

### **Creative Place Making**

'Place-making' is defined in urban planning practices as "the process of creating high-quality places where people want to live, work, play, shop, learn, and visit" (PPS and Metropolitan Planning Council, 2008), indicating that these places have a strong sense of place. Therefore, the process of place-making means transforming space into a place (Lew, 2017). According to Wyckoff, there are four successful place-making patterns including standard place-making, strategic place-making, creative place-making, and tactical place-making (Wyckoff et al., 2015). The creative place-making pattern is selected to achieve its criteria and indicators as it is more relevant to the cultural and creative characteristics of the third place, in order to accomplish a cultural third place.

The concept of creative placemaking emerged in 2010 and was defined by Wyckoff as "a dynamic phenomenon that uses the power of arts, culture, and creativity to shape the physical character of a place, enhance it, and create a creative environment that gives it its unique cultural identity" (Wyckoff et al., 2015), in addition to stimulating economic development. Lew defined it as "shaping and creating a place through cultural values, perceptions, memories, and traditions, giving meaning to space and transforming it into a place" (Lew, 2017). This approach of placemaking encourages the integration and distribution of cultural and creative activities within urban spaces and residential neighborhoods (Zitcer, 2020). It emphasizes the diversity of cultural treatments tailored to each place, rather than a standardized approach for all communities, which supports the uniqueness, distinctiveness, and identity of each community (Markusen and Gadwa, 2014).

Projects within this approach focus on artistic, cultural, and creative aspects, including museums, concert halls, public art displays, and any architectural structures that contain artistic themes for the creative members of the society (Markusen and Gadwa, 2014). As for the activities, they include artistic, cultural, and recreational activities that add vibrancy to places, such as movies in public parks, chalk art on walls, outdoor festivals and cultural rituals, and more (Mustred and Brown, 2010).

### **Elements of Creative Place-making**

Creative areas play a role in generating cultural vitality for society, which is considered an essential element of cultural creativity. The presence of the elements listed below leads to significant benefits (cultural, economic, and social) for both society and the place (Morley and Winkler, 2014; Vazquez, 2012):

- Community cultural participation: Attracting collaborative cultural events and activities in public spaces (Wyckoff et al., 2015).
- Place-based orientation: Creative placemaking that is rooted in the history and identity of a place fosters a connection between its past and the present, leading to a sense of belonging and responsiveness to the elements present in their built environment (Morley and Winkler, 2014).
- Asset based-orientation: Focusing on developing the cultural and artistic assets of the community and harnessing their creative potentials in those spaces (Vazquez, 2012).
- Cultural development: Focusing on enhancing the cultural environment, which promotes the flourishing of arts, culture, and creativity (Markusen and Gadwa, 2014).
- Community development: Improving the quality of life and meeting human needs in a better way (Wyckoff et al., 2015).
- Economic growth: Focusing on improving the standard of living for the community (Forsyth, 2014) (Mustred and Brown, 2010).



- Arts and culture: Arts and culture as a tool for creating creative spaces (Mustred and Brown, 2010).

### **Creative Place-making: Advantages and Values**

Creative place-making has a lot of benefits; it enhances the local creative economy and provides new job opportunities (Forsyth, 2014). In addition, cultural engagement within the society enhances the quality of life (Ramli, and Ujang, 2020). Positively impacting cultural capital by preserving tangible and intangible heritage creates a thriving and dynamic community (Ghavampour and Vale, 2019), further achieving cultural, social, and economic development goals through the arts (PPS, 2016).

### **Creative Place-making Criteria**

Previous studies have discussed the concept of creative placemaking and have identified its dimensions, benefits, and considerations (Zitcer, 2020; Markusen and Gadwa, 2014; Morley and Winkler, 2014; Ramli and Ujang, 2020). This study reveals several indicators and criteria that are considered prominent cultural features in creative placemaking; vitality, diversity, inclusiveness, and value (Fig. 3). These features provide cultural and meaning attributes for a place, as described below:

#### **1. Vitality of place**

A vibrant place contains various cultural activities that encourage community participation and cultural exchange (Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007).

#### **2. Diversity of place**

Cultural diversity includes facilities and mixed-use patterns in the built environment, as well as diversity in users' gender and their cultural background, in addition to cultural industries that support the local economy (PPS, 2016).

#### **3. Inclusiveness of place**

A culturally inclusive place welcomes all the segments of society and all age groups, providing comfort, play, seating, as well as cultural dialogues and knowledge exchange (Gawlak et al., 2021).

#### **4. Identity of place**

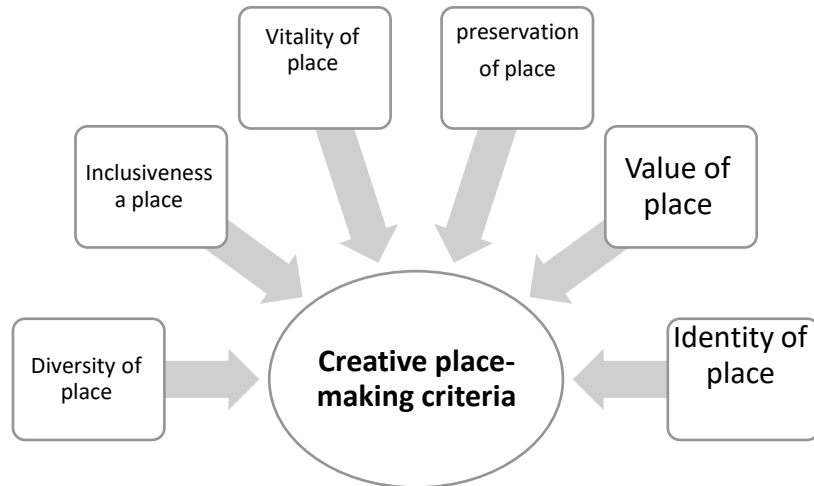
This means that the place should have a local identity that reflects its history, the culture of its inhabitants, and their cultural roots (Salih and Al-slik, 2023; Dovey, 2016).

#### **5. Value of place**

Culture adds a unique characteristic to a place, where the place holds a high value and a special spirit for the community due to the memories it carries, which enhances individuals' sense of belonging to it (Al Khafaji and jabber, 2020).

#### **6. Preservation of place**

Preserving tangible and intangible heritage in addition to maintaining cultural continuity and preserving the spirit of the place, while enhancing the connection and belonging to it (Al-Assadi et al., 2022; Alsliq and Alshami, 2015; Al-Bazzaz and Abona, 2007).



**Fig. 1:** Cultural third places framework structure  
Source: Authors

This theoretical framework thus produces a set of indicators for evaluating culturally rich third places as shown the Table 1.

**Table 1:** Framework of cultural third places.  
Source: Authors

Design Element (Dimension)	Criteria	Indicator
Physical Domain (Spatial Characteristics)	Linkages and sequencing:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physical and Visual access</li> <li>▪ Connectedness</li> <li>▪ Continuity</li> </ul>
	Legibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Readable (clear to pedestrians)</li> </ul>
	Comfort and personalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thermal (physical) comfort</li> <li>▪ Visual (aesthetic) comfort</li> <li>▪ Acoustic comfort (from noise)</li> </ul>
	safety and Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ safety from crime</li> <li>▪ Safety and environmental protection</li> </ul>
	Adaption and Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flexibility and adaptability of spaces for various activities.</li> </ul>
	Movement and Permeability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pedestrian traffic (pedestrian paths)</li> <li>▪ Transit positions</li> <li>▪ Car Parking</li> </ul>
	Spatial relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Connection between (in) and (out)</li> </ul>
	The experiential landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Testing quality of spaces and places by expert it.</li> </ul>
	Service facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sanitation services</li> <li>▪ Electrical services</li> <li>▪ Cleaning services</li> </ul>
Activities and Uses	Necessary activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Functional activities necessary for their daily lives, such as work.</li> </ul>
	Optional (selectivity) activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural entertainment activities such as cultural participation in seminars and dialogues, walking, singing...etc.</li> </ul>
	Social activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community activities, such as festivals and celebrations of all kinds, are the result of the quality of the place.</li> </ul>
	Cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The cultural diversity of urban facilities and structures.</li> <li>▪ The cultural diversity of users.</li> <li>▪ Diversity of industries and cultural crafts, which supports the local economy.</li> </ul>

<b>Meaning &amp; interpretation Domain</b>	Cultural vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Multiple cultural activities stimulate participation and cultural communication of the community</li> </ul>
	Cultural inclusivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The cultural place is inclusive and welcoming to all segments of society and all age groups.</li> <li>▪ It provides rest, play and sitting, in addition to cultural dialogues and knowledge exchange.</li> </ul>
	Cultural preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Preserving tangible and intangible heritage.</li> <li>▪ Maintaining cultural continuity.</li> <li>▪ Preserving the spirit of the place, which enhances the connection and belonging to it.</li> </ul>
	Cultural identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The place reflects the community's local identity, history, and cultural roots.</li> </ul>
	Cultural value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The place has unique characteristics, with a high value and a special spirit for the community.</li> </ul>

## The Case Study; Al-Mutanabi Street in Baghdad city

### Choice of the setting

Al-Mutanabbi Street is located in the heart of the old city of Baghdad, within one of the heritage neighbourhoods in the Rusafa area known as the Jadid Hassan Basha centre. The history of this area dates back to the early period of Baghdad city in the Abbasid era (762 CE), but the most prominent landmarks in the area that still exist today date back to the Ottoman period and the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Al-Mutanabi Street is the study area which includes, Al-Qushla complex, Suq-AlSaray, and the historical-cultural axis, as well as the riverfront area enclosed between Al-Rashid Street to the North and the Tigris River to the South (Fig. 6). It constitutes an urban sector that includes Baghdad's most important cultural spaces and architectural heritage landmarks. This location is chosen because it is one of the most prominent areas in the old Rusafa, that can be described as a cultural third place, characterized by spaces known for their heritage importance and intellectual activities within an urban fabric that owns a cultural and civilizational character. Moreover, in addition to its historical significance within the historical-cultural path in the Baghdad city, it is located on the Tigris River, which can be utilized for cultural tourism purposes, meeting the requirements of the contemporary society (Fig. 5).

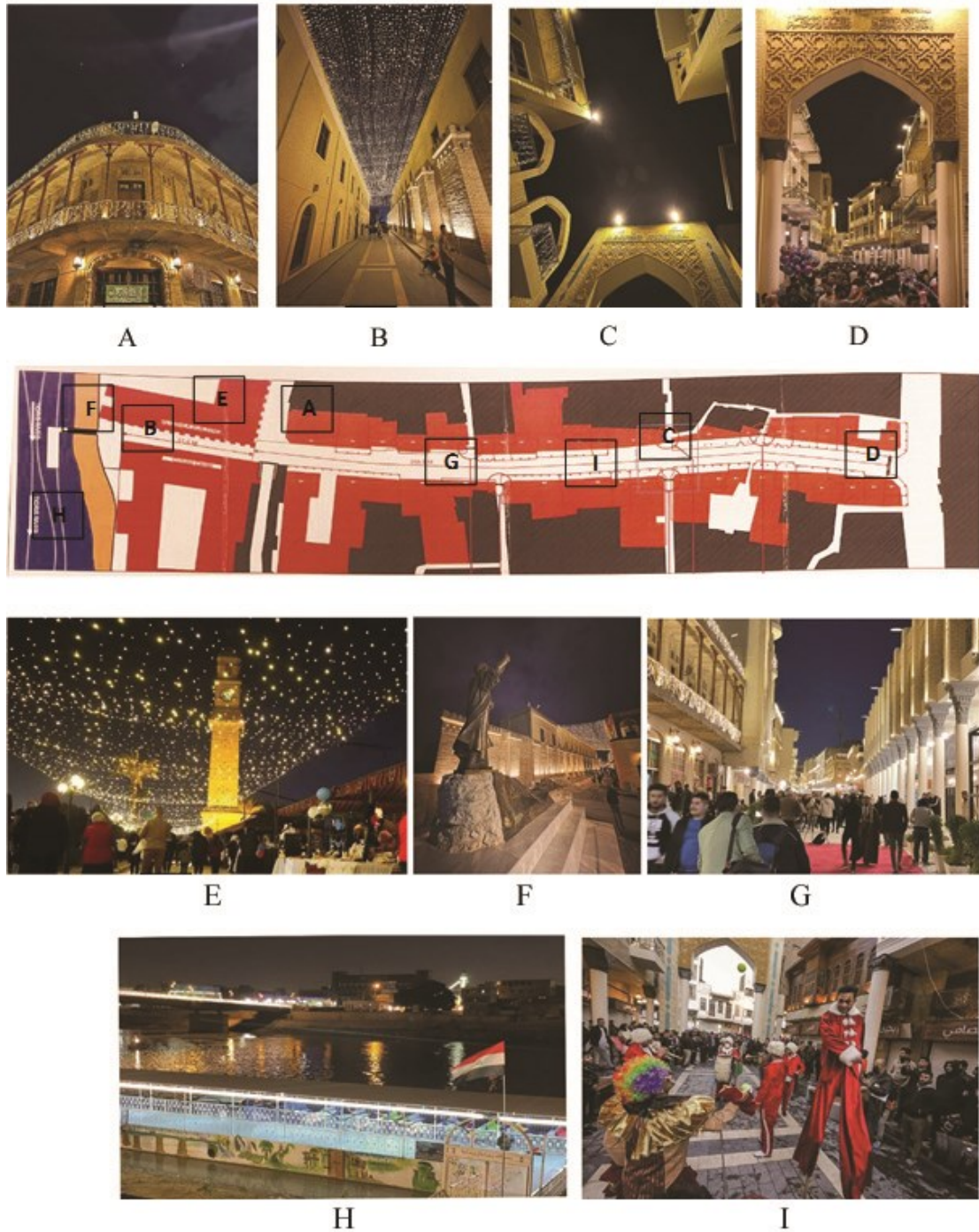
This research evaluates the urban cultural environment of Al-Mutanabi Street after the recent rehabilitation and revitalization processes, following years of neglect and destruction. The success of this development in creating a cultural third place for the community that enhances the sense of belonging to place and the local identity, and supports cultural sustainability is assessed based on the theoretical framework developed in the study. The study area extends from the entrance of Al-Mutanabbi Street, starting from Al-Rashid Street in the North, to the riverbank and Abu Al-Tayeb Al-Mutanabbi statue in the South, as shown in the Fig. 5 (Al-Mutanabbi street GIS image).





**Fig. 5:** Al-Mutanabbi street GIS image and map  
Source: Baghdad Municipality.





**A:** Shabandar heritage café, **B:** Street perspective. **C:** Main entrance gate, **D:** Entrance gate, **E:** Al-Qushla land mark, **F:** Mutanabbi Statue, **G:** Street activities at night, **H:** The river side, **I:** Street activities.

**Fig. 6:** Al-Mutanabbi street plan and the surroundings.

Source: Al-Shami.

### Research Methodology

This study conducted a survey in the selected area to test the validity of the theoretical framework as depicted in the Table 1. The study area, which consists of the city's crucial locations and architectural heritage features, was evaluated. The questionnaire collected responses from 40 Iraqi participants representing different specialties and from diverse age groups, males and females. The aim of this questionnaire was to assess the suggested framework for identifying

critical factors of cultural third places. The survey utilized a Likert scale of 1 to 5 to determine the significance of each aspect, with 5 denoting the highest importance and 1 representing the lowest. The primary domains of the proposed framework were categorized into three main groups: physical domain, uses and activities, and meaning and interpretation domain.

## Findings and the Discussion

### Physical Domain

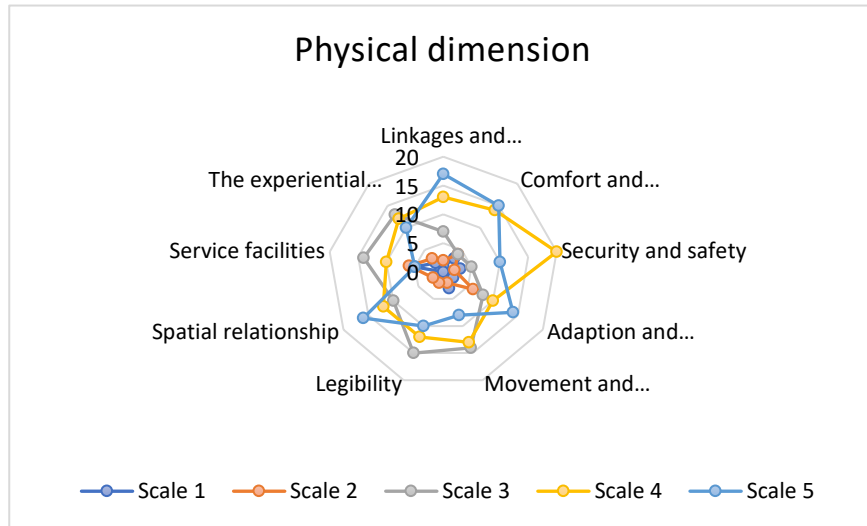
According to the physical domain scores resulting from the questionnaire survey, the highest rating was given to linkages and sequence in the site; it received 4.08 out of 5, which is higher than the other aspects (Table 2). However, the aspect of spatial relationship received a score of 4.05 out of 5. The comfort, safety, adaptation and flexibility, legibility and experiential landscape scores were all relatively close to each other, ranging from 3.85 to 3.63. The aspect of services and movement received the lowest score of 3.10 for the services aspect and 3.53 for movement and permeability. Fig. 7a. The second bar chart shows the average scores for each aspect shaded according to their importance and compared to the legend as shown in the Fig. 7) (Average comparison between the results).

**Table 2:** Physical dimension results.

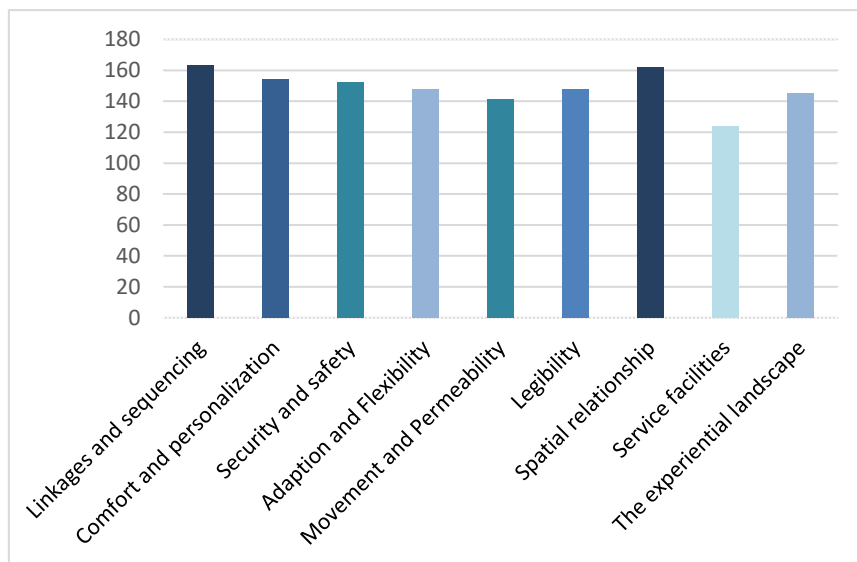
Source: Authors

Dimension	Criteria	Not at all satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Neutral	Very satisfied	Extremely satisfied	Average/200	Average/5	Total
Physical dimension	Linkages and sequencing	1	2	7	13	17	163	4.08	40
	Comfort and personalization	3	4	4	14	15	154	3.85	40
	Security and safety	3	4	5	18	10	148	3.70	40
	Adaption and Flexibility	2	6	8	10	14	148	3.70	40
	Movement and Permeability	3	2	14	13	8	141	3.53	40
	Legibility	1	2	15	12	10	148	3.70	40
	Spatial relationship	0	2	10	12	16	162	4.05	40
	Service facilities	5	6	14	10	5	124	3.10	40
	The experiential landscape	2	3	13	12	10	145	3.63	40





(a): Physical attributes domain



(b): Average values of Physical domain

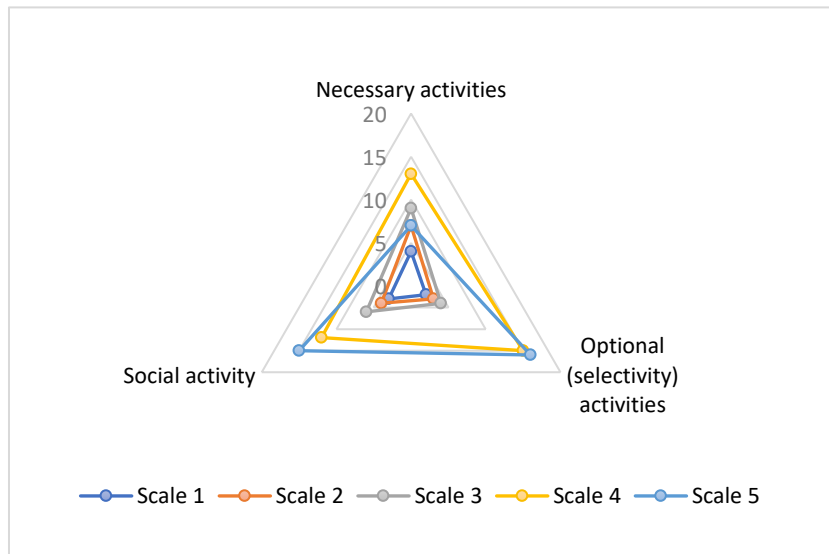
**Fig. 7:** Physical Dimension Values.  
Source: Authors

### Uses and Activity Domain

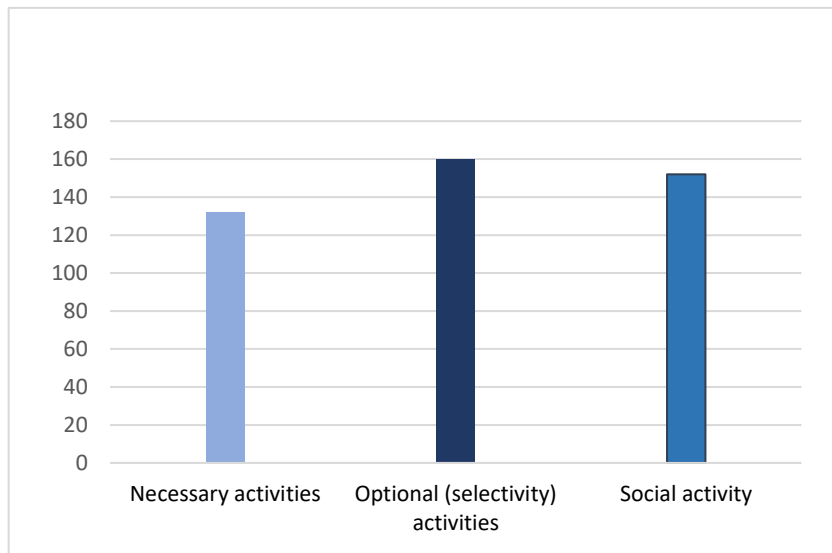
The scope of uses and activities indicates that the highest priority was given to optional activities (Table 3), with the highest average score of 4.00 compared to the other activities. The scores for social and necessary activities were only in the medium to low range. The social aspect was deemed moderately important and received a score of 3.80, while necessary activities received a score of 3.30 (as shown in the Fig. 8a). The bar graph Fig. 8b illustrates the average rating for each activity.

**Table 3:** Results of the Activities and Uses.  
Source: Authors

Dimension	Criteria	Not at all satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Neutral	Very satisfied	Extremely satisfied	Average/200	Average/5	Total
<b>Activities and uses</b>	Necessary activities	4	7	9	13	7	<b>132</b>	<b>3.30</b>	40
	Optional (selectivity) activities	2	3	4	15	16	<b>160</b>	<b>4.00</b>	40
	Social activity	3	4	6	12	15	<b>152</b>	<b>3.80</b>	40



(a): Uses and activity domain



b: Average values of Uses and activities domain.

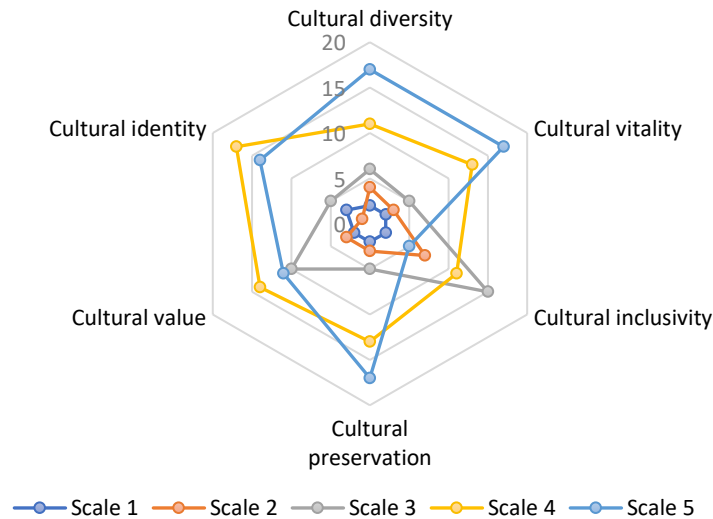
**Fig. 8:** Uses and activity Dimension.  
Source: Authors

## Meaning & Interpretation Domain

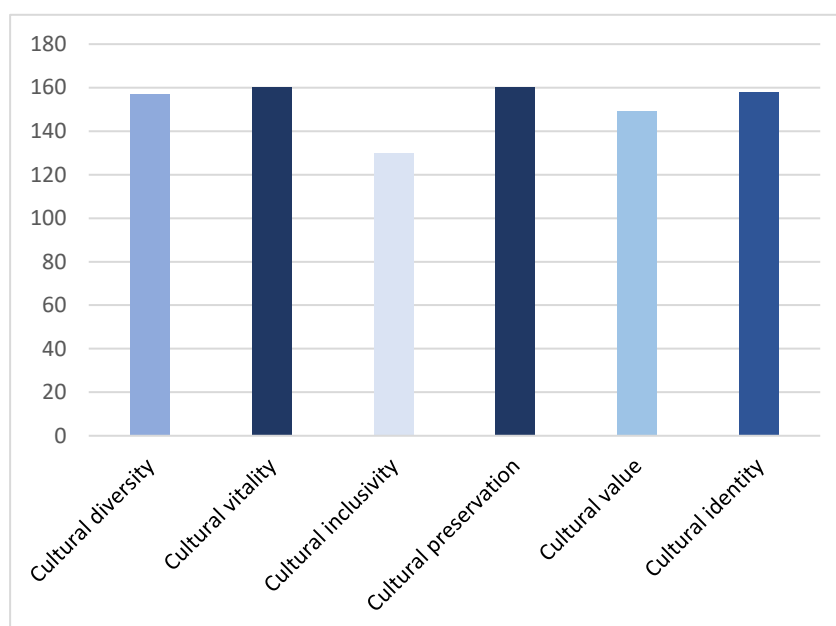
The assessment of the cultural meanings aspect of the street resulted in scores ranging from the highest score of 4.00 for cultural conservation of heritage and cultural vitality to the lowest score of 3.25 for cultural inclusiveness (Table 4). The average results for other aspects, including cultural diversity, cultural identity, and aesthetic value, ranged from 3.93 to 3.7 (as shown in the Fig. 9a). The bar chart in the Fig. 9b displays the average scores for all the aspects. The results suggest that integrated aspects and domains are important in shaping the cultural urban third place, regardless of the relative priorities among them.

**Table 4:** Results of the Meaning & interpretation Dimension.  
Source: Authors

Dimension	Criteria	Not at all satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Neutral	Very satisfied	Extremely satisfied	Average/200	Average/5	Total
<b>Meaning and interpretation</b>	Cultural diversity	2	4	6	11	17	<b>157</b>	<b>3.93</b>	40
	Cultural vitality	2	3	5	13	17	<b>160</b>	<b>4.00</b>	40
	Cultural inclusivity	2	7	15	11	5	<b>130</b>	<b>3.25</b>	40
	Cultural preservation	2	3	5	13	17	<b>160</b>	<b>4.00</b>	40
	Cultural value	2	3	10	14	11	<b>149</b>	<b>3.73</b>	40



a: Meaning & interpretation Domain



b: Average values of Meaning domain.

**Fig. 9:** Meaning and interpretation dimension.

Source: Authors

## Conclusions

The research discusses the relationship between the third place and the cultural dimension of sustainable development, where the presence of people in neutral third places that carry the characteristics of their cultural heritage--both tangible and intangible--enhances their sense of belonging and rootedness to place, and improves their awareness about themselves and their identity. Thereby, third places emerge as a tool for establishing stronger, more cohesive urban communities that strengthen individuals' connections and interactions based on the cultural values they support, promoting cultural sustainability. The research establishes a conceptual framework for the cultural third places based on 'creative place-making' as a critical approach that integrates aspects of meaning and interpretation with the spatial characteristics of third places (physical domain), as well as uses and activities to achieve a culturally sustainable third place.

The framework produces a set of indicators organized within the physical, uses and meaning domains. The impact of the indicators may vary from place to place according to the physical configuration, varying activities, and the cultural meanings they support. The integration of indicators--in spite of their varying impact and the degree of success and effectiveness--reflect signs of progress, as they determine that the intervention is on its way to achieve cultural third places.

Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad represents a unique iconic cultural place, which has been a center of intellectual and literary activities for centuries. The street reflects the city's rich history and cultural heritage. The application of the framework revealed that most qualitative indicators played significant role in achieving cultural third place. The results suggest that integrated aspects and domains are important in shaping the cultural urban third place, regardless of the relative priorities among them.

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