

# Maintaining Identity of the Built Environments of Religious Cities: Impact of Expansions at the Historic Karbala, Iraq

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## Abstract

The architectural landscape of the city of Karbala is a rich heritage which has the possibility to be used in the development and shaping of the urban fabric of the city. It demonstrates the richness of Islamic architecture and the rhythmic movement of architectural styles. Its importance in creating a distinct personality in all social, cultural, architectural, and environmental aspects is uncontested. However, recent developments have witnessed a loss of the local style which is a major issue to be resolved. Any development of this area requires good planning methods and policies that deal with the cultural heritage that represents the memory of the society that must be preserved and dealt with carefully and cautiously.

This paper examines this issue to unravel the reasons that have led to the deterioration of the urban and cultural identity of the homogeneous fabric of the city. Modern developments have affected its homogeneity that have led to a loss of its unity of concept, resulting in an urban and architectural chaos. In fact, the contemporary scene represents the disintegration of the bonds that link the parts of the city to the civilized existence of the culturally and economically dependent community in addition to urban interdependence.

The research employs a set of methods were used in the identity analysis of the traditional urban fabric through the use of a questionnaire form as a method to collect data and information from a specific group of individuals closely related to the study site, as well as to understand and analyze the set of questions posed, as well as observation and analysis of the site based on random demolitions of the urban fabric compared to the experts' opinions that it should be preserved.

The findings confirm the view that each city has its character and personality based on the general concept that it has grown up on. Preserving them will give the city a balance in its urban expansion, without falling into urban disasters that may cost the city. It could destroy its cultural and economic treasury together and may destroy its historical cultural heritage in an irreplaceable manner.

**Keywords:** Local architecture, Traditional fabric, Urban Development, Identity, Cultural heritage. Karbala, Iraq.

## Introduction

The concept of the emergence of Islamic cities is linked to a set of military, commercial, administrative, and other goals, as in Basra, Wasit, and Kufa. The emergence of some cities can be linked to the religious aspects, as can be seen in the cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kadhimiya and other cities. Often, the mosque or shrine was the main point for the gathering of individuals and tribes around it in a compact organic style and a thoughtful circulative system. It produced a gradual space system that takes into account the social and behavioral considerations of the individual and the group to form some of the basic features in the design of Arab cities. Indeed, it specified the formations that meet the physical, spiritual and social needs of the individuals and the groups (Al-Moussawi, 2018).

As cities grow, their social, economic, and institutional organization, as well as their physical structures have been exposed to the pressures of change resulting from, for example, the expansion of cities and their Mahalla due to the increase in the number of their members or visitors. Thus, the impact of this on the change and diversity of religious, social and cultural traditions and rituals can be linked to the background of individuals and social, cultural and behavioral groups. They take into account the investment of the urban fabric of the city to meet the needs and requirements of its society. Such changes can be seen more clearly after 2003 in terms of the increase in the number of visitors. In fact, these have reached in recent years to the point that they cannot be controlled without laws and clear determinants from the specialists and decision-makers (Attia, 2009).

The corrupt governments that have taken it upon themselves to administer Iraq since 2003 have contributed, in one way or another, to the destruction of social and cultural heritage. They have done so by manipulating the ownership of a large number of heritage buildings and turning them into commercial purposes. In fact, the lack of clear planning policies that implicitly and explicitly control the country's facilities and institutions has led to a complete collapse in government departments. The absence of a law against any acts of vandalism has also led to a significant deterioration in its structural condition with a clear absence of any policy to preserve such heritage. On the other hand, irrational projects in many parts of Karbala, such as the redevelopment of the city center or the expansion of the area around the shrines, could destroy the surrounding traditional and heritage sites (Barnett et al., 2003).

Urban design of the Iraqi holy city or shrine cities is inspired by the historical eras of Islamic cities in the Middle East, and the urban design of these cities consists of two basic elements. The first is the combined traditional organic fabric, and the second is the sacred scene or shrine, which usually consists of a courtyard or outer space and the closed space that includes the tomb. What distinguishes these cities and gives them their shape and identity are often lighthouses and domes.

Many different intellectual currents show changes to the urban landscape of the holy city, on the condition of survival within the social values and social formation in those cities. In this context, the definition of tradition and the preservation of identity remain important issues.

This study looks at the various factors behind the deterioration or loss of an architectural style with a distinct local identity (Sharbaty, 1964).

It seeks answers to the following research questions: "

- Has the demolition of the Mahalla and houses of the old city negatively affected the identity of the city and its social and cultural specificity?" "
- Does the importance of preserving historical and heritage buildings lie in the identity they reflect in the area and the traditions and customs of its inhabitants?"
- Do the buildings built after 2003 mimic the architectural style and symbolism of the history of the region?"

This research aims to establish the alteration in the physical structure of the city of Karbala has impacted its unique identity and cultural heritage, including the safeguarding of its religious practices and social customs.

Its objectives are:

1. To Explore the importance of architectural identity as it carries information about the local architectural style, traditions, and historical developments, making it a means of transmitting heritage and history to future generations.
2. To Clarify the stages of the religious identity of the city of Karbala because it represents one of the aspects of diversity and cultural heritage and enhances communication between the built environment and man.
3. To Formulate development requirements according to a comprehensive and practical approach that restores the urban balance of the city while retaining its own values and historical assets.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Paying attention to the needs of the present at the expense of human heritage is one of the grave mistakes committed by humanity in many ages. With the increase of phenomena surrounding us, which are evidence of the past, the choice between them becomes more problematic, several patterns can be observed to deal with the issue of preserving identity in times of change, even the modern phenomenon can be considered worthy of preserving it as a defense against rapid technology change, or as a symbol of cultural identity or both. Some of them came with the proposals of (Belkacem, 2009), who dealt with the factors affecting change (Nofal, 2002), who dealt with theories of change, and (Ackoff, 1974), who dealt with the patterns of dealing with the issue of change and the outlook for future planning in general.

These changes came with different effects, including, changes resulting from foreign intervention in the Arab-Islamic world that causes a change in the basic structure in the political structure, or changes resulting from the introduction of technology in economic life due to the emergence of the economic importance of some cities, or resulting from the reflection of the introduction of technology on the physics of the city, for the architectural aspect of urban as a result of the changing requirements of society, and on the other hand, five formulas were put forward to deal with this aspect, the first of which is using models Western classical architecture in terms of emphasizing some of the principles of classical architecture such as symmetry, and the second shows strange architecture features in the transfer and imitation of construction methods and foreign design as a result of its association in the minds of progress, development and contemporary, where glass architecture, towers, metal buildings and other solutions that were found in an environment other than our environment emerged, and the third is in an attempt to give heritage features to the architectural product using some heritage vocabulary of traditional Arab Islamic architecture without sufficient awareness of the characteristics of each element and how to employ it In the architectural and urban composition, which added a mixture of discordant and heterogeneous styles, the fourth is in attempts to express environmental architecture, where this is evident in the adoption of the slogan of the environment, which began in the contemporary stage, including the call for a sustainable environment without serious appreciation of the environmental, economic and human technology that created each of its elements, while the fifth is reflected in an attempt to find a distinctive architectural character, which are attempts to marry originality and modernity and the search for identity and distinctive architectural character, with the inclusion of heritage vocabulary The architect and its solutions as a result of the link between originality and heritage architecture, some succeeded and others failed (Belkacem, 2009).

While Nofal referred to several theories to deal with the factors affecting change through Dr. Hammad's proposals and the constants and variables in front of the Arab city and came as alternatives to solve planning problems, which are: (Nofal, 2002).

**Theory of Seclusion:** It is summarized by resorting to heritage, introversion, and isolation from traditional thought for fear of change, as a result of attachment to religious concepts that depict the plan as negative modernization for fear of slipping with the current of globalization.

**Theory of Merging:** It is the absolute acceptance of all the secretions of the modern city with its pros and cons, with the complete mixing of all imported approaches, considering technology and its machines as scientific achievements that express the summit of civilization. This theory is rejected by our reality and does not coincide with the correct Islamic point of view, which urges effort for the sake of science and knowledge.

**Theory of Challenging:** This theory needs high abilities and skills, and more than that, it needs thinking minds, great determination, and high material and organizational capabilities.

**Theory of Adaptability:** It is considered the most accepted theory, as it deals with the inevitability of change and adaptation to global developments, and the selection of the vocabulary of the modern Arab city is cautious is based on examination and scrutiny, as these developments or their strength today is knowledge. Five strategies have been proposed to be taken into account when planning the city of the future, first: preserving the Islamic faith (sanctity of the dwelling, right of way, good neighborliness, negation of harm, and observance of rituals). Second: Preserving the mentality of the individual (establishing schools, establishing hospitals, developing research, preventing the establishment of corrupt houses). Third: Preserving the Arab identity (Arabic language, authentic customs, proper behavior). Fourth: Preserving the environment (natural resources, climate change). Fifth: Keeping pace with technology (encouraging inventions and research laboratories)(Nofal, 2002).

It is clear from the above that intellectual diversity within the above theories to deal with heritage was offset by other types similar to the general line, which is what Russel L. Ackoff put forward in his book *Re-Designing the Future*, where he mentioned four types of orientations to deal with the planning and development strategy, through:(Ackoff, 1974)

**Inactivism:** It means full conviction of the situation in which an entity exists, and the unwillingness to change, the philosophy followed is to maintain, and prefer the state of stability, and survival, the owners of this trend believe that any social or environmental changes are either temporary, ephemeral or transient, the decisions taken avoid major changes and do not believe in the end in planning and walking on what things are going to, such as swimming with the current.

**Reactivism:** Emphasizes the desire to return to the previous situation wherever it is, believing that things are going from bad to worse, opposing and resisting any change but also stopping any changes that may occur in the situation, do not want to be complicated and focus on simple problems whose solutions are also simple, their philosophy is based on nostalgia and returning to it, swimming against the tide and returning where they are, they see the bad things in things, especially technology, more than the positive aspects in them.

**Preactivism:** They believe that the future will be better than the past and the present, They are based on logic, science and experience more than they rely on intuition, intuition and diligence, They believe that the required form of the future state - even if it is not controlled - can accelerate its occurrence and do not support the issue that the plans itself by itself, they try to identify problems and deal with them before they become serious, and return to the most giving, strength and optimism.

**Interactivism:** Different from other orientations, they don't want to stay the way things are, they don't want to go back to the past, they want to design the future and invent ways to get it. They believe in their ability to control the important parts of it, control its effects on humans, and prevent future threats more than prepare for them. Described as idealists, they tend to self-development, self-awareness, and self-control, seeing technology as a potential force that depends on how it is used by humans (Ackoff, 1974).

## Urban Conservation and Development Conflict

Paying attention to the needs of the present at the expense of human heritage is one of the biggest mistakes made by humanity in many ages. With the increase of phenomena surrounding us, which are testimonies to the past, the choice between them becomes increasingly problematic. Even a modern phenomenon can be considered worthy of preservation as a defense against rapid technological change, as a symbol of cultural identity, or both. (Lawrence, 2001). The preservation of the heritage of a country is no longer a requirement specific to that country but has become one of the general global trends. Heritage is no longer popular only for a limited local place, but some heritage sites have become world heritage, considering that heritage in any country of the world is an integral part of the general world heritage. Thus, there is a regulation for the registration of World Heritage and human settlements subject to well-studied controls by specialists and under the auspices of international organizations such as UNESCO, Habitat, and others affiliated with international community organizations at the United Nations.

The ability to transmit transferable aspects of a society such as knowledge, behavior, and core values to successive generations reinforces the dynamism of traditions. It expresses the past experiences and inherited knowledge of previous societies in an architectural and spatial configuration. It summarizes their demands and capabilities by the nature of the available resources, which creates ecological balance. As a physical basis for social, cultural, psychological, and environmental traits, traditions provide a complete picture of the coherent relationships between community and place or interactions between family and space over time. Rapoport (1969) shows that space-specific mechanism link space to social variables and time factors. In response to natural and environmental changes, adapting to cultural shifts and changing beliefs of society, an urban system acquires a complexity and dynamism to accommodate these influences and inform the nature and characteristics of the ancestors of subsequent societies (Al-Hathloul, 1981; Al-sayyed, 2011; Rapoport, 1969; Steele, 1997).

There are two main factors on which the urban development of the Arab city is built: housing and places of worship. However, there came a fundamental difference in planning standards and principles on which the Arab city depended on the eras and the late nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century significant increase in population. It was also buttressed by the emergence of technology in all fields, and the entry of Western thought to Arab societies. Moreover, various other standards adopted by the Islamic holy city have also appeared. The result has been a change in the form of society in it, at that time the science of planning with its theories and concepts was not known. Thus, the planning of Islamic cities and holy cities have taken place according to the needs of the population and their ways of living and conditions. However, despite that, there appeared planning and urban trends showing values, principles and standards in planning and architecture.

The Arab Islamic city and the ancient holy city from the planning perspective are idea: they reconciled the material and moral needs by applying planning standards. It expressed economic, religious, social and cultural influences (Wael, 1995). They also expressed social values, cultural principles and cognitive factors rooted in traditional environments that influence the intellectual awareness of new developments. This attitude can be seen in the development of the city of Ghadames in Libya or Fez in Morocco where they allow the full coexistence of traditional structures and new developments without affecting each other (Fig. 1). In these contexts, existing structures may be affected or transformed by new developments under any pretext (Abou Ashour and Atayah, 2010; Ibrahim and Hagirah, 2010; Al-Thahab, 2016).

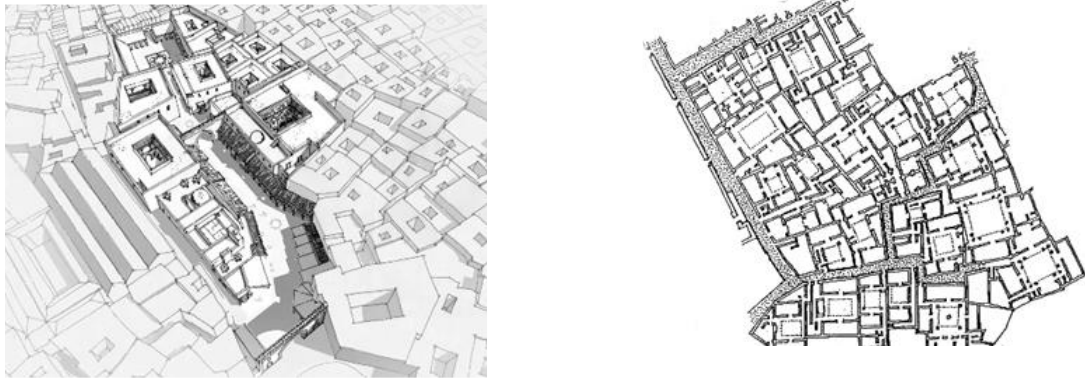


Fig. 1: Demonstrating urban integration between traditional and modern structures in the development of Medina in Fez – Morocco

Source: Ragette

On the other hand, the urban fabric in the center of the Arab-Islamic city is compact, meaning that the building blocks are stacked with each other, and this style of planning has established bonds of familiarity between members of the society. It has a great social impact as well as a significant environmental impact, due to the proximity of buildings to each other, which provides shade and reduces the hours of exposure of buildings to sunlight.

### Identity

As a human language that encompasses both the physical component and the psychological content, architecture represents a true reflection of identity through the embodiment of the cultural and social beliefs of society. Accordingly, the architecture-strong identity formula reveals an effective problem in the continuity of traditional built environments. In developing countries, these two components have experienced instability, imbalance, and fear of loss due to cultural change and the deterioration of inherited social principles (Porteous, 1977). Arab societies have faced a great responsibility, either to create a kind of integration and compatibility with the perspective and dimensions of modernization, thus moving away from their original identity, or to create a new perspective that protects their inherited identity amid this ideological conflict (Abou Ashour and Atayah, 2010). To maintain social values, interactions, and practices as important issues of community culture is to define ourselves and represent our personality (Hauge, 2009). In line with this concept, identity as an effective expression of individuals' meanings, experiences, and interactions based on intimate social and cultural values is due to an unambiguous procedure through which the interrelationship between meaning and culture is constructed and employed. This perspective supports Charles Correa's view of defining identity as a process, being a process and not something self-conscious (Correa, 1983).

Continuing tradition for successive centuries depending on intimate relations, cohesive interactions and solid environmental and economic treatments supported by sharia' principles and qualified highly power represented by Ulama'a and community elders create a specific built environment and a concrete platform for a distinct identity. Architecture as a systematic mechanism and structural system provides, according to Karl Propper (1948), an effective platform to work in, criticize and change (Giesen, 2000). Associated with identity, tradition combines both functional components with a kind of order and stability that enhance its reference to change in terms of changing social aspects and cultural beliefs. In traditional societies, identity, according to (Haferkamp and Smelser, 1992), is characterized by a kind of constancy and solidity with regard to social, cultural and religious traditions, while representing a progressive approach in modern societies (Abdelsalam, 2002). Tradition-identity cohesive relationship has been disrupted with the emergence of modernity that splatted traditional contexts under the pretext of tradition's death (Bianca, 2000). Latter

concept led to a fundamental shift in socio-cultural principles, and thus further change in the built environment. These changes have failed to establish reasonable links with local contexts, resulting in a wide flaw in the basic principles (Taleb, 2006). A human need, and hence a necessity, has become people's perspective of identity, where "being recognised, for having identity," according to (Sixsmith, 1986). "is most gratifying" (Abdelsalam, 2002).

In terms of identity, the urban structure represents an environmental oasis and a human institution that reflects a set of social variables, cultural beliefs and traditional customs that symbolize individual and collective conscience. This human system is going through a critical period that threatens its identity acquired over successive generations of interrelated principles between people, their functional needs and psych desires, and the surrounding built environment (Rapoport, 1969). Prior meanings and requirements differ with respect to the nature and priorities of individuals or small social groups within urban environment boundaries (Carmona, 2003). In this context, individual and collective identities can be revealed demonstrating emotional and physical meanings of individuals' life, including safety, security, privacy and belonging as key issues of people's everyday life, continuity and identity (Sixsmith, 1986). To share individual identity with others is to control these meanings through a distinct collective identity rolling people's interactions. Man-place interrelationship. represents an important formula in this context in which each part takes its identity from the other. (Al-Thahab, 2016). Time factor plays an effective role in balancing this relation and reflects a set of changing social and functional practices that occur in the same context over time (Fethi, 1977).

While ignoring global concepts, traditional living environments demonstrate a specific form of identity that revealing a kind of uniqueness to their users who in turn grant their built environment certain meanings enhancing thus the continuity of individual and collective identities (Abdelmonem, 2011). Former environments define, according to Norberg-Schulz (1980), the man-made approach to the built environment where identifiable, meaningful and coordinated physical contexts with rich human resource contents of intangible values link physical and spatial components together within a cohesive context (Cetin, 2010) (Soud et al., 2010). In line with this approach, building environment constitutes principally both human values and spatial/physical attributes (Rapoport, 1986). Former set reveals the home as a human institution, while the latter reflects the social, cultural, spiritual and emotional investments practiced by an individual or social group (Smith, 2006).

## Literature Review

Many have examined the issue of identity in the built environment. Among them, Nouri (2003) discusses the view of war as a catalyst and accelerator for the transformations and changes of urban reality from a view of being a physical act that works to introduce a new type of information into the urban network of the city. He argues that wars change the state of its urban identity, and the results contain its treatment of the act and building identity and reconstruction in the city. They focus on the symbolic construction that forms of the image of the city according to the indicators that are put forward and produced by war (Nouri, 2003). On the other hand, Al-Naeem presents an objective analytical vision of the state of change and transformation of the Gulf urban identity due to the rapid changes that these societies have gone through. They may have produced problems that need to be clarified by presenting that there are always two paths offered for treatment. One of this is to revive the past and the other is to replace the present.

Moreover, it portrays that groups seek to preserve their identity by reproducing images that express their experience and collective heritage to protect social identity from disappearance, thus characterizing two positions on the meaning of identity. The first sees identity as something that was completed and ended in the past, and the second dynamic sees it in constant transformation. The conclusions contain that the transformations of urban identity produce an illustrative aspect of the social situation and the effects of the course of its movement on the formation of the reality of urban identity (Al-Naim, 2001). In contrast,

Rodwell (2008) explains that conservation can be expressed as the control of the rate of change in the urban fabric of historic cities and the socio-cultural structures of their inhabitants. It is implemented so that historic cities are not only recognized as fixed elements and admired for their history and architecture, but as a vibrant space inhabited by local communities appropriately as an essential part of the protection of identity and sense of belonging. Both conservation and sustainability share a general rule (Rodwell, 2008). Conservation and sustainability can be linked together in the context of historic cities, although both have different roots. Orbasli (2008) refers to a comprehensive term that includes the intervention and management necessary to protect the building and the cultural significance of historical buildings and sites and their associated environment concerned with the present, past and the future (sustainable outlook). She argues that there is a need to realize that every civilization and society must adopt an approach to preserving cultural heritage within the framework of its values. As she says, there is a growing awareness that different civilizations do not treat cultural heritage in the same way (Orbasli, 2008).

While, AL-Kafaji (2006) discusses the thought of modernity and postmodernism at the level of urban planning and touches on the new style in the city of Karbala as an attempt to change the reality of the situation, as the study found that religious tourism in the city of Karbala has a great impact on changing the urban identity of the urban fabric due to the human crowds that the city cannot accommodate during the period of visiting the shrine. The gap in this study is that it did not address possible solutions to address the issue of absorbing these numbers without resorting to the destruction of the urban fabric (AL-Kafaji, 2006). On the line, Al-Wardi (2006) reached the achievement of the peak of the urban landscape in the cities of the holy shrines in the architecture of the shrine, which represents the main axis for the emergence of those cities, which cherishes the neighborhoods and axes of movement, and there are four methods of redevelopment such as the method of simulation and imitation, the style of monolithic integration, the style of monolithic contrast, the method of liberation of thought and its launch. The belief that communication with the past is achieved by keeping the old fabric and its alleys in the same way created by the ancestors and the fear of change led to reaching this tragic state of these important areas, and therefore the process of redevelopment should keep pace with the times and its requirements, and serve the religious and tourist function of those cities while preserving the urban identity not through stagnation and rejection of change, but renewal that is inspired by the values and spirit of Islam. The study did not address the factors that led to the destruction of urban identity (Al-Wardi, 2006).

Regarding Karbala, Attia (2009) touched on what is related to the city center that it suffered from the forced removal of its urban fabric for multiple periods more than the rest of the cities, and the fabric carried many local and religious features and symbols, and that religious shrines or the holy shrine in the city of Karbala is a point of attraction for all groups in society because it carries the historical and heritage dimension and its location for the city as a landmark that opens horizons for its growth and prosperity. The gap in the study did not address the methods to be followed in order to preserve the rest of the urban identity of the urban fabric (Attia, 2009). On the same year, AL-Dada (2009) the study found the real problem of not taking into account Islamic concepts when preparing the basic designs of the Islamic city, which were adopted by the Islamic city and distinguished by it and inspired by the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet, and the emergence of new concepts far from the intellectual, social and economic environment of the Islamic city community. This study did not address the way to deal with the Islamic city during its reconstruction after deliberate sabotage (AL-Dada, 2009). And Al-Rushdi's (2013) study reached the provision of a planning policy that meets contemporary needs through the integration of old and new through renovation and preservation in the city center, and the study focused on the importance of religious events in the urban development project. The researcher did not explain which planning policy could be followed in religious cities (Al-Rushdi, 2013).

Locally, Sultan's (1999) study found that preserving the distinctive religious identity and character of the city means preserving one of the important symbols in the nation's historical heritage and perpetuating it for future generations. A major gap in the study is that



the researcher did not treat the city as a single system and that losing any part of this system necessarily means reviving it (Al-Sultan, 1999). And, Al-Hankawi & Al-Kubaisi (2010) research found that the urban development strategy includes cultural, social, economic and urban development, which is one of the most interfering factors in changing the urban characteristics of the city and the content of other changes, and that the development strategy requires a comprehensive vision of the historical value and events of each city in addition to the reality of the situation and the requirements of the times. The research dealt with the importance of the religious sign and did not address the importance of the fabric itself (Al-Hankawi and Al-Kubaisi, 2010). Garriga (2010) the study reached an important key conclusion: identity must be preserved as a pluralistic heritage identity (a call to preserve the heritage of each stage of the city, such as the period of modernity and beyond, giving a glimpse into the history of the region). It also recommended that the identity of the urban fabric should be preserved and that demolition should be avoided as much as possible unless necessary (Garriga, 2010). Finally, Kamouna (2006) discussed the problems of cities and historical centers in Iraq, the researcher believes that the shrine is the center of the region (visual and functional) is what can be preserved by preserving the traditional fabric of the region and its other characteristics. The gap in this study is that it did not address the necessity of preserving the urban identity because it is complementary to the shrine (Kamouna, 2006).

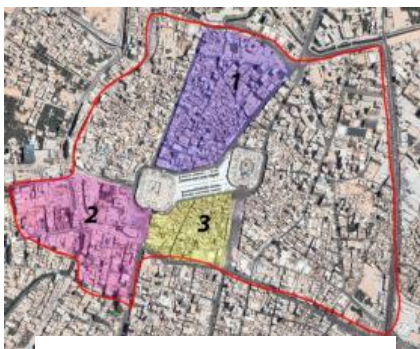
### Research Methodology

A set of methods was used in the identity analysis of the traditional urban fabric through the use of a questionnaire form as a method to collect data and information from a specific group of individuals closely related to the study site, as well as to understand and analyze the set of questions posed, as well as observation and analysis of the site based on random demolitions of the urban fabric compared to the experts' opinions that it should be preserved.

The research uses a range of methods in the identity analysis of the traditional urban fabric, and in the form of accurate qualitative data, a questionnaire containing the following questions was used:

This form was distributed to specific groups related to the study area, namely "visitors by 60 visitors they **V** code, residents of the region by 60 residents they **H** code, and experts with competence in the field of urban design and conservation, numbering 30 specialists they **EX.** code" The places of distribution of the form were distributed equally between "Mahalla of Bab al-Salama because it was not subjected to any demolition it **1** code, Mahalla of Bab al-Mukaim because it was partially demolished it **2** code, and Mahalla of Bab al-Najaf because a large part of it was removed. It **3** code" (Fig. 2 & 3)

On the other hand, through personal observation, documents, and photography obtained by the researcher, the strengths and weaknesses that occurred due to the demolition of the urban fabric in residential Mahalla were identified and the situation and the possibility of preserving the remaining urban identity were evaluated.



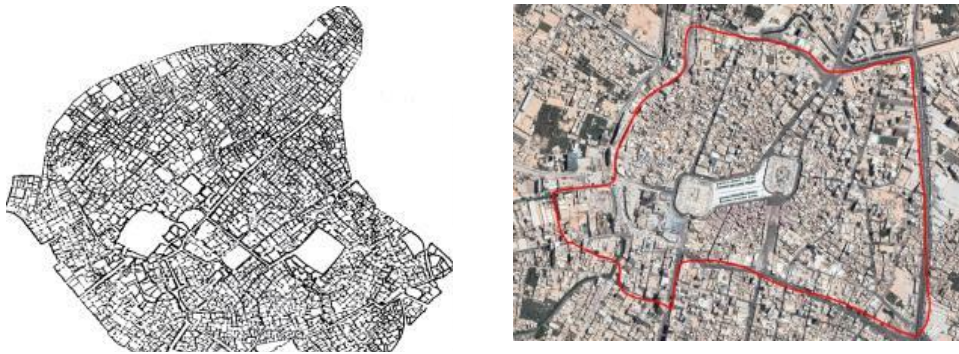
**Fig. 2:** The Case Study area  
Source: Research



**Fig. 3:** The demolitions that occurred in Mahalla 2 and 3  
Source: Research

### The Case Study: Karbala

Karbala is one of the remaining examples of the holy Arab-Islamic cities of Iraq and the Middle East, located 100 km south of the capital Baghdad. Its urban fabric consists of two large shrines located in the central area of the city center and a network of winding streets with densely populated urban units forming alleys. The urban structure of the city faces a lot of pressures and changes over long periods, and these changes can be identified as belonging to two stages: The first phase is from the beginning of the last century, where the shape of the city took the form of overcrowded housing units and closed to itself. The second is from the beginning of the nineties of the last century and until now, when the urban fabric of the city has been subjected to deliberate deterioration on the grounds of development and accommodating new events and requirements (Alobaydi et al., 2015).



**Fig. 4:** Difference between the urban fabric of Karbala city 1900 (left) and 2020 (right).  
Source: Hussein, ?

The city center, where the two shrines are located, is the gathering site of the city's residents and the center of their lives, as the markets surround the two kindergartens, extending in front of their entrances so that the visitor can only pass through them. These markets are characterized by their simplicity of construction and Islamic architecture. The most important feature of these markets was the presence of the boxes of a distinct character. In addition to the markets, religious buildings are also adjacent to the two shrines (Al\_ansari, 2007).

The city center of Karbala today consists of eight parties (Mahalla) as in Fig.5, which are the same names as the gates that were in the old wall that surrounded the old city.



**Fig. 5:** A plan for the city center of Karbala, showing the names of the locations of Mahalla in the city.

Source: Attia

Within the ancient fabric of the city in Karbala, there are many heritage building units that carry historical value, religious value, or aesthetic artistic value, or all share one building, but what is indicated is that no detailed documentary study and data collection of the city's assets, similar to other ancient cities, has been conducted by any executive authority such as the Department of Heritage and Antiquities, urban planning, or an academy such as universities or other institutions, such as land use surveys. The values mentioned according to special criteria or data on the structural condition of each building and so on. Only important religious buildings are what have been included in reconstruction, maintenance sometimes, demolition and reconstruction, because these buildings attract religious interest in society, and the other reason is that these buildings have a financial return (Al-Sultan, 1999).



**Fig. 6:** Al-Abbas Street in the city center of Karbala. The random appearance of buildings is different from the urban fabric

Source: Fadil

The city has four aspects and important and basic features that must be passed, although its origin is the same, which is the presence of the two holy shrines of Imam Hussein and his brother Al-Abbas, peace be upon them, which is the main engine for various activities in the city, and these aspects are:

- 01.** is the religious aspect: It is at the top of the aspects studied in the city of Karbala, although the religious use in the city does not exceed 1% of the total area of land use in the city (currently the entire city), but its spiritual dominance is clear over the city, through the continued effectiveness of the visit throughout the year (Al-Thahab, 2016).
- 02.** The heritage aspect (historical): The city of Karbala is characterized by historical depth as it passed in the research depth that tells the succession of clear stages in the growth and expansion of the city through the change of the urban fabric body. It is remarkable that the expansion of the city towards the south and southwest by circling the city center and surrounding it and not moving away from it in the form of concentrated circles, despite the plan's attempt to break this concentration in the new parts of the city (Al-Moussawi, 2018).
- 03.** The economic aspect: The religious and historical aspects of the city are greatly reflected on the economic aspect. The city of Karbala is one of the new major centers in Iraq. This made investors who are trying to find investment opportunities in the city benefit from the human numbers that come to the city annually. The city of Karbala may have investment opportunities in the fields of tourism and agro-industry (Chadirji, 2015).
- 04.** The cultural aspect: This aspect is of great importance in the history of thought in the city of Karbala throughout its history, represented by schools of thought and jurisprudence, as well as Karbala rituals of its cultural features such as its association with the twentieth revolution and other important features (Chadirji, 2015).

## Urban Reality and its Pressures in the City Center of Karbala

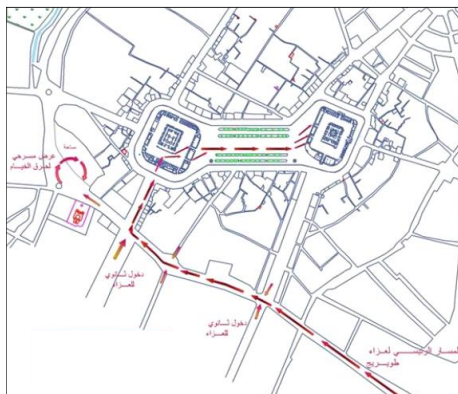
It is important to enumerate the jobs and events in the city center that give a real impression of the burden it bears, and these events are divided into two parts:(Hussein, 2016)

- **Activities related to the residents of the city of Karbala:**

There are many jobs in the city center, including the commercial job (divided into wholesale and retail trade, each of which has its own requirements for loading and unloading goods ... etc.) as well as the industrial function (the city center contains many industry workshops that have replaced housing), including some handicrafts, the housing function (which is the original job and has its own requirements of water, electricity, sewage networks, etc.), as well as the therapeutic function (although many doctors leave the city center, most doctors and laboratories are still in the city center), and the warehouse function (many old houses have been transformed after their people abandoned them due to lack of services into stores for merchants, which It increases the speed of damage and lack of maintenance), the recreational function (the city center still represents the largest degree in the process of entertaining the people of the city), and the educational function (the city center contains many religious and non-religious educational centers and many service institutions). Added to all this is the religious devotional function of visiting the city's residents to the holy shrines in the city center, as well as performing Friday prayers and congregation.

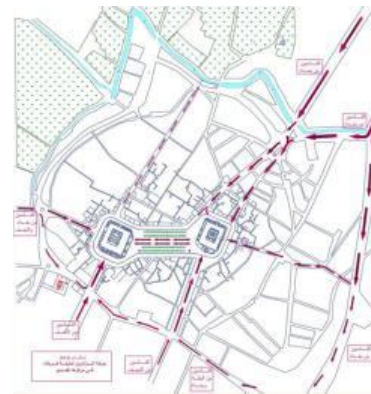
- **Activities for visitors to the shrine:**

The visitor from outside the city of Karbala goes to the center of the city of Karbala to perform his visit to the shrine of Hussein, peace be upon him, and he also needs many services and facilities that are added to the performance of the visit, which are as follows: The visitor needs easy access and ease of movement within the city and the visitor needs to perform his visit without numerical harassment and crowding that forces him to hurry and leave quickly from near the shrine, as well as the visitor needs to live and find comfortable housing easily and whenever A relative of the Shrine was better, and the visitor needs health groups spread in clear groups and not individual units, as well as the visitor needs restaurants of different grades to be provided with food, and the visitor needs to be treated in health centers when an emergency occurs, and the visitor needs to shop before leaving to his family and the goods are often religious or heritage, these requirements are common to all visitors to the shrines, whether in the million visits and others, and there are requirements and needs that are according to the visitor, such as cultural events and request Museums, libraries, attending cultural festivals that are often held in the city center and others.



**Fig. 7:** Red line shows the entry port (Rakza Tuwairj) to the two shrines

Source: Malik



**Fig. 8:** The movement of visitors in the old city center of Karbala

Source: Malik

## Urban Problems in the City Center and the Area Surrounding the Shrines

The holy city of Karbala faces unique challenges that are rarely seen in other cities, in several aspects, including planning and design in the architectural work within the city. The first aspect is the process of updating the basic plan of the city of Karbala and the free district in terms of the concentration of most of the city's activities and events in its historical center, and the other side is represented by the process of importing design vocabulary without taking into account the identity and specificity of the city's heritage and religious affiliation. They are urban problems and the other problems of the city are the arrival of large numbers from outside the city during the performance of the visit to the shrine of Imam Hussein peace be upon him. Therefore, the revival of the city of Karbala lies mainly in analyzing and reconsidering how the effectiveness of the visit is performed in all its details without affecting the effectiveness of the visit to the lives of the residents of the city. The first sign of a solution is to dismantle the big problem and break it down into smaller ones (Attia, 2009).

- 01:** Urban problems in the city of Karbala include the state of random distribution of land uses, after several accumulated abuses for periods of time, and this transgression at all levels, such as the transformation of some residential areas into commercial or industrial, including what is in the historical city center, and the transformation of green areas and orchards in the city into building spaces that are not subject to any laws other than the laws of the owner of the orchard. This is one of the duties of the basic modernization of the design of the city of Karbala to restore and correct the course of these abuses (Alansari, 2007).
- 02:** One of the problems is at the level of architectural design, and as a reality in the city, the city's personality is an Islamic personality since its inception as a metropolitan city, but the city is still moving away from this feature with designs alien to its environment, through the approach of some architects to modern architectural currents without paying attention to the privacy of the religious and historical city center of Karbala. It has come to the extent that the abundance of these diverse and strange designs has become alien to the sacred shrines to their urban environment after they were included in research that the designs surrounding the shrine distort the shrine and the city. One of the urban problems in the city center as well as in the city as a whole is the neglect of the environmental aspect in the designs through the use of materials that do not harmonize with the local environment of the city of Karbala, such as wrapping the façade of an entire building with glass, or making holes in the building that are very large that do not harmonize with the heat in the summer. This is due to the lack of commitment of the concerned designers to the laws of urban planning in the areas and sectors of the city, including the city center, and sometimes some legislative laws for building in the city, which need to be reviewed and updated to be consistent with some of the emergency changes in the city (Hassan, 2008).

## Findings

### Urban Fabric

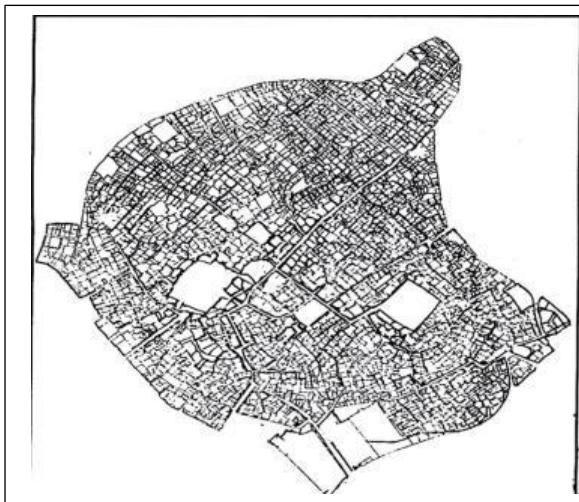
The city of Karbala has an urban fabric integrated and compact in its design relations that cannot be divided. Its urban structure is in the form of single units. The middle courtyards can only perform their role efficiently through their association with the surrounding building spaces, and this enhances how the community deals with the environment and its pride in it, as well as reflects social relations and ties (Albayaty, 1983).

### Morphological Changes to the Traditional Urban Fabric in the Historic Karbala in the 20th century

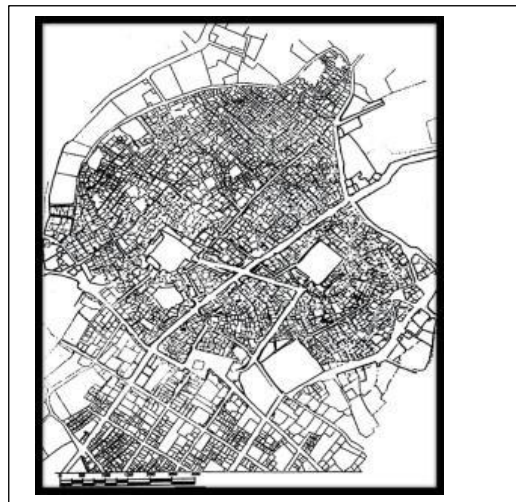
The city of Karbala has reached the pinnacle of urban integration in the form and shape of the old city of Karbala with the basic components of the Islamic city. It consists of the religious center and all other public activities that gather around the vicinity of the religious center, including markets and others. Then the activities scale up and get closer to

the privacy of the residences. This era represents the stage of development of the city and the stability of its form, and the city of Karbala at this stage bear the characteristics of the authentic city. This indisputable historical stage is the result of the accumulation of events, thought, and civilization, which have led to the completion of the balanced form in the uses of the land (Figs 9,10). All this was before any change was made in its urban fabric, from tearing apart by opening wide streets and removing spaces by opening squares for expansion near the shrines, as will be shown in successive stages of time (Al-Kalidar, 1949).

In the beginning, the changes that occurred in the center of the city of Karbala began after the year 1935 AD when the first project began to open streets within the old fabric for the entry of vehicles to the nearest point within the city. This period was a problem of most cities that have a narrow and winding street as a dominant aspect of the fabric. Since then, there have been many projects in the area, all of which contributed in some way to the expansion of these streets until some of them became large squares (Al-Kalidar, 1949).



**Fig. 9:** The second phase of the urban development of the city of Karbala  
Source: Rasha



**Fig. 10:** The third phase of the urban development of the city of Karbala  
Source: Attia

The urban changes that have occurred in the traditional urban fabric of the holy city center of Karbala in the 20th century can be classified into three phases and at successive time intervals:

### **The First Phase (1916 – 1947)**

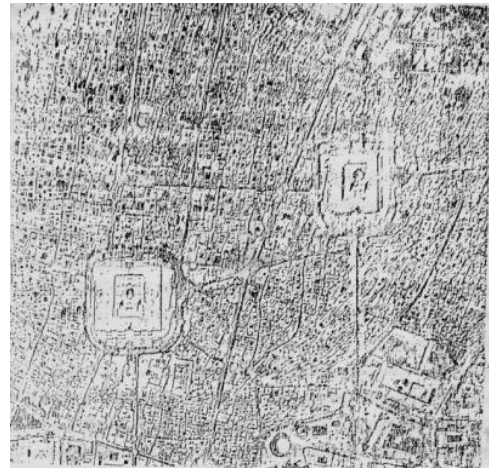
This phase represents the changes that occurred in the urban fabric in 1916 when the construction of Al-Abbas (pbuh) Street, which extends from Bab Al-Sahn Al-Sharif to Imam Al-Abbas (pbuh) to the Abbasiya Mahalla. This street is the first straight street in the old city (Fig. 11). The First World War and its aftermath witnessed new social demands arising from many factors and the beginning of new jobs that met these new requirements. For example, the traditional house has become incapable of satisfying new human needs. After the establishment of the Iraqi government in 1921, the city of Karbala expanded towards the South. The economic movement was active and the markets were busy, especially in the modern part, whose streets were straight and wide (Al-Kalidar, 1949). In 1935 AD, Imam Ali Street, peace be upon him, which connects the North of the city with its South. According to the interview with the Director of Urban Planning, this street divided the old city into two parts: each shrine was in one part, on the right was the shrine of Abbas and the left was the shrine of Hussein, peace be upon him (Fig. 11).

The Municipality of Karbala began in stages due to the urban development of the area by opening Ali Al-Akbar Street, which connects the two courtyards of the shrines to each other and extends from the side of the Hussainiya (gate of the small courtyard) to the front of Hazrat al-Abbas (Bab al-Qibla). work to open the street surrounding the courtyard of Rawda Husseiniya under the pretext of regulating traffic and the traffic of visitors, has connected the street surrounding the street (Ali Al-Akbar) to consist of the intersection of the two streets with a space similar to the square (Fig. 12) (Hussein, 2016). In 1947, the houses surrounding the courtyard and religious schools were demolished to expand the courtyard, a method that tried to isolate the shrine from the organic fabric. Due to the lack of intellectual and urban vision of the officials at that time, Karbala lost its most beautiful architectural monuments, as a result of this project. These were part of the Husseiniya shrine, which remained visible for centuries, the most important of which are the minaret of the slave and some religious schools and mosques (Attia, 2009).



**Fig. 11:** Aerial plan of the city center of Karbala showing the construction of Al-Abbas Street extending under the Abbasid Hadra to the south

Source: Kalidar



**Fig. 12:** An aerial view of the city center of Karbala showing the emptying of the area surrounding the shrines and its connection with the new streets.

### The Second Phase (1949-2003)

Bab al-Qibla Street (1949) became as an affirmation of the Western style so that the shrine became visible from this axis, and Bab al-Qibla Street for Hazrat al-Husseiniya parallels the street Bab Qibla of the Abbasid Shrine. When the street surrounding the shrine was opened, it was isolated from the surrounding fabric. The shrine had a wall overlooking the street, after the doors were the only ones from the wall of the Shrine that could be seen from the outside. As for the rest of the parts of the wall (or adjacent to the wall), it was dealt with by modifying the fabric after its demolition and building Mahalla and apartments higher than them above the Mahalla. It turned the wall of the shrine from the outside into a commercial function after religious schools, mosques, and husseiniyas in the same location. The Mahalla and the new street performed the religious and educational function complementary to its function and the function of establishing and having the shrine itself.

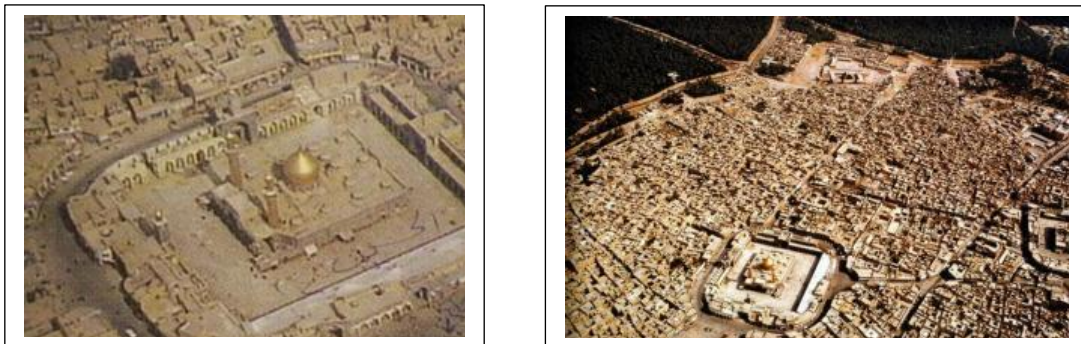
This is in addition to removing the city's history and historical documents and evidence represented by the previous construction (Attia, 2009). According to the interview with the Director of Urban Planning, in 1955 AD, the street surrounding the shrine of Imam Al-Abbas (peace be upon him) was opened, in such a way that each street shrine is surrounded and connected by Ali Al-Akbar Street. It was connected South to the outside of the city by a separate street from the qibla side, and North by the intersection of Ali Al-Akbar

Street with Imam Ali Street heading North (Fig. 13). (Interview with the Directorate of Urban Planning).

In 1978, planning began for the implementation of the pedestrian street project with a width of 40 m, which connects the Husseiniya and Abbasiya kindergartens. The work was completed in 1980. This led to the destruction of many prominent Islamic architectural landmarks, including part of the famous Souq al-Hussein northeast of Shrine al-Husseiniya, Al-Safi Mosque, Badkuba Religious School, Hassan Khan School, beautiful heritage houses, and others. Irregular buildings were built on both sides of the pedestrian street without prior study and planning and an understanding of the city's Islamic urban character (Al\_ansari, 2007).

In the year 1980 AD, all that surrounds the Shrine was removed and stripped of its neighborhoods, which were considered one of its accessories, dependencies, and arms in the fabric of the city. Thus, it was like the limbs of the body, and by demolishing the building surrounding the shrines, which were mostly mosques, husseiniyas, religious schools, and scientific institutes, which were eliminated, Karbala was stripped of the high scientific status that had been prepared for it by the previous centuries gradually over time by the various governments that came to the region (Karbala Municipality Archive). The period between 1991 – 2003 was the demolition of large areas of the city center (between the two kindergartens and their surroundings) that followed the events of the popular uprising, and this represents the height of the destruction inflicted on the city.

All distinctive Islamic architectural landmarks were removed, which led to the loss of the city much of its urban heritage, such as mosques, institutes, religious schools, husseiniyas, some old mosques, markets, caesars, and beautiful heritage houses. The area between the two kindergartens turned into a wide square 350 meters long and 160 meters wide (Karbala Municipality Archive). Then the municipality of Karbala began to pave the floor of the wide square between the two kindergartens with concrete and planted parts of it with palm trees. Licenses were granted to build hotels around this square without developing a study of the center in terms of planning and design. Buildings were constructed surrounding the center too (Al\_ansari, 2007).



**Fig. 13:** Aerial view of the city showing the streets surrounding the shrines after removing the fabric.

Source : <http://www.ahl-ul-bayt.org>

### **The Third Phase (2003-2023):**

Since 2003, after receiving a new management system for the holy shrines that do not depend on the families living in the area to manage the shrine as was customary before this date, new projects began in the same shrines and abroad. Ideas and design proposals poured in from various local and non-local parties due to the importance of the issue of the city of Karbala. Thus it for example, Al-Kawthar Foundation in Iran made a proposal for the reconstruction of the holy shrines in Iraq. It is still putting forward several design proposals at the level of the threshold and the level of the city center. In 2006, the International Research



Company received an update on the basic design of the city of Karbala and the free district, including the old city center, following the establishment of a tender announced by the Iraqi Ministry of Municipalities and Works. However, according to an interview with Husseiniya Shrine/Engineering Affairs, none of the proposals has been implemented (Fig. 14,15).

In (2009), Diwan Company handed over the basic design update for the old city center of Karbala (the two shrines and the surrounding residential Mahalla, and part of the Abbasiya Mahalla). The process of submitting design alternatives was completed in 2014. In 2015, the proposal submitted by Diwan Company was implemented in stages, the first was the demolition of part of the Mahalla of Bab al-Najaf or Bab al-Mashhad and part of the camp Mahalla to establish a dish of Egaila on it.



**Fig. 14:** Development proposal submitted  
Source: Global Research Company



**Fig. 15:** Development proposal submitted  
Source: Diwan

In 2020, the second phase of the design began, which included the demolition of part of the Eastern and Western Abbasiya Mahalla in the near part of the area between the Two Holy Mosques and after Al-Gomhoria Street. The demolition process has not yet been completed. Here, another new dish will be established for visitors, which is the Imam Hassan Al-Mujtaba bowl. In 2022, the third phase of the expansion of the area surrounding the shrines began, as a large part of the Bab Al-Taq Mahalla was demolished from the side overlooking the Sidra Street, to create another new courtyard that will be complementary to the Egaila courtyard called the awaited Imam courtyard.

As observed by the author, in 2023, which is the time when the research is written, the Abbasid shrine began with its cadres to implement the fourth phase of the expansion of the area surrounding the shrines. This stage included the demolition of part of the Mahalla of Bab Al-Khan from the side overlooking Al-Alqami Street, and on an area of 12,000 square meters, the Sayyida um Al-Banin bowl was established. The last phase of this project's completion was demolishing all residential Mahalla surrounding the shrines, the last of which is the Mahalla of Bab Al-Salama. ( )

### Reconstructing Urban Identity

The holy city of Karbala faces unique challenges that are rarely seen in other cities, in several respects, including planning and design in the architectural work within the city. Urban problems are at the level of architectural design, and as a reality in the city, its personality is an Islamic figure since its inception as a metropolitan city. However, the city is still moving away from this feature with designs alien to its environment, through the approach of some architects to modern architectural currents without paying attention to the privacy of the religious city center of Karbala and historic value.

It has come to the extent that the abundance of these diverse and strange designs has become alien to the sacred shrines to their urban environment. It is clear that the designs surrounding the shrine are distorting the shrine and the city. One of the urban problems in

the city center as well as in the city as a whole is the neglect of the environmental aspect in the designs through the use of materials that do not harmonize with the local environment of the city of Karbala. These include wrapping the façade of the entire building with glass or making holes in the building that are very large that do not harmonize with the heat in the summer.

The population of the city of Karbala is estimated at 1,218,732 according to the statistics of 2018 issued by the Ministry of Planning. According to this, less than 1% of its population is concentrated in the center of Karbala city as per the data of the Directorate of Urban Planning in Karbala for the year 2021. This means that the absolute majority lives outside the city center.

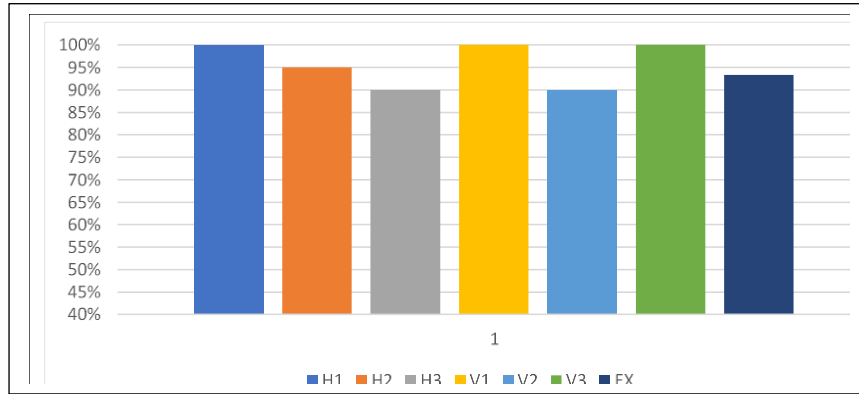
### Responses to Research Questions

For this research, as for the spatial boundaries, the ancient historical city center of Karbala was chosen, which is represented by 7 residential Mahalla that carry with them a record of civilizational, cultural, social, and urban values. As for the temporal boundaries, the choice was made (2003 – now) because of the significant changes in the region's urban fabric. In response to the question

"Did the demolition of the Mahalla and houses of the old city lead to a negative impact on the identity of the city and its social and cultural privacy?", the results show that there is an absolute majority in agreement on the impact of successive demolitions on the urban fabric of the city of Karbala.

As the demolitions did not take into account the religious, social and cultural specificity of the city, and that it did not take into account the urban identity of Karbala, there must be a need to study urban development policies and the most appropriate policy. is sold with the historical fabric of Karbala, which treats Current problems without damaging the identity of the city.

Did the demolition of the Mahalla and houses of the old city lead to a negative impact on the identity of the city and its social and cultural privacy?"							
R es p.	H 1	H 2	H 3	V 1	V 2	V 3	E x
T ru e	2 0	1 9	1 8	2 0	1 8	2 0	2 8
F al es	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
M a y b e	0	0	2	0	1	0	2



**Fig.16:** Agreement of different community samples on variant A1 in the city center

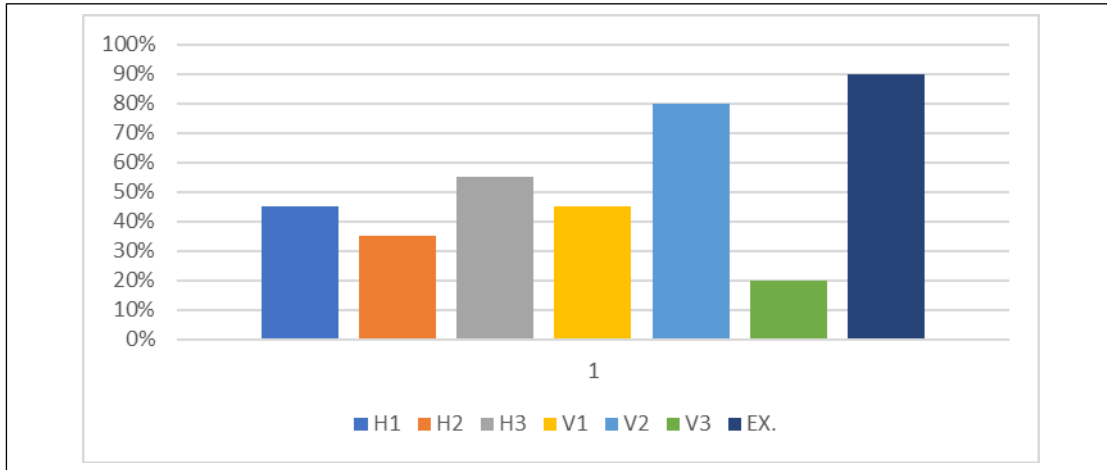
In response to the question, "Are the buildings built after 2003 buildings with an architectural style that mimics the symbolism of the history of the region?", the results revealed that 90% of experts confirm that the current buildings, which were built after removing large parts of the urban fabric, are not related to the city's ancient history and the privacy of its society. They are buildings with an alien style to the region and do not take into account any of its customs, traditions or climate conditions.

This is confirmed by Dr. Abbas Kreyzeh, one of the professors of the architectural department at the University of Technology, who is interested in what happened and is still happening in the centers of religious cities. He explained that the religious city has its specificity when dealing with its urban fabric, as it likened the city's historical fabric to being like the fabric of human skin. Any addition or deletion must be done like the surgical procedure when the fabric carries in its component's customs, traditions, identity and society.

80% of visitors appeared through the axis of Qibla Imam Hussein Street in support that the buildings that were built after 2003 simulate the symbolism of the area. During the interviews, a visitor Ahmed Hamed Rabat, a resident of Dhi Qar, said that the newly built high buildings provide him with housing close to the holy shrines, and he says that the city's historical fabric of demolition and emptying is only a process and a correct method to open the kinetic axes for the visitors.

In the same area, 60% of the residents did not support the demolitions, an elderly man Abu Ibrahim, who is an opponent of the demolition from the outskirts of the Bab al-Najaf Mahalla towards the camp Mahalla, said that the Mahalla no longer has a suitable environment for housing due to the changes that took place on the urban fabric that lost its climatic characteristics as well as its privacy. This has caused the migration of the indigenous people with well-known lineages at the level of Karbala, as well as the restrictions by the authorities, which caused a lack of services.

Are the buildings built after 2003 buildings with an architectural style that mimics the symbolism of the history of the region							
Resp.	H 1	H 2	H 3	V 1	V 2	V 3	E x
True	1	1	9	1	4	1	2
False	3	5	2	4	4	0	1
Maybe	6	2	9	5	1	4	3



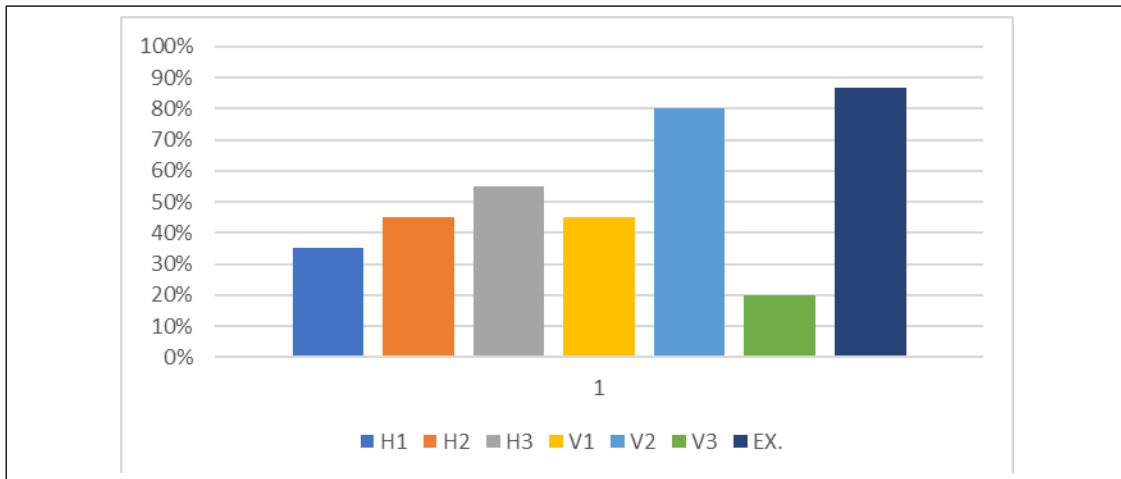
**Fig. 17:** he percentage of agreement of different community samples on variant A2in the city center

In response to the question, "Does the importance of preserving historical and heritage buildings lie in what they reflect the identity of the region and the traditions and customs of its inhabitants?", the results included that 87% of experts support the importance of heritage buildings and the need to preserve them in various ways and methods. One of the experts, Haider Naji Attia, stated that there are many heritage buildings in the center of Karbala that no longer exist due to the neglect by the concerned authorities and society as well, such as old baths and some residential houses for the well-known families and religious scholars.

The results also indicated that only 35% of the residents of the Mahalla of Bab al-Salamah on the importance of preserving historical buildings. One of the residents of the area, a middle-aged man Muhammad Rajab Dahi, a resident of the Shamiya area and lives in Karbala recently and owns one of the houses in the Mahalla of Bab al-Salama when asked about his opinion on the importance of heritage, said that the city needs to modernize its buildings due to the momentum of visitors and in his own words. "There is no importance of heritage against the visitors of the Imam".

As for the results of visitors, they included 20% - 80% for the importance of preserving heritage buildings, as visitors from the axis of Al-Shuhada Street said the importance of preserving historical and heritage buildings because of their importance to the city's urban identity.

Does the importance of preserving historical and heritage buildings lie in what they reflect the identity of the region and the traditions and customs of its inhabitants?							
Re sp.	H 1	H 2	H 3	V 1	V 2	V 3	E x
True	7	9	11	9	16	4	26
False	4	8	5	1	3	8	29
Maybe	9	3	4	10	1	8	35



**Fig. 18:** Different community samples on variant A2 in the city centre

The results appeared in the first question with the agreement of all the selected samples on the impact of random demolitions of the city's fabric on its physical and cultural identity, the researcher suggests that this agreement came as a result of the impact of social practices held in the city center, this impact was reflected in one way or another on everyone, whether visitors or residents in the area, perhaps due to changes in land uses and these changes led to the reduction and loss of some events that were held in the city center that express identity. The loss of some heritage signs, whether religious schools or small shrines, may also have led to people's resentment of the random actions of decision-makers in the way they deal with the city's historical fabric.

The results of the second question showed that most of the selected samples agreed on the impact of the current urban landscape on the traditional fabric of the city, and its loss of urban and cultural identity, especially that buildings after 2003 - the year in which Iraq was subjected to war - did not comply with the standards, legislation and building controls set by the local government in the historic city center area. The visitors from the axis of Al-Shuhada Street, which was symbolized V3, are residents of Karbala, but they are outside the boundaries of the current center and outside the fabric, from the researcher's point of view that this percentage was expected, due to the belief of the people of the city that the center should be emptied of all buildings and only the two shrines remain surrounded by a barren square used as a place for the gathering of visitors, and this is what the researcher believes is a big mistake because the problem of not absorbing the city center for the large numbers coming to it is a big problem that needs Fragment them and then search for solutions provided that they do not affect the identity of the urban city.

The results of the third question showed a divergence in opinions about the importance of buildings because they reflect the identity of the community or the region, I see as a researcher and live near the current city center that the original community of this area has been forcibly displaced due to the continuous harassment by the authority because of their refusal to deal with their homes as places of residence for visitors, as the indigenous people were replaced by others who do not understand the meaning of heritage, identity and preservation because they are ignorant of the customs and traditions of the region, you see them now turning the function of some residential houses into Commercial warehouses, some of which were demolished, and others turned into hotels for visitors.

During the interview with the experts, they were discussed with them possible solutions to return the identity of the area that was lost due to the randomness of dealing by the residents, and their opinions were that the rest of it should be preserved.

## Conclusions

The main objective of the research was to reach the closest possible formula that can be found in the way of dealing with the site of holy shrines in the city of Karbala based on an elaborate knowledge base that brings together all the phenomena intertwined in the issue of developing shrines within the city, so the conclusions of the research came in this specific issue:

1. The research stresses the need for a balance between development and identity preservation, through the development of deliberate and non-random plans for demolitions.
2. This study emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural and historical monuments as part of urban identity, and conservation strategies must be developed.
3. The results indicate the joint recommendation among the samples of the study population on the importance of urban identity in enhancing the cultural identity of the Karbala community and distinguishing it from other religious cities.
4. The results showed that urban identity is an essential part of the cultural heritage of the city of Karbala, and must be strengthened and preserved in the face of rapid changes.
5. What was reflected in the results is the absence of the role of academics and specialists in all the deterioration of the urban identity of the city of Karbala, so the study recommends that specialists should be involved in the development processes, which contributes to preserving the urban identity.

The study showed that the justifications for demolishing the local identity of the city of Karbala are unacceptable, and it is possible to accommodate the number of visitors without resorting to the demolition of the urban fabric in this method.

## Notes

1. Mahalla: It is a well-defined housing unit with self-sufficiency and strength that ensures the establishment of a social unit among its residents, in addition to the availability of the necessary conditions in the residential environment to resist the social fragmentation of the city and the resulting collapse in the formation of the city.
2. The selection of (3) Mahalla was as follows: a Mahalla that was destroyed called (Bab Al-Najaf) bearing the number 3, a Mahalla that was partially destroyed called (Bab Al-Mukaim) bearing the number 2, Mahalla that was not subjected to any destroyed called (Bab Al-Salama) bearing the number 3, these numbers in the practical study.
3. Shrine is another name for the shrine of Imam Hussein

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