



The Impacts of Dialogue between Cities on Strategies and Plans for Urban Renewal: The case of Barcelona, Spain and Baghdad, Iraq

CASE STUDY

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ubiquity press

ABSTRACT

Iraqi cities, particularly the capital Baghdad, have great historical and cultural value, embodied in their historical centers' distinctive architectural and urban character. Baghdad experienced multiple wars and political conflicts that led to severe neglect, combined with an absence of clear strategies to rehabilitate its historical city center. These circumstances accelerated the decay and deterioration of its buildings and urban fabric, eventually leading to the mass emigration of historical centers' inhabitants.

In the process of remedying this situation, two contradictory trends emerged. The first focused on looking to old, nearby cities for ideas and solutions. The second trend called for the examination of successful strategies employed elsewhere, for the purpose of benefiting and learning from them. This research adopts the second strategy, as it contains an implicit reference to dialogue between cities, and investigates its impact on strategies and plans for urban renewal.

The present research aims to identify the possibilities and opportunities for dialogue between different cities, based on their ideological and experimental urban renewal strategies. The result of the dialogue can be translated into futuristic visions to serve the advancement and revitalization of any city, which will help address its occupants' needs. Therefore, this research focuses on Barcelona's urban renewal model, which has been one of the most successful for a city that has suffered experiences similar to those of Baghdad.

This research relies on chronologies and spatial comparative methods to compare Baghdad and Barcelona. It concludes that the dialogue between cities is a dialogue of ideas, which provides the opportunity to benefit from others' experiences and strategies. This dialogue supports the exploration of new methods for the development of urban areas and the formulation of appropriate planning solutions.

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KEYWORDS:

urban renewal strategies;
dialogue between cities;
historic city center; Barcelona;
Baghdad

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Abd Yashoaa, N, Noori, F,
Alslik, G and Kharrufa, S.
2023. The Impacts of Dialogue
between Cities on Strategies
and Plans for Urban Renewal:
The case of Barcelona, Spain
and Baghdad, Iraq. *Future
Cities and Environment*,
9(1): 11, 1–22. DOI: [https://doi.
org/10.5334/fce.177](https://doi.org/10.5334/fce.177)

1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Iraqi towns, especially the capital Baghdad, have endured numerous wars and political upheavals that have resulted in chronic neglect and a lack of clear plans to restore the historic city center. Due to these factors, the city's structures and the urban fabric started to deteriorate faster, which eventually caused a significant migration of residents from historical centers. Two opposing trends formed when trying to fix the problem.

The first trend was based on returning to old Iraqi cities to inspire solutions from them, refusing to open up to other cities and their experiences. This trend believes that the Iraqi historic districts built relying upon the formation and cultural values of the local inhabitants, which directly reacted to their previous problems, forgetting that, in most cases, these solutions are no longer suitable for the current problems. This issue led to the need for a second way of thinking that considers and analyzes the experiences of others and their solutions to their current problems and measures their suitability for the problems of Iraqi contemporary society. The second trend called for the examination of successful strategies employed elsewhere for the purpose of benefiting and learning from them. This research adopts the second strategy, as it contains an implicit reference to dialogue between cities and investigates its impact on strategies and plans for urban renewal. (Abd Yashoaa, 2013).

The dialogue between cities refers to the exchange of ideas, experiences, and knowledge between cities and their residents to solve common complex urban problems and to reach best practices across different urban contexts (Abd Yashoaa, 2013). The concept of dialogue between cities started the transition to current urban renewal methods and strategies. The idea was introduced along with the Euromed Heritage Program in 1998, by a Spanish organization called RehabiMed. This program considered historic cities across the Mediterranean with different cultural, ethnic, and geographical aspects as a single entity, in order to revitalize them by taking their historical and spatial urban contexts into account. This method is based on an analysis of the cities' main problems to find the best solutions and develop new renewal strategies to enhance the locals' living conditions by including them in the decision-making process (Casanovas, 2008).

Similarly, the Dortmund Initiative, launched in 2007, focused on consolidating the concept of dialogue between similar cities, particularly ones in the Middle East, and their historic centers. The study included Birzeit in Palestine, Madaba in Jordan, Beirut in Lebanon, and Al-Amadiya in Iraq. It covered social, cultural, religious, and economic activities, which were all considered essential to the cities' heritage. These cities all experienced similar difficulties and faced identical threats and challenges that affected them and their urban fabric, eventually

creating serious obstacles that delayed and prevented their development (Reicher & Awadallah, 2010).

Several design and planning researchers have examined other successful urban renewal strategies since then. One of these researchers was Saliba (2010), who discussed the possibility of imitating a previous experience for Beirut's historical center reconstruction, as the city suffered dramatic destruction due to war and civil unrest. This experience can be used as a model for Baghdad and its historical center, Al-Rusafa, which suffered similar destruction due to war. According to Saliba, this model includes three aspects to attract more investors, occupants, and tourists: integration within the city center context, rehabilitation of buildings and their open spaces, and a legislative and institutional framework (Saliba, 2010).

Martin Giate and Acceso Desde (2010) discussed the possibility of benefiting from Cordoba's experience with altering the flow of the Guadalquivir river, and applying a similar strategy in Baghdad, which has a similar river (the Tigris). Both rivers represent good natural locations for the development of early human settlements, as they offer a source of potable water, irrigation, food production, and transportation. The combination of these factors eventually led to the flourishing of commercial activities in these cities. Both rivers became the main axis for growth and expansion on the riverbanks (Giate & Desde, 2010).

Later and within the same context, Victoria Garriga (2010) published an article titled "Two Projects in the Old City Center of Barcelona." In this article, she discussed recent ideas regarding urban renewal strategies used in Barcelona's historical city center. These ideas focused on historic buildings and how to preserve and maintain them to allow their adaptive reuse. Garriga suggested using these ideas in Baghdad, because it has a similar historical city center, as both cities have valuable historic districts full of life and culture (Garriga, 2010).

Blaž Križnik (2018), in his paper "Transformation of deprived urban areas and social sustainability," examined and compared two successful urban renovation and redevelopment models, applied in two neighborhoods (Poblenou in Barcelona and Wangsimni in Seoul). These two districts belong to two different cultures with different lifestyles. Despite the differences, Križnik found significant similarities in the results of the two projects (22@ in Barcelona and WNT in Seoul), as they both produced positive social effects, enhancing everyday life and creating better social coherence in societies. These projects encouraged and enhanced locals' participation in the decision-making process for the development of these areas, increasing their social bonding and improving their interrelationship with the living places (Križnik, 2018).

There are certain gaps in the existing research: first, the basis for choosing the city or cities with which dialogue will be conducted has not been examined. Second, the study of the dialogued cities as cities with cultural heritage and an urban fabric which has distinct characteristics,

as well as functional and financial requirements for their residents. Third, the methodological steps necessary to complete the dialogue have not been investigated. It is necessary to determine what is required to transfer an urban renewal experience from one city to another. Fourth, the studies focused only on successful models and compared their results without considering the techniques required to transfer these benefits to other cities that lack any clear model needed to enhance their current critical everyday life conditions, like Baghdad.

The lack of previous studies on the impact of the dialogue between cities and the methods to transfer experimental urban renewal strategies between cities represents a significant research problem that requires further examination.

2. RESEARCH AIM

This research aims to identify the possibilities and opportunities of a dialogue between different cities based on their ideological and experimental urban renewal strategies to adapt a vision for the future towards their advancement and revitalization. The study is aimed in particular towards cities that suffered from the deterioration of historical city centers, such as Baghdad.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research relies on an analytical comparison between Baghdad and Barcelona, which requires the following:

3.1 THE SELECTION OF SUITABLE CITIES; BOTH SIDES OF THE DIALOGUE

To examine the impact of the dialogue between cities on the transfer of methods from one city to another, and to investigate how these methods can be applied to develop better renewal strategies, Barcelona and Baghdad were selected for a detailed dialogue on both ideological and urban renewal levels. The selection of these cities is based on several factors. First, both cities have a long history, extending back several thousand years; therefore, they both contain valuable historical centers that need to be maintained and developed with some delicacy. Both cities experienced violent upheavals that destroyed parts of the city and caused emigration. The third factor is that Barcelona recently experienced a successful planned modernization, largely due to the need for restructuring to accommodate the Olympic games in 1992. Baghdad, on the other hand, more recently experienced severe violent conflicts, from the late 20th century to just a few years ago, which resulted in the destruction and deterioration of large parts of the city. The city is now ready for restructuring and can significantly benefit from the experience of Barcelona.

3.2 ANALYSIS STEPS: URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGIES AS A DIALOGUE

This comparison between Baghdad and Barcelona investigates the origins of both cities and the timeline of their development and growth up to their present urban form. The research first focuses on the factors that affected their historical centers' deterioration and the circumstances behind them. Subsequently, the authors focus on demonstrating the strategies and plans offered by the government and private organizations to develop Barcelona and revitalize its historical center. This investigation clarifies the success of experimental urban renewal strategies and suggest strategies for applying these solutions to the revitalization of Baghdad's historical city center, based on the similarities found in the previous steps.

4. HYPOTHESIS

The dialogue between cities occurs through urban renewal strategies between two or more cities physically and intellectually, where urban renewal ideas and strategies represent the intellectual dialogue (society, economy, and cultural heritage). The new urban renewal experience represents the physical dialogue (the morphology of the city and its urban components).

5. URBAN MORPHOLOGY PHASES IN BAGHDAD AND BARCELONA

Baghdad and Barcelona witnessed several important changes that significantly affected their urban morphologies. This research selects the most significant events in these two cities' histories and considers them the primary drivers behind the cities' generation. These important historical events are described in chronological order:

5.1 THE BEGINNINGS

Baghdad was established during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Abu Jafar Al Mansur in AD 762, as the first organized urban core in the area and as a capital for the Abbasid Caliphate (Jawad, 1969). The city was located on fertile land, among several settlements and agricultural villages on the west bank of the Tigris, to the south of the current Al-Kadhimiya district. In this era, Baghdad was known as the Round City, and it was a pioneer in science, political, economic, and cultural fields (Figure 1 (A); Alsiliq, 2008).

Barcelona was established during the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus in the first century, as a colony and Roman fortress (Beltram, 2005). The city is located on a vast area of land, rich with many streams that flow into the sea. Barcelona grew into the first organized urban core in the area and a typical Roman city. It was

known at that time as Iulia Augusta Paterna Faventia Barcino (Figure 1 (B); Gausa & Cervelló, 2002).

A comparison of the two cities during this phase found the following similarities and differences:

The similarities: Both cities were constructed based on an urban plan.

The differences: This phase ended with the total disappearance of Baghdad’s urban morphology. Although it lasted for more than 300 years, there have been no archeological discoveries associated with this phase. The only sources of information about it are descriptions found in historical texts. By contrast, archeological remains from Barcelona’s Roman period can be found in the old city center, near Plaza Del Rey, in the Gothic Quarter. These archeological remains include part of the Roman city wall and several tombs.

5.2 MEDIEVAL PHASE: FIFTH TO FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

After the disappearance of the Round City, a new urban core developed on the eastern bank of the Tigris. This new core was called Al-Rusafa and appears to have been a large neighborhood built by caliph Al-Mahdi, who, in the eighth century, ordered the construction of the Al-Rusafa mosque and palace (Jawad, 1969). The area where these buildings were constructed was an important inhabited agricultural and trade area consisting of farms, villages, and settlements (Alsiliq, 2008). Significant urban development in this area started after the relocation of the caliphate center to Al-Hasani Palace, which was used by caliph Al-Ma’mun as a center of government (Jawad, 1969).

The urban core of Al-Rusafa soon began to grow around the caliphate palace toward the north, east, and south, as neighborhoods grew until they merged into a single entity. These neighborhoods were Kilwatha, Al-Thulatha Market, and Al-Mukharam (Alsiliq, 2008). At the beginning

of the eleventh century, the west side of the urban core integrated with the Al-Karkh quarter, which took its name from the river Karkhiya. Al-Karkh soon grew even further to include more neighborhoods (Sheikh Bashar and Sheikh Sandal), and an external city wall was constructed around Al-Karkh quarter, similar to the one used to protect Al-Rusafa. The two cores soon combined to form Baghdad city (see Figure 2 (A); Sousa, 1952).

By contrast, Barcelona suffered a recession and economic deterioration, caused by a series of Roman expansion wars, that lasted from the fifth to the beginning of the thirteenth century. This recession prevented any serious development in the city during this period (Beltram, 2005). The expansion and urban development took place at the end of the period, when construction extended beyond the Roman city walls, into the surrounding agricultural areas. This expansion led to the creation of several neighborhoods, soon filled with settlers who worked in trade and sailing. The new addition consisted of several residential units, markets, palaces, churches, and monasteries (Nicolás, 2010).

The previous expansion materialized through several stages, the first toward La Ribera and El Gotic quarters in the east. This location had been a gully in the Roman period and is currently known as Las Ramblas. This expansion was enclosed by a new city wall to protect that part of the city. The second stage of the expansion took place during the fourteenth century, toward the west. It included the construction of the El Raval quarter and the new western city wall (Figure 2 (B); Beltram, 2005).

Certain similarities and differences can be noted between Baghdad and Barcelona during this phase:

The similarities: Both cities expanded into inhabited areas with plenty of water resources. In both cases, a distinctive organic urban fabric emerged, and city walls were constructed to provide protection.

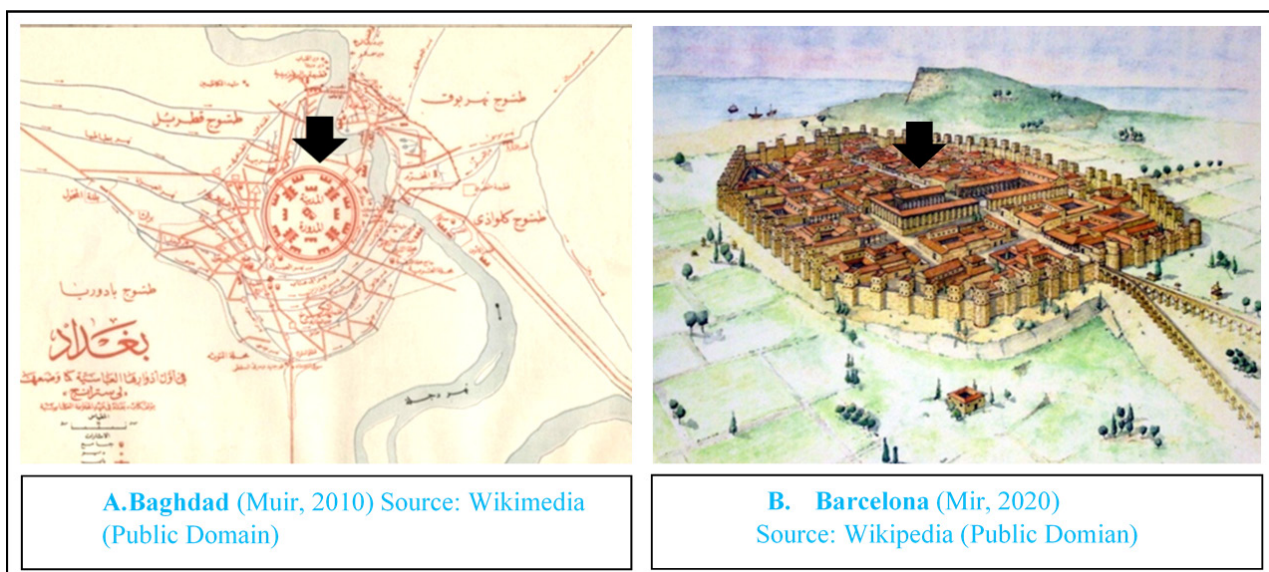


Figure 1 Shows Baghdad and Barcelona’s first urban core generation; the beginnings.

The differences: Barcelona expanded outside the Roman colony, while Baghdad developed around a new urban core on the eastern bank of the Tigris. The end of this phase included the full integration of the Karkh and Rusafa quarters to generate the city of Baghdad, the two quarters connected by unplanned bridges. Barcelona had not yet been integrated as a single unified city at this time.

5.3 RENAISSANCE PHASE: SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

The two cities showed a wide range of differences during this phase, particularly in terms of the growth of their new urban cores. Baghdad’s old city witnessed the generation of two new urban cores in addition to the old cores, Al Karkh and Al Rusafa. One of these new urban cores grew around the Al-Imam Abu Hanifa Al Nu’man shrine in Al-Adhamiyah quarter. The second new urban

core grew around Al-Imam Musa Al-Kadthim shrine in Al-Kadthemiya quarter, as shown in Figure 3 (A) (Alsiliq, 2008). In Barcelona, the new core was generated from the integration of the El Gotic and La Ribera quarters with the La Raval quarter via Las Ramblas, especially after the destruction of the city wall that separated them. The three integrated quarters were called Barcelona, representing the entire city; its remains can still be seen, as shown in Figure 3 (B) (Beltram, 2005).

However, similarities can also be noted between Baghdad and Barcelona during this phase. Both cities experienced limited building within the city walls, following recessions due to the damage caused by natural disasters and political conflicts, impacting both social and economic aspects of life at this time. All these factors had negative effects on the urban growth of the two cities (Figure 4 (A) and (B); Nicolás, 2010; Sousa, 1952).

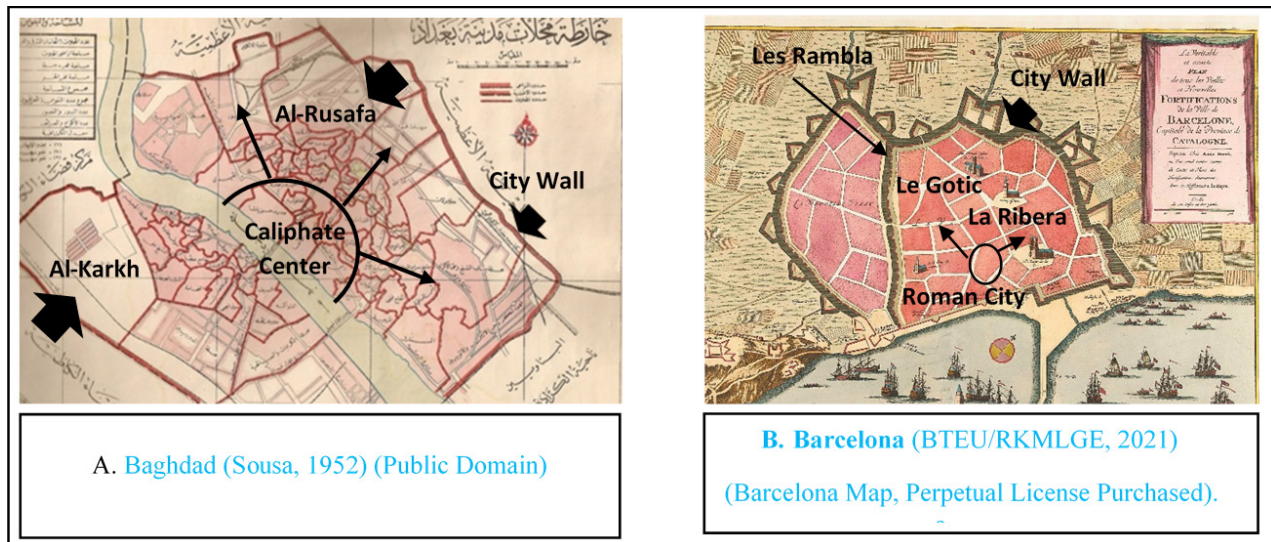


Figure 2 Shows the growth and expansion of Baghdad and Barcelona outside the city walls. Medieval phase: fifth to fifteenth centuries.

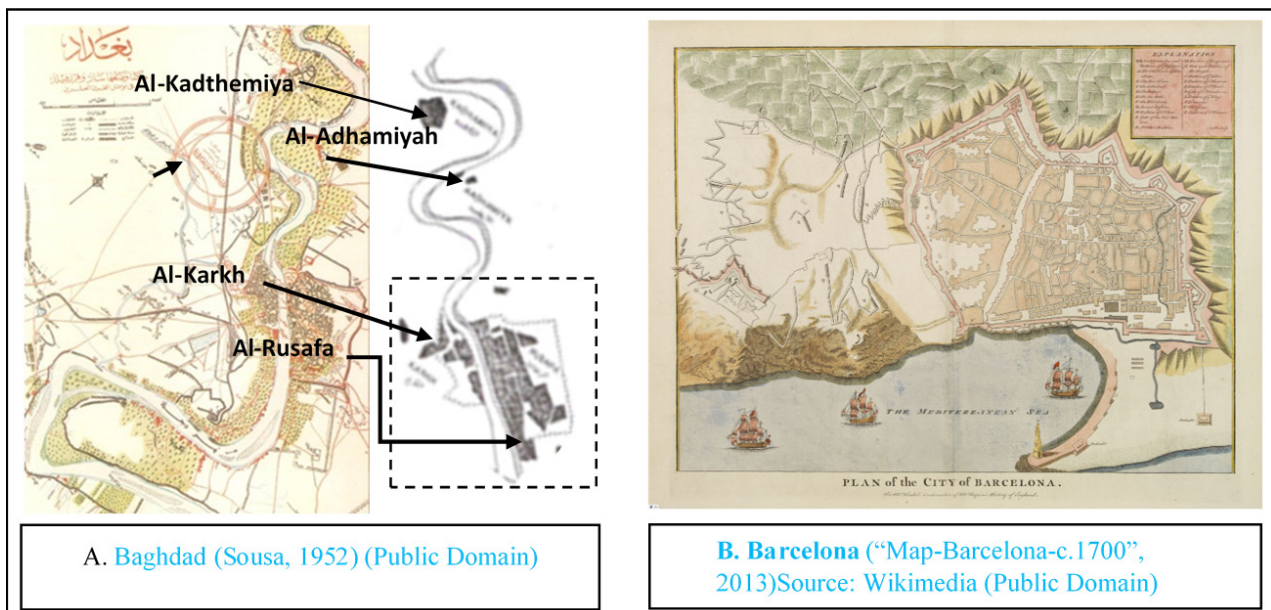


Figure 3 Shows the entire cities of Barcelona and the growth of new urban cores for Baghdad. Renaissance phase: sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

5.4 INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION PHASE: THE BEGINNING OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

No significant construction developments nor any noticeable urban changes can be noted in either of the two cities during this phase. They maintained the same urban structure they had during the previous two centuries. For example, Baghdad experienced a simple expansion toward the north and south of Al-Rusafa in East Baghdad, as shown in Figure 5 (A) (Al-Ashaab, 1974). Barcelona enacted a ban on construction outside the city walls (Marshall, 2004), except for the military compound La Ciutadella de Barcelona, which required the demolition of 1,350 houses (Figure 5 (B); Wynn, 1979).

Baghdad lost its political importance, as it was no longer the capital of the Arabic empire, which negatively affected social and economic life (Jawad, 1969). Barcelona witnessed a vast political transformation, from the old feudal land ownership system to a capital system, which positively affected social and economic life (Nicolás, 2010).

5.5 THE BEGINNING OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION: THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY UNTIL THE PRESENT

Many similarities between the two cities can be noted during this phase.

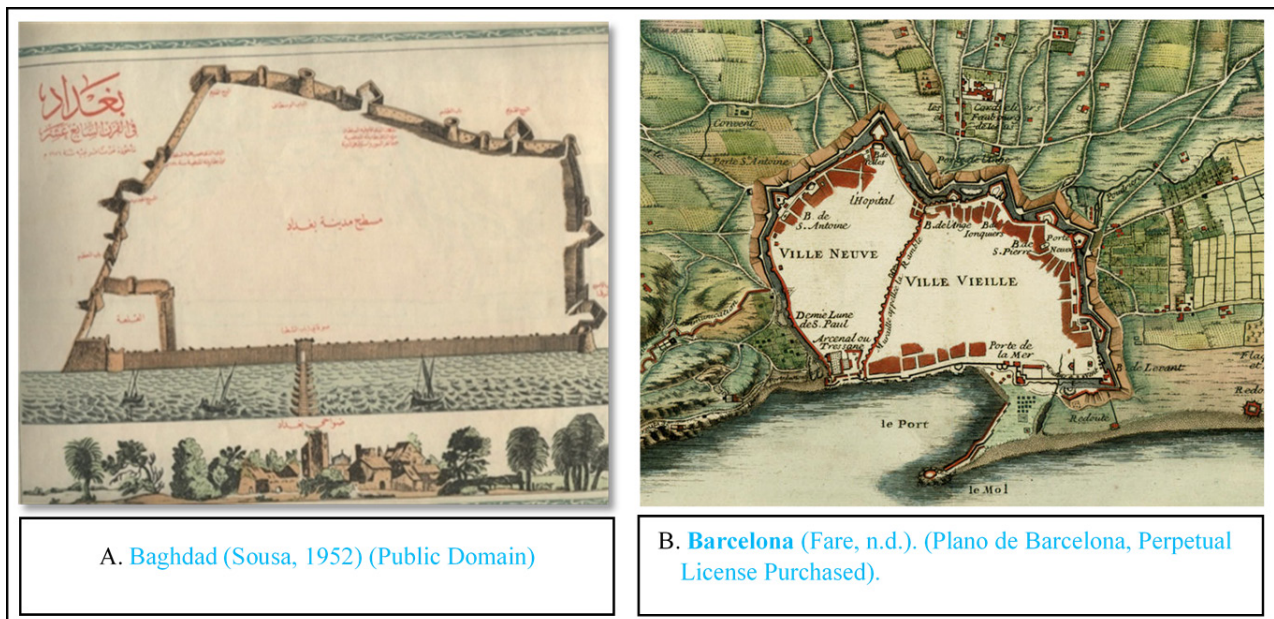


Figure 4 Shows the city of Barcelona and Baghdad at the end of the seventeenth century. It can be seen from the plans that the general structure of the cities had not changed from the previous stage.

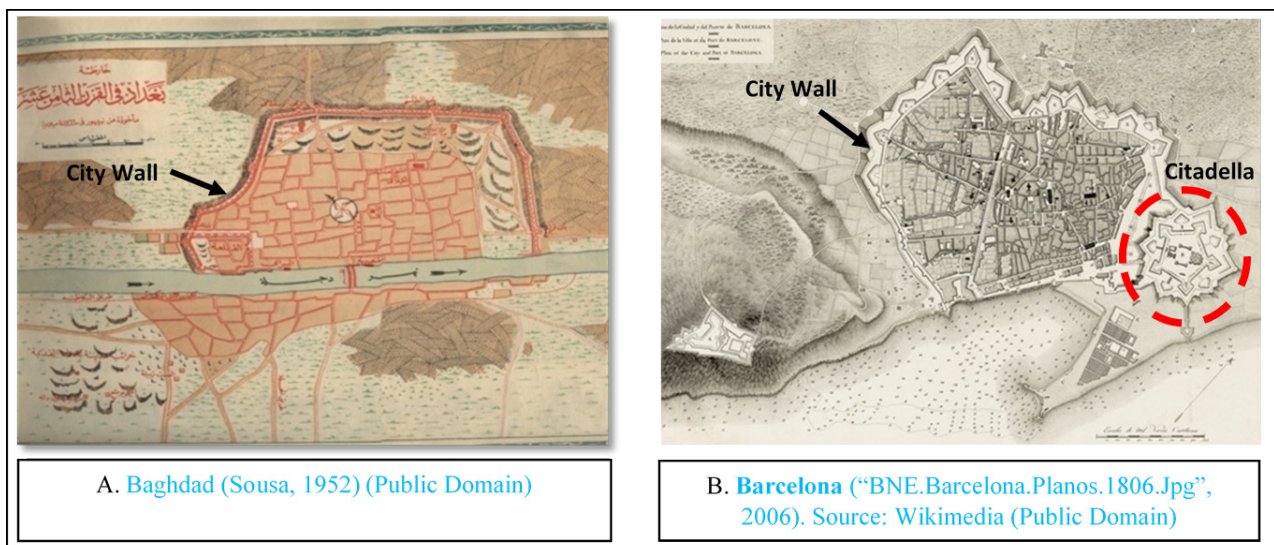


Figure 5 Shows the city of Barcelona and Baghdad during the industrial revolution phase: the beginning of the eighteenth century. It can be seen from the plans that the shape of the cities are relatively stable, and the construction is occurring only within their walls, except for the citadella – Barcelona.

First, both cities experienced rapid growth and expansion outside their city walls, especially in the middle of the nineteenth century. Baghdad expanded after the demolition of its city walls in 1869. This expansion occurred along the Tigris on both its east and west banks (Fethi, 1978). Barcelona also expanded after demolishing its city wall in 1858; the new expansions grew to surround the old city from three sides (Sokoloff, 1990).

Second, the previous expansions outside the city walls led to the construction of affluent bourgeois neighborhoods in both cities. In Barcelona, these neighborhoods were built according to the Cerdà Plan, creating a network of grid roads and uniform residential plots (Figure 6 (B)). The Cerdà Plan consists of an urbanistic synthesis of populist ideology, a successful push for social equality, and a well-planned architectural revitalization of a city's layout (Beltram, 2005). A similar case occurred in the newly constructed neighborhoods in Baghdad, as they were designed according to the western gridiron system (Figure 6 (A); Jackson, 2016). Over time, these new neighborhoods in both cities became attraction points for rich and influential people, who gradually migrated to them from the old city centers. In contrast, the city center attracted new migrants from the surrounding agricultural areas (Al-Hasani, 2021).

Third, the urban fabric of the historic centers of both cities was affected by the opening of wide new roads, able to accommodate new transportation methods represented by modern-day vehicles. The best example of these roads is Al-Rasheed Street, constructed in 1908, which longitudinally divides the historical city center of Baghdad city in Al-Rusafa quarter (Figure 7 (A); Alsiliq, 2008), and Ferran street, constructed in 1830, which

transversely cuts the historical center of Barcelona (Figure 7 (B)). These roads have become vital commercial cores in addition to their roles as important public spaces that enhance and support social interaction between the residents of these areas (Nicolás, 2010).

Fourth, the generation of a modern image for each of these cities was accomplished by abandoning traditional construction methods and committing to new building regulations. Baghdad's first modern features can be seen in the first master plan for Baghdad, completed in 1936. This plan suggested opening a group of new, wide, straight commercial roads, following the European style, that transversely cut the historical city center parallel to Al-Rasheed Street (Pieri, 2008). The construction of one of these roads, Al-Jamhoria Street, required the demolition of 32 hectares of the old urban center, to be replaced with new multi-story buildings constructed with modern building materials and methods (Figure 8 (A); JPC, 1984).

A similar development occurred in Barcelona, where modern development projects are represented mainly by the creation of new roads in 1907. Two roads cut through the old historical city from north to south, and one main wide road cut the city transversely from east to west (Gausa & Cervelló, 2002). The municipality of Barcelona did not construct these roads, except for the Via Laietana, a wide French Boulevard with Chicago-style buildings on both sides. As a result, large areas of the old historical city center were demolished (Figure 8 (B); Nicolás, 2010).

Fifth, the municipality of Baghdad commissioned Polservice Foundation to prepare Baghdad's first master plan in 1965. The plan was updated in 1973, due to the city's rapid growth (Polservice, 1973). According to the plan, circular roads were to be constructed

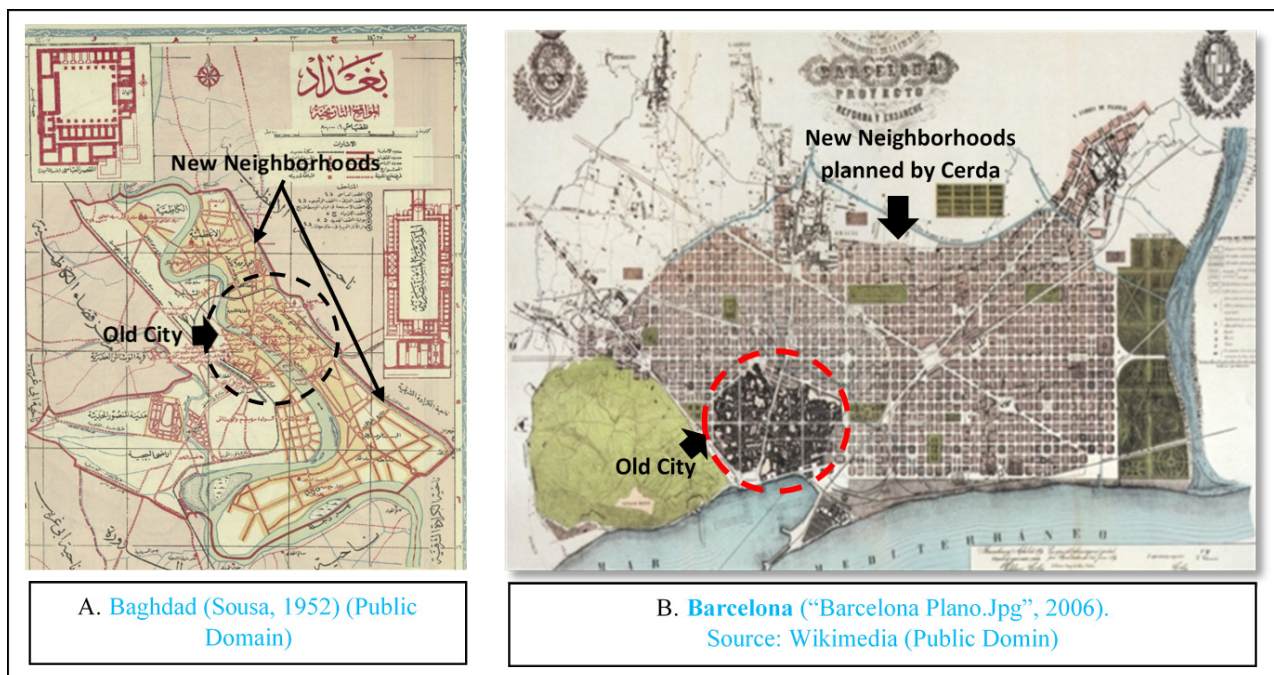


Figure 6 Shows the magnitude of urban expansion outside the old city wall of Barcelona and Baghdad at the middle of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

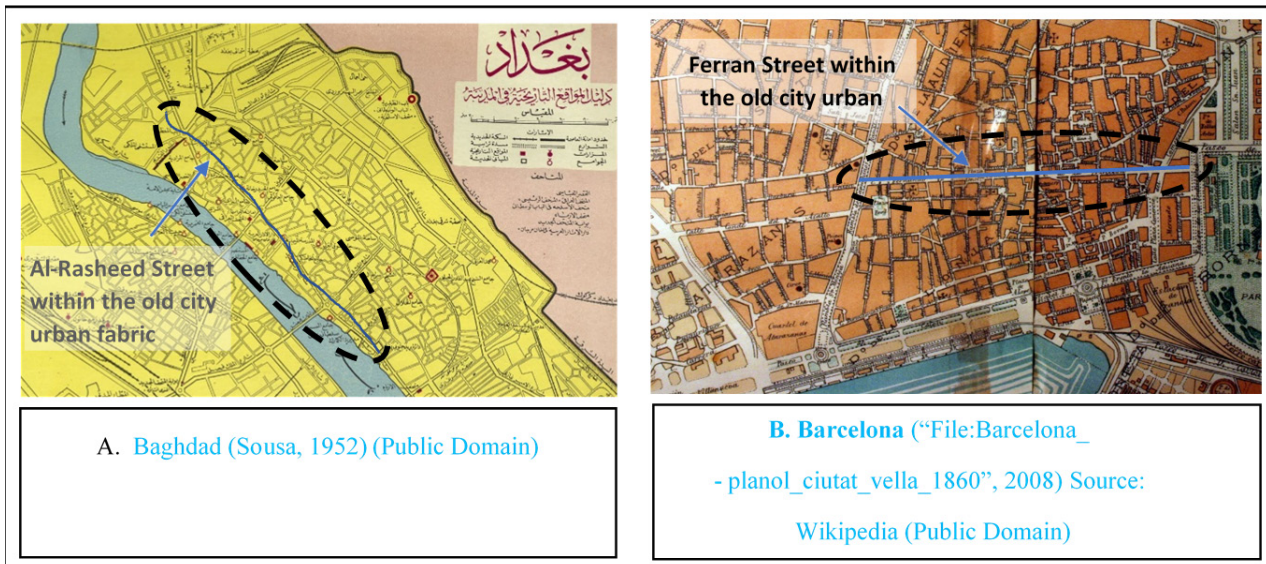


Figure 7 Shows the first urban intervention in the old city’s urban fabric in Barcelona and Baghdad at the middle of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

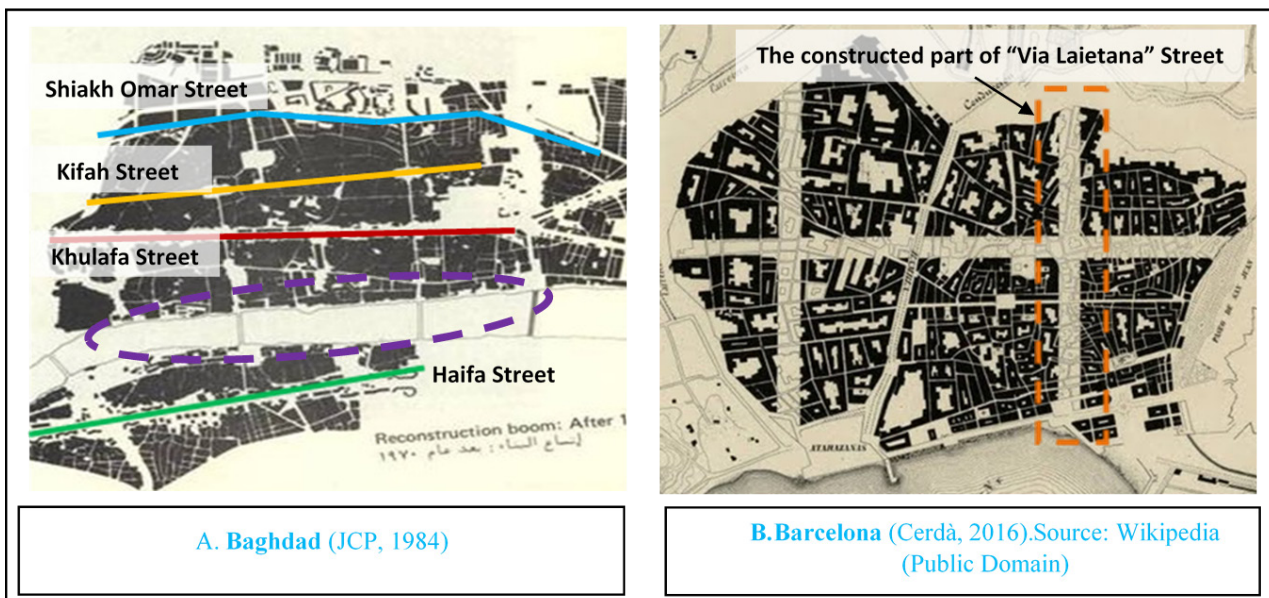


Figure 8 Shows the modern streets penetrating the old city urban fabric in Barcelona and Baghdad in the twentieth century.

to accommodate the new urban cores that grew on the perimeter of the regular network, extending longitudinally and transversely on both sides of the Tigris (Stanek, 2017). Baghdad’s current shape appears to be a result of the interaction between three main urban patterns, starting with Baghdad’s organic old city core (Al-Karkh and Al-Rusafa), surrounded by the gird system, and the new radial system roads neighborhoods (Figure 9 (A); Al-Ashaab, 1974).

Similarly, Barcelona’s rapid growth prompted its Municipal Council to organize its first master plan in 1976 and revise it in 1988, following the announcement of Barcelona as the host of the 1992 Olympic Games. According to that revised plan, all the new neighborhoods, which appear as central nodes located on the perimeter of the Cerdà grid system, were connected by circular roads

surrounding the city. Barcelona’s current shape results from the interaction between the organic urban patterns of Barcelona’s historical core, the newly added gird-system-based urban neighborhood, and the new neighborhoods with radial nodes (Figure 9 (B); Beltram, 2005).

Certain differences between Baghdad and Barcelona can be noted, towards the end of this phase. One of the most important was the division of the urban fabric of Baghdad’s historical city center in Al-Rusafa into five isolated parts, due to the construction of the new streets. These five divisions enclosed and segregated the old unified and adjacent urban fabric of Baghdad (JPC, 1984). By contrast, Barcelona maintained the continuity and the unity of its historical urban fabric without any separation (Gausa & Cervelló, 2002). Table (1) shows a summary of the similarities and differences of both cities.

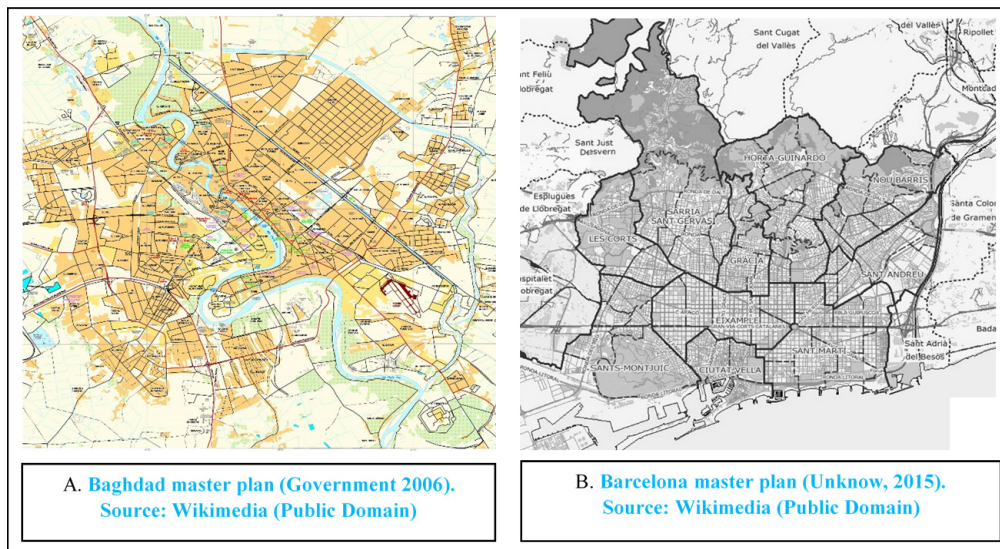


Figure 9 Shows the current shape of Barcelona and Baghdad.

	TIMELINE	SIMILARITIES BARCELONA-BAGHDAD	DIFFERENCES BARCELONA-BAGHDAD
The morphology of the two cities and their urban components	THE BEGINNINGS	Both cities were constructed based on an urban plan.	This phase ended with the total disappearance of Baghdad's urban morphology, while the Archeological remains from Barcelona's Roman period can be found in the old city center.
	MEDIEVAL PHASE: FIFTH TO FIFTEENTH CENTURIES	Both cities expanded into inhabited areas with plenty of water resources. A distinctive organic urban fabric emerged in both cases, and city walls were constructed to provide protection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Barcelona expanded outside the Roman colony, while Baghdad developed around a new urban core on the eastern bank of the Tigris. - Barcelona had yet to be integrated as a single unified city, while the Karkh and Rusafa quarters integrated as a single unified city called Baghdad representing the entire city.
	RENAISSANCE PHASE: SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both cities experienced limited building within the city walls. - Recessions caused by natural disasters and political conflicts impact social and economic aspects of life. 	Baghdad's old city witnessed the generation of two new urban cores in addition to the old cores, while Barcelona witnessed the integration of its q (El Gothic, La Ribera, and La Raval) to represent the new core of the entire city, which is called Barcelona.
	INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION PHASE: THE BEGINNING OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	Both cities' shapes were relatively stable, and the construction occurred within their walls.	Baghdad lost its political importance, as it was no longer the capital of the Arabic empire, which negatively affected social and economic life, while Barcelona witnessed a vast political transformation from the old feudal land ownership system to a capitalist system, which positively affected social and economic life.
	THE BEGINNING OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION: THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY UNTIL THE PRESENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both cities experienced rapid growth and expansion outside their city walls. - Both cities witnessed the construction of affluent bourgeois neighborhoods. - The newly constructed neighborhoods in Baghdad and Barcelona were designed according to the Western gridiron system. - The urban fabric of the historic centers of both cities was affected by the opening of wide new roads, able to accommodate new transportation methods represented by modern-day vehicles. These roads have become vital commercial cores and important public spaces that enhance and support social interaction between the residents of these areas. 	Barcelona maintained the continuity and the unity of its historical urban fabric without any separation, while the urban fabric of Baghdad's historical city center was divided into five isolated parts due to the construction of the new streets. These five divisions enclosed and segregated Baghdad's old unified and adjacent urban fabric.

TIMELINE	SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES
	BARCELONA-BAGHDAD	BARCELONA-BAGHDAD
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipal Council for both cities organized the first master plan to integrate the historical center with its surrounding areas, which caused the demolition of a large area of the historical city center and replaced with new multi-story buildings constructed with modern building materials and methods. - Both cities' current shapes appear to be a result of the interaction between three main urban patterns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The old organic city core • The gird system • The radial system road. 	

Table 1 A summary of the growth and development of Baghdad and Barcelona's historical city centers during ascending periods showing the similarities and differences of each (Author).

6. DETERIORATION OF BAGHDAD AND BARCELONA'S HISTORICAL CITY CENTERS

Changes in the social and built environment in the twentieth century negatively affected the growth and development of Baghdad and Barcelona's historical city centers. Baghdad's old city started to deteriorate at the end of the twentieth century. Barcelona's historical city center deteriorated around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. This deterioration can be summarized as follows:

First, the deterioration started for both cities with physical changes that took place in the old city centers, represented by the construction of straight, wide main roads, in response to the invention of technologies like modern vehicles. The construction of these roads required the destruction of essential parts of the heritage fabric in both Baghdad (Al-Hasani, 2021) and Barcelona (Nicolás, 2010).

Second, the increase in economic and social stratification led to the rise of distinct social classes, especially after the construction of new districts around the city center. This dramatic change affected the population diversity and social harmony, as affluent families migrated toward the new districts, creating distinct wealthy and poor areas. For example, the new "including-lands" law, established in Baghdad in 1933, resulted in increased immigration towards large cities, which eventually led to significant social segregation, as only the low-income classes of society inhabited the old city center (Al-Ashaab, 1974). Barcelona, on the other hand, was significantly affected by Franco's political segregation policy, which resulted in the isolation of the locals from the immigrants, forcing the low-income immigrants to inhabit the old city center districts exclusively. This segregation eventually caused a noticeable deterioration in the quality of life for those residents (Nicolás, 2010).

This deterioration was accompanied by high unemployment and neglect for both Baghdad and Barcelona city center inhabitants.

Third, the deterioration in the built environment and the main city infrastructure due to the significant increase in the population caused inconsistency in the size and quality of the government services provided to these areas, as compared to the new, wealthy neighborhoods. A state of chaos and visual confusion became noticeable between the modern buildings in the affluent districts and the traditional buildings inhabited by the poor residents of the city centers in both Baghdad and Barcelona (Al-Hasani, 2021; Nicolás, 2010).

Fourth, the deterioration phase continued in the urban fabric of Baghdad's old city center as the country entered a series of wars, starting in the early 1980s (Al-Hasani, 2021). The next decade also witnessed a 40-day continuous bombing raid in 1991, which led to the destruction of most of the buildings within the city (Figure 10 (A)). The bombing was followed immediately by severe sanctions that isolated the city and the entire country from the world for years. These sanctions led to further economic deterioration, which caused a severe slowdown in construction and rebuilding. These events seriously affected the population and their living conditions, as many lost their livelihood. Eventually, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 caused further destruction on an unprecedented level, which was followed by civil unrest and rioting, accompanied by a series of random bombings which damaged many essential and valuable buildings (Figure 11 (A)).

Barcelona suffered similar circumstances, as the siege and bombing caused by the Franco regime and the civil war lasted from the 1930s until 1975 (Figure 10 (B)). These events resulted in the segregation and division of different parts of the old city, as well as the destruction of several other parts, which eventually led to the removal of certain urban features and the deterioration of the inhabitants' daily living conditions (Figure 11 (B); Nicolás, 2010).

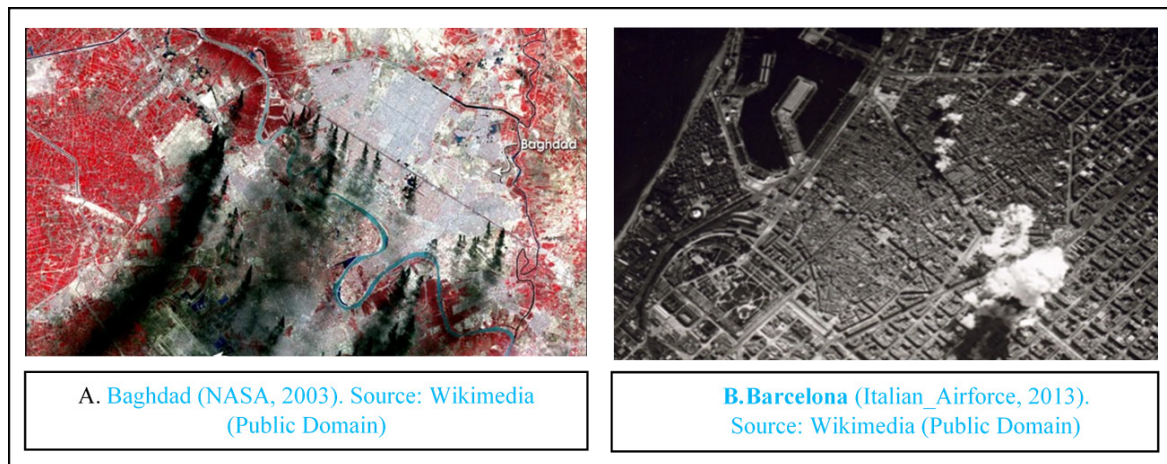


Figure 10 Shows the bombing of Baghdad and Barcelona, including their historic city centers.



Figure 11 Shows the destruction in Barcelona and Baghdad from armed conflict.

The city centers of Baghdad and Barcelona became neglected relative to the newly built quarters within the same cities. Baghdad's city center still suffers from being neglected, due to all the other issues described above. Table 2 shows a summary of the events leading to the deterioration of both centers.

7. THE BEGINNING OF URBAN RENEWAL PROJECTS (PLANS AND PROCEDURES FOR BARCELONA'S OLD CITY CENTER) AS A PART OF THE ENTIRE CITY'S REVITALIZATION

The first urban renewal projects started in 1980, due to population's increasing recognition of Barcelona's old city center's importance. This dramatic change took

place in 1979, after the end of Franco's dictatorship and the election of the first democratic government (Meyer, 2003). These projects relied on two main strategies to achieve the required goals.

7.1 MICRO-SURGERY PROJECTS

These projects focused on cleaning up Barcelona's old city center neighborhoods and developing public spaces by creating new plazas and small gardens, which sometimes required the removal of one or more residential units. Micro-surgery projects also focused on providing the required street furniture, such as public sitting areas, garbage bins, and streetlights, as well as the allocation of unique children's play areas within these public spaces. These projects took on the rehabilitation of some old and structurally deteriorated houses. Some of these buildings were removed and rebuilt, as their conditions were unsuitable for rehabilitation (Santos, 2010).

DESCRIPTION		
Baghdad and Barcelona Historic City Centers Problems	Physical Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Historical city centers for both cities started to deteriorate around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth due construction of new modern buildings, straight, wide main roads, and modern vehicles. – A state of chaos and visual confusion became noticeable between the modern buildings in the affluent districts and the traditional buildings inhabited by the poor residents of the city center.
	Social – Economic Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The population diversity and social harmony in both cities are effected by the physical changes. – Increase the migration toward the new districts creating wealthy and poor areas inside the historical city center.
	Political Decisions Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Some Political decisions reinforced racial segregation between the locals and immigrants, which led to a deterioration in the quality of life for the historical city center inhabitant. – The lack of the size and quality of the government services provided to the historical city center led to the deterioration of the main city center infrastructure. – Both cities witnessed a series of wars that led to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deterioration of the historical city center urban fabric. • Destruction of most of the historical buildings. • Economic decline, which slowdown in construction and rebuilding. • The reduction of the population and their living conditions, as many lost their livelihood

Table 2 The reasons behind the deterioration of Baghdad and Barcelona's historical city centers (Authors).

7.2 MACRO-SURGERY PROJECTS

Macro-surgery projects focused on all of Barcelona's neighborhoods. They started in 1988, after the official declaration of Barcelona as the official host for the 1992 Olympic Games (Gausa & Cervelló, 2002). These projects included early forms of private investment support for the urban renewal and development projects to aid and support the government sector. They were oriented toward creating a new city identity by constructing new functional and symbolic spaces that encourage the acceptance of diversity and emphasize the integration of both the old city center and the surrounding modern neighborhood (Santos, 2010).

The most important macro-surgery projects were.

7.2.1 Sports city construction

Barcelona's growth as a destination for significant cultural and sporting events made the creation of a city brand for tourism possible (Rius-Ulldemolins, 2020). Barcelona's municipality decided to build a new sports city, divided into four main urban spaces, near the external boundaries of the city. The municipality designed and constructed the required infrastructure and provided good connectivity for the built spaces with all essential parts of the city (Gausa & Cervelló, 2002).

7.2.2 The construction of Ronda De Dalt motorway (the Circular Road)

Ronda De Dalt motorway is considered one of the most significant urban developments in Barcelona, as it encircles the entire city with all its road networks, and connects these roads, which has helped decrease traffic congestion and connect the four sports locations with the city center. The Ronda De Dalt motorway was built with new construction materials, providing the road with a unique identity (Gausa & Cervelló, 2002). Barcelona's municipality provided sitting and rest areas, green belts, and specially designed fuel stations and entrances (Marshall, 2004).

7.2.3 The development of the waterfront

The beach area was divided into four primary zones at the start of the project. The first zone starts in the old city center. The development process for this area included integrating the historic Las Ramblas with the waterfront and adding Barceloneta, a new contemporary neighborhood, to the old city center. The municipality allocated some of the Barceloneta buildings as residential units for tourists. Other buildings were designed for commercial use, in addition to entertainment areas, such as bars, restaurants, cafes, and open green spaces. The second and the third nearby zones received similar, though somewhat less intensive, attention because, during the development process, the municipality aimed to focus on directing tourist and local attention toward the first zone (Subirós, 2007).

An expert opinion was offered by Dr Pedro Azara Nicolás, professor of aesthetics at Barcelona's School of Architecture on this issue during a personal interview held with him by the authors. They general consensus was that the fourth zone, located outside the city center, had experienced a simple development process, represented by cleaning and rehabilitation of the beach and efforts to preserve the natural features of this location (Figure 12).

7.2.4 Reviving Barcelona's historical city center

One of Barcelona municipality's central ideas for reviving its historic city center's image was to make it a hospitable place for all. A group of Barcelona's municipality staff members were interviewed by the authors along with Mr. Marc Aureli Santos, the head of Urban Renewal Projects of Barcelona. They expressed their opinions on the future plans for the development of the city. There were two strategies planned.

The first strategy involved preservation of the original urban fabric and rejection of the demolition mechanism, as well as using urban infill to fill the urban voids with newly constructed buildings that blend into the urban

context. These new buildings are constructed using the same local building materials, respect the city and the neighboring skyline, use the same setback, and apply similar architectural elements to preserve the harmony and the continuity of this dense urban fabric (Figure 13).

The second strategy included defining the boundaries of residential neighborhoods, especially after commencing comprehensive studies aimed at understanding the social values of their inhabitants and connecting them with everyday urban activities.

In the third strategy, the municipality, along with private investors, developed two new methods, primary and complementary, to revitalize and connect the old with the new modern axes of networks. The main method aimed to redefine the external boundaries of the axes, which was done by unifying all buildings on each side. All buildings were constructed following similar regulations, which included applying the same setback, type of architectural elements, heights, and building levels. All buildings on the main axes must have 7 or 8 levels. Buildings located at branches must have 4 or 5 levels, taking into consideration that the building regulations state that no buildings may exceed in height the Sagrada Familia Cathedral (Subirós, 2007).

The Barcelona municipality's complementary method aimed to provide similar services to all streets (axes).

These services include street lighting, furniture, bicycle parking facilities, telephone booths, garbage bins, and similar pavements and trees, as shown in Figure 14 (Marshall, 2004).

During the authors' visit to Barcelona, they observed that the previous two methods applied to integrate old and modern axes networks managed to consolidate visual and dynamic continuity for those axes and to preserve the relationship between the spatial scales and human activities.

The fourth strategy involved the restoration of the old city's urban form by using public spaces as organizing elements for the urban areas and as enhancers for their qualities. The municipality created 38 new public spaces and rehabilitated 45 existing public squares within the old city. These spaces helped activate and motivate cultural activities, such as celebrations and carnivals, which consolidated social coherence and gathered Barcelona's fragmented and divided sections (Meyer, 2003). This strategy also focused on enhancing neglected historical spaces by renaming them based on critical historical events and adding some monuments within them to remind the new generation of their local identity (Figure 15; Subirós, 2007).

The fifth strategy focused on using and re-activating Barcelona's economic structure to protect the original



Figure 12 Shows part of the redevelopment of the Barcelona waterfront represented by the first zone (left), which has witnessed complete redevelopment, including adding new cafeterias, hotels, a mall, and beach services. The figure also shows the fourth zone (right), which has been preserved in its original condition with the addition of simple beach accessories.



Figure 13 Shows some of the housing projects that were implemented as part of the urban renewal plan for Barcelona's old city towards improving the quality of life for the residents (images by authors).

inhabitants of the historic city center and limit migration to other parts of the city. The municipality and its partners created direct methods to initiate 14 cultural activities, including museums and cultural centers with nine libraries and colleges, in addition to their ongoing work to revive traditional crafting. These cultural activities were distributed into three-quarters of the historic city, within new and historic buildings. This strategy also focused on rehabilitating some historic and residential units for tourist flats and motels. The total number of rehabilitated motels used for this purpose reached 187 out of a total

of 480 in the entire city (Santos, 2010). This vital step increased the economic value of these properties and their areas by attracting more tourists. The final aspect of the fifth strategy aimed to preserve and rehabilitate some of the important buildings from the medieval era, including cathedrals, palaces, hospitals, traditional markets, and the citadel. This aspect also focused on designating new functions for some of these buildings, which served the cultural tourism sector, and provided more work opportunities to the locals (Figures 16 and 17; Nicolás, 2010).



Figure 14 Shows the municipality’s effort role in improving and maintaining the urban, social, health, and aesthetic environment of Barcelona’s old city, in terms of organizing electricity wires in a way that does not distort the city’s urban form, adding plants along streets, providing waste containers, improving and rehabilitating buildings’ facades and maintaining their unified layout (images by authors).

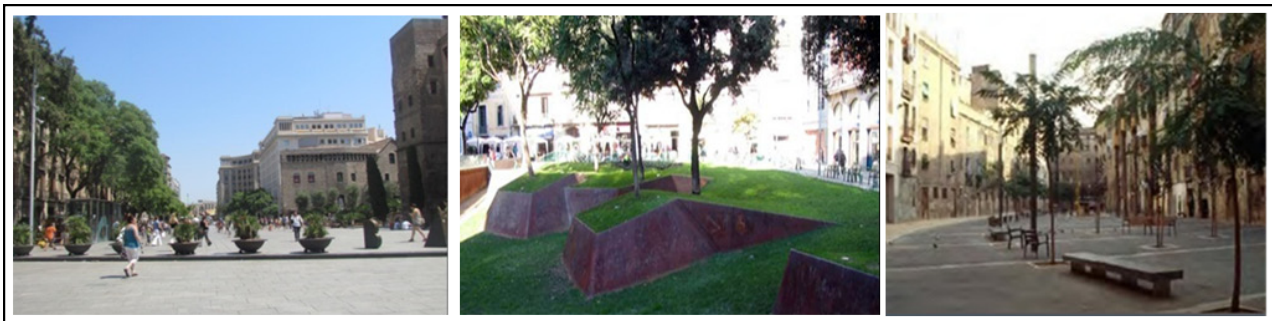


Figure 15 Shows some examples of public and private spaces that were created and improved as part of the urban renewal plan for Barcelona’s old city towards encouraging artistic, social, and cultural activities in the neighborhoods (images by authors).



Figure 16 Shows some of the traditional markets within Barcelona’s old city neighborhoods that have been preserved into the same original shapes and functions, which strengthened their connection with their urban surroundings as part of Barcelona’s urban renewal plan (images by authors).



Figure 17 Shows some examples of the selected buildings inside Barcelona's old city, which have been preserved into the same original shapes and rehabilitated with new functions to accommodate periodic cultural activities (images by authors).

8. USING BARCELONA'S URBAN RENEWAL EXPERIENCE TO REVITALIZE BAGHDAD CITY CENTER

The following suggestions are based on the analysis of the Barcelona experience described above.

8.1 ENHANCING THE WATERFRONT

One of the essential features of the Barcelona experiment is its elevation of the waterfront area. Therefore, the first target for the Baghdad city center revitalization should be the development and enhancement its waterfront (Figure 18-1 and Table 3-1), following the ideas and strategies used in Barcelona:

The first strategy is to consider both banks of the Tigris as open public spaces that can be used for entertainment and recreation. This research proposes the creation of new attraction focal points, such as monuments, Flag Island, and an amphitheater within the river itself, facing the historical city center of Baghdad. These new focal points can be connected visually and dynamically with the riverbanks, by using pedestrian bridges as an extension of the traditional axes and paths on both the Al-Rusafa and Al-Karkh sides of the river.

The second strategy aims to create new pedestrian-friendly walkways along the riverbanks, which should help to visualize the river as a new gathering place, rather than its current state as an isolated edge. This research proposes the addition of uniquely designed landscapes to each location, including sitting areas, trees, children's zones, sports equipment, restaurants, booths, and other street furniture. These newly created landscapes along the river can also be connected with pedestrian bridges, to increase the feeling of connectivity and unity between both sides of the city.

The third strategy concerns revitalizing riverbanks by designating specific areas to function as boat wharves and river taxi stations with other service facilities. These new facilities will help to further connect neighborhoods on both sides of the river and decrease traffic congestion, in addition to their role in entertaining visitors with these water features.

8.2 CREATING NEW ATTRACTION FOCAL POINTS

Another essential feature of the Barcelona experiment is the creation of new attraction focal points in different parts of the city (Figure 18-2 and Table 3-2), including its historical city center. Therefore, when revitalizing Baghdad's city center, it is essential to develop similar attraction focal points within the city and its historic city center. Several strategies can be useful to achieve this goal:

The first strategy is to invest in the historical sites and their buildings to revitalize these locations and create new activities that extend their daily use, attract more tourists, and restore their vitality. One of the essential locations of these sites is Jadid Hassan Basha, which includes several important historical buildings from the Ottoman and Abbasid Empires. Some of these important buildings are currently not in use, such as Al Mustansiriya School, The Court, Abbasid Palace, The Citadel, Al-Qishla, and Saray Souq. This research suggests prioritizing these buildings and presenting them as a complete historic urban complex by reusing them to include cultural, tourism, and entertainment activities. These new suggested functions include museums, cultural centers, libraries, restaurants, traditional cafés, and cinemas. All these new functions and their specific activities must be suitable for the historical value of each building to preserve its architectural style. The new activities may require new open public spaces and a new network of well-designed paths that include green spaces and sitting areas.

The second strategy aims to create public open spaces within the urban areas of the historical city center and design them to include special and unique monuments and buildings that embody the local identity of the Iraqi community.

The third strategy concerns reviving the Maidan square, as it is one of the oldest squares in Baghdad. This space is currently neglected; it is used as an unorganized car park area and lacks a cultural function. This research suggests transforming it into a public, organized transportation square as it was before, considering the need to redefine and regulate the surrounding buildings to reflect local Baghdad identity.

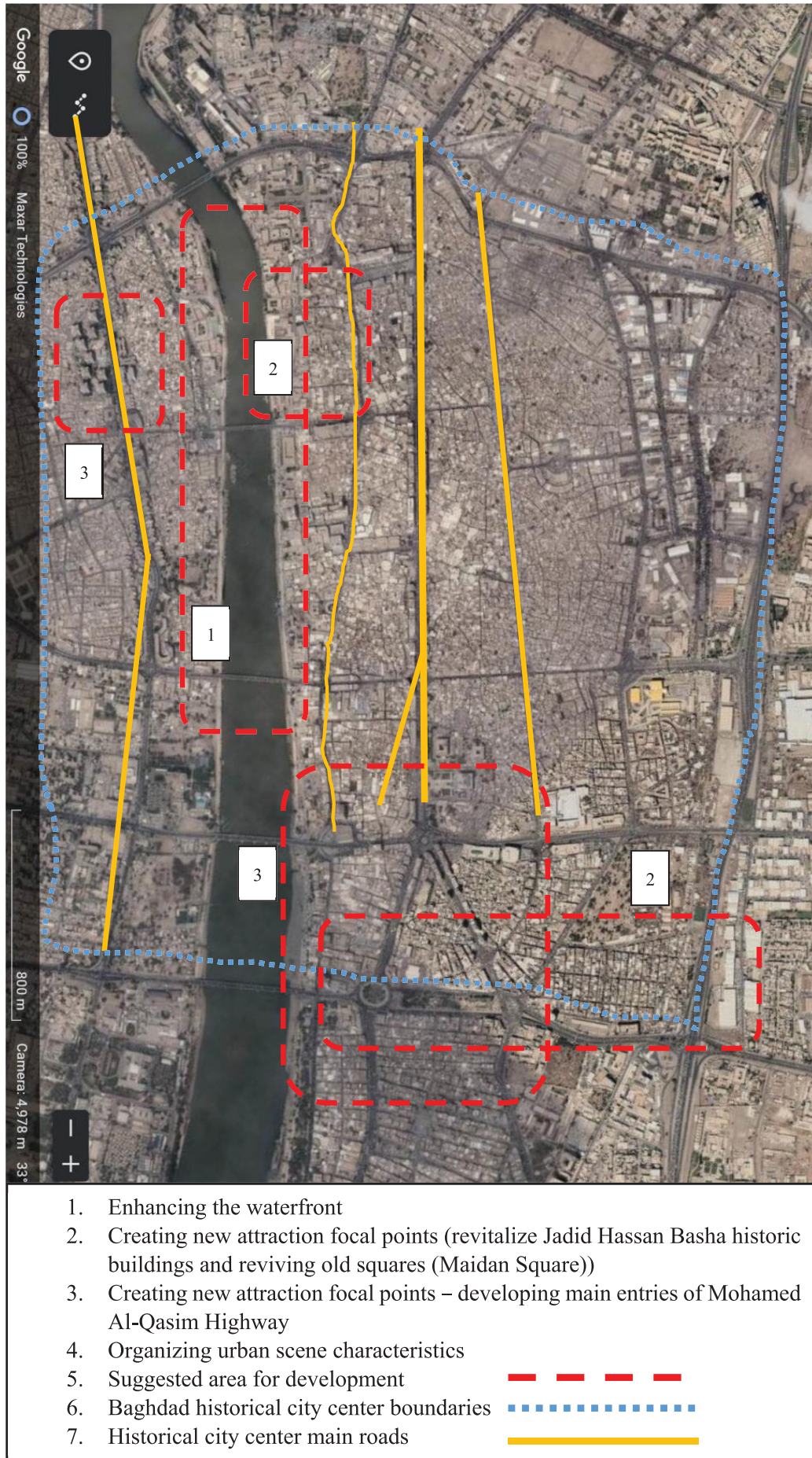





Figure 18 Shows designated areas in Baghdad’s historic city center for urban renewal. (Google Earth, 2023).

NUMBER	MAPS	PICTURE
1.		

1. Tigris Waterfront

Enhancing The Water Front





2.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Al-Qishla 2. Saray Souq 3. Al Mustansiriya School 4. The Court 	

Creating New Attraction Focal Points – Revitalize Jadid Hassan Basha Historic Buildings




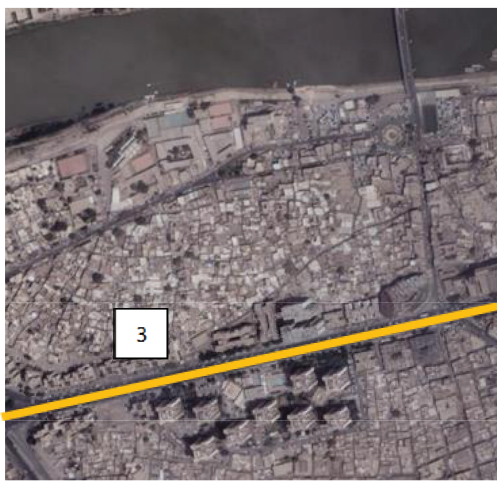

	
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1. Al-Maidan Square

Creating New Attraction Focal Points – Reviving Old Squares (Maidan Square)

NUMBER	MAPS	PICTURE
		
		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mohamed Al-Qasim Highway 2. Al-Tahrir Square 		

Creating New Attraction Focal Points – Developing main entries of Mohamed Al-Qasim Highway

3.		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Al-Khulafa Street 2. Al-Saadoon Street 		
		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Haifa Street 		

Organizing Urban Scene Characteristics

Table 3 Shows the designated areas in Baghdad’s historic city center for urban renewal given in **Figure (18)** with enlarged maps and pictures. (Google Earth, 2023).

The fourth strategy focuses on developing the main entries of the Mohamed Al-Qasim highway, which connects several quarters of Baghdad, including its historical city center. This research suggests using these main entries as new attraction focal points for Baghdad residents and visitors. This goal can be achieved by constructing new functionally and aesthetically unique buildings that host several types of activities, including entertainment, culture, and tourism. This research specifies locations where these developments can take place, such as the intersection of Mohamed Al-Qasim and the historical city center, the Al-Wahda neighborhood, Al-Tahrir square, and Wathiq square.

8.3 ORGANIZING URBAN SCENE CHARACTERISTICS

One of the Barcelona experiment's most important features involves the organization of urban scene characteristics. A similar approach can be used in Baghdad, using the following strategies:

The first strategy involves redefining streets as spaces by enhancing their visual and dynamic continuity, especially on the main streets. The best way to achieve this goal is by reorganizing and regulating building heights and setbacks on the sides of both roads, unifying the buildings' finishing materials, using similar vegetation, pavements, and street lighting, and organizing all advertising panels. The best targets for these solutions are Al-Saadoon and Al-Karada streets, which lead to the historic Baghdad city center, as well as Al-Khulafa street, located inside the city center (Figure 18-3 and Table 3-3). The municipality also needs to consider that all newly added buildings must be designed to comply with the new regulations to achieve the required continuity of horizontal and vertical lines with surrounding buildings. This continuity will prevent the visual disturbance caused by two adjacent neighborhoods with two different architectural styles and two different building heights. Examples of this can be found in one of Baghdad's historical city centers, Al-Nehr alley, which has low-rise vernacular style buildings, and nearby Al-Binouk area, which has modern high-rise buildings.

The second strategy aims to achieve a coherent built environment with a well-established identity for the city center. The priority is fixing any confusion and contradiction occurring in the city skyline, which can be observed when looking from the city center boundaries toward its core. It can also be noticed between the new main roads of Baghdad's city center with its high-rise buildings and the nearby historical low-rise neighborhoods. The best examples of these main roads are Haifa and Al-Khulafa Streets, as both include significant contrast in building heights between their buildings and the surrounding neighborhoods. This research suggests maintaining the heights of high-rise buildings located on Al-Khulafa Street and creating a

hierarchical decrease in building heights and functions toward nearby commercial areas, such as Shorjah and Sadriya Streets on one side and toward residential areas on both sides. A similar solution can be used on Al-Rasheed Street, especially in the nearby Al-Binouk area.

8.4 ENHANCING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT FOR BAGHDAD'S HISTORICAL CITY CENTER RESIDENTS

Another significant aspect of the Barcelona experiment was preserving local traditions and improving living conditions for locals, which will eventually slow down or even stop emigration. This process will ultimately help to reinforce the inhabitants' sense of local identity and inclusion, and make them feel like they belong to their city. The following approach can be applied to Baghdad:

The first strategy involves local and volunteer groups' participation in preserving culture and local traditions. This strategy aims to ensure that locals' opinions are considered during the decision-making process, especially because government committees make all Baghdad preservation and development project decisions.

The second strategy aims to provide new opportunities for city center residents, to enhance their social and living environment. The government can achieve this goal by delivering small financial loans to help locals start new projects and traditional hand-craft workshops, which will provide more job opportunities and improve social cohesion.

The third strategy ensures that development plans focus on enhancing Baghdad's historic city center's tourism and economic conditions. This strategy can be achieved by inviting investors to develop empty areas, rehabilitate deteriorated buildings, infill unused lots, and redesign public spaces with special projects that serve the culture and tourism sectors. These projects can be developed in neighborhoods that have suffered from unauthorized activities, which have transformed them into industrial sectors filled with polluted materials and damaged their historical value. Examples of such areas are Shaikh Omar, Jadid Hassan Basha, and Shorjah. This strategy can enrich the value of these areas by making them tourist districts, increasing their economic value, and creating new focal points to attract local and international attention.

8.5 REGULATING VEHICLES INSIDE THE BAGHDAD HISTORICAL CITY CENTER

The Barcelona experience was also characterized by protection of the urban fabric of its historical center by preventing private cars from entering the heart of its historical center. Therefore, it may be a good strategy to rely on public transportation inside the Baghdad city center, to reduce traffic and noise. The movement of vehicles within the side streets surrounding the historic center should be investigated to improve traffic congestion within the narrow streets.

9. CONCLUSIONS

The concept of dialogue between cities encompasses a dynamic exchange of ideas, offering numerous advantages. First, it allows cities to tap into the wealth of international experiences and ideas, applying them to their own urban renewal strategies. By learning from successful initiatives worldwide, cities can adapt and improve their own approaches. This dialogue facilitates the utilization of existing international experiments and ideas, leveraging their potential to benefit urban renewal strategies. Cities can draw inspiration from diverse sources, implementing proven methods and practices. Additionally, the dialogue encourages the exploration of new methods to develop all urban areas, not solely focusing on the city center. By widening the scope of urban development, cities can ensure equitable growth and enhance the quality of life for all residents.

Moreover, the dialogue facilitates the establishment of new planning rules and regulations. Through the exchange of insights, cities can refine their governance frameworks and implement more effective policies for sustainable urban development. Learning from the mistakes of other cities becomes possible through dialogue, enabling cities to avoid strategies that have led to unfavorable outcomes elsewhere. This proactive approach helps prevent similar errors from occurring in the future, promoting smarter decision-making and long-term success. Lastly, the dialogue fosters a better understanding of other cities. By engaging in open conversations and knowledge sharing, cities can gain insights into different urban contexts, cultures, and practices. This increased understanding promotes collaboration and enables cities to leverage diverse perspectives in their own development strategies.

A study and analysis of Barcelona, despite its relatively small size and limited political and economic influence compared to other major world cities, has revealed the city's significant achievements in implementing successful and innovative urban renewal strategies. Barcelona's approach included a comprehensive vision that considered the city as both a physical entity and a reflection of its residents' needs and lifestyles. By acknowledging the tangible aspects of urban spaces while catering to the demands of the local population, Barcelona achieved a harmonious balance in its renewal efforts. The concept of fostering cooperative efforts among various stakeholders played a pivotal role in Barcelona's success. Collaboration between the government, architects, planners, and local communities proved instrumental, as each group contributed their knowledge and expertise. The inclusion of local residents, who possess valuable insights into their own culture and demands, further enriched the decision-making process. Barcelona's strategies were not only visionary but also practical and feasible. The city's implementation of its renewal plans demonstrated the realistic application of innovative concepts, ensuring tangible and measurable results.

Cultural, political, tourist, and sports events hold significant potential in revitalizing neglected parts of a city. By stimulating these events, authorities can generate the necessary motivation to establish new urban development plans or expedite existing ones that have been delayed. These events serve as catalysts for change, rejuvenating urban neighbourhoods and improving the living conditions of residents.

Barcelona stands as a prime example of a city that embraces dialogue and remains open to other cultures within or close to its own cultural understanding. Consequently, further application of the city dialogue experiment between Barcelona and other Iraqi cities would yield considerable benefits. By engaging in meaningful exchanges, Iraqi cities can learn from Barcelona's experiences and adapt relevant strategies to their own contexts.

Finally, it is essential to recognize the significance of the historical city center as an economic and cultural resource. Revitalizing these areas can breathe new life into urban neighbourhoods, benefiting residents and preserving cultural heritage. By focusing on the restoration and enhancement of the historical center, cities can create thriving environments that contribute to a higher quality of life for their inhabitants.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Events in the arts, politics, tourism, and athletics have enormous potential to revive run-down areas of a city. These incidents act as catalysts, inspiring authorities to create fresh urban development plans or finish ones that have been put off for a while. Barcelona is a prime example of a city that embraces the idea of city dialogue and keeps doors open to cultures that are either part of or closely related to its own. The city conversation initiative between Barcelona and other Iraqi cities should definitely be expanded upon in light of its success.

The historical city center, with its rich heritage, serves as an indispensable economic and cultural resource that has the power to restore and revitalize urban neighbourhoods. By preserving and rejuvenating these historical areas, cities can enhance the living conditions of their residents. These vibrant city cores attract visitors, boosting tourism and creating economic opportunities for local businesses. Additionally, the restoration of historical city centers brings back a sense of identity and pride among the inhabitants, fostering a stronger sense of community and belonging.

In light of these considerations, this research recommends the initiation of popular celebrations and festivals as integral components of urban revitalization efforts. Such events play a significant role in rehabilitating and revitalizing open urban areas, preventing them from falling into abandonment and becoming neglected spaces within the city. By organizing exhibitions, parties, and art festivals, cities can activate the emotional

affiliation between citizens and their urban environment. These festivals create a sense of excitement and engagement, drawing people to these areas and reinvigorating their vitality. Exhibitions provide platforms for artists to showcase their talents, while parties and art festivals generate a vibrant atmosphere that encourages social interaction and cultural exchange.

In summary, cultural, political, tourist, and sports events have the potential to breathe new life into neglected parts of a city, prompting authorities to pursue urban development plans. Barcelona's success in embracing city dialogue and cultural openness provides inspiration for similar endeavors between Barcelona and other Iraqi cities. Furthermore, the historical city center serves as a crucial economic and cultural asset, capable of revitalizing neighborhoods and improving residents' quality of life. Initiating popular celebrations and festivals, such as exhibitions, parties, and art festivals, plays a vital role in rehabilitating open urban areas, nurturing citizens' emotional connection to their city, and preventing the abandonment of these spaces.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Abd Yashoaa, N, Noori, F, Alslik, G and Kharrufa, S. 2023. The Impacts of Dialogue between Cities on Strategies and Plans for Urban Renewal: The case of Barcelona, Spain and Baghdad, Iraq. *Future Cities and Environment*, 9(1): 11, 1–22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/fce.177>

Submitted: 25 January 2023 **Accepted:** 23 May 2023 **Published:** 11 July 2023

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