The Role of Urban Place in Activating Urban Competition in Baghdad City as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of urban competition, focusing on the role of heritage urban places in enhancing urban competitiveness. Urban competition refers to a city's ability to possess economic, social, cultural, and security-related competitive advantages within its geographical region compared to other competing cities. Public places and urban landscapes—particularly heritage ones—attract tourists and institutions, thereby enhancing the city's image and interactively influencing the quality of urban life. A relatively rich cultural heritage and urban atmosphere in modern cities contribute to improving the quality of the place or attracting various stakeholders (such as institutions and professionals). Many cities around the world boast a rich cultural diversity that contributes to their overall attractiveness, which in turn reflects on their regional status and global standing, thereby influencing urban competition. Definitions of urban space, heritage, urban competition, and the factors that activate it were reviewed, along with a discussion of previous studies to identify the research problem, which is the "knowledge gap in studying the role of heritage urban places in activating urban competition." The research objective was identified as "activating urban competition through heritage urban places." To determine the relationship between urban places with cultural heritage value and their impact on urban competition, a theoretical framework was developed that includes the dependent variable (urban competition) and its indicators in urban places. This framework was then applied to two case studies in the city of Baghdad. Results were presented and analyzed, leading to conclusions that emphasized the importance of cultural heritage, quality of place, and quality of life in urban places in activating urban competition.

Keywords: Urban place, Quality of place, Quality of life, Urban competition, Heritage places.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban competition is the ability of the city as a regional system to offer more advantages to residents and businesses compared to other cities. This ability is formed as a result of a controlled process of city development under specific geographical, economic, social, and

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environmental conditions at the macro and meso-regional levels **(Khabibrakhmanova et al., 2023)**. The ability of cities to attract investments, benefit from external resources, transform assets into heritage, and generate income ultimately depends on their level of urban competitiveness and inter-city competition **(Ghahremani et al., 2021).** There is now a different relationship between economic growth, the city's performance, and the quality of its urban areas compared to the past **(Gospodini et al., 2002).** Urban areas today are a magnet for economic expansion, and urban spaces, as key components of urban spatial formations, are essential for achieving competitiveness in global cities and cities that are still discovering how to become global. As a result, urban areas are influenced by globalization and competition and have the ability to mutually affect both processes **(Ghahremani et al., 2021).** Literature review of the research subject was analyzed and discussed, the research problem was found, the research hypothesis was set, a theoretical framework was built, and then applied to a case study: Al-Mutanabi Street in Baghdad city, to achieve the aim of the research to activate urban competition through the heritage urban place. Literatures related to the concepts of urban competition and urban place were reviewed from different perspectives with a focus on aspects relevant to the current study. The concept of urban place has been studied in terms of its definition and components by **(Murshed et al., 2022; Abeynayake et al., 2022; Alnaim et al., 2023; Mohamed et al., 2023).**

Table 1. Literature review analysis

Reference	Study objective	Study indicators
(Murshed et al., 2022)	Study of the importance of community character in place-making and its impact on the quality of places and public spaces.	Street and space characteristics, walkability, comfort and safety, climate influences, and sustainability
(Abeynayake et al., 2022)	Study of the relationship between the concepts of clarity and imagery, and the impact of the presence and characteristics of landmarks on these concepts in urban areas.	Clarity of landmarks in terms of tangible characteristics (morphological characteristics, relationships of elements) and intangible characteristics (emotional value of the landmark).
(Alnaim et al., 2023)	Study and examine the quality of public spaces, develop spatial attributes, address challenges related to the planning and design of public spaces, and provide recommendations to enhance their value.	Accessibility, usability, comfort, attractiveness, safety, maintenance
(Mohamed et al., 2023)	Study the importance of the quality of public spaces, the factors affecting this quality, and assess the level of user satisfaction.	Indexes and tools for evaluating the quality of public spaces
(Poorarabi, 2016)	Study of the relationship between quality-based factors and urban competitiveness, which are the Quality of Life (QoL) factor and the Quality of Place (QoP) factor.	Public capital, quality of life (availability of natural and social phenomena), quality of place (tangible characteristics of the place, such as accessibility, and intangible ones, such as comfort and entertainment)
(Ghahremani, 2021)	The study discussed the importance of urban spaces within	Environmental and social sustainability, Arts, culture, and local properties, Global

		cities, as they enhance urban competitiveness in the context of intercity urban competition.	cooperation in space design and service delivery, Application of modern technologies, The idea of the global public sphere, Planning for recreational activities and urban tourism.
	(Komasi, 2022)	Studying the concept of competitiveness as an indicator of the success and quality of urban places, and demonstrating the impact of its factors and indicators on these places.	The economic component, the social component, and the environmental component.

Studies of **(Poorarabi, 2016; Ghahremani, 2021; Komasi, 2022)** focus on the concept of urban competition. They discussed the most important criteria for evaluating city competition and derived evaluation tools to assess competition between cities. **Table 1** provides a summary of the relevant literature. Most studies focused on describing and analyzing the concept of competition in general within the urban environment; however, they did not specifically examine the role of urban place and its heritage value in activating urban competition.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Methodology

The research focused on three concepts: the heritage, the urban space, which was considered the dependent variable, and the urban competition, which was considered the independent variable, with reference to their linguistic and terminological meanings. The theoretical foundations were studied first, followed by the identification of indicators that affect urban competition. A theoretical framework was built that indicates the relationship between the heritage urban place and urban competition. Then, the framework was tested on a case study, which was two different locations in Baghdad city, by using a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected using descriptive analysis, field research, library materials, online resources, and testimonial interviews. A sample of thirty participants for each location was randomly selected. The questionnaires focused on how the presence of heritage in urban space can influence and activate urban competition. Questionnaires were distributed to the participants at different times throughout the day, and the interviews were also conducted.

2.1.1 The Urban Place

The urban place is defined as the place where urban life takes place, including streets, roads, squares, and alleys. These places form the identities of cities as they are important reference points that create connections between the past and the present **(Cengiz et al., 2018).** Cities derive their identity from their cultural and historical heritage. According to Moayedi (2019), the only way to ensure the sustainability of these historical sources is to preserve the sites that witness historical events by adaptive reuse for appropriate purposes **(Moayedi et al., 2019).** Places emerge as important forms that reflect the identity of communities, while landscapes represent the living areas of communities **(Mahbis et al., 2023).** Public areas or public places are considered as places to achieve "collective life" and play an

important role in increasing "social capital in communities" by shaping "social interactions" They are also considered places for development by shaping "individual and social identity" **(Mitchell et al., 1995)** Thus, public places are the most important parts of the city where communication and interaction between people occur. Therefore, focusing on public places as important and influential areas in urban life indicates the significance of these places in improving the quality of cities, their competition, and their impact on the quality of life for users **(Tibaldes et al., 2003).** Urban places are created by reshaping space and integrating signs, symbols, and values into the surrounding environment. City governments use a variety of methods to develop urban environments to compete with other cities and attract stakeholders, investors, skilled labor, tourists, high-income residents, and media attention **(Klaus et al., 2004).** In public places, there is an emphasis on the necessity of enhancing the quality of pedestrian guidance, as is the case in traditional cities, which had their own identity through tall buildings, domes, and lighthouses that guided pedestrians in the city **(Carmona et al., 2008).**

2.1.2 The Importance of Urban Place

The importance of places in the conscious preservation of historically significant buildings and other cultural structures, as well as the historical urban heritage, is emphasized while attempting to integrate them into modern frameworks. The techniques of place-making that rely on art and culture (creative place-making) are a process of reshaping the urban environment around artistic and cultural events, especially those linked to local culture, by placing sculptures and artworks in public areas. This enhances creativity, integrates the arts into daily life, and shapes a unique cultural identity for the community **(Wyckoff et al., 2015; Grabow et al., 2015).**

2.1.3 Urban Competition

Urban competition is defined as the ability possessed by a city that enjoys a competitive advantage—economic, social, cultural, and security—in the national geographic space, compared to other competitors (other cities) **(Komasi et al., 2022; Nasi et al., 2023).**
The ability of cities to attract investments, benefit from external resources, transform assets into heritage, and generate income ultimately depends on their level of urban competitiveness and inter-city competition **(Ghahremani et al., 2021).** Although many authors in the scientific literature have used different criteria and characteristics to define a competitive city (human resources, companies, infrastructure, institutions, effective policy networks, and membership in networks), they all agree that the most competitive cities are those that provide the best possible quality of life for their citizens, the most favorable business and investment environments, and the most attractive conditions for tourists, and so on **(Khabibrakhmanova et al., 2023).** In the context of competition between cities, urban spaces are crucial elements for cities that enhance urban competitiveness. In today's world of globalization, the concept of urban place has changed to accommodate new material and spatial requirements **(Sáez et al., 2017; Ghahremani et al., 2021).**
There is a different relationship now between the city's economic growth and the quality of its urban areas than it was in the past **(Gospodini et al., 2002).** Urban areas today are a magnet for economic expansion, and urban spaces, as key components of urban spatial formations, are essential for achieving competitiveness in global cities and cities that are still discovering how to become global. As a result, urban areas are influenced by globalization

and competition and have the capacity to mutually affect both processes **(Ghahremani et al., 2021).**

2.1.4 The Heritage

Understanding our heritage is essential to comprehending the world we live in. It enables us to make connections between our past understanding of the world and how it functions, and our present experiences. The inventiveness of people and societies is closely related to this memory and cultural history. As a form of art derived from previous interactions between people, communities, and the environment, each community has its own traditions that have been passed down orally through customs, practices, or simulations. As time goes on, this communal work serves as a repository for the group's experiences and a source of inspiration, strengthening its identity and ensuring its survival **(Albayaty et al., 2023).**

There are two types of heritage: tangible heritage and intangible heritage. According to UNESCO, tangible heritage comprises the physical structure and everything it contains, works that the ancestors have left to the present generations, and intangible heritage, which is what gives people their cultural identity through the experiences they have accumulated over time. By combining these two aspects of human history in one location, we can create what is known as a cultural urban landscape, which is an urban area where the people's physical heritage—represented by buildings, landmarks, edifices, significant urban fabrics, and other elements—meets their culture, which is represented by their customs, traditions, social practices, crafts, and skills. This gives researchers insight into how earlier generations lived and interacted with their environment **(UNESCO, 2011).**

Scholars like **(Yuen, 2013; Yeo, 2005)** acknowledged the significance of culture, local identity, and legacy in forming the local global image in their research. In addition to emphasizing culture, **(Yuen, 2013)** thinks that major investment, public-private cooperation, and physical heritage preservation are some of the most important strategies for urban area transformation. The relationship between urban competitiveness and urban quality characteristics has been the subject of much attention from urban scholars **(Sarimin and Yigitcanlar, 2012; Pancholi et al., 2015; Esmaeilpoorarabi et al., 2018)**. Nowadays, in the knowledge economy, where intangible innovative and creative elements within urban competitiveness are highly prized, the significance of site quality for quality of life is becoming more widely acknowledged **(Ghahremani et al., 2021).**

2.2 Urban Competition Indicators

Through the study and analysis of the urban space and its heritage, and urban competition within the framework of previous literature and the meanings and definitions of the concepts presented earlier related to the research, the necessity and importance of heritage and urban space in activating urban competition become clear. These spaces and their heritage influence the attraction of users and tourists to the place, thereby enhancing the urban competition of the area. Accordingly, a set of indicators can be derived to activate this competition, as seen in **Fig. 1** These indicators were used to form a questionnaire that was applied to a case study of two different urban places in Baghdad city, that are (Al-Mutanabbi Street and Al- Tahrir square) to test the importance of the presence of heritage in the urban space in activating urban competition.
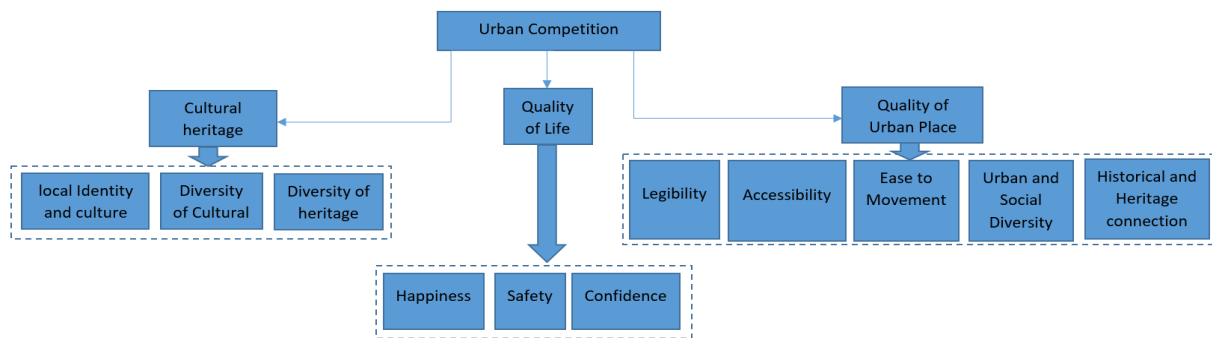
Figure 1. Urban Competition Indicators. Source

2.3 The Case Study

2.3.1 Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad

As seen in **Fig. 2,** Al-Mutanabbi Street is situated in the New Hassan Pasha Center, one of the historic areas of the Rusafa district of Baghdad's old city. Although this region's history begins in the early Abbasid era (762 AD), the notable landmarks that remain today are from the Ottoman era and the early seventeenth century. **Fig. 3** shows that the most significant cultural venues and architectural sites in Baghdad are located inside this metropolitan region. This location was selected because it is among the most well-known parts of Old Rusafa, which is a place that may be regarded as a cultural heritage place, thanks to its intellectual activities and locations recognized for their historical significance within an urban fabric with a cultural character. Furthermore, it is situated on the Tigris River, which makes it suitable for cultural tourism and satisfies the demands of modern society and competition, in addition to its historical significance within the city of Baghdad's historical cultural path.
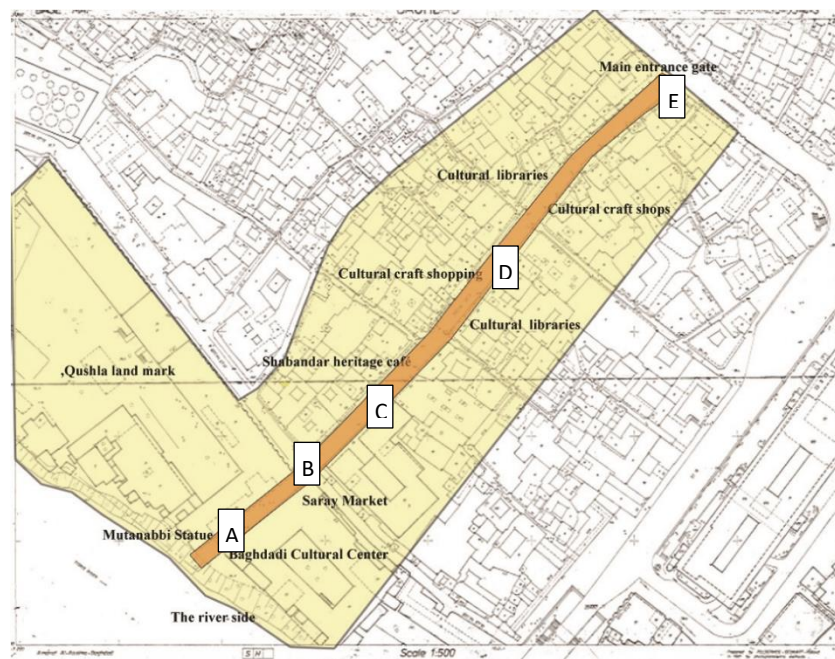
Figure 2. Al-Mutanabi Street GIS. Source (Baghdad Municipality)

Figure 3. Al-Mutanabi Street Heritage Buildings**.**

The cultural environment of Al-Mutanabbi Street is assessed as a heritage cultural place in this study, following recent restoration and remodeling projects. This development's success is measured by how well it preserves the area's existing urban legacy, creates a cultural hub for the community, strengthens local identity and sense of belonging, and stimulates the area's urban competition **(Al-Shami et al., 2023).**

2.3.2 Al-Tahrir Square in Baghdad

As seen in **Figs. 4 and 5**, Al-Tahrir Square is one of the primary urban nodes in Baghdad city. It serves as a transitory zone connecting numerous significant regions of Baghdad. It is a vital link to four of the most important streets of the capital: Al-Rasheed, Al-Jumhuriya, Al-Saadoun, and Abu Nawas. The area surrounding Tahrir Square is called the Bab Al-Sharqi. The old city center of Baghdad. As a valuable public place, this Square has faced urban transformation of social identity due to many events and political activities that took place there, and witnessed many celebrations, activities, and demonstrations throughout the ages, which gave it political and national importance.

Now, Al-Tahrir Square features a lot of business activity, monuments, religious and heritage structures, and beautiful historical sites that have been around for many years. In Al-Tahrir Square, there are several significant landmarks that are grouped sequentially from northeast to southwest. The Motherhood Statue(A), the Freedom Monument(B), the mural (C), the Marjan Building(D)(which belonged to the family of the Prime Minister in the royal era and designed by the famous architect (Jaafar Allawi) built in 1941). (Abdul Wahhab Morgan, The Turkish Restaurant Building(E), Al-Aqeedah School for Girls(F), Al-Urfaly Mosque(G), Surrounded by a vibrant network of markets, cinemas, theatres, music and photography shops, as well as restaurants and cafes, Al Umma Park once served as a major Urban entertainment area for Iraqi families.

Figure 4. Significant elements at Al-Tahrir Square
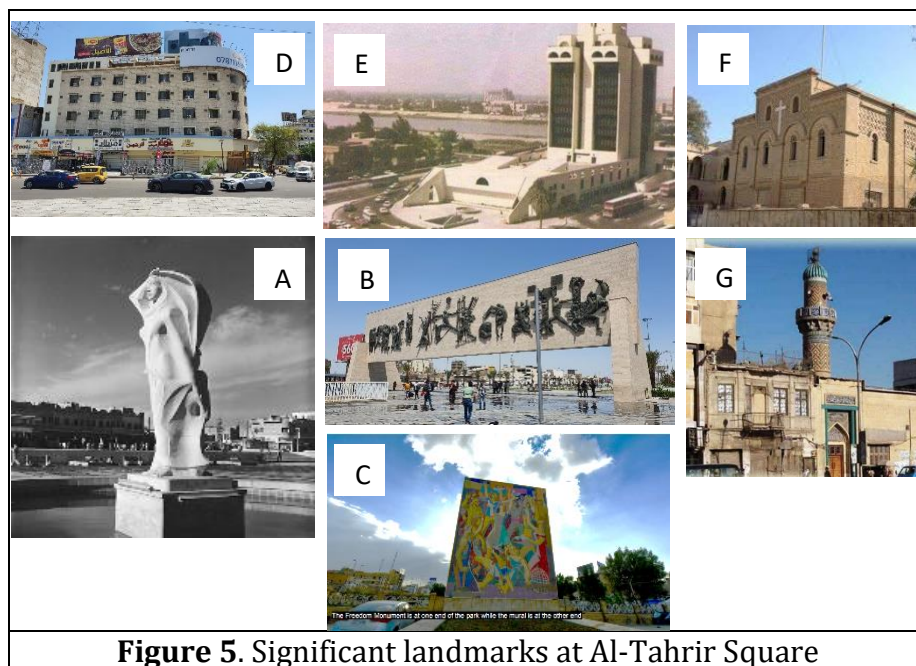
Figure 5. Significant landmarks at Al-Tahrir Square

2.4 Method

To verify the validity of the theoretical framework shown in Figure 1, this study carried out a survey in the chosen locations. The city's important sites and architectural heritage elements made up the research area, which was assessed. A total of thirty Iraqi participants for each location, from a range of specialties, age groups, and genders, answered the questionnaire. This questionnaire's objective was to evaluate the proposed framework for determining important aspects of urban coping. To assess the value of each component, the

survey used a Likert scale with 1 being the least important and 5 being the most. The primary domains of the proposed framework were categorized into three main groups: quality of urban place domain, quality of life domain, and cultural heritage domain.
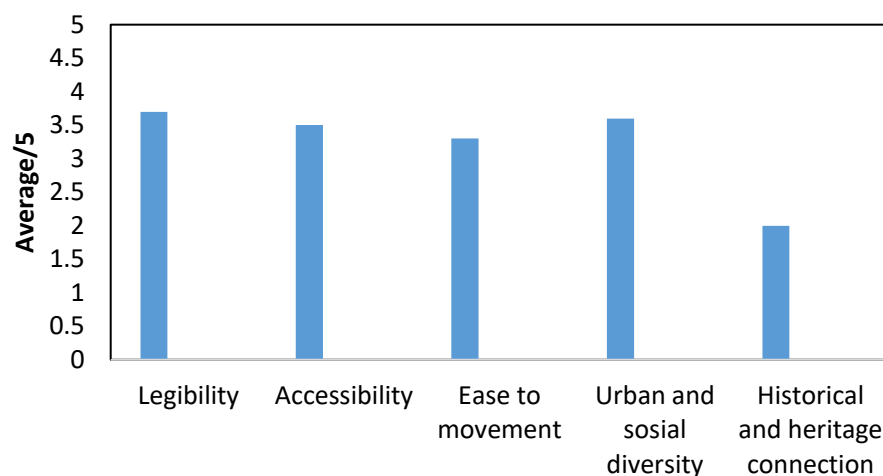
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Quality of urban place domain

3.1.1 Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad

According to the quality of urban place domain scores resulting from the questionnaire survey, **Fig. 6** shows that the highest rating was given to (Historical and heritage connection) in the site; it received 3.8 out of 5, which is higher than the other aspects, as shown in **Table 2**. The aspect of (Ease of movement) received the lowest score of (3.3).

Table 2. Results of the quality of the urban place for Al-Mutanabbi Street

| Indicator	Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Average/5	total
Quality of urban place	Legibility	0	5	5	12	8	3.7	30
	Accessibility	4	4	7	7	8	3.5	30
	Ease of movement	4	4	8	9	5	3.3	30
	Urban and social diversity	3	3	5	12	7	3.6	30
	Historical and heritage connection	3	5	0	10	12	3.8	30

Figure 6. Quality of urban place domain results for Al-Mutanabbi Street. Source

3.1.2 Al-Tahrir Square in Baghdad

According to the quality of urban place domain scores resulting from the questionnaire survey, **Fig.7** shows that the highest rating was given to (Historical and heritage connection) in the site; it received (3.9) out of 5, which is higher than the other aspects, as shown in **Table 3**. The aspect of (Ease of movement) received the lowest score of (3.5).

Table 3. Results of the quality of urban place for Al-Tahrir Square

Indicator	Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Average/5	total
Quality of urban place	Legibility	1	1	11	8	9	3.7	30
	Accessibility	2	2	7	11	8	3.7	30
	Ease of movement	4	2	6	10	8	3.5	30
	Urban and social diversity	1	2	9	11	7	3.7	30
	Historical and heritage connection	0	4	5	10	11	3.9	30
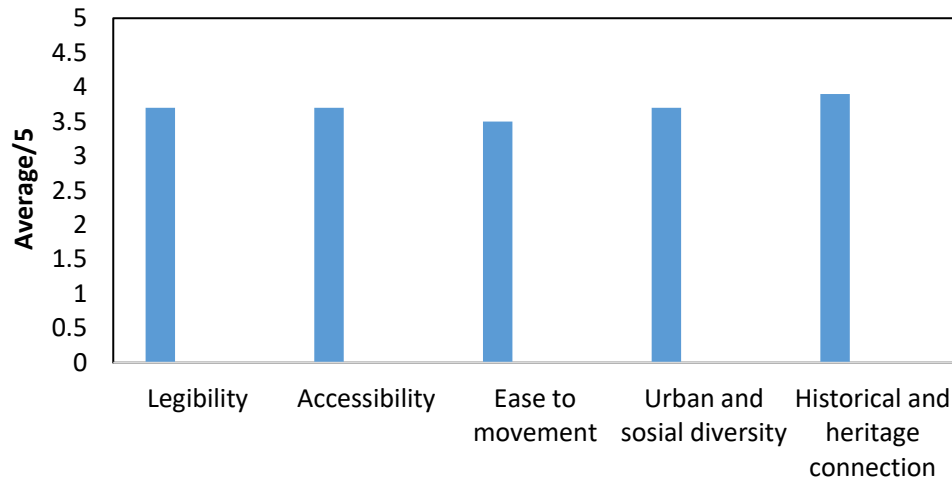
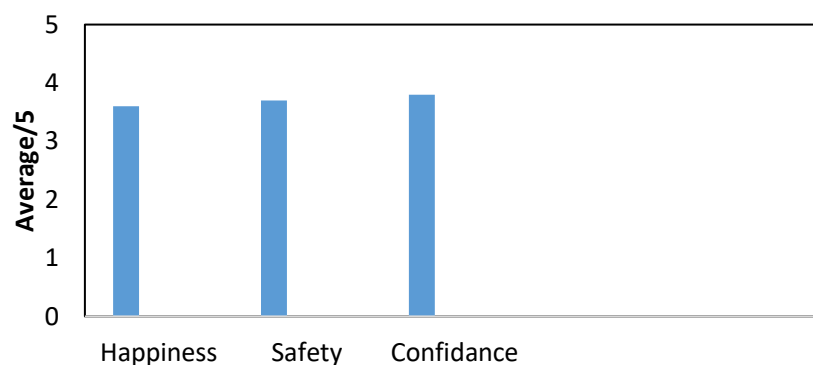**Figure 7.** Quality of urban place domain results for Al-Tahrir Square

3.2 Quality of Life Domain

3.2.1 Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad

According to the quality of life domain scores resulting from the questionnaire survey, **Fig. 8** shows that the highest rating was given to (Confidence) in the site; it received (3.8) out of 5, which is higher than the other aspects, as shown in **Table 4**. The aspect of (Happiness) received the lowest score of (3.6).

Table 4. Results of quality of life for Al-Mutanabbi Street

Indicator	Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Average/5	total
Quality of life	Happiness	2	3	6	11	8	3.6	30
	Safety	0	5	5	12	8	3.7	30
	Confidane	1	4	6	9	10	3.8	30

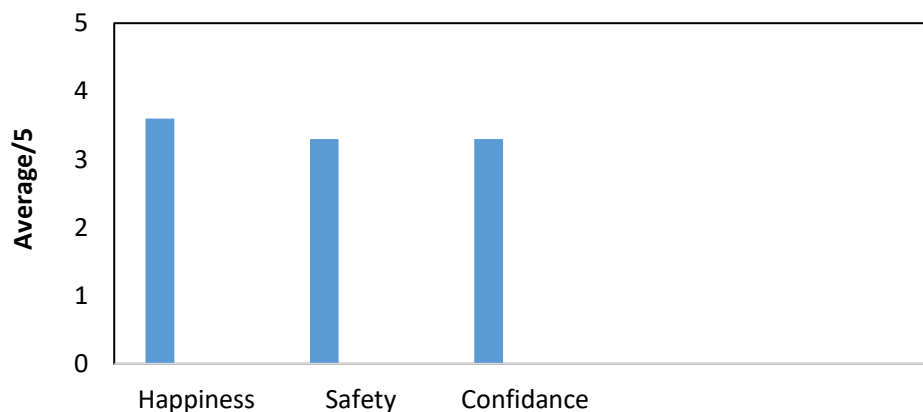**Figure 8.** Quality of life domain results Al-Mutanabbi Street

3.2.2 Al-Tahrir Square in Baghdad

According to the quality of life domain scores resulting from the questionnaire survey, **Fig. 9** shows that the highest rating was given to (Happiness) on the site; it received (3.6) out of 5, which is higher than the other aspects as shown in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Results of the quality of life for Al-Tahrir Square

Indicator	Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Average/5	total
Quality of life	Happiness	0	3	10	12	5	3.6	30
	Safety	0	5	13	11	1	3.3	30
	Confidane	1	5	11	9	4	3.3	30

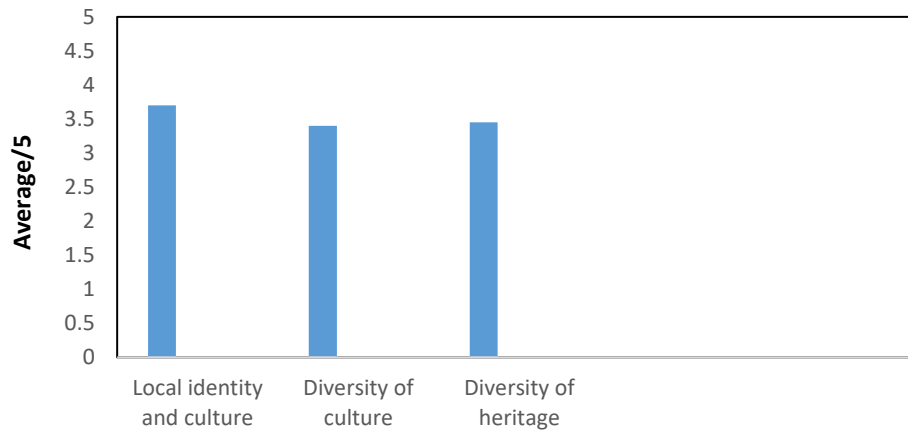**Figure 9.** Quality of life domain results for Al-Tahrir Square

3.3 Cultural Heritage Domain

3.3.1 Al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad

According to the cultural heritage domain scores resulting from the questionnaire survey, **Fig. 10** shows that the highest rating was given to (Local identity and culture) in the site; it received 3.7 out of 5, which is higher than the other aspects, as shown in **Table 7**. The aspect of (Diversity of heritage) received the lowest score of (3.3).

Table 7. Results of cultural heritage for Al-Mutanabbi Street**.**

| Indicator	Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Average/5	total
Cultural heritage	Local identity and culture	1	3	6	12	8	3.7	30
	Diversity of culture	2	6	5	11	6	3.4	30
	Diversity of heritage	3	6	7	7	7	3.3	30

Figure 10. Cultural heritage domain results for Al-Mutanabbi Street

3.3.2 Al-Tahrir Square in Baghdad

According to the cultural heritage domain scores resulting from the questionnaire survey, **Fig. 11** shows that the highest rating was given to (Local identity and culture) in the site; it received (3.9) out of 5, which is higher than the other aspects, as shown in **Table 8**. The aspect of (Diversity of culture) received the lowest score of (3.7).

Table 8. Results of the cultural heritage for Al-Tahrir Square

Indicator	Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	Average/5	total
Cultural heritage	Local identity and culture	1	3	6	6	14	3.9	30
	Diversity of culture	1	2	9	11	7	3.7	30
	Diversity of heritage	0	4	6	10	10	3.8	30
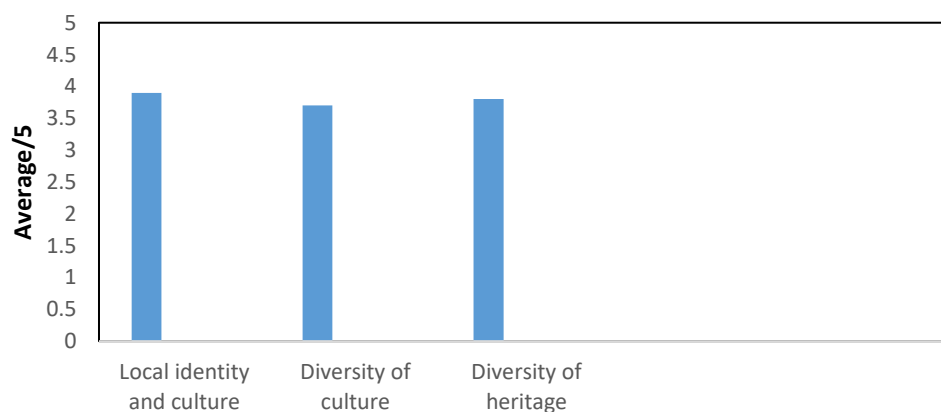
Figure 11. Cultural heritage domain results for Al-Tahrir Square.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study discusses how urban heritage places contribute significantly to urban competition. It provides a conceptual framework linking urban place, cultural heritage, and urban competition. The Heritage urban places influence the identity and image of cities,

making them more competitive regionally and globally. A new perspective on urban competition is provided by the integration of cultural value, quality of life, and quality of place into urban design. "Historical and Heritage Connection" was rated best in both locations of the case study, demonstrating the direct correlation between urban competitiveness and a strong legacy identity. For both locations, "Local identity and culture" received the highest score in the cultural heritage category, highlighting how preserving cultural distinctiveness improves user engagement and appeal. Al-Mutanabbi Street had the lowest score in "Ease of Movement" despite its high cultural significance, suggesting that better pedestrian accessibility and navigation would strengthen the street's competitive advantage. Al-Tahrir Square has a high "historical and identity" score, but its lower safety and confidence scores point to the need for improved social trust and urban management. With reference to the quality of life, indicators such as "Confidence" and "Happiness" were comparatively high, demonstrating that well-maintained heritage sites have a favorable impact on social wellness and user satisfaction. To improve the city's identity and competition, include historical and cultural elements in development plans. Also, to preserve the cultural and social significance of heritage places like Al-Mutanabbi Street and Al-Tahrir Square, make investments in their repair and adaptive reuse. Enhance Accessibility and Safety by Improving Infrastructure. Apply and refine the research's proposed indicators (quality of place, quality of life, cultural heritage) in evaluating and improving urban places.

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Credit of Authors Contribution

Hala Abdul Jabbar Nema: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, and analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. Inaam A. Al-Bazzaz: Supervision, Review, and academic guidance.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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دور المكان الحضري في تفعيل المنافسة الحضرية – مدينة بغداد حالة دراسية

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الخلاصة

تناقش هذه الدراسة مفهوم المنافسة الحضرية وتركز على دور الأماكن الحضرية التراثية في تفعيل المنافسة الحضرية. تمثل المنافسة الحضرية قدرة المدينة التي تمتلك ميزة تنافسية اقتصادية واجتماعية وثقافية وأمنية في الإقليم الجغرافي، مقارنةً بالمنافسين الآخرين (المدن الأخرى). تجذب الأماكن العامة والمناظر الحضرية، وخاصة التراثية منها، السياح والمؤسسات، مما يعزز صورة المدينة ويؤثر على جودة الحياة الحضرية بطريقة تفاعلية. يساهم التراث الثقافي الغني نسبياً والأجواء الحضرية في المدن الحديثة في تحسين جودة المكان أو جذب مختلف أصحاب المصلحة (مثل المؤسسات والمهن). تتمتع العديد من المدن حول العالم بتنوع ثقافي غني يساهم في جاذبيتها العامة، مما ينعكس على موقعها كمدينة ضمن الإقليم ومكانتها عالمياً، وأثره في تفعيل المنافسة الحضرية. تمت مراجعة تعريفات المكان الحضري، والتراث، والمنافسة الحضرية، والعوامل التي تعمل على تفعيلها، ومناقشة الدراسات السابقة لتحديد مشكلة البحث والتي تمثلت بـ "الفجوة المعرفية في دراسة دور الأماكن التراثية الحضرية في تفعيل المنافسة الحضرية" وتحديد هدف البحث والذي يتلخص بـ "تفعيل التنافس الحضري من خلال المكان الحضري التراثي". ولغرض التوصل الى العلاقة بين المكان الحضري، الذي له قيمة تراثية ثقافية، وأثره في المنافسة الحضرية، تم بناء إطار نظري يتضمن المتغير المعتمد وهو (المنافسة الحضرية) ومؤشراتها في المكان الحضري، ومن ثم تطبيق الإطار النظري على (2) حالة دراسية في مدينة بغداد وعرض النتائج وتحليلها والتوصل الى الإستنتاجات النهائية والتي أكدت على أهمية التراث الثقافي وجودة المكان وجودة الحياة في المكان الحضري في تفعيل المنافسة الحضرية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المكان الحضري، جودة المكان، جودة الحياة، المنافسة الحضرية، المكان التراثي.