

# Re-defining the traditional neighborhood areas in the historical city center Saray Sulaimani as a case study

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## Abstract



It is widely accepted, that historic urban quarters are coherent entities, which are clearly identified by their traditional character and architectural values and meanings.

These areas have been described as critical areas in the city, because they hold and kept in the same time the identity of the city, and been more decayed day by day due to obsolescence phenomenon which faced these areas continuously.

In this regard, Sulaimani city center showed many kinds of developments, which are totally not exceeds the individual buildings oriented. The way that these individual buildings had become as a landmark of the city, because of its richness in holding many historical, architectural, heritage values. The last was the rehabilitation of Sulaimani - Saray building.

Examination of successful examples of revitalization projects for historic urban quarters in different cities shows that, aside from the application of effective organizational, legal, fiscal, financial tools, correct identification of the contextual attributes during the analytical stage plays a key role in determining the appropriate strategic approach to revitalization. From this point of view, the problem research derived as the lack of contextualism perspective in revitalization projects in historical traditional areas in the city center leads to what known as building based instead of area-based protection. The study tries to achieve objectives underlying as necessity of treating these areas as one integrative unit which are participating in drawing the context of urban scene, and any effort to separate building from its context leads to fragment the urban tissue specially in the urban center, and of course this whole view can pave the road to re-define these decayed areas in the way described as more widely and sustainable method.

**Keywords:** Historical urban quarter, traditional neighborhood, Redefining, contextualism, identity of place

## 1. Introduction

Historic urban quarters have a symbiotic relationship with the rest of the city. They must therefore be considered within the context of the city as a whole and their conservation has to be considered, not as a straightforward and restrictive concern for preservation, but as a concern for revitalization and enhancement (Tiesdell et al., 1996: p 22).

This process involves the integration of the historic parts, their various functions, and sense of place. Accordingly, revitalization can be defined, in its simplest form, as a “process through which the deterioration and decay of a historic urban quarter can be addressed terminated or reversed” (Doratli, 2000: p 32).

So the place is not simply an area composed of external elements to humans, but is integrated, is owned and redefined by inhabitants.

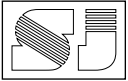
## 2. Historic urban quarters

Historic urban quarter are special places not only due to the cultural heritage that they house, but also due to their urban pattern. Many such quarters are in danger due to losing their traditional characters, if relevant measures are not put in place to ensure the continuity of such characters.

Tiesdell et al. (1996) stated: “Historic urban quarters should be considered as part of an economic dynamism; they are rarely autonomously functioning zones and they usually have a symbiotic relationship with the rest of the city. They must, therefore, be considered within the context of the city as a whole.

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(Tiesdell et al., 1996: p 22) The process of revitalizing involves the integration of the historic legacy, inheritance, and sense of place with the demands of contemporary economic, political and social conditions. Accordingly, revitalization can be defined, in its simplest form, as a “process through which the deterioration and decay of a historic urban quarter can be addressed terminated or reversed”. (Doratli, 2000 p.32)

Such a process calls for the connectivity of conservation-area objectives and the consideration of physical quality, social viability, economic vitality and the wider concern for sustainability, all of which demands the rapid, efficient and focused conversion of new knowledge into socially, economically and environmentally acceptable solutions.

### 3. Obsolescence

Obsolescence is the underlying concept, which can be defined as “the mismatch between the services offered by the fabric and the contemporary needs”. (Lichtfield, 1988)

Based on this argument, obsolescence can be considered as a process through which most of the problems of traditional urban quarters are being generated. The area may suffer under different types of obsolescence:

- Physical/structural obsolescence: The traditional buildings would be subject to physical/structural deterioration, which leads to obsolescence. This may occur due to different factors: the effects of time, the weather, earth movement, traffic vibration, poor maintenance, which result in the deterioration of building fabric. Obsolescence of this nature is likely to be—at least initially—gradual. (Tiesdell et al., 1996: p 23)
- Functional obsolescence: Obsolescence of this type arises due to the functional characteristics of the building/area. Due to its design and the constraints of its fabric, the building may fail to meet the contemporary standards and requirement of the user. Inadequacy of a building may range from a lack of sanitary fittings in good conditions and spaces to a lack of central heating, air conditioning and other contemporary facilities.
- Locational obsolescence: This type of obsolescence is primarily an attribute of the functional activities within the area. When the building was originally built, its location was determined in terms of accessibility to other uses, markets, and suppliers, transportation infrastructure and the like; but over time the location may become unfavorable or obsolete for the

activities, for which the building was constructed. (Tiesdell et al., 1996: p 25)

- Besides of these most basic types, it is also possible to consider other forms of obsolescence:
- Image obsolescence: related to the perception of a building or an area. Uncomfortable traffic circulation, noise, smell, vibration in old quarters, which make them unattractive.
- Official/legal obsolescence: related to physical and functional dimensions. Restrictions may render buildings obsolete; or in an area, which is declared as “conservation zone”, the absence of financial incentives may reduce the willingness of property owners to restore and rehabilitate their property. This, in turn, reinforces official obsolescence.

### 4. Regeneration, re-vitalization vs Re-defining

Tiesdell et al., (1996: p 20) argue that the urban revitalizing “, involves both the renewal of the physical fabric and the utilization—of buildings and spaces. Accordingly, there is a need for both physical and economic revitalization.

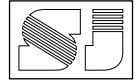
Depending on their inherent qualities as well as local physical, socio-economic conditions, different comprehensive approaches, in other words different strategies— restructuring the economic base, regeneration, functional diversification- should be engaged in the revitalization processes of historic urban quarters. (Doratli, 2000)

Tiesdell’s argument therefore, underpins three contextual attributes within this definition of “revitalization”: place assets, obsolescence, and intensities of development pressures.

In the following statement Rossi (Rossi, A. 1982) unveils the role of collective memories in shaping an identity for a city; “the city itself is the collective memory of its people and like memory it is associated with objects and places”.

In its broadest sense, urban regeneration covers all activities designed to combat urban obsolescence and improve social and economic conditions, including development, redevelopment and improvement. In this article however, as per Tiesdell et al. (1996) it will only be used in a more limited sense.

Accordingly, the main focus of protection has changed from being devoted to individual buildings towards area-based protection. Parallel to the re-evaluation of these quarters, and to the changing dimensions and objectives of preservation and conservation, a strong emphasis has been placed on the recognition of architectural, cultural value and historic character. Thus the process has been changed their perspectives to include sense of place and reconnecting man to place rebuilding the



nontangible bridge (spiritual), the study named the entire process as (Redefining).

### 5. Continuity in the urban built environment

Change and development is the required and important issue, that should occurred inside the instant frame concerned with time-place structure and their distinguished features. Such a process calls for the connectivity of area-based objectives (Context), and the consideration of physical, social, economic quality, viability and vitality which have the wider concern with sustainability. As stated by Lynch (Lynch, K. 1972 p. 33) "if change is inevitable, then it should be moderated and controlled so as to prevent violent dislocation and regenerate a maximum of continuity with the past". Therefore, it is important to conserve the built heritage while not undermining the intangible values, to keep a strong continuity with the past. In the historical point of view, the city represents the cultural continuum. This concept holds some fixed points related to inhabitants in certain place or time and helped them.

### 6. Context and Contextualism

Context can be described as the combination of one phenomenon /circumstance/fact/event with others for the creation of a whole; and as a result, „context“ is the term that denotes the generation of items through the combination of all events/circumstances. The term context can be also defined as the background, environment, framework, setting, or situation encircling an act or a circumstance. (Çizgen, Gültekin, 2012 P.185)

The importance of context emerges when its ability to express and bring to light an item's contents, its inclusion within a combined unity, its definition and its formation and attainment of a meaning is the matter of discussion. Thus, the item becomes an element of the entirety/whole and becomes an integral part of the context. According to Nesbitt (1996), the main belief behind contextualism is that every knowledge is context related; in other words, context is the key to understand any knowledge it is associated with.

The new emphasis on the context of cities and the respect for older architecture will continue to remind people of an earlier age, as they are drawn back into previously abandoned parts of cities that now surge with renewed life. (Sotoudeh 2012, p.1)

As Capon (1999) has discussed, contextualism can help many context values of design be recalled and introduced to the current agenda. In this way, the continuity of urban fabric, the relationship between new and old and loyalty to

visual harmony can all be established; allowing us to re-acquaint ourselves with the lost architectural meaning. (Çizgen, Gültekin, 2012 P.50) Burden (2001) defines contextual design in his work "Illustrated dictionary of architecture" as: "...any doctrine emphasizing the importance of the context in establishing the meaning of terms, such as the setting in to which a building is placed, its site, its natural environment or its neighborhood". (Burden, 2001, p.87)

Capon (1999) gives the following notes on the wide range of contextualist comprehensive thinking:

- Functional aspects: circulation, concepts of movement – light and vision within context
- Form- concept of scale, color and relation to surroundings
- Meaning – historical associations – notion of the age of surroundings
- feelings of place - poetry and picturesque Nature – natural world –plants, topography. (Capon, D. S.1999 p.191)

The inclusion of all of these factors in the design is, in actuality, dependent upon the designer's personal approach, the context and period. As a result, some of these factors may be seen more predominantly within a design. In a design that is looked at in a contextual frame, everything is taken into account as a whole and the building will be shaped according to the "place" in which it is found.

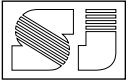
Capon (1999) also highlights that it is possible to discuss these contextual data's according to their categorizations. Capon separates the data into the following three headings as a means of defining them; and emphasizes the imperative for the design to master all of the noted data:

- Visual Appropriateness - VISUAL CONTEXT – personal taste, feeling
- Micro climatic – FORMAL CONTEXT – scientific environmental data
- Identity, meaning, local and cultural-
- HUMAN CONTEXT - human values. (Capon, D. S.1999 p.191)

The designer must re-schedule these factors in a detailed manner and took them into his(her) consideration gradually.

### 7. Case Study

Shexan district as a traditional and historical neighborhood located in the center of Sulaimani city (fig.1), with an area 45556.6 square meters (11.2 acre). The area is now suffering from many urban problems which has a priority to take it as a case study. The site is surrounding by main



streets since it's located in the heart of the city, such as: (Peramerd, Goran, Bekas and Shexan streets), and closed to (Qanat, Mawlawi, Sabunkaran, and kawa) streets which the most of them are heritage streets (Fig.1). The site and its sounding are a part of city center which include varieties of residential, commercial, health, religious, administration and entertainment activities with the various areas or percentage, so the area formed as a mixed use contains the daily, necessary, and public necessities of city inhabitants. The commercial activities covered about 42% and residential is about 33% from the total area of selected site.

As the topography of Sulaimani city, the site has the distinct topography too, with the elevation of 13m height from the highest point (north) to the lowest point (south).

The residential part of the site which the study tries to focus and analyze it, is about 50 families with 230 inhabitants.

### 7.1. Physical situation

The study area includes 42 tradition houses, 38 tradition buildings and only (1) new building as shown in fig. (2)

Such areas can be identified as being in a high state of development, with too much economic stress for development, resulting severe pressure to demolish the old buildings in order to realize the full potential of valuable sites. In that case, the buildings are either in states of physical/structural obsolescence, that is, in poor condition or functional obsolescence, where there would be a mismatch between the fabric and contemporary needs and desires.

### 7.2. Methodology

The study tries to use the analytical qualitative methodology depending on analyzing the physical and visual context, which holds meaning and adds meanings too to the context in order to re-generate the human relationships to the place using GIS, and Auto cad techniques besides of population and infrastructures situations surveys includes all services that neighborhood society needs.

Thus the study's methodology represents the set of consequently gradual steps as diagram below (Diagram1)

#### 7.2.1. Reshaping Shexan as a Micro neighborhood

Before transformations will be occurred in the area at different threshold times, Shexan was the traditional historic neighborhood. Now, it has

been suffered from shrinking it's size just to a few hundred of inhabitants.. only 29% from the inhabitants are indigenous, the structure of the families are between 5-7 persons .. 42% from them are illiterate. Most of the houses are traditional constructed from local materials (Mud, brick, and stone), as general the area suffered from obsolescence phenomenon such as (Structural, visual, functional) (Fig.3).

The area interesting with a good technical infrastructures, with religious, educational, health... Just there has been needs for social and entertainment infrastructure. There was not enough privacy, green areas and open spaces. (Fig.4)

#### 7.2.1.1. Circulation network

As any other traditional area, Shexan poses an active circulation network, zig-zag shaped, well connected, human oriented (Pedestrian), various width ranged between (1,5 to 7 meters) (Fig.5)

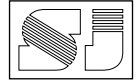
#### 7.2.1.2. Open Spaces and green area

As a result of figure-ground map analysis of the studied area (Fig.8), and besides of its compacted planning pattern, the space ratio is around 47% , this ratio indicates the medium density of masses (building's m and availability of enough spaces to spiritual activities. Transformations in the structure of the area, social relationships, safety, shapes and locations of these open spaces pushed the children to play inside or in front of their houses. (Fig.7)

The importance of green area exceeds the environmental dimensions to reach their sustainable levels and to promote its human environment. There are a few number of trees and no green spaces in the study area, what composed any ratio is the small gardens inside the residential units and distinct green space related to Saray buildings (Fig.9), which this space with houses gardens composed around 5%..

#### 7.2.2. Contextualism

Contextualism, as explained before, came from the desire to resolve the problems regarding harmony with the historical environment and the placement of new buildings within historical surroundings. Contextual design approaches can be summarized as attitudes that usually replicate the styles and architectural form in the existing surroundings. So the next steps will include these concepts gradually.



### 7.2.3. Obsolescence

Intensities of development pressures are highly interrelated with obsolescence, and it is one of the key issues in the deterioration process that an area faces as possible solutions are proposed to address this process.

This contribution begins by focusing on the underlying forces that shape the context of urban development policies. As seen, several dimensions of the context have been distinguished, such as demographic, economic, social, and ecological dimensions. The concluding sections return to the context in its totality and refer to some current obsolescence concepts and initiatives for urban development policies.

The main policies concerning the urban redevelopment and its linkages to obsolescence concepts are: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redevelopment>

#### 1- Urban Rehabilitation ..... Physical + visual

At the city center, we are more concerned with the building rehabilitation, which can also be called "Building Restoration". Building restoration describes a particular treatment approach and philosophy within the field of architectural conservation. According to the U.S. Secretary of Interior's standards, "Restoration is said as the act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period.

#### 2- Urban Renewal .....Physical + visual

Land redevelopment is a program, often followed where there urban decay has been notified. Urban renewal involves the relocation of businesses, the demolition of structures, the relocation of people, and the use of eminent domain (government purchase of property for public purpose) as a legal instrument to take private property for city-initiated development projects.

#### 3- Urban Reuse ..... Economic

Urban reuse is another policy of urban redevelopment, which help in reusing the vacant land. Also, reuse refers to the process of reusing an old site or building for a purpose rather than which it was built or designed for.

#### 4- Urban Infill ..... economic + visual

Urban Infill is used for the rededication of land in an urban environment, usually open-space, to

new construction. Infill has been defined as the use of land within a built-up area for further construction, especially as part of a community redevelopment or growth management program or as part of smart growth.

During the policies application on the studied area, the study found that the all parts of the area needs policies as infill, rehabilitation, conservation and redevelopment consequently. These policies have been explained in quantities, area and location in detail as below (Fig. 10):

#### A- Infill

Two great problems have been faced the studied area, that are the intrusion of commercial buildings and activities inside the area. The second problem is demolishing the traditional residential units and transforming their area to parking uses, the parking total area is 5692 m<sup>2</sup> which composed a bout %11 of the total area. (fig.11). So the proposed policy is to employ these areas to its original use (traditional residential units) (Fig.12)

#### B- Rehabilitation

Most of the existed residential units needs rehabilitation policy. (fig.12) The process should be fulfilled under the re-generation of architectural elements and contextualism concept.

#### C- Conservation

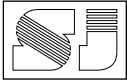
Saray building (4623 sq.m) which is located in the south east of the area (fig.13) deserve the policy of conservation.. That is done recently but in the same time raised the contextualism concept ... so all the traditional historic buildings should be covered by this policy consecutively.

#### D- Re-development

Some buildings which are located in the south west part of the studied area, without any architectural, constructional, and historical values (fig.14) need to apply the re-development policy.

### 7.2.4. Setting out the physical elements

All physical elements which rooted from the previous ages and related to Kurdish architecture especially from the studied area should be reemerged within the concept of contextualism, however these elements concerned to the spatial structure, architecture design or any visual contents of urban area. These elements enhanced the regeneration, revitalizing, rehabilitation and



finally redefining the studied area as traditional historic neighborhood at the city center of Sulaimani city. Besides of all the process helped and acted on strengthening the relationships between man and place, so the trinity of man, physical elements and place would be completed.

#### 7.2.4.1. Courtyard

It is the main element in the traditional Kurdish house which contribute the way the families live, the inhabitants spend most of day or night times in this centric space. It has various irregular shapes, area and location which separate it from Arabic Islamic houses and gave it its identity. So the typology had been done by the study in order to re generate this design principle issue in building the new residential units (Fig.15)

#### 7.2.4.2. Building heights

As any traditional neighborhoods, Shexan neighborhood respected the human scale in all planning and design principles, so the building heights mostly didn't exceed one or maximum two floors (fig.16)

The ratio for units with one floor composed about 86% from the entire residential building units in the studied area.

#### 7.2.4.3. Other architectural elements

There are many elements which holds architecture, historic and locational values and meanings, they should be studied, regenerated and re used. These elements will act contextually and composed the necessary steps towards drawing the redefine process of the studied area, such as openings, ornaments, construction details, building materials and visual contexts such as paintings (coloring). (Fig.17)

#### 7.2.5. Place identification

All the previous mentioned elements helped in constructing the invisible spiritual bridge between man and place, promoted him (her) to stay, give royalty full of resilience, love and defense. So place needs to be connected, protected, and stopping all inconvenience intrusions, which have been invaded continually during past till now.

#### 7.2.5.1. Site access

There are (8) accesses penetrate the studied area (fig. 18). There were be limited and controlled by greenery or physical elements (fig.19). Besides of that constructing any buffer zones provided connectivity and permeability.

#### 7.2.5.2. Exploring the center of neighborhood

For enhancing the neighborhood to be more sociable, interactive, and to provide daily necessary, the study preferred to explore the small neighborhood center includes some shops, social activities and meeting space as existed in the original shape previously, (fig.20).

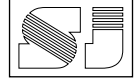
#### 8. Discussion

All collected data related to inhabitant's opinion about the future of Shexan indicated that the area exposed to be eliminated in the near future because of outward migration of original inhabitants, distortion of physical properties, transforming them to parking area, and commercial intrusion and invasion to the suggested area. So the redefining process including regeneration, obsolescence handling revitalizing and reconnecting the area with surroundings and constructing the spiritual bridges between inhabitants and the place are more tangible and necessary steps towards applying the contextualism concept based on district revitalization instead of separate building attitudes.

#### 9. Conclusions

The study arrived some important points regarded to research problem, solving and testing the hypotheses, it can be pointed out as following:

- Any regeneration process would be in the frame of the area's identity. That would be in the frame of redefining the original values .
- Rehabilitation of separate building will act upon the area fragmentation, reducing the connectivity and distorting the harmonizing of physical, structure and visual contents of the entire area.
- This would be done due the concepts of contextualism.
- The concept of contextualism, also should be linked to the obsolescence situation regarding all kinds of the phenomenon.
- So, the determination of any types of obsolescence will draw the policy for how the action plan will be determined to redefine the identity of the area.
- After all trinity of man, physical elements and place will complete the cycle, and formed the main objective which the authorities should take in to their consideration in any future development projects especially in the center of the city.



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### اعادة تعريف المحلات التقليدية في المراكز التاريخية للمدن- سراي السليمانية حالة دراسية

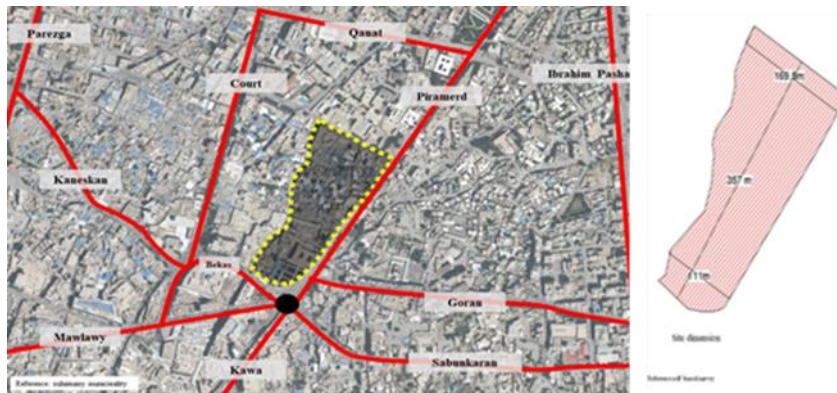
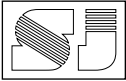
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### المستخلص

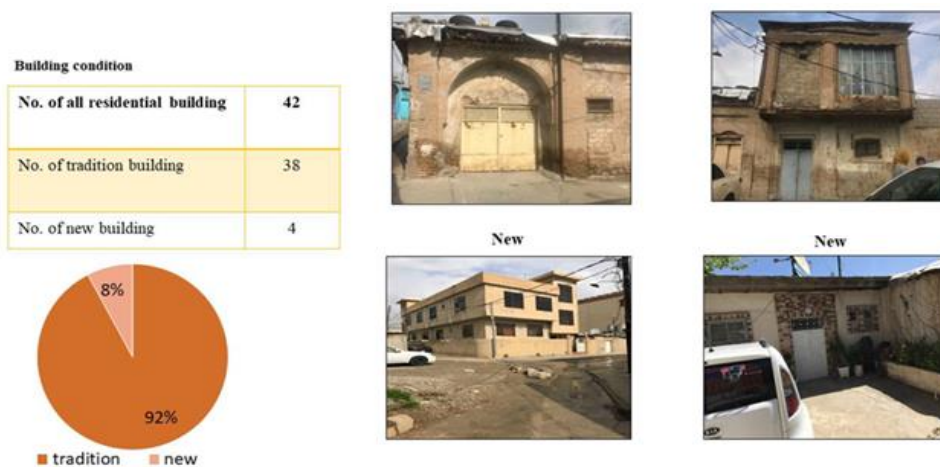
لا خلاف من اعتبار المناطق التاريخية الحضرية كيانات متماسكة، معروفة بشخصيتها التقليدية وقيمها المعمارية التي تحمل الكثير من المعاني والدلالات. تتصف هذه المناطق بمناطق حساسة ودرجة ايضا على مستوى المدينة بأكملها، وذلك بسبب ما تحملها من هوية المدينة والمحافظة عليها ايضا. تتعرض هذه المناطق الى التآكل والتفكك يوم بعد اخر، لاسباب كثيرة منها ظاهرة لاتدنار التي تواجهها باستمرار. في هذا السياق، طال مركز مدينة السليمانية الكثير من محاولات التطور والتغيير والتي هي بمجملها لا تتعدى تطورات جزئية ومناطقية صغيرة ايضا، ترجمت هذه التغييرات الى جعل بعض المباني المنفردة كمبان دالة بسبب ما تحملها من قيم تاريخية وتراثية و معمارية. اخر هذه المحاولات هي اعادة تأهيل مبنى سراي السليمانية. تظهر تجارب سابقة في هذا المجال وفي مناطق تاريخية عديدة في مدن مختلفة من العالم، وبغض النظر عن استعمالها لطرق وادوات تنظيمية وقانونية ومالية، تلعب التعريف الصحيح لمكونات السياق وتشخيصها في المرحلة التحليلية دورا رئيسيا في تحديد استراتيجيات مناسبة لاعادة احياء هذه المناطق.

من هذا المنطلق تم اشتقاق المشكلة البحثية بغياب النظرة السياقية في مشاريع اعادة احياء المناطق التقليدية في المراكز التاريخية يؤدي الى توجه الحفاظ على المباني المنفردة بدلا من التوجه المناطقي. تحاول الدراسة وكتحقيق للاهداف المحددة جعل التعامل مع هذه المناطق كوحدة متكاملة واحدة، ضرورة ملحة تسهم في رسم السياق في المشهد الحضري. اية محاولة في فصل هذه الابنية عن سياقها تؤدي الى تجزئتها وانسلاخها عن النسيج وبالاخص في المراكز الحضرية. وبالطبع هذه النظرة الشاملة تؤدي الى تعبيد الطريق لاعادة تعريف هذه المناطق المتهاكلة والتي تعتبر ايضا من الطرق الشائعة والمستدامة ايضا.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المناطق الحضرية التاريخية، المحلات التقليدية، اعادة التعريف، السياقية، هوية المكان.



**Figure 1:** Sulaimani center -satellite image + site layout (by researchers).



**Figure 2:** the physical situation of study area (by researchers).

**Re-shaping** the study area as (historic traditional micro neighborhood)



**Re-emerging** (visual contexts) which has and adds meanings to the context (Contextualism)



**Re-employing**, re-vitalizing, of all residential units which has been suffered from any kinds of (obsolescence)

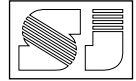


**Stopping** all kinds of (intrusion) especially commercial

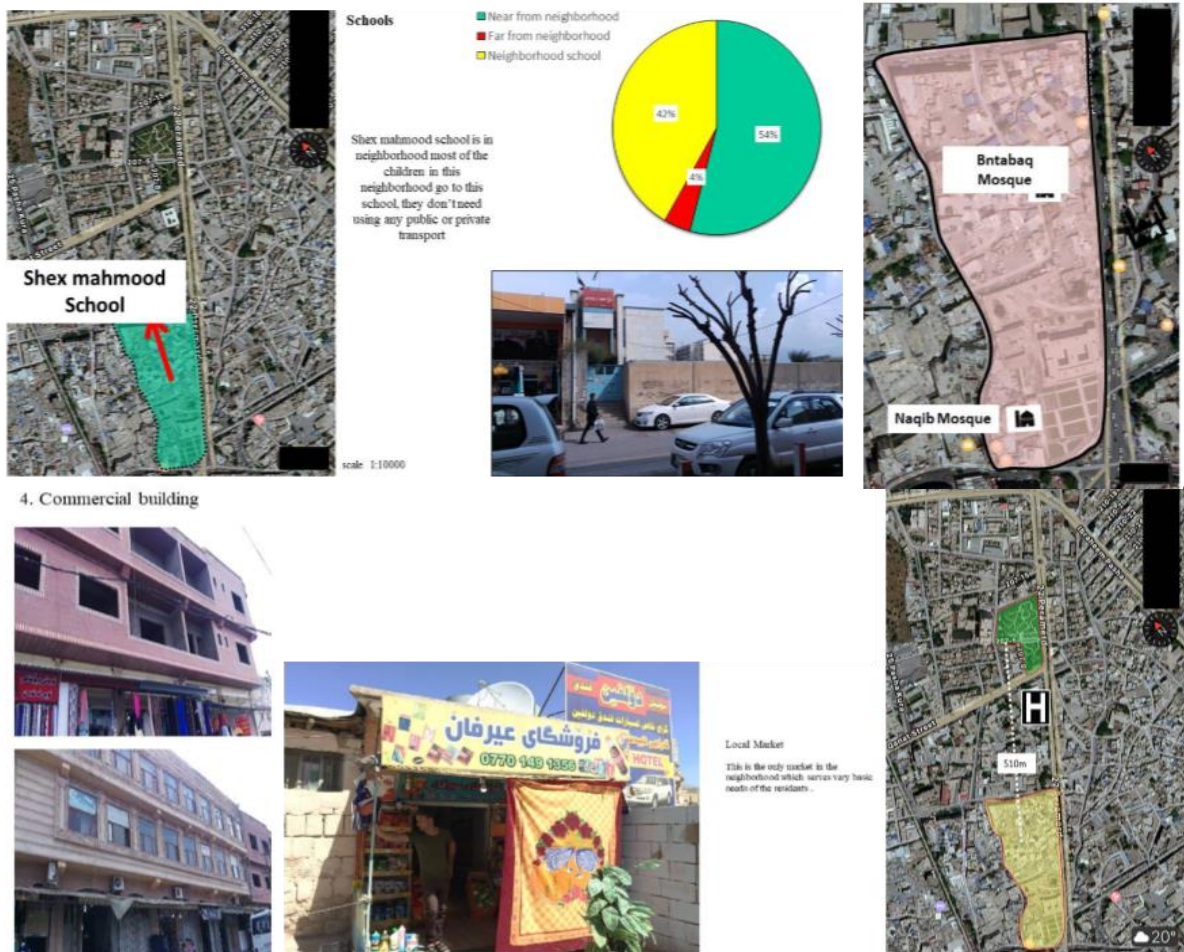


**Setting out** all physical elements which add and promote the (re-defining) concept

**Diagram 1 :** the main steps of redefining process applied to study area (By researcher).



**Figure 3:** buiding materials and various oblesence observed in the area (By researcher).



**Figure 4:** Some Social infrasrtucture exists in the study area (By researcher).

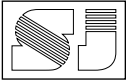


Figure 5: circulation network -images and photos- (By researcher)



Figure 6: views shows how children play (By researcher).

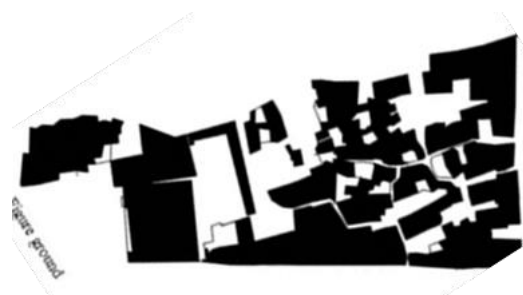
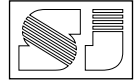
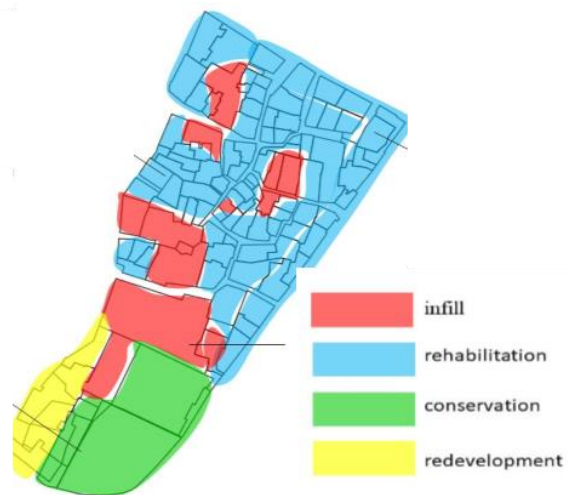


Figure 7: Figure-ground analysing map of study area (By researchers).



Reference self based survey

**Figure 8:** Shapes and location of green spaces in the study area (by researchers).



**Figure 9:** The studied area division due to requested policies (by researchers)



**Figure 10:** The problem that faced the studied area is demolishing the residential units in order to use them as parking area (by researchers).

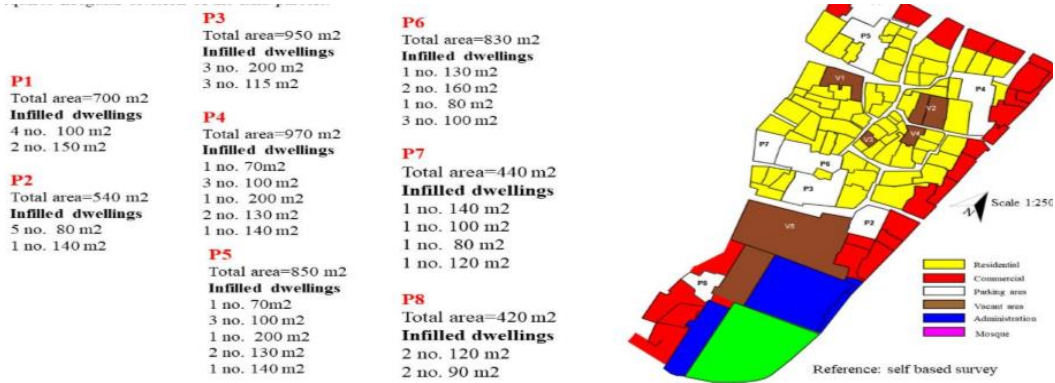
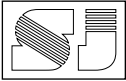


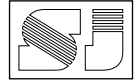
Figure 11: Parking areas and infill calculations in the studied area (by researchers).



Figure 12: some views shows the demolished or inconvenience situations of the residential units (by researchers).



Figure 13: Saray view and location due to the studied area (by researchers).



**Figure 14:** views show some buildings without any values needs re-development policy (by researchers).



**Figure 15:** Courtyard typology in Shexan district in the Sulaimani city center (by researchers).



**Figure 16:** One and two floor houses in Shexan studied area (by researchers).

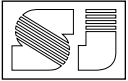


Figure 17: other architectural elements and visual contexts found in the studied area (by researchers).

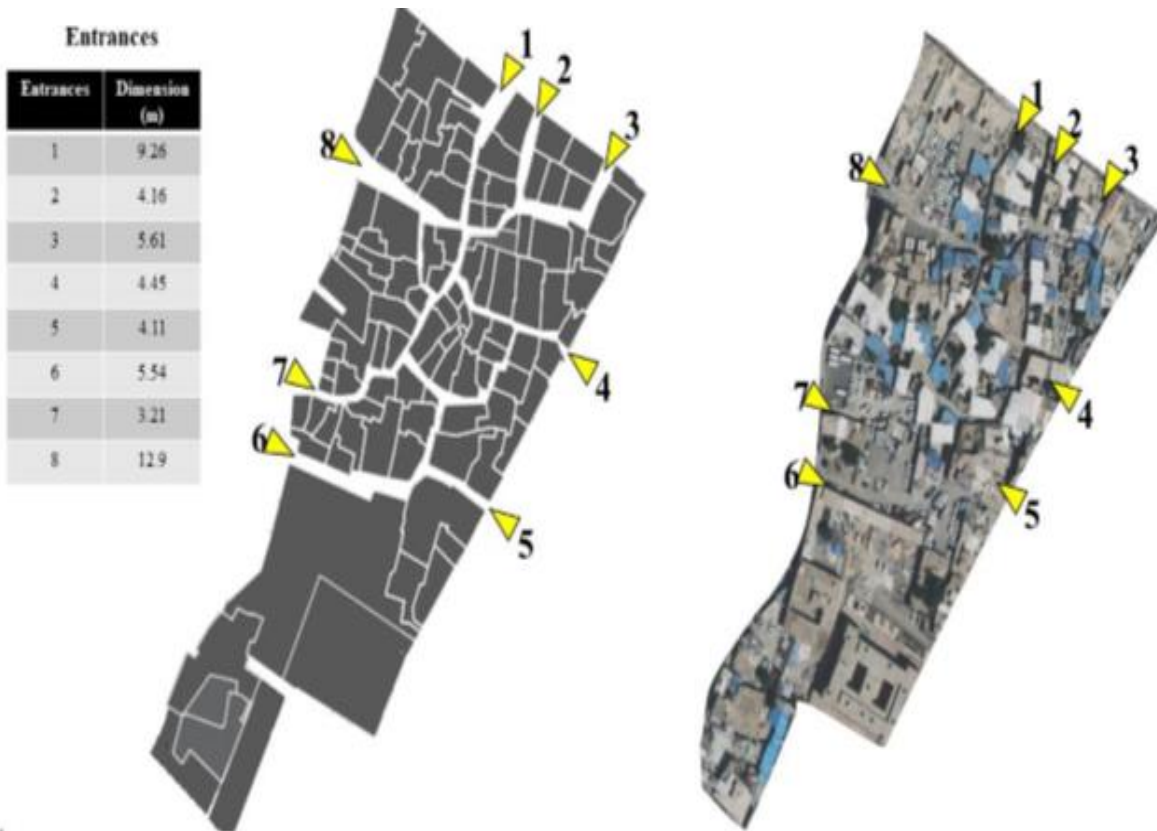
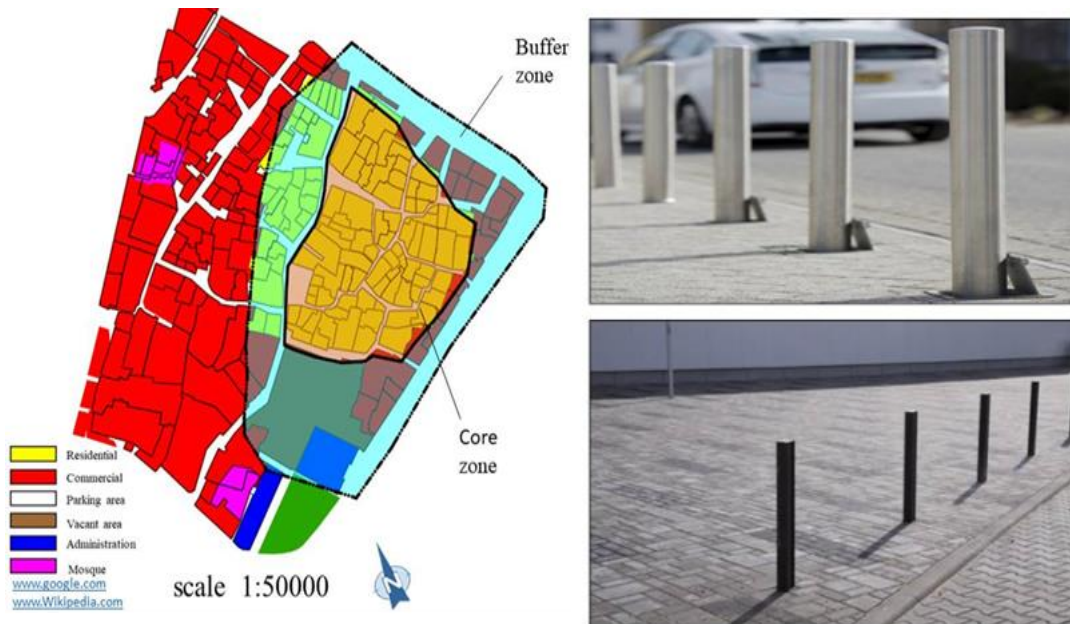
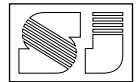


figure 18: Accesses from all directions leads to the studies area (by researchers).



**Figure 19:** buffer zone suggested to keep identity to the studied area (by researchers).



**Figure 20:** finding the neighborhood center on the inconvenience site of new building. (by researchers).