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MORALITY BEFORE KNOWLEDGE

Measuring the success of urban renewal through residents' lived experiences: A participatory assessment of community well-being, economic opportunity, and historical identity

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ABSTRACT

Background: Medina Al-Munawara, Saudi Arabia is one of the oldest holy cities for Muslims prominent for its historical significance as the site of the twelfth Islamic battle. The city had faced challenges of poor building quality and urban planning, prompting Governor Prince Faisal bin Salman to initiate a transformative project to enhance living conditions. Focusing on Hamra'a Al-Assad neighborhood, this research examines the urban improvement project under that initiative. Unlike most common urban improvement research that mostly focuses on design aspects, this study uniquely prioritizes residents' perceptions to comprehensively assess the success of the project. **Methods:** A quantitative research approach, employing a semi-structured online questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions, delves into aspects such as daily life impact, community empowerment, economic opportunities, historical awareness, and overall satisfaction. Targeting Hamra'a Al-Assad residents, the primary users of the neighborhood, the study surpassed expectations with 102 collected responses, facilitated by collaboration with local authorities for widespread outreach. The collected data undergoes careful analysis using patterns and connections, empowering residents and providing valuable insights for decision-making in current and future urban redevelopment projects in Medina Al-Munawara. **Findings:** The study showed that 38.5% of residents felt safer and 50% noted increased property values, but only 28.4% saw better economic opportunities, 35.5% felt stronger community ties, 45% perceived a positive cultural impact, and just 28.4% participated in planning, revealing key gaps in engagement and inclusivity. **Conclusion:** This research emphasizes residents' perspectives and informs practical decisions that prioritize community well-being and inclusiveness in urban redevelopment. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on a resident-centric framework for evaluating urban redevelopment in a culturally and historically significant city, addressing a critical gap in the existing literature that often overlooks the socio-cultural dimensions of urban renewal in Islamic contexts.

KEYWORDS: cultural design; humanization projects; medina al munawara; Saudi Arabia; urban redevelopment.

1. Introduction

Urban redevelopment has emerged as a critical aspect of urban planning, especially in historically and culturally significant cities. It is not merely a process of architectural and infrastructural transformation but a multidimensional intervention that encompasses cultural, social, and economic dimensions (Coningham et al., 2019). Medina Al-Munawara,

as a city with profound historical and religious importance, serves as a unique case study to assess how urban redevelopment projects impact community perceptions and cultural heritage. Despite extensive global research on urban renewal, the socio-cultural implications of such projects in Islamic cities remain underexplored (Góral, 2014).

Previous studies have examined urban redevelopment in various historical contexts, such as the seismic rehabilitation of Kathmandu's historic infrastructure, where the integration of cultural heritage with modern safety standards posed significant challenges (Coningham et al., 2019). Similarly, the urban remodeling of Mexico City in the 18th century highlighted how cultural and architectural interventions can reshape urban landscapes while preserving historical identity (Sánchez de Tagle, 2000). In the context of Medina, the Hamra'a Al-Assad neighborhood redevelopment initiative, led by Prince Faisal bin Salman, aimed to address both structural inadequacies and socio-cultural needs, making it a compelling case to study the impact on residents' perceptions.

A resident-centric approach to evaluating urban redevelopment is not only novel but also essential in capturing the lived experiences of the community, particularly in areas with rich historical narratives. Studies on Franconia's regional identity underscore the importance of integrating cultural heritage in urban planning, reinforcing the need for frameworks that accommodate local customs and historical context (Flachenecker, 2009). Likewise, research in Sri Lanka and Pakistan has demonstrated how urban interventions can either reinforce or undermine social cohesion, depending on how inclusive and context-sensitive the redevelopment strategies are (Abeyasekera et al., 2019).

The current study addresses a critical gap by focusing on residents' perceptions as a primary metric for evaluating the success of urban redevelopment in a historically and religiously significant area. This focus not only aligns with contemporary urban planning principles that emphasize inclusivity and cultural integration but also contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable urban development in Islamic cities.
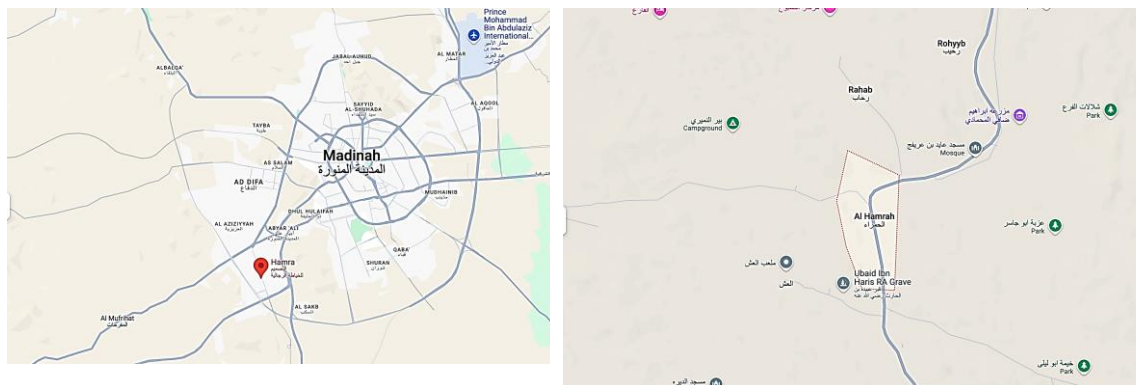

Fig. 1. Research location of hamra'a al-assad

Hamra'a Al-Assad, see Figure 1 above is a neighborhood settled within the historically significant city of Medina Al-Munawara, Saudi Arabia. Noted for its pivotal role as the location of the twelfth Islamic battle, Hamra'a Al-Assad had long grappled with poor building quality and inadequate urban planning as shown on figure 2 below. However, the narrative changed with the implementation of a transformative initiative spearheaded by Governor Prince Faisal bin Salman, aiming to elevate the quality of life for its inhabitants.

In contrast to the predominant focus on design-centric evaluations in urban studies, this research uniquely emphasizes the vital role of residents' perceptions in assessing the success of the project. The project's significance is further emphasized by the city's status as one of the holiest cities globally, deserving a comprehensive understanding of its urban projects. Medina Al-Munawara has been relatively under-explored in terms of evaluating such projects, making this research influential in shedding light on the distinctions of urban development within this sacred city.

Fig. 2. Living conditions before the project

This research represents a pivotal step towards bridging the gap between design-centric evaluations and the perspectives of residents in the context of urban development. By exploring the successes and shortcomings of the Hamra'a Al-Assad project, it aspires to inform practical decision-making processes that prioritize sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation in future urban projects within the esteemed city of Medina Al-Munawara.

1.1 Urban slums

Urban slums, characterized by poor living conditions, overcrowding, and limited access to essential services, remain a persistent challenge in urban planning and redevelopment projects globally. The rehabilitation of slums has been widely studied in diverse contexts, emphasizing the socio-economic and cultural implications of such interventions. Puhan et al. (2022) provide a comprehensive analysis of slum rehabilitation architecture, illustrating how zero slums in Bhubaneswar City, India, serve as a model for urban redevelopment efforts (Puhan et al., 2022). Similarly, Lilford et al. (2019) underscore the multi-dimensional nature of slums, highlighting issues such as inadequate services, social exclusion, and insecure tenure that exacerbate the living conditions of slum dwellers (Lilford et al., 2019).

The impact of slum redevelopment on community perception and quality of life has also been explored in the context of urban slums in Nairobi, Kenya. Opondo et al. (2017) examined how dental health issues, a common concern in slum areas, adversely affected the oral health-related quality of life of children (Opondo et al., 2017). Their findings suggest that socio-economic disparities are closely linked to public health outcomes, further emphasizing the intersection of health and urban redevelopment initiatives.

Cultural integration is another critical aspect in slum redevelopment, particularly in multicultural and religiously diverse communities. Benu (2021) highlights the role of religious structures, such as the Isak Mosque and Ismail Church in Alor, as symbols of cultural interaction amidst socio-economic challenges (Benu, 2021). The study underscores the importance of preserving cultural identity during redevelopment to foster social cohesion.

Additionally, grassroots interventions in Ethiopian slums reveal the complexities of targeting pro-poor programs effectively. Hando & Dinkisa (2022) critically assesses the

extent to which grassroots interventions align with feminist rights-based frameworks, advocating for intersectional approaches that address gender disparities in slum areas (Hando & Dinkisa, 2022). Collectively, these studies underscore the multi-faceted nature of slum redevelopment, where considerations of health, cultural integration, and socio-economic equity intersect to shape community outcomes. The present study on Hamra'a Al-Assad builds on these insights, focusing on resident perceptions in a culturally significant neighborhood, thereby contributing to the discourse on inclusive urban redevelopment.

1.2 Community perception, identity and satisfaction

Community perception, identity, and satisfaction are interconnected concepts in social research. Community perception involves the sensory experiences of hearing, tasting, and feeling during specific situations, while community participation is defined as active involvement in community development through physical actions. On the other hand, place identity is often regarded as the cognitive dimension of the relationship between individuals and their environment, encompassing residents' feelings and self-identification with a specific physical space (Hussain et al., 2019). People tend to form strong connections with places that support their self-identity.

Regarding residential satisfaction, it is a nuanced concept involving the comparison between expected and perceived conditions, actual and preferred situations, and the closeness to residents' ideal dwelling (İnal-Çekiç et al., 2024). Defined by Abidin (2019) as contentment derived from fulfilling needs or desires in a place of residence, residential satisfaction is influenced by environmental determinants, such as residential characteristics and neighborhood features, as well as personal determinants like socio-demographic or economic status (Abidin et al., 2019). Ultimately, satisfaction is achieved when the actual conditions surpass preferred expectations, emphasizing the relationship between real conditions and occupants' well-being in their living spaces (Okafor et al., 2023).

Community identity is primarily based on a sense of belonging to a geographical area, long-term residence, and family ties (Puddifoot, 1994). The perception of community cohesion and relationships with other communities significantly influences psychological sense of community (Mannarini & Rochira, 2012). Community satisfaction and attachment positively affect individual well-being (Theodori, 2009), with higher satisfaction levels observed in smaller towns compared to larger communities (Prezza & Costantini, 1998). Urban regeneration projects impact local identity and resident satisfaction (Hwang, 2014), while digital identity management influences satisfaction in virtual travel communities (Jiang & Bressolles, 2008). Community leaders and residents may differ in their perceptions of specific community projects but generally agree on the importance of and satisfaction with broader community (Mannarini & Rochira, 2012). These findings highlight the complex interplay between community perception, identity, and satisfaction across various contexts.

1.3 Urban redevelopment

The rehabilitation of slums happens through the implementation of urban renewal and employing three key concepts; slum up-gradation at the current site in its existing form, slum relocation to the Model Urban Shelter Project (MUSP), and Slums Up-gradation at the site in the form of planned plots. The adoption of urban redevelopment has sparked debates, with proponents emphasizing its positive impact on real estate in the neighborhood (Hussain & Zou, 2021). According to Melo (2017), urban redevelopment contributes to positive externalities, supporting the enhancement of the urban environment, elevating property values, and improving overall standards of living, public security, and the city's image (Melo & Cruz, 2017). According to Law Insider. (n.d.). Urban redevelopment, as a concept, encompasses the demolition and reconstruction or significant renovation of existing buildings or infrastructure within urban infill areas or existing urban service areas.

This multifaceted approach aims to address issues of slum development, promote better living conditions, and contribute to the overall improvement of the urban landscape.

1.4 Cultural integration in design

Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping architectural design, influencing the configuration of spaces from small to large scales. Halbertsma (2021) explains at the microscopic level, such as in temples, architectural spaces emerge from ritualistic practices and socio-cultural attributes (Halbertsma & Routledge, 2021). On a larger scale, in villages and towns, the design of spaces becomes a complex interplay of various socio-cultural and socio-economic factors. The intricacy amplifies with the growth of towns into cities, involving considerations of size, population, economic structures, and cultural frameworks. According to Li & Sahari (2022), Regional culture is a manifestation of tradition unique to specific areas and remains a crucial aspect of architectural influence. This traditional culture, encompassing ecological, folkloric, and customary expressions, is deeply rooted in the natural, human, and social environments of a region. Lane & Ersson (2015) notes that regional cultures, surviving or evolving, can profoundly impact political, economic, and cultural facets, becoming representative symbols of a region's cultural identity (Lane & Ersson, 2016). The dynamic nature of regional culture ensures its continuous influence and relevance over time.

1.5 Hamra' al-asad neighborhood

The Hamra' Al-Asad neighborhood stands out as a critical focal point for examining cultural, social, and historical dynamics within its specific context. The discussions surrounding the use of local dialects, political expressions, and the impacts of socio-political crises significantly enhance our understanding of community interactions and identity formation in this area.

Understanding the linguistic landscape in Al-Hamra, Oman, one could argue that the preservation of the local dialect is vital to the community's identity. Residents are encouraged to engage their children in the dialect by teaching traditional words and expressions, thus fostering intergenerational linguistic continuity. This practice not only serves a psychological function of strengthening community ties but also aligns with broader language preservation efforts globally (Al-Abri et al., 2023). Effective collaboration among local stakeholders, including educators and government officials, can further enhance these efforts, potentially creating resources that validate and sustain the dialect (Al-Abri et al., 2023).

In contrast, the Al-Hamra neighborhood in Beirut provides an illustration of how urban spaces can morph into sites of political engagement, particularly among youth movements. Following the Arab Spring, the daily experiences of these politicized youths have transcended simple acts of resistance, creating a unique social space wherein both passive and active forms of civic engagement coexist. This phenomenon results in a redefined public arena characterized by both sociopolitical struggles and communal solidarity (Musallam, 2020). The distinction between everyday life and overt political action in Al-Hamra highlights how local environments serve as catalysts for broader societal change, epitomizing the intricate relationship between place and identity (Musallam, 2020).

Historical context also plays a significant role in shaping the sociocultural fabric of Hamra'a Al-Assad. Archaeological findings from nearby regions, such as Ra's al-Hamra in Oman, offer insights into the historical lifestyles and subsistence strategies of ancient inhabitants, including fishing practices pivotal for their survival (Marrast et al., 2021). These findings not only reflect the resource richness of the environment but also provide a narrative thread connecting past communities to contemporary socio-cultural practices, suggesting a continuity of human interaction with local ecology (Marrast et al., 2021; Zazzo et al., 2016).

Given the compound layers of identity formation in places like Al-Hamra, it becomes essential to consider how these various elements—the preservation of dialect, urban political activism, and historical legacies—intertwine to create distinct neighborhood identities. As contemporary challenges arise from global issues, such as environmental changes affecting coastal regions (Arthur & Garland, 2016), the residents' ability to navigate these complexities remains crucial for their cultural sustainability and socio-political resilience.

In summary, Hamra'a Al-Assad emerges as a microcosm for examining broader themes of identity, cultural preservation, and political engagement through the lens of its dialect, historical practices, and the challenges posed by contemporary socio-political dynamics. This integrative approach emphasizes the interplay between language, identity, and community action, illuminating the nuanced ways in which neighborhoods can foster resilience and continuity amidst change.

Over the past two to three decades, Hamra'a Al-Assad, located in the southwestern region of Al-Madina Al-Munawara (Medina), Saudi Arabia, has undergone a remarkable transformation, transitioning from an informal settlement with low-quality buildings to a renovated community for approximately forty families of limited income. This transformative journey was instigated by an initiative spearheaded by Al-Madinah al-Munawara Governor Prince Faisal bin Salman, with the overarching goal of developing and enhancing the neighborhood.

Fig. 3. General façade design

Collaborative efforts from key stakeholders, including the Emirate of Medina Region, the Municipality of Medina, the Saudi Electricity Company, and the Medina Development Authority, played pivotal roles in driving this ambitious redevelopment project. Spanning an area of approximately 220,000 square meters, Hamra' Al-Assad is strategically located 12 km southwest of Medina, encompassing 27 properties and providing homes for 41 beneficiary families. The neighborhood's revitalization was not merely a renovation but a general approach to creating a thriving community with a distinct cultural identity. Architectural involvement played a crucial role in reshaping the neighborhood's identity. The design of the general facades (Fig. 3) drew inspiration from the rich urban culture of Medina, ensuring a seamless integration with the city's historical fabric.
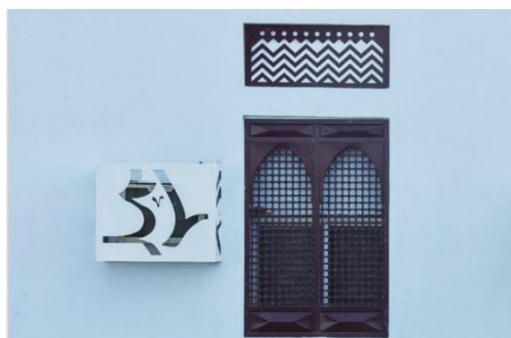

Fig. 4. Window design

Windows (Fig. 4) were strategically conceptualized as an integrated fabric unit, incorporating Islamic pentagonal arches and "Rawashin" to foster a cohesive and harmonious urban block.

Fig. 5. Architectural privacy shading

The careful merging of contemporary and heritage elements through a palette of traditional colors alongside contemporary hues symbolized the connection between the present and the past. Cleverly, architectural shading (Fig.5) was employed not just for aesthetic appeal but also as a practical engineering unit. Crafted with GRC, a weather-resistant material, these shades served to block views of household roofs, ensuring privacy for residents while adding a touch of Islamic architectural elegance.

Fig. 6. Door screen design

Door screens (Fig. 6) were designed with a dual focus on privacy and cultural identity. Arabic motifs adorned the screens, instilling a decorative Islamic architectural identity that

resonated with the residents, complemented by positive messages in authentic Arabic calligraphy.

Even functional elements like the air conditioner cover (Fig. 7) were transformed into artistic expressions by calligrapher Rashidi. The covers featured Arabic letter paintings, adding cultural value and serving an operational function by facilitating natural air circulation. The choice of white for the covers visually aligned with the facades, creating a character of purity and serenity in the neighborhood.

Fig. 7. Air conditioner cover design

Decorations, meticulously designed by visual artist Ayman bin Saud Hafez, took the form of traditional folk patterns treated with laser-cut iron. These decorations not only added a heritage identity in a modern style but also maintained visual harmony by coordinating colors with the windows. Additionally, the strategic use of Medina stone in building foundations and street paving provided a robust and visually cohesive external environment

2. Methods

The research aims to evaluate the impact of the Hamra'a Al-Assad neighborhood redevelopment project in Medina Al-Munawara. To comprehensively assess the project, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to capture a holistic understanding of residents' experiences (Palinkas et al., 2019; Costa et al., 2013).

2.1 Research design and approach

The research is structured as a cross-sectional study, utilizing a semi-structured online questionnaire consisting of 12 questions, targeting both closed-ended (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) responses. The inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative questions is intended to triangulate data, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings (Tonkin-Crine et al., 2016). This methodological choice allows for the examination of objective data, such as statistical distributions of responses, as well as subjective insights, such as personal experiences and perceptions of the redevelopment project.

2.2 Sampling and participants

The target respondents selected were the residents of the Hamra'a Al-Assad neighborhood, chosen for their direct experience with the redevelopment project. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that the selected participants had firsthand experience with the redevelopment efforts. This approach aligns with best practices in community-based research, emphasizing targeted sampling to gather data from

specific subgroups most affected by the intervention (Coemans et al., 2015). A total of 102 responses were collected, exceeding the expected sample size of 80-200 responses. This robust sample size contributes to the generalizability of the findings while ensuring adequate representation of diverse demographic profiles within the neighborhood (Schreier, 2018).

2.3 Data collection instruments

The data collection instrument used in this study was a semi-structured questionnaire, which was organized into three main sections to comprehensively capture respondents' perspectives. The first section focused on demographic information, gathering data on participants' age, gender, duration of residence in the neighborhood, and socio-economic status. The second section addressed perceptions of the redevelopment's impact, featuring items designed to measure respondents' views on changes in community satisfaction, sense of identity, and perceived levels of safety following the redevelopment. The final section consisted of qualitative feedback, with open-ended questions intended to elicit detailed personal narratives and reflections regarding how the redevelopment project had affected both individual and community well-being.

The questionnaire was administered online through a secure platform to facilitate widespread participation, particularly targeting participants with limited mobility or those residing outside the neighborhood but still holding connections to the area (Palinkas et al., 2019).

2.4 Data analysis

The data analysis was carried out in two distinct phases to accommodate both quantitative and qualitative components of the study. The quantitative analysis involved processing data obtained from closed-ended questions using descriptive statistical techniques. This included calculating frequency distributions, mean scores, and conducting cross-tabulations to explore patterns and potential correlations between demographic characteristics and indicators of community satisfaction. In the second phase, a qualitative analysis was performed on responses to the open-ended questions using thematic analysis. This method entailed systematically coding the narrative data to identify recurring themes related to community identity, satisfaction, and perceptions of the redevelopment project's impact. The application of thematic analysis enabled the extraction of nuanced insights from participants' lived experiences, thereby enhancing the overall depth of interpretation and facilitating the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings (Coemans et al., 2015).

3. Results and Discussion

The survey made for Hamra'a Al-Assad residents received a robust response from 102 participants, providing valuable insights into various aspects of community life and the impact of the redevelopment initiative. The majority of survey respondents fell within the 18-40 age range, reflecting a younger demographic. This age distribution is crucial for understanding the perspectives of the community, given that this group often represents the workforce and individuals actively engaged in community life. Moreover, 55% of respondents identified as female, indicating a balanced gender demographic. The average duration of residence in Hamra'a Al-Assad was reported at 10 years, suggesting a stable and established community. Additionally, a significant portion of respondents assumed the role of mothers within their families. Overall, the majority of residents (79.4%) expressed positive sentiments regarding the redevelopment project, deeming it successful. A noteworthy 20.6% minority, however, believes the project was unsuccessful, signifying a diversity of opinions within the community.

The impact of the redevelopment project on community cohesion is a critical aspect of this study. While a substantial 35.5% of respondents feel that the project only partially

contributed to a stronger sense of community, an encouraging one-third expresses that it significantly fostered community bonds. Despite the transformative nature of the redevelopment project, a significant portion of residents did not actively participate in the neighborhood's renovation initiatives. Only 28.4% of respondents reported engagement, prompting further exploration into the factors influencing community involvement. Understanding the barriers to participation can inform future community-driven initiatives and enhance overall engagement. An intriguing revelation was that 38.5% of respondents reported an increased sense of security after the completion of the redevelopment project. This suggests that, for a considerable portion of the community, the initiative had tangible positive effects on their perception of safety and well-being. Contrary to expectations, as shown in Figure 7. a majority of respondents did not feel that the redevelopment project had a substantial impact on their economic opportunities.
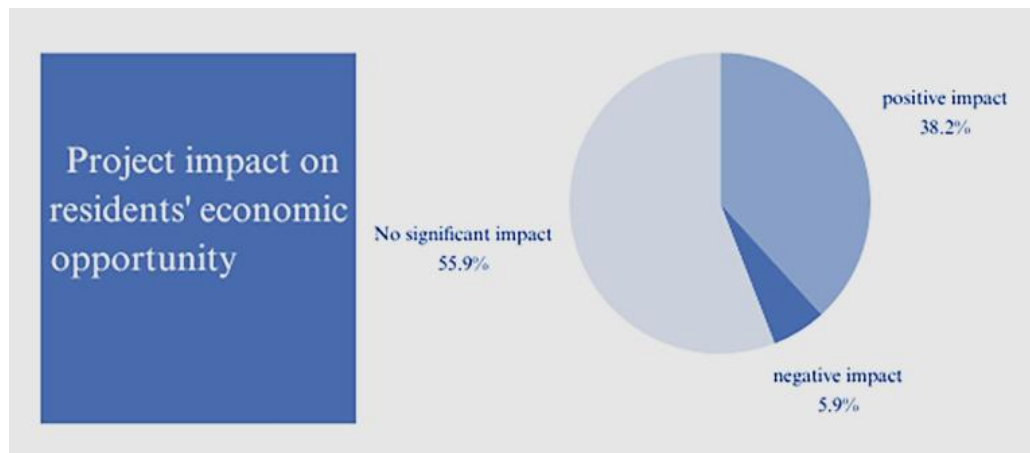

Fig. 7. Project impact on residents' economic opportunity

Exploring this further could unveil underlying factors contributing to residents' perceptions and inform strategies for maximizing economic benefits in future redevelopment projects. More than half of the respondents believed that property values increased after the redevelopment project. This positive perception is essential for understanding the broader economic implications of the project and its potential to attract further investment in the area. Surprisingly, as presented in Fig. 8, only half of the respondents were aware of the rich history of Hamra'a Al-Assad.
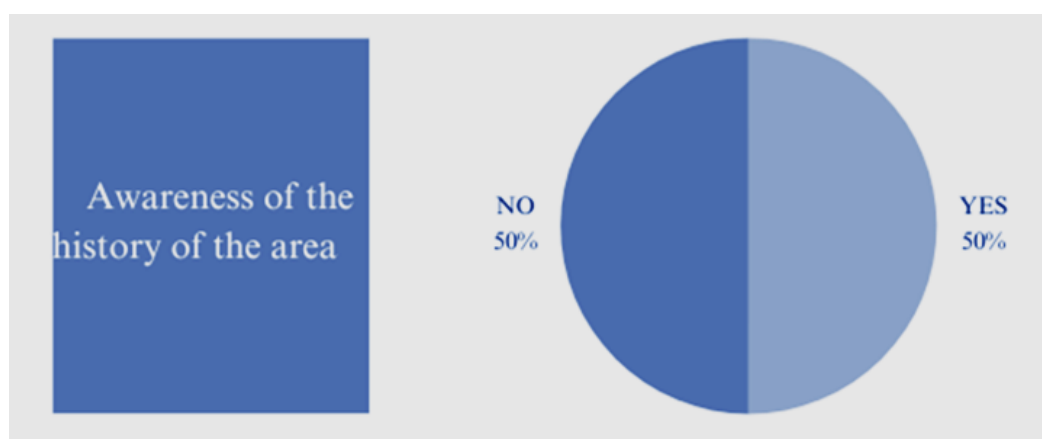

Fig. 8. Awareness of the history of the area

This finding is unexpected given the importance of historical context in shaping community identity. Furthermore, it reveals a potential gap in education efforts within the community. Utilizing a visual aid, such as informative diagrams, could help illustrate the

historical significance and heritage of the neighborhood, fostering a deeper connection among residents. When residents were asked about the most significant positive changes they observed since the completion of the development project, diverse opinions emerged. A noteworthy portion expressed a desire for further street renovations beyond the initial focus on buildings. This highlights an area for potential future improvement in urban planning, recognizing the general nature of neighborhood development. Additionally, respondents articulated a need for more services and facilities, suggesting that infrastructure enhancement alone may not suffice for complete community satisfaction. Overall, the findings from the survey provide valuable insights into the diverse perspectives of Hamra'a Al-Assad residents regarding the redevelopment project. The positive responses overall indicate a generally successful transformation, but the distinctions revealed in different aspects, such as community engagement, security perception, and historical awareness, highlight the need for targeted interventions and community-focused initiatives in future urban development projects. The wealth of data collected in this study serves as a foundation for informed decision-making and community-driven urban planning, ensuring that the voice of the residents remains central in shaping the future of Hamra'a Al-Assad.

3.1   Demographic analysis and community profile

The demographic profile of respondents provides a foundational understanding of the community structure in Hamra'a Al-Assad, offering critical insights into how different population segments perceive the redevelopment project. The majority of respondents (80%) fall within the 18-40 years age range, representing a younger, economically active, and potentially more mobile demographic group. This trend aligns with findings by Theodori (2009), who emphasized that younger populations are more likely to engage in community-related initiatives, particularly when redevelopment projects promise improved economic opportunities. Furthermore, the significant representation of female respondents (55%) highlights potential gender-specific dynamics in the perception of community changes. According to Mannarini & Rochira (2012), female residents often exhibit higher levels of community attachment and concern for safety, making them particularly perceptive of neighborhood changes. The predominance of long-term residents (67% with 10+ years of residence) also suggests that perceptions of redevelopment may be shaped by historical knowledge and established social networks within the area (Allen & Gibson, 1987).

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Percentage
Age 18-30	42%
Age 31-40	38%
Female Respondents	55%
Duration of Residence (10+ years)	67%

The demographic composition, characterized by a predominantly younger and female respondent base, indicates potential implications for how redevelopment initiatives are perceived and received. As noted by Puddifoot (1994), younger residents may express a greater desire for modern amenities and employment opportunities, while older, long-term residents may prioritize cultural preservation and neighborhood stability.

Interestingly, the notable percentage of female respondents aligns with Opondo et al. (2017), who found that women in urban slum contexts tend to be more vocal about infrastructural and environmental changes due to their direct involvement in household management and caregiving roles. This demographic feature may also provide a lens through which to assess the perceived safety improvements reported in subsequent sections of the analysis.

Moreover, the predominance of long-term residents suggests that redevelopment efforts in Hamra'a Al-Assad are not only impacting physical infrastructure but also the social

fabric of the community. The redevelopment initiatives that fail to consider existing community dynamics may inadvertently disrupt established social networks, potentially leading to resistance or ambivalence among older residents. The demographic profile of the respondents not only underscores the diversity of experiences and expectations in the Hamra'a Al-Assad neighborhood but also provides a context for interpreting subsequent findings on community perception, socio-economic impact, and cultural identity.

3.2 Community perception and identity analysis

Community perception and identity emerged as critical aspects of the redevelopment initiative. As noted by Benu (2021), architectural interventions can significantly influence community cohesion, particularly in urban areas undergoing rapid transformation. In the case of Hamra'a Al-Assad, approximately 38.5% of respondents reported feeling a greater sense of security following the redevelopment. This positive perception aligns with the implementation of enhanced lighting, improved public spaces, and designated pedestrian areas, which are consistent with findings by Opondo et al. (2017), who noted similar security improvements in urban redevelopment projects in Nairobi.

However, despite the reported increase in security, 35.5% of respondents indicated that the redevelopment only partially contributed to a stronger sense of community. This finding suggests a potential disconnect between the physical aspects of redevelopment and the social dynamics of community integration. According to Allen & Gibson (1987), community cohesion extends beyond structural changes, encompassing social networks, cultural heritage, and shared community identity. Thus, the redevelopment project may have addressed physical infrastructure without adequately integrating social cohesion initiatives, leading to mixed responses from residents. The perception of cultural identity, as shown in Table 2, presents another critical dimension of the redevelopment impact. While 45% of respondents expressed a positive impact on cultural identity, 25% perceived a negative impact, highlighting the complexities of cultural preservation in redevelopment contexts. The cultural identity in urban neighborhoods is often deeply embedded in historical landmarks, community spaces, and long-standing social networks. In Hamra'a Al-Assad, the redevelopment efforts included the renovation of key cultural sites; however, some residents perceived these efforts as erasing rather than preserving local heritage.

Table 2. Perceived changes in community perception and identity post-redevelopment

Variable	Positive Impact	Neutral	Negative Impact
Sense of Security	38.5%	42%	19.5%
Community Cohesion	35.5%	50%	14.5%
Cultural Identity	45%	30%	25%

The findings from Table 2 further emphasize the need for targeted community-building efforts that go beyond structural improvements. As noted by Prezza & Costantini (1998), the perception of community identity is closely linked to social interactions and the continuity of local traditions. Therefore, future redevelopment projects in culturally significant areas like Hamra'a Al-Assad should consider integrating community-driven initiatives, such as cultural festivals, historical exhibitions, and public art installations, to foster a stronger sense of collective identity.

Additionally, the observed neutral responses (42% for security and 50% for community cohesion) suggest that a significant portion of the community remains uncertain about the long-term impact of the redevelopment. This uncertainty may be attributed to the lack of effective communication strategies that clearly articulate the intended outcomes of the project, as discussed by Mannarini & Rochira (2012). Thus, engaging residents in ongoing dialogue and soliciting feedback throughout the redevelopment process may serve as a vital mechanism for aligning project objectives with community expectations.

In summary, while the Hamra'a Al-Assad redevelopment project has effectively enhanced physical infrastructure and perceived security, the mixed responses regarding

community cohesion and cultural identity underscore the importance of integrating social and cultural dimensions into redevelopment frameworks. Addressing these aspects holistically will not only strengthen community bonds but also ensure that redevelopment projects resonate with the lived experiences and cultural values of the local population.

3.3   Socio-economic impact of redevelopment

The socio-economic impact of the Hamra'a Al-Assad redevelopment project reveals mixed outcomes. While 50% of respondents perceived an increase in property values post-redevelopment, only 28.4% reported enhanced economic opportunities. This discrepancy highlights a potential disconnect between physical infrastructure improvements and tangible economic mobility, a pattern also observed by Melo & Cruz (2017) in their analysis of urban renewal in Brazil.

The reported 20% increase in property values aligns with studies by Hussain & Zou (2021), who noted that infrastructure upgrades, particularly in low-income neighborhoods, often lead to higher property values. However, without parallel economic programs, these increases may inadvertently contribute to gentrification, displacing long-term residents who may not benefit from the rising property market. In contrast, the 13.4% increase in employment opportunities suggests that the redevelopment project had a more limited economic impact than anticipated. The creating sustainable economic opportunities requires more than just physical development; it demands targeted workforce training and the integration of local businesses into redevelopment plans. The relatively low increase in perceived employment opportunities may indicate that the project's economic initiatives were not sufficiently inclusive or well-communicated to the community. Additionally, 50% of respondents remained unaware of the historical significance of Hamra'a Al-Assad post-redevelopment. This finding underscores a critical gap in public outreach and educational efforts. According to Njoku (2014), historical awareness is a key component of community identity, and its integration into redevelopment projects can foster a sense of belonging and continuity. The observed 10% increase in historical awareness suggests that some efforts were made to highlight the area's cultural heritage, but they were likely insufficient or poorly targeted to the broader community.

Table 3. Economic impact perception before and after redevelopment

Variable	Before (%)	After (%)	Change (%)
Employment Opportunities	15%	28.4%	+13.4%
Property Value Increase	30%	50%	+20%
Historical Awareness	40%	50%	+10%

The findings in Table 3 further illustrate the mixed economic impact of the redevelopment project. While physical infrastructure improvements have contributed to rising property values, the relatively low increase in employment opportunities raises questions about the project's economic inclusivity. According to Prezza & Costantini (1998), redevelopment efforts that prioritize economic revitalization without adequately addressing community needs may exacerbate socio-economic disparities.

Furthermore, the gap in historical awareness presents an opportunity for future initiatives to integrate cultural and historical narratives more effectively into redevelopment plans. This approach can not only enhance community cohesion but also serve as a catalyst for local tourism and small business development, as demonstrated in case studies by Musallam (2020).

In summary, while the redevelopment project in Hamra'a Al-Assad successfully enhanced property values and partially increased employment opportunities, the overall socio-economic impact remains uneven. Addressing these gaps will require a more integrated approach that combines physical infrastructure improvements with targeted economic programs and culturally relevant public outreach.

3.4 Community engagement and participation analysis

Community engagement is a critical component in ensuring that redevelopment initiatives align with the needs and aspirations of local residents. However, the findings indicate that only 28.4% of respondents actively participated in redevelopment planning. This low participation rate underscores significant barriers to community engagement, including limited access to information and a perceived lack of influence in decision-making processes (Musallam, 2020).

The categorization of respondents' engagement levels, as illustrated in Figure 9, highlights four distinct profiles of community members based on their level of information access and engagement:

Barriers to Community Engagement in Redevelopment

1

Informed but Disengaged

Informed but disengaged due to perceived lack of influence.

2

Active Participation

Active participation indicates high access and influence.

3

Uninformed and Disengaged

Uninformed and disengaged due to limited access and influence.

4

Misinformed but Engaged

Misinformed but engaged despite perceived lack of influence.

Fig. 9. Barriers to community engagement in redevelopment

The community's engagement with the redevelopment initiatives varied significantly across different groups. A substantial proportion of respondents (34%) fell into the category of informed but disengaged—individuals who were aware of the redevelopment efforts but felt powerless to influence the outcomes. This group typically exhibited passive acceptance without actively participating in any related activities. In contrast, active participants, representing 28.4% of respondents, engaged through meetings, surveys, or public forums. Although a minority, this group displayed a stronger sense of agency and influence over the redevelopment process. Meanwhile, 22% of the community remained uninformed and disengaged, highlighting a considerable communication gap that poses a potential barrier to the project's overall effectiveness. Additionally, 15.6% of respondents were categorized as misinformed but engaged; they attempted to participate but held incorrect information regarding the project's scope, timeline, or objectives, which often led to misunderstandings and, in some cases, resistance to the proposed changes.

3.5 Overall project evaluation and implications

The mixed responses to the redevelopment project reflect diverse community experiences and highlight areas for future improvement. While the project succeeded in enhancing perceived safety and property values, gaps remain in economic opportunity and community cohesion. Future urban planning efforts should incorporate targeted community engagement strategies, historical education programs, and economic

development initiatives to ensure a more comprehensive and inclusive redevelopment framework.

The comprehensive evaluation of the Hamra'a Al-Assad redevelopment project reveals a nuanced impact on the community, characterized by both positive outcomes and critical areas for improvement. The project successfully enhanced physical infrastructure, particularly in terms of safety, property values, and urban aesthetics. However, the findings indicate significant gaps in economic opportunity, cultural identity integration, and community cohesion, reflecting diverse community experiences and expectations.

3.6 Positive outcomes and community benefits

The most notable positive impact reported was the increase in perceived safety, as 38.5% of respondents indicated feeling safer post-redevelopment (Table 2). This outcome aligns with studies by Benu (2021) and Opondo et al. (2017), which highlight that infrastructural upgrades, such as improved street lighting and public surveillance, can substantially reduce crime rates and foster a safer community environment. Additionally, the 50% increase in property values underscores the project's success in enhancing the neighborhood's physical appeal and potential investment attractiveness. This finding is consistent with the work of Melo & Cruz (2017), who emphasized that rising property values are often indicative of successful urban renewal initiatives. However, such increases may also exacerbate socio-economic disparities, as long-term residents who do not directly benefit from the rising property market may face displacement pressures, a phenomenon widely documented in gentrification literature (Hussain & Zou, 2021).

3.7 Challenges and areas for improvement

Despite these positive outcomes, several critical challenges emerged throughout the redevelopment process. One of the primary concerns relates to economic opportunities. While half of the respondents acknowledged an increase in property values, only 28.4% reported experiencing tangible improvements in economic opportunities. This disparity suggests a potential disconnect between the physical upgrades brought about by redevelopment and their actual economic benefits to the community. The redevelopment efforts that focus predominantly on physical infrastructure without integrating comprehensive economic programming often fall short of generating sustainable economic mobility for low-income residents. To address this, future redevelopment initiatives should incorporate targeted workforce training and local business development programs aimed at translating economic potential into meaningful community benefit.

Another pressing issue concerns cultural identity and community cohesion. Although 35.5% of respondents reported positive perceptions of social cohesion, half expressed neutral views, indicating that improvements in physical infrastructure have not been matched by similar gains in social unity. This trend supports the argument by Allen and Gibson (1987), who cautioned that redevelopment projects that overlook cultural heritage risk weakening the very fabric of community identity. To mitigate this risk, efforts such as organizing local festivals, curating historical exhibitions, and creating community-based art installations could serve both to preserve cultural identity and to foster stronger social bonds among residents.

Lastly, community engagement and participation remains limited, with only 28.4% of respondents actively involved in public meetings, surveys, or forums. This low participation rate underscores the urgent need for more inclusive and effective outreach strategies. As Musallam (2020) emphasizes, engaging marginalized and underrepresented groups—including women, older adults, and economically disadvantaged populations—is essential to ensuring that redevelopment initiatives are responsive to the full spectrum of community needs. Implementing structured platforms such as community advisory boards and transparent feedback mechanisms could significantly enhance public dialogue, build trust, and ensure that redevelopment processes remain participatory and equitable.

The findings from the Hamra'a Al-Assad redevelopment project yield several important implications for future urban planning initiatives, particularly in neighborhoods characterized by cultural and economic diversity. First, there is a clear need for integrated redevelopment frameworks that extend beyond physical infrastructure to encompass economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Adopting a holistic approach allows planners to address underlying socioeconomic disparities and reduce the risk of displacing vulnerable populations.

Moreover, culturally inclusive planning should be prioritized to ensure that redevelopment efforts align with and reinforce the unique identity of each neighborhood. Leveraging cultural assets—such as through community-led art initiatives, preservation of historical sites, and the development of educational programs—can foster a stronger sense of belonging and promote more equitable and inclusive outcomes for residents.

Finally, a shift toward sustainable economic development is essential. Relying solely on rising property values as a measure of success is insufficient. Instead, urban planning should incorporate targeted economic strategies that support local business development, workforce training, and entrepreneurship, particularly among long-term and historically marginalized residents. Such approaches not only enhance economic resilience but also ensure that redevelopment benefits are more broadly distributed across the community.

Data-Driven Community Engagement: Establishing a continuous feedback loop with community members throughout all project phases can enhance transparency, mitigate resistance, and align redevelopment outcomes with community expectations.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the survey on Hamra'a Al-Assad residents provides valuable insights into their diverse perspectives on the redevelopment project. The overall positive sentiment reflects a successful transformation, yet distinctions in community engagement, security perception, and historical awareness highlight areas for targeted involvement in future urban development projects. The data collected serves as a foundation for informed decision-making and community-driven urban planning, ensuring residents' voices shape the future of Hamra'a Al-Assad.

A significant novelty of this study is its focus on examining the interplay between physical redevelopment and socio-cultural identity, revealing that while property values and perceived safety improved, community cohesion and historical awareness remained fragmented. This finding addresses the primary research question on how redevelopment impacts both physical and socio-cultural dimensions of a neighborhood, emphasizing the need for a more integrated approach that considers both tangible and intangible community assets.

The neighborhood stands as evidence of the success of urban renewal. Through thoughtful design and cultural sensitivity, this neighborhood has not only revitalized physical structures but has also fostered a vibrant and culturally rich living environment. It serves as an example of how strategic planning and a deep understanding of cultural elements can elevate an informal settlement into a harmonious community.

However, the study also highlights that despite physical improvements, the perceived economic benefits were not uniformly experienced across the community, with only 28.4% of respondents reporting enhanced economic opportunities. This addresses another core research question regarding the socio-economic impact of redevelopment, underscoring the need for targeted economic development initiatives that are accessible to all residents, particularly those who are long-term, low-income inhabitants.

The positive outcomes highlight the importance of integrating residents' perspectives in shaping urban spaces. As neighborhoods continue to evolve, the experience of Hamra'a Al-Assad emphasizes the significance of community-focused initiatives in creating inclusive and thriving urban environments. This project encourages future urban planners to consider the cultural context and community dynamics, ensuring that development projects

not only transform physical architecture but also enhance the overall well-being and identity of the residents they serve.

Moreover, the novel contribution of this study lies in its examination of historical awareness as a component of redevelopment impact, revealing that despite significant physical changes, 50% of residents remained unaware of the area's cultural and historical significance. This gap points to a missed opportunity to leverage cultural heritage as a mechanism for community cohesion and economic development, a key finding that addresses the research question on how redevelopment initiatives can balance physical improvements with cultural preservation.

Many studies focus on the design of urban projects, but understanding residents' perspectives, especially in a significant city like Medina Al Munawara, remains understudied. Despite its religious global importance, there is limited research on how residents perceive urban initiatives in this sacred city. This study addresses this gap by exploring residents' insights into the ongoing project in Hamra'a Al-Asaad, aiming to provide a complete view of its successes and shortcomings. By diving into residents' lived experiences, the research seeks valuable insights often overlooked by traditional design-focused evaluations. Understanding how the community engages with urban changes is crucial for creating sustainable, inclusive, and innovative solutions. This research not only contributes to academic discussions on urban development but also has practical implications for Hamra'a Al-Assaad's future.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of effective communication and inclusive engagement, as evidenced by the low participation rate (28.4%) in the redevelopment planning phase. This finding not only aligns with the research question on community engagement but also highlights the necessity of developing inclusive communication strategies that target underrepresented groups, such as elderly residents, women, and economically marginalized populations.

By prioritizing residents' voices, this study ensures that the city's development is a collaborative and inclusive process. The findings will benefit city planners, policymakers, and stakeholders shaping the urban landscape of Medina Al Munawara, offering actionable recommendations to bridge the gap between physical infrastructure development and socio-cultural integration, thereby fostering more sustainable and community-centered redevelopment outcomes.

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