

# From courtyard to monument: Effect of changing social values on spatial configuration of "the cities of the holy shrines" in Iraq

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**THEME:** Historical Evolution of the Built Form

## Abstract

The cities of the holy shrines of Iraq constitute historic cores of big city centers that have grown and developed since hundreds of years ago. They were first established as shrines for religious personalities (Muslim, Christian, Jewish or from any other religion). The importance of the holy shrines is measured by the number of pilgrims visiting the shrine in any religious event. The most significant cities among these are (NAJAF, KARBALA, SAMARRA, KADHIMIYA), where the number of pilgrims may reach up to 2 million a day during religious events. Therefore, these cities represent main economic hubs of major cities according to the density of visitors during the religious tourism .

The original urban patterns of these cities are unique and prominent among other historic cores in the Middle East and Islamic cities. They have two main elements; the first is the organic compact traditional urban fabric and the second is the holy shrine building, which consists of the courtyard and the shrine. Likewise, the city does not embrace any other monument except the holy shrine with its minarets and domes. In contrary, there currently appears an obvious change in the cities of the holy shrines as a result of rational urban planning intervention. They are now connected together to form historic cores to the movement network in the big city and its new sectors. In spite of these changes, these cities continue to relatively preserve its urban system. Nevertheless, the main challenge of these historic cores is manifested in the changing social values and its impact on the spatial configuration, including the change of the main urban space of the city into a monument surrounded with a street that is accessed via wide vertical streets penetrating the old urban fabric, instead of the old Winding narrow pathways.

The Paper seeks to understand the effect of social value changes to the spatial configuration of these historic urban cores that lead to a conflict in the urban space values as a result of the impact of the linear streets and their new buildings, versus the continuity and the increased centrality of the urban structure arising from the increased. And the Paper also tries to find an answer to the following question: Is it possible to preserve the fundamental spatial configuration of the cities of holy Shrine which is based on Invariant social values despite the changed of morphological characteristics of the historic urban fabric?

## Introduction:

Social values and belief systems have significantly influenced construction techniques and the spatial organization of dwellings to satisfy the evolving community needs and to enhance the place identity and the community's sense of belonging. On the other hand, religion and belief systems contribute to the location

and settlement pattern of different communities. Mosques, Shrine, temples and churches are significant built forms that enhance the identity of a culture.

Today, where spatial and temporal barriers are diminishing, the architecture, cultural heritage and their historical characteristics become dynamic values which combine local and global aspects. Beyond their physical importance, cities have psychological and social importance for their inhabitants. Therefore, historic traditional cities reflect the local socio-cultural values and psychological meanings of the city. For that reason, a holistic approach should be adopted to maintain the character of these valuable cities and move them forward in future developments to maintain social and cultural sustainability and help people to bind their lives with the past, present and future.

This Paper discusses the urban intervention as one of the main problems that encounters the Arab historic cores as in the cities of the holy Shrines (chS) and all changes and transformations affected these cores by time after attempts made to merge the historic cores with the new urban sectors through master plans, urban development strategies and comprehensive transportation plans, by the clearance parts of the old urban fabric which caused the change social values and loss of synthetic's characteristics and the weak potential of achieving the physical and social requirements of the occupants of these cores.

**The General Problem;** It is identified in the separating central public space "the courtyard of the city of the holy Shrine" from their organic context and exposing it as if it was isolated monuments, resulting from the trend towards rational planning to link the historic core with new sectors in the major city. This approach allowed an intervention by using linear streets that penetrate these cores and divide its urban fabric, causing initially a social-spatial segregation. It is what made (chS) include two systems of values, first the original value system of the(chS) and the second system of contemporary life values associated with new sectors of the major city. As that the trend towards rational planning by using "the penetrating linear streets" is not always motivated by mere traffic considerations, but to enhance the shrine as a central monument building which attracting large numbers of national and international visitors (pilgrims) and to deliver adequate utilities to the Shrine.

In view of the continuity of the importance of shrines as a religious value that's behind the emergence of the historical core, the Paper discussed the problem through introducing the concept of "change and the stability of the social values "of the (chS)as historic cores. In light of the discussions of the studies that handled the general problem with this concept, the Paper problem was identified in the lack of a clear vision on the effect of changing the social values on the spatial configuration. However, the Paper thesis was "spatial configuration of space follows the invariant social values, even if the visible urban form of the (chS) is changed.

#### **. The objectives:**

The primary research objectives are:

1. Identify appropriate methodology to study and quantify the spatial configurations of organically evolved built environments of the (chS)in Iraq.
2. Build intellectual model explains the relationship between social values and special configuration.
3. Determine the effect of changing social values on spatial configuration of the (chS).

**Methodology:**

In order to achieve the objectives of the research, it was required to adopt a methodology that was correlated to: (a.) Building an epistemological base that embraces the of the concept of the (chS) in Iraq as a historic cores, characteristics of the spatial structure, the social values associated with spatial configuration and then, reaching a intellectual model to determine the relationship between the social values and spatial configuration.(b.) Using space syntax theory as a tool to monitor the spatial configuration evolution to four (chS) in Iraq to investigate the effect of changing social values on spatial configuration system in a comparative analysis method for maps and statics.

The comparative analysis of two different configurational cases of the 1<sup>st</sup>. stage (1920s) and 3<sup>rd</sup> stage after (1990) in Al-Kadhimiya.

**Conclusion:**

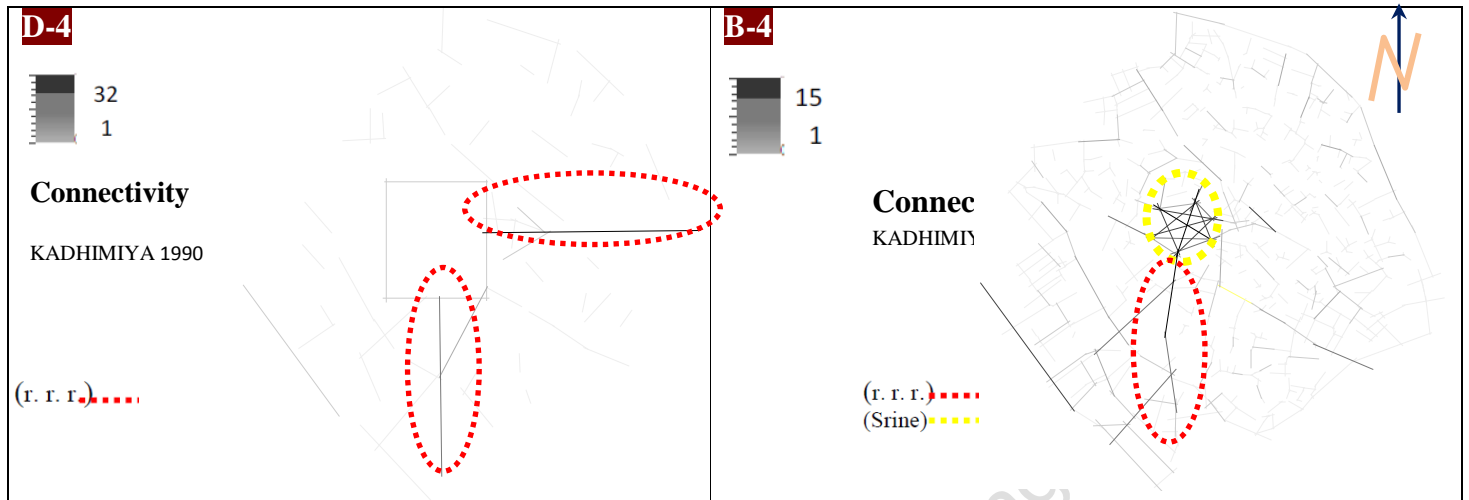
This paper revealed the importance of the social values (religious beliefs and practices) for the (chS) in determining the main characteristics of their urban structures. Through the space syntax theory and tools, the effect of changing social values on the spatial configuration has been confirmed, after it has been building a intellectual model of the relationship between the two variables. And made an attempt to prove the hypothesis, which was "spatial configuration of space follows the invariant social values, even if the visible urban form of the (chS) is changed, so the spatial configuration is more invariant from formal configuration of the(chS). While the variant social values correlates with urban form and patterns which are subject to the human and social needs and that it changing over time.

An integration that has occurred between the new (the linear streets) and the old (the old urban fabric) in the cities of the holy Shrine is based on the invariant social values as a forces that generate the configurational relations between the centre of cultural life) representative by the new broad linear street as (ritual route) which passes and contains the monument (Shrine)as a central place and the with the rest of the narrow winding streets of the old fabric ,and this configuration represent the invariant genetic patterns that specify these cities. This view contradicts with a concept (design principles stemmed from Islamic law), because of the values can be represented in many forms while maintaining their "importance, necessity and centrality" for society.

Consequently, this paper confirms it is possible to preserve the old urban historic fabric despite the changes in the social values lying behind the formal configuration of this fabric and the continuity of its "invariant social values" that correlated to the religious function that determines the spatial configuration of the (chS).

It is important to highlight the social values as an operators for a spatial configuration "of the cities of the holy shrines" especially it is receives" the millions going to the shrine, which exposing "urban fabric" in danger of complete elimination and immigration the societies , as it happened in (Al-Medina in KSA) where the historical urban fabric surrounding the mosque of Prophet was removed entirely and replaced it with a high buildings as a gentrification approach , necessitating the need to pay attention to this cities as a world Heritage.

Figure (7) The comparative analysis of connectivity between 1<sup>st</sup> stage, 3rd stage of Al-KADHIMIYA



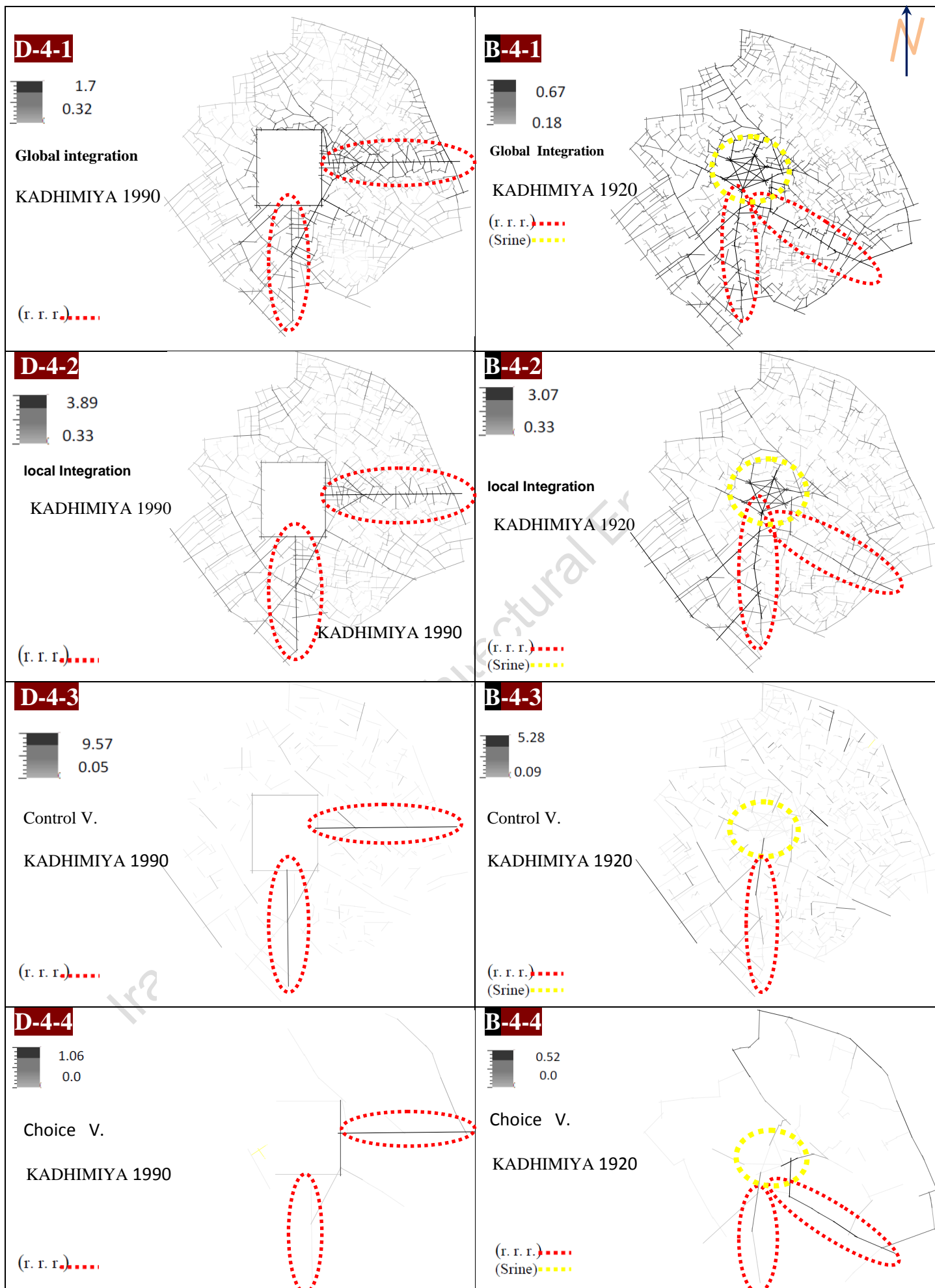


Figure (8) The comparative analysis of two different configurational cases 1<sup>st</sup> stage, 3<sup>rd</sup> stage of Al-KADHIMIYA

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