WHAT MAKES AN ATTRACTIVE USER-FRIENDLY STREET? EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF MAWLAWI SHOPPING STREET ENVIRONMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF SULAYMANIYAH CITY, IRAQ

Omar Abdulwahhab Khalaf[1], Nor Haslina Ja`afar[2], Nor Zalina Harun[3], Noraziah Mohammed[4], Omar Hussein Ali[5]

[1]*Faculty of Engineering, Department of Architectural Engineering*
TISHK INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY-ERBIL, KRG, IRAQ
[1,2,4,5] *Architecture and Built Environment Department, Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment*
UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA
[3] *Institute of the Malay World and Civilization (ATMA),*
UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA

Abstract

Streets are one of the vital components of an urban form that supports the city dwellers' public and private activities. Therefore, the purpose of attraction is necessary for persuading people to use the street and presenting the image of the city. Thus, the problem statement of this paper is that attractiveness of the shopping street decreases due to the presence of too much traffic management, and an uncomfortable environment attributed to an over-presence of traffic lights. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to determine the attraction factors associated with the user-friendliness of the shopping streets. This paper uses a case study approach of Mawlawi Street in Sulaymaniyah city in Iraq. The methodology used is the quantitative method via a survey of users (n = 330). The data were analysed statistically by SPSS using the mean values. The results show that the cultural attraction factor is the strongest form that contributes to people using the shopping street with a mean value of 3.1446. It is expected that the findings from this study will help designers, urban planners and policymakers to understand the needs and attitudes of users towards creating an attractive user-friendly shopping street environment in Iraq.

Keyword: user-friendly street, street attractions, user perceptions, attractive environment, shopping street, Mawlawi Street, Sulaymaniyah

[1] Lecturer at Tishk International University and PhD Student at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Email: omar.abdulwahab@tiu.edu.iq

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INTRODUCTION

This research identifies the idea of "user-friendly shopping street" in Sulaymaniyah city centre in Iraq. The major focus is to research on the physical design features and the main attractions in the shopping areas in terms of physical, social, and cultural aspects. Such attractions are strongly connected with the mixed use of the streets through various activities in places with building that have architectural features (Gehl, 2010).

Based on the problems highlighted by recent studies, urban shopping streets are regarded as not user friendly as many of the streets do not fulfil user's needs. The urban shopping streets are also found to have lack of connection with main attractions in terms of physical, social, and cultural, despite the fact that these are the most vibrant aspects that provide the image of user-friendly built environment (Capitanio, 2019; Khalaf et al., 2021).

Urban areas all over the world are now experiencing the challenge of domination of private vehicles. Other than that, issues such as insufficient amount of the walking streets as well as poorly designed path make it difficult for the pedestrians to utilize the walking area (Chua & Ahmad, 2021).
In Iraq, the rapid economic growth after the war in 2003 has made the citizens prefer the use of private cars, resulting in difficulties of preserving good walking environment and cause unattractive surroundings for shopping area (Khder et al., 2016). The unpleasant quality of the built environment in most of the city's historical street has made the streets to be inactive most of the time. Therefore, it is essential to improve the attractiveness level of the shopping street by focusing mainly on the design and provision of streetscape elements (Handoyo & Wijayanti, 2021; Mazin & Radi, 2019).

This paper presents the attractions factors that users associate with the user-friendliness of the shopping street in Mawlawi Street, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq.
It is expected that the findings from this study will help designers, urban planners, and policymakers to understand users' needs and attitudes towards user-friendly shopping street in Sulaymaniyah context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have highlighted that there is a major difference between the definition of a road and a street. Road is known as "an ordinary route of communication between different places for travellers using vehicles." In contrast, a street is referred as "an enclosed space between two lines of adjacent buildings" (Ernawati et al., 2018; Moughtin, 2003; Yassin, 2019). In this perception, streets are more inclined to be people-oriented that caters to people's functional, leisure, and social requirements (Jacobs, 2013; Moura et al., 2017; Wan Ismail et al., 2018). It is essential for streets to be user-friendly in order to

provide a liveable environment for users such as pedestrians (Jaafar et al., 2017; Khalaf & Ja`afar, 2020).

Among all publicly accessible space in a city, streets, much like parks, are the most used by the city dwellers. Thus, the characteristics of a street and its qualities must meet the needs of all users (Wan Ismail et al., 2018; Yassin, 2019). In this research, street is regarded as "one of the essential elements in designing an urban space" (Ali et al., 2019; Sipan et al., 2021).

The term "user-friendly" in this study refers to a functional balance among factors like social needs, environmental as well as financial constraints (Shamsuddin.S et al., 2002). The level of user-friendliness of the street is an important factor to bring people to the street (Asadi-Shekari et al., 2019; Harun et al., 2020). Therefore, the understanding of current users' needs in a specific context is important (Chladek, 2019; Rahman et al., 2016). By understanding the specific contextual needs in space, a remedy that leads to the street improvement can be strategized (Rahman & Shamsuddin, 2010). One of the challenges for urban and transport planners is negligence in providing the appropriate places for walking which could attract pedestrians in cities (Elhamy, 2012; Khalaf & Ja`afar, 2020; Roozkhosh et al., 2020).

Attractions on the street represent factors that user-friendly shopping streets possess (Taylor, N., 1999; Jacobs, 1993; Rahman et al., 2015b). Attractive pedestrian environments are also linked to economic benefits because financial returns derived from land or property value increase with lively and high-quality streets (Capitanio, 2019; Carmelino & Hanazato, 2019).
Streets may be made to attract and suit pedestrians by considering several factors. For instance, when a street is designed to improve its aesthetic qualities, people become more attracted to the street and hence use it more. Another factor in making the street more attractive is the consideration of night-time activities and allowing the street to cater to diverse functions. Furthermore, successful public pedestrian area should have open spaces that are accessible, well-designed, and comfortable (Ismael et al., 2019; Sepe & Pitt, 2013). Abbaszadeh (2011) discussed that buildings' features must form an attractive public environment, as well as creating places that could be seen and enjoyed by the public.

In this paper, attractive is categorised in physical, social, and cultural aspects of the use of streets where various activities are conducted at buildings and architectural feature (Gehl, 2010).

Streets supply a space for commercial activities such as stores, service facilities such as banks, post offices, and social spaces for health, education, administration, cultural facilities, and political activities. In addition, public spaces all over the city can be used for variety of activities (2012; Ja'Afar et al., 2017; Mehta, 2018).

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Physical attractiveness is represented by the physical factors at the spatial rank availability, facilities, lighting, landscape, recreational space, and safety of the users (Nathiwutthikun K., 2006; Cambra & Moura, 2020; Rahman et al., 2018). Physical aspects of street consist of providing devices and facilities for users' daily needs. The physical role covers the shape and size of the street as well as visual complication (visual and aesthetic factors such as seating, landscaping to subspaces, protection and shield lighting from the sun and cold and human being scale) (Zeka B., 2011; Tandon & Sehgal, 2017). It is also important to combine elements such as architectural style, materials and traditions, relationship of buildings to landscape, history, and economic factors to create distinctive and specific places to their location, not the qualities of somewhere else (Cadw, 2013; Al-Obeidy, 2015).

In terms of social attractiveness, attractive public spaces in urban areas are paramount to construct the feeling of comfort or wellbeing to the users. Attractiveness is strongly connected with the mixed-use of streets, various activities and good places with buildings and architectural features (Gehl, 2010). The social components' personalisation, vending activities, kiosks, shows and performances, activities involving human desires and needs can be considered when upgrading a street to achieve a more cohesive society (Mazin & Radi, 2019). Sociable streets are streets that can offer various purposes such as socialising, daily or festive shopping, dining, lingering, promenading, holding celebration or protest, and survival. Such streets are the desired component of any good mixed-use neighbourhood and therefore of any good city (Chladek, 2019; Mehta, 2018). All this leads to greater social participation, gathering, and communications among society, which provides greater linkage in the community (Mazin & Radi, 2019).

In contrast, cultural components give streets a sense of place and identity that consider the local and regional context (Initiative Global Designing Cities, 2016). The cultural components include the sense of place (local and regional contexts), time factor, adequate personal space, and demographic structure (Initiative Global Designing Cities, 2016). They also consider diversity, change, and a sense of history from the street's years and the successive decisions regarding design, construction, or reconstruction (Jacobs, 2013; Mazin & Radi, 2019). Across the world, there are cities that have some major streets which anchor significant civic, cultural, and commercial buildings and spaces. Such streets host various historical memories of the city. Revitalising such streets provides an easy way to restore image and identity (Ja'afar & Harun, 2018; Mehta, 2018).

This paper categorises attractiveness into three: (1) physical, (2) social, and (3) cultural. Physical attractiveness means that the street is traditionally situated in the city centre where it becomes the most common place to earn

income. The physically attractive street is regarded as the main source of commerce and labour through the presence of shopping centres. It must also have the presence of landscapes and public spaces with adequate public facilities as well as attractive buildings. The second type which is social attractiveness means the street must have leisure and aesthetic value. Such street will make the users to feel comfortable with the presence of various types of outdoor cafes, refreshment kiosksas this kind of street is suitable for people to gather for different activities The users of the street would feel relax whenever they use a socially attractive street. Finally cultural attractiveness is regarded as streets that have culturally unique name that remind the users of sweet memories which reflect the city's identity, and the historical values it possesses.

METHODOLOGY
This research uses quantitative methodology. A total of 330 questionnaires were distributed. The respondents were asked to answer the variables regarding the attractiveness of street attractions that they perceived. All the data were analysed using the SPSS 2017 version 25.0 software. The questionnaires used items with 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *undecided*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The 5-point scale is chosen when researchers want to collect many attitudes in a short time. The highest mean values among the three categories of attractiveness and between each one of them were recorded. The range of 3 to 5 was determined for the mean score, where 3 represents the scale's midpoint (Johns, R., 2005; Ali et al., 2020).

CASE STUDY
The data were collected from Sulaymaniyah city centre users. The city of Sulaymaniyah is the centre of Kurdish culture with historical values (S. Hisham, et al., 2019). The study focuses on users' needs in the shopping area and the relationships with physical, cultural, and social attractions of the built environments.

Mawlawi Street is chosen because the street is one of the busiest and the most famous shopping streets located in the city centre of Sulaymaniyah in Iraq. It can be considered as the main link that connects the city centre and historical areas to the Public Park and Salm Street (Figure 1).

The width of the street is 15 m, and it is almost 1 km long. It is the entrance to the city centre and historic district in Sulaymaniyah (Taha H., 2007). There are various activities on both sides of the street, including hotels, green groceries, retail shops, restaurants, book shops, and informal activities such as vendors and hawkers (Figure 2). However, the lack of efficient public transportation has made the city dwellers to become more dependent on private cars. After 2003, most of the residential houses around Mawlawi Street were

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bought by traders who have now demolished the houses and converted them to commercial buildings (Khder et al., 2016).
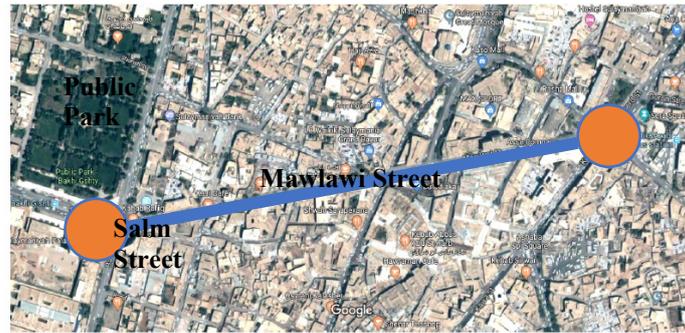

Figure 1: Mawlawi Commercial Street- Sulaymaniyah City Centre
Source: (Google earth)

Figure 2: Mawlawi Street land use
Source: (Khder et al., 2016)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that the cultural attractions (3.1446) are the most attractive attractions for Mawlawi Street, followed by social attractions (2.9503) and physical attractions (2.9022). This finding shows that cultural attractiveness is the strongest form that contributes to people using the shopping street (Figure 3). Shopping streets are crucial to the liveability of any city because they accentuate lifestyle features that are distinct by forms of activity from the social and cultural values of people leveraged by shopping habits. Hence, streets attractions must be friendly, culturally and socially convenient for users to attend shopping event compared to the physical aspects (Carmelino & Hanazato, 2019). In addition, the streets are culture-specific, which have been developed over the years (Tandon & Sehgal, 2017).

Table 1: Degree of Attractiveness based on Mean Values

Descriptive Statistics

Category	Variables	Mean Values
Cultural Attractiveness		3.1446
	Name of the Mawlawi Street itself	3.2727
	Remind of sweet memories	3.1515
	Reflect Sulaymaniyah identity	3.1242
	The historical values it possesses	3.0303
Social Attractiveness		2.9503
	Its leisure and aesthetic value	3.1152
	It makes me feel comfortable and well-being of using it	3.0576
	Lots of outdoor cafes, refreshment kiosks	2.9545
	This street gathers people to do different activities	2.8788
	It makes me feel relaxed when using this street	2.7455
Physical Attractiveness		2.9022
	It is traditionally situated in the city centre	3.0545
	Attractive best place to earn money or income	3.0515
	Presence of the landscapes	3.0182
	Presence of the public spaces	2.9182
	It is regarded as the main source of commerce and labour	2.8939
	Presence of public facilities	2.8333
	Attractive buildings	2.7939
	Presence of shopping centres	2.6545
Mean Value Response format 1=strongly disagree 5= strongly agree		2.9343

Source: (Field surveying 2020)

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Figure 3: The Main Attractions of Mawlawi Street
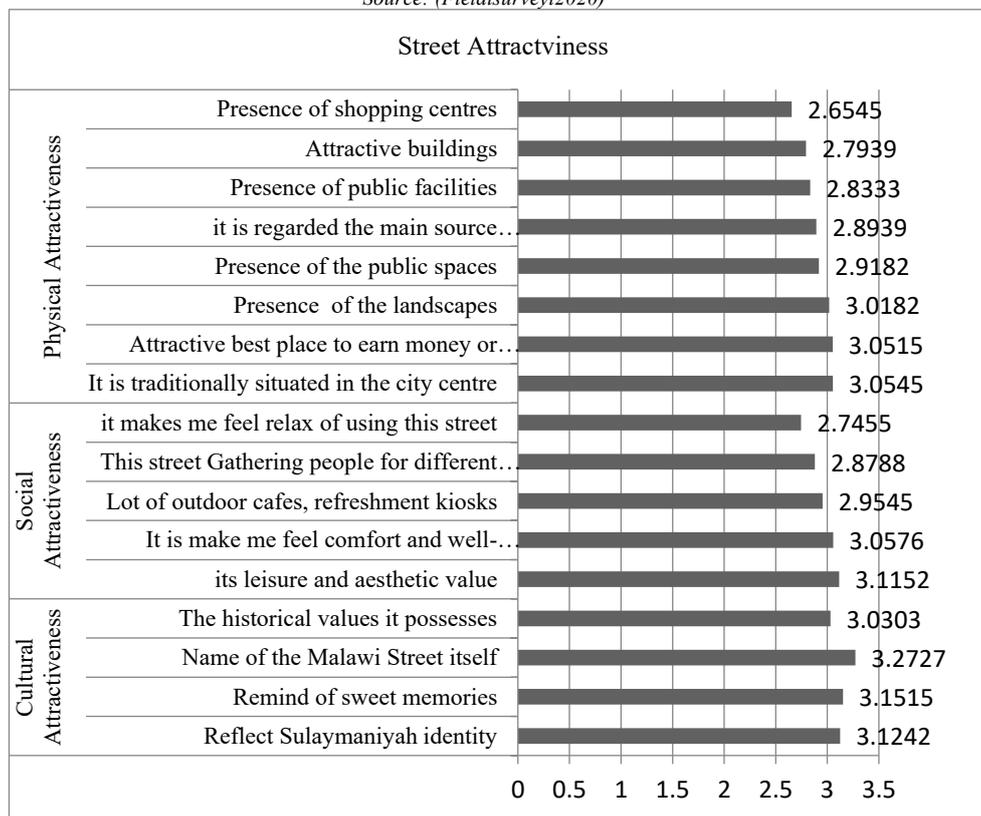*Source: (Fieldisurveyi2020)*

Figure 3 shows that the respondents acknowledge Mawlawi Street's cultural attractions as the main factor of its role as a shopping street from the responses such as "name of the Mawlawi Street itself" (3.2727), "remind of sweet memories" (3.1515), "reflect Sulaymaniyah identity" (3.1242), and "the historical values it possesses" (3.0303). The results portray that a sense of alternate relationship and friendliness are present among users in Mawlawi Street. This is due to the reputation of a Kurdish culture city and the attractive town gained by Sulaymaniyah city over the years, making the city habited by different types of users (Khder et al., 2016). Cultural components give streets a sense of place and identity that considers the local and regional context in addition to creating a user-friendly place (Jacobs, 1993; Mazin & Radi, 2019; Initiative Global Designing Cities, 2016).

This is an important contribution of the study because not all shopping street with user-friendly design elements from other countries with different culture are suitable for Iraq.

The results show that social attractiveness has a higher mean value (2.9503) compared to physical attractiveness. This clarifies that users are more attracted to social elements from the statements "its leisure and aesthetic value" by mean value of 3.1152, and "it is making me feel comfortable and well-being of using it" by mean value of 3.0576. This illustrates that the street offers less social opportunities among the users of Mawlawi Street because the street is too crowded for any outdoor activities. According to Ismael et al. (2019), public spaces are some of the most important city elements.

In short, the social attractiveness influences the user-friendly environment design of shopping street on user perceptions in Mawlawi Street, Iraq. Although the street is not socially attractive for social activities, a good social attractiveness of the shopping street design should be achieved by integrating its aesthetic values and outdoor refreshment activities to attract shopping environment.

The results portray that physical attractiveness has the lowest mean value of 2.9022 on user perception. The most significant mean value is 3.0545 for "this street is traditionally situated in the city centre", 3.0515 for "attractive best place to earn money or income", and 3.0182) for "presence of the landscapes".

In addition, the dissatisfied features of the shopping environment in such historic street have made the street unattractive most of the time (Khder et al., 2016). Previous studies stated that shopping streets are more attached to the common sense of the commercial event compared to the physical setting (Carmelino & Hanazato, 2019; Mazin & Radi, 2019; Mehta, 2018; Moura et al., 2017).

In short, physical attractiveness is important because it will enhance the function of a street as a user-friendly shopping street by considering the functions, such as the attractive best place to earn money or income. Physically attractive street is regarded as the main source of commerce and labour where it will attract people to the street for gatherings.

CONCLUSIONS
In conclusion, cultural attractiveness is the highest attractions among all variables in the context of Mawlawi Street in Sulaymaniyah city. However, the street is not socially and physically attractive in some parts of the items. Thus, the provision and design of the cultural attractions have a significant role in improving attractiveness in the shopping street in Iraq generally and in northern Iraqi cities in Sulaymaniyah particularly.

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It is also noteworthy that the variables that contribute to the attractiveness vary for each context, especially countries with a different climate and economic level such as between developing and developed countries or culture of the place. This identifies the variables that need to be considered in future guidelines and policies for planning and design in urban spaces, especially shopping streets. It is hoped that these attractiveness factors will be considered by those involved with the decision making in urban design, as a guide to create a user-friendly shopping street environment that is generally lacking in the current urban streets.

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