



Cultural Memory as Urban Identity: Assessing Heritage Preservation in Alexandria



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Abstract: Cultural memory plays a crucial role in shaping the identity and continuity of cities so as to reflect their historical narratives, traditions, and collective experiences. Cities serve as repositories of memory, where architecture, public spaces, monuments, and urban landscapes embody the past while influencing contemporary urban life. However, rapid urbanization, globalization, and socio-political transformations often challenge the preservation of cultural memory, thus leading to the loss or redefinition of historical narratives. Sustainable urban development and adaptive reuse of heritage sites offer pathways to maintaining cultural memory while accommodating modern needs. This paper explored the importance of cultural memory in urban contexts with a particular focus on the relationship between conservation and user experience. The exploration primarily involved extracting fundamental principles and guidelines from leading international bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), whose conferences and charters emphasized the importance of cultural continuity, community involvement, and context-sensitive design in the preservation of urban heritage. These principles were applied as assessment criteria to evaluate the selected sites in Alexandria, a city in Egypt, which has undergone significant renovation projects in recent years. By aligning these projects with international preservation standards, the paper highlighted the successes and shortcomings of local interventions. Ultimately, cultural memory could be embedded into the physical and experiential layers of the city whereas urban development could remain rooted in identity, history, and continuity to preserve the legacy of cultural heritage.

Keywords: Cultural memory; Urbanization; Preservation; Alexandria; Adaptation

1 Introduction

Cities worldwide are going through major changes that often threaten their historical and cultural identities in the context of fast urbanization and globalization. The preservation of cultural memory inside urban environments has therefore become a major issue in current architectural and urban planning conversation. Cultural memory, embodied in buildings, public spaces, customs, and shared stories, forms a crucial link connecting the past, present, and future of a city; it shapes communal identities and promotes a sense of belonging.

Urban areas are more than infrastructure and functions; they are living archives of collective memory. Cultural memory, the shared pool of knowledge and traditions passed across generations, finds a tangible form in the built environment. From ancient alleyways to public squares, urban spaces silently carry the narratives of identity, struggle, heritage, and belonging. Urban planning, therefore, plays a crucial role not only in shaping the physical layout of cities but also in determining the memories to be preserved, altered, or erased. Cultural memory in the urban context shapes the relationship between people and their environment:

→ **Identity:** Cities with preserved memory sites reinforce a sense of “who we are” by showing “where we come from”.

→ **Belonging:** Familiar architectural styles, historic neighborhoods, and public rituals help residents feel rooted in their community.

→ **Continuity:** Memory-rich environments provide a psychological anchor, especially during rapid social and political changes.

Academic studies highlighted the maintenance of cultural memory for improving urban sustainability and social cohesion. For example, research showed that memory-oriented urban renewal could offset the uniformity of metropolitan areas by giving first priority to the preservation of collective memory and cultural legacy [1]. Furthermore, incorporating cultural legacy preservation into urban development strategies could help communities strengthen their social and historical links to locations and past [2].

Preserving cultural memory in urban development aims to maintain the unique identity of a city, foster a sense of belonging, and ensure continuity between the past, present, and future. This involves safeguarding both tangible elements such as historic buildings and streetscapes, and intangible aspects like traditions and collective memories. Integrating cultural memory into urban planning not only protects valuable traditions and stories but also creates spaces that resonate with local identity and collective experiences. Such an approach enhances social cohesion, strengthens emotional connections between people and places, and supports sustainable development by reusing existing structures and preserving the distinctiveness of the urban landscape. Ultimately, preserving cultural memory ensures that progress does not come at the cost of erasing the rich layers of history that define the soul of a city [3].

Disconnection from cultural memory through urban neglect could lead to a loss of identity, emotional disorientation, and a weakening of community ties. The way urban environments are designed and managed can either reinforce a sense of continuity and psychological well-being or contribute to cultural disconnection and alienation. This paper explored the preservation of cultural memory through urban planning and its contribution to communal resilience and emotional health, thus highlighting the key aspects, persistent challenges, and broader implications of forgetting versus remembering in the ever-evolving urban landscape.

Alexandria in Egypt holds a unique cultural identity that is paramount to its people. This identity is shaped by a rich tapestry of history, geography, and social diversity, thus making it one of the most culturally layered cities in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean Sea plays a central role in Alexandrian identity by shaping the mood, lifestyle, and economy of the city. The Corniche, the seaside promenade, is not just a physical space but also a cultural symbol of freedom, reflection, and community. The sea is both a metaphor and a literal backdrop to the Alexandrian way of life.

In modern times, Alexandrians could feel the tension between preserving their unique identity and adapting to rapid urbanization and socio-political changes. People have a strong sense of nostalgia for the golden eras of the city; intellectuals and youth are actively engaging in the movement to revive the cultural soul in Alexandria.

2 Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and evaluative strategies to explore the preservation of cultural memory in Alexandria. It began with an extensive review of the academic literature, governmental and organizational reports, historical accounts, and documents about urban policy to establish a foundational understanding of the cultural landscape and heritage practices in this historical place. The research focused on a set of historically and culturally significant case studies with diverse approaches to safeguard urban cultural memory, as the sites visited in their pre- and post-renovation states involving Sayed Darwish Theatre, El Salam Theatre, Fouad Street, Nabi Daniel Street, the Citadel of Qaitbay, and El Montazah Park represented iconic landmarks in Alexandria.

Apart from the desk-based research, the methodology included fieldwork like site visits to each of the selected locations. These visits were conducted to directly observe current physical conditions, ongoing preservation efforts, and spatial dynamics in relation to cultural memory. The field observations provided insight into the sensory and material aspects of place identities, thus allowing a grounded understanding of the perception and on-site experience of the heritage.

To further enrich the data, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including local residents, shop owners, heritage professionals, urban planners, and municipal officials. These interviews aimed to capture community perspectives on the value of cultural memory, the perceived threats to heritage, and local aspirations for preservation. The participatory element enabled a bottom-up understanding of urban memory that extended beyond official narratives.

The study identified key strategies for the preservation of cultural memory, including the recognition of urban heritage as a vital element of collective identity, the adoption of a landscape approach to conservation, the integration of heritage policies into local governance, and the use of documentation and mapping tools. Additionally, it emphasized the importance of legal frameworks, financial mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement. A qualitative content analysis was conducted on documents and interview transcripts, while an assessment and ranking system was developed to evaluate the effectiveness of preservation efforts and to propose context-sensitive strategies that prioritize identity and memory retention. To ensure objectivity, a standardized questionnaire was designed based on synthesized criteria, addressing dimensions such as cultural memory, urban identity, environmental responsibility, and community participation. This questionnaire was distributed to a panel of 21 experts, including professors of urban planning in Egyptian universities and specialized urban development engineers who have actively participated in project implementation. Their responses were collected and aggregated; the obtained final rankings could reflect the average

scores across all evaluations. This approach minimized individual bias, strengthened intersubjective reliability, and provided a strong foundation for the comparative analysis of the heritage sites in Alexandria.

3 Conceptualization of Cultural Memory

Jan Assmann, a leading scholar on memory studies, introduced the concept of cultural memory as a form of collective memory maintained through cultural expressions and long-term institutions, not just interpersonal communication. According to Assmann [4], cultural memory was defined as “institutionalized, formally conveyed, and ceremonially repeated knowledge that forms a community’s shared identity over centuries”.

In the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in year 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined intangible heritage as traditions, performing arts, rituals, and knowledge that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage provides communities with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity [5].

In accordance with the Memory of the World Program in year 1992, the UNESCO highlighted the safeguarding of documentary heritage like archives, manuscripts, and oral histories to ensure their accessibility to the public.

The global documentary heritage belongs to all, and must be fully preserved and protected to ensure universal access to memory and knowledge for future generations [6]. This kind of memory is preserved in symbols, rituals, architecture, literature, and public spaces. Unlike communicative memory which is informal and personal, cultural memory is structured and enduring [4]. Assmann [4] distinguished two types of collective memory, presented in Figure 1: Communicative memory, spanning typically 80 to 100 years, encompasses everyday memories shared within a community [4, 7] whereas cultural memory extends over centuries and is maintained through cultural formations such as texts, rituals, monuments, and other symbolic practices [8].

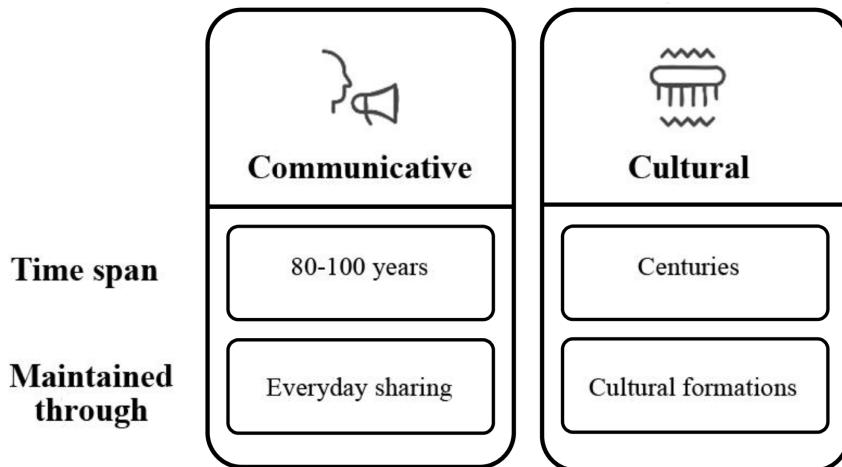


Figure 1. Comparison between communicative and cultural memories

4 Urban Spaces as Archives of Memory

Urban spaces act as archives of memory in the urban context, thus materializing cultural and historical narratives in ways that influence how communities see themselves and relate to their environments, “the city can be seen as a text written by history. Every building and street contain traces of past lives, ideologies, and identities” [9]. The World Heritage Convention asserted that monuments, cities, and landscapes embodied the collective memory of humanity, and that their loss was a loss to the entire world. It stated, “The deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all nations of the world” [10]. Cities serve as repositories of cultural memory, thus embedding collective narratives within their built environments as manifested in various elements.

Monuments serve as deliberate acts of remembering. Whether statues or memorial parks, often celebrating collective achievements or mourning shared losses, encode specific historical narratives. For instance, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria reconnects Egypt with its ancient intellectual legacy. Monuments actively construct memory by shaping the collective interpretation, honor and contest of events [11].

Architectural styles and building materials often reflect the values, technologies, and aesthetics of their times. For instance, Islamic architecture in old Cairo preserves centuries of religious and cultural traditions through domes, arches, and calligraphy. European colonial buildings in Alexandria tell the story of the cosmopolitan past and colonial

encounters of Egypt. These structures do not just house activity but also narrate the passage of time and evolution of identity visually [12].

Street names and place-naming or renaming streets is a subtle yet powerful form of memory politics. Street names often commemorate historical figures, events, and ideologies. In Alexandria, Saad Zaghloul Street, embedding nationalist memory in everyday experience, honors the leader of the 1919 revolution. After revolutions or changes in the regime, street names would be revised to reflect the new political narrative and to signal shifts in collective identity. The simple act of walking through a city becomes a walk-through history [13].

The spatial organization and urban layout of streets, districts, and public spaces also carry memory. Historic city centers, like Mansheya district in Alexandria or Islamic core in Cairo, often maintain traditional patterns that reflect cultural and religious principles [13].

Narrow alleys and courtyards encourage communal living and privacy, which are values central to many societies in the Middle East. Public squares historically function as sites for civic discourse and ceremony, embedding democratic or social traditions in their use. Preserving such patterns fosters continuity and belonging whereas erasing them could result in disorientation and alienation.

4.1 Challenges

Preserving cultural memory in urban planning presents several key challenges that professionals should navigate to maintain the historical and cultural integrity of urban environments; these include:

(1) Pressure from urbanization and development: Rapid urban growth often prioritizes new construction over the preservation of historic sites, thus leading to the demolition or alteration of culturally significant structures.

(2) Limited funding and resources: Financial constraints frequently hinder the maintenance and restoration of heritage sites as preservation projects often require substantial investment, which may not be readily available.

(3) Resistance from stakeholders: Conflicting interests among developers, local communities, and policymakers could impede preservation efforts, especially when economic development is prioritized over cultural conservation.

(4) Environmental factors: Accelerating deterioration and complicating preservation efforts, climate change and pollution pose significant threats to historic structures.

(5) Lack of public awareness: Insufficient public understanding of the value of cultural heritage leads to neglect and inadequate support for preservation initiatives.

(6) Illegal excavation and looting: Looting and excavation of heritage sites for commercial purposes have been significant challenges to heritage preservation. These illegal activities have led to the loss of historical artifacts, structures, and sites that play a crucial role in preserving cultural and historical heritage.

(7) Balancing modernization with tradition: Integrating contemporary infrastructure and amenities while maintaining the authenticity of historic sites is a meticulous task that requires thoughtful planning and design.

(8) Technical challenges: Preserving aging structures requires specialized knowledge and skills, particularly when dealing with materials and construction techniques that are no longer in common use.

4.2 Key Aspects for Preserving Cultural Memory by Organizations

Urban heritage and cultural memory have increasingly become central concerns in the discourse of international urban development. Various global organizations have acknowledged the critical role that cultural memory plays in shaping inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities. This section highlighted key aspects and recommendations by prominent international bodies that addressed the preservation of cultural memory within urban planning frameworks.

4.2.1 The 36th UNESCO general conference in 2011

The key recommendations mentioned in “Preserving Cultural Memory in Urban Development” are:

- **Recognize Urban Heritage as a Vital Element of Cultural Memory**

Urban heritage including both tangible elements like architecture and intangible aspects like traditions should be viewed as a key resource that enhances the livability of urban areas and fosters economic development and social cohesion.

- **Adopt a Landscape Approach to Urban Conservation**

Move beyond the preservation of individual monuments to consider the broader urban context including the interrelationships among the physical forms, spatial organization, natural features, and the social, the cultural, and the economic values.

- **Integrate Heritage Conservation into National and Local Urban Policies**

Embed heritage conservation strategies in the larger goals of the overall sustainable development so as to ensure public and private actions aimed to preserve and enhance the quality of human environment. Embedding heritage in broader policy frameworks could allow cultural memory to be respected in planning and development.

- **Engage Local Communities and Stakeholders in Decision-Making**

Involve a diverse cross-section of stakeholders, e.g., the local communities, in identifying key values in their urban areas, developing visions to reflect their diversity, setting goals, and agreeing on actions to safeguard their heritage.

- **Use Documentation and Mapping Tools to Record Memory-Rich Urban Areas**

Undertake comprehensive surveys and mapping of the natural, cultural, and human resources in a city to inform planning and boost conservation efforts.

- **Assess Heritage and Environmental Impact before Interventions**

Anticipate the effects of changes like climate change and socio-economic stresses to protect cultural memory during development.

- **Establish Legal Frameworks Tailored to Local Conditions**

Create legislative and regulatory measures aimed at the conservation and management of both tangible and intangible attributes of urban heritage, to reflect local conditions and recognize traditional and customary systems.

- **Mobilize Financial Support**

Develop financial tools to support innovative income-generating development rooted in tradition, including micro-credit and other flexible financing options to support local enterprises.

- **Promote Capacity-Building and Research**

Engage communities, decision-makers, professionals, and managers in capacity-building efforts to foster understanding of the historic urban landscape approach and its implementation. Encourage research to identify values, understand their meanings for communities, and present them comprehensively.

- **Design Public Spaces**

The UNESCO explicitly addressed the importance of preserving a sense of place and identity in the recommendation on historic urban landscape [14]. It stated, “Density and growth can undermine the sense of place, the integrity of the urban fabric, and the identity of communities”. This highlighted the necessity of integrating heritage conservation into urban planning to maintain the distinctiveness and cultural significance of urban environments.

4.2.2 UN-Habitat: The global public space toolkit

- **Design Public Spaces**

The UN-Habitat has emphasized the importance of preserving a sense of place and identity as part of cultural memory preservation. The UN-Habitat discussed the contribution of public spaces to the identity and character of urban areas [15]. They noted that “places that have a strong sense of place have an identity and character felt by local inhabitants and visitors alike”.

4.2.3 The UNESCO-Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) online conference on “Living with World Heritage: Adaptive Reuse and Regeneration in the Euro-Mediterranean Region” on 17–18 May 2021

- **Encourage Adaptive Reuse of Heritage Buildings**

The UNESCO emphasized the importance of adaptive reuse within the framework of sustainable urban development. It underscored adaptive reuse as a strategic approach to revitalize historic urban areas and to ensure their functions and relevancy in contemporary contexts.

4.2.4 The Habitat III thematic meeting on public spaces held in Barcelona

- **Design Public Spaces**

The UNESCO and other stakeholders adopted the Barcelona Declaration, which underscored the role of public spaces in cultural expression and memory preservation:

“There is a need to preserve the character and quality of existing historical public areas, in order to promote local identity and to transmit heritage to the future generations; improve existing public areas in central and peripheral parts of the city, in order to upgrade their quality and foster the sense of belonging of the communities; design new public spaces in built areas and in new urban expansions, to increase the quality of life of the inhabitants and strengthen social stability”.

This highlighted the necessity of preserving existing historical public spaces and thoughtfully designing new ones to reflect and transmit cultural heritage. Determined by preferences, expectations, feelings, values, and beliefs, place identity is a complex pattern that combines the identity of a place and a person. It is influenced by the experiences and preferences of people in relation to the natural environment and others [14].

5 Proposed Guidelines for Preserving Cultural Memory

Drawing on international recommendations and best practices articulated by the UNESCO and the UN-Habitat through reports, conferences, and policy frameworks, a set of evaluative guidelines was synthesized in this research. These guidelines emphasized the preservation of cultural memory, the safeguarding of urban identity, the promotion of environmental responsibility, and the fostering of inclusive community participation. Collectively, they provided a comprehensive framework for assessing the cultural, social, and environmental values of intervention within historic urban contexts. The criteria developed through this study aim to support communities in sustaining a sense of identity and continuity over time. The guidelines, shown in Figure 2, are detailed below.

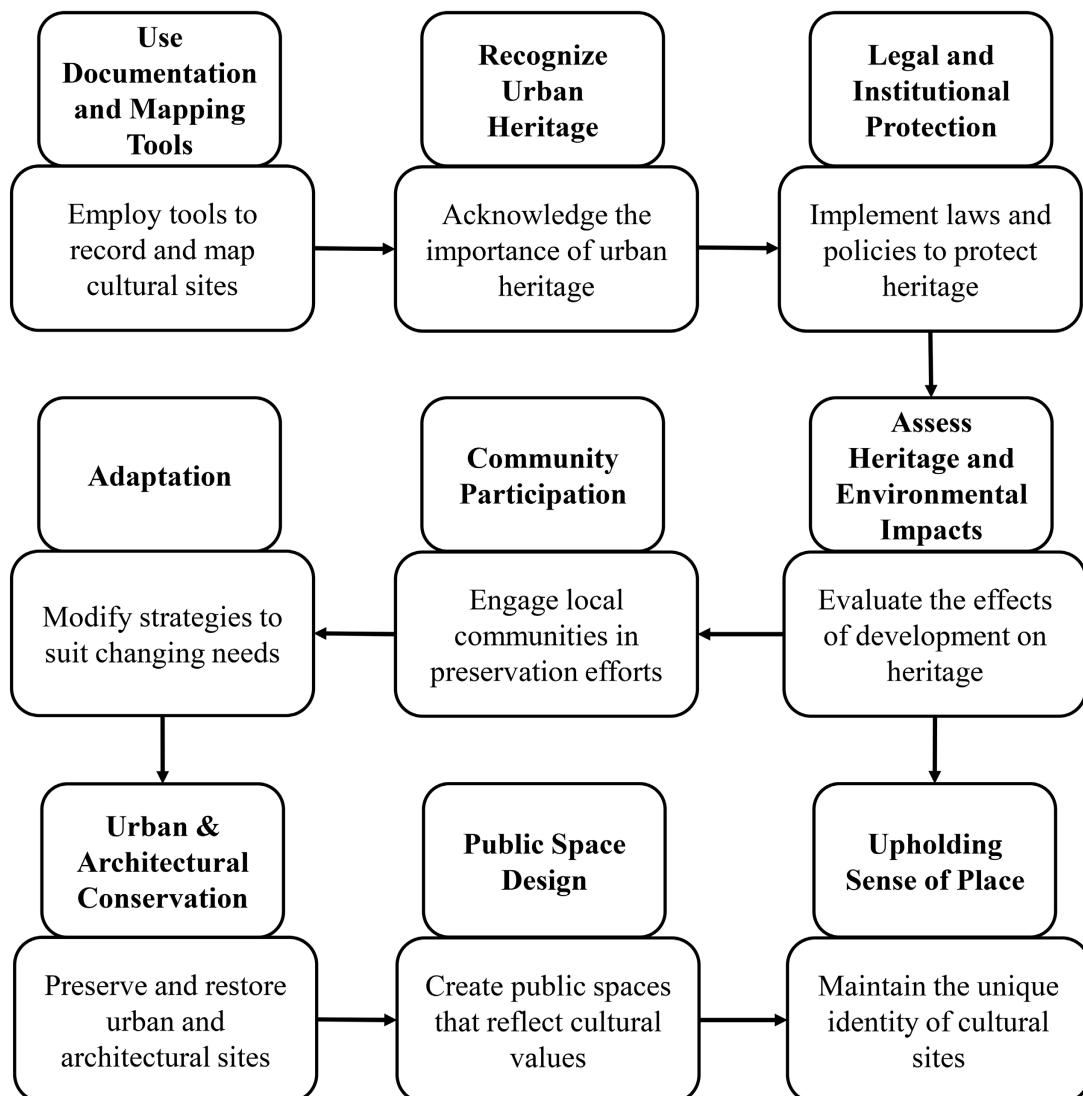


Figure 2. The proposed guidelines for preserving cultural memory

5.1 Use of Documentation and Mapping Tools

Undertake comprehensive surveys and mapping of the natural, cultural, and human resources in a city to inform planning and boost conservation efforts.

5.2 Urban Heritage as a Vital Element of Cultural Memory

Acknowledge the importance of urban heritage in terms of both physical aspects like historic buildings, streets as well as public spaces, and intangible cultural expressions like local traditions, crafts, and festivals as a key part to shape the identity and collective memory of a community.

5.3 Legal and Institutional Protection

Create legislative and regulatory measures aimed at the conservation and management of both tangible and intangible attributes of urban heritage.

5.4 Assessing Heritage and Environmental Impact

Anticipate the effects of changes like climate change and socio-economic stresses to protect cultural memory during development.

5.5 Community Participation

Involve a diverse cross-section of stakeholders, e.g., local communities, in identifying key values in their urban areas, developing visions to reflect their diversity, setting goals, and agreeing on actions to safeguard their heritage.

5.6 Adaptation

Adaptive reuse is the process of repurposing old buildings for new functions while preserving their historic features to ensure that they remain functional and relevant in contemporary contexts. It offers a sustainable approach to conservation by giving structures a new life, hence reducing the need for demolition and new construction. This practice maintains cultural identity while meeting contemporary needs in order to blend heritage with innovation.

5.7 Urban and Architectural Conservation

Urban and architectural conservation focuses on preserving the historical and cultural values of buildings and cityscapes. It aims to protect heritage through modern use like restoration or adaptive reuse.

5.8 Public Space Design

Design new public spaces in built areas and new urban expansions to improve the inhabitants' quality of life and strengthen social stability.

5.9 Upholding the Sense of Place

Preserve and reinforce the unique character, atmosphere, and emotional significance of urban areas by protecting cultural expressions, architectural features, and social practices that contribute to the identity and attachment to place in a community.

6 Rating System

When rating renovated projects, an explicit and adaptable rating scale is considered to be indispensable for evaluating the importance of each individual aspect in relation to identity preservation, urban conservation, and community involvement. A score rating scale was adopted to assess the upcoming renovated projects, as shown in Figure 3 and Table 1.

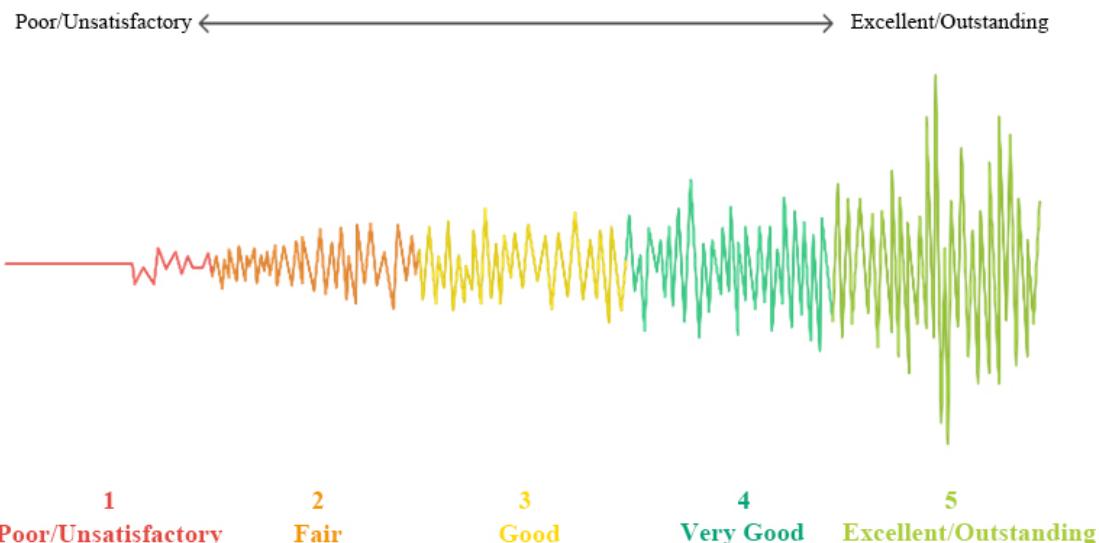


Figure 3. The adopted rating system

Table 2 outlines the key aspects for preserving cultural memory in urban planning and architecture; a structured approach to assessing buildings through the proposed principles was created. The review highlighted various strategies and provided insights into a framework for grading or assessing buildings based on their ability to uphold cultural memory, with each criterion aligned with the practices and recommendations discussed above.

Table 1. Rating descriptions and key focuses of the scoring

Score	Rating Descriptions	Key Focuses
1	Poor/Unsatisfactory: The project fails to address the key aspects or causes significant damage.	Major loss of identity, irreversible alterations to heritage, no community involvement, or lack of respect for the context.
2	Fair: The project partially addresses the key aspects but with some significant gaps or weaknesses.	Some preservation efforts but cultural identity compromised, moderate community involvement or minimal environmental considerations.
3	Good: The project addresses most key aspects well with only minor shortcomings.	A clear sense of place and community identity maintained, moderate engagement, some contextual or heritage elements omitted.
4	Very Good: The project successfully integrates most key aspects to preserve identity and heritage.	Excellent balance between functionality, cultural preservation, and community involvement, minor improvements may still be possible.
5	Excellent/Outstanding: The project fully meets all key aspects with innovative solutions and best practices.	Exemplary integration of cultural identity, community participation, environmental sustainability, and historical integrity.

Table 2. Assessment of urban heritage conservation projects

Key Aspects	Focuses of Assessment	Guiding Questions	Rating Descriptions				
			1	2	3	4	5
1. Use documentation and mapping tools	Evaluate the scope, accuracy, and practical application of documentation and mapping in guiding urban conservation and development strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were comprehensive surveys and mapping tools used to inform the project? • How effectively were these tools integrated into planning and decision-making? 	No documentation or mapping used, leaving gaps in historical and cultural context.	Some surveys or mapping used, but incomplete or poorly integrated into planning.	Comprehensive documentation used in planning, though there may be room for improvement.	Detailed documentation and mapping used to inform a well-executed conservation strategy.	Comprehensive, up-to-date documentation and mapping fully integrated into the planning process.
2. Recognize urban heritage as a vital element of cultural memory	Evaluate how the project interprets urban heritage as an active carrier of shared cultural memory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is urban heritage treated as an asset that narrates collective memory? • Are historical narratives preserved, interpreted, or made visible? 	Treats heritage as an obstacle; disconnects from cultural memory.	Heritage is mentioned but not meaningfully integrated.	Recognizes heritage value, some link to cultural continuity.	Urban heritage is actively linked to cultural memory and place identity.	Urban heritage is celebrated as a living expression of cultural memory and collective identity.

3. Legal and institutional protection	<p>Assess the adequacy and enforcement of legal and institutional frameworks for the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project comply with existing heritage protection laws and regulations? • Were any new policies or institutional frameworks introduced or strengthened? 	<p>No legal frameworks or protections considered, risking future harm.</p>	<p>Basic legal compliance, but insufficient institutional support for long-term protection.</p>	<p>Legal measures are in place, with some protections but not fully enforced.</p>	<p>Strong legal and institutional frameworks in place, ensuring sustainable protection.</p>	<p>Legal and institutional frameworks fully support long-term preservation, with effective enforcement.</p>
4. Assess heritage and environmental impacts	<p>Measure the extent to which environmental and socioeconomic risk assessments are integrated into planning processes to mitigate negative impacts on cultural heritage.</p>	<p>Measure the extent to which environmental and socioeconomic risk assessments are integrated into planning processes to mitigate negative impacts on cultural heritage.</p>	<p>Significant environmental degradation, lack of climate change awareness or mitigation strategies.</p>	<p>Environmental impacts acknowledged but insufficient planning for climate change or socioeconomic factors.</p>	<p>Moderate integration of environmental impact assessments and heritage conservation.</p>	<p>Thorough assessment of environmental and heritage impacts with clear mitigation strategies.</p>
5. Community participation	<p>Assess the level and diversity of stakeholder involvement in heritage-planning processes and the degree to which community input influences decisionmaking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were local communities and stakeholders actively involved throughout the planning and design process? • How were diverse voices and cultural values represented in the final outcomes? 	<p>No or minimal community involvement or consideration of local values and needs.</p>	<p>Some community involvement but lacks diversity or meaningful influence on outcomes.</p>	<p>Active community involvement with some influence on final decisions.</p>	<p>Broad community engagement, with clear influence on the final vision and actions.</p>	<p>Full community involvement with diverse stakeholders influencing.</p>

6. Adaptation	<p>Assess the degree of success for heritage buildings to be repurposed for modern needs while retaining cultural and architectural significance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project successfully include new uses while preserving the heritage value of a building? • How does the new function support community needs and contemporary urban life? 	<p>Minimal or poor adaptation, disrupting historical value and functionality.</p>	<p>Some successful reuse, but key heritage elements are lost or heavily altered.</p>	<p>Integrate modern uses into heritage value, but certain features may be altered.</p>	<p>Strong adaptation of heritage for modern needs, with minimal compromise.</p>	<p>Innovative adaptive reuse with complete respect for the heritage value of the building.</p>
7. Urban & architectural conservation	<p>Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies in maintaining the historical and architectural integrity of urban heritage sites, including materials, design authenticity, and context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the project maintained the historical authenticity of the buildings and surroundings? • Are original materials, design elements, and the urban context preserved or appropriately restored? 	<p>Major loss of identity, irreversible alterations to heritage, no community involvement or lack of respect for the context.</p>	<p>Some preservation efforts, but cultural identity compromised, with moderate engagement, but some contextual or heritage elements may be missed.</p>	<p>Maintain a clear sense of place and community identity, with moderate engagement, but some contextual or heritage elements may be missed.</p>	<p>Excellent balance between preservation and innovation, with community collaboration.</p>	<p>Exemplary preservation of historical integrity, promoting cultural heritage with full community participation.</p>
8. Public space design	<p>Evaluate the enhancement of public space initiatives in terms of livability, foster social inclusion, and reflect local cultural identity in both existing and new urban developments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the design enhance accessibility, usability, and social interaction? • How does it reflect and support the local identity and cultural values? 	<p>Public spaces are poorly designed, inaccessible, and disconnected from the community.</p>	<p>Public spaces are functional but lack design quality or fail to engage local identity.</p>	<p>Public spaces are inclusive and functional, reflecting some local identity.</p>	<p>Public spaces designed to enhance social cohesion, reflecting local culture.</p>	<p>Exceptional public space design that fosters social stability and cultural expression.</p>

<p>9. Upholding the sense of place</p> <p>Evaluate the success for the project to maintain or enhance the uniquely physical, cultural, and experiential qualities that define the identity and meaning of a place for its inhabitants.</p> <p>• Does the project retain the physical and cultural elements contributing to the distinct character of an area?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways are local narratives, aesthetics, and traditions reflected in the design and planning? 	<p>No respect for the unique identity or cultural elements of the place.</p>	<p>Partial reflection of place identity, but key cultural elements are missing in the design.</p>	<p>Reflects the uniquely cultural elements, but local symbolism and meanings could be enhanced.</p>	<p>Excellent reflection of cultural identity, a sense of belonging and place was enhanced.</p>	<p>Fully honor and celebrate the sense of place, deeply connected to the local cultural identity.</p>
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7 Case Studies

The heritage in Alexandria, positioned uniquely at the crossroad of civilizations, is a rich tapestry woven from centuries of cultural, religious, and architectural influences. From the grandeur of ancient Greco-Roman past to the layered imprints of Coptic, Islamic, and modern colonial periods, the city embodies a deep cultural memory that continues to shape its identity nowadays. This complex historical landscape offers valuable insights into how urban heritage is preserved, adapted, or at times, neglected. To better understand the dynamics of cultural memory in the built environment of Alexandria, the following case studies, presented in Figure 4, examined specific heritage sites to highlight both the challenges and opportunities in conserving the multifaceted legacy in the city [16]. The heritage sites were selected as they had been documented prior to renovation and have undergone restoration recently, thus allowing a critical assessment of their pre- and post-renovation conditions. These sites, which were visited in both their pre- and post-renovation states, represent iconic landmarks of Alexandria.

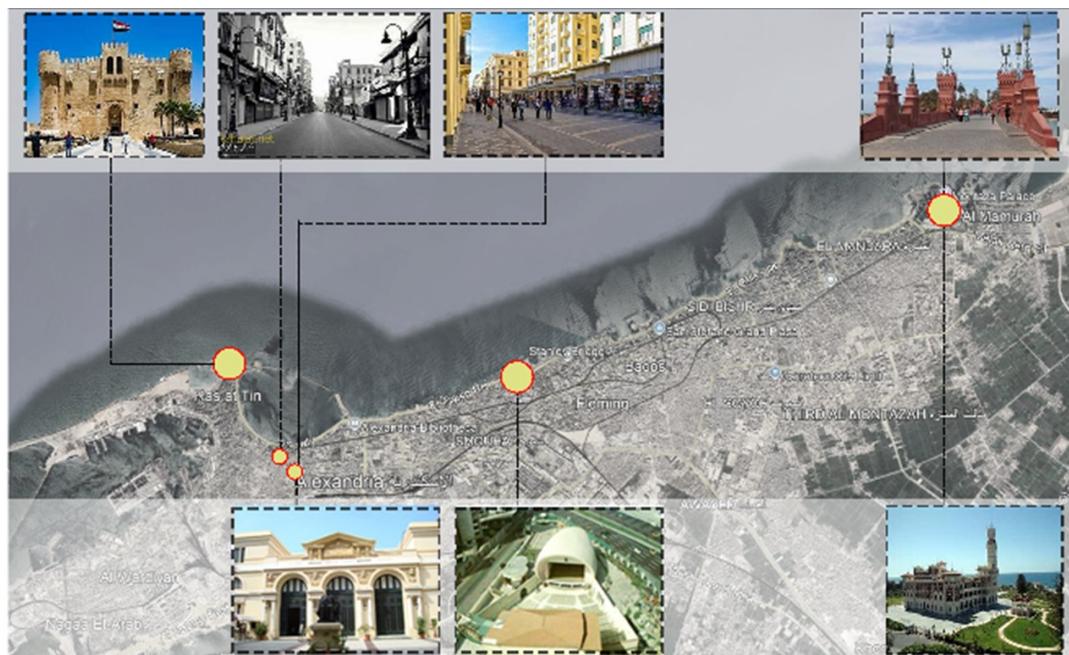


Figure 4. Areas of the case studies in Alexandria

7.1 The Revolutionary Legacy in Egypt: Fouad Street in Alexandria

Gamal Abdel Nasser, known as Fouad Street in Alexandria, stands as a significant urban landmark to honor the legacy of the second president in Egypt and a native son in the city. This thoroughfare not only commemorates the contributions of Nasser to the modern history of Egypt, but also reflects the evolution as well as the political and social transformations in the city [17].

Fouad Street, shown in Figure 5 [17, 18] and Figure 6 [19], has historically functioned as a social and cultural axis. It hosted cinemas, cafes, bookshops, and clubs frequented by the diverse communities in Alexandria such as Egyptians, Greeks, Italians, Jews, and Armenians. The street has long been a hub for intellectual exchange, nightlife, and civic life. Even today, the area retains a bohemian charm and is popular with artists, students, and tourists. However, the pressure of modernization, vehicular congestion, and neglect pose significant threats to its character.



Figure 5. Fouad Street in the early 19th century and 20th century [17, 18]

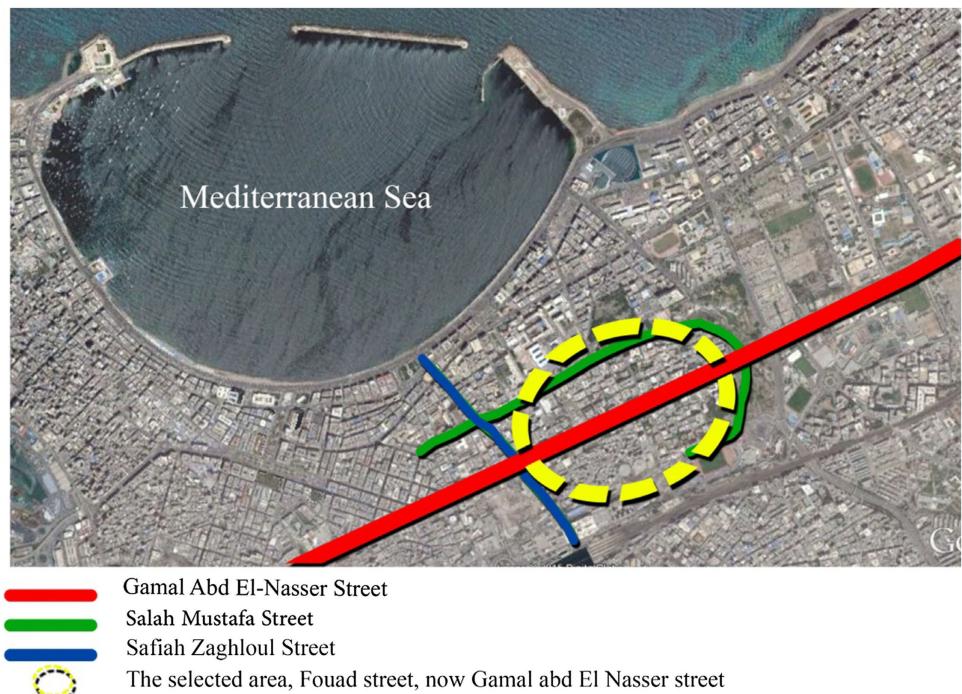


Figure 6. Satellite map for the selected area, Gamal Abdel Nasser Street [19]

Fouad Street serves as a vital artery in the urban landscape of Alexandria. Its development, aiming to transform Egypt into a self-sufficient and industrialized nation, reflects the broader efforts of modernization which characterize the era of Nasser. The infrastructure and surrounding neighborhoods of the street have evolved over time, thus mirroring the adaptation of the city to the changing political and economic dynamics [19].

The architectural landscape of Fouad Street features a mixture of styles that reflects the cosmopolitan past of Alexandria. Historic mansions, apartment blocks, cinemas, and government buildings, often designed by Italian,

French, and Greek architects, line the street. The use of wrought iron balconies, ornate cornices, and elegant colonnades lends the street a unique visual identity.

Some notable buildings include:

- The Royal Theatre, now closed but still standing;
- The Greco-Roman Museum;
- The 19th and early 20th centuries villas.

The street also maintains elements of colonial urban planning, including wide pavements and tree-lined avenues.

The Architectural Restoration along the street covered ten heritage buildings, illustrated in Figure 7 [19], undergoing restoration so as to preserve their original facades and color schemes. The street was divided into two main zones, presented in Figure 8 [19] and Figure 9 [19], to indicate the heritage buildings and landmarks.

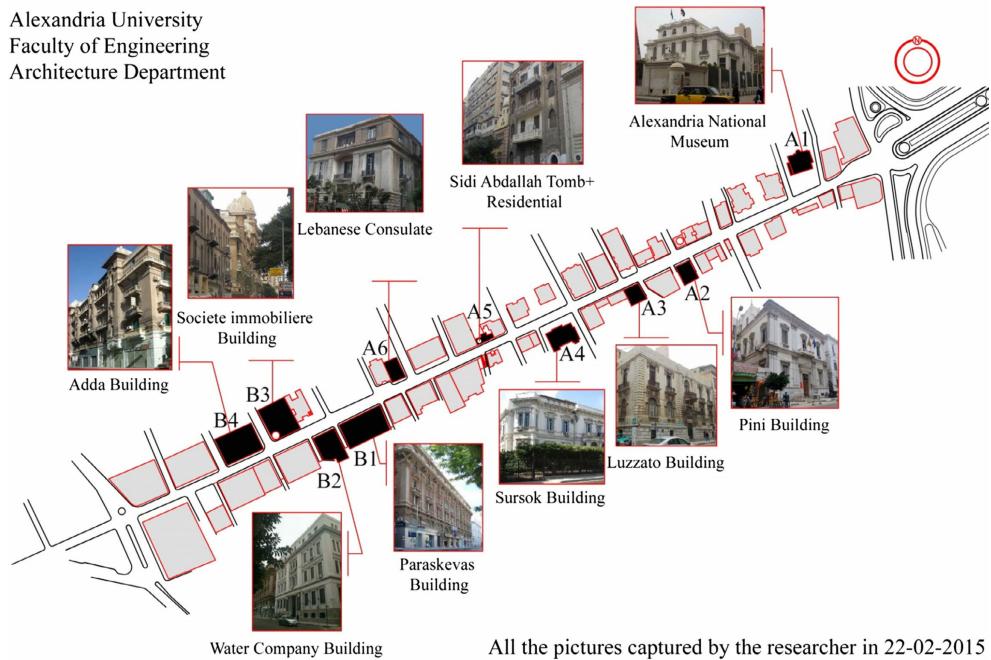


Figure 7. The locations of the ten selected buildings were divided into two main zones [19]

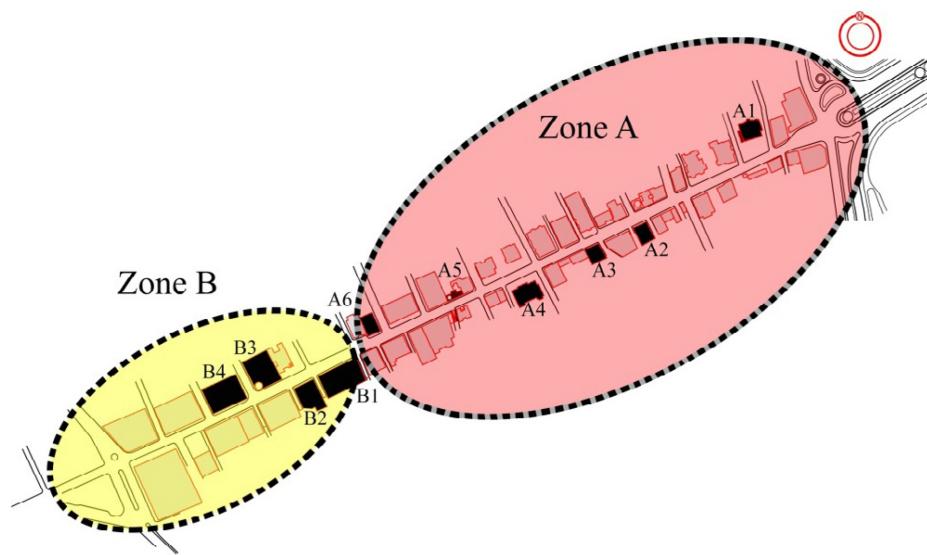


Figure 8. The locations of the ten selected buildings [19]

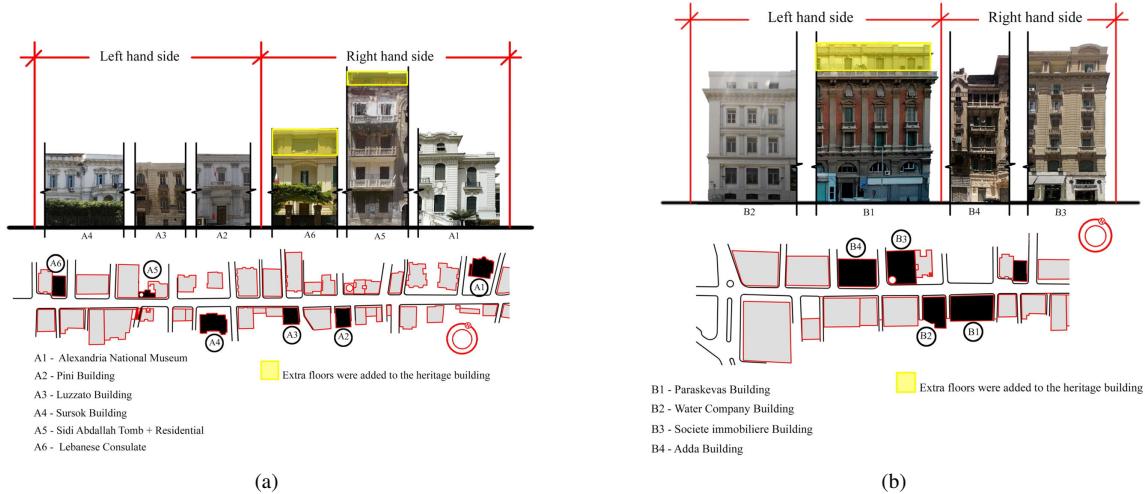


Figure 9. Building elevation, zones A (a) and B (b) [19]

Fouad Street remains a vitally historical and cultural memory in Alexandria; it reminds the layered past of the city and the requisite for inclusive heritage preservation, as displayed in Figure 10 [20, 21]. Its unique blend of history, architecture, and culture transforms it into a candidate for integrated conservation and urban revitalization strategies.



Figure 10. Two Shots for Fouad Street after restoration [20, 21]

7.2 Sayed Darwish Theatre—A Preserved Node of Cultural Memory

Sayed Darwish Theatre, formerly known as Teatro Mohamed Ali, was located in Fouad Street, one of the oldest and continuously used streets in the world. The theatre, shown in Figure 11 [22] and Figure 12 [22–24], stands as a restored emblem of the cosmopolitan and cultural past of Alexandria. The architectural fabric with its Italian façades, iron balconies, and classical scales supports a historic ambiance that activates collective memory through sensory and visual cues.

The theatre is not an isolated structure; it is embedded in a cultural corridor, surrounded by other heritage buildings, cinemas, and cafés. This context nurtures social rituals such as attending performances, strolling before and after shows, and engaging in cultural dialogues to reinforce a sense of belonging and continuity. The urban form of the architecture fosters human-scale interaction and layered experiences, thus turning the street into a narrative of time.

The careful renovation of the theatre has preserved not only the physical architecture but also the social function

and symbolic value of the place. It is a living site of memory where history, architecture, and community practices intersect.



Figure 11. The entrance of Sayed Darwish Theatre [22]



Figure 12. The cultural corridor and the facade of Sayed Darwish Theatre facing Fouad Street [22–24]

7.3 Revitalizing the Historic Nabi Daniel Street in Alexandria: A Cultural Memory and Urban Renaissance

Nabi Daniel Street, one of the oldest and most historically significant thoroughfares in Alexandria, has long served as a vibrant artery of cultural, religious, and commercial life, as shown in Figure 13 [25] and Figure 14. Stretching approximately 730 meters through the heart of the city, this ancient street is home to a remarkable array of heritage sites including the Prophet Daniel Mosque, the Eliyahu Hanavi Synagogue, and St. Mark's Church. Despite its rich history, the street has faced challenges in recent decades, including urban congestion, unregulated street vending, and deterioration of historic buildings. In response, a comprehensive renovation project, as presented in Figure 15, was launched in 2023 with an investment of EGP 103 million in order to restore its architectural integrity and cultural prominence [26].



Figure 13. Old Nabi Daniel Street before restoration [25]

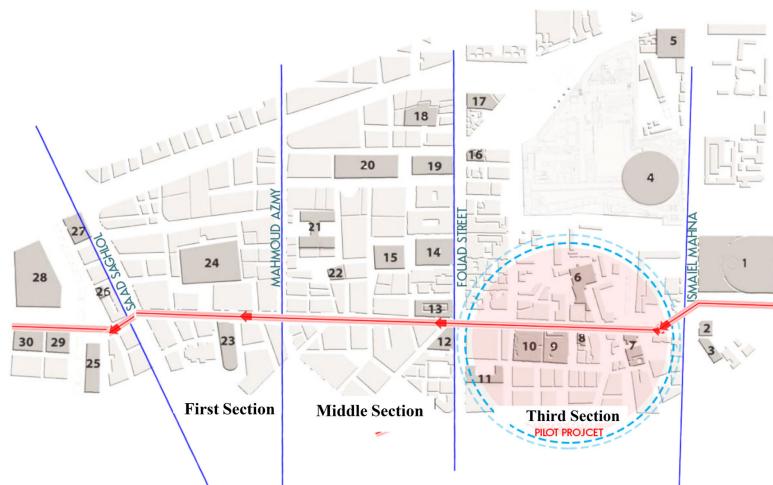


Figure 14. Nabi Daniel Street accessibility map

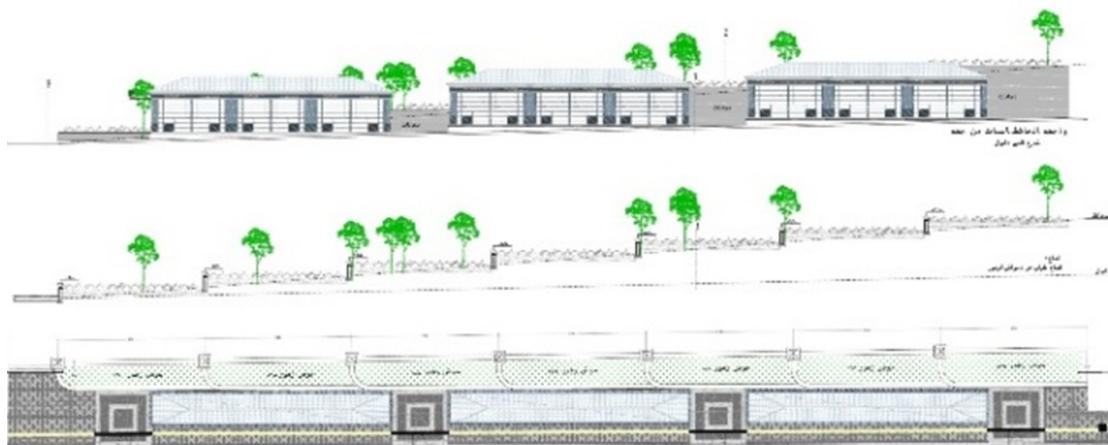


Figure 15. Drawings of the renovation design

Some of the data, documents, and records presented in this case study were obtained from Alexandria Group for Architecture & Planning (AGAP) Consultants, an engineering consulting office specializing in design, engineering consultancy, decoration, and planning works. The information was collected through an in-depth interview with the firm's team, who provided valuable insights and access to their heritage documentation materials and the Nabi Daniel project archives. Figure 14, Figure 15, Figure 16, and Figure 17 are derived from their work.



Figure 16. Before and after renovation for famous buildings in the street

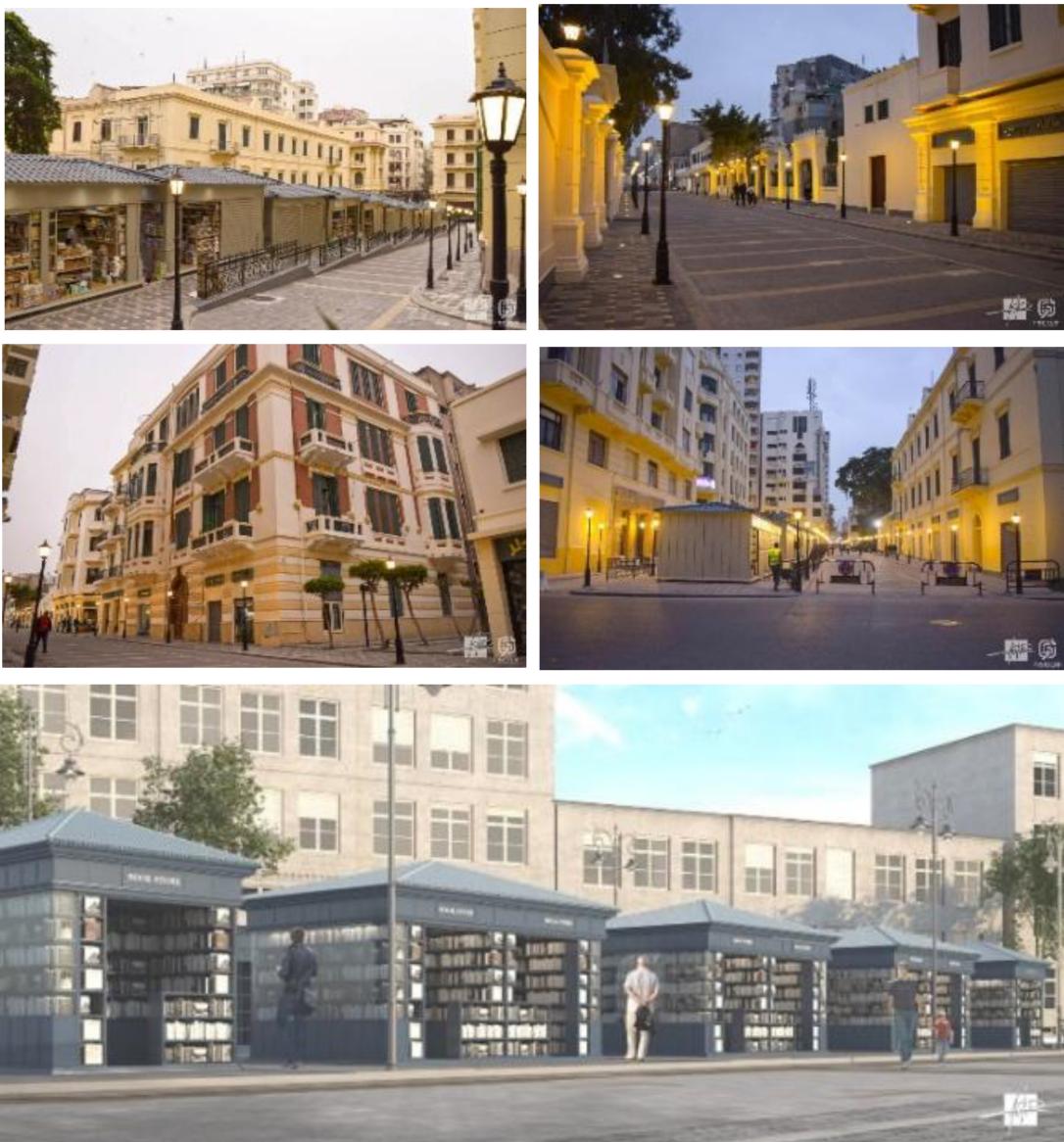


Figure 17. Five shots for Nabi Daniel Street after renovation

The renovation strategies were divided into four main parts, i.e., First strategy: Identifying problems and limitations; Second strategy: Documentation and classification of master plan; Third strategy: Full documentation; and Fourth strategy: Architecture and urban design.

The renovation initiatives seek to balance heritage preservation with urban functionality. The Architectural Restoration included 15 heritage buildings, as illustrated in Figure 16, undergoing restoration to preserve their original facades and color schemes for maintaining the historical aesthetic of the area. By revitalizing key landmarks and improving infrastructure, the project aims to boost cultural tourism, offering visitors a more immersive historical experience.

Each building undergoes a thorough evaluation to determine the extent of restoration required, with a focus on structural integrity and historical authenticity.

Efforts are made to restore the original facades of the buildings, including cleaning, repairing, and repainting in uniform colors to maintain a cohesive historical aesthetic. Where necessary, structural elements are reinforced to ensure the safety and longevity of the buildings. Modern systems, such as lighting and security, are discreetly integrated to enhance functionality without compromising historical integrity.

The street is regaining its identity as a symbol of religious coexistence, intellectual heritage, and urban elegance. Locals and tourists alike now engage with its history more consciously through curated cultural paths and restored landmarks.

Saving Nabi Daniel Street is not just about brick and mortar but also about preserving the soul and cultural memory

of Alexandria. By restoring its architecture, as illustrated in Figure 17, documenting its stories, and encouraging respectful engagement with its past, the city protects cultural memory that shapes identity, continuity, and shared heritage. As a result, the future generations will not only see history; they could actually feel it.

7.4 El Salam Theatre—Lost Memory Through Urban Fragmentation

In contrast, El Salam Theatre was located in the Sidi Gaber district, shown in Figure 18 [27, 28], Figure 19 [29] and Figure 20 [29], a transitional area historically characterized by spontaneous pedestrian activity and public engagement along the seafront. Prior to demolition, the theatre, acting as a space for cultural expression and neighborhood cohesion, served the local population in an informal yet vital way.

The subsequent infrastructural overhaul in Sidi Gaber, notably the construction of the Sidi Gaber Bridge and associated seafrot redevelopment, imposed a new spatial logic on the area. Emphasizing vehicular efficiency over public space, these interventions disrupted the physical and symbolic relationships between the theatre and its surrounding urban environment. Elevated roads and standardized design elements replaced the diverse, textured identity of the space, thus severing the site from its emotional and historical associations [27].

With the demolition of El Salam Theatre, the neighborhood lost a node of cultural memory. No markers, rituals, or spaces were preserved to anchor the significance of the theatre in the collective consciousness. The place, once resonant with community life and artistic expression, became a residual space with limited meaning.



Figure 18. El Salam Theatre before demolition—signs of abandonment and spatial neglect [27, 28]



Figure 19. (a). A photo showing the El Salam Theatre and its context before demolition; and (b) A recent photo from the same angle of view after removing the theatre, adding the traffic bridge, and changing the whole context [29]

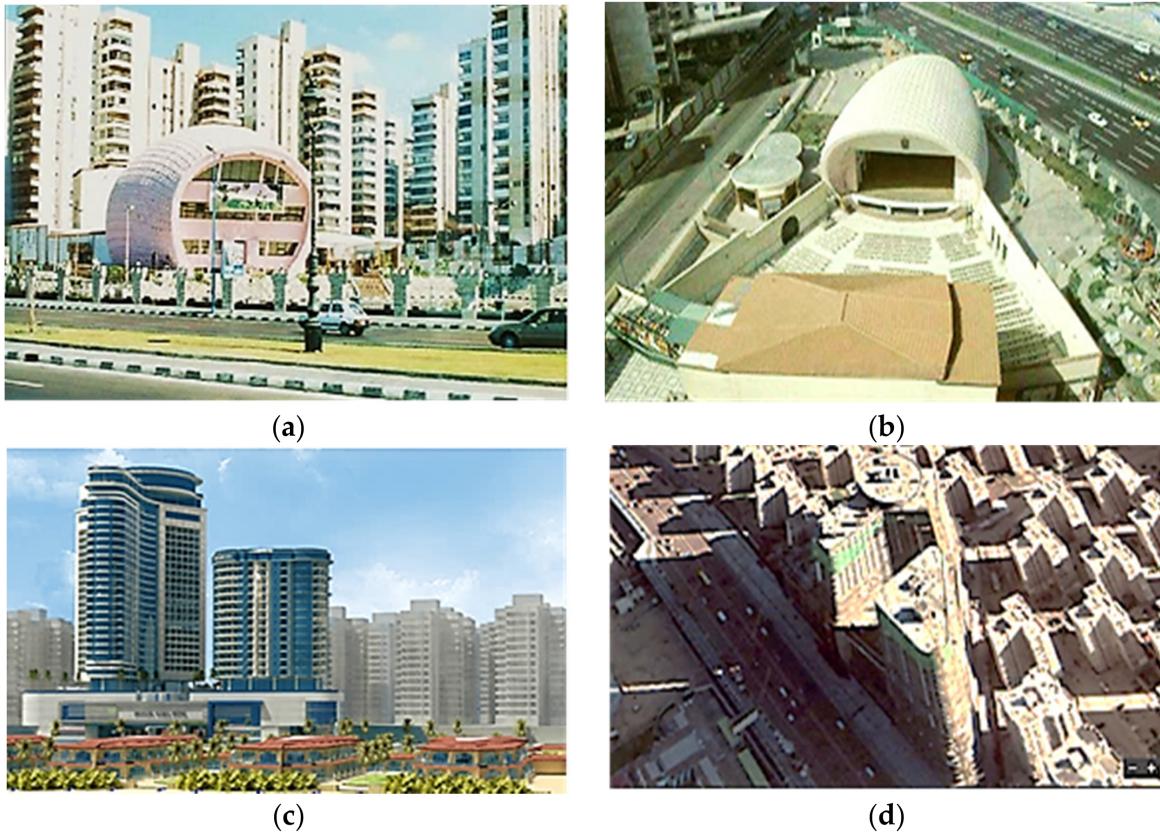


Figure 20. (a) El Salam Theatre in its original context; (b) The site plan view of El Salam Theatre; (c) A 3D view of the new hotel project that had replaced the theatre; and (d) A Google Earth view showing the unfinished new hotel project, replacing the site plan of the theatre [29]

7.5 The Citadel of Qaitbay, Alexandria

The Citadel of Qaitbay is one of the most iconic landmarks in Alexandria, strategically positioned on the Mediterranean coast. Built in 1477 AD, it was designed to protect Egypt from potential invasions, as shown in Figure 21 [30]. The site is not only significant for its military purpose but also for its symbolic link to the ancient Pharos lighthouse, blending the legacy of ancient and medieval engineering [31].



Figure 21. An image of the Citadel of Qaitbay [30]

The heritage process of the Citadel of Qaitbay encompasses a multifaceted approach involving historical research, architectural conservation, and cultural revalorization, as illustrated in Figure 22 [32, 33], Figure 23 [33] and Figure 24 [33]. The efforts include structural stabilization, material restoration using traditional techniques, and reuse of original stonework wherever possible [33]. Interpretive materials and signage have been developed to enhance public understanding. Community engagement programs, educational outreach, and academic research also form key components of the heritage process, in order to ensure that the monument remains accessible and relevant to the

future generations [34]. Strategies for the Citadel of Qaitbay aim to preserve its historical authenticity while adapting the structure for modern educational and tourism uses. These strategies include:

Adaptive Reuse: Some selected interior spaces have been repurposed as exhibition halls and educational centers without altering the original architectural fabric, thus allowing visitors to experience the site while learning about its history.

Reversible Interventions: All modern additions, such as lighting, pathways, and display cases, are designed to be reversible, in accordance with the international conservation principles.

Tourism Walkway: New walkway suits the style of heritage design for the historical site and the Citadel of Qaitbay. These renovation strategies ensure that the Citadel remains both a historical monument and a functional cultural venue, hence promoting long-term engagement and safeguarding authenticity.



Figure 22. Adaptive reuse of the Castle spaces [32, 33]



Figure 23. Renovation of the surrounding area [33]



Figure 24. Masterplan of the renovation [33]

Qaitbay waterfront can be divided into two zones: Zone A represents a historic zone and Zone B includes different uses and recreational facilities, as presented in Figure 25 [33].

This innovative presentation not only enhances visitors' experiences but also plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting the cultural memory of Alexandria. By integrating modern technology with historical storytelling, the Sound and Light Show at the Citadel of Qaitbay, illustrated in Figure 26, stands as a testament to the commitment of the country to celebrate and safeguard rich heritage [33].

The preservation was made with effort to bring back the mental image of the historical Qaitbay Citadel. The urban design was also taken into consideration to suit the modern days and the historical background [34].

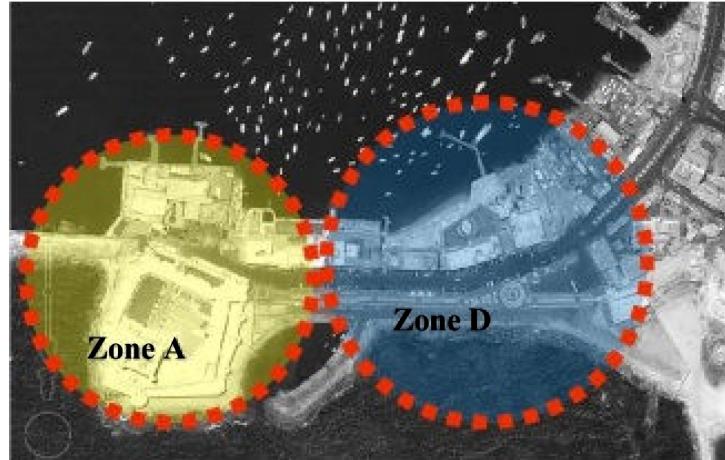


Figure 25. The two main parts of the Citadel [33]



Figure 26. The sound and light show at the Citadel of Qaitbay

7.6 El Montazah Park in Alexandria

Located in the eastern border of Alexandria and the northern coast in Egypt, the 360-acre park encompasses the view of a gulf known as "El Montazah Gulf". In 1892, Khedive Abbas Helmy II, the last ruler of Egypt and Sudan under the khedival title, selected the area between two elevated hills and a small northern island as the site for his summer retreat. He commissioned the construction of palaces and landscaped gardens in this scenic location. Atop one of the hills stood historical cannons dating back to the reign of Mohamed Ali, originally installed to defend the northern coast of Egypt and the city of Alexandria. These cannons remain in their original position to this day, and in front of them, Helmy II constructed the Salamlek Palace. On the other hill, which housed a coastal guard post, Helmy acquired the land from the government and built the Haramlek Palace, as shown in Figure 27 [35, 36]. Additionally, he purchased the Sinadino house and its adjoining land, along with several nearby plots from local residents, to expand the summer residence. Overseeing the development, Helmy II named the entire estate "El Montazah", meaning "The Garden". After his death, the royal family maintained the estate, which continued to serve as a royal retreat up to the

reign of King Farouk I, the last monarch of Egypt. Then, the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 occurred, resulting in government ownership of the palace and the opening of the gardens for the public. The Salamlek Palace was converted into a museum until it was incorporated into the presidential palaces designated for hosting the president's guests. Today, El Montazah has become one of the most popular recreational destinations of Alexandria. It was chosen as a case study in this research for several reasons: it plays a significant role in promoting social, economic, and cultural sustainability; it is the largest green area in Alexandria alongside Antoniadis Park and Al Shalalat Gardens; and it enjoys a strong international reputation as a prominent site for tourism and leisure [36, 37].



Figure 27. Salamlak, Haramlek and Gardens of El Montazah [35, 36]

In recent years, El Montazah has undergone significant renovations as part of broader governmental and private initiatives to modernize the site and position it as a leading tourist destination in Alexandria. These renovations have sparked significant debate among conservationists, urban planners, and local residents [37]. The efforts of the government have brought notable improvements, including upgraded infrastructure, enhanced facilities, and increased hospitality and commercial services; however, these changes have led to a series of disadvantages and concerns regarding the potential negative impact, which affects the cultural memory of Alexandria [37]. The most notable negative impact involves:

Loss of Historical Authenticity: Critics argued that the renovations might compromise the historical and architectural integrity of El Montazah. The introduction of modern structures and materials that do not align with the original design could diminish the cultural heritage of the site, as shown in Figure 28 [35]. This concern is echoed in the critics' discussions about the risk of over-commercialization threatening the authenticity of historical sites [37].



Figure 28. The different styles of architecture [35]

A Sense of Loss by Local Residents: The renovations have transformed a space that once served as a communal gathering spot into a more commercialized environment. The memories associated with family outings, picnics, and leisurely strolls in the park are now juxtaposed with the reality of restricted access and privatized areas [37]. The demolition of the Aida Cabins, as shown in Figure 29 [38, 39], in Montazah Park is more than just the loss of old buildings—it is the quiet fading of cherished memories that generations of Alexandrians grew up with. These small and seaside cabins were not luxurious but they held something far more valuable, including the warmth of family summers, the laughter of children by the shore, and the peaceful rhythm of life by the Mediterranean. For many locals, the cabins were a part of their identity—a familiar scene that told stories of togetherness, belonging, and the beauty of simple traditions. Their removal has left a deep emotional void as if a piece of the soul in the city has been quietly taken away [35].

Environmental Impact: El Montazah Park has long been a cherished green space, offering a natural retreat for generations. The extensive construction and development activities associated with the renovations have adverse effects on the natural environment of the park. The alteration of green spaces and potential disruption to local ecosystems are significant concerns for environmentalists and residents alike. The removal of trees has affected the

cultural memory of residents in Alexandria, as shown in Figure 30. The purpose of cutting these trees was not for building new hotels only. Critics argued that such actions had prioritized aesthetic spectacle and tourist appeal over ecological sustainability and cultural continuity [37].



Figure 29. Aida Cabins [38, 39]

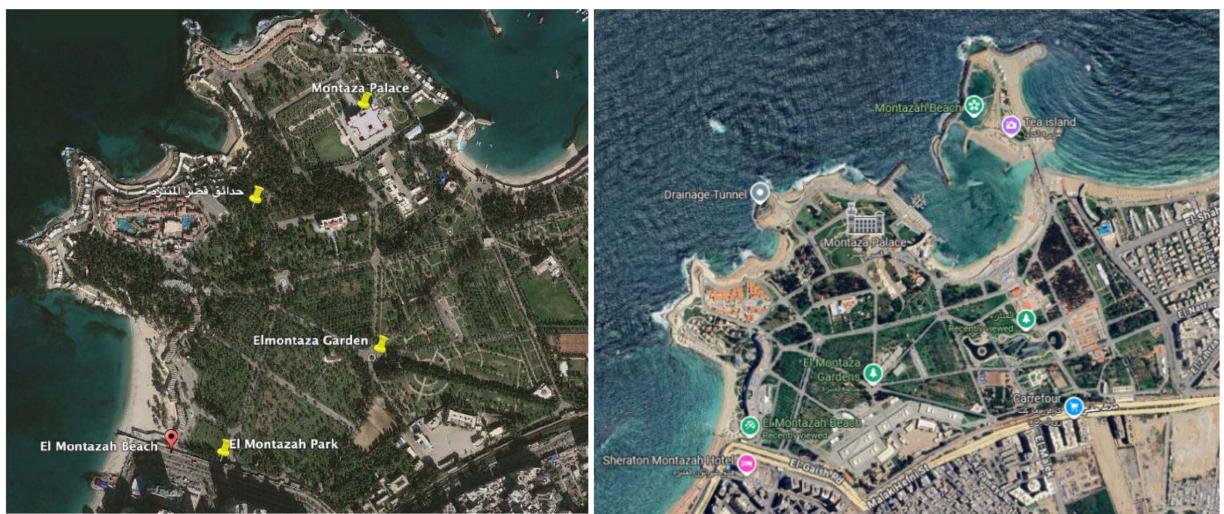


Figure 30. The top view of El Montazah showing the difference (Google Maps)

Over-Commercialization and Restricted Public Access: The transformation of El Montazah into a major tourist attraction has not only led to the over-commercialization of the area but also contributed to the diminishing of public access to its once-public spaces. The introduction of numerous commercial ventures, such as shops, cafes, and entertainment facilities, has shifted the focus of the park towards tourism and leisure, sometimes overshadowing its historical and cultural significance. As part of this shift, private hotels and resorts now occupy prime areas of the park, many of which offer exclusive access to beach fronts and leisure amenities. In the past, the beaches in El Montazah were accessible to all, thus providing a public sanctuary where locals and visitors could freely enjoy the coastal beauty. Today, however, these once-open spaces have been privatized, with restricted access to the sea and beach areas, hence limiting public use and transforming the area into an exclusive commercial zone. This shift not only alters the original identity of the park but also reduces its role as an inclusive and public green space, so the tensions between modernization and preservation are reinforced (Figure 30).

8 Results and Discussion

The strategies employed across the case studies in Alexandria vary in effectiveness, reflecting differences in the scope, implementation, and sensitivity to heritage values. Overall, the interventions could be rated as moderately successful, with some standing out as exemplary models. For instance, the restoration of Sayed Darwish Theatre and the Citadel of Qaitbay demonstrates a high level of technical and historical fidelity, preserving architectural details while reactivating their cultural roles. In contrast, interventions along Fouad and Nabi Daniel Streets, though valuable in maintaining the urban character, sometimes suffer from inconsistent enforcement and commercial pressures that dilute the heritage experience. The adaptive reuse strategy applied in El Salam Theatre presents a creative approach, though its success depends on sustained cultural programming. The rehabilitation of El Montazah Park balances environmental and recreational concerns, yet this could benefit from greater public accessibility and interpretive signage. Overall speaking, while the strategies show clear intent to preserve cultural memory, their effectiveness

hinges on long-term maintenance, community engagement, and integrated urban planning. Table 3 presents a comparative assessment of two historically significant streets in Alexandria, i.e., Nabi Daniel Street and Fouad Street, through the lens of cultural memory preservation. The evaluation applies nine key criteria, including legal protection, adaptive reuse, public space design, and preservation of identity and place. Each street was rated on a 5-point scale, based on available data, urban analysis, and contextual heritage values. The table highlights the contributions of these two streets to collective memory and urban continuity while identifying key challenges and differences in the conservation and integration strategies. Table 4 and Table 5 apply the same assessment to the remaining case studies.

The evaluation results demonstrated a clear disparity in the preservation of cultural memory across different heritage sites in Alexandria. Fouad Street, Sayed Darwish Theatre, and the Citadel of Qaitbay each scored 41 out of 45, thus indicating comprehensive preservation efforts supported by strong documentation, adaptive reuse, and recognition of heritage significance. Nabi Daniel Street showed moderate performance, with particular strengths in heritage recognition but weaker institutional support. In contrast, El Salam Theatre and El Montazah Park received low scores, reflecting limited community involvement, poor integration into heritage policies, and a lack of strategic conservation planning. These findings underscored the requisites for targeted interventions, especially in underperforming sites, and advocated for more inclusive, policy-driven, and well-funded heritage management approaches.

Table 3. A comparative evaluation of the preservation of cultural memory in historic streetscapes: Nabi Daniel Street vs. Fouad Street

Key Aspects	Fouad Street	Nabi Daniel Street
1. Documentation and mapping	Comprehensive documentation and classification of buildings guiding a clear master plan. 5/5	Heritage zones and landmarks identified; partial documentation exists. 4/5
2. Recognition of heritage significance	Restoration focused on religious coexistence and cultural significance. 4/5	Revolutionary and cosmopolitan legacy in Egypt preserved and highlighted. 5/5 1/5
3. Legal and institutional protection	Government-backed renovation project with conservation guidelines. 4/5	No formal legal or institutional framework have been applied apparently. 4/5
4. Environmental and heritage impact assessment	Restoration balanced urban utility with heritage sensitivity. 4/5	Protection applied to several key buildings under restoration. 3/5
5. Community	Cultural paths encouraging community interaction but with seemingly top-down planning. 5/5	Restoration efforts acknowledged, but some areas faced urban pressure. 3/5
6. Adaptive reuse	Modern systems, e.g., lighting and security, integrated into historic fabric. 5/5	Some buildings, e.g., Royal Theatre, remained inactive; others actively reused. 4/5
7. Urban conservation	Uniform color schemes and facade restoration preserved identity. 4/5	Architectural style retained; modern pressures presented challenges. 3/5
8. Public space design	Enhanced cultural tourism and walkability. 5/5	Public character maintained but congestion limited usability. 4/5
9. Upholding the sense of place	Revitalized as a symbol of the spiritual and historical roots of Alexandria. 41/45	Continued to reflect a layered identity, with risks from modernization. 31/45
Total scores		

Table 4. A comparative evaluation of the preservation of cultural memory in historic streetscapes: The Citadel of Qaitbay vs. El Montazah Park

Key Aspects	The Citadel of Qaitbay	El Montazah Park
1. Documentation and mapping	5/5 Comprehensive documentation and architectural mapping guiding a faithful restoration.	3/5 Documentation appeared to have guided the intervention; some landmarks like Salamlek and Haramlek were preserved.
2. Recognition of heritage significance	5/5 Heritage value was acknowledged and reflected in the decisions of design and conservation efforts.	2/5 Partial recognition; some landmarks like Salamlek and Haramlek were preserved but other places have not received the same level of protection.
3. Legal and institutional protection	4/5 Protected under heritage laws; Restoration supervised by cultural institutions.	2/5 There is limited evidence of regulatory enforcement to protect the public and historical functions of the site from over-commercialization.
4. Environmental and heritage impact assessment	4/5 Renovations assessed to preserve heritage fabric and minimize environmental impact.	1/5 No transparent environmental or heritage impact studies were made public; tree removal and artificial lake construction disrupted natural and historical elements.
5. Community participation	5/5 Some public events and outreach; limited actual involvement in decisions.	1/5 Renovation was top-down with minimal visible community engagement; public concerns over access and identity loss were not reflected in decision-making.
6. Adaptive reuse	5/5 Successfully adapted for modern use while maintaining character.	3/5 The park was repurposed for leisure and tourism, aligning partially with its original recreational use, but lacked sensitivity to cultural and ecological context.
7. Urban conservation	5/5 Integrated into Alexandria's conservation strategy.	2/5 Key structures were retained, but modern interventions altered the park's original character and spatial composition.
8. Public space design	4/5 Exterior surroundings functional but not pedestrian-friendly or cohesive.	2/5 While amenities improved for tourists, local accessibility and inclusiveness were reduced due to privatization and restricted beach access.
9. Upholding the sense of place	5/5 Strong preservation of spatial identity and atmosphere.	1/5 The historical identity and emotional connection for locals were disrupted by commercialization and spatial exclusion.
Total scores	41/45	17/45

Table 5. A comparative evaluation of the preservation of cultural memory in historic streetscapes: Sayed Darwish Theatre vs. El Salam Theatre

Key Aspects	Sayed Darwish Theatre	El Salam Theatre
1. Documentation and mapping	5/5 Comprehensive documentation and architectural mapping guided a faithful restoration.	1/5 No clear documentation or mapping was evident; interventions lacked heritage guidance.
2. Recognition of heritage significance	5/5 Heritage value was acknowledged and reflected in design decisions and conservation efforts.	1/5 Partial recognition; some elements preserved but others altered without cultural sensitivity.
3. Legal and institutional protection	5/5 Protected under heritage laws, Restoration supervised by cultural institutions.	1/5 No formal legal or institutional framework appears to have been applied.
4. Environmental and heritage impact assessment	5/5 Renovations assessed to preserve heritage fabric and minimize environmental impact.	1/5 No clear evidence of heritage or environmental assessment processes.
5. Community participation	5/5 Some public events and outreach; limited actual involvement in decisions.	1/5 Minimal involvement; the community had limited influence on the project's outcome.
6. Adaptive reuse	5/5 Successfully adapted for modern use while maintaining character.	1/5 No significant adaptive reuse strategy applied; space use was altered without regard for heritage.
7. Urban conservation	5/5 Integrated into Alexandria's conservation strategy.	1/5 Site context was overlooked; surrounding fabric was not conserved or reinforced.
8. Public space design	5/5 Exterior surroundings functional but not pedestrian-friendly or cohesive.	1/5 Limited attention to public space design; lacked inclusivity or cultural reflection.
9. Upholding the sense of place	5/5 Strong preservation of spatial identity and atmosphere.	1/5 The original identity of the place was diminished or lost due to insensitive alterations.
Total scores	41/45	9/45

9 Findings: Post-Preservation User Experience

Beyond architectural and conservation assessments, user experience provided a crucial dimension in understanding the effectiveness of preservation projects. Examining how residents and visitors interact with heritage sites after renovation offered insight into whether interventions have successfully sustained cultural memory, reinforced urban identity, and restored spaces to meaningful everyday use.

9.1 Sayed Darwish Theatre

Following its restoration, the theatre has regained its role as a cultural hub. Audiences reported a sense of pride and continuity when attending performances in a venue that retains its historic character while offering modernized facilities. The revival of the theatre has reinforced the cultural memory of artistic excellence in Alexandria, hence reconnecting citizens with a tradition of music and performance.

9.2 El Salam Theatre

Despite the renovations, user experience remains limited due to restricted programming and a lack of strong community outreach. Visitors noted improvements in physical conditions but also expressed disappointment at

the underutilization of the space. This reflected a missing opportunity to activate the site as a meaningful cultural landmark within everyday urban life.

9.3 Fouad Street

As one of the oldest urban corridors in Alexandria, its conservation has been positively received by residents and visitors alike. Users described walking along the street as an immersive experience in the layered history of the city, where architectural continuity enhanced the sense of identity. However, heavy traffic and inconsistent maintenance occasionally disrupted this cultural atmosphere.

9.4 Nabi Daniel Street

The preservation of this street has allowed users to engage with its multi-religious and commercial heritage. Visitors experienced it as a living archive of cultural coexistence, where heritage buildings, bookshops, and religious sites coexist in close proximity. Community members highlighted the street as a symbolic connector of diverse cultural memories.

9.5 The Citadel of Qaitbay

In the period of post-renovation, the Citadel remains one of the most visited landmarks in the city. Users, often described visits as both educational and symbolic, reported a strong sense of identity and pride in the monumental heritage. While the site continues to function primarily as a tourist attraction, local visitors emphasize its role as a reminder of resilience and maritime legacy.

9.6 El Montazah Park

Renovations have improved physical accessibility and landscaping, but user experiences are marked by concerns over commercialization and restricted public access. Many Alexandrians felt that the park no longer reflected its traditional role as a communal leisure space tied to family memories. The transformation has created tension between heritage preservation and exclusive development models.

10 Conclusion

The preservation of cultural memory for Alexandria is essential to maintaining the unique historical identity of the city in the face of ongoing urbanization, social transformation, and environmental pressures. As a city layered with centuries of cultural, religious, and architectural influences, Alexandria holds a rich urban heritage that should be actively protected and thoughtfully interpreted. This study, through an in-depth examination of six key heritage sites, i.e., Sayed Darwish Theatre, El Salam Theatre, Fouad Street, Nabi Daniel Street, the Citadel of Qaitbay, and El Montazah Park, has shed light on both the opportunities and shortcomings in current conservation practices. These case studies illustrated the different facets of historical and cultural fabrics represented by each site in Alexandria, spanning from vibrant artistic institutions and civic spaces to monumental landmarks and streets enriched with memory and meaning.

The findings revealed that while some sites such as Fouad Street, Sayed Darwish Theatre, and the Citadel of Qaitbay, demonstrated exemplary approaches through adaptive reuse, comprehensive documentation, and strong urban conservation frameworks, others like El Salam Theatre and El Montazah Park remained significantly underprotected, hence suffering from weak legal safeguards, limited community engagement, and poor integration into broader urban policy. The contrasting scores reflected uneven implementation of preservation strategies across the city and highlighted the need for more consistent and inclusive approaches to balance development with cultural continuity. Notably, the revitalization of historic theatres such as Sayed Darwish does more than restoring a structure as it revives cultural practices and anchors public memory in the built environment. Likewise, the conservation of urban corridors like Fouad and Nabi Daniel Streets shows that streetscapes could retain historical character while accommodating modern urban needs.

Moreover, the case of the Citadel of Qaitbay emphasized the symbolic power of monumental heritage in shaping collective identity, while El Montazah Park drew attention to the dangers of commercialization and restricted public access to culturally significant spaces. The comprehensive scoring framework in this study rooted in site visits, stakeholder interviews, and policy analysis to underscore the importance of recognizing urban heritage not as static relics but as dynamic components of everyday life. It became clear that sustainable preservation should involve a multidisciplinary lens, combining architecture, urban design, cultural policy, and active community participation.

The analysis was based on the selected six heritage sites, though representative, could not fully capture the diverse cultural landscapes of the city. Time constraints and limited access to archival documentation and certain decision-making bodies restricted the depth of historical and policy analysis. The scoring framework, though systematically developed, inevitably reflected subjective judgments in evaluating intangible aspects such as cultural memory and community engagement.

Future research should expand the scope of case studies to include additional heritage typologies, such as residential districts, industrial heritage, and religious sites, which also contribute significantly to the cultural identity of Alexandria. Comparative studies with other Mediterranean cities facing similar urban and environmental pressures could provide a broader framework for best practices. Deeper ethnographic research involving local communities would enrich the understanding of how heritage is experienced and valued in everyday life.

Ultimately, preserving the cultural memory of Alexandria is not simply about maintaining old buildings; it is about safeguarding the narratives, rituals, and meanings that give life to those spaces. By adopting more inclusive, well-funded, and policy-integrated strategies, and by involving local communities as stewards of their own heritage, the past continues to inform and inspire the present and the future. These efforts are not only critical for Alexandria but also for other rapidly changing cities in the region, rendering the heritage to be preserved as a living and evolving legacy embedded within the urban fabric.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, R.A.R.; methodology, R.A.R.; formal analysis, E.G.; investigation, Y.M.A.E.D.; data curation, M.K., E.H., and E.G.; writing—original draft preparation, Y.M.A.E.D., M.K., E.H., and E.G.; writing—review and editing, R.A.R.; visualization, Y.M.A.E.D., E.H. and M.K.; supervision, R.A.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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