



CP in Middle Eastern Cities: Challenges, Opportunities, and a Framework for Urban Park Redesign

Mustafa Mohammed Hussein^{*}, Mehran Alalhesabi

Faculty of Architecture and Environmental Design, Department of Urban Design, University of Science and Technology (IUST), Tehran 16846-13114, Iran

Corresponding Author Email: mustafa.aldulami@gmail.com

Copyright: ©2026 The authors. This article is published by IIETA and is licensed under the CC BY 4.0 license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

<https://doi.org/10.18280/ijstdp.210717>

ABSTRACT

Received: 2 April 2026
Revised: 14 June 2026
Accepted: 22 June 2026
Available online: 31 July 2026

Keywords:

creative placemaking, urban regeneration, Middle East, public space, hot-arid climate, cultural identity, Baghdad

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been experiencing the most rapid urbanisation, political instability, environmental strain and ineffective governance that have ever been seen. Due to the deficits in adaptation to extreme climatic conditions and the degradation of cultural activation in hot-arid cities, there has been a significant decrease in social vitality and place identity. This study is a structured narrative review of creative placemaking (CP) literature aimed at understanding its applicability to urban regeneration within the MENA region and conceptual and practical barriers to implementing CP. Building on the previous search, a systematic search was performed in Semantic Scholar, Scopus and Web of Science, covering 52 peer-reviewed publications (2002-2025). The theoretical definitions, implementation models and the relationship between environmental and socio-cultural aspects of CP are addressed. The findings highlight five major gaps: the absence of case studies specific to the MENA region, the limited incorporation of climate responsive design, lack of attention to the focus on heritage-based regeneration, insufficient theorization of governance in post conflict situations and lack of context specific assessment frameworks for informal neighborhoods. Conversely, this paper suggests an operationalizable Contextual CP Framework (CCPF) which combines environmental adaptation, cultural identity, participatory governance and spatial resilience. The framework is intended to be consistent with the actual climate constraints and the cultural heritage of cities, such as Baghdad, which is rooted in culture, and supported by measurable indicators and a validation plan. The paper concludes that although CP has high transformative potential, the implementation of CP in the MENA region needs to be climate responsive and culture based in order to ensure sustainable and inclusive urban regeneration.

1. INTRODUCTION

The urban public spaces form the arteries of cities, at once the stage of social interaction, the vessel of cultural memory and the engine of economic action. These spaces have come to be a major concern among urban designers, policymakers, and the general population in an era characterized by the rapid urbanization process, the fluctuation of climate, and the increasing socio-economic disparity. By 2050, 68% of population of the world is expected to live in urban centers, indicating a strain on the social fabric and the infrastructure that serves the population, as never before UN-Habitat [1]. It is the city of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region that occupies a very tricky place in this global context: it is where some of the oldest continually inhabited urban landscapes on earth can be found, but where so much of the open space has been eroded away by decades of war, unplanned development, and environmental destruction.

The city of Baghdad, the capital of Iraq and one of the historical centres of the Islamic civilization, is a bright example of this paradox. The city where the legendary House

of Wisdom used to be situated and where centuries of Arabic culture and intellectual life have been spreading nowadays struggles with a disintegrated urban space, decaying parks, and a significant decrease in the standards of public life [2]. The larger challenge is captured in Abu Nuwas Park, which is located on the east side of the Tigris River and bears the name of an esteemed poet of Abbasid times, Abu Nuwas (c. 756–814 CE). Although this park is centrally located, has historical resonance, and is near major pilgrimage routes, it has been turned into a poorly used transit area with no cultural programming, artistic installations, and relevant social interaction. The lack of connection between the latent cultural potential of the park and its current state poses a serious question as to how urban spaces in historically rich but contaminated with environmental and political issues, MENA cities can be rethought to return life and energy, enable a sense of belonging, and celebrate cultural heritage?

Creative placemaking (CP) provides a potential answer to this question that has not been well-developed yet. CP as defined by Markusen and Gadwa [3] in their benchmark white paper on the topic of the U.S. National Endowment of the Arts

is a process whereby partners consisting of public, private, non-profit, and community groups strategically influence the physical and social nature of a neighbourhood, town, city, or region around the arts and cultural practices. As opposed to traditional city planning where emphasis is laid on physical infrastructure, CP places art, culture and community involvement as the generative forces that can convert a static space to a dynamic social ecosystem. In Western cities, the strategy has had impressive outcomes. High Line in New York, Superkilen in Copenhagen, and Gardens by the Bay in Singapore are often mentioned as the best examples [4, 5]. Nevertheless, how these models can be applied to the context of MENA, where climatic extremes, Islamic cultural traditions, and unique governance frameworks are the order of the day is an open and pressing research question.

The present review paper answers that question by conducting a structured narrative review of the literature on CP in seven thematic axes: (1) theoretical foundations and conceptual development; (2) empirical support of Western applications and implementations; (3) the emergent applications in the MENA region; (4) climate-sensitive design in hot-arid climate and (5) integration of heritage and Islamic cultural identity; (6) community involvement and social inclusion; and (7) synthesized research gaps. The final review corpus consisted of 52 sources identified through structured screening across Semantic Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and supplementary Google Scholar searches. The review is concluded by the proposal of a Contextual CP Framework (CCPF) that is specifically oriented to the urban park redesign of the city of Middle East and the example of Abu Nuwas Park in Baghdad can be used.

This review ought to have triple contribution. On the one hand, it brings a rather diverse and fragmented body of literature across a variety of fields and geographic settings into a unified analytical mode of viewing CP in the MENA region. Second, it draws five research gaps that are deemed crucial to

the lack of systematic application of the principles of CP to the cities of the Middle East. Third, it suggests a contextual framework that encompasses climate responsiveness, Islamic cultural tradition and participatory governance aspects that the current CP models which are very much based on Western experience fail to capture effectively.

2. REVIEW METHODOLOGY

This study uses a structured narrative review method, which is a mixed method between systematic search procedure and qualitative synthesis method. The methodology aimed to bridge interdisciplinary research on CP, urban regeneration, climate responsive design, cultural heritage and participatory urbanism in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) cities. A structured narrative review was deemed most appropriate for the following reasons: The literature reviewed was spread across several disciplines and from a variety of methodological traditions, conceptual frameworks, and publication formats.

The present study differs from a fully systematic literature study in which the emphasis is on statistical synthesis or on a meta-analysis and it focuses mainly on conceptual integration, thematic interpretation, and development of a cross-disciplinary framework. However, systematic search and screening methods were used to enhance transparency, methodological consistency, and analytical rigor.

The search and screening processes of the study are guided by the PRISMA framework, however, this study is not quantitative and rather aims for an interpretive and framework-oriented approach. Therefore, the review should be recognized as a systematic search transparency measure, structured narrative review, and not as a full systematic meta-analytic study.

Table 1. Search strategy query terms, filters, and yield

Theme	Primary Query Terms	Year Filter	Citation Filter	Initial Hits	Included
CP Theory & Frameworks	"CP" AND (theory OR framework OR definition OR critique)	2002–2025	≥10	15	7
CP in Practice (Western)	"CP" AND (urban park OR public space OR regeneration OR revitalization)	2010–2025	≥15	15	6
MENA Urban Regeneration	("CP" OR "urban regeneration") AND (Middle East OR MENA OR Arab OR Islamic OR Gulf)	2015–2025	None	25	5
Hot-Arid Climate Design	"hot arid climate" AND (outdoor space OR thermal comfort OR urban park OR public space)	2010–2025	≥10	10	3
Heritage & Sense of Place	"sense of place" AND (heritage OR cultural identity OR Islamic cities OR urban park)	2006–2025	≥10	10	4
Community Participation	"participatory design" AND (urban space OR placemaking OR community engagement)	2015–2025	≥10	10	5
Public Art & Social Cohesion	"public art" AND (placemaking OR urban space OR social cohesion OR installation)	2015–2025	≥10	10	3

Note: CP = creative placemaking.

2.1 Search strategy and data sources

The primary literature search was carried out using Semantic Scholar academic database which indexes over 200 million scholarly publications in various fields with support for citation tracking, author disambiguation, and integration with open access. The database was chosen given its wide interdisciplinary scope, and the fact that it includes journals from the Scopus and Web of Science databases, as well as journals from emerging institutions in MENA that might not

be covered in more specialized databases.

In addition, to improve the search coverage and limit database bias, supplementary searches were carried out on search engines such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The primary database was used to find the majority of the literature, with Google Scholar being primarily used for grey literature, institutional reports, book chapters, etc., not indexed in the primary database.

Seven search queries were created, using a process of iteration, with the help of keyword expansion, backward

citation and snowballing. As illustrated in Table 1, the search was carried out from January to February 2026 and the publications from 2002—2025 were included. The bottom edge year (2002) was chosen to represent the beginning of the theoretical underpinnings of CP that are linked to the work of Richard Florida on the creative class.

2.2 Study selection and screening process

To ensure methodological transparency and consistency, the selection of studies used a screening workflow following the PRISMA guidance. The records were taken from Semantic Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar search and underwent screening at various stages, such as the removal of duplicate records, title screening, abstract screening, and checking the eligibility of full text. Studies were included if they were relevant to the three themes of CP, urban regeneration, climate-responsive design, cultural heritage integration, and participatory urbanism in the context of urban contexts in MENA or similar countries around the world.

As shown in Table 2, a final review corpus of 52 studies was selected after being screened according to a rigorous structured screening procedure and a thematic relevance assessment. The process of selection of the included works focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly book chapters, institutional reports, and interdisciplinary research that clearly focused on CP and culturally responsive design of public spaces in cities.

A PRISMA-informed flow diagram was used to outline the

stepwise process undertaken in this study for literature identification and screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of literature. Figure 1 shows the process followed. This diagram starts with the number of records retrieved from several databases, which are then deduplicated to ensure data is refined. It then describes the screening of the titles and abstracts where irrelevant studies were eliminated according to the outlined inclusion criteria. The full-text eligibility evaluation stage is then introduced, in which studies were assessed in more depth and additional exclusions were made because of methodological and/or contextual limitations. The final stage of the process is the inclusion of 52 studies, which are the basis for thematic synthesis and the development of a framework via the structured narrative review corpus.

Table 2. PRISMA-informed study selection and screening process for the structured narrative review

Screening Stage	Number of Records
Records identified through database searching	214
Duplicate records removed	48
Records screened (title/abstract)	166
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	74
Full-text articles excluded	22
Final included studies	52

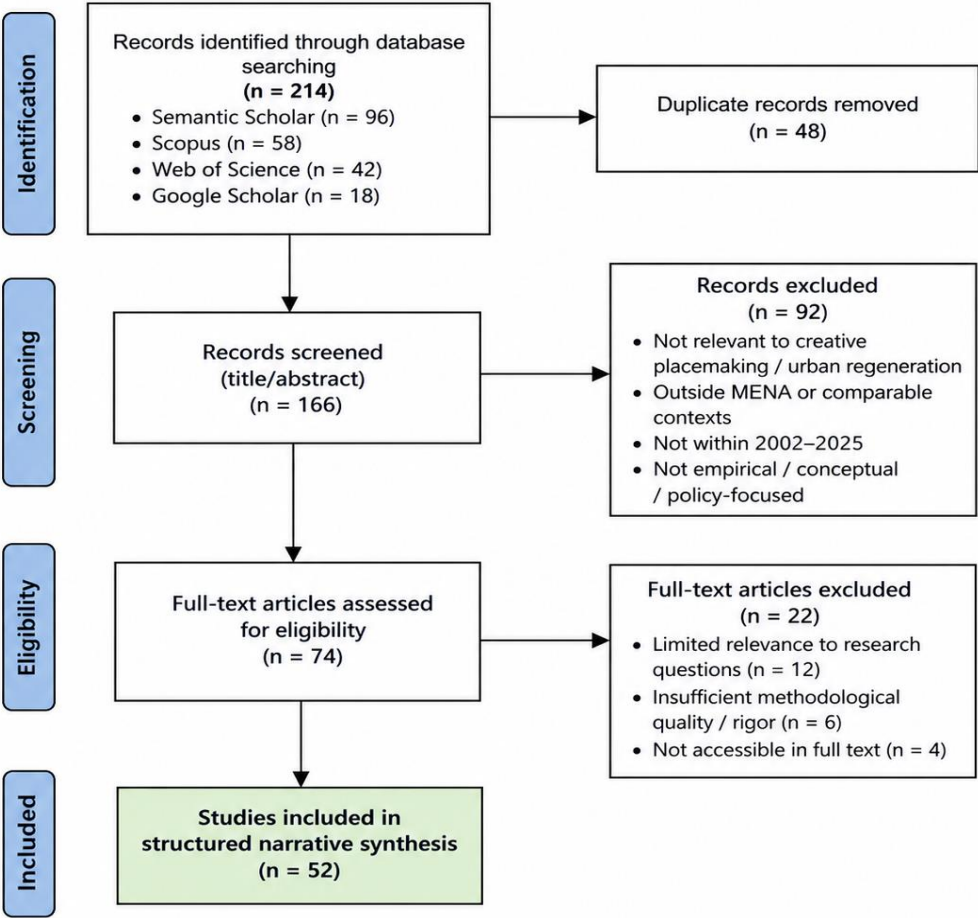


Figure 1. PRISMA-informed flow diagram of the literature search and study selection process

Geographic Distribution of CP Literature

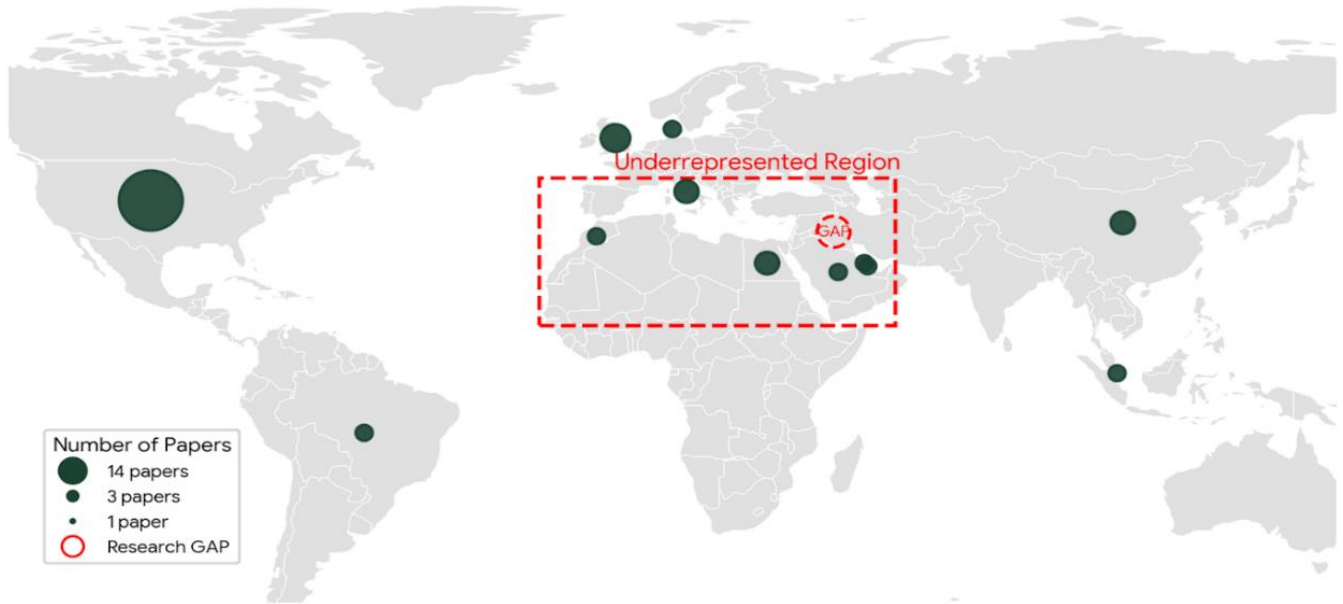


Figure 2. Geographic distribution of reviewed creative placemaking (CP) literature (2002–2025)

2.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The studies had to match the following criteria: (a) published between 2002 and 2025, (b) published in an English language peer-reviewed journal, edited volume, or as an institutional white paper; (c) must cover the topic of CP, urban park design, an urban public space regeneration, or a similar theme; (d) must be directly relevant to the objectives of the review. Articles were filtered out based on the following criteria: purely investigating indoor cultural spaces only (museums, galleries) and not touching on public space, being a conference abstract and thus lacking the full-text or discussing placemaking but not focusing on spatial design.

Figure 2 shows the last corpus that includes 33 sources: 24 journal articles, 4 books/monographs, 3 institutional reports/white papers, and 2 edited volume chapters. They were divided into seven thematic categories to analyse them and some of the sources were relevant to more than one theme. The recorded citation counts were captured during the time of search (February 2026) to give an indication of the scholarly impact but it is noted that the citation counts will be skewed towards the older publications and English-language articles.

2.4 Analytical approach

The thematic analysis was completed in three phases. To begin with, all the sources were read and coded based on the main thematic contribution, geographic area of interest, methodology, and the main findings. Second, the within-theme synthesis was done to find convergent findings, contradictions and idea evolution over time. Third, the cross-theme synthesis was conducted to find gaps in the intersection of themes, e.g., the gap between the research on thermal comfort (Theme 4) and the theory of CP (Theme 1), where no other study is able to bridge the gap between two areas of knowledge. This intersectional gap analysis is the main analytical contribution of the review and the core of the proposed framework of Section 10.

3. CREATIVE PLACEMAKING: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONCEPTUAL EVOLUTION

In Figure 3, the CP intellectual architecture is based on the synthesis of three different academic traditions: urban economics and the thesis of creative class, cultural policy and arts advocacy, and participatory urbanism. Knowledge of these origins is necessary to determine the extent to which CP can be applied to other contexts than those of its Anglo-American heritage.

3.1 The creative class thesis and its legacy

Richard Florida has created a conceptual forebear of CP, his creative class thesis, which he formulated in *The Rise of the Creative Class* [6, 7]. Florida claimed that economic development after industrialization is no longer built around the traditional sources of production (land, labour, capital) but around the human capital of creative professionals (scientists, engineers, artists, designers, knowledge workers) which are concentrated in the cities providing cultural amenity, social tolerance and technological infrastructure. His 3T model, Technology, Talent, Tolerance, suggested that the cities that seek economic competitiveness have to develop environments friendly to and keeping the creative talent in the cities, and that the important facilitators of that attraction are lively streets and cultural amenities.

The thesis of Florida had an astronomical impact in the circles of municipal policy, as cities around the world embarked on investment in cultural districts, arts festivals, and cultural economy approaches. But it was also targeting persistent academic criticism. The heaviest criticism is the causal orientation of the Florida argument: does urban prosperity come because of the concentration of creative classes, or because of creative-workers flow? Empirical evidence has been not entirely flawless, and various researchers have observed that Florida structure is systematically flawed in terms of displacement impacts

associated with the attraction of creative-class populations, i.e., gentrification, increased housing prices, and the expulsion of lower-income locals who were already present prior to the creative revolution [8]. In *The New Urban Crisis* [9], Florida himself admitted most of these criticisms, and suggested remedial policies such as more equitable investment in housing and transit.

To this end, the creative class thesis is important to this review as the discursive source of CP and not a tested economic model. It laid the theoretical groundwork of connecting creativity, culture and place that later theorists, especially Markusen and Gadwa [3], would bring down to the more grounded community-based practice.



Figure 3. Evolution of creative placemaking (CP) theory and practice (2002–2025)

3.2 Formalizing creative placemaking: Markusen and Gadwa (2010)

CP is a term that took its official title in the white paper commissioned by the National Endowment of Arts and written by Markusen and Gadwa [3]. This groundbreaking document left the theme of macro-economic framing in Florida and placed CP as a place-based practice whereby, in strategic ways, the physical and social identity of a neighbourhood, town, city, or region is designed around the arts and other cultural practices. This definition has three characteristics, which are worth highlighting.

To begin with, there is the expressly cross-sectoral character of CP: actors that are traditionally working in distinct institutional realms, such as government agencies, private developers, community organizations, and individual artists, are to collaborate. This intersectoral requirement differentiates CP and traditional public art programs, which generally entail a commissioning organ, an artist contracted but not the community at large and or the private sector.

Second, CP deals with physical and social qualities of place. It is not only about the sculpture installation or the murals, but rather the arrangement of space, programmes, structures of governance, and economies of a place which as a whole would determine the experience of a place. Such holistic scope places CP nearer to urban design theory than to arts administration.

Third, cultural activities and arts are the medium of transformation in which the definition focuses on. This differentiates CP as compared to other wider placemaking discourse (perhaps focused on traffic calming, street furniture or pedestrian infrastructure but not arts) or cultural policy (perhaps focused on arts funding with no spatial implication).

3.3 Critical and constructive responses

The 10 years after the Markusen and Gadwa white paper

saw the institutional growth and critical analysis of CP. ArtPlace America funded more than 100 million CP projects in the United States in 2011–2020 on the institutional side, the knowledge of which was significantly accumulated by Daniel and Kim [10]. These investments proved that CP would produce real results, such as more people walking around, the creation of new businesses, property prices, but showed that the question of whose needs were being fulfilled when arts-led change generated higher land values in neighbourhoods that were formerly affordable.

Zitcer [8] provided the most critical commentary regarding the construction of the concept. Zitcer based her argument on a discourse analysis of policy documents, grant application and institutional communications, showing that CP is a type of a "boundary object" - a concept with enough elasticity that different interested parties can project their own meanings onto it, allowing building a coalition of otherwise divergent interests. This elasticity made it easy to be adopted but at the same time, it blurred fundamental tensions between the community development objectives (equity, inclusion, cultural preservation) and economic development objectives (property appreciation, tourism revenue, drawing investment). Instead of dismissing CP, Zitcer argues that more specificity is needed to determine the creativity in the focus and the place making.

A social justice writer, Post et al [11] further watered down this criticism by critiquing the racial and class aspects of CP. Post proposed that CP initiatives spearheaded by predominantly white-cultural institutions in colour-majority neighbourhoods created the risk of recreating a pattern of cultural extraction the aesthetic input of the marginalized community extraction is repurposed into places-making without a proportional return of economic or political gain to the marginalized communities. This criticism is especially applicable to MENA applications, where ethnic, sectarian, and class differentiation in urban areas such as Baghdad makes

special consideration to the who and why of whose cultural narratives are prioritized in placemaking efforts.

Courage and McKeown [12] provided a positive synthesis in CP in Post-Industrial Cities, claiming that the tensions postulated by Zitcer and Post are not the innate characteristics of CP but the result of particular decisions in the implementation. When CP processes are participatory in an authentic sense, i.e. when members of the community are co-designers and not just consumers of the experience, the approach may lead to both economic re-vitalization and social

justice aims. They have case studies of post-industrial American cities, which prove that deep involvement (months or years of involvement, rather than consultation events) is more associated with fairer results.

3.4 Synthesis: Four dimensions of creative placemaking

Concluding on integrating the theoretical literature, CP may be working in four interlocking dimensions, each has its own pointers and areas of outcomes as shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Four dimensions of creative placemaking (CP) synthesis of theoretical literature

Dimension	Core Logic	Key Indicators	Outcome Domain	Principal References
Physical-Spatial	Art and design transform the material environment, creating new spatial configurations and sensory experiences	Public art density; green infrastructure; pedestrian connectivity; shade/shelter; wayfinding legibility	Environmental quality; spatial vitality	Markusen and Gadwa [3], Sepe [13]
Socio-Cultural	Cultural programming and artistic expression strengthen social bonds, shared identity, and sense of belonging	Cultural event frequency; participation rates; narrative representation; intergenerational engagement	Social cohesion; sense of place; cultural capital	Blessi et al. [14], Kelkar and Spinelli [15], Low et al. [16].
Economic	Arts-driven place transformation generates tourism, supports creative industries, and enhances property values	Visitor counts; local business revenue; employment in creative sectors; property value change	Local economic development; tourism revenue	Florida [6, 7], Bellini et al. [17].
Participatory-Governance	Cross-sectoral partnerships and community co-design ensure legitimacy, equity, and sustained engagement	Stakeholder diversity; co-design sessions; community representation; governance transparency	Democratic legitimacy; social equity; community ownership	Post et al. [11], Courage and McKeown [12],

It is this four-dimensional model that will be used to give the analytical frame with the help of which the following sections will assess the applicability of CP to MENA urban situations. As one will see, the current literature has strong evidence and guidance to offer regarding the physical-spatial and economic aspects but is largely lacking in its coverage of the socio-cultural and the participatory aspect in non-Western contexts.

4. CREATIVE PLACEMAKING IN WESTERN CITIES: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND TRANSFERABLE LESSONS

CP has been mainly tested, developed, and studied in urban centers in Western countries, which has created a significant amount of empirical data on the effects, processes, and implementation issues of CP. This part is an overview of the most important case studies and empirical evidence, with special consideration of the lessons that can and cannot be applied to the Middle Eastern setting.

4.1 The High Line: Iconic success and cautionary tale

CP cannot be discussed without mentioning the High Line in New York City which is arguably the most impactful public space initiative in the twenty-first century. The High Line was developed between 2006 and 2014 on a 2.33-kilometre stretch of derelict elevated railway on the West Side of Manhattan, reorganizing other infrastructure into a linear park with landscape architecture by James Corner Field Operations, art installations coordinated by Friends of the High Line, and cultural programming, which attracts more than eight million visitors each year [4].

The High Line reflects the physical-spatial and economic aspects of CP at the most powerful. The project triggered around 5 billion dollars of real estate development around the area, turned the Meatpacking District and West Chelsea into cultural destinations around the world and stimulated dozens of similar projects in the world called rail trails. Its design ethos - to maintain the industrial nature of the railway, but to add some scrupulously selected planting and art - illustrates the concept of site-specific creativity that lies at the heart of successful placemaking.

Nevertheless, the High Line explores the inequity tensions, which Zitcer [8] and Post et al. [11] have mentioned, as well. The neighbourhood surrounding the park also experienced rapid gentrification since the opening of the park: median rents within two blocks of the High Line by 2019 rose by 103 percent in the period between 2003 and 2019 at the cost of long-term residents and small businesses. The West Chelsea Latino and mainly low-income community was dominated by the developments of luxury condominium buildings and up-scale retail. This trend indicates that innovative placemaking, in the absence of anti-displacement mechanisms, can trigger the effect of exclusionary vitality, a place that is alive and active but no longer accessible to the population that the majority requires to use the amenities of the place.

Two essential lessons of the High Line to MENA applications are, first, that a design that incorporates arts ideas can create phenomenal transformative energy in unutilized spaces; and, second, that the energy created should be directed into governance mechanisms that prevent the displacement of existing communities.

4.2 Comparative case studies

In Table 4, Superkilen Park (Copenhagen, 2012)

demonstrates that culturally attentive placemaking can be constructed based on co-design that becomes material authorship: everyday objects identified by residents of 60-plus countries of origin (e.g., benches, swings, signs) were sourced and installed to represent diversity and make it visible and valid in the public space. By contrast, the 798 Art District in Beijing is a good example of more organic, artist-driven change of a former industrial complex into a significant contemporary art hub, but it also shows a major contradiction in the non-Western setting: the raw industry has been turned into a tourist attraction and is increasingly eroded by state-market relations, which creates commercialization and displacement instead of long-term cultural management.

In Fresh Paint Springfield (Massachusetts, 2019), inclusive CP is implemented in most of the BIPOC population (mostly through process design rather than aesthetics): belonging was

reinforced by the multi-phase process of engagement between artists and residents, culturally distinct stories of the mural, and open-door studio practices that allowed making creation publicly accessible. Lastly, the Sankofa Red Payphone (Los Angeles, 2018-2021) proposes a lower cost and more scalable approach: a lone Afrofuturist narration object that moves around neighborhoods and is changed to fit the community, but develops social capacity by being there woven into the story instead of a fixed infrastructural system. Comprising these cases, they highlight four lessons that can be transferred: deep involvement is more important than end form, authenticity is structurally susceptible to commercialization, mobility has the power to replace permanence, and the context of governance is a strong determinant of whether CP is empowering or extractive.

Table 4. Comparative analysis of key creative placemaking (CP) case studies

Project	City / Country	Year	Scale	CP Dimensions	Key Outcome	Limitation / Critique
The High Line	New York, USA	2009–14	2.33 km linear park	Physical-Spatial; Economic	8M+ annual visitors; 5B adjacent development	103% rent increase; community displacement [11]
Superkilen	Copenhagen, Denmark	2012	30,000 m ² park	Socio-Cultural; Participatory	Objects from 60+ nationalities; multicultural identity	Tokenistic diversity critique; ongoing maintenance cost
798 Art District	Beijing, China	2002–ongoing	60+ ha creative district	Economic; Physical-Spatial	Major contemporary art hub; tourism anchor	Commercialization eroding artistic authenticity [13]
Fresh Paint	Springfield, USA	2019	12+ murals citywide	Participatory; Socio-Cultural	Community pride; BIPOC representation; belonging	Festival format limits long-term sustainability
Bahrain Pearling Trail	Muharraq, Bahrain	2012–ongoing	3.5 km heritage route	Socio-Cultural; Economic	UNESCO inscription; heritage tourism growth	Limited community co-design in initial phases
AlUla	AlUla, Saudi Arabia	2017–ongoing	22,561 km ² region	Physical-Spatial; Economic	Global cultural destination; \$15B+ investment	Top-down; limited local Bedouin participation
Souq Waqif	Doha, Qatar	2006–08	1.5 ha restored market	Physical-Spatial; Economic	Iconic place identity; tourist anchor	Image-making over place-making
Abu Nuwas Park	Baghdad, Iraq	— (proposed)	1.2 km waterfront	All five CCPF layers	Framework proposed in this review	No empirical CP study exists (Gap 1)

4.3 Social capital and community outcomes

On top of the high-profile case studies, an empirical literature base has investigated how creativity works to bring about outcomes at a community level through CP. One of the first studies that explicitly operationalized social capital in a CP framework to demonstrate its effects, Kelkar and Spinelli [15] revealed that CP programs involving local artists yielded statistically significant greater levels of social trust and community cohesion compared to ones that make use of externally commissioned art. The difference between bonding and bridging capital (developing relationships within communities or developing relationships across social boundaries, respectively) is especially helpful in the MENA contexts, where sectarian and ethnic diversity in urban centres such as Baghdad requires placemaking strategies that develop bridges without obliterating difference.

Quantitative evidence on the topic was presented by Blessi et al. [14] who reported projects of urban regeneration in Italy which found cultural events in the urban areas as “a source of accumulating human” and social capital. Their longitudinal

study showed that neighbourhoods that maintained cultural programming in civic spaces showed statistically significant changes of civic participation, education and local entrepreneurship than the control neighbourhoods. Most importantly, these influences were greatest when the cultural programming was produced locally as opposed to imported programming - a result that has a direct implication to the application of MENA where the temptation to import western cultural programming leads to erosion of local cultural identity.

Sepe [13] added a methodological context of measuring creative urban regeneration based on what she referred as “PlaceMaker analysis” - a systematic approach of measuring how artistic interventions transform the sensory, functional, and perceptual attributes of the urban space. Her model, which was experimented in several cities in Italy, offers a systematic method of assessing the results of CP that can be applied to MENA settings with some additions of culture-specific indicators of sensory perceptions (e.g., the use of the call to prayer in organizing the temporal structure of using public space).

4.4 Urban design as health determinant

The broader relevance of CP is pointed out by the emerging evidence of the relationship between the quality of urban design and the social health. Authors in *The Lancet* discussed urban design as a significant trend in the future of health and wellbeing and state that the quality of the public spaces directly affects the level of physical activity, mental health, social isolation, and respiratory outcome. This health aspect brings urgency to the CP agenda in MENA cities, in which the adverse health outcomes of poor design of the public space are exacerbated by environmental hazards extreme heat, dust pollution, water scarcity, etc. The redesign of the parks in Baghdad like that of Abu Nuwas not only to cultural vitality but also to the health of the population is a consequence of the negative air quality that has been observed in the city [2] and the lack of access to green spaces in the city.

The literature on Western CP supports the physical-spatial and economic aspects of CP and offers solid evidence of the effect on visitor counts, property prices, and social capital. Yet, three major limitations put direct transfer to MENA settings into doubt: (1) climate assumptions - all of the large Western case studies are in temperate or cool-temperate climate where outdoor comfort can be enjoyed most of the year; (2) governance models - Western CP is based on non-profit organizations and philanthropic foundations that are not easily found in most MENA economies; (3) cultural repertoire the artistic vocabularies that are used in Western CP (contemporary art, street murals, performance art) might not be understood by or might actively have a detrimental effect on communities whose aesthetic practices are based on Islamic art forms.

5. CREATIVE PLACEMAKING IN THE MENA REGION: EMERGING APPLICATIONS AND CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES

The implementation of the principles of CP in the MENA, although much less covered than in Western settings, is not only not nonexistent. An expanding literature on the topic, commonly under the heading of urban regeneration, heritage revitalization, or cultural tourism development as opposed to CP, deals with the issue of how cities in the MENA region transform their public spaces by engaging with arts and culture. This section sums up these contributions, which have emerged and defines the contextual factors that make MENA placemaking unique as compared to the place making in the West.

5.1 Gulf cities: Spectacle, identity, and the placemaking paradox

According to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, in the last twenty years, especially the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have spent a multitude of funds on cultural infrastructure and the development of the public space. The Saadiyat Island (where the Louvre Abu Dhabi will be), Doha Museum of Islamic Art and National Museum of Qatar, and AlUla development in Saudi Arabia are all examples of cultural investment in the billions of dollars to diversify their economies, spread soft power and build iconic spaces. Nevertheless, there is a debate over the connection of these

megaprojects and true CP.

The article by Authors investigates the concept of placemaking and transit-oriented development in the city of Doha with the emphasis on the roles played by such cultural institutions as the Qatar National Museum and the redeveloped Souq Waqif as anchors of place identity within a city with a fast pace of both physical and demographic changes. Their review of the literature has shown a fundamental conflict; even though such projects indeed create spectacle, in a visual sense of the term, spaces that create international publicity and tourist attraction, they do not, in most cases, produce the day-to-day vitality and community ownership that they have found have defined successful CP in the Western literature. An example of such a place is Souq Waqif which is more of a tourist attraction, a place to dine out than a true community gathering place, as it is a replicated historical marketplace. The authors also found that Gulf placemaking is often based on image-making, as opposed to place-making - a discovery that has far-reaching implications on the wider MENA region.

Mohamed et al. [18] discussed the AlUla Heritage Site in Saudi Arabia, in which a Saudi-French commission, led by the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU), has invested in developing the historic Nabataean city of Hegra (the first UNESCO World Heritage Site in Saudi Arabia) into a cultural destination. The landscape architecture, installation of artworks (including international artists like Agnes Denes) and cultural festivals are included in the project within a desert scenery. Although not explicitly described as a CP project, the AlUla project may be viewed as the most ambitious place transformation through arts in the MENA region. But its top-down delivery, global artistic portfolio, and somewhat narrow involvement with local Bedouin populations cast doubt on the aspects of participatory and cultural authenticity of CP.

5.2 Heritage routes and cultural corridors

Heritage route and cultural corridor projects are forming a more community-based model of MENA placemaking. The Pearling Trail Bahrain [19] described a 3.5-kilometre walker-friendly trail throughout the historic core of Muharraq, which links 17 structures, three offshore oyster fields and a waterfront linked to the pre-oil pearling sector of the Bahrain economy. The Pearling Trail, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012 is a type of heritage-based CP that combines architectural preservation, interpretive signage, community workshops and cultural events into a historically authentic fabric of the city.

There are several things that the Baghdad could learn through the Bahrain model. First, it shows that MENA heritage routes may be used as a linear CP project - similar in conception to the High Line in New York but based on local cultural stories, as opposed to imported ones. Second, it demonstrates that UNESCO inscription can become a force of initiating the community and foreign funding, leading to the institutional legitimacy lacking in purely local initiatives. Thirdly, the Pearling Trail combination of intangible heritage (oral histories of pearl divers, traditional songs, craft demonstrations) and physical conservation is also moving towards a holistic model of placemaking that places equal emphasis on material culture as well as immaterial culture - a distinction that is especially relevant in the Islamic cultural context where calligraphy, poetry, and oral tradition are all given at least equal cultural weight.

5.3 Urban regeneration and gentrification concerns

The first systematic review of urban regeneration-led gentrification in MENA cities was performed by Abdelfattah et al. [20]. The review, which included 47 articles on 12 MENA countries, found a peculiar trend: contrary to the market-based gentrification of the Western cities (where the increasing property values result in the eviction of the poor people), MENA gentrification is often state-based, and it is caused by the clearance and reconstruction of informal settlements or historic quarters led by the government, as mentioned in Table 5. In several known instances such as regeneration works in Cairo, Beirut and Amman urban regeneration has included physical destruction of low-income

housing and eviction of existing communities to allow cultural, commercial or tourism development to take place.

The implications of the findings by Abdelfattah et al. [20] are an important caution to the proponents of CP in the MENA region: The institutional and governance environment in which CP is implemented is not the same as the model found in the West non-profit. When it comes to urban development, the state is the most (and sometimes only) dominant actor in most MENA countries and hence civil society organizations are limited on their ability to represent the interests of communities in the planning efforts. MENA CP structures should thus include arrangements of community voice that are shaped to and realistic of current governance systems.

Table 5. Comparative analysis of emerging CP/urban regeneration projects in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region

Project	Country	Type	Scale	Funding Model	Community Participation	Heritage Integration	Climate Adaptation
Bahrain Pearlring Trail	Bahrain	Heritage route	3.5 km	Government + UNESCO	Moderate (consultation)	High (pearling heritage)	Low
AIUla Heritage Site	Saudi Arabia	Cultural destination	22,561 km ²	State (\$15B+)	Low (top-down)	High (Nabataean/Islamic)	Low (desert context unaddressed)
Souq Waqif Revival	Qatar	Market restoration	1.5 ha	State (Amiri Diwan)	Low (no co-design)	High (traditional souk)	Low (AC dependence)
El-Shallalat Park	Egypt	Urban park renewal	12 ha	Municipal	Moderate (user surveys)	Moderate (Alexandrian)	Moderate (shade, water)
Marrakech Medina	Morocco	Heritage regeneration	600 ha	Government + tourism	Low (state-driven)	High (Islamic architecture)	Moderate (traditional)
Abu Nuwas Park (proposed)	Iraq	Waterfront park CP	1.2 km	TBD (CCPF model)	High (CCPF Layer 4)	High (Abbasid literary)	High (CCPF Layer 1)

Table 6. SWOT analysis Abu Nuwas Park as a creative placemaking (CP) candidate

Strengths	Weaknesses
• 1.2 km prime Tigris River waterfront frontage • Eponymous connection to Abu Nuwas one of the greatest Arabic poets (c. 756–814 CE) • Central location in Baghdad's urban core • Proximity to Kadhimiyya pilgrimage corridor (millions of annual visitors) • Historical significance as a gathering space since the Abbasid era • Strong emotional attachment among Baghdad residents	• Severe infrastructure degradation (post-conflict) • No shade infrastructure; summer temperatures > 50 °C • Absence of cultural programming or public art • Safety and security concerns (especially evenings) • Environmental degradation: air pollution, dust, Tigris water quality • No institutional mechanism for participatory park governance
Opportunities	Threats
• Untapped religious tourism economy (pilgrims as cultural tourists) • Growing youth population (median age ~21) receptive to digital engagement • Rich Islamic heritage vocabulary for design (calligraphy, geometry, gardens) • Evening programming exploiting post-sunset cooling (15–20 °C drop) • International development funding (World Bank, UNESCO, UNDP) • Potential UNESCO inscription for Baghdad heritage sites	• Political instability and shifting municipal priorities • Gentrification risk if land values increase ([20]). • Climate change intensifying heat extremes (+2–3 °C by 2050) • Water scarcity limiting green infrastructure options • Sectarian tensions affecting public space governance • Brain drain reducing local creative talent pool

5.4 The Baghdad context: Latent potential, manifest challenges

Baghdad is a place with a distinct place in MENA placemaking. Being one of the great historical cities of the world - the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, the home of the One Thousand and One Nights and the historical centre of Arabic literary culture - Baghdad has the cultural resources of the greatest depth and appeal. The location of the city in an Iraq pilgrimage network (between Baghdad and Kadhimiya, Samarra, Najaf, and Karbala) creates a steady stream of local

and international tourists, which is a noteworthy yet largely untapped customer base to the CP projects.

The key location to this review is Abu Nuwas Park, as shown in Table 6, which represents the possibilities and the issues. The 1.2-kilometre frontage of the park to the Tigris River, with which it is eponymously associated, its primary location in the urban geography of Baghdad, and its association with the renowned Abbasid poet Abu Nuwas (whose work was marked by subversive wit, mastery of the lyric, and critique of the social structure) makes it a logical place to do CP. The park, however, is presently plagued by

various inadequacies: poor shade and climate coverage, no public art, cultural events, or literary celebration, lack of pedestrian facilities, safety, and environmental degradation in the form of air pollutants and dust [2].

The conceptual framework of the study is the seminal research on urban waterfront regeneration in developing countries by Hoyle [21] which offers a conceptual framework that is relevant to Abu Nuwas. Drawing on the case of Stone Town waterfront in Zanzibar, Hoyle presented that waterfront parks in the context of complex developing countries must be implemented through a two-phase process that balances three goals that are often conflicting, including environmental sustainability (preservation of water quality, flood management), economic viability (need to raise revenue to maintain operations), and community involvement (must serve the local population, not only tourists). The step-by-step strategy of Hoyle may be especially suitable to Abu Nuwas, in which environmental and safety problems have to be resolved first, and only after that, it will be possible to implement more ambitious design-driven interventions.

Abdelhamid and Elfakharany [22] in a study of the usability of urban parks in Alexandria, Egypt, a MENA region where the environmental and socio-economic conditions are more similar to Baghdad than western case studies, found that there are four main predictors of park use: perceived safety, activity diversity, shade and thermal comfort, and cultural relevance. Interestingly, cultural relevance was assessed with the views of the residents on whether the park represented their identity and whether it offered activities that were significant to their community, which are the two factors that directly relate to the socio-cultural aspect of CP. Abdelhamid discovered that the cultural relevance of parks had 40-60% greater rates of daily use than similar physical quality parks with less cultural resonance, even after location and accessibility were adjusted. This observation gives quantitative evidence on the CP assumption that cultural integration is not a mere aesthetic addition, but an operational force behind the usage of parks.

Research Gap 1: Absence of systematic CP studies in Iraq

Although Baghdad has an outstanding cultural heritage, a sizeable urban space struggle, and an opportunity to tap into a large visitor pool with the help of religious tourism, the CP framework has not been implemented in Baghdad and Iraqi cities on a systematic basis in any peer-reviewed study. The literature of the MENA focuses on the Gulf (UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia) and North African (Egypt, Morocco) countries, in which the economic, security, and governance environment is varied. Such a disjuncture places the urban designers and policymakers in Iraq without an evidence-based guide on how to incorporate the arts and culture in the redesign of the public space. The current review will help fill this void by consolidating transferable results of similar MENA settings and suggest a framework that would be specifically tailored to the setting in Baghdad.

6. DESIGNING FOR HOT-ARID CLIMATES: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS AND CREATIVE RESPONSES

Any CP framework in Middle East cities must grapple with a primary environmental limitation that has not been sufficiently tackled in the literature of CP, which is the

extreme heat, based on temperate Western climates. Summer temperatures in Baghdad regularly reach over 50 °C and the effect of the urban heat island raises ground-level temperatures in densely developed regions by 3 to 8 °C. These factors, along with permanent water shortage, worsened vegetation cover, and frequent dust storms (shamal winds bringing dust particles of the Syrian and Arabian deserts), make outdoor public spaces physically intolerable to large parts of the year [2]. What it means to the CP is far-reaching: the strategy based on activating an open space with the help of arts and cultural events needs to address the issue of rendering the open space livable during the hottest months.

6.1 Thermal comfort research in hot-arid urban spaces

The best all-encompassing empirical investigation of outdoor thermal comfort in hot arid climates is the study by Aljawabra and Nikolopoulou [23] who made field measurements and structured interviews on urban open spaces in Marrakech (Morocco) and Phoenix (Arizona, USA). Their results formulated a number of principles that directly relate to the CP in Baghdad.

To start with, shade was identified as the most influential design variable of outdoor thermal comfort when dealing with hot-arid climates. Darkened spaces showed changes of 15 - 20 °C in physiological equivalent temperature (PET) relative to neighboring sunlit areas - a change that alters thermal experience by making it as hot as physiologically discomforting versus thermally comfortable on standardized comfort scales. This observation suggests that shade infrastructure should be the foundation of every other design objective of any CP intervention in Abu Nuwas Park.

Second, Aljawabra and Nikolopoulou [23] had reported high levels of thermal adaptation in dwellers of hot-arid urban areas: people, who were used to high temperatures, found it comfortable where the PET values were considered to be hot or very hot by residents of temperate environments. This effect of adaptation implies that the design standards based on European or North American study of thermal comfort cannot be simply applied to MENA situations; MENA-specific levels of comfort will have to be determined by local fieldwork.

Third, the researchers established that evaporative cooling (fountains, water channels, misting systems, and vegetated surfaces) had a great impact on the perceptions of thermal comfort, although the air temperature changes were relatively small. This result has significant implications on CP because a water feature or a green wall can be both functional (climate mitigation) and aesthetic (artistic expression).

6.2 Green infrastructure and sustainability

Colding et al. [5] investigated the connection between green urban areas and sustainability and offered a more ecological context in which the redesign of parks should be placed. Their comparison showed that parks with designed green infrastructure (bioswales, rain gardens, permeable surfaces, native plantings, and vertical greenery) decrease conventional designed parks on several sustainability outcomes such as stormwater management, support of biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and control of microclimate. In hot arid environments, where traditional green space is limited by water shortage, the framework provided by Colding et al. [5] implies the change of water-intensive turf-based park to xeriscape strategies that will entail the combination of

drought-resistant indigenous plants with selective water application on areas with high cooling impacts.

In the case of Abu Nuwas Park, this would translate to a design approach that does not rely on the Western concept of a park with vast lawns (which would necessitate unnatural volumes of irrigation in the climate of Baghdad) instead of mosaic of shaded meeting spaces, xeriscaped walkways and concentrated water features along the frontage of the Tigris where the river presence offers natural evaporative cooling. Such a solution, which perhaps can be referred to as climatic placemaking, redefines environmental restrictions no longer as a hindrance to CP, but as criteria of design, capable of producing unique, place-based creative responses.

6.3 Toward climate-responsive creative placemaking

This review revealed that there is an untapped design space for hot-arid urbanism for the intersection of thermal comfort studies and CP theory. In the MENA context, infrastructures of comfort (shade, cooling and ventilation) are not separated from infrastructures of culture (art, programme and gathering), but are as much a part of the same design system. When climate adaptation is considered a medium of creative expression, placemaking is made 'functionally viable' when faced with climate extremes. The synthesis of the primary strategies from this hybrid is given below in Table 7.

Table 7. Climate-responsive creative placemaking (CP) strategies for hot-arid urban parks

Strategy	Climate Function	CP Integration	Precedent/Evidence
Mashrabiya-inspired shade canopies	Reduces PET by 15–20 °C; filters harsh sunlight into patterned shadows	Shade structures as sculptural installations; Islamic geometric patterns cast as dynamic shadow art that shifts with the sun's movement throughout the day	Aljawabra and Nikolopoulou [23]
Interactive water features	Evaporative cooling; humidity increase; psychological cooling effect	Fountain designs referencing the <i>chahar bagh</i> (four-garden) tradition of Islamic paradise gardens; interactive water jets as play infrastructure for children	Colding et al. [5]
Vertical gardens and green walls	Transpiration cooling (3–5 °C surface temperature reduction); dust filtration; noise absorption	Living art installations using drought-resistant native species; community-maintained vertical gardens as participatory art projects	Colding et al. [5].
Temporal programming	Exploits post-sunset cooling (temperatures drop 15–20 °C after sunset in Baghdad's continental climate)	Evening and night cultural events: open-air cinema, poetry recitals, light/projection art, night markets aligned with cultural calendars (Ramadan, Nowruz, literary festivals)	Abdelhamid et al. [22],
Semi-enclosed pavilions	Transitional indoor-outdoor spaces with stack ventilation and strategic openings for cross-ventilation	Gallery pavilions, performance spaces, maker studios, and reading rooms as climate-refuge "rooms" within the park landscape	Aljawabra and Nikolopoulou [23]
Misting corridors and fog art	Localized temperature reduction of 5–10 °C through atomized water particles	Fog sculptures (referencing Fujiko Nakaya's pioneering work) as environmental art; mist tunnels as sensory experiences along park pathways	Environmental art practice; thermal engineering [24]

Temporal programming and sensory interventions need to be given special consideration. As stated in Table 7, “misting corridors” and “fog art” are examples of a shift from engineering solutions to sensory environmental art, more importantly, the traditional western model of the park as a mostly daytime facility is very outdated in this context of socio-climatic conditions in the MENA region. In some cities, such as Baghdad, the night and hours following sunset are the most important times of the day for social activity, given the drastic drops in temperatures at that time. This means that CP strategies that focus on the evening use of the city's cultural spaces – whether this is an outdoor poetry reading, a projection art on a heritage façade or an illuminated night market – constitute an effective way of reacting to climatic reality more than a mere aesthetic preference. The “time-factor” in climate-responsive placemaking is significantly underrepresented in ongoing CP literature, which still assumes a daytime climate for placemaking.

Research Gap 2: Absence of a climate-responsive CP framework

Although there has been an extensive individual literature on thermal comfort during hot-arid conditions and innovative placemaking theory, none of these studies have brought these two literature fields together in a cohesive structure. The

implicit assumptions within the literature on CP is temperate climate, year-long outdoor comfort; the literature on thermal comfort does not view the arts and cultural programming as part of design variables. The significance of this gap is especially relevant to MENA cities, in which climate is likely the only most crucial factor that defines how usable the public space can be. A system where shade, cooling, and temporal programming are no longer viewed as limiting CP but as design media through which creative expression can be realized would be an important theoretical and practical contribution.

7. HERITAGE INTEGRATION, ISLAMIC CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND SENSE OF PLACE

One of the most theorized concepts in urban design and environmental psychology is the notion of sense of place, the constellation of meanings, attachments and identities that individuals and communities have to certain places. Within the framework of CP, sense of place works both as an end (CP project is successful reinforces sense of place) and as a medium (successful CP utilizes available place meanings and cultural stories as creative resource). With the case of Middle Eastern cities, in which place identity is inherently linked to Islamic cultural heritage, literary tradition, and religious

meanings, the heritage aspect of CP becomes complicated and multi-faceted and cannot be considered through the current Western-based models.

7.1 Cultural diversity and park design

Low et al. [16] in *Rethinking Urban Parks: Public Space and Cultural Diversity* have still provided the best account of cultural diversity in the design of urban parks. The authors illustrated that the design and programming of parks is not culturally neutral based on ethnographic studies conducted in New York City parks: certain spatial arrangements, planting selections, furniture placements, activity offerings, and so forth, have been shown to support some forms of cultural practice over others in a systematic way. Parks formulated based on the aesthetic ideals of the dominant culture - the so-called pastoral landscape tradition of Anglo-American Park design, with its focus on open grass, scattered seating, and visual contemplation - can unwillingly be closed to communities whose spatial culture aimed at social reunification, proximity between generations, food preparation and sharing, and acoustic liveliness.

The results presented by Low et al. [16] have their direct implication on the Abu Nuwas Park redesign. The space planning of the Iraqi park culture, influenced by the social norms and the extended family recreational way of living, culinary tradition based on sharing meals, gives preference to spatial arrangements that are rather different than the Anglo-American pastoral model: seating family groups in close proximity, picnic areas with shade, barbecue areas, playgrounds directly near (not isolated) family gathering play zones, and noisy environments that support conversational, musical and prayer call activities. An imaginative place making model, which would establish Western spatial standards, would most probably not produce social vitality and belonging that it is designed to produce.

7.2 Measuring spatial vitality

Li et al. [25] conducted a PRISMA-based systematic review of methods for evaluating vitality in urban public spaces, synthesizing 89 studies into a framework of six key vitality indicators: (1) activity diversity the range of different activities observed in a space; (2) *temporal usage patterns* how usage varies across hours, days, and seasons; (3) pedestrian flows the volume and directionality of foot traffic; (4) social interactions the frequency and nature of interpersonal exchanges; (5) cultural programming the presence and regularity of organized cultural events; and (6) environmental quality perceptions of comfort, cleanliness, safety, and aesthetic appeal. This framework provides a robust methodological foundation for assessing the current state of spaces like Abu Nuwas Park and measuring the impact of CP interventions.

Most importantly, Li et al. [25] discovered that the cultural programming and activity diversity was the best predictor of perceived vitality, and it outperformed the quality of physical design in its predictive capacity. This result supports the main assumption of CP that whatever is happening at a place (programming, events, artistic activity) is at least as important as the physical appearance of the place (design, materials, landscaping). In the case of Abu Nuwas Park, where cultural programming and the diversity of activities are currently rated low, this implies that even small increases in the cultural programming (e.g., weekly poetry recitals, seasonal art

exhibitions, community craft markets) would create disproportionate improvement in perceived vitality.

7.3 Islamic heritage as a creative resource

The cities of the Middle East have their own cultural resources that are not covered by the Western CP literature: the Islamic geometric art (including its mathematically advanced tessellation and infinite pattern systems), Arabic calligraphy (a highest form of visual art with strong spiritual connotations), the traditional garden design (the *chahar bagh* or four-fold paradise garden, and its quadripartite water channels, which represent the rivers of paradise), traditions of the literature (the poetry, which takes a more central place within Arabic culture than in most Western cultures), traditions of space and acoustics of the mosque, the souk, the hammam, the caravanserai.

These aspects constitute the abundant vocabulary of inventive placemaking that is neither Western-based, place-specific, nor aesthetically strong. The literary tradition of Abu Nuwas himself provides a rather interesting source of creativity in the case of Abu Nuwas Park. The much-discussed wit, his subversive approach to the traditional poetic subjects, and his glorification of the cosmopolitan urban lifestyle in Baghdad during the Abbasid golden age all served to bring fame to Abu Nuwas (c. 756–814 CE), who is currently considered one of the greatest Arabic poets of all time. His poetry, both bacchic (*khamriyyat*) and erotic (*ghazal*) and ascetic (*zuhdiyyat*), provides a literary landscape of unfamiliar richness that could be used to inform CP interventions of both calligraphic installations and poetry walks as well as performance spaces to respond to the legacy of Abu Nuwas.

A framework that was suggested by Bellini et al. [17] and which is applicable to this discussion is the association of heritage, urban regeneration, and creative tourism. Their model does not relegate cultural heritage only to the role of a passive repository that must be preserved but reacts to the present creative activity by giving rise to new creative solutions. Here, heritage-based CP is a process that entails three mutually reinforcing components (1) interpretation - the process of making heritage readable, visible, and available to modern audiences through narrative, in the forms of storytelling, signage, and mediating artistic work; (2) activation - programming heritage sites with living culture (performance, craft, food, festival) that relates past and present; and (3) innovation - contemporary artists and designers commissioned to create new works that react to, redefine, or engage in dialogue with heritage materials. This three-process model opens a good operational model of incorporating the literary heritage of Abu Nuwas in the redesigning of the park.

7.4 Heritage tourism and the pilgrimage economy

The fact that Baghdad is a member of the Iraqi pilgrimage system gives the CP opportunity a unique economic aspect. The city is also linked to a cluster of religious Shia locations - Kadhimiya (in Baghdad), Samarra, Najaf, and Karbala - that collectively receive millions of pilgrims every year of Iran, Lebanon, Bahrain, Pakistan, India, and other nations with large Shia communities. The economy of pilgrimage creates large streams of visitors using Baghdad, but the spaces of this city are not currently organized to harness the potential of the culture tourism of these streams.

According to the creative tourism framework by Bellini et al. [17], as a park situated in the center of Baghdad and located close to the Kadhimiya pilgrimage axis, Abu Nuwas Park could be repositioned as a cultural waystation place where pilgrims and tourists should experience both the secular literary and art heritage of Baghdad and their pilgrimage destination. This positioning would involve delicate design taking into account the spiritual aspects of the pilgrimage as well as providing contrasting cultural experiences: e.g., the garden areas of the Quranic views of the paradise, calligraphic installations of the sacred and literary texts, exhibits area explaining the historical role of Baghdad as the centre of the Islamic scholarship and artistic output.

Research Gap 3: Islamic heritage integration in CP frameworks

None of the literature reviewed has critically investigated how Islamic cultural heritage, including geometric art, calligraphy, literary tradition, principles of garden design and the spatial practices of the mosque and the souk can be converted into CP schemes. The current literature on the topic of cultural identity incorporates it as a generic variable and no exact aesthetic, spiritual, and social aspects of the Islamic heritage in the urban space are given attention. This gap is not just theoretical: it has practical implications to the designers and policy makers in MENA cities in the form of lack of evidence-based advice on how the local cultural assets can be translated into useful placemaking interventions. A study agenda focusing on how Islamic cultural aspects may be a content (what is expressed) and medium (how it is expressed) of CP would be a great contribution to the field.

8. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PARTICIPATORY DESIGN IN CP

The involvement of the community is extensively discussed as the basis of successful CP [3, 12]. The intellectual reasoning is quite simple: since CP aims at the change of collective spaces in such a way that they embody and support the sense of community, the communities utilizing those spaces must be actively engaged in the process of transformation. Unless there is involvement, CP will run the risk of creating spaces that have been aesthetically achieved but socially isolated in that they are designed to rather than with the people who will occupy them. Nevertheless, the shapes and processes of meaningful engagement differ greatly regarding the cultural and political contexts and the MENA region poses specific challenges that the largely Western body of participation literature is unable to successfully tackle.

8.1 Models of participation in western creative placemaking

In their research of the Fresh Paint Springfield mural festival, authors were able to describe the outcomes of participatory CP in some of the most detailed ways. The lead muralist of the festival works in a mostly Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) community in Springfield, Massachusetts, thus the key stages involved in the process included early community discussions with the local residents to find out their stories and issues; co-design workshops where residents could provide visual concepts and cultural

references; open studio sessions where community members could observe the actual process and participate in it; and a final public celebration. The resultant mural, as a culturally tailored representation of the members of the local communities, created statistically significant changes in the perceived sense of belonging and neighbourhood pride in residents.

There are three aspects of the Springfield model that are worth special consideration in MENA applications. To begin with, multi-stage interactions: the participation was not an isolated incident but a process that lasted a few weeks during which trust could be built between the artists and the community members. Second, culturally specific content: the observable figures in the mural were familiar people within the local community in culturally guided poses and contexts which formed a visual image of belonging. Third, porous borders: the open-door studio policy blurred the traditional distinction between artist and audience whereby community members could experience the creative process as it was happening and participate in it in real time. All these components are ingredients of a paradigm of profound engagement that is far out of the consultative or informational delivery model that typifies most traditional planning efforts.

8.2 Digital participation tools

Authors has discussed the idea of using Minecraft as a participatory urban design tool by referencing the Block-by-Block program by UN-Habitat that uses the popular video game to engage communities in the developing world in developing urban designs. The program gives participants (most of whom have never been introduced to formal planning process before) a three-dimensional environment in which they can model their desires regarding the spaces in their neighborhoods. Block by Block has been applied in more than 40 countries since its release in 2012 to involve communities in Nairobi, Mumbai, Mexico City, and Pristina, among others. Several benefits of the Minecraft approach were identified in the analysis by Delaney: it involves youths who are typically not included in planning processes; the game-like format of it minimizes the intimidation aspect that comes with formal meetings of people; its visual outputs are easy to communicate to professional designers.

In the case of Baghdad, where a youthful population (median age of about 21 years), increased use of internet, and a well-developed gaming culture, create an opportunity to digitalize participation instruments, the Block-by-Block model can be used in order to involve youth in the redesign of Abu Nuwas Park. Nevertheless, Delaney also warned that the digital engagement tools have the problem of favoring technology-savvy participants to disadvantage older adults, women with less access to technology, and poorer economically disadvantaged groups of people - which is more acute in the Iraq context.

Authors presented a complementary model of digital-physical hybrid placemaking in their study of the Sankofa Red, an Afrofuturist payphone rotating in three installations across neighbourhoods in Los Angeles. The installations entailed local people communicating their stories, memories, and hopes using the payphone interface whereby a cumulative collection of neighbourhood narratives was created. The Sankofa Red model shows that CP does not necessarily have to occur through permanent and costly installations: low-priced, mobile creative objects can be used to develop long-

term community interaction and social placemaking capacity in the face of scarcity budgets and unpredictable institutional conditions, circumstances that typify most MENA urban environments.

8.3 Community engagement in urban green spaces: Evidence from emerging economies

Bressane et al. [26] investigated the interaction among community engagement and urban green space management in the Metropolitan Region of Mexico in Brazil, which, although geographically too far apart to be a part of the MENA region, has many structural similarities with Baghdad, such as high urbanization rates, high levels of socio-economic inequality, poor municipal services, and an extensive history of top-down planning. In their quantitative study of 33 municipal environmental departments, they observed that there was moderate positive association between the intensity of community involvement in the management of the park and the green space coverage as well as reduced socio-environmental inequality. Municipalities that had invested in participative mechanisms (community advisory boards, volunteer maintenance programs, co-design processes) were found to achieve better measurably better green space outcomes in comparison to municipalities that used only municipal management.

This observation has significant implications to Abu Nuwas Park, in which the maintenance capacity of municipalities is low, and the community does not have ownership of the public space. CP technique which includes community stewardship systems, such as neighbourhood associations taking care of community gardens, artist groups controlling exhibition areas, student organisations running cultural events, etc. might not only increase the quality of parks and help to maintain them over time, but also create the civic infrastructure required to support them.

8.4 Participation challenges in Middle East and North Africa contexts

The models of participation that are reported in the Western literature are based on institutional prerequisites that are unlikely to be the reality in most of the MENA states: an active civil society sector that can coordinate participation in community-based activities; municipal planning systems that have institutionalized a requirement to consult the public; legal systems that allow freedom of assembly and expression; and gender conventions that allow mixed-gender participation in community design. Some of these conditions to some extent or entirely do not exist in Iraq. The agencies of the civil society act within severe limitations; consultations with the population in urban development are not informalized; the issues of security do not allow meeting the people in certain regions; the culture of gender separation, although it depends very much on the neighbourhood and class, and generation, may demand certain or different forms of engagement with the women.

These are not reasons why community involvement in CP cannot happen in Baghdad, but they require culturally sensitive engagement strategies. Possible transformations are: engaging through existing social institutions (mosques, community centres, schools, tribal councils) instead of introducing new institutional forms; creating gender-sensitive forms of participation that offer specific spaces to allow women to give feedback; employing digital tools (social media

surveys, WhatsApp discussion groups, online visualization platforms) as supplement to face-to-face engagement; and basing on the Iraqi practice of diwaniya (informal social gathering) as a model of community design discussion.

Research Gap 4: Culturally Adapted Participatory Methods for MENA CP

Although participatory design approaches to CP are well-recorded in the Western market and in select Global South markets, no such approach has been developed or empirically explored to adapt to culturally sensitive approaches to participatory CP in MENA cities. There are still some critical questions to be answered: How can gender-sensitive involvement be organized in societies that do not assume mixed-gender engagement of the populace? What are the possibilities of using the existing social institutions (mosques, tribal councils, diwaniya traditions) as a place where participatory design can take place? Which digital tools can be useful in reaching communities of MENA with different technological literacy levels? What is the best way to modify the participation processes in situations where the civil society infrastructure is weak and freedom of assembly is limited? These questions must be answered by empirically investigating the CP concept to help in a practical application in cities such as Baghdad.

9. SYNTHESIS AND RESEARCH GAP ANALYSIS

The above six thematic categories demonstrate a very evident and consequential trend in the CP literature: the theory and practice of CP have attained a high level of sophistication in urban settings of the west, yielding strong pieces of evidence of effects on spatial vitality, social capital, economic development, and cultural identity. At the same time, the frameworks of CP as applied to the cities of the Middle East, where one of the oldest and most rich urban cultures in the history of humanity overlap with harsh realities of the environment, different administration models, and intricate socio-political relations are still in the infantile and, in large part, unarticulated phase. This section will integrate the literature reviewed and provide a detailed mapping of the coverage theme and formally list the five identified research gaps through cross-theme analysis.

9.1 Thematic distribution of reviewed literature

Table 8 brings out a number of interesting trends. To start with, the fact that CP research is geographically concentrated in the United States and Western Europe is remarkable: out of 33 reviewed sources, 22 are connected in some way with the Western settings or focus on them. There are only 5 sources touching upon MENA settings and they refer mainly to the Gulf States and North Africa instead of to the Levant or Mesopotamia. There is no peer-reviewed source that deals with CP, or any similarly related concept, in Iraq. Second, the qualitative case studies and conceptual analyses prevail in the methodological landscape and little quantitative or mixed-methods research. Third, the most frequently cited articles are either foundational theory (Markusen and Gadwa [3]; Florida [6] or papers discussing the environmental design (Low et al., [16], Aljawabra and Nikolopoulou [23]) and it implicates that the most effective scholarship in this research is either based

on establishing theoretical stances, or is aimed at covering the

physical aspects of the public space.

Table 8. Thematic distribution and gap assessment of reviewed literature (33 sources)

Thematic Category	Sources	Key Authors	Primary Geography	Methodological Approaches	Gap Severity
CP Theory & Frameworks	7	Markusen and Gadwa [3]; Florida [6]; Zitcer [8]; Post [11]; Courage and McKeown [12]	USA, UK	Conceptual; discourse analysis; case study	Moderate
CP in Western Cities	6	Hammond and David [4]; Blessi [14]; Kelkar and Spinelli [15]; Sepe [27]; Stokes et al. [28]; Furtado and Payne [29]	USA, Italy, China, Denmark	Case study; survey; ethnography; longitudinal	Low
CP/Regeneration in MENA	5	Bellini et al. [17]; Mohamed [18]; Helmy [19]; Abdelfattah [20]; Furlan et al. [30]	Gulf States, North Africa, Saudi	Systematic review; case study; qualitative	High
Hot-Arid Climate Design	3	Colding et al. [5]; Abdelhamid and Elfakharany [22]; Aljawabra and Nikolopoulou [23]	Morocco, Egypt, General	Field measurement; survey; meta-analysis	High
Heritage & Sense of Place	4	Low et al. [16]; Bellini et al. [17]; Li et al. [25]; Sepe [27]	USA, China, General	Ethnography; PRISMA review; PlaceMaker	Moderate
Community Participation	5	Courage and McKeown [12]; Furtado and Payne [18]; Delaney [31]; Bressane et al. [26]; Stokes et al. [28];	USA, Brazil, Global	Action research; case study; survey	Moderate
CP in Iraq / Baghdad	0	—	—	—	Critical

Table 9. Cross-thematic gap matrix intersection analysis

Intersection	Expected Connection	Current State	Gap Implication
CP Theory * MENA Context	CP frameworks adapted for MENA governance, culture, and climate	No adaptation exists; theory remains Western-centric	Practitioners lack theoretical guidance for MENA CP
Climate Design * CP	Shade, cooling, and temporal strategies as creative media	Treated as separate domains with no bridging literature	MENA CP lacks environmental viability
Islamic Heritage * CP Practice	Calligraphy, geometric art, poetry as CP content and medium	Heritage treated generically; Islamic specificity absent	MENA CP risks cultural irrelevance
Participation * MENA Governance	Culturally adapted engagement methods for MENA contexts	Methods developed for Western civil society only	CP implementation in MENA lacks community legitimacy
Waterfront Design * CP in Developing Countries	CP-specific frameworks for riverside/waterfront parks	Hoyle (2002) predates CP discourse; no update exists	Waterfront CP in cities like Baghdad lacks guidance

9.2 Cross-thematic gap analysis

The most significant gaps in research arise not in the literal categories of the themes but at their crossroads. Although there are internal gaps in each of the themes, the greatest potential sources of theoretical and real-world contribution are in the interconnections between themes: where, e.g., the research of thermal comfort and the theory of CP cannot and should be connected to each other, or where heritage studies and participatory design are, respectively, in different fields of discipline as shown in Table 9.

9.3 Five identified research gaps

Gap1: No Systematic CP Studies in Iraq

Although Baghdad has a remarkably rich cultural heritage (the Abbasid civilization, classical Arabic poetry, Islamic architecture), has major challenges with urban space (degradation of the city after the conflicts, air pollution, underinvestment), and is endowed with a large tourist potential in terms of religious tourism, no peer-reviewed research has proactively used the CP framework in Iraqi cities. The literature on MENA CP focuses on the Gulf States and North Africa where the economic, security as well as governance conditions are fundamentally different. Such a void leaves no

evidence-based advice to offer Iraqi urban designers, policymakers, and cultural organizations on how to incorporate arts and culture into the redesign of the public space.

Gap 2: No Climate-Responsive CP Framework

No systematic integration has occurred between the thermal comfort literature [3, 23]. The CP literature presupposes implicitly temperate climates where outdoor comfort can be enjoyed all year round; the thermal comfort literature includes the planning of the environment and does not entertain the programming of arts and culture. In such cities, such as Baghdad, where summer temperatures are more than 50 °C and the spaces outside cannot be used during several months, this difference is one of the essential barriers to CP implementation. An alternative perspective on shade structures, water features, and evening programming as creative media, rather than engineering solutions, is badly required.

Gap 3: Islamic Heritage Integration in CP Frameworks

The CP literature considers cultural identity as a generic one but fails to consider aesthetic, spiritual and social dimensions of the Islamic heritage. There is no research done to analyze

the ways Islamic geometric art and Arabic calligraphy, classical poetry, garden design traditions (*chahar bagh*), and the space activities of the mosques and souks can be systematically integrated into the CP models. This gap has both theoretical (the lack of full comprehension of the role of CP in the non-Western cultural contexts) and practical implications (the designers of MENA cities do not receive any advice on how the local cultural resources can be translated into effective placemaking interventions).

Gap 4: Culturally Adapted Participatory Methods for MENA

The participatory technique of the design of CP is already well-reported in Western settings [29, 31] and a few in the Global South settings [26], but it has not been developed or tested in the MENA sociopolitical environment. What is the appropriate way to organize gender-sensitive participation? What are ways that current social institutions (diwaniya, mosque communities, tribal councils) will be used as the engagement platform? Which digital tools can work considering MENA patterns in terms of connectivity and literacy? What should the operation of the participation processes be in environments with limited civic space? These queries are not answered.

Gap 5: Waterfront Park CP in Post-Conflict Developing Cities

The work of Hoyle [21] on waterfront revitalization in third-world nations was written earlier than the official definition of CP and does not mention anything related to arts or cultural programming. A later study has not proposed CP-specific riverside or waterfront park models in developing or post-

conflict settings - precisely the gap that is directly applicable to the 1.2 km Tigris River frontage of Abu Nuwas Park. The convergence of waterfront urbanism, CP, post-conflict reconstruction, and hot-arid climate design is a challenging, yet highly essential point of research.

10. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK: CONTEXTUAL CREATIVE PLACEMAKING FOR MENA URBAN PARKS

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature and the five research gaps, in this section, the proposal will be a CCPF that will be specifically proposed to redesign urban parks in the Middle East cities as presented in Figure 4. The CCPF overcomes the shortcomings of the current Western-oriented CP models by incorporating five interrelated layers of responding to the climatic, cultural, and governance realities of the MENA environment. Although it is indicated with the case of the Abu Nuwas Park in Baghdad, the framework itself is meant to be scaled to similar urban spaces in the region, with the necessary contextual tuning.

10.1 Framework architecture

In Figure 5, the CCPF is organized into five concentric circles, each taking a different aspect of the placemaking dilemma. The stratification is based on most contextually specific (climate response, on the bottom) to most universal (evaluation and sustainability, on the top), which is based on the idea that successful placemaking in extreme environments needs to create physical habitable conditions before going higher order with cultural and social aims.

CCPF: Contextual Creative Placemaking Framework

Designed for Urban Park Redesign in Hot-Arid Middle Eastrean Cities

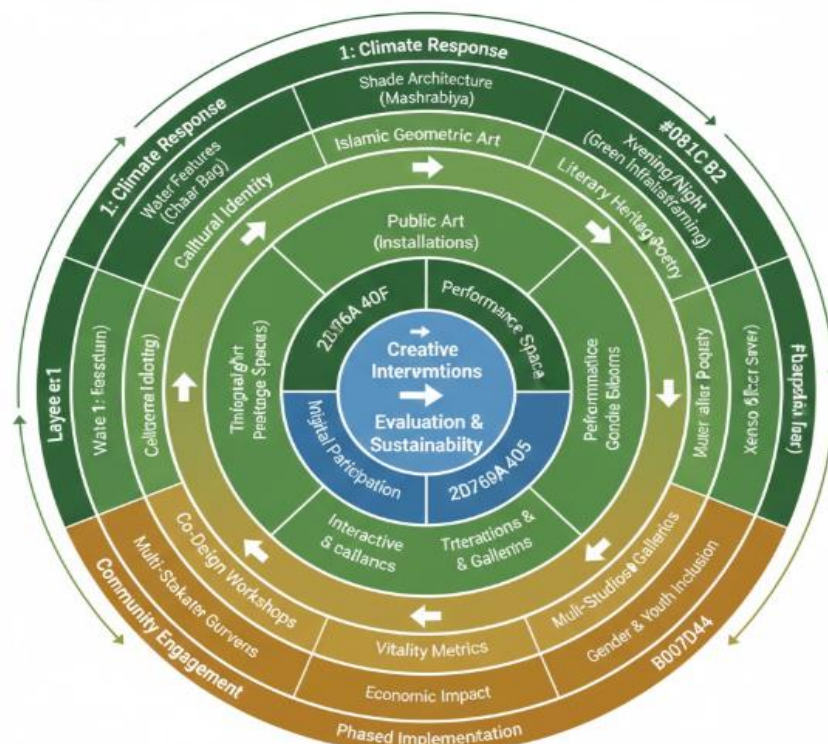


Figure 4. Contextual creative placemaking framework (CCPF) conceptual architecture

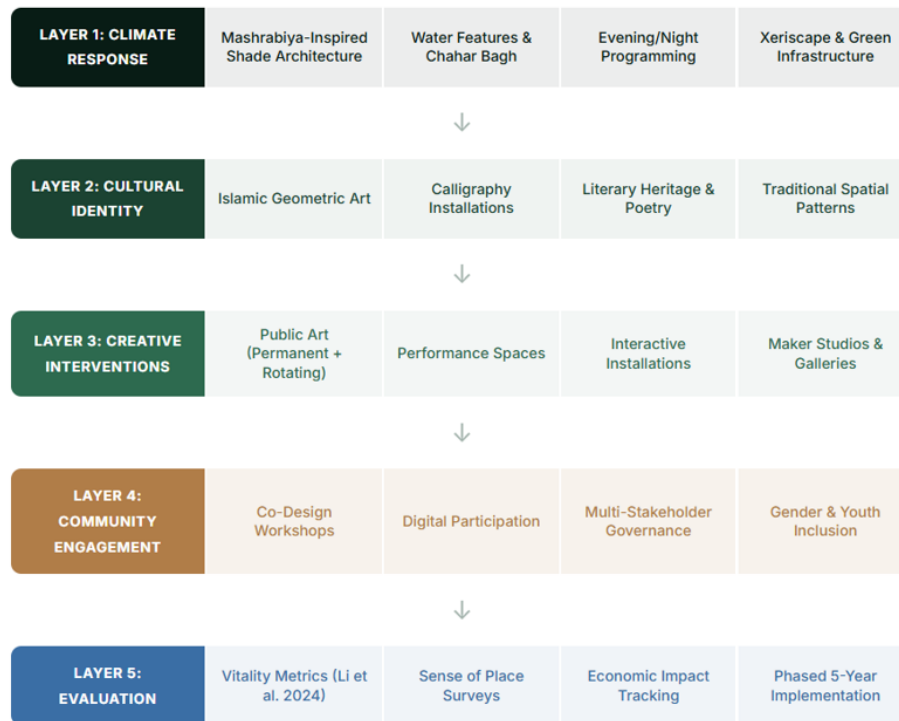


Figure 5. Contextual creative placemaking framework (CCPF) for Middle East and North Africa (MENA) urban parks

Table 10. Operationalization of the contextual creative placemaking framework (CCPF): Variables, indicators, and measurement methods

CCPF Layer	Operational Variable	Key Indicators	Measurement Methods
1. Climate Response	Thermal Habitability	• Physiologically Equivalent Temperature (PET) reduction • Percentage of shaded walkable area (Target: > 70% in peak hours)	• On-site thermal sensors (HOBO data loggers) • ENVI-met microclimate simulation modeling
2. Cultural Identity	Heritage Legibility	• Frequency of traditional calligraphic/geometric motifs in permanent installations • Continuity of “Poetry Walk” installations	• Spatial syntax analysis of cultural landmarks • Qualitative semi-structured user interviews
3. Creative Interventions	Programming Vitality	• Diversity of activity types (e.g., poetry, music, digital art) • Frequency of rotating exhibition updates (e.g., quarterly)	• Li et al.’s six-indicator framework (activity diversity, temporal usage) [25] • Automated visitor counters
4. Community Engagement	Participatory Inclusivity	• Number of co-design workshops held in local institutions (mosques/schools) • Diversity of participant demographics (gender/age)	• Digital participation tracking (Minecraft/WhatsApp logs) • Post-engagement satisfaction surveys
5. Evaluation & Sustainability	Adaptive Management	• Percentage of design modifications based on stage-based community feedback • Long-term maintenance cost-to-usage ratio	• Longitudinal vitality surveys (Year 1 to Year 5) • Phased implementation monitoring

10.2 Operationalization of the contextual creative placemaking framework: Variables, Indicators, and Methods

To ensure the CCPF is applicable as a technical design and evaluation tool, its five conceptual layers must be translated into operational variables. Table 10 defines the specific indicators and measurement methods required for evidence-based implementation.

To guarantee the efficacy of the framework, the CCPF follows a hierarchical weighting logic, giving preference to preconditions related to environmental and social factors. The primary weight (40%) goes to Climate Response since urban life is dependent on physical habitability in hot-arid

environments. The secondary weight (30%) is given to Cultural Identity and Creative Interventions as the core factors to support social cohesion and long-term site use. The tertiary component is Community Engagement and Evaluation (30%) and is the key process to ensure the sustainability of the project and local ownership.

The CCPF validation is a three-stage process of evidence-based validation, starting with Baseline Validation, which is based upon a six-indicator vitality framework, to determine current usage patterns in Abu Nuwas Park. This is followed by Phase 1 Pilot Testing, an approach involving a "Climate-Cultural Node" to test immediate PET reduction in the microclimate and user resonance. Finally, Phases 2-3 are devoted to Longitudinal Evaluation which is a 5-year

monitoring plan to help track the development of social capital and economic benefits, making sure the framework is responsive to Baghdad's changing urban needs.

10.3 Layer descriptions and evidence base

Layer 1: Climate Response is the set of environmental preconditions of outdoor open life. With reference to Colding et al. [5] and Aljawabra and Nikolopoulou [23], this layer focuses on shade, evaporative cooling by water feature, native landscaping that is drought-tolerant, and the shape of the spaces to reduce the amount of sunlight exposure and the size of the natural ventilation. More importantly, the CCPF rephrases such functional needs as creative possibilities: the shade canopies can be sculptural representations of Islamic geometric patterns; water channels can be made in allusion to the *chahar bagh* garden tradition; night-time programming can turn a climatic limitation into a unique cultural experience.

Layer 2: Cultural Identity is based on the literature of heritage integration [16, 17] and the gap analysis of the Islamic heritage in CP (Gap 3) that the local cultural assets should become the main content in the creative interventions. This layer is represented in Abu Nuwas Park as follows: a Poetry Walk occupying the Tigris promenade with calligraphic installations of the verses of Abu Nuwas; pavement design with allusions to the geometric motifs of the Abbasid period; Arabic calligraphic signage and wayfinding; spatial arrangement in reference to Iraqi social patterns (family seating areas, communal dining spaces, intergenerational play areas).

Layer 3: Creative Interventions deals with the fundamental CP principle of the arts-led place change, guided by the empirical evidence provided by Blessi et al. [14], Kelkar and Spinelli [15], and Sepe [13, 27]. The CCPF suggests a twofold approach of permanent installations (sculpture, environmental art, architectural features) which create the sense of place and rotating/temporary interventions (exhibitions, performances, artist residencies, seasonal festivals) which keep the novelty and interaction with the community. A model of a rotating urban furniture by Stokes et al. [28] is highly applicable, as it provides the cost-efficient way to maintain the creative program despite the limitations of

the budget.

Layer 4: Community Engagement puts into practice the participatory aspect of CP in culturally adjusted mechanisms. Based on the participation issues unique to the MENA region discussed in Gap 4, and in response to the identified challenges, the following layer suggests: co-design workshops that take place in the frame of the established community institutions (mosques, schools, neighbourhood councils); gender-alterative forms of participation such as women-only design sessions and mixed-gender online platforms, youth participation via Minecraft/Block by Block-style digital visualization platforms; and multi-stakeholder governance apparatus constituting both the municipal authorities and the cultural organizations, community representatives, and artists.

Layer 5: Evaluation and Sustainability offers the monitoring and adaptive management framework that will be required in evidence-based placemaking. Based on the six-indicator vitality framework by Li et al. [25] this layer will provide baseline measurements prior to intervention, monitor changes during the implementation of the program in stages, and feed the data of the evaluation directly back into design changes. It is suggested to implement it in the form of a five-year phased implementation: Phase 1 (Year 1) environmental cleanup and shade infrastructure; Phase 2 (Years 2-3) cultural installations and community programming; Phase 3 (Years 4-5) consolidation, evaluation, and scaling.

10.4 Application to Abu Nuwas Park, Baghdad

Table 11 presents the proposed interventions structured according to the Creative Climate Public Framework (CCPF), integrating climate responsiveness, cultural identity, creative placemaking, community engagement, and evaluation strategies. Each intervention is accompanied by measurable target indicators to facilitate future implementation and performance assessment. The framework combines environmental sustainability with cultural heritage preservation and participatory planning to enhance the quality and resilience of public spaces. Furthermore, the interventions are grounded in established literature, providing a replicable evidence-based approach for future park development within the MENA sociopolitical context.

Table 11. Contextual creative placemaking framework (CCPF) application matrix Abu Nuwas Park redesign

CCPF Layer	Proposed Intervention	Target Indicators for Future Implementation	Key Reference
Climate Response	20 mashrabiya-pattern shade canopies along Tigris promenade; 3 mist corridors; xeriscape plantings with native Euphrates poplar and date palm	Substantial increase in shade coverage; significant PET reduction in gathering areas; measurable water savings via native xeriscaping	Aljawabra and Nikolopoulou [23]
Cultural Identity	1.2 km "Poetry Walk" with calligraphic Abu Nuwas verses; Abbasid geometric pavement patterns; <i>chahar bagh</i> -inspired central garden	Enhanced sense of place; literary heritage legibility; high cultural resonance for local and pilgrim visitors	Low et al. [16], Bellini et al. [17]
Creative Interventions	Open-air gallery; 200-seat amphitheatre for poetry/music; 4 rotating art installations; artist-in-residence studios	Increased annual visitation rates; social capital generation; growth in economic activity from cultural tourism	Blessi et al. [14], Stokes et al. [28]
Community Engagement	12 co-design workshops via mosques and schools; women-focused design sessions; Minecraft youth visualization; multi-stakeholder governance board	Documented community ownership; equitable representation; alignment of design with local cultural norms	Furtado and Payne [29], Delaney [31]
Evaluation	Baseline vitality survey (6 indicators); annual follow-up surveys; visitor counters; economic impact tracking; 5-year phased plan	Evidence-based adaptive management; longitudinal impact documentation; replicable model for MENA parks	Abdelhamid and Elfakharany [22], Li et al. [25]

11. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The literature on CP has been examined in a multi-thematic fashion that includes theory, practice, climate, heritage and participation, and 52 peer-reviewed papers have been gathered from a structured narrative review of two decades of scholarly research on CP. The synthesis suggests that there is an imbalance in the field in that the concept of CP has been developed at the theoretical level and verified in empirical studies in Western urban contexts, whereas it is still in its budding stage in the MENA. This is especially remarkable, since the MENA region is one of the most culturally rich on earth, but also has to deal with extreme weather and severe issues with creating urban space.

The cross-thematic analysis revealed five critical gaps in the research: (1) the absence of systematic CP studies in the city of Baghdad, which has an exceptional cultural heritage; (2) the absence of frameworks that combine thermal comfort design with CP, leading to the lack of viable models for its implementation in hot-arid cities; (3) the lack of using Islamic cultural heritage as content and medium of CP; (4) the lack of culturally adapted participatory approaches appropriate to the MENA governance and social contexts; and (5) the gap in waterfront park CP frameworks in the context of post conflict cities.

The proposed CCPF tackles these gaps in a five-layered operational structure: Climate Response, Cultural Identity, Creative Interventions, Community Engagement and Evaluation. The study applies this framework to the Abu Nuwas Park in Baghdad, identifying these layers as design actions that can be implemented at the park and measured; for example, the use of shade architecture inspired by mashrabiya and a 1.2-kilometre "Poetry Walk," along with culturally attuned co-design solutions. With this, the conceptual model of the CCPF becomes an operational one and can be tested.

This review has implications which are not restricted to Baghdad. The CCPF is a model to be transferred to urban parks in other cities in the MENA region with similar climatic, cultural, and governance characteristics, such as those in the Gulf, North Africa, and the Levant. The need for culturally responsive, climate-adaptive and community-driven approaches to civic space design is becoming an issue of urban resilience as urbanization and climate change pressure the region more.

11.1 Limitations

Certain restrictions need to be recognized. For one, this is a structured narrative review and does not provide the statistical reproducibility that a full meta-analysis does, but uses PRISMA-informed search protocols and is transparent. Second, it was mostly searching in English-language sources, abstracts of which were usually in Arabic, thus leaving out some relevant scholarship that have been published in Arabic, Persian or Turkish language. Third, the framework relies on secondary sources; although it sets forth targets that can be measured for Abu Nuwas Park, the framework does not rely on direct empirical testing, but on implementation research specific to the park. Lastly, citation counts are an indicator of impact and will inevitably overestimate the impact of older articles while potentially underestimating the strong development of recent MENA-based research.

11.2 Future research directions

Four priority research directions emerge from this review:

(1) Empirical validation: The CCPF should be tested via pilot intervention at Abu Nuwas Park. Future research must assess pre- and post-intervention vitality, sense of place, and community satisfaction using the six-indicator framework established by Li et al. [25] to validate the framework's effectiveness.

(2) The creation and validation of culturally specific vitality measures of urban spaces in the MENA, which would add to the universal framework offered by Li et al. [25], the measurements that would reflect the uniqueness of the time-related rhythms (evening/night usage), space-related activities (family clustering, gender dynamics), and sensory spaces (acoustic role of the call to prayer, olfactory importance of food culture) of Middle Eastern public life.

(3) Longitudinal studies of the effects of CP on sense of place and social cohesion in post-conflict cities that present the specific issues of building trust in the broader population and social identity within the urban environment due to sectarian violence, displacement and conflicting identities.

(4) Comparative analysis of CP implementation in sub-regions of MENA, including Gulf, Levant, North Africa, Mesopotamia, to establish how climate, governance, economy, and cultural tradition variations moderate the efficacy of various CP strategies and to adjust CCPF to sub-regional use.

Finally, the redesign of places such as Abu Nuwas Park is more than landscape architecture, it is civic imagination. It states that beauty and meaning can be created even in the midst of conflict and environmental stress. Research can inform decisions that make these important urban dreams a reality by offering a contextually adapted, operational evidence base.

REFERENCES

- [1] Un-Habitat. (2020). World cities report 2020: The value of sustainable urbanization. UN.
- [2] Zakzak, L., Subramani, K., Luomi, M., Fuller, G., Salem, F., Lafortune, G. (2024). The arab region SDG index and dashboards 2023/2024: Towards just transitions in the Arab States. World Government Summit Series. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4805111>.
- [3] Markusen, A., Gadwa, A. (2010). Creative placemaking. Washington, DC. http://www.terrain.org/columns/29/CreativePlacemaking_NEA.pdf.
- [4] Hammond, R., David, J. (2011). High Line. The Inside Story of New York City's Park in the Sky. FSG Originals.
- [5] Colding, J., Giusti, M., Haga, A., Wallhagen, M., Barthel, S. (2020). Enabling relationships with nature in cities. Sustainability, 12(11): 4394. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114394>
- [6] Florida, R. (2002). The Rise of the Creative Class. <http://creativeclass.com/rfcgdb/articles/14%20The%20Rise%20of%20the%20Creative%20Class.pdf>.
- [7] Florida, R. (2012). The Rise of the Creative Class- Revisited. <https://creativeclass.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/national%20journal%20Rise%20of%20the%20Creative%20Class.pdf>.
- [8] Zitcer, A. (2020). Making up creative placemaking.

- Journal of Planning Education and Research, 40(3): 278-288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X18773424>
- [9] Florida, R. (2017). The new urban crisis: How our cities are increasing inequality, deepening segregation, and failing the middle class-and what we can do about it. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 34: 647-649. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-018-9632-3>
- [10] Daniel, J.L., Kim, M. (2020). Creative placemaking: Creating change by building partnerships. *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*, 6(1): 96-110. <https://doi.org/10.20899/jpna.6.1.96-110>
- [11] Post, C.W., Greiner, A.L., Buckley, G.L. (2023). *The Routledge Companion to the American Landscape*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003121800>
- [12] Courage, C., McKeown, A. (2018). *Creative Placemaking: Research, Theory and Practice* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- [13] Sepe, M. (2014). Urban transformation, socio-economic regeneration and participation: Two cases of creative urban regeneration. *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, 6: 20-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463138.2013.866560>
- [14] Blessi, G.T., Tremblay, D.G., Sandri, M., Pilati, T. (2012). New trajectories in urban regeneration processes: Cultural capital as source of human and social capital accumulation—Evidence from the case of Tohu in Montreal. *Cities*, 29(6): 397-407. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2011.12.001>
- [15] Kelkar, N.P., Spinelli, G. (2016). Building social capital through creative placemaking. *Strategic Design Research Journal*, 9(2): 54-66. <https://doi.org/10.4013/sdrj.2016.92.01>
- [16] Low, S., Taplin, D., Scheld, S. (2005). *Rethinking Urban Parks: Public Space and Cultural Diversity*. University of Texas Press.
- [17] Bellini, N., Siracusa, G., Raglianti, M., Rovai, S. (2023). The social media strategy of cultural institutions in the pandemic: The case of Italian opera houses. In *Rediscovering Local Roots and Interactions in Management*. FONDAZIONE CUEIM.
- [18] Mohamed, A.M.R.M., Samarghandi, S., Samir, H., Mohammed, M.F. (2020). The role of placemaking approach in revitalising AL-ULA heritage site: Linkage and access as key factors. *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning*, 15(6): 921-926. <https://doi.org/10.18280/ijstdp.150616>
- [19] Helmy, E.M. (2020). Integrated cultural heritage planning in Egypt: A catalyst for tourism after the Arab Spring? In *Cultural and Heritage Tourism in the Middle East and North Africa*, pp. 170-186. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429279065-11>
- [20] Abdelfattah, R.S., Maghelal, P.K. (2024). The anatomy of urban regeneration-led gentrification in the middle east and north Africa—A systematic literature review. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, 8(8): 5993. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i8.5993>
- [21] Hoyle, B. (2002). Urban waterfront revitalization in developing countries: The example of Zanzibar's Stone Town. *Geographical Journal*, 168(2): 141-162. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4959.00044>
- [22] Abdelhamid, M.M., Elfakharany, M.M. (2020). Improving urban park usability in developing countries: Case study of Al-Shalalat Park in Alexandria. *Alexandria Engineering Journal*, 59(1): 311-321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aej.2019.12.042>
- [23] Aljawabra, F., Nikolopoulou, M. (2010). Influence of hot arid climate on the use of outdoor urban spaces and thermal comfort: Do cultural and social backgrounds matter? *Intelligent Buildings International*, 2(3): 198-217. <https://doi.org/10.3763/inbi.2010.0046>
- [24] Jia, C., Zhang, Z., Wang, M., et al. (2023). Investigation on indoor thermal environment of industrial heritage during the cooling season and its impacts on thermal comfort. *Case Studies in Thermal Engineering*, 52: 103769. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.csite.2023.103769>
- [25] Li, X., Kozłowski, M., Salih, S.A., Ismail, S.B. (2025). Evaluating the vitality of urban public spaces: Perspectives on crowd activity and built environment. *International Journal of Architectural Research*, 19(3): 562-583. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ARCH-01-2024-0009>
- [26] Bressane, A., Loureiro, A.I.S., Almendra, R. (2024). Community engagement in the management of urban green spaces: Prospects from a case study in an emerging economy. *Urban Science*, 8(4): 188. <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci8040188>
- [27] Sepe, M. (2018). Place identity and creative district regeneration: The case of 798 in Beijing and M50 in Shanghai art zones. *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture*, 35(2): 151-171. <https://doi.org/10.4305/metu.jfa.2017.2.15>
- [28] Stokes, B., Bar, F., Baumann, K., Caldwell, B., Schrock, A. (2021). Urban furniture in digital placemaking: Adapting a storytelling payphone across Los Angeles. *Convergence*, 27(3): 711-726. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856521999181>
- [29] Furtado, L.S., Payne, J.M. (2023). Inclusive creative placemaking through participatory mural design in Springfield (MA). *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 89(3): 310-323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2022.2083008>
- [30] Furlan, R., Al-Mohannadi, A., Major, M.D., Paquet, T.N. (2023). A planning method for transit villages in Qatar: Souq Waqif historical district in Doha. *Open House International*, 48(2): 425-446. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OHI-05-2022-0121>
- [31] Delaney, J. (2022). Minecraft and playful public participation in urban design. *Urban Planning*, 7(2): 330-342. <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v7i2.5229>