

Assessing the Planning and Design of Sulaimani City Entrances

An Evaluative Approach

Sivan Hisham Taher Al Jarah¹, Rebaz Jalil Abdulla²

^{1,2} City planning Engineering, Technical College of Engineering, Sulaimani polytechnic University, Sulaimani, Iraq

Email: sivan.taher@spu.edu.iq¹, rebaz.jalil@spu.edu.iq²

Abstract:

The entrances to the city play a crucial role in captivating visitors as they arrive in each urban area. These entry points are anticipated to symbolize the city's physical, cultural, social, and historical traits, serving as sources of inspiration for those who enter. They serve as the initial point of contact, setting the tone for the urban experience that follows. A well-designed city entrance should not only be aesthetically pleasing but also functional, safe, and reflective of the city's unique identity. The entrance serves as a window to the perception of the city's landscape and is an element that requires semantic consideration in terms of perception. The purpose of this study is to grab the attention and examine the importance of city entrances that have been neglected. While the first image of the city taking by the residents and visitors is through the city entrance. Therefore; paying attention and redevelop entrances of the cities reflect a right and a pleasant image about the cities. In addition; enhancing various historical, natural, environmental, cultural and economic prices of the city. This study conducting Sulaymani city in Iraq as a case study employed a mix-method in analyzing present and future scenario of city entrances in term of several variation (entrance as a symbol of a city, entrance as a mental boundary of a city and entrance as a window to look at a city). The finding of the study shows that the city of Sulaimani main entrances fail to showcase the city's unique identity and cultural heritage. This deficiency holds considerable implications for both inhabitants and those who visit the city. Furthermore, the study revealed significant deficiencies across various domains, encompassing planning and design strategies, infrastructure and transportation facilities, land use and zoning patterns, as well as cultural and social considerations. Finally, a notable issue lies in the absence of clearly defined entrances and their actual responsibility in establishing a distinct boundary between the exterior and interior of the city.

Keywords: City Entrances, Urban Identity, Sulaymani City, Entrance Redevelopment.

الملخص:

تلعب مداخل المدينة دوراً حاسماً في جذب الزوار عند وصولهم إلى كل منطقة حضرية. يتوقع أن ترمز نقاط الدخول هذه إلى السمات الجسدية والثقافية والاجتماعية والتاريخية للمدينة، وتكون مصادر إلهام لأولئك الذين يدخلونها. إنها نقاط الاتصال الأولى، تضع السياق لتجربة حضرية تلتها. يجب أن تكون مدخل المدينة المصمم بشكل جيد لا يثير الإعجاب فقط من الناحية الجمالية، بل أيضاً يكون وظيفياً، آمناً، وعاكساً للهوية الفريدة للمدينة. يعتبر المدخل نافذة لتصور منظر المدينة وهو عنصر يتطلب النظر إلى الدلالات الدلالية فيما يتعلق بالإدراك. هدف هذه الدراسة هو لفت الانتباه وفحص أهمية مداخل المدينة التي تم تجاهلها. بينما تكون الصورة الأولى للمدينة التي تلقطها السكان والزوار من خلال مدخل المدينة. لذلك؛ يعكس الانتباه وإعادة تطوير مداخل المدن صورة صحيحة وممتعة عن المدن. بالإضافة إلى ذلك؛ تعزيز مختلف الجوانب التاريخية والطبيعية والبيئية والثقافية والاقتصادية للمدينة.

قامت هذه الدراسة بدراسة مدينة السليمانية في العراق كدراسة حالة واستخدمت طريقة مزج الأساليب في تحليل السيناريوهات الحالية والمستقبلية لمداخل المدينة من حيث عدة متغيرات (المدخل كرمز للمدينة، المدخل كحدود ذهنية للمدينة، والمدخل كنافذة للنظر إلى المدينة). تظهر نتائج الدراسة أن المداخل الرئيسية لمدينة السليمانية لا تستطيع عرض الهوية الفريدة للمدينة والتراث الثقافي. يحمل هذا النقص آثاراً كبيرة على السكان وأولئك الذين يزورون المدينة. وعلاوة على ذلك، كشفت الدراسة عن نقص كبير في مجموعة متنوعة من المجالات، بما في ذلك استراتيجيات التخطيط والتصميم، والبنية التحتية ومرافق النقل، واستخدام الأراضي وأنماط التنظيم، وكذلك الاعتبارات الثقافية والاجتماعية. وأخيراً، المشكلة البارزة تكمن في عدم وجود مداخل محددة بوضوح ودورها الفعلي في إقامة حدود متميزة بين الخارج والمدخل للمدينة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مداخل المدن، الهوية الحضرية، مدينة السليمانية، تطوير المداخل.

پوختہ:

دروازه‌ی شارکان رژیکی بهرچاویان همیه له سهر سمنج راکیشانی دانیشتووان و سهردانیکهرانی شارکان، دهروازه‌ی شارکان و ناوچه شارستانیه‌کان هینایه‌کی گرنگن بوق خسته رووی وینه‌ی فیزیکی و ده‌خسته کلتورو لایه‌نی روشنبری و کومه‌لایه‌تی ناوچه‌کان و کومه‌لگاکانیان، که ده‌بینت شونناسیک بوق نه ناوچانه، و همروه‌ها خالی ده‌سینکی نیشاندانی ناوچه شارستانیه‌کانه که ده‌بینت به شیوه‌یک دیزاین کراپیت نهک تنهها بیر له لایه‌نی رپوکمشی کراپینته بطلکو و لیکدانه‌وهی بوق چهند چه‌مکیک تیدابیت و هک لایه‌نی ئاسایش و شونناس شارستانی و همروه‌ها لایه‌نی چونتی کارکردنی نه دهروازانه به ههند و هرگیرابیت، که ده‌شیت و هک پانچه‌رمه‌ک و ابیت که برواننیه دیمه‌نیک که ئه‌ویش دیمه‌نی شارکمه‌یه که بهرچه‌سته ده‌بینت له هززی بینه‌رد.

مهبہست و نامانچ لهم تو پیزینه و یه نه و یه که گرنگی دهروازه شارهکان بخانه رهو که گرنگیه کی نه توی پینه در اوه له کاتیکدا که یه کم و ینا و یه کم بچوون له سهر شارهکان در ووست دهیت له هزری بینه ردا له سهر شارهکه، هر بهو هویمه و زور گرنگه پیداچوونه و بکریت به سهر دیز اینه دهروازه شارهکان و به شیوه هک سه رنج را کیش ریک بخرین. وه گرنگی بدریت به نیشاندانی لایه نی (میز ووی و کلتوری و شارستانی و ثابوری و سروشی شارهکان).

ئەم توپىزىنەوە لە سەر دەروازەكانى شارى سليمانى لە عىراق ئەنچامدرابە و چەند رىيگەمەكى جۇراوجۇر بەكار ھىنزاوە بۆ شىكىردىنەوە وينە ئىستاۋ داھاتووى دەروازەكانى شارى سليمانى. دەروازەكان لە چەند رۇوەيەكمەوە شىكىردىنەمەيان بۆ كراوە وەك (دەروازەسى شار وەك ھىممايمەك بۆ شار، دەروازەسى شار وەك سەنۋورىيەكى ھزرى شار، دەروازەسى شار وەك پەنچەرىيەك بۆ نىشاندانى شار مەكان).

به پی ئهنجامه کانی تویزینه موکه دهراز مکانی شاری سلیمانی سهرکه تتو نهیون له نیشانداني شووناس و بهها شارستانیه کانی شاره که که ئەمەش به شیوه یهکی نەریئنی کار دەکات له سەر دانیشتووان و میوانانی شاری سلیمانی، وە دەرى دەخات کە كەم و كوریهکی زور ھەمیه لەلایەنی پلان و دېراین و رېتكھستن و خزمەتگوزاری و كىشەکانی ھاتوچۇ و بەكارھەنیانی زەوی له دهراز مکانی شاری سلیمانی. له كوتاییدا كىشەمی سەرەکى ئەم دهرازانه لەمودا كۆ دەبىتەمە كە سەنورىيکى تايىەت و دیاركراویان بې تەرخان نەمکراوه لەنەپوان دەرەوەي و ناوەوەي شار مکان.

کلیله و شهه: دروازه شار، شووناسی شارستانیهت، شاری سلیمانی، پیشخستی دروازه شارهکان.

1. Introduction

City entrances typically refer to the points of entry into a city. These entrances are commonly located at major roads or highways leading into the city and serve as both functional and symbolic gateways [1-3]. First image and impression about the city draw through its entrance, the entrance is the window of the city [4]. Cities entrances are the spatial boundaries of internal movement into the city during a specific path within a certain period of time, City entrances are the opening that possible to move through it from an open space to a closed space, which the beginning is and end sign of the journey [2, 5]. The entrance to the city usually refers to the urbanization that develops on both sides of the main access roads for the city [6]. The development of the city entrances is a great idea that has expanded all over the world because the city entrance is important part in the city structure [7-10]. It gives an initial picture of the place where the person enters and draws a special identity for the city [5] [8].

Nowadays, different cities and their types often notice at their entrances; but unfortunately this important element has not given adequate importance. Therefore; many cities because of its entrances that are considered unorganized and do not reflect the beauty or importance of these cities [8] [1]. The accumulation of urban waste and places for selling junk, narrow roads and in a deteriorating condition, the lack of green spaces ...ect, and all these issues give a negative image about cities. Therefore; entrances of cities require further consideration and improvement through a good planning and effective management in order to provide a beautiful picture about the city which reflects the identity and distinctiveness [11, 12]. The entrances are the primary and real interface that highlights the character and function of the city [13].

The visitor's observation highlights a valid concern regarding the entrances to cities. The condition and design of city entrances play a significant role in shaping the overall perception of a city. Neglected or poorly maintained entrances can create a negative image and undermine the potential of a city, regardless of its size [9] [14]. To address this issue, it is essential to prioritize and invest in the improvement of city entrances. Conceiving and proposing appropriate urban interventions are necessary that take into account all social, urban and environmental aspects. Then, planning should be undertaken to ensure that the location, design, infrastructure and management of these entrances are functional, aesthetically pleasing, and aligned with the city's character and purpose [1, 6, 15]. This may involve creating wider roads, implementing effective design concept, incorporating green spaces and landscaping, and developing areas that promote economic activities without compromising the overall appearance of the entrance [14, 16].

Effective management is crucial in implementing these improvements. This involves collaboration between city authorities, urban planners, architects, and other relevant stakeholders to establish a comprehensive vision and execute it efficiently [17, 18]. Regular maintenance and upkeep of the entrances should also be prioritized to preserve their positive impact. Through revitalizing city entrances, a positive and welcoming first impression for visitors, residents, and potential investors can be created [10, 12]. These entrances act as the face of the city, representing its progress, development, and overall quality of life. A well-planned and well-managed entrance reflects a city's commitment to growth, attractiveness, and the well-being of its inhabitants [11, 19].

Planning and redevelopment the framework of the city entrance and gateway guides' future development and corridor renewal, ensure a good management and optimal use of the various entrances to cities [5].

The objective of the study is to assess and analyze the existing conditions, design, functionality, and overall impact of city entrances. This study aims to gather information and insights that will facilitate the development of strategies and plans for improving the entrances to create a positive and welcoming image for the city. Certainly; clearly articulate the goals and objectives of the entrance improvement project. Identify the desired outcomes and the specific aspects of the entrances that need to be addressed in this paper. Ultimately, this approach can contribute to creating entrances that leave a positive and lasting impression, enhancing the overall image and experience of the city and its identity.

Assess Current Conditions conduct a thorough assessment of the existing entrances, including both identity measures and physical characteristics, functionality, aesthetics, and overall user experience. Evaluate factors such as traffic flow, pedestrian safety, signage, landscaping, waste management, and accessibility. Finally; the study is to provide a holistic understanding of the current state of city entrances and guide the development of strategic plans that enhance the existence city entrances. The study aims to create welcoming, memorable, and representative gateways that reflect the unique character and aspirations of the city Identity.

2. Literature review

Extensive research in the field of urban studies has been devoted to exploring the complex connections between city entrances and the notion of identity. These studies examine into how the visual and symbolic elements of city entrances contribute to shaping not only the physical landscape but also the perception of the city's character and essence. A limited studies have investigated into the development of planning and strategies related city entrances. Typically, these investigations concentrate on elements that can effectively represent the city's culture and values. However, there are instances where factors supporting visitors' perceptions of the city are also considered [3, 16]. Zohreh Torabi and Yalda Sima have launched their study "Urban Identity in the Entrance of City" that look into the identity elements within city entrances. The study highlighted an important aspect of culture and urban life that reflected in the city entrances. They claim that these entrances are usually the first things people encounter when they come to a city. In addition, city entrances have the power to show a city's history, culture, and how people interact with each other. They examined factors such as the appearance of buildings, the design choices made, the signs used, and the overall visual presentation. This helped them understand what contributes to making a city unique and special [11]. Additionally, Yousef Bagheri and Seyed Amir Mansouri have conducted a study "City entrances as an element for creating an independent identity for the city landscape" that concerning the identity as well. These studies have discussed the reflection the identity and character of the city [11, 12].

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding the allocation and the significance of transport corridors in regional development. In the realm of regional development, the role of transport corridors holds immense importance. This study specifically delves into the case of TRACECA in Turkey to examine the critical role that transport corridors play in fostering regional growth and

connectivity. This study explores the potential impacts of TRACECA on regional development. The focus of this examination is primarily on the theoretical aspects of regional development. Additionally, the study emphasizes the significance of transportation activities and transport corridors in driving regional development. The culmination of this study involves an assessment of the effects of TRACECA, a comprehensive transport corridor, on its member countries as well as Turkey [8].

Likewise, Hugo Priemus and Wil Zonneveld have investigated about what are corridors and what are the issues? Introduction to special issue: the governance of corridors. They claim that the linear concepts, like the corridor, have a rich historical background in spatial and urban planning. A contemporary iteration, known as the mega corridor or euro corridor, has emerged within the discourse on European territorial development. This concept aims to harmonize policies concerning infrastructure, urban growth, and economic advancement. However, as evidenced by the Netherlands' case, the corridor idea may face resistance from spatial planners. From an analytical perspective, the corridor concept possesses undeniable validity. It addresses various pressing policy matters associated with corridor expansions, necessitating enhanced coordination between different spatial levels of policymaking. Herwin Sap study is about exploring potential connections between modern theories and spatial policies related to corridor development, and those put forth by Collins, Whebell, and Doxiadis. Through this examination, the paper also seeks to establish links between theories about corridor development and the concepts and designs associated with linear cities. The primary aim is to assess the relevance and potential insights that can be gleaned from these sources within ongoing discussions surrounding corridor development in contemporary contexts [20, 21].

Finally, many studies have explored urban ecological corridors construction that explain the ecological corridor, encompassing ecological and cultural aspects, symbolizes urban ecological and green progress, emerging as a significant focus in landscape ecology, urban ecology, and ecological planning. Addressing the challenge of reconciling regional ecological preservation with economic growth, and satisfying urban residents' ecological needs amidst natural ecosystem degradation, the creation of urban ecological corridors is complex. Moreover, heightened urbanization and ecological civilization advancement have elevated standards for these corridors. Constructing such corridors is crucial and necessitates a spatial strategy that harmonizes ecological protection and economic development [7, 15, 18, 22].

Indeed, the discussion surrounding city entrances as urban spaces is vast and multifaceted. Within the study area, one prominent example is the entrance gate at the city's main entry point [2, 14]. However, with technological advancements and evolving travel patterns, traditional entrance gates may have experienced a decline in significance. In their place, airports and train stations have emerged as modern symbols of identity and become new gateways to the city [17, 18]. These transportation hubs not only facilitate mobility but also shape the first impressions of travelers, contributing to the city's overall image and cultural identity [17]. By incorporating unique architectural elements, cultural symbols, and local artwork, these modern gateways can effectively represent the identity and spirit of the city, leaving a lasting impact on visitors and residents alike [3, 12].

Previous publications have revealed that the city's overall layout and structure are planned with consideration for entry points, scale, proportions, and hierarchy [23, 24]. The spatial structure is organized in a way that guides individuals through a gradual progression of enclosed spaces, facilitating a sense of identity and legibility. The design aims to create a visual experience that allows observers to recognize and engage with the city as they move through the space at their own pace [12, 18]. It is essential for city planners and designers to carefully consider the design of entrances and entry points to create a memorable and welcoming experience for visitors. This includes taking into account elements such as architectural aesthetics, wayfinding signage, landscape design, and the integration of technology where appropriate [3, 16, 25]. The goal is to provide an initial recognition of the city's unique identity and character, inviting individuals to explore and engage with the urban environment. Below are the main factors that affect the city entrance (See **Fig No.1**).



Figure 1: The main factors that affect the city entrance

Source: Drawing by Authors Using [2, 3, 16, 18, 22].

By strategically designing entrances and considering the visual aspects and movement of people entering the space, cities can create a positive first impression and a seamless transition into the urban fabric [6, 10]. This approach enhances the overall urban experience and contributes to the city's identity, making it more attractive to residents, visitors, and potential investors. City entrances can be influenced by several variables that impact their design, functionality, and perception. These variables are context-specific, depending on the city's unique characteristics and objectives (See **Table 1**).

Table 1: Key factors that can affect city entrances

Key factors		Explanation
1	Architectural Styles	City entrance designs may embrace various architectural styles, such as classical, modern, contemporary, or a fusion of styles, depending on the city's history, cultural heritage, and overall urban character.
2	Landmark & Monument	Iconic landmarks and monuments often feature prominently in entrance designs. These structures serve as landmarks themselves, drawing attention and guiding people towards the city center or notable attractions.
3	Culture Representation	City entrances are an opportunity to showcase the city's cultural identity through the integration of local art, cultural symbols, and historical references. Sculptures, murals, or decorative elements can tell stories about the city's heritage and values.
4	Gateways & Arches	Grand arches or gateways are commonly used to mark the entry points of the city. These structures not only create a sense of arrival but also provide a distinct boundary between the urban landscape and the surrounding areas.
5	Wayfinding & Signage	Clear wayfinding elements and signage are crucial for guiding pedestrians and motorists towards key destinations within the city. Directional signs and maps help visitors navigate effectively.
6	Green Spaces & Landscaping	Design the entrances with landscaping that reflects the city's natural environment and enhances the aesthetic appeal. Green spaces with trees, flowers, and seating areas can create a welcoming atmosphere and provide a sense of tranquility.
7	Public Art and Installations	Integrate public art and installations into the entrance design to add vibrancy and creativity. These artistic elements can become iconic symbols of the city and contribute to its cultural identity.
8	Lighting Design	Thoughtful lighting design is essential, especially for entrances that are accessible at night. Properly placed lights can enhance the architectural features, create a safe environment, and contribute to the overall ambiance.
9	Traffic Management	Consider the flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic at the entrances. Efficient traffic management measures should be implemented to ensure smooth movement and safety for all users.
10	Accessibility:	Ensure that the entrances are accessible to all individuals, including those with disabilities. Implement ramps, elevators, and other features to provide equal access for everyone.
11	Community Engagement	Involve the local community in the design process to gather input and ensure that the entrance design reflects their needs and aspirations. Community engagement fosters a sense of ownership and pride in the final outcome.
12	Sustainability	Emphasize sustainable design practices in the entrance design, such as using environmentally friendly materials, rainwater harvesting, and energy-efficient lighting.
13	Consistency and Cohesion	Maintain a consistent theme and design language throughout all city entrances. Cohesiveness in design creates a unified image of the city and strengthens its brand identity.

Source: Drawing by Authors Using [2, 3, 5, 7, 16, 26]

City entrance designs present an opportunity to showcase a city's unique character and culture. By incorporating local elements, historical significance, and functional considerations, well-designed

entrances can leave a lasting positive impression on residents and visitors, enhancing the overall urban experience. In this study three main points have been considered; entrance as a symbol of a city, entrance as a mental boundary of a city and entrance as a window to look at a city. The following are a short description of each of them, then followed by **Figure 2** which shows sub-variables of each of them:

a. Entrance as a symbol of a city:

The city entrance holds profound symbolism, acting as the first point of connection and a gateway to the city's unique identity and culture. It creates a distinct boundary, both physical and metaphorical, separating the city from its surroundings and establishing a sense of place for residents and visitors. Often adorned with architectural wonders, historical landmarks, or iconic structures, the entrance reflects the city's history, culture, and achievements. Beyond its practical function, it embodies the city's values and aspirations, leaving a lasting impact on those who cross its threshold. Furthermore, the city entrance represents unity by bringing together diverse communities and individuals from different backgrounds under a shared identity. It becomes a focal point for celebrations, gatherings, and events, fostering a sense of belonging among residents. The entrance evolves over time, reflecting the city's growth, blending modern elements with tradition while preserving its evolving narrative. Ultimately, the city entrance stands as a potent emblem, encapsulating the city's essence and creating enduring memories for those who pass through, shaping their perceptions and remembrances of the place.

b. Entrance as a mental boundary of a city:

This perspective refers to the psychological or emotional aspects of how people perceive a city's entrance. It could be about how individuals define or draw a mental boundary when they enter a city. This boundary might influence their expectations, attitudes, and feelings toward the city and its inhabitants. City entrances serve as the initial points of contact for both residents and visitors, influencing their first impressions and overall experience of the city [20, 27]. By investigating the cognitive and emotional aspects associated with city entrances, this research aims to uncover how these symbolic gateways contribute to the formation of a city's identity. The city entrance as a mental boundary is influenced by a combination of physical, cultural, social, and economic factors that collectively shape visitors' perceptions and experiences as they enter the city [10, 22, 25].

c. Entrance as a window to look at a city:

The entrance to a city serves as a metaphorical window that offers a glimpse into the essence of the urban landscape lying beyond. Just like a well-adorned gateway, it serves as a herald, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the city's history, culture, and unique character. Beyond its architectural beauty, a city's entrance is a symbol of its identity and offers invaluable insights into its past, present, and future [10, 25]. This essay delves into the significance of a city's entrance as a gateway to explore and understand the vibrant tapestry of urban life. It might explore how the first impression of a city gained through its entrance impacts the overall perception of the city. The city entrance stands as a proud witness to the passage of time, encapsulating the very essence and soul of a city within its impressive arches and facades [27, 28]. These gateways are not mere structures; they

extend an open invitation for all to explore the city's unique blend of history, culture, architecture, and aspirations. They gently remind us that cities are living entities, constantly evolving yet firmly rooted in their heritage

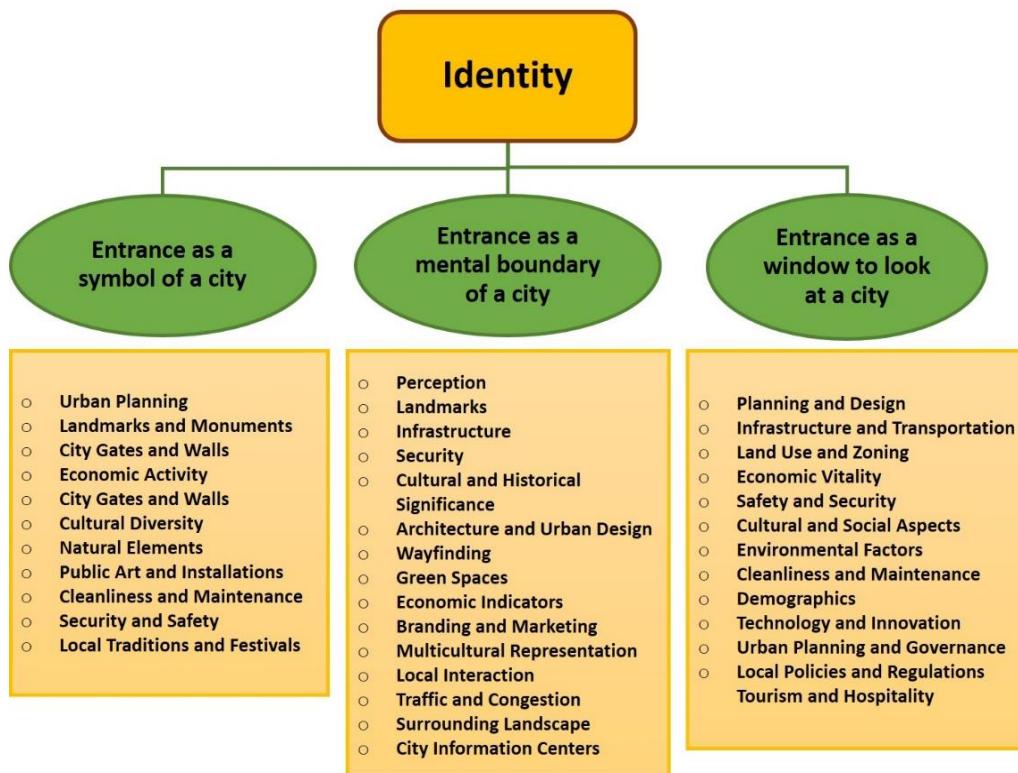


Figure 2: Main concepts of "entrance" from three different perspectives with related variables [3, 11, 12, 19, 26, 29].

3. Methodology

In order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the importance of city entrances in shaping urban identity, this study will employ a mixed-methods approach. The "mix mode research method" involve qualitative surveys and site investigation. The qualitative survey employs interviews with experts and academic professors which provide valuable insights into the emotional and cultural significance of these entrances. It's important to mention that the qualitative methods has involve collecting non-numerical data, such as interviews. While, the onsite survey and investigation involve an in-depth examination of historical records, architectural documentation, and urban planning strategies related to renowned city entrances. Also, implicates observations, or analysis of textual or visual materials [28-30]. At the end, the "mix mode research method" is an approach that combines various data collection methods within a single study. By utilizing multiple research data collection techniques, this method enhances the comprehensiveness and depth of understanding of the research topic. The integration of multiple methods can enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings.

This research aims to explore and analyze the pivotal role of city entrances as primary elements contributing to the unique identity and character of urban centers. This study involves studying the main physical entry points or gateways to the city of Sulaimani and understanding their significance,

design, and impact on both visitors and residents. The main question of this study is whether the Sulaimani's city entrances can be turned into systematic and planned areas by using planning and design measured and standards. The approach here involves employing a planning system and design principles to capitalize on existing opportunities and create a desirable environment. The hypothesis of this study is that the final outcome of the Sulaimani city entrances would be a good model for the city in both scales of urban planning and urban design. The city entrances area should be organized in order to have interaction with the city inside area, to tell the visitors city stories through reflecting the identity, history, culture and customs and so on.

In this study, a case study approach was adopted, with a specific focus on the four main entrances of Sulaimani city. To gather relevant data, field surveys were conducted, and the obtained data underwent comprehensive analysis to derive meaningful insights. By integrating different analytical approaches, researchers can leverage the strengths of each method while overcoming their individual limitations [28, 29]. Typically, in mixed-mode research, data is collected through a combination of methods [28, 30]. In this study, a case study approach was adopted, focusing on the four main entrances of the city of Sulaimani. The examination of these entrances involved gathering relevant data through field surveys, followed by a comprehensive analysis of the collected information.

3.1 Study Area

Sulaimani, situated in the Kurdistan Region of northern Iraq, holds significant importance as the second-largest city in the region. It serves as a prominent cultural, economic, and political center. Positioned in the northeastern part of Iraq, close to the borders of Iran, Sulaimani has been chosen as the focus of this study due to its vibrant cultural scene [6]. The city is a home to museums, art galleries, and theaters that display its rich historical legacy and modern artistic creations. Moreover, Sulaimani's reputation as an educational hub, with several universities, attracts tourists from across Iraq and neighboring countries. The city's population is diverse, comprising Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, and various other ethnic groups. This cultural diversity enriches Sulaimani's dynamic character, blending its historical legacy with modern developments [6].

Furthermore, the city's natural beauty adds to its attraction, making it an attractive destination for visitors. Sulaimani's significance as a center of activity within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq cannot be overstated. As depicted in **Fig. No.3**, Sulaimani features four main entrances: Kirkuk entrance to the west, Dukan entrance to the northwest, Azmer entrance to the north, and Arbat entrance to the east. These entrances play a crucial role in shaping the first impressions of residents and visitors, as they represent the gateway to the city's charm and opportunities.

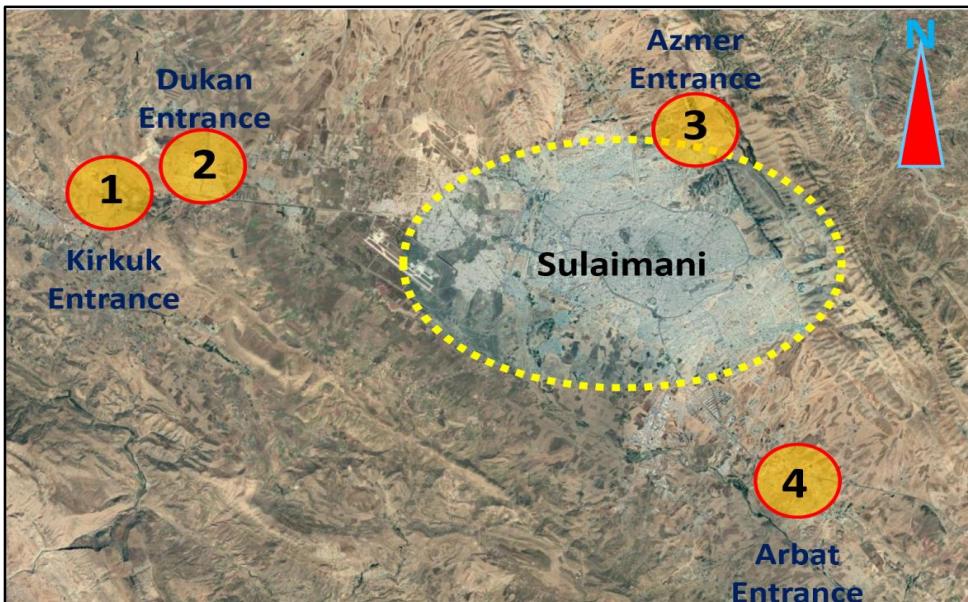


Figure 3: The study area and the position of the city entrances.

Source: The Authors using google Map

3.2 Data collection and analysis

In this research, the interviews were conducted until a saturation point was reached in the answers. This means that additional participants did not provide any new or distinct information about the questions being asked [31]. This approach aligns with Eisenhardt's (1989) perspective [32], which suggests that once a researcher achieves 'theoretical saturation'—where a significant amount of participants have been gathered—the collection of cases should stop to prevent redundant data and repetitive stories. Other authors have also noted that the number of interviewee in qualitative research depends on the researcher's judgment, and there's no universal rule for the sample size [33].

This interview collected qualitative data through conversations and semi-structured interviews involving a total of 8 participants which coded them as (R1-R8) in the study and met the selection criteria. The participants included three town planners, three architects, two urban designers. In this study, to respect confidentiality as agreed with the interview participants, the real names of individuals or organizations are not disclosed. The following is a list of questions that were asked during the interview:

1. Are the main four entrances in Sulaimani city easily identifiable?
2. What key factor is causing the unclear identity of the city's entrances?
3. Is there an impact on visitors' perceptions and impressions of a city when its entrances are well-designed?
4. What factors do effect the maintenance and cleanliness of the four entrances?
5. How does having entrances with unplanned and unfavorable designs affect the overall atmosphere?
6. What are the consequences of not maintaining the entrance areas on a city's status and its appeal as a destination?

7. Based on the findings, what aspects are lacking in the city entrances from the perspective of urban planning principles?
8. How does the absence of clear wayfinding signs and information at entrances impact visitors' experiences?
9. Why is it important to provide signage that is easy to understand and accessible?
10. In what ways does the presence of informal and unplanned structures near entrances disrupt a city's visual harmony and planned growth?
11. How does having a well-organized and coherent urban landscape contribute to creating a sense of place and identity?
12. What negative effects can arise from having disorganized and mismatched structures near entrances that impact how visitors see the city?
13. What security measures secure all entrances as city boundaries?
14. According to your point of view, what specific elements are identified as lacking in the four entrances within the study area?
15. What is your opinion on generating plans and strategies to enhance entrances performance?

4 Result and finding

The findings of this research were obtained through two types of data collection. The first type came from observing and gathering data in the study area, while the second type was obtained from qualitative interviews with experts. In order to evaluate the current conditions of the four main entrances to the city of Sulaimani (see **Fig. no 4**). It seeks to explore the overall impact these entrances have on the city from three key perspectives: firstly, as symbolic representations of the city itself; secondly, as psychological boundaries that shape perceptions of the city; and thirdly, as windows offering unique viewpoints into the city's essence.

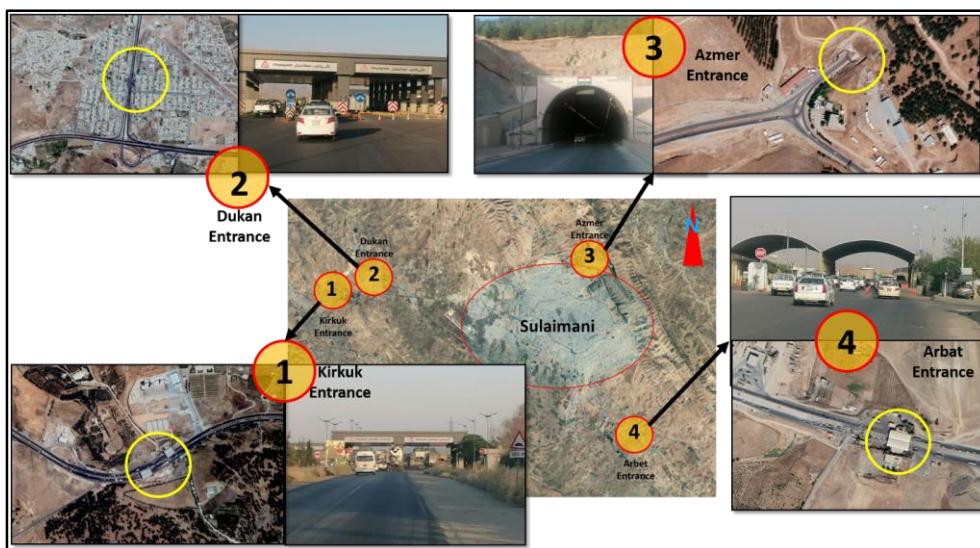


Figure 4: Four main entrances of the Sulaimani city.

Source: *The Authors*

The study's purpose is to gather valuable information and insights to aid in the formulation of effective strategies and plans for enhancing these entrances, thereby creating a positive and inviting

image for the city. To achieve this, each entrance is subjected to a detailed evaluation, carefully analyzing the various sub-variables falling under each of the three main perspectives (**refer to Figure No 3**). By conducting a thorough investigation through this approach, the study endeavors to pave the way for transformative improvements that will positively impact the city's overall character and appeal to both residents and visitors alike. Following is the investigation examines the city's four entrances through the lens of three main variables, gaining valuable insights into their symbolic significance, psychological impact, and unique perspectives on the city.

4.1 Entrance as a symbol of a city:

According to the respondents of the interviewee to the questions related the term entrances as symbol of the city the respondents R1 states as follow “ *Well, from what I can see, the study's findings really highlight how both the Kirkuk and Azmer entrances come across as effective mental boundaries of the city. It's interesting how that perception doesn't seem to hold up as strongly for the Dukan and Arbet entrances. When it comes to infrastructure, it's clear that Kirkuk, Dukan, and Azmer entrances have put in the effort – they've got well-developed and efficient setups. Now, Arbet entrance is a bit behind in that aspect*”. While R4 seen that “ *The indistinct identification of Sulaimani city through its entrance can be attributed to several factors that influence visitors' perceptions and experiences. One significant aspect contributing to this issue is the absence of a distinct and iconic design for the city's entrances. In urban environments, entrances play a vital role in representing a city's identity and unique characteristics. Studies have shown that well-designed and visually appealing entrances can positively impact visitors' perceptions and foster a sense of attachment to the city*”.

In this study, according to the interpretation of the data analysis referring to the **table 2**. The assessment in term of entrance as a symbol of a city has shown that these four entrances suffer from the lack of proper maintenance and cleanliness. In addition, unplanned and undesirable design lead to an unwelcoming and unattractive ambiance. Although, research has demonstrated that the physical appearance of urban spaces, including entrance areas, significantly influences visitors' emotions and overall satisfaction. Neglecting the maintenance of these crucial areas can result in negative perceptions, impacting the city's reputation and attractiveness as a destination. Based on the findings of this study concerning urban planning principles, it is evident that the city lacks clear entrances with distinctive city gates, walls, landmarks, and monuments. Furthermore, the study indicates a notable absence of consideration for economic activities in the surrounding area of city entrances except, Arbet entrance.

While interpreting the viewpoints of the respondents and observing the site, the study's findings reveal that the absence of adequate wayfinding signage and information at these entrances can hinder visitors' ability to navigate the city effectively. Clear and informative wayfinding systems are essential in facilitating visitors' movement and promoting positive experiences. Studies have emphasized the significance of providing accessible and intelligible signage, enhancing urban exploration and satisfaction. Furthermore, the presence of informal and unplanned structures near the entrances can disrupt the visual coherence and planned development of the city. According to urban planning theories, well-organized and coherent urban landscapes contribute to a sense of place and identity. Conversely, disorganized and incongruous structures near entrances can create an unfavorable impression of the city, affecting visitors' perceptions. In general, all the respondents

concur that the four entrances in the study area experience a lack of cultural diversity, landscape and natural elements, public art and installations, cleanliness, maintenance, as well as local traditions and festivals. Regarding security and safety, all four entrances have been thoroughly fortified with robust and secure measures (**see table 2**).

Table 2: Entrance as a symbol of a city.

Variables: Entrance as a symbol of a city	Sub variables	Ent.	Assessment	
			Site observation	Respondents Opinion
	Urban Planning	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Missing Missing	Ent1 &Entt2 Have planning measures
	Landmarks & Monuments	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Missing Available Missing	Ent1 &Ent3 can realize simple land mark and monuments
Entr.1 (Kirkuk)	City Gates & Walls	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Missing Missing	Ent.1 & Ent.2 Have designated Gates
	Economic Activity	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	In Four entrances there is no any economic activates
	Cultural Diversity	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	The cultural diversity is not exist in any study entrances
Entr.2 (Dukan)	Landscape & Natural Elements	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Available Missing	Only Ent.3 has landscape & natural elements
	Public Art and Installations	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	Public art and installations do not exist in any one of four entrances
	Cleanliness and Maintenance	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Missing Available Missing	In entrances Ent.1 & Ent.3 there is a moderate cleanliness and maintenance
Entr.3 (Azmer)	Security and Safety	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Available Available	In Four entrances there is an excellent security and safety
	Local Traditions and Festivals	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	Local traditions and festivals do not exist in any one of four entrances
Entr.4 (Arbat)				

4.2 Entrance as a mental boundary of a city:

From the perspective of entrances serving as mental boundaries of the city, the study finding derived from the interview and site observation reveals that Kirkuk and Azmer entrances are perceived as effective city boundaries. However, this perception is absent for the Dukan and Arbet entrances. The same observation applies to landmarks. When considering the city's infrastructure, the study indicates that Kirkuk, Dukan and Azmer entrances exhibit a well-developed and efficient infrastructure. Conversely, Arbet entrance are lacking in terms of the infrastructure. Finding related to the security and safety of the city, 7 out of the 8 respondents agree that the all entrances are fortified with a strong and robust security system, making them effective city boundaries. R5 debate as follow "*The security measures include advanced surveillance cameras, regular patrols by trained personnel, and access control points. Overall, the entrances are well-protected and act as strong city borders.*"

When it comes to wayfinding, during the site observation there are noticeable differences among the four entrances. The entrances of Kirkuk, Dukan, and Arbet have relatively moderate wayfinding systems in place, making it easier for visitors to navigate. However, the Azmer entrance, unfortunately, suffers from a lack of proper wayfinding, which can lead to confusion and inconvenience for those trying to find their way. Addressing this issue at the Azmer entrance would greatly enhance the overall visitor experience and ensure smoother navigation for everyone.

Among 8 respondents, 5 of them say that "*In general, the four entrances lack significant cultural and historical significance, distinctive architecture and urban design, green spaces, effective branding and marketing, multicultural representation, opportunities for local interaction, dedicated city information centers, and appropriate traffic and congestion solutions*" the study result has concluded that the entrances suffer from persistent congestion and a lack of viable traffic management measures. Addressing these shortcomings is crucial to transform the entrances into more inviting and functional spaces that enrich the overall experience for both residents and visitors alike. (**See table 3**).

Table 3: Entrance as a mental boundary of a city

Variables: Entrance as a mental boundary of a city	Sub variables	Assessment		Respondents Opinion
		Site observation		
 Entr.1 (Kirkuk)	Perception	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Missing Available Missing	Only Ent.1 & Ent.3 provide a good perception to the residents and visitors
	Landmarks	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Missing Available Missing	Both Ent.1 & Ent.3 , landmarks can serve as recognizable features and contribute to creating the sense of entrance as a mental boundary of a city
	Infrastructure	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Available Missing	In Four entrances there is a moderate infrastructure and services
	Security	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Available Available	In Four entrances there is an excellent security and safety
	Cultural and Historical Significance	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	Cultural and historical significance do not exist in any one of four entrances
	Architecture and Urban Design	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Missing Missing	Architecture and design elements have been implemented only in Ent.1 & Ent.2 , but they are both in poor condition
	Wayfinding	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Missing Available	The wayfinding if exist, they are in poor condition and need some improvement
	Green Spaces	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	None of the four entrances have taken into account the presence of green space
	Economic Indicators	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Available	Only around the Ent.4 there is economic activity and commercial stores
	Branding and Marketing	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	There is no any branding and marketing have been used in the four entrances area
	Multicultural Representation	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	Multicultural representation do not exist

	Local Interaction	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	There is no any local interaction consideration in the city entrances
	Traffic and Congestion	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Available Available	There is a noticeable traffic congestion at all four entrances
	Surrounding Landscape	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	None of the four entrances have taken into account the landscape & outdoor design
	City Information Centers	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	City information centers do not exist in the four entrances

4.3 Entrance as a window to look at a city

This specific section of the study focused on the visual characteristics and impressions of the city as seen from the four entrances. The finding from the investigation revealed important observations related to the city's appearance and ambiance at each entry point. However, concerning planning and design aspects discussed with respondents. R7 and R8 thought that "*The study identified substantial deficiencies in multiple areas, including planning and design strategies, infrastructure and transportation facilities, land use and zoning patterns, as well as cultural and social considerations. Addressing these shortcomings would be crucial in transforming the city's image and ensuring a more cohesive and attractive experience for individuals entering through any of the four entrances*"

Additionally, the finding from this study is the robust economic activity observed around Arbet entrance. The analysis indicates a thriving economic environment in this particular area, characterized by various business activities, commercial establishments, and potentially favorable investment opportunities. The presence of vibrant economic activity can have positive implications for the overall development and attractiveness of the city, particularly in the vicinity of this entrance. Further exploration into the factors contributing to the success of economic activity in this region may provide valuable insights for enhancing economic growth and development in other parts of the city as well (see table 4).

Table 4: Entrance as a mental boundary of a city

Variables: Entrance as a window to look at a city	Sub variables	Indicator		Assessment
 Entr.1 (Kirkuk)  Ent.2 (Dukan)  Ent.3 (Azmer)  Ent.4 (Arbat)	Planning and Design	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	There is no planning and design criteria have been used in the four entrances area
	Infrastructure and Transportation	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	None of the four entrances have required infrastructure and services
	Land Use and Zoning	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	None of the four entrances have taken into account the land use and zoning
	Economic Vitality	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Available Missing	Around Ent.3 there is a considerable economic activity
	Safety and Security	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Available Available	In Four entrances there is an excellent security and safety
	Cultural and Social Aspects	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	None of the four entrances have taken into account the cultural and social aspects
	Environmental Factors	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Available Missing	Only Ent.3 has different environmental features
	Cleanliness and Maintenance	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Available Missing	Ent.4 suffer from the lack of cleanliness and maintenance
	Technology and Innovation	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	In Four entrances there is no technology and innovation measures
	Urban Planning and Governance	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Missing Missing Missing Missing	There is a significant lack of urban planning and governance at all four entrances
	Local Policies and Regulations	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Available Available	Regulations and local policies exist, though their effectiveness is limited.
	Tourism and Hospitality	Ent.1 Ent.2 Ent.3 Ent.4	Available Available Missing Missing	Entrance 1 and Entrance 2 have a presence of tourism and hospitality activities

The comprehensive study of city entrances has highlighted critical aspects that significantly influence the urban experience. Examination of the four entrances revealed varying wayfinding efficiency, with Kirkuk, Dukan, and Arbet showing moderate systems, while Azmer lacked adequate signage. The study identified substantial shortcomings in planning, infrastructure, cultural significance, and social considerations. Entrances lacked distinctive architecture, green spaces, effective branding, multicultural representation, local interaction opportunities, dedicated city information centers, and traffic solutions. The absence of a clear boundary distinction between the city and its surroundings at entrances affects the sense of arrival, making well-designed entrances crucial for creating a memorable urban experience.

5 Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, the comprehensive study conducted on the city entrances has shed light on crucial aspects that significantly impact the overall urban experience. The examination of the four entrances revealed varying degrees of wayfinding efficiency, with Kirkuk, Dukan, and Arbet demonstrating moderate wayfinding systems, while the Azmer entrance faces deficiency in signage compared to the other entrances mentioned. Additionally, the study identified substantial shortcomings in multiple areas, including planning and design strategies, infrastructure and transportation facilities, land use and zoning patterns, as well as cultural and social considerations. Notably, the entrances lack significant cultural and historical significance, distinctive architecture and urban design, green spaces, effective branding and marketing, multicultural representation, opportunities for local interaction, dedicated city information centers, and viable traffic and congestion solutions.

The absence of a clear distinction between the cities' boundaries and its inside at the entrances has substantial consequences for both residents and visitors. This deficiency not only reduces the sense of arrival but also affects the creation of a distinct boundary between the city's urban landscape and the surrounding areas. Therefore, well-designed city entrances can create a sense of arrival and anticipation for visitors. A distinct transition from the borders to the city center can set the charisma for a memorable urban experience, but the absence of such a distinction can leave visitors with a less impactful first impression.

Redesigning city entrances to reflect the identity and cities cultural involves incorporating elements of architecture, art, cultural symbols, and historical references. By using traditional materials and local craftsmanship, integrating cultural symbols and artwork. Incorporating historical landmarks and embracing the city's natural environment by integrating landscaping and green spaces. The entrances can evoke a strong sense of the cultural context. Engaging the local community in the process and using storytelling elements, interpretive signage, and interactive installations will enhance visitors' understanding and connection to the city's cultural heritage. Additionally, employing sustainable design practices that blend with traditional techniques, maintaining a consistent theme, and collaborating with local artists, architects, and designers will further contribute to the authenticity and creativity of the redesigned entrances. Ultimately, these efforts will transform the entrances into meaningful gateways that embody the identity and enrich the urban experience for residents and visitors alike. In addition to physical structures, city entrances are often marked by road signs, traffic signals, or specific infrastructure indicating that you are entering a particular city. These can include city limit signs, street signs, or changes in the road layout and design.

By implementing these strategies in a coordinated manner, the city entrances can be transformed into vibrant and welcoming spaces, leaving a lasting positive impression on residents and visitors alike. The collective effort of city authorities, urban planners, community stakeholders, and residents will be instrumental in achieving these improvements and enhancing the overall urban experience.

Exploring Innovative Design Approaches: Future studies should delve into innovative design approaches for city entrances that not only reflect the city's identity but also prioritize sustainability, accessibility, and the seamless integration of technology to enhance the visitor experience. **Assessing the Socioeconomic Impact:** Research should focus on quantifying the socioeconomic impact of well-designed city entrances, measuring their influence on tourism, local businesses, property values, and overall quality of life for residents and visitors.

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