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Traditional Bazaar Spaces in Southern Punjab, Pakistan: Social Life, Urban Identity, and Residential–Commercial Coexistence

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Abstract

This paper focuses on discussing the traditional bazaar space of Uch Sharif, a historic urban centre in Southern Punjab, Pakistan, and how these bazaars have facilitated the social interaction, identity creation in the city and how they have shaped or united the residential and commercial lifestyle. The study, using a qualitative, case-based approach that combines spatial mapping, architectural analysis, visual documentation, and interviewing the stakeholders, reveals that the bazaars of Uch - Chunri, Mehboob Subhani and Bukhari are not just commercial centres, but are also dynamic socio-spatial systems. The buildings are climatically responsive, the plans are multi-use and the activities are culturally embedded, which are all aspects of vernacular urbanism. The bazaars of Uch are hybridities in space, with trade, dwelling, religion and social life in a dense urban structure, a structure that is quite the opposite of the rigid zoning patterns of the modern city. Based on theories of social space (Lefebvre), place attachment (Relph and Tuan), and vernacular resilience, the study demonstrates the importance of these bazaars in maintaining intergenerational knowledge, a community network, and flexibility of its environment. The courtyards, shaded alleys and the thick earthen walls that they employed as passive cooling systems are also good examples of sustainability in the conception of cities in semi-arid landscapes. Yet, these are threats that are becoming more present in these heritage spaces that are threatened by modernization, neglect and uncontrolled development. The study is in favor of comprehensive regeneration plan which comprises heritage zoning, participatory planning and encouragement of the traditional micro enterprises. This study evokes the lived heritage and the architectural intelligence of Uch bazaars which are still relevant as sensitive low energy cities with rich cultural heritage. Concludes that it is not only important to conserve them physically with the renewal of such spaces, but also to maintain the sense of social and symbolic meaning of everyday urban life.

Keywords: *Residential-commercial coexistence, Social interaction, Southern Punjab, Traditional bazar spaces, Urban identity*

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INTRODUCTION

Cities are not mere screens on which human action is projected, but vivid stages on which identity, culture and community are lived. South Asians have been using bazaars as economic markets, social gathering centers and cultural focal points. Pakistan, its old cities and architecture give it a good background to explore these processes. The vernacular architecture and cultural traditions of Uch Sharif in Southern Punjab are a good example. The present paper addresses the role of its bazaar quarters in providing social interaction, urban identity, and the co-existence of residential and commercial life, especially as this space becomes marginalized by the forces of rapid urbanization and the globalizing tendencies.

Trade and gathering places form part of the cultural memory in Pakistan and forgetting of bazaars is a threat to the intangible heritage (Cheema and Bell, 2013). The bazaars such as Chunri, Mehboob Subhani and Bukhari in the Uch Sharif are sources of vernacular knowledge and urban social capital. They are clumped together, have small corridors, and courtyards, as well as shaded alleys, which not only moderate climate but also provide societal interaction (Mahmood, Ali, and Ahmad, 2022). All these characteristics represent the concept of urban interiority, in which form is created by cultural and climatic pressures instead of being dictated by design paradigms (Shah and Muro, 2023).

However, olden-day bazaars are decadent, commercialized, and ignored by the government. These dangers are portrayed in the erosion of place identity in the Anarkali Bazaar of Lahore (Batool and Bahauddin, 2025). In the same way, Uch, where modern infrastructure is emphasized more than cultural preservation, suffers both architectural and social networks due to the redevelopment pressures (Ahmad, 2022). Bazaars overlap with both shrines and communal grounds too, creating a stratified urbanism of sacred and commercial life coexisting (Snehi, 2019). This is inclusive as compared to contemporary forms of the city that spatially isolate functions and classes (Shakir, 2018).

Environmental sustainability is also expressed in traditional bazaars. Climate-responsive solutions, such as jallis, courtyards, tall walls, and thermal massing included passive design features long before the introduction of mechanical systems. Studies have verified that they are cost-effective and thermally comfortable to low-income population (Kazmi, Anjum, Iftikhar, & Qureshi, 2011). Socially, bazaars create a condensing effect, promote interaction, informal economies, and bottom-up urbanism (Bhatti, Hayat, and Mukhtar, 2013). According to Mokhtar (2012), sacred and commercial worlds tend to become one and the same in pluralistic space that cannot be attained in traditional zoning.

The Central Asian, Mughal, and indigenous mix; colorful culture; and bazaars preserving craftsmanship, textiles, and agricultural trade make Uch Sharif an appropriate center of interest (Mahmood et al., 2022). But these cities are ignored by urban research, which focuses on mega-cities such as Lahore or Karachi. This analysis shifts focus to marginal yet

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historically important locations, and proposes cultural sustainability instead of commercial expediency.

Preservation itself, like in Lahore, is often treated outside the community and may diminish heritage to veneer (Snehi, 2023). Regeneration of the city should not only conserve bricks and mortar but also virtual properties, including rituals, relationships and rights to the city. The economic revival of bazaars will boost economies, encourage sustainable tourism and help to improve civic pride. Cultural heritage in South Punjab will be useful in attracting visitors and providing livelihoods with proper planning (Vandal, 2011).

The study is interdisciplinary, cutting across architecture, sociology, anthropology and environmental studies. It emphasizes the construction and maintenance of urban identities through spatial, social, and symbolic aspects of traditional bazaars and explains why they should be preserved in the era of modernity.

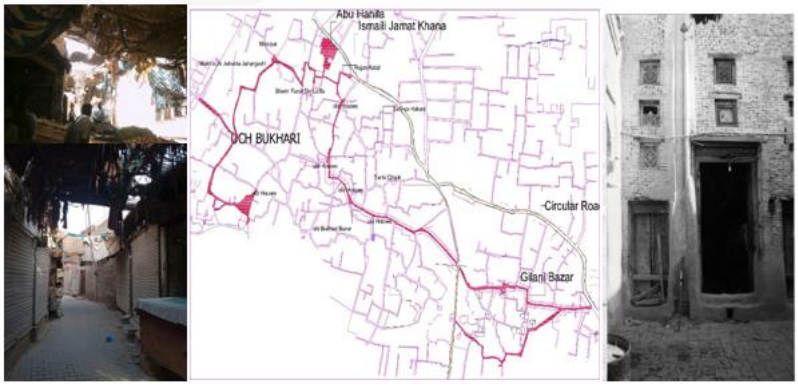


Figure 1. Figure 1. Example of coexistence of residential and commercial life in Uch Bukhari Bazar.

Figure 1 presents a spatial and photographic representation of the unique coexistence of commercial and residential life within the selected sample bazaars of Uch Sharif—Chunri Bazaar, Mehboob Subhani Bazaar, and Bukhari Bazaar. The bazaars were deliberately selected as having architectural continuity, spatial richness and preserving traditional mixed-use urbanism. The master plan of Uch was introduced as the central map to show the embeddedness of these bazaars in the organic urban fabric of the town. They are located near to important religious, communal and circulation nodes, which highlights their functional centrality and historic relevance. The pictures on the left show the inside atmosphere of these bazaars, which are made up of narrow pedestrian alleys with shops in front and temporary roofing. They are for both climatic and social purposes, not only for relief from the heat, but also for social informalities. The right photograph features a vernacular residential frontage, which is a typical feature of Bukhari Bazaar, and which shares a space frame with living quarters and shops. The built form represents an adaptive layering of private and public life, an integral part of Uch's architectural heritage. Altogether, these bazaars have been a dynamic aspect of urban areas in which commerce, culture and community come together in a coherent and sustainable spatial system.

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In this regard, this study poses the following questions:

What is the role of the old markets of Uch Sharif in the daily life and in the construction of urban identity?

How do these bazaar locations allow for the coexistence of residential, commercial, religious and communal life in a small historic urban fabric?

How do the spatial and architectural aspects of the Uch's bazaars express vernacular resilience, climate responsiveness and cultural continuity in the context of the pressures of 'modernization' processes?

A novelty of this research is that it defocused major heritage towns of Pakistan and converged the research focus on Uch Sharif, the historic town of southern Punjab that is yet under-explored in urban and heritage studies. Although Uch Sharif has received few academic analyses, its traditional bazaars are still very dynamic that can be considered a living socio-spatial system. The study explores three of these market plazas—Chunri Bazaar, Mehboob Subhani Bazaar and Bukhari Bazaar—as more than just markets, as places of cultural continuity, intergenerational social networks, mingled residential-commercial spaces, climate-responsive environmental adaptations and strong local identity, using systematic spatial mapping, architectural documentation, visual analysis, and local stakeholder engagement. By this the research contributes to the current discourse on vernacular city making, the sustainable conservation of intangible elements of living heritage and inclusive approaches for regeneration of historic towns in South Asian context.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to consider the manner in which the traditional bazaar space creates the identity of the city and its social interactions, and which is related to the theoretical body of urban sociology, human geography and the theory of the architecture in general. One particularly interesting theoretical orientation is what is known as The Production of Space by Henri Lefebvre (1991) where it is claimed that social spaces are actually actively produced by material, representational and experiential practices. This is because, in the context where it happens, the bazaar isn't just a passive medium for trade, but a social space that is being generated and that belies shared histories, values and identities. These markets can be considered the spatial practice of the urban dweller and the lived experiences, cultural continuity and socio-political negotiation of those people.

This opinion is consistent with the place theory, such as Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977) who highlight the phenomenological nature of space and the significance of human experiences and attachments to make places meaningful. In this sense the traditional bazaar spaces are not abstract spaces, but spaces where the sensory, cultural symbolism and intersubjective relations are served that create social cohesion and identity. Such emotions about place in such spaces can cause a high emotional and political value that cannot be easily translated to an economic transaction, as Cresswell (2015) has observed.

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Such spaces are also vital as a result of the contribution of urban theorist Jane Jacobs (1961). She stated that "eyes on the street" and the short block typologies of traditional bazaar, along with mixed use and tight knit communities, are the elements of successful streets and neighbourhoods. It is a human scale space that grows organically, encourages informal use and informal surveillance, and can be multi-generational, thus supporting the urban form by being both safety enhancing and enhancing the urban form for resilience and adaptability.

The empirical studies also reveal that bazaars help to form urban identity and interaction. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area finds that traditional souq is a cultural space that integrates trade, religion and everyday life. In such cases as the ones presented in Aleppo and Fez the presence of bazaars, that typically constitute the nervous center of the city and the city's life revolves around them (Bianca, 2000). Their hierarchical structure, the main and secondary alleys which lead to the resident spaces that are open towards both the public and the domestic life, attaining the balance between commerce and domesticity (Hakim, 1986).

Chattopadhyay (2006) studied the traditional bazaars of Kolkata in India and found that their adaptive nature of architecture and fluidity enable them to be economically viable and culturally resilient. Even under urban pressures, these markets remain socio-cultural nodes due to their integration into the networks of communities. In Southeast Asia, Lim (2015) highlighted the inclusive and fluid nature of vernacular commercial spaces in cities such as Hanoi and Yogyakarta as a way of promoting pluralism and micro-entrepreneurship.

Watson (2009) has reported the informal markets in the African cities such as Lagos and Nairobi, whereby the informal markets contribute to the development of urbanism in the cities and how the informal markets exist outside the formal regulatory framework but play a significant role in the economic sustainability and social life of the cities. Such markets, though informal, generate dense spatial practices and local urban identities.

Bazaar spaces can be considered as a demonstration of how architecture can be sensitive to climate and context, viewed in design and environmental terms. Studies of Iranian bazaars, including those in Isfahan, demonstrate that vaulted arcades, wind towers and courtyards are used not only to provide environmental benefits (shade, ventilation) but also social uses (meeting places) (Memarian & Brown, 2003). These attributes are in line with the concepts of sustainable urbanism and low-energy buildings.

In the Pakistani context, empirical research on the traditional bazaar spaces is sparse and slowly becoming an object of scholarly interest. Batool and Bahauddin (2025) examined the role of the Anarkali Bazaar lived experience in place-making and urban memory in Lahore. In their research, they discovered that in spite of the infrastructural degradation and commercialization, the users continued to have a good emotional

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attachment to the space by conducting daily rituals, seasonal festivals and common histories. One of the points that are emphasized by the researchers is the need to acknowledge the intangible heritage in the urban policy- what can be related to the case of Uch Sharif.

In his study of Sufi shrines and markets surrounding them in Sindh, Shakir (2018) illustrates that these spaces are places of both spiritual and commercial practice. They are centers of urban resilience, where pilgrimage, ritual practice and informal trade are accommodated, therefore, not subject to homogenized urban development. Mokhtar (2012) also confirms this by discussing the sacred economy of Sehwan Sharif, in which bazaars cannot be dissociated with religious activities and communal identity.

Kazmi, Anjum, Iftikhar and Qureshi (2011) in Multan used quantitative method to evaluate the performance of traditional public buildings such as markets and concluded that the traditional buildings scored higher in terms of thermal comfort and energy efficiency compared to modern buildings. According to their study, the passive cooling methods like jallis, thick walls and courtyards have still a relevance in the modern context of sustainable design.

Cheema and Bell (2013) provided a conservationist approach with their recording of the Bibi Jawandi Tomb Complex in Uch Sharif. Although the preservation of monumental architecture was the center of attention, they focus on the importance of the bazaar structures around to preserve the cultural integrity of the heritage zone. These spaces are not only commercial but also enhance the sacred geography of the city.

Mahmood, Ali, and Ahmad (2022) analyzed the morphologies of residential buildings in Uch Sharif and their vicinity to commercial hubs critically. Their results indicate that the spatial overlap of homes and bazaars facilitates dynamic social interactions, informal economies, and gender-sensitive spatial negotiations. This interdependence of spaces questions the contemporary zoning practice and provides alternative models of integrated urbanism.

Moreover, the lack of urban planning that is sensitive to the heritage is also very important. There is a dearth of institutional support in the cities of Southern Punjab to document, preserve, or adaptively reuse their rich collection of vernacular and heritage sites (Ahmad, 2022). Today, cultural capital and its historical context of Uch Sharif is still subject to infrastructural neglect, informal encroachment, and poorly conceived development projects that threaten its urban fabric.

There are some initiatives that offer inspiring examples. The Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA) has also demonstrated an approach towards heritage preservation and community engagement in order to redevelop traditional markets like Delhi Gate and Shah Almi. However, the efforts have not spread to other remote regions like Uch Sharif. Many local theories have been expressed by scholars such as Vandal (2011) and Hassan (2004) which emphasizes the need for localization in the urban

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development process by taking local culture into consideration rather than using globally-homogenized approaches to the planning process.

The literature can therefore be summarised around a few themes – the traditional bazaar spaces are multifunctional, socially integrative and climatically responsive. They defy zoning in cities, offer lessons in resilience and sustainability and are important cultural identity statements. But they are under threat due to the problem of policy neglect, commercialization and imperative of modernization. Recent studies like Ding et al. (2024) on cultural sustainability of bazaar spaces across Asia and Iqbal et al. (2022) on bazaar versus shopping center user preferences in Karachi, Pakistan, further emphasize the socio-cultural and economic significance of these vernacular urban forms in the current context of South Asia. In addition, Mahmood et al. (2023) give information about the conservation problems which exist today with the heritage monuments of Uch Sharif.

In conclusion, traditional bazaars and particularly those in the cities that have a stratified history like Uch Sharif can be interpreted as a kind of an archive of space and an archive of place. They are not only transactional spaces, but also spaces of memory, meaning and identity. Such spaces are important in the discourse of urbanism and it is argued in the theoretical and empirical literature that such spaces need to be re-valued in a context like Pakistan where a debate of conservation versus modernization is still ongoing. The future studies should be focused on the elaboration of the integrated frameworks, which would integrate spatial analysis, community participation, and sustainable planning to make sure that traditional bazaars remain the important elements of the urban experience.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed is a case study whereby the researcher concentrated on the historic urban development of Uch Sharif that is characterized by vernacular architecture, dense urban form and rich cultural traditions. The case study methodology is especially applicable to the deep contextual analysis, where the context around the phenomenon is not clearly distinguished and marked (Yin, 2018). Since, the dynamics of bazaar space in Uch Sharif cannot be studied without taking into consideration the larger socio-cultural and environmental context of the city, the case study method allowed comprehensive examination.

A mix of architectural documentation, on-site observation, visual mapping and informal interviews were used to collect primary data. Layout, spatial arrangements and architectural features of bazaars and surrounding houses were documented through visual surveys and spatial mapping. This method has been extensively used in vernacular urbanism studies in attempts to interpret the spatial patterns and typologies of the city in respect to climate, culture, and everyday activities (Rapoport, 2005; Memarian & Brown, 2003). Important bazaar clusters, which were

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examined, were Chunri Bazaar, Mehboob Subhani Bazaar, and the Bukhari market zone.

To capture the architectural features including jallis (lattice screen), wooden balconies, courtyards and facade typologies, photographs were used. The analysis of visual data was used to translate the contribution of these features to passive climate control, community interaction and continuity of cultural identity. According to Dey (2015), visual ethnography enables researchers to take a more active stance regarding the symbolic and experiential aspects of space, which are paramount to the issues of this study.

Purposive sampling was also used to allow informal interviews with residents, shopkeepers, local planners and elders to understand how the spaces are used, perceived and valued. Urban ethnographic research commonly uses informal and semi-structured interviews because they produce detailed and situational answers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were not recorded to accommodate comfort and privacy of the participants, particularly in such culturally sensitive areas. Rather, more elaborate field notes were kept and coded on a thematic basis.

Secondary information was acquired through pre-existing academic literature, master plans (where available), heritage reports and policy documents. The historical development of the settlement pattern and the importance of the commercial-residential integration were traced by means of relevant archival materials and maps. The visual, spatial, textual, and narrative data were triangulated, which made the results more reliable and in-depth (Patton, 2015).

A thematic coding process was used to analyze data. The visual and narrative information were categorized into key themes like; social interaction nodes, climatic adaptability, residential-commercial coexistence, aesthetic values, and spatial integration. These codes were not pre-thought, but appeared naturally in the course of fieldwork and data immersion, according to the principles of a grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

The spatial analysis was also assisted with field survey sketching of base maps and cross referencing with the master plan information (where it exists). Various aspects including circulation networks, spatial clustering, and boundary conditions were used to explain the similarities or differences between bazaar typologies and modern urban planning models. The approach of spatial layering has been effectively applied to the study of South Asian urbanism to put the relationship between form, function, and meaning in context (Saif, 2025).

Ethics was part of the research. All interviews and observations were accompanied by verbal consent. Participant identities are anonymized, and unnecessary photographs of people were avoided. Additionally, cultural and religious meaning of some places was taken into account during documentation, which means their representation was sensitive as regards to sacred and residential places.

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To sum up, the qualitative and multi-method research design used in the present research allowed to provide the comprehensive, grounded, and contextualized interpretation of the traditional bazaar spaces in Uch Sharif. The combination of spatial analysis, visual ethnography and narrative inquiry provides a strong methodological approach to reveal the socio-cultural, functional, and architectural dynamics that characterize these key urban spaces. Figure 2 summarizes the research methodology used in this study.

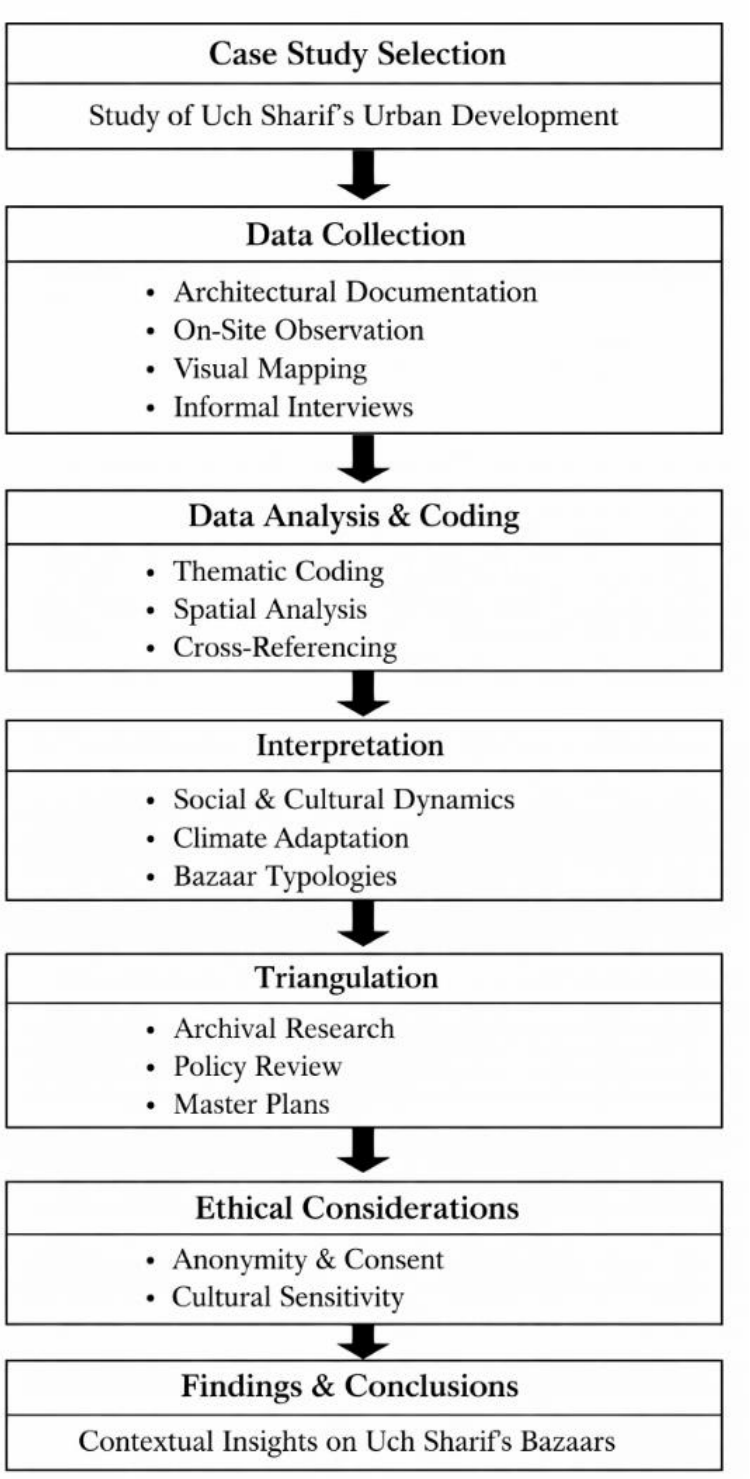


Figure 2. Research methodology framework summarizing the qualitative, multi-method research design. (Source: The Authors).

CASE OF UCH BAZAARS

The city of Uch Sharif in Southern Punjab, Pakistan, has extreme historical, architectural and spiritual dimension. The town of Uch was established in the 8th century or before that as an important staging-post on ancient trade and pilgrimage routes. The urban fabric of Uch Sharif has evolved as a result of cultural accretion over a number of centuries, as a result of the dynastic movement, religious traditions, and more localised vernacular traditions. One of the most outstanding elements of this urban space is its traditional bazaars which act as both spatial and social veins between home life, religious hubs and business. The case study includes an extensive study of the architecture, space dynamics and morphologic characteristics of the bazaar of Uch Sharif, utilizing both the findings of the primary studies and sound secondary sources.

The decision of selecting Uch Sharif as the center of this investigation has been taken due to its rich historical background, architectural value and urban-cultural continuity so that it may be presented in a clear depiction of the traditional bazaar based urbanism of the south of Punjab in Pakistan. Uch is not only a town with rich heritage that has architectural significance but it is also a living example of organically developed mixed-use urban form with religion, commerce and community coexisting. Strategically situated and a religious and trade center, Uch Sharif has been flourishing since the 12 th century, when it was under the Delhi Sultanate and Mughals. It was a strategic trading and pilgrim centre between the areas of Multan (Sindh) and Central Asia (Cheema & Bell, 2013). It is also religiously important as a seat of Sufism with the shrines of the descendants of Bahauddin Zakariya including the saintly Jalaluddin Surkh Posh Bukhari which have been visited by pilgrims since centuries ago (Snehi, 2019). Because the spiritual topography of Uch is a deeply embedded one, its physical topography is also a reflection of the embeddedness. In spite of the fast pace of urbanization, many of Uch's vernacular buildings and spatial rationales have survived. The blended character of residential and bazaar areas and the climate responsive courtyard typologies along with the use of local materials and techniques make Uch an exemplar of indigenous urban resilience (Mahmood, Ali, & Ahmad, 2022). This renders the town particularly relevant in the discussions in the present times on sustainable and inclusive urbanism, especially in the semi-arid space of South Asia. Additionally, Uch is underrepresented in academic scholarship and in heritage policy—even after having been placed on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List by the Government of Pakistan. It reflects the hybrid culture of Southern Punjab that is formed by Sufi Islam, artisan traditions and agrarian economy. Thus, studying Uch is not only useful from a localised perspective but can also be used to guide the wider debate on 'heritage sensitive urban development' in Pakistan. Significantly, the urban morphology of Uch Sharif is quite intact and it's possible to explore continuity of traditional urban practices. The presence of heritage zones in Uch is a living urban laboratory, which is

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not found in other large cities like Lahore or Karachi where historic neighbourhoods are in danger of being encroached upon or gentrified. The condition offers a rare chance to analyze an urban system in place that is high functioning but low energy and socially cohesive, a characteristic that is becoming more and more uncommon in the global South. In this context, Uch Sharif is not just a testament to the country's past and contemporary culture but also a pivotal point for considering urban sustainability, cultural resilience, and vernacular planning practices. Moreover, this dedicated case study becomes even more important because of the "relative obscurity" of this town in the mainstream of urban research.

In Figure 3 an in-depth visual survey of Mehboob Subhani Bazaar in Uch Sharif is presented to capture its architectural awareness, ecological awareness and socio-economic dynamism. This is one of the few cases where a vernacular usage has been adapted in a semi-formalised manner, as traditional commerce is still carried out in an adapted spatial framework. The overhead wooden trussed system and the sloping roof, which can be seen throughout the images, are built to accommodate passive ventilation and natural lightings that are enhanced by the perforated concrete blocks (jali walls) that are placed in a strategic location. These properties control the inside temperature and daylight entry – crucial in the hot and semi-arid Uch climate. The linear spatial rhythm is preserved along the central walkway, supported by symmetrical shopfronts which allow visibility and a continuous pedestrian movement. There are images of both street stalls and formalised retail outlet, indicating the stratification of the bazaar's economic system to meet the needs of various income levels. The images of lower level are active images of the market, where the local people trade, such as textile, jewelry and daily goods, which further supports the idea of the bazaar as social and community center. Mehboob Subhani Bazaar is a significant example of transitional urban morphology architecturally as it is a combination of the use of contemporary materials with the traditional planning. Although more modern materials have been used, such as concrete to replace the older ones, the spatial nature and cultural uses have not changed, which highlights the history and modernity in the urban habitat of Uch.

The architectural and atmospheric characteristic of Bukhari Bazaar which is one of the most historically ingrained commercial streets in Uch Sharif is expressed in figure 4. This bazaar is highly vernacular and the semi-covered passageways and the informal interventions within the space have resulted out of the passage of time as it has been developed to suit the environmental conditions and the needs of its users. Of note is the use of local organic materials for roofing the roof, such as thatch, bamboo matting and palm fronds. These materials provide shade and minimize direct solar gain but diffused light penetrates, producing a special atmosphere of diffused light and a pleasant temperature. The simple wooden beams and makeshift trusses point to a simple,

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community-built tradition in which expediency and incremental construction are virtues. While it is clear that some parts of the roof have suffered as a result of poor maintenance, the area is still alive and strong, and has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. Closed stores and street-side kiosks continue to line the crooked alleys, keeping the small-scale traders very dense and the bazaar a source of financial livelihood for most of the citizens. It may be noted that the spatial proximity and sociality found in the traditional bazaar of Uch is evident with Bukhari Bazaar; the narrowness, the overhead coverings and human scale of the bazaar provide a trading and social space, that traversed several generations of people.

Chunri Bazaar, Uch Sharif is a unique architectural essence as it possesses high heritage content and is more or less intact in terms of historical morphology compared to other market venues of the town as shown in Figure 5. The images depict a two-story market structure featuring arched arcades and timber framing with carved capitals, which suggest influences from colonial or pre-colonial vernacular architecture. The sturdy yet elegantly detailed structure suggests that Chunni Bazaar may have once been used for a semi-formal business center, possibly serving not only the cloth merchants but also the artisan traders, too – which seems to make sense as its name is Chunri Bazaar, which means a traditional patterned cloth draped on women and Chunni. It is clear that there is a spatial stratification as the first floor features recessed shopfronts which would have protected from the strong sun, while the second floor is a series of rhythmic arches which were likely storage space or a continuation of the trade space. These multi-purpose floors are examples of adaptive typology of market buildings in the South Asian context, where the maximum verticality is exploited in the small urban plots. The old faces and the roofed shops of the lower paintings indicate old age and ongoing transformation: some of the areas are no longer in use, others are still functioning as local stores. In modern Kathmandu, Chunri Bazaar is a silent witness to the survival of ancient marketplaces – a perfect blend of elegant decay and unflagging use – and offers a fascinating insight into the layered history of architectural developments in Uch.

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Figure 3. Figure 3. Mehboob Subhani Bazar, Uch Sharif (Source: The Authors).



Figure 4. Figure 4. Bukhari Bazaar, Uch Sharif (Source: The Authors).

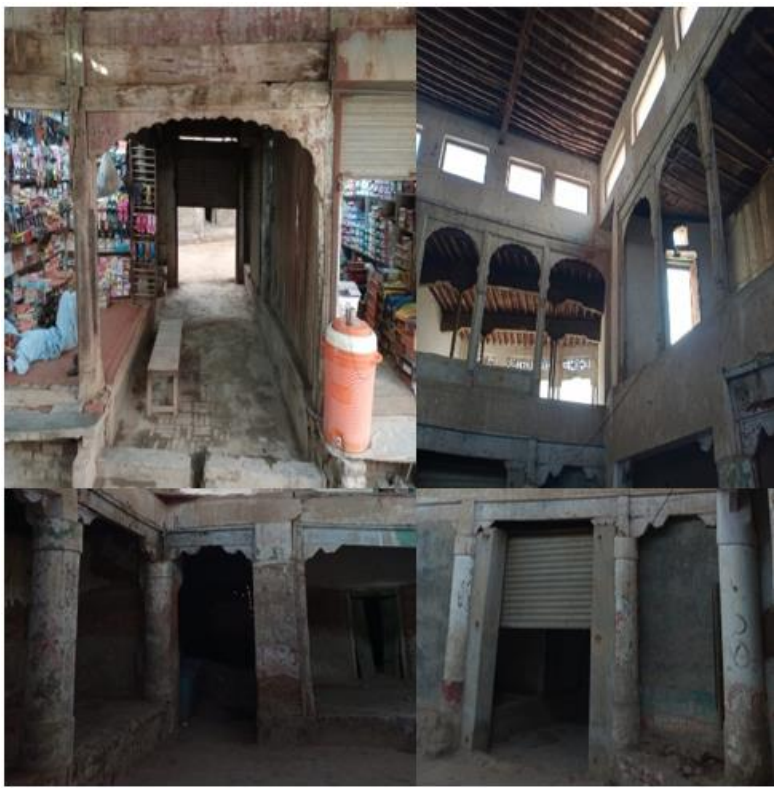


Figure 5. Chunri Bazaar, Uch Sharif (Source: The Authors).

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Morphological Analysis

The organic urban morphology of Uch Sharif is characterized by a combination of meandering streets and compactly mixed clusters of uses, typical of historic south Asian towns (Bianca, 2000). As socio-spatial spines connecting the homes, shrines and communal nodes, the three bazaars studied (Chunri, Mehboob Subhani and Bukhari) are embedded within this dense fabric. These places stand in contrast to modern single-use zoning, as they feature a mixed uses model: shops on the ground floor and upper floor and/or rear residences that are continuously occupied, informally policed and provide a sense of community (Jacobs, 1961; Kazmi et al., 2011).

The use of vernacular elements is predominant such as thick mud-brick and stone walls for thermal mass, internal courtyards (sehān) for cross-ventilation and social gathering, jharokhas, jalis and narrow alleys with shade. These elements are a suitable passive cooling system for hot semi-arid climate and they are in use since before mechanical systems (Memarian & Brown, 2003). As a multi-functional and lived space, Courtyards perform tasks like domestic activities, vendors' gatherings and festivals, a performance of Lefebvre's (1991) socially produced space.

The bazaars are connected with Uch's sacred landscape around important shrines (e.g. Jalaluddin Surkh-Posh Bukhari and Bibi Jawandi), which allows for seamless interactions between trade, pilgrimage and

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ritual (Snehi, 2019). Yet, the heritage is under threat from vehicular encroachment, ad hoc concrete interventions, competition from modern retail, and infrastructure neglect, which threaten both the physical fabric of the heritage and the intangible practices.

Traditional solutions such as diurnal thermal storage in thick walls, night ventilation by courtyards and alleys and localized evaporative cooling are verified by psychrometric analysis (Figure 8) which shows the shift of the conditions towards the thermal comfort zone, which confirms the low-energy performance of this indigenous urbanism.

Heritage Value Analysis of Traditional Bazar & Houses in Uch

Heritage significance is evaluated within six interconnected dimensions, which collectively represent a dynamic and evolving system and not monuments.

Urban Character and Values

A century by century accretion, producing a consistent but diverse morphology. Mehboob Subhani Bazaar is a linear, structured form, Bukhari Bazaar displays organic, semi-covered winding alleys and Chunri Bazaar presents vertically stratified arcades with timber framing. That diversity is a sign of vernacular flexibility, human-scaled, walkable and socially intimate, in contrast to the inflexibility of modern planning (Bianca, 2000).

Uses and Activities

The bazaars are multi-temporal cultural spaces. The day is dedicated to commerce – textiles, handicrafts, spices and produce – while the evening is spent in socializing. The proximity to shrines weaves together an economic life and the pilgrimage and Sufi rituals, and the courtyard serves as a space for festivals and communal gatherings (Snehi, 2019). Temporal layering contributes towards vibrant street life and place attachment.

Functional and Economic Value

The local availability of materials along with passive design (thick walls, high ceiling, clerestory openings, cross-ventilation) provide thermal comfort and low maintenance (Kazmi et al., 2011). The live-work model provides for low capital micro-enterprises and inclusive informal economies, which help marginalised groups and counter gentrification trends in larger cities.

Community Needs and Cultural Value

Spatial organisation is sensitive to the local cultures' protocol. The inward facing courtyards provide a balance of privacy (purdah) and family interaction and hospitality. Extended-family compounds and spaces for common use promote intergenerational solidarity and support. Market and courtyard spaces are directly related to intangible heritage, with rituals practiced within these spaces that are integrated into the built fabric through kinship, religious observance and communal practices.

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Aesthetic and Architectural Value

The aesthetic expression is a result of pragmatic craftsmanship which comprises of carved timber columns, arched verandas, jali screens and context-sensitive roofing (bamboo matting and thatch in Bukhari Bazaar versus pitched timber trusses in Mehboob Subhani). All these elements are sensitive to climate, skills and cultural idiom and contribute to Uch's unique visual identity (Cheema & Bell, 2013).

Cultural Memory and Continuity

The bazaars and houses are places which witness events of generations of human life and at the same time give meaning to the emotional-historical events (Tuan, 1977). The intergenerational transmission of property, artisanal skills (textile work, embroidery, wood carving) and ritual practices are the source of cultural continuity and are essential for the maintenance of Southern Punjabi identity in the face of homogenisation.

Integration of Domestic Architecture with Bazaar Morphology

Figures 6 and 7 show a typical house with two floors, which is next to Chunri Bazaar, where the domestic–commercial interface is seamless. The plan is inward looking, with a central courtyard (sehān) as the thermal and social spine which offers natural ventilation, daylight and privacy buffering. Climate control and controlled interaction are provided for ground floor spaces (baithak, kitchen, utilities) through thick perimeter walls and minimising street openings to reduce heat gain. Patios on the first floor add to the ventilation.

This set up allows estimated 15-20% reduction of cooling demand in passive mode. Live-work patterns and reciprocal oversight is facilitated by direct proximity to the bazaar. Due to cultural aspirations for hospitality and gender appropriate behavior, and to deal with monsoon flooding, the facade (Figure 7) is narrow, includes controlled thresholds and a step-by-step public-to-private zoning. The typology reveals this way vernacular domestic architecture actively helps and is helped by the surrounding bazaar system.

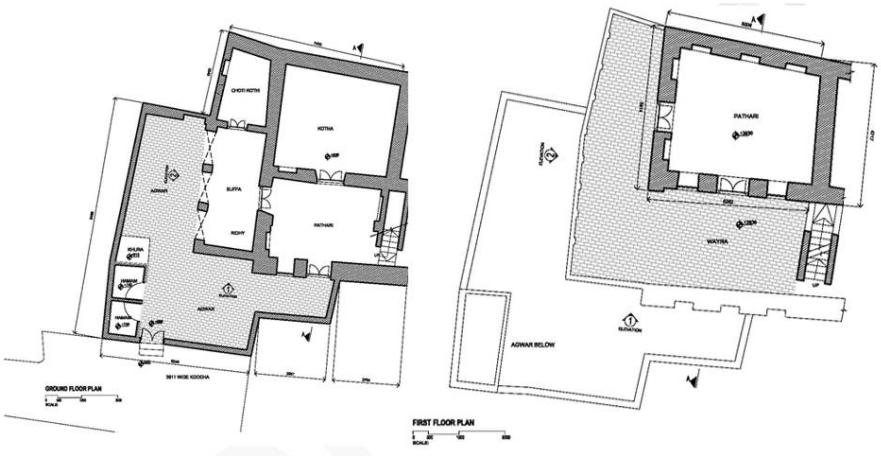


Figure 6. Typical Two-Story Traditional House for analysis w.r.t neighboring Bazar (Source: The Authors).

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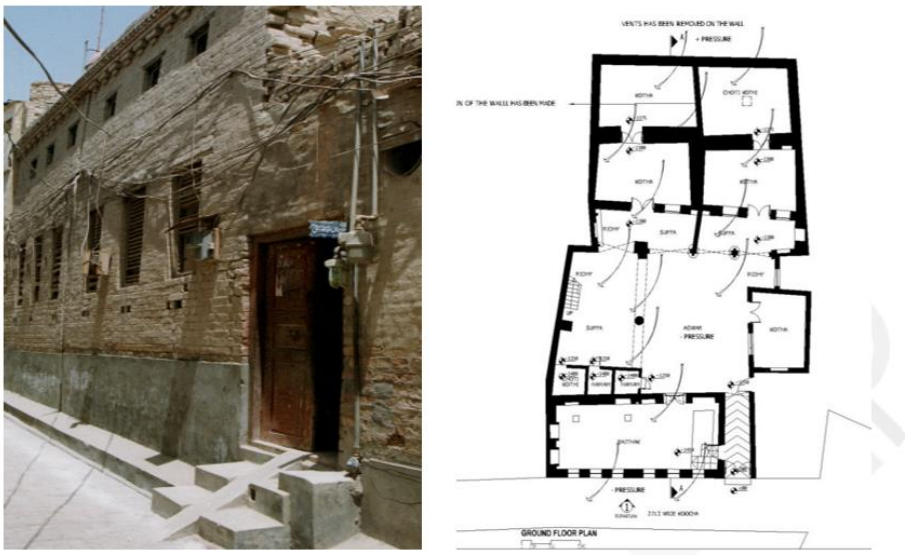


Figure 7. Front View of house with Ground Floor plan (Source: Authors).

Synchronic and Diachronic Microclimatic influences on Uch Sharif's Heritage Cluster

Figure 8 is the psychrometric chart, which is drawn from the local meteorological data, to show the position of the climate of Uch Sharif with respect to the thermal comfort envelope. Much of the year is outside comfortable conditions as there are extended periods of hot, low-humidity weather with high solar radiation. The vernacular response is synergistic: high thermal mass store and release heat diurnally; high clustering of form and narrow alleys provide shade and channel breezes; high internal courtyards provide stack-effect ventilation and localized evaporative cooling; and selective fenestration using jalis modulate light and airflow.

These strategies move the indoor and semi-outdoor conditions towards the comfort zone (illustrated as adaptive pathways on the chart). The traditional system is climatically intelligent, low-carbon urban form, which is energy saving compared with mechanical systems. The analysis has confirmed the cultural value and environmental performance of Uch's heritage architecture and thus has provided empirically-based knowledge for sustainable design in similar historic sites in semi-arid regions.

In conclusion, the psychrometric chart underscores the scientific validity of vernacular architecture, showing that indigenous methods are not only culturally rooted but also performatively robust. In the context of climate-responsive design, the chart affirms that traditional architectural practices in Uch are inherently sustainable, capable of delivering thermal comfort with minimal reliance on external energy inputs—an increasingly critical criterion in global climate adaptation strategies.

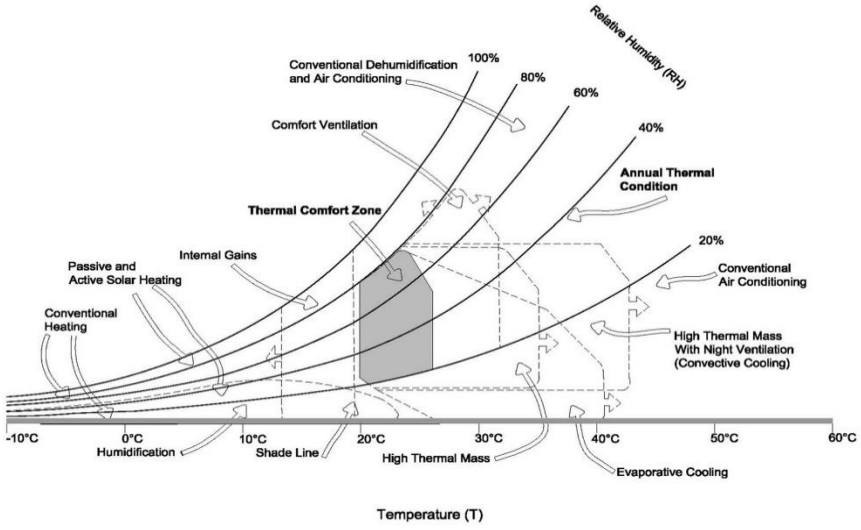


Figure 8. Psychometric Chart on the basis of Metrological data (Source: Authors).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The traditional bazaars in Uch Sharif are not mere markets, but rather, living, intertwining socio-cultural systems where trade, residence, religion and communal life overlap. The current research forms their significance as the urban settings that are simulated by human experience, social relations, and adaptation to the environment. Unlike modern zoning, which separates land uses, the bazaars have a mixed spatial rationality; houses, shops and holy places exist side-by-side, making possible organic participatory urbanism. This arrangement is consistent with the idea of the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre of the concept of a social space, the space created in the course of lived practices, and not a projection of a blueprint. Bazaars are centers of community integration in Uch, where daily trade, festivals and family customs are conducted. Their continued application strengthens cultural identity and knowledge transfer between generations, especially with regard to artisanal skills and religious practices. Architecturally, strong affinity to passive environmental design principles are evidenced by the use of courtyards, narrow shaded alleys and thick walls made out of local materials. Psychrometric modeling - an analysis of temperature–humidity conditions against human comfort thresholds - proves that the outlined measures improve comfort of the semi-arid climate in Uch, which minimizes the use of mechanical cooling and makes the city a vivid case of sustainable urbanism. The heritage is, however, threatened. The character and usability of these spaces are being eroded due to encroachment, unplanned development, loss of craftsmanship and neglect of infrastructures. Modernization and digital transition are disrupting local economies, and informal traders and artisan communities are becoming more and more marginalized. To deal with this challenge, one should go beyond architectural conservation. The local involvement, adaptive reuse, and socio-economic regeneration should be enabled through regeneration strategies. There should be heritage zones,

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better facilities and cultural tourism coupled with respect of local traditions. The existence of counterpart models, like the Walled City of Lahore, can be used as an instructive precedent but is lacking in smaller heritage municipalities, like Uch. Finally, Uch Sharif bazaars teach a lot about inclusive, low-energy, culturally rooted urbanism. Their survival does not depend on how they are kept in the past but how they are modified to be relevant to the current needs, how they are made alive, operational and rooted in their past rich heritage. Table-1 provides brief summary of the entire study based on different components.

Recommendations

The findings of this study have direct relevance for broader heritage management and urban planning frameworks. The observed residential–commercial hybridity, climate-responsive vernacular design, and strong place attachment in Uch's bazaars align closely with the principles of the UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach, which advocates integrating heritage conservation with sustainable urban development and community participation. The study's evidence of passive cooling performance and low-energy urban form also supports Pakistan's commitments under SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), particularly targets related to inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable urbanisation. Furthermore, the identified threats of encroachment and loss of intangible heritage underscore the need for stronger implementation of provincial heritage legislation and the development of Integrated Conservation and Development Plans (ICDPs) that move beyond monument-centric protection toward living heritage management. The eight recommendations proposed below are designed to operationalise these frameworks at the local level while remaining sensitive to the specific socio-spatial and climatic realities of Southern Punjab's historic towns.

In order to protect and restore the historic bazaars of Uch Sharif, the implementation of a multi-dimensional community-based approach is essential. The empirical evidence implies the following specific interventions:

1. Heritage Zone Declaration: The historic bazaar localities of Uch Sharif ought to be declared a Heritage Zone in the national and provincial cultural heritage laws. Official designation would restrict uncontrolled building, automobile encroachment, and land-use transformation, and it would allow the receipt of restoration funding and technical support.

2. Participatory Regeneration Framework: No regeneration program can be run without involving the local stakeholders such as traders, artisans, residents, and religious leaders. Community-based participatory planning workshops would help to make sure that interventions meet the needs of the community, foster local trust, and maintain the socio-cultural practices inscribed in it.

3. Cultural and Microenterprise Revival: Develop support programs of the traditional crafts like textile dyeing, calligraphy, wood carving, and

embroidery. Creation of a cultural cluster or a place where bazaars meet near Mela Ground can be used as a platform to display local talent, attract tourists and earn an income to marginalized communities.

4. Better Infrastructure and Facilities: Enhance basic facilities like garbage disposal, water drainage, street lights and toilets without making any changes to the spatial or visual nature of the bazaar. To further enhance the sustainable nature of these spaces, it is possible to incorporate eco-friendly technologies, e.g. solar lighting or rainwater harvesting.

5. Connectivity and Walkability: Create foot-friendly paths between Chunri, Bukhari and Mehboob Subhani bazaars and shrine precincts to create a logical urban heritage walk. Accessibility and cultural tourism may be promoted through wayfinding signage, resting places, and interpretive boards.

6. Architectural Guidelines: Provide architectural conservation guidelines in facade repairs, roofing materials and signage regulation so as to ensure that interventions are done in a manner that is sympathetic to local vernacular styles. Sustainability will be enhanced by conducting training workshops to the local masons and builders in heritage sensitive methods.

7. Institutional Support: Form a Uch Heritage Cell in the local government that will have conservation architects, planners, and community liaisons. This unit has the capacity to serve as a facilitator between provincial governments, donors, and community organizations.

8. Education and Awareness: Put in place heritage education in schools and in the form of public workshops to cultivate a bond of pride and stewardship among the youth and future generations.

With these recommendations implemented, Uch Sharif will become a living heritage town, which will find a balance between tradition and development and would serve as an excellent example of sustainable and inclusive urbanism in Pakistan.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has a number of limitations which need to be recognised. First, it is a single case study and results are context specific and would not be fully generalizable to other historic towns in Pakistan or in the region. Second, the qualitative nature of the research is suitable for the investigation of lived experiences and socio-spatial dynamics, but the research itself is inherently interpretive and therefore, triangulation was used throughout the spatial, visual and narrative data to strengthen the credibility of the research. Third, to avoid offense to participants, field notes were taken in lieu of audio recordings, which might have restricted the recording of subtle participant expressions. Finally, the study was concentrated on the three selected bazaars and it was impractical to study the three in detail, to cover the whole of the historic core of Uch Sharif. Future studies may be able to remedy these shortcomings using multi-case comparison studies, mixed-methods studies that combine

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quantitative thermal or spatial analysis, and longitudinal studies which can examine the effectiveness of regeneration interventions over time.

Table 1. Brief Summary of the Study

Component	Brief Description in This Study
Problem Statement	Traditional bazaars in historic secondary cities like Uch Sharif are marginalised by modernisation, neglect, and uncontrolled development, threatening social interaction, urban identity, residential–commercial coexistence, and sustainable heritage.
Research Gap	Limited integrated research on vernacular bazaars in Southern Punjab. Most studies focus on large cities or monumental heritage; few combine spatial morphology, multi-dimensional heritage value, microclimate, and policy recommendations for living heritage.
Significance	Provides a replicable model for inclusive, low-energy, culturally rooted urbanism in historic towns of the Global South. Supports heritage policy, local economies, climate adaptation, and shifts conservation from monumental to living heritage approaches.
Context	Uch Sharif: 8th-century historic trade and Sufi pilgrimage centre in Southern Punjab with organic urban fabric, vernacular architecture, and strong residential–commercial–religious integration. Currently facing modernisation pressures while retaining traditional mixed-use character.
Chosen Sample	Three key bazaars in Uch Sharif were purposively selected: Chunri Bazaar (high heritage value with arcaded structures), Mehboob Subhani Bazaar (linear structured form), and Bukhari Bazaar (organic, semi-covered vernacular typology). Selection criteria included architectural continuity, spatial richness, functional centrality, and representation of traditional mixed-use urbanism.
Theoretical Framework	Integrates Lefebvre's production of space, Relph & Tuan's place attachment, Jane Jacobs' urban vitality principles, and vernacular resilience/bioclimatic architecture theories.
Research Philosophy	Qualitative, interpretive/constructivist paradigm. Emphasises lived experience, meaning-making, cultural context, and inductive understanding of socio-spatial phenomena.
Research Methodology	Qualitative single-case study (Yin). In-depth exploration of Uch Sharif bazaars using multi-method design with triangulation for rigour and contextual depth.
Techniques	Spatial mapping, architectural documentation, visual ethnography, purposive sampling, informal interviews (field notes), thematic coding (grounded approach), and psychrometric analysis. Data triangulated across visual, spatial, and narrative sources.
Findings	Bazaars function as dynamic socio-spatial systems with strong residential–commercial hybridity, high multi-dimensional heritage value, effective passive climate control, and significant threats from encroachment and modernisation.
Research Contributions	Advances interdisciplinary understanding of vernacular urbanism in South Asia by integrating Lefebvre's social space, place attachment theory, and sustainability frameworks. Demonstrates the academic value of lived heritage, mixed-use morphology, and indigenous knowledge in secondary historic cities.
Policy Implications	Delivers eight practical recommendations: heritage zone declaration, participatory regeneration, cultural microenterprise revival, infrastructure improvement, enhanced walkability, context-sensitive architectural guidelines, dedicated institutional support

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	(Uch Heritage Cell), and heritage education programmes. Offers a transferable model for other historic towns in Pakistan.
Limitations	Qualitative single-case study focused on three bazaars in one historic town, limiting generalisability. Reliance on field notes (due to cultural sensitivity) and interpretive analysis introduces potential subjectivity, despite triangulation. Absence of longitudinal or quantitative data restricts assessment of long-term impacts and precise environmental performance.

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Resume

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