

Transcript: Safeguarding Cultural Heritage of Basrah - Dr Hamed Hyab Samir

Mehiyar Kathem 0:00 Welcome to the Nahrein Network. My name is Dr. Mehiyar Kathem and today we're with our friend and colleague from the University of Basrah. Dr Hamed Samir, thank you for joining us today. You've just on the verge of completing a your first phase of the scholarship, with the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, and then the Nahrein Network Scholarship, which is a two month scholarship and you're about to complete the first month of your scholarship. Could you tell us a bit about your background and the research you're undertaking?

Hamed Samir 0:29 Thank you so much. And thank you so much for Nahrein network to support Iraqi heritage and Iraqi researcher, I am Hamid Samir, the head of the architecture department in the College of the engineer and University of Basrah. I finished my PhD in urban design in Salford University in Manchester, UK. My topic was about the identity of the city of Basrah, Visiting Scholarship in Nahrein network, which is starting 14 days ago. It's focusing on the safeguarding the heritage of the city of Basra and what is the challenge and threats that facing the heritage of the Basrah. Nowadays, as you know, Basra is the important city in Iraq. It is the second city after the capital Baghdad, and it has suffering from ignoring and has suffering from many problems during the last few decades. And so on, there is a call and to safeguarding and to protect and to preserve the heritage of the city, which is disappearing day after day, from the landscape of the city of Basrah. It includes two kinds of the Heritage tangible heritage and Intangible Heritage of the city of Basrah. And the city of Basrah is deserve all of that, and deserve more than that, because it's rich city, and it's a long history for the city, make it as a rich city with the heritage and the landmark is at Loughborough University, with my supervisor and working together to have a proposal for projects to save the heritage of the city of Basra. And we are working for a long planned vision for a future to support and support the researcher as well and Basrah city for documentation, the heritage city and for the new project preservation project for the future, to support the heritage and the local people, and the raising the awareness of the local people of the city of Basra to evaluate and value, the landmark and the heritage and the treasure that they have on the city and protect it and stand against all the calls to demolish and destroy this kind of the Heritage

Mehiyar Kathem 3:05 threats that you mentioned many in Basrah as it is the case for the rest of the country. But could you tell us about the main threats that bus was heritage faces today?

Hamed Samir 3:16 there is many challenges and threatens facing the heritage of the Basrah. First of all, as I said before, it's the awareness of the local people and the awareness of the decision maker as well because both of them not reach their satisfied level of awareness regarding the heritage of the city of the Basrah. Therefore there is a call to make workshops, conference and so on on the future, to raising the awareness of the local people and raising the awareness of the decision makers are regarding the heritage of the city second threatens priority of the government and fund and budget that they give it for this sector of the in the city. It's not enough and we need more and more because it's deserved. And there is rehabilitation and preservation of the special for the tangible heritage need a lot of the money because the the situation of the heritage and the traditional building is about now. So this is also one of the challenges and threats are the third one is related to the immigrations that's happened in the city of the Basrah. There is two kinds are two sides of the immigration the local people leave the city and go to the other city and another countries and the other. Immigration is coming from the other cities to the Basrah city because certain city of Basrah is in the state of city and it's represent one of the attractive city for the job for the workers because a lot of job available in the city. And most of the people they come into the city with their families,

they don't have enough understanding for the heritage value. And they don't give enough attention for the heritage monument and heritage landmark on the city. Therefore, this is also represent a big threats for the heritage on the city. The fourth one is the economic because the city of Basrah is an industrial city is one of the central industrial city for the Iraq and the economic is drivers for everything, and economic attract many foreign war companies from outside and these companies will not respect the city, soul, and the city history and the history of the city of the Basrah. And therefore, they ignore the tradition. They ignore the history. They ignore everything related related to the heritage of the city. And they do and make and stablished new projects, which is far from the soul of the city.

Mehiyar Kathem 6:12 one of the challenges that we see increasingly is the negative detrimental impact of climate change on Basra on Iraq, but Basrah in particular, given its location. Can you tell us a bit about the impact that climate change can have or has currently on on the people of Basra and on the culture heritage of Basrah

Hamed Samir 6:35 climate change represent a very big issue for Basrah and for the local people in Basrah because the city of Basrah is the hottest city in the world. And sometime the degree during the July and August reached more than 55. So therefore, there is a call also for peoples and for decision maker to back again to their traditional architectural style, but again to the RE vision for the planning of the city and care about the enough urban space and the rivers also rivers on the canal of the Basrah. As you know, it's one of the most important feature of the city which is distinguished the Basrah from other cities on the Iraq on the Middle East as well. And unfortunately most of these rivers and canals and this appear today and this make the climate of the city become very hottest and noticed more day after day. So, there is a solution there is many features in the traditional architecture could help to solve this problem or at least to reduce the impact of the harsh climate for the people of the city and regard to the design of the houses or in regard to the design on or the planning of the delays and so on

Mehiyar Kathem 8:10 what are the practical steps and measures and interventions that could be implemented to support the well being of Basrah population when it comes to the drastic increases in temperature, particularly over the summer. whether in reference to modern buildings or heritage building.

Hamed Samir 8:29 There is many features of is provide unsuitable for the Basrah climates, and Basrah for weather. For example, one of them is the courtyard which is disappeared today from most of the buildings on the Basrah public building and private building, especially for the houses courtyard was resent one of the main part which is provide a suitable and comfortable environment inside the house and both purses purpose one of them regarding to the climate and environment because it's provide a comfortable environment inside the house and most of the windows open a door to the courtyard. And the second one is represent also privacy for the family to do the activity inside the courtyard. So, the courtyard is important for the Basrah and the another features or the another item should be taken into consideration is the material that used on the for the building and construction and the city. Unfortunately, during the last few years, because Iraq is open to the world, and there is no monitoring for the important the material from outside. So most of the materials that's used today is not suitable for the climate such as for the such City for the Basrah. So it's called to back again to the traditional material that's work more better than the new material used in the landscape of the city of Basrah. Today, third one is also about the planning of the city and the width of the streets and width of the alley and the direction of alley as well. There's a call as well, to reduce the wide streets and vehicle access to the neighborhood itself and to back again to the narrow street, which was provided shadow during the day for pedestrains working on this, alleys. And this

paths, in addition to the urban faces inside the city, which is this appear today, unfortunately, the gardens, the urban open spaces, and so on. Most of these are disappearing today on the city of Basrah. So there's a call for the decision maker, again, to re planning the city and provide open spaces for the people inside the neighborhood or inside the city itself.

Mehiyar Kathem 11:09 And of course, we see in Iraq, in Basrah in Baghdad, many other cities, a growing amount of mostly local investment in new structures, hotels, apartment blocks, how do you see this panning out over the next few years? How do we understand the investment when it comes to culture heritage in Basrah,

Hamed Samir 11:28 yes, investment in Basrah is active now, especially on the few years ago, last a few years ago. But unfortunately, there is no investment on the heritage sector so far. And it's also a call from this stage to the decision makers also, and to the investors investment company as well, to get attention for the heritage on the city of Basra and to go deep inside this sectors and to get more projects and planning for the future for reserving investments in project two preserving the cultural heritage of the city of Basrah. On the another side, there is a call for the government, local government and central government to get a rule and regulations and legislations for the investment and to prevent them to follow foreign respective for the landscape forth of the city of Basra. And this rule should be made a limitation and should forcing the investment company from the history of the city of Basrah and from the heritage buildings and heritage cultures of the Basrah city.

Mehiyar Kathem 12:48 And of course that would need rules, guidelines and regulatory framework to ensure investors safeguard the basis of the areas they're working in. Sometimes investors are also developers building on archaeological land. And this obviously is detrimental to the archaeology of the site. And Basrah obviously is rich in its cultural heritage. I mean, have you seen any efforts to regulate this this area in ways that can actually work with both investors but also provide a framework for safeguarding cultural heritage.

Hamed Samir 13:27 As I said, previously, I unfortunately, there is no a comprehensive vision of comprehensive plan for the investment, especially for the Basrah city. And according to that, there is overlapping between the projects overlapping between the local government and central government regarding the investment sectors of the city. And so therefore, unfortunately, there is nothing yet about it. And we hope, for example, to get some plan for the future for preserving cultural heritage, preserving the landmark also. And also, there is called, as I said before, for the regulations and your regulations that prevent, for example, destroy and demolish the traditional building and the heritage building on the city of the Basrah.

Mehiyar Kathem 14:25 And going forward, what are your plans, in terms of your own research or your own work when it comes to safeguarding cultural heritage of Basrah or working on the research regarding that

Hamed Samir 14:42 We will keep fighting. Again, it's those who want to destroy and demolish the heritage and ignoring the heritage and we will keep working very hard to get more and more attention to the Iraqi heritage in general and Basrah heritage in particular

Mehiyar Kathem 15:03 on that note that Dr Hamed Samir, I wish you good luck with your work. And I do hope that the situation will improve in Basra.

Hamed Samir 15:15 Thank you so much. Again, thank you so much for Dr Mehiyar being here and thank yous for Nahrein network for this opportunity to be here and to talk about the heritage of the important city such as Basrah. Thank you.

