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The Role of Functional Characteristics of Commercial Streets in Influencing Sense of Place in Mosul City Centre

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Abstract. In most cases, changes in the street's uses, types and the streets' activities may consequently erase what is precious to the users. However, due to insensitive new development within the street has resulted in, the sense of place being disrupted thus, affecting the people's feelings and perception of the streets. The objective of this paper is to identify the role of the commercial streets in terms of its functional characteristics in giving the sense of place to Mosul City Centre. The case study was conducted in one of the streets in Mosul City Centre, namely; Nineveh Street. A mixed method approach was used in this study which involved 330 respondents to survey questionnaire, 30 respondents for in-depth interviews, field observation, and photographic recordings. The result shows that functional features can be characterized into three main categories i.e. roles, namely social space, cultural space, commercial space, and channel of movements. Each of these categories has an considerable role especially, commercial space in giving the sense of place to Mosul City Centre.

Keywords Sense of place; functional characteristics; commercial streets; Mosul City Centre; street roles.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In terms of functional characteristics, streets play important roles in the cities. Particularly, these functional characteristics have roles as a communication space, public space, a place of social and commercial encounters and exchanges, place to do business, political space and symbolic and ceremonial space [13] and [17]. "Role" means a function or the degree to which someone or something is involved in a situation or an activity and the effect that it has on it [15]. Street is one of the earliest components of the urban spaces known to man and is the most prominent "public open space" which plays an important role especially in Asian Cities. Basically, it determines the urban pattern of the cities by creating its 'sense of place'. Sense of place is defined as qualities that differentiate between one place and another and therefore, the discussions will center upon the street's qualities that create the sense of place for a city [19], [16]. This paper highlights the role of functional characteristics in influencing the sense of place. This type of role is examined in the context of the Nineveh Street in the Mosul City Centre in Iraq.

In most cases, changing the street's uses, types and the streets' activities may consequently erase what is precious to the users. However, due to insensitive new development, the sense of place being disrupted thus, affecting the people's feelings and perception of the streets [19] and [22]. Besides, nowadays, traffic congestion is one of the main reasons that has been given is the narrow streets accommodating the old buildings [11]. This means, that the priority is given to the function of the streets as a channel of movement for motor vehicles. This makes the street an uninteresting space [17].

Moreover, there is no doubt that the U.S. occupation of Iraq from 2003 to 2013, has had a negative impact on the functional role of the commercial streets of the city centers, especially, Mosul City Centre. The deterioration of the security situation in Mosul affects all aspects of life. This issue has forced street users do their shopping, meeting, and working as soon as possible. It has also forced some of the owners of the shops and medical clinics in Mosul City Centre to leave and move to the close quarters of residence. All these issues caused an imbalance status in the role of the functional characteristics of the commercial streets in the Mosul City Centre [2] and [3].

Hence, the purpose of this paper is to identify the role of Nineveh commercial Street in Mosul City Centre based on functional characteristics in the influencing sense of place. The role of functional characteristics in this study covers four roles, namely, social space, cultural space, commercial space, and channel of movement.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the literature, streets have multi-functions which are stated by various scholars, including [5], [3], [14], and [17]. As an important element of urban form, streets function as social spaces, commercial spaces, cultural spaces, as channels of movement and as symbolic representations of local tradition and culture [6], [8], [17] and [20]. In many city centers and mixed-use neighborhoods, people are still depending on streets for functional, social and leisure activities such as travel, shopping, play, meeting, and interaction with other people, and even relaxation [5], [6], [13], and [20]. Street also is a place where people sell, buy and enjoy commercial, It is a place to learn about commerce [17]. A street serves many roles simultaneously providing for traffic movement and access, and as public space for urban activities [6]. Historically, streets in cities were used as spaces to serve basic survival, communication and entertainment needs, and perform several political, religious, commercial, civic, and social functions [13] and [22].

Cultural-based street activities refer to parades, street events, art performances, street musicians, traditional foods, culture-based goods such as crafts that form the life of a street. As a channel of movement, street connects one place to another. It also provides a link between buildings, both within the street and in the city at large. As a link, it facilitates the movement of people as pedestrians or within vehicles, and the movement of goods [18].

Scholars in various fields related to urban studies suggest thinking about the street as a social space rather than a channel for the movement [13] and [20]. Street provide opportunities for short-term, low intensity contacts that constitute easy interactions with other people in a relaxed and relatively undemanding way

[13]. Hence, even in contemporary times, the street, as a social space, can play multiple roles and offer social contact and interaction, social awareness and learning, and social cohesion.

In terms of the role of street as commercial space, street vendors are dependent on the streets or public transport facilities where there is a flow of pedestrians, and they are in direct contact with their customers. Thus, people use the streets as a place to offer goods and a place to display as much as they were "allowed". Pedestrians see, compare, discuss with their companions, bargain and decide whether to buy an item or not [6].

3.0 CASE STUDY

3.1 The Study Area and Justifications

The study focuses on "Nineveh Street " which located in the city center of Mosul as an area of investigation (Figure 1, 2, 3). This Street is chosen based on its functional, social-cultural and historical characteristics which represent the character of Mosul City Centre. It is one of the main commercial streets which is considered the busiest part of Mosul City Centre. It was emerged during the English occupation of the Mosul city after the first decade of the last century, where the process of planning and architectural transformation occurred. Simultaneously, this street shares the following characteristics [1], [2], and [3]:

- (a) Located within the main commercial/ shopping district of the city centre.
- (b) Identifiable as the main street and well-known as popular shopping street.
- (c) The highest concentration area of pedestrians, shoppers and visitors.

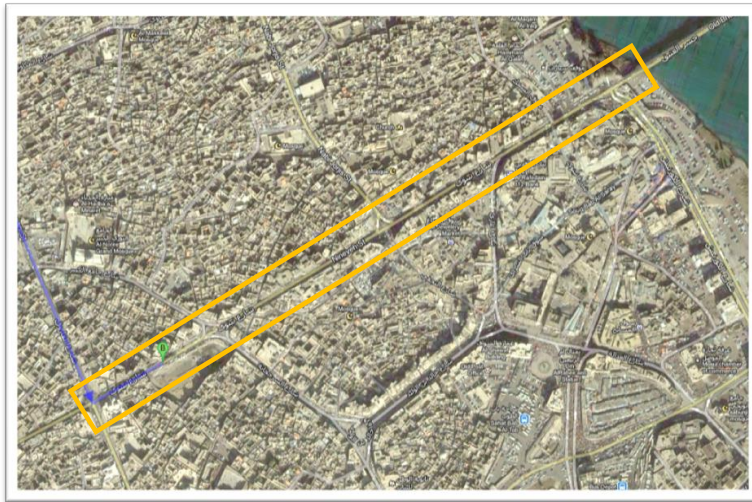


Figure 1: Nineveh Street, Source: Google Earth, 2013



Figure 2 and 3: Nineveh Street in the present and past, Source: (Author, 2013).

3.2 Respondents of the Study

A designed questionnaire and based on previous researches were used, this study determined two types of street users, static and mobile users. The static users comprised of shipowners, shopkeepers, vendors, office workers, residents, and students. The mobile users comprised of shoppers and visitors [9] and [22].

3.3 Methodology and Research Procedure

This research employed, quantitative and qualitative techniques. The first stage of the techniques was survey questionnaire. The quantitative method was used to identify functional characteristics of commercial streets. Specifically, 330 questionnaire surveys were used based on (5.5%) sampling error and at (95%) confidence level, which are employed by many researchers as [9], [11], and [22]. After that, the role of the functional characteristics was measured using qualitative method which included 30 in-depth-interviews, observations as [14] and [21], and photos recognition task.

This study used the approach of "non-probability sampling" of "Time-interval and Cluster Sampling" (cluster sample interval) as [10]. In non-probability sampling, the researcher chooses the sample based on who they think would be appropriate for the study.

4.0 ANALYSIS

Regarding to the conducted survey questionnaire, the in-depth interviews, observations and photo recognition task, the role of functional characteristics make the Nineveh Street a unique street compared with others. Generally, the dominant purpose of using this street is for shopping which enrolled about (66%) of the respondents. Moreover, working is mentioned by (29%) of the respondents as a second reason of going to this street (see Figure 4). Meanwhile, a few respondents use this street for leisure and other purposes.

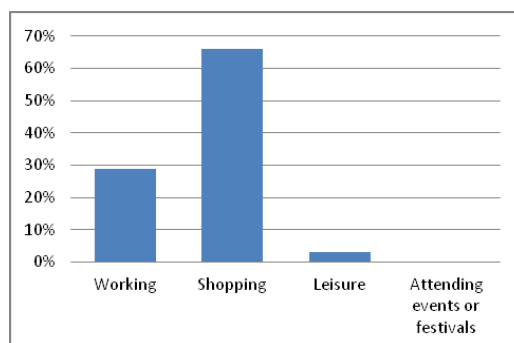


Figure 4: Purpose of going to the street, Source: Field survey, 2013

According to the coverage of this study, the four roles of functional characteristics in Nineveh Street are analyzed as the followings;

1) As a social space

According to the survey, Nineveh Street plays some role as a social space. About (78) respondents stated that they use this street for leisure, relaxing, eating, and chatting. The highest number of respondents who use the street, prefers two places, namely, the fish restaurants in Al-Maydan area and the restaurants along this street at (7%) and (6.3%) respectively (Figure 5).

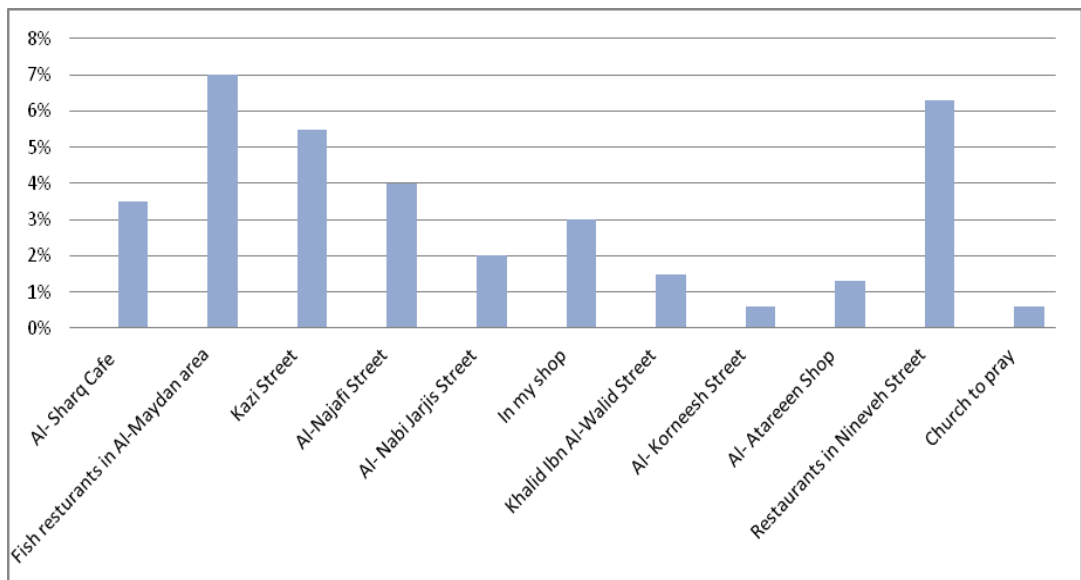


Figure 5: Places or streets where respondents go for social activities, Source: Field survey, 2013

One interviewee indicated that:

"Most people especially who work along the Nineveh street and its surrounding area used restaurants or their shops, not only for eating, but also for leisure, relaxing and chatting".

The other streets that are linked to Nineveh Street also add some roles to Nineveh Street. However, it was mentioned by the least number of respondents who use it as a social space. The highest percentage of respondents recognizes

this street as a social space due to its strategic location (Figure 6). Moreover, the majority of respondents tend to come alone to this street more than being with a company of friends or family.

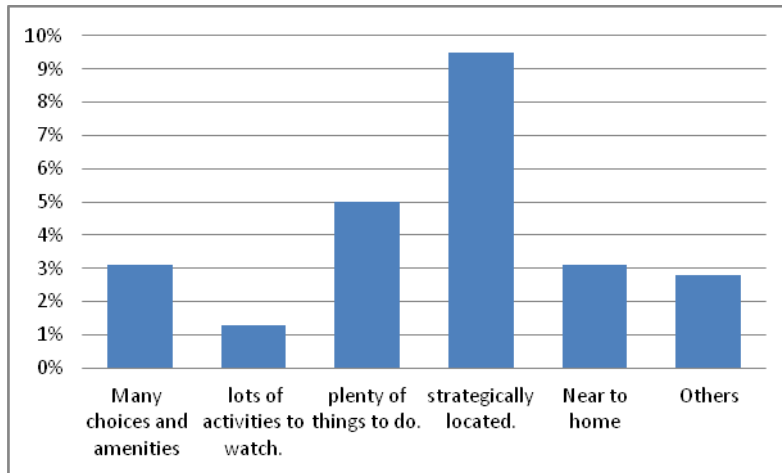


Figure 6: Causes why respondents chose these places or streets, Source: Field survey, 2013

2) As a commercial space

Nineveh Street plays a very important role in terms of commercial activities. Approximately all respondents stated that they used this Street for shopping. They prefer the shops along the street, especially, the ready made garment shops, kid game shops, and Al-Maydan area at (73%), (41%), and (32%) respectively (Figure 7). Another type of shop is pharmacies, which were mentioned by the least number of respondents at (8%).

Multi choices, cheap and affordable prices, the strategic location of the street, and the quality of goods play an important role in determining why most respondents prefer this Street for shopping (Figure 8).

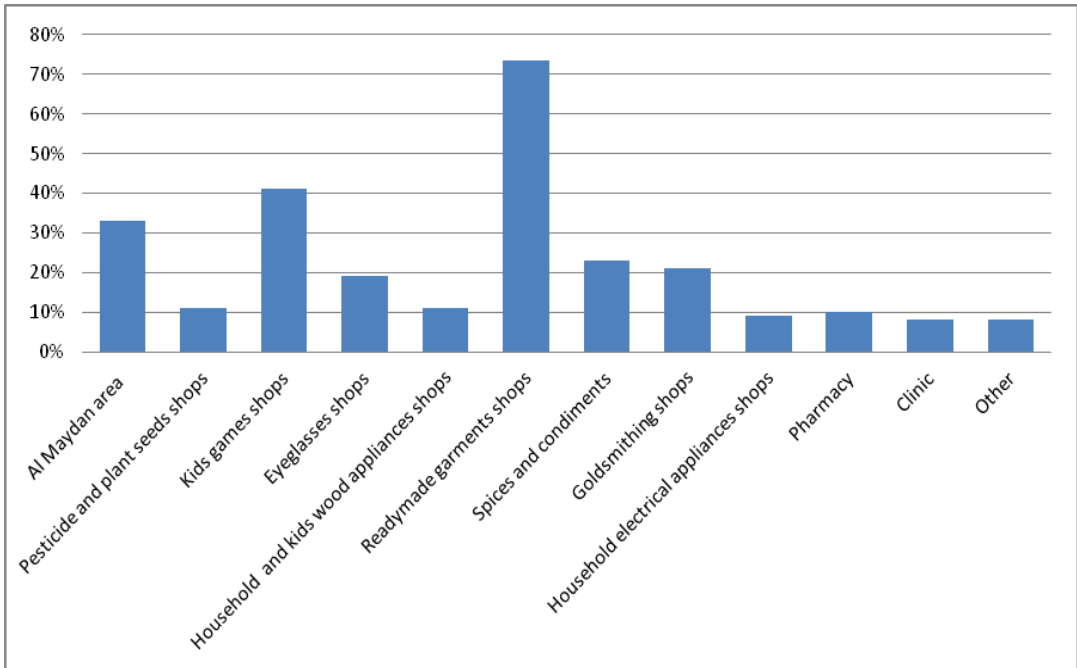


Figure 7: shops which respondents prefer to do your shopping, Source: Field survey, 2013

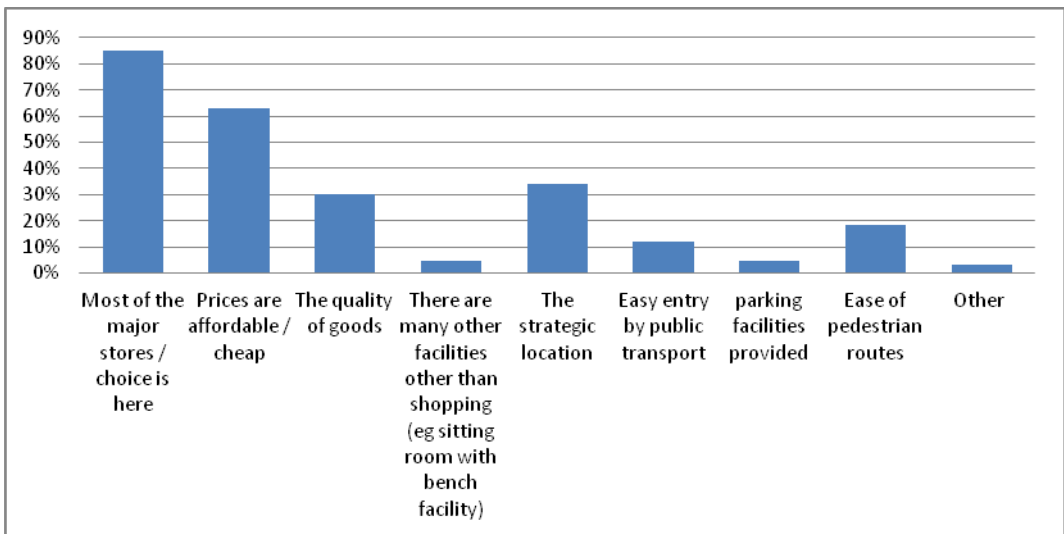


Figure 8: Causes why respondents chose this street to do their shopping, Source: Field survey, 2013

The interviewee also asserted that this Street had great role to play as a commercial space. One interviewee stated that;

“This street looks like outdoor and open supermarket. You can find anything which comes to your mind”

Besides, this street was described by another respondent as;

“A resources of goods Whether retail or wholesale. People always need this street specially for shopping”.

It was apparent that the Nineveh Street plays an appreciating role as a commercial space, which made it distinctive.

3) As a cultural space

According to the survey, religious and cultural celebrations and festivals play some role in presenting Nineveh Street as a cultural space. Typically, cultural goods and traditional foods have an important role to make this street unique, where they were mentioned by (62%) and (31%) of the respondents respectively (Figure 9). One interviewee asserted that:

"In the past years, this street witnessed many political, cultural, and religious events i.e. event of the birth of the Prophet Mohammed, however, in the last three years, people could not do this event due to changing of political circumstances that has made this street becomes unsafe".

Another interviewer said that:

"changing of the regime in Iraq in 2003, has ended the role of street as a political space because many political buildings were there, while this buildings currently are used for commercial uses or stores".

In addition, only (10.5%) of the respondents consider this street is important in religious and cultural celebrations, festivals and events. About (10.2%) of the respondents mentioned that this importance comes from the easy movement in the Street and from its linking with other streets and places. Besides, the presence of many religious and cultural buildings, such as the mosques and the church, give this street an importance, which mentioned by (8.5%) of responde-

-nts. In addition, (7.5%) of respondents consider this Street important along with its historical and religious values. The other respondents indicate that the shape, size and the name of this Street, contribute to its importance.

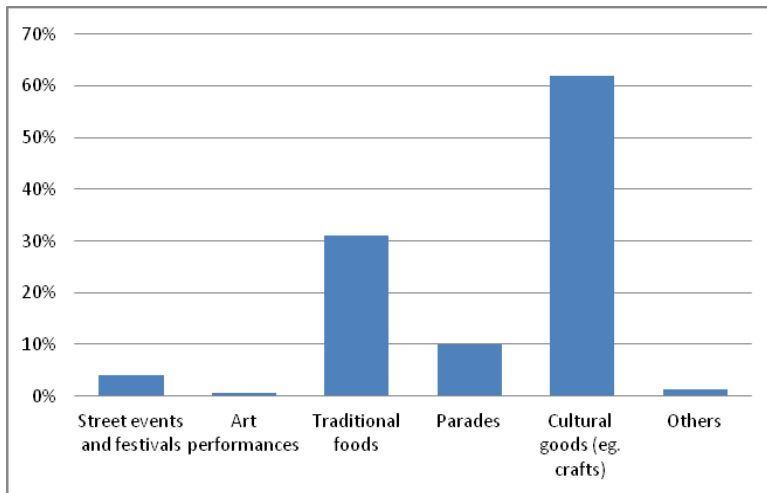


Figure 9: The most distinctive features which was chose by respondents, Source: Field survey, 2013

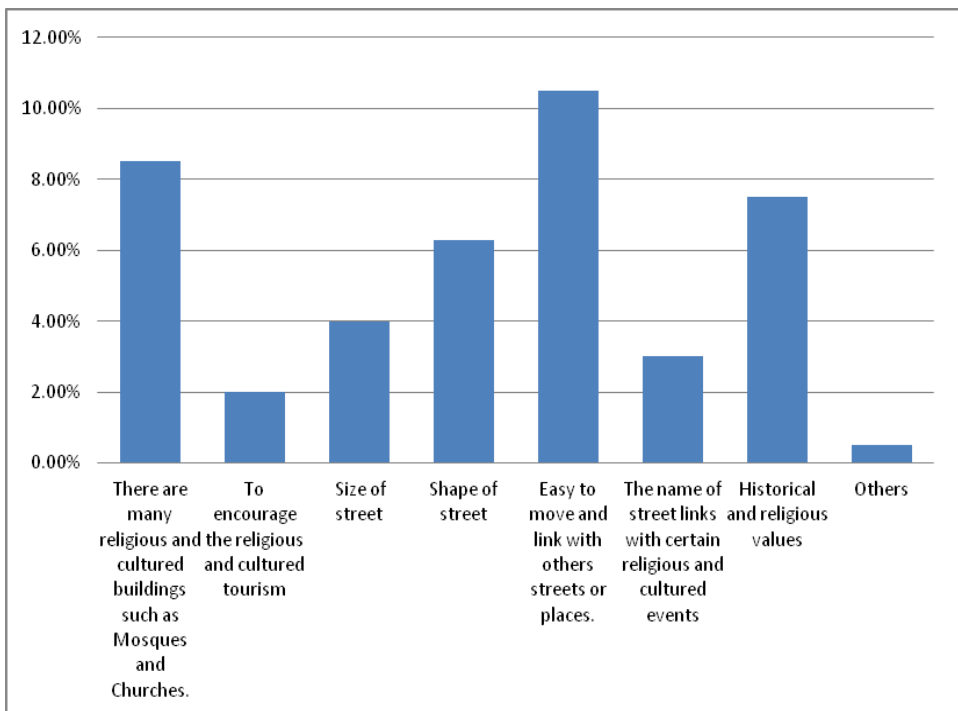


Figure 10: Causes why respondents considered this street is important, Source: Field survey, 2013

4) As a channel of movement

From the survey, people use the street for many purposes. About (63%) of the respondents mentioned that they move from place to place accessing this Street on foot. Besides, (20%) of the respondents said that they used this Street to go to certain buildings (Figure 11). The other (14%) of the respondents used the Street to move from place to place by public transportation and (10%) used their own vehicles.

According the survey, Nineveh Street witnesses coming of 114 respondents every day, (10) respondents once every two days, (44) respondents once a week, (12) respondents two times a week, (31) respondents once every two weeks, and (64) respondents once a month (Figure 12).

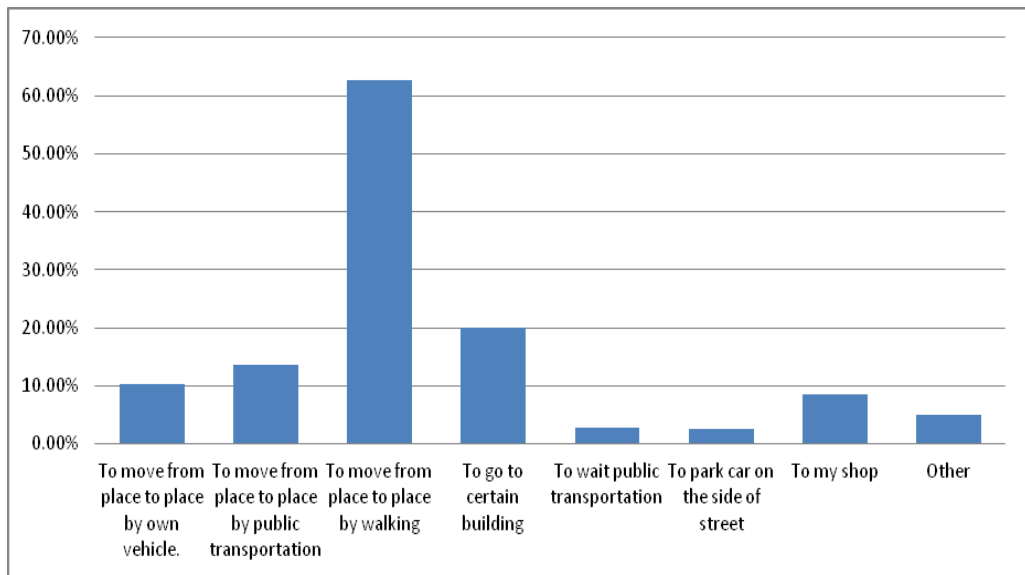


Figure 11: The purpose of using the street in terms of movement, Source: Field survey, 2013

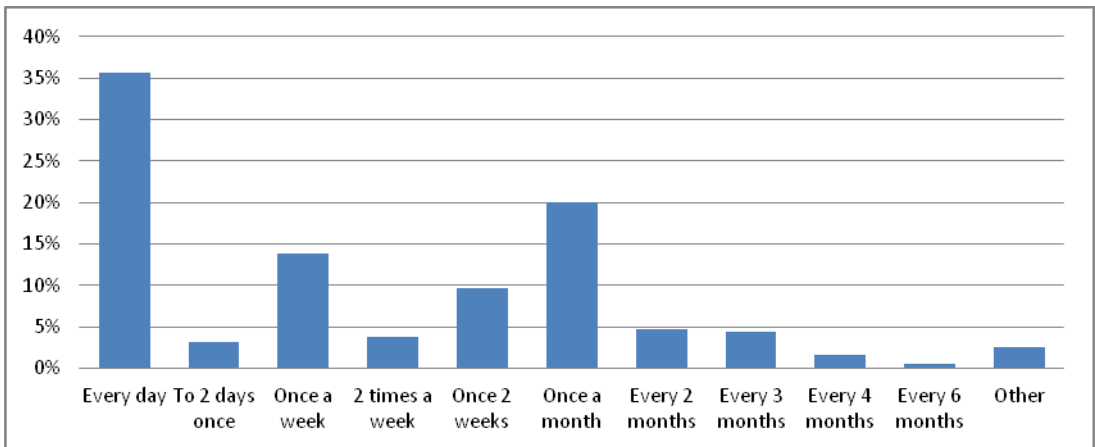


Figure 12: Frequency down the street, Source: Field survey, 2013

The respondents use various modes of travel to the Street from a distance. The highest number of them, which is about (47%), uses public transportation (Figure 10). Besides, about (32%) of them walk to the street, while only (14%) of the respondents ride their cars or vans to enter this street (Figure 13). Moreover, speed, low cost of mode of travel, and the presence of nearby station of public transportation explain why most people chose these modes of travel more than other modes (Figure 14).

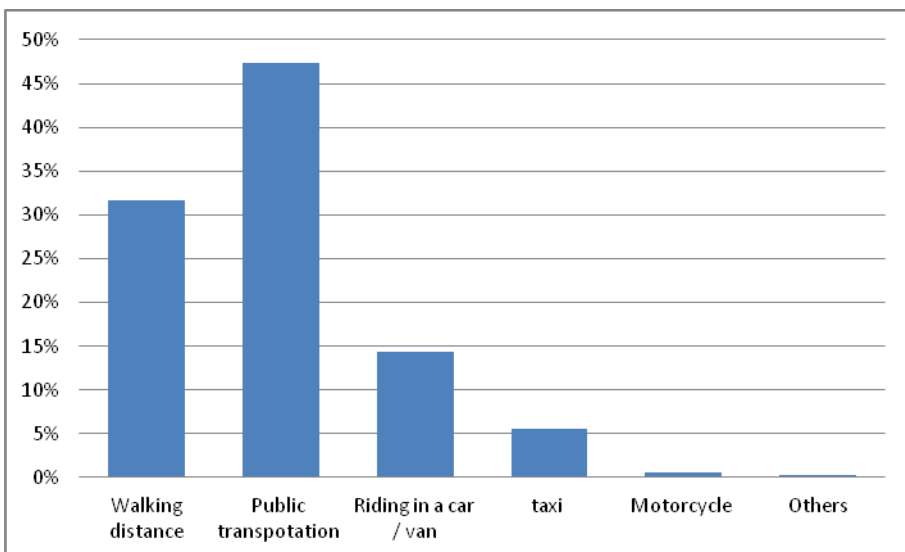


Figure 13: Mode of travel to this street, Source: Field survey, 2013

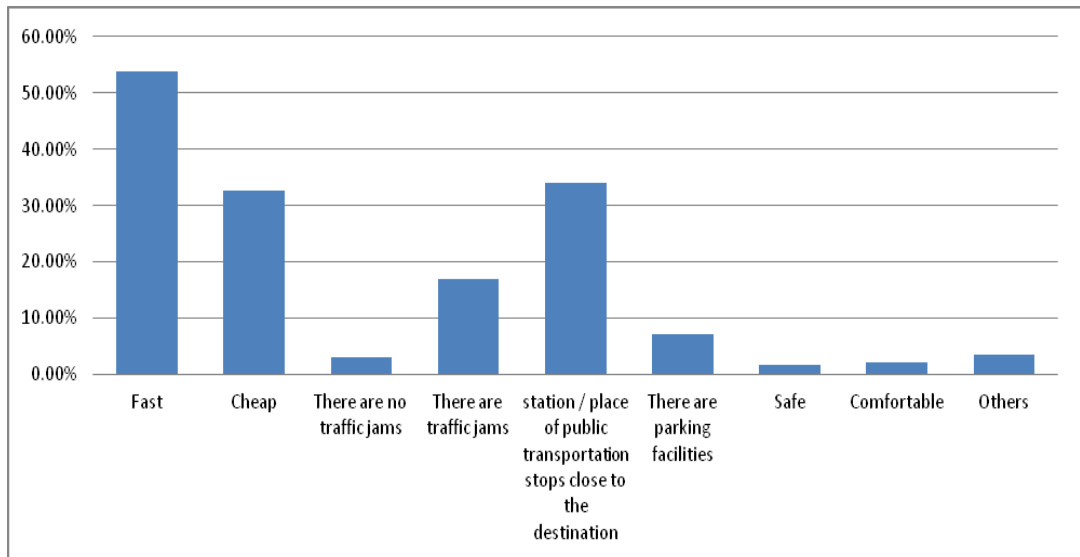


Figure 14: Causes why respondents chose mode of travel, Source: Field survey, 2013.

On the other hand, the survey targeted the people who were present in the street. Almost all respondents choose walking as a mode of travel to move from one place to another (Figure 15). Two striking reasons were stated by respondents for choosing the walking mode. Firstly, it is considered fast by (70%) of the respondent, and secondly, it eases the understanding and connecting the destinations in the Street that were mentioned by (51%) of the respondents. Moreover, other street users indicate cheap and traffic jam as reasons of preferring the walking mode instead of other modes of travel inside the Street.

The analysis of the photo recognition interview shows that Nineveh Street is very crowded during the daytime (Figure 17). In addition, one interviewee indicated that:

"Not only the presence of many cars leads to make this street very crowded, but also closing and narrowing of some surrounded street by military checkpoints".

These statements assert, why most of the respondents chose walking distance more than other means of transportation.

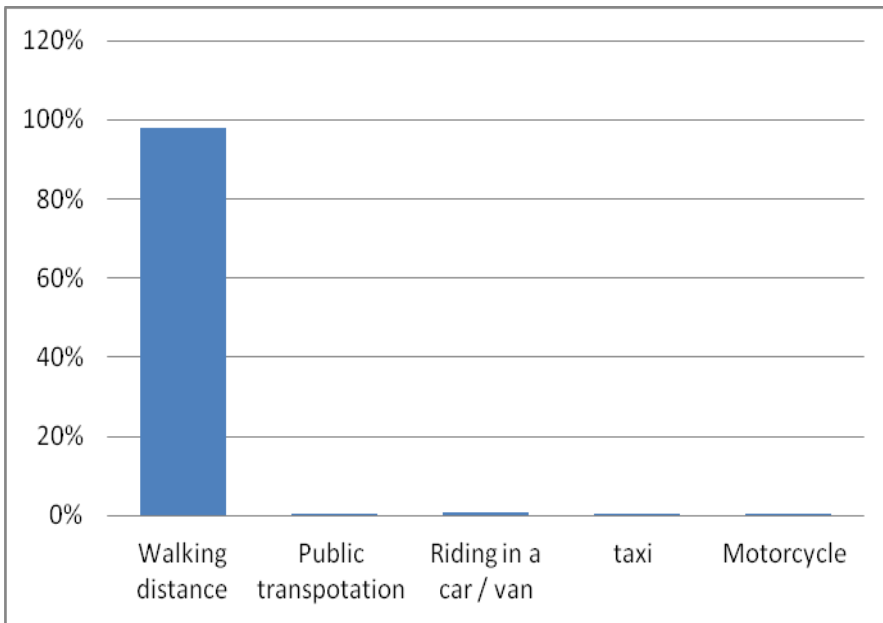


Figure 15: Modes of travel when respondents are on the street, Source: Field survey, 2013

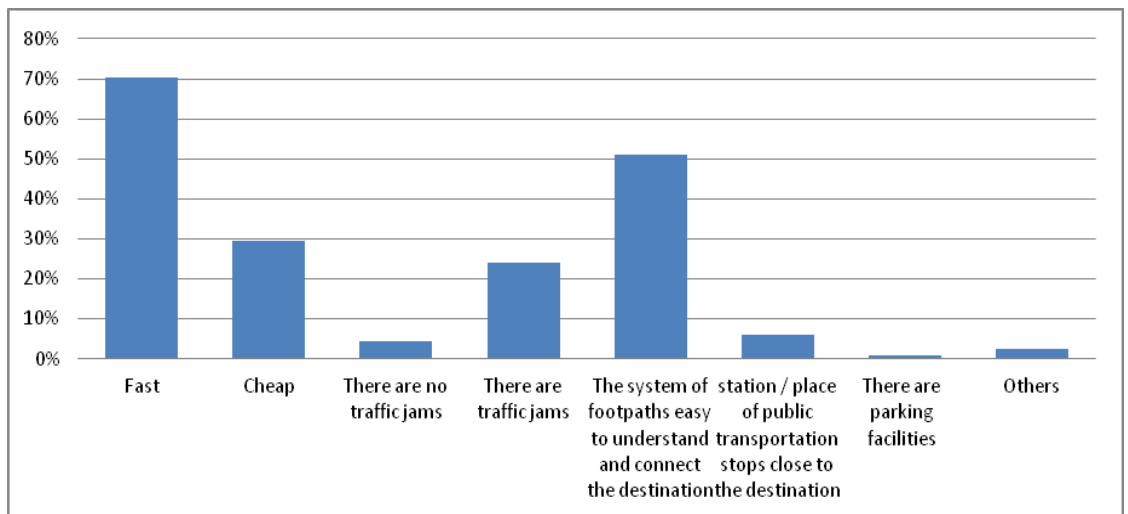


Figure 16: Causes why respondents chose certain mode of travel, Source: Field survey, 2013



Figure 17: Causes why respondents chose certain mode of travel, Source: Field Photos Recognition Task, 2013

5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The functional characteristics which relate to what is happening in the place play an important role associating with the sense of place of Mosul City Center. From the survey findings, the purpose of going to the street for shopping is mentioned as the main role. This was stated more frequently by the respondents than working, and greater than other purposes of going to the street. Hence, the essential purpose of going to the Nineveh Street refers to its important role as a commercial space. This indicates the lack of using this street for leisure. The diversity of the affordable and cheap shops and choices make this street very important. It also makes this Street noticeable as commercial space, especially, ready-made garment shops, kid game shops and Al- Maydan area where fish stalls and specialist markets are located.

Almost one-third of the street is a dedicated market for women. The presence of men's activities such as relaxing, leisure, eating and chatting, is unsuitable in this part of Mosul City Centre. While, the rest of the Street is used by both sexes, especially men. This case generated a kind of embarrassment to the local women. Consequently, this forced them to complete their intended goal like shopping very quickly. Hence, they used to go with their families. This reveals why almost all female respondents did not state the use of this street as a social space. Moreover, most men also did not use this street as a social space. As long as the Street has a commercial importance, venders, buyers and users

can not find enough time to practice social activities such as gathering and chatting in the Street. Besides, there is no doubt that security absence and tense political conditions in Iraq, especially Mosul City, had a negative effect on the role of the functional characteristics as social space. People would fulfill their requirements from the street as soon as possible to avoid any inconvenience and sudden threaten actions.

From the survey's and in-depth interview findings, cultural goods and traditional foods play an important role in determining why this street is considered as a cultural space. These qualities make this street unique compared with others. Perhaps the changing of political circumstances in Iraq and wars, have a negative effect on the role of the street as a cultural space. This elaborated why (228) respondents mentioned that this street is not important in religious and cultural celebrations, festivals and events.

According to the findings, the street has very important role as a channel of movements. Around (200) respondents, who use this Street, walk from place to another because they considered it fast, easy to understand and connect the destination, or cheap. On the other hand, most of the respondents, who come from a distance, use public transportation as it is fast, cheap or availability of nearby stations of public transportation. Obviously, the Nineveh Street has a strategic location within the Mosul City Centre. Therefore, the users of the Street come and go to this Street easily. In the in-depth interview, these reasons were further elaborated by the respondents in explaining why the location of the street is considered to be distinctive. From the interview response, it was clear that this street is like an outdoor and/or open supermarket that leads to many surrounding markets and commercial streets. Hence, this street plays an important role as a channel of movement through its many linkages with other surrounded places.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The study demonstrates that sense of place is strongly linked to the role of functional characteristics of commercial streets. Commercial streets have played influential roles in influencing sense of place as reflected in the users' high degree of dependence on the streets for shopping and movement from place to place.

The research on the role of the functional characteristics to commercial streets in Mosul City Centre indicates the need for more identifiable street roles to enhance the influencing of the sense of place in Mosul City Centre. Thus, the findings suggest that restore the roles of Nineveh Street as cultural and social space is necessary for influencing sense of place.

It is evident from the data analysis and results of this paper that the Nineveh Street plays the greatest important role as a commercial space in influencing sense of place. The strategic location of the Nineveh Street in the core of Mosul City Centre, and diversity of goods, enhance the role of this Street as a commercial space. Meanwhile, the Nineveh Street has significant role as a channel of movement, but it is less than the commercial role. The strategic location of this street overlooking the Old Bridge, is considered as the gateway for the users who live in the left side of Mosul City.

In addition, the American occupation since 2003-2013 has had a negative impact on the role of the functional features of the Nineveh Street as a social and cultural space. The absence of celebrations, festivals, art performances, and parades has reduced the cultural role of the Street. Moreover, The absence of safety had made not only the Nineveh street unsafe and unsuitable place for relaxing and leisure, but any outside place in the whole of Mosul City that no longer plays the role it should.

Thus, it is concluded from the review that the role of the functional characteristics is an important criteria for the study of sense of place. These roles are qualities which distinguished the Nineveh Street and made it unique in Mosul City Centre.

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