

## An Overview Study of the Baladiya Square in Benghazi City- Libya

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### Abstract

Baladiya Square is one of the most important squares in the city of Benghazi, representing the cultural and social heart of the city. It has served as a significant site for historical events that have shaped the city. The square is home to numerous historical buildings of architectural value that outline its boundaries and define its character, dating back to various historical periods. Among these is Al-Atiq Mosque, which dates back to the early Ottoman period and serves as the primary and front-facing element of the square. The Baladiya building, from the era of Italian occupation, along with historic residential buildings exhibiting a unified architectural language, contributes to the square's unique character. Over time, the square has been a meeting point for the local community, serving as a gathering place for writers, poets, and intellectual elites of the city. However, in recent decades, the square has experienced significant changes that have diminished its cultural role. It has transformed into a bustling marketplace filled with shops displaying goods on the sidewalks, negatively impacting pedestrian movement and distorting the overall image of the square. The aim of this study is to explore the Baladiya Square in Benghazi, highlighting its significance as an important urban space that serves as a hub for human interaction. It is a place where activities and recreational pursuits take place, contributing to the strengthening of social bonds and community cohesion.

**Keywords:** Benghazi City, Public Squares, Baladiya Square, Old Mosque, Baladiya Building.

## دراسة عامة عن ميدان البلدية في مدينة بنغازي، ليبيا

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### الملخص

يعتبر ميدان البلدية من أهم ميادين مدينة بنغازي، والذي يمثل القلب الثقافي والاجتماعي للمدينة، علاوة على أنه شكل محطة مهمة لأحداث تاريخية مرت بها المدينة. حيث تتواجد فيه العديد من المباني التاريخية ذات القيمة المعمارية التي ترسم حدوده وتشكل معالمه، والتي تعود لفترات زمنية متعاقبة. مثل المسجد العتيق الذي يعود تاريخ للحقبة العثمانية الأولى ويشكل وحده الضلع الامامي والرئيسي للميدان. ومبنى البلدية الذي يعود تاريخه لحقبة الاحتلال الايطالي، ثم مباني سكنية تاريخية بلغة معمارية موحدة تعطي للميدان طابعه المتميز. على مر الزمن، كانت ساحة الميدان نقطة النقاء للمجتمع المحلي، وهي مكان تجمع الكتّاب والشعراء والنخب الفكرية بالمدينة. لكن خلال العقود الأخيرة، شهدت الساحة تغيرات جذرية أدت إلى تراجع دورها الثقافي، حيث تحولت إلى سوق شعبي مزدحم بالمحلات التي تضع بضاعتها على الأرصفة، مما يؤثر سلباً على حركة المشاة ويشوه الصورة العامة للساحة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف ساحة البلدية في مدينة بنغازي، وتسليط الضوء على أهميته كفراغ حضري مهم شكل محطة للتواصل البشري، ومكان لقيام النشاطات والترويح عن أنفس السكان، ساهم في تعزيز الروابط الاجتماعية والتماسك الاجتماعي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** مدينة بنغازي، الساحات العامة، ميدان البلدية، الجامع العتيق، مبنى البلدية.

### 1. Introduction

The squares have always had a great cultural and vital importance, an importance dating back to the beginnings of the formation of cities, and from the oldest that we have of them dates back to many centuries ago, specifically when (Socrates) was wandering his face in the squares of Athens, which was known at that time as (Agora), the American critic and writer Michael Kimmel, who specializes in architecture in The New

York Times, believes that the importance of public squares lies in the fact that they play the role of magnets, as they attract people and people of different affiliations to them, and witness the mixing of Everyone is in one crucible, desiring to satisfy the spirit of participation and fusion in common societal values (Ghait, 2020). There are many squares and squares in Benghazi, both old and new, including those that existed before the Italian presence in our country, and some that were built by the Italians. How not, when it has become a meeting place for intellectuals, poets, politicians, enthusiastic youth, and workers in various fields, meeting in its cafes and corners and on its sidewalks, presenting the issues, concerns, and ideas of their generation and their public affairs. This implicitly indicates that it is one of the most important and beautiful squares, in addition to its importance derived from the location of Benghazi and its port, which was historically Africa's first gateway to the world (Ghait, 2020).

The historic Baladiya Square has preserved the social and economic memory of our city over the years, and it is considered one of the oldest and oldest squares in Benghazi, and one of the three squares that existed in the city of Benghazi before the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911 AD. It is located in the center of the city, where the old city is in the locality of Sidi Salem, between Souk al-Dalam and Souk al-Hout, and there is the municipal building or the Benghazi municipality palace, which was the seat of the Benghazi municipality, which is the oldest government administrative building in the city built in the nineteenth century, as its foundation dates back to the year 1872 AD (Ghait, 2020). The square visual axis is direct to Atiq Mosque in Benghazi, is one of the oldest and best known in the city. The mosque, also known as Al-Jami al-Kabir (the Great Mosque), forms the north side of Freedom Square. The original structure dates to the early fifteenth century, and since then received many renovations. The present central-domed structure is Ottoman in design (Elmahmudi, 2009).

## 1.2 Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in recognizing the importance of public squares, particularly Municipality Square in Benghazi, and preserving its historical, architectural, and social value amidst the changes it has undergone over successive periods. Highlighting its importance as an

essential urban space, Municipality Square has served as a hub for human interaction, a venue for activities and leisure for residents, and a contributor to strengthening social bonds and social cohesion.

### 1.3 Scope and objectives of the study

The scope of this study especially focuses on the changes lived in the historical city center, some architectural works placed there and their environment as they contribute the formation of city identity. In this frame, the findings are interpreted and suggesting a proposal as a redevelopment of the site. Therefore, the research will pursue the following objectives:

- Study area and circulation analysis of population and visual axes.
- Extracting the mind map of visitors.
- Based on the findings, suggesting an urban design proposal for the redevelopment of the site.

### 1.4 Research Methodology

The methodology used in this study aims to provide a comprehensive and practical analysis for revitalizing the Municipality Square, enhancing its cultural identity, and improving its urban environment by:

- The descriptive method for studies on public squares, their significance, and key principles, in addition to previous studies addressing the Municipality Square and its cultural and social importance.
- The analytical method is used to analyze the current state of the Municipality Square, identifying its general features, and determining its main strengths and weaknesses.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 General overview of public squares

Public squares are key spaces within urban environments, serving as open areas that mirror a city's identity and the cultural heritage of its communities. Since ancient times, urban squares have served as gathering places for community members, where "urban life" unfolds. As a vital part of a city's structure, urban squares play a crucial role in shaping its image and prestige. The main distinction between a public park and a public square is that "in a square, citizens interact not with elements of nature, but with the core of urban culture, history, and memory. In recent decades, numerous urban

squares have seen a decline in their functionality and importance as a result of changes in the ways public spaces are utilized. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize and give greater attention to the design of urban squares as both public and open spaces (Memluk, 2013).

## 2.2 Urban square significance

The public square is an open space enclosed by architectural features, serving as a focal point within the urban context that facilitates social interaction, as well as cultural and economic activities. Public squares' uses are multiple, and all have a perfect impact on the city image, comfort, economy, and user well-being. Each public square can serve a specific function, such as social, cultural, political, commercial, or recreational activities, or it can function as a multifunctional public space from its inception. Over time, the usage patterns of public squares have evolved, leading to increased congestion from both people and vehicles. With the rise of shopping centers, individuals have increasingly opted to spend their time indoors rather than in open public spaces. As a result, urban squares have diminished in value and significance in many countries. However, by the mid-20th century, the discussion surrounding the importance of public squares was revitalized due to several studies focusing on human well-being and urban development, which emphasized the significance of public spaces in general and public squares specifically (Mazroua, 2021).

## 2.3 Urban square attributes

### 2.3.1 Physical design attributes

The square has three confining elements: the surrounding structures row, the floor expansion, and the sky above. Each factor can vary; for instance, the surroundings may be uniform in height, proportion, and design, or they may exhibit significant differences. The floor may be homogeneous in texture and expansion, or it may have slopes, steps, or different levels, etc. The perception of ceiling height (the sky) is influenced by the interaction between the height of surrounding buildings and the extent of the walls. Most physical approaches to urban squares emphasize their form, size, scale, and proportion, along with geographical factors and visual complexity. This includes aesthetic elements such as seating, landscaping, subspaces, shelter from the sun and cold, lighting, and considerations of human scale. M. Childs outlined the fundamental elements and compositional components of

public squares to assist urban planners in making informed decisions when designing these spaces (Mazroua, 2021).

- The first component of a public square is the floor, which refers to the horizontal surface surrounded by walls. This area may include various pavements such as asphalt driving lanes, brick walkways, and a central pond. It is divided into three sections: the catchment area, the frame, and the central field. The catchment area is where most users of the civic space arrive.
- The second component is the enclosing wall, which consists of building facades, free-standing walls, arcades, or any vertical elements like tree lines and fences. This component significantly influences the enclosure of the space.
- The third component is the virtual ceiling, which can be formed by tree canopies, lights, or any horizontal plane within the space that contributes to the overhead enclosure.

### 2.3.2 Perceived design attributes

Camillo Sitte was the first to recognize the sense of enclosure as a key principle in the design of public squares, emphasizing the feeling of safety that this enclosure provides. He recommended reducing the number of streets leading into the square and decreasing their width or employing winding streets to enhance the sense of enclosure (figure 1).

Sitte classified public squares into two categories: hard spaces and soft spaces. Hard spaces are well-defined and enclosed by solid architectural blocks, while soft spaces are surrounded by a variety of architectural elements (Vukmirovic & Gavrilović, 2020).



Figure 1: The scale of human interaction – by Project for Public Spaces (PPS)

### 2.3.3 Principles of great place

Most successful public spaces, whether a grand downtown plaza or a modest neighborhood park, share four essential attributes:

- They are accessible and well-connected to other significant locations in the area.
- They are comfortable and convey a positive image.
- They encourage people to engage in activities.
- They foster a sociable atmosphere where people enjoy gathering and visiting (Vukmirovic & Gavrilović, 2020).

### 3. Baladiya square

One of the most famous and important landmarks of the city of Benghazi is the Baladiya square, which is located in the center of the old city. This landmark derives its importance from being the oldest square of the city, as there are its most important features, which are the Baladiya building, the Atiq Mosque (one of the oldest



mosques) and the entrance to the dark market, the largest market in the city (Lannaizy, 2022). The Baladiya square represented a market for the city since the Ottoman era, and it contains a group of small shops built of wood that were removed during the Italian era and the square was expanded. since the Ottoman era, this square has been famous for holding religious celebrations in it, especially on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday, where Sufi Zawiya's gather with their singers who chant praises and dhikr. In the fifties, one of the most famous cafes in the city was located in this square, which is Al-Aroudi Café, which was a meeting place for intellectuals and the people of the city, as well as the August 9 Cinema.

The Baladiya Square is a prominent public space in Benghazi, Libya, recognized for its unique architecture, vibrant atmosphere, and historical significance. It serves as a central hub for various activities and has been a key gathering place for public events, demonstrations, and celebrations. The square is surrounded by important buildings, shops, and cafes, making it a popular destination for both locals and tourists. Among these structures is the notable Atiq Mosque, which adds to the square's cultural and historical value (figure 2). Sidi Salem Arch: The Baladiya square was famous for the presence of the small arch leading to Sidi Salem Street, and this arch is adjacent to the Atiq Mosque. In the Italian era, the kiosks that obscured the mosque from the square were removed, palm trees were planted in front of it, and the square was paved, so the mosque appeared in a more beautiful way than before. The arch represented a separator between the two most important neighborhoods in the city, namely the popular neighborhood that includes Sidi Khreibish and its environs, and the European neighborhood built by the Italians 1620s (Lannaizy, 2022). Among the old memories of the residents of the city of Benghazi in this square is a picture still fresh in the memory of the (Arabiyat) station. or the horse-drawn carriage as a means of transporting individuals and families from one neighborhood to another.



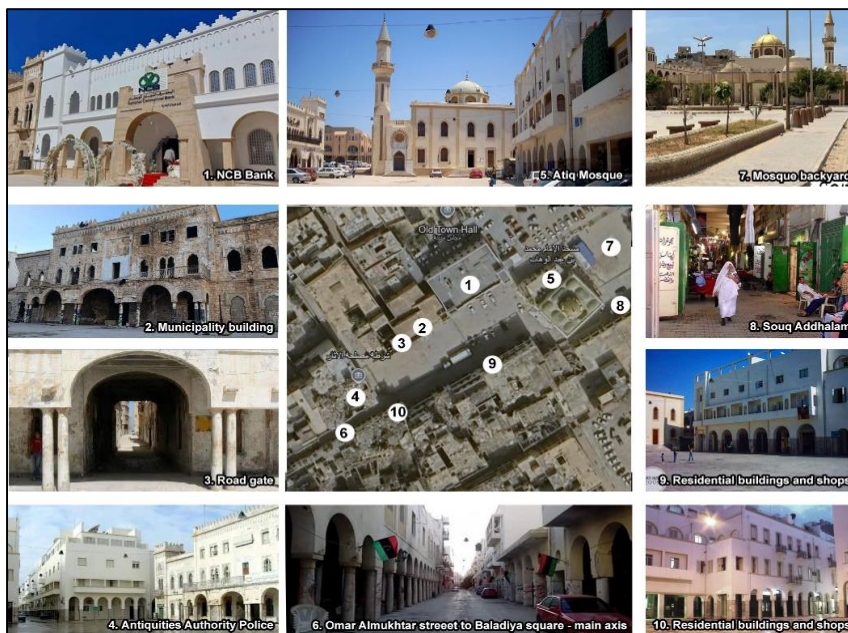


Figure2: Baladiya square

### 3.1 Brief historical background Of Baladiya square

Atiq Mosque was pivotal in the establishment of Baladiya Square, with its site intentionally selected for its prominence near the waterfront to reflect the character of the Ottoman city of Benghazi. It also serves as an important axis, extending along Omar Al-Mukhtar Street. According to Hayman in 1881, the mosque is described as "a small mosque with a huge minaret." However, this traveler mistakenly believed that the entrance facing the mosque, which features three openings topped with semi-circular arches, belonged to the ancient mosque. This confusion arose because the mosque was not easily visible from Baladiya Square due to the shops positioned in front (Haimann, 1883).

During Taher Pasha's rule, the original house of prayer was demolished, although the minaret, along with the ablution facilities, toilets, and rainwater tank, remained intact (Magine). A new prayer house was constructed in the same style as the Osman Mosque. However, in 1905, unusually heavy rains caused part of the central

dome to collapse. In 1907, the Turks initiated restoration of the dome of the ancient mosque, although this was done in a manner that differed from its original design. Following the Italian occupation, an Italian magazine noted that Benghazi had several mosques, with the largest located at the entrance to the market in Baladiya Square. At that time, this mosque featured a large dome, which was undergoing maintenance when the Italian attack commenced. (الفقي، 1996). During the Italian occupation of Benghazi, the Italians preserved the mosque in its original architectural style. In contrast, they built a massive cathedral with two domes (unlike classical cathedrals) to serve as a landmark representing Italy in Benghazi (Al-Zugheibi, 2015).

In 1920, the Italians expanded Omar Al-Mukhtar Street and developed the square. By the 1930s, the Old Mosque had become an important landmark and a visual focal point in the Municipality Square along Omar Al-Mukhtar Street. During the 1970s, maintenance work was carried out on the mosque ( figure 3). However, the mosque and the surrounding buildings sustained damage after the 2014 war, but its foundation remained intact, allowing for voluntary maintenance work to be conducted in recent years ( figure 4).

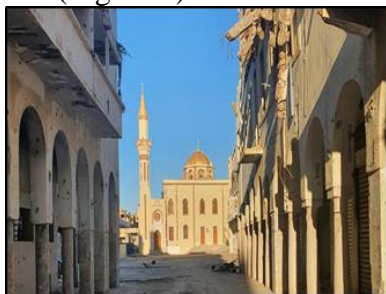


Figure 3: Atiq Mosque 1973



Figure 4: Current state of  
Baladiya Square

### 3.2 Site analysis

The site is analyzed according to the factors that affect the quality of the field's design, and focuses on developments that increase the quality of the place. It focuses on the four main factors, Access & Linkages, Uses and activities, Sociability, Comfort and image.

### 3.2.1 Access & Linkages

It is how easy it is to reach Al-Baladiya Square for cars, public transportations and pedestrians, as well as the study covers linking Al-Baladiya Square with other squares through roads and paths for cars or pedestrians. Accessibility - The area of Al-Baladiya Square is an area accessible to all. As for the buildings, the shops have their entrances without stairs. The administrative buildings are the same. The bank building has stairs and an attached ramp. As for the mosque, it needs a ramp as a modification in the design of the entrance to the building.

#### 3.2.1.1 Pedestrian paths and walkability

Accessibility can be easily evaluated by examining a place's connections to its surroundings, including visual links. An excellent public space is accessible, inviting, and easy to navigate, allowing visibility of most activities both from a distance and up close. The edges of a public space significantly enhance its accessibility; for instance, a row of shops along a street tends to be more engaging and safer for pedestrians than a blank wall or an empty lot. Since the early 2000s, following the nationalization of trade, public activity in Baladiya Square has transformed, becoming increasingly popular among residents and visitors alike (figure 5).



Figure 5: Baladiya square evening

### 3.2.2 Uses and activities

#### 3.2.2.1 Changes in square activities

The activities and uses of buildings in Baladiya Square have evolved throughout history, with key changes summarized as follows:

- The Square's Historical Role: From its inception, Baladiya Square served significant political and cultural functions. During the Italian occupation, it hosted military parades and celebrations for Muslims at the Baladiya building.
- Changes in Function: Over time, particularly after the nationalization of trade in the 1970s and the establishment of socialist rule, the square lost its primary cultural function. It transformed into a commercial hub linking Omar Al-Mukhtar Street with Souq Adhullam, resulting in a decline in its value and significance among the local population. The square became more of a popular marketplace for household items and various shops.
- Cultural Traditions: Despite these changes, Baladiya Square remained a site of cultural significance during events such as Mawlid, when Sufi practitioners would process from Zawiya Issawiya to the square, which served as the gathering point for the celebration. This tradition, passed down through generations of Libyans for over a century, continued until recent years, with processions moving through narrow alleys amidst the joyful celebrations of people on their balconies.

**Al-Atiq Mosque** has undergone significant changes in function over the years, as noted by Al-Sadiq Al-Naihoum. Initially, like many mosques in other Arab cities, it served as an integrated political forum where issues affecting the people of Benghazi were discussed. This religious-political building functioned as a venue for conferences that addressed local problems and proposed improvements to the quality of life for residents. Additionally, it was a gathering place for local holidays and community events. However, in recent years, the mosque has transitioned primarily

into a place for performing prayers, losing its earlier role as a hub for community engagement and political discourse.

**The Municipality building** serves as the central focal point of Baladiya Square, with its prominent balcony historically used for political speeches and religious ceremonies. Notably, Mussolini and King Idris delivered several speeches from this balcony. Beneath the municipality building lies Municipal Street, which leads to the intersection of Darby Street and continues to Ahmed Rafiq Al-Mahdawi Street and Al Shabi Corniche. Unfortunately, Al-Baladiya Square Street suffers from neglect. This street, which dates back to the Italian occupation, features buildings from that era that have not been restored or maintained, contributing to its status as one of the region's abandoned thoroughfares. Currently, the street lacks lighting and essential services that could revitalize the area. To improve its condition, a restoration project could involve repainting the street white while preserving the existing infrastructure. Additionally, the incorporation of lighting and greenery could enhance the space, breathing new life into this historically significant corridor (السني، 2017).

### 3.2.3 Sociability

#### 3.2.3.1 Micro social fabric in the Baladiya square

The social fabric of the Baladiya Square area is highly interconnected, with compact buildings fostering a greater sense of interdependence among residents compared to other neighborhoods. The alleys serve as communal playgrounds for children, while balconies provide vibrant spaces for neighborly interactions and communication. Enhancing Baladiya Square will further strengthen this social cohesion by facilitating outdoor gatherings and activities. Additionally, repurposing existing buildings for various uses will contribute to revitalizing the area, creating opportunities for community engagement and reinforcing the bonds among residents.

#### 3.2.3.2 Restaurant and cafes

When exploring any city, the importance of cafes cannot be overlooked, as they play a vital role in shaping the local culture and embodying values that influence residents' behaviors. In Libya, particularly in Benghazi, cafes possess a unique character that



resonates with a significant portion of the community. For decades, visiting cafes has become a well-established daily ritual for men, leading many to regard them as a "second home" (الزغبي، من معالم المدينة، 2015).

### 3.2.3.3 Evening use

Omar Al-Mukhtar Street, which lines Baladiya Square, is known for its small shops, newspaper stands, offices, and inviting outdoor seating that contributes to a cozy atmosphere. The wooden chairs attached to the shops are a notable feature of the area's street furniture. This vibrant ambiance can be revitalized by introducing services such as cafes, bookstores, and other engaging activities, enhancing the warmth and charm of the evenings in the neighborhood.

### 3.2.4 Comfort and image

A space that feels comfortable and inviting is more likely to succeed as a public area. Comfort encompasses perceptions of safety, cleanliness, and the availability of seating. Surprisingly, many otherwise appealing places suffer from a lack of seating, which can deter people from lingering. Providing a variety of seating options allows visitors to choose between sun and shade at different times of the day or year, making the space more attractive and encouraging social interaction (Vukmirovic & Gavrilović, 2020).

#### 3.2.4.1 Environmental data and comfortability

The orientation of the square is advantageous, as it benefits from ample shade provided by the surrounding buildings, which typically stand three stories high. This design not only enhances the comfort of pedestrians but also makes walking through the square a more enjoyable experience. Furthermore, the arrangement of buildings acts as an effective windbreaker. Analysis of wind patterns indicates that the strongest winds originate from the north, where the area is densely populated with buildings and features winding alleys. This arrangement plays a crucial role in providing a comfortable environment for visitors, as the blend of shade and soft breezes fosters an inviting setting for casual walks. The orientation of the sun and the design of pedestrian pathways are essential elements in enhancing the overall experience.

### 3.2.4.3 Attractive points: Visual axes and mental map

Research has identified several sources of information that contribute to the formation of cognitive maps, based on a series of experiments. These studies demonstrate that organisms utilize three primary sources during their movement processes: dimension, orientation, and self-motion. These sources are processed through three distinct mechanisms, which help in navigating and understanding spatial environments (Guelton, 2023). During our study of the Baladiya square, we spoke with one of the residents of downtown district (a woman, 53 years old) who used to shop weekly from the Baladiya square, but he had not gone there for nine years, we asked him to draw a mental map of what he remembers from the view of the square. He drew some spontaneous lines and began to draw the dome of the ancient mosque in the first line, as if he was the main element of this field.

We could start by dividing the question into three underlying questions. In the drawing of an urban mental map ( figure 6).

- How does the memorial process take place?
- How is the symbolic process of drawing carried out?
- How do the two processes interact?

The dome of the Al-Atiq Mosque is the point of attraction for the square and it is the dominant element of the place, which can be seen before entering the square about 550 meters, so it is important to consider it as the most important element in the square because it has a great historical and moral value for the residents ( figure 7).

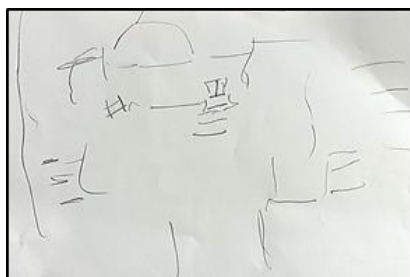


Figure 6: A mental map sketch of Baladiya square, done by one of its users



Figure 7: Image of Baladiya square 2012 shows Atiq mosque's dome as the focal point



### 3.2.5 Spatial characteristics of the original design

This study demonstrates the use of spatial analysis, through plan and sectional diagrams drawn from literature review and secondary data, as a method to examine how the physical and spatial qualities of the square have an effect on its function as a public space. The findings and analysis revealed that the layout, spaces and components of the square indeed have an effect on the square's sociability.

#### 3.2.5.1 Place components

M. Childs outlined the fundamental components of public squares, along with their compositional elements, to assist urban designers in making informed decisions when creating these spaces.

- The first component is the floor of the public square, defined as the horizontal surface enclosed by surrounding walls. This floor can include various pavements, such as asphalt for driving lanes, brick pathways, and even a central pond. The floor is typically divided into three sections: the catchment area, the frame, and the central field. The catchment area is where most users arrive from, while the frame surrounds the central space. This framed area may feature multiple layers, small fields, subspaces, or civic coves, providing a sense of enclosure while remaining open to the larger central area. It serves as an ideal space for people to sit, eat, and observe activities (Mazroua, 2021). In Baladiya Square, the flooring consists of a single material—cement tiles measuring 40x40 cm—serving all three sections: the catchment area, the frame, and the central field (figure 8).



Figure 8 : arch Passageway along the square

- The second component is the enclosing wall, which consists of building facades, free-standing walls, arcades, and other vertical elements like tree lines and fences. This component significantly influences the sense of enclosure within the space. The walls define the boundaries of the area and determine the extent of its closure. A review of both the historical design and the current situation reveals that the Sidi Salem arch plays a crucial role in delineating the borders of the field. The surrounding buildings feature archways and semi-circular arches along the passageways, contributing to the overall aesthetic and functional qualities of the square ( figure 9).



Figure 9: the left side of Baladiya square

- The third component, known as the virtual ceiling, can be represented by elements like tree canopies, lighting fixtures, or any other horizontal planes that contribute to the overhead enclosure of the space. Baladiya Square is bordered by several significant buildings, the most notable being the ancient mosque directly across from it. Originally designed in the Ottoman style, the mosque's current appearance is somewhat obscured after its restoration. On the right side of the square, the Baladiya building and the commercial bank exhibit distinct Islamic architectural features ( figure 10). The left side is lined with small shops, while facing it is a hallway showcasing classic Italian design. Additionally, there are narrow alleys that serve as secondary entrances to the square. The main access points, however, are along the axes of Omar Al-Mukhtar Street,

Si Salem Street, and Souq Adhalem, which act as primary thoroughfares leading into the square.



Figure10: the left side of the Baladiya square

### 3.2.5.2 Architectural items

The Municipal Square area showcases a wealth of architectural elements, each side expressing a cohesive architectural style that enhances the overall harmony of the space. The left side of the square features the Andalusia style, with tall, distinctive windows, decorative roof peaks, and clock towers. On the right side, the architecture is more understated, with simple windows, undecorated balconies, and semicircular arches. The focal point, Al-Atiq Mosque, was originally defined by its Ottoman architectural style; however, the recent restoration has somewhat altered its original appearance, introducing elements that deviate from its traditional character (figure 11).



Figure11: Architectural items of the Baladiya square

### 3.2.5.3 Green items

There used to be palm trees facing the municipality building, as well as trees near the Sidi Salem arch ( figure 12), but after the renovations that took place in the square, the palm trees and trees were removed along with the Salem arch. The square needs logging on the right side, to give life to the square as well as shade for passers-by (figure 13).



Figure 12: Baladiya square.  
2012



Figure 13: Baladiya square before  
removing trees

## 3.3 Site Analysis Discussion

Baladiya Square was the gathering point of intellectuals in the city, and it is its main cultural center where the most important symbols of the city are located. It has great historical as well as moral value, as well as the architectural language of the site is clear. Each of its elements is of great importance that determines the identity of the place. The square has a long history and was considered over time the main meeting place for the population as well as the arena for displaying military shows during the Italian occupation, as well as a platform for delivering important speeches, which constitute an important point in the history of the city. Baladiya Square, during its last periods before the 2014 war, faced the problem of losing its cultural importance and turning it into a popular market, after it was a cultural square acquainted with writers and poets and a gathering point for intellectuals, Cultural places have turned into popular stores that offer their

goods on pedestrian walkways, which affects pedestrian movement as well as causes visual distortion of the place. Baladiya Square needs to be revived as a cultural area, by re-operating the buildings and employing them as bookstores, music centers, libraries, cultural centers, as well as entertainment spaces and cafes. It must be followed by its external activities, external sessions, which the municipal square lacks ( figure 14).

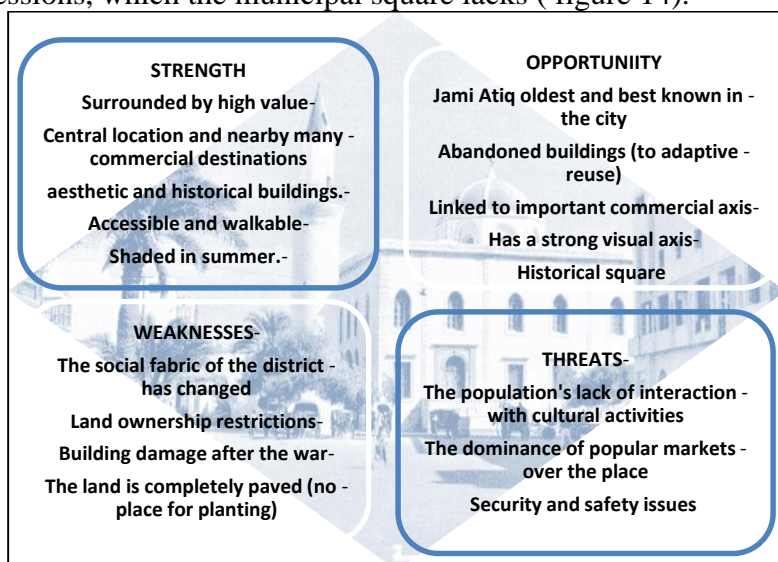


Figure 14: SWOT Site Analysis

As a result of analyzing the site as previously, and in order to achieve a new vision for the site, it is necessary to understand the factors that make the place active, understanding the culture of the residents and the pioneers of this place, how they interact in it and what are the gathering points that the residents interact with and what are the reasons and factors influencing, and from these data it was concluded that the activities will be re-activated It existed in the past and had a main reason for reviving the area (figure 15).

- **previous activities:** Previous activities and cafes are being restored in the area, where wooden benches are placed in front of them as a meeting place for the people, where several outdoor activities are held in the evening.



- **The overall picture:** The overall picture of the place is restored for its moral value to the residents of the region, intellectuals, as well as historians, since the place dates back to the Ottoman era. Historical monuments are highlighted, as well as attention to visual axes.
- **Silphium Fountain:** A water element was added to the area as an active element in the site, as it is also used as a session in the site, and as an element that gives life to the place, as well as improves spatial comfort.
- **bougainvillea and palm:** Green elements are used in the area to give life to it and improve the spatial environment in the area. Where the climbing bougainvillea plant is placed next to the columns at the sessions, as for the palm trees, they are placed in their old place.



Figure15: Proposed overall picture

## Conclusion

Baladiya Square occupies a great moral and historical value for the population, and the area was full of many cultural activities and was considered the main meeting place for writers and intellectuals. The area suffered from neglect and the activities in it changed. And it became just a wide street in which vendors spread their goods. as a neglected popular area. The area must be revived by understanding the culture of the community and how they interact with it, while highlighting the symbols that pertain to the city, such as silphium plants, to activate the area as a cultural area again. It was proposed to re-use the vacant buildings to be cultural buildings, with the

addition of outdoor sessions in the area, plants, and the water element that mediates the main axis of the square. So, the municipality square returns as the city's cultural center again. The study recommends the preservation of the Municipal Square and its revitalization as a central hub for social and political events and activities, as follows:

- **Conservation of the Square:** Recommend the establishment of initiatives dedicated to preserving and rehabilitating the Municipal Square as a site of cultural heritage.
- **Hosting Cultural Activities:** Advocate for the organization of events and exhibitions that promote the square's use and encourage social interaction.
- **Promoting Scholarly Research on the Square:** Encourage researchers to undertake comprehensive studies on the Municipal Square, focusing on its historical significance and development.
- **Community Engagement Programs:** Implement community-led workshops and activities to foster a sense of ownership and pride among local residents.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Upgrade pathways, lighting, and seating areas to create a more welcoming and accessible environment.
- **Cultural and Artistic Installations:** Introduce public art pieces, such as murals and sculptures, that reflect the historical and cultural essence of the city.
- **Sustainability Practices:** Ensure that any revitalization efforts include eco-friendly practices, such as using sustainable materials and integrating energy-efficient technologies.

By implementing these recommendations, Baladiya Square can reclaim its status as a vital cultural center for the city.

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