

MEANS TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL INTERACTION IN GREEN OPEN SPACE IN BAGHDAD, IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

Since the war of 2003 and Baghdad suffers in different levels political, administrative, economic ethnic, sectarian, etc. That led to the loss of lives, social capital, increased crisis aggravation between different ethnic, and destruction a lot of open space and recreational places in Baghdad nowadays. Therefore this paper addresses the issue of lack of social interaction among Baghdad residents as a result of lack in open spaces and recreational activities. Thus the main objective of the paper is to determine the means to enhance sound social interaction for community of Baghdad in green open spaces through identifying criteria and factors of open spaces in general to support social interaction and community. This paper employs qualitative content analysis method which mainly focused on collecting summarizing and analyzing various documentation such as (writing journals, articles, researches, books, Web sites, manifestos, transcripts and figures) from more than 30 source, regarding the importance of public open spaces for the community. Content analysis of the paper is the fundament for a qualitative oriented procedure of text interpretation used to summarize and analyze the information gathered. Results of this study confirms that sound social interaction in general requires an appropriate physical space (could be green open space) which includes such criteria: design, activities, elements, access and linkage, safety and security, administration and maintenance, and users' characteristics, also previous studies in this area emphasize that the responsible authorities need to make redouble efforts in order to address the issue of existing parks in Baghdad nowadays.

Keywords: social interaction, green open spaces, outdoor recreation, Baghdad city, content analysis method

1. INTRODUCTION

Baghdad is the capital of Iraq and largest city in Iraq. Located along Tigris River which runs through Baghdad center and divided it to two parts Karkh the western shore of the Tigris and Rusafa the eastern shore of the Tigris. Old Bagdad "Rounded City" built in 762 in the western shore of Tigris River on a circle shape as a new phenomenon in Islamic architecture. Baghdad was consist of seven elements; mosque and school, caliph palace, landscape, surrounding walls, gates, and residential areas. The mosque was one of the most important elements in the city, and it was the first building built in the city. Baghdad residents cared about taking sciences during that period, where scholars and students had been came to Baghdad from different regions and countries. Therefore Baghdad community was complex of different societies, religions and races and all these differences are coexisting peacefully with a high interaction among each other. Many types of open space were constructed e.g. parks, orchards, rivers blanks, zoos and mosques' courtyard (al-Rajhy, 2006). Abbasid dynasty ended in Baghdad when Mongols (Hulagu) invaded Baghdad in 1258 AD, where they looted and destroyed of the city's most important buildings, burned parks and gardens there, and killed thousands of people. Iraqi society and culture have been affected by previous policies and cultures in terms of living habits. Baghdad also has changed in terms of urban and cultural structure, while community were mix of different religious and nationalities (Abdullah, 2003). In 1956 Iraq exposure to military coup against the kings led to the Republic of Iraq (20th revolution), that led to significant changes in the structural of Iraq and its population and the number of Baghdad residents. After that revolution a lot of public parks, open spaces and squares have been developed also growing the interest in theaters and cinemas and so on (al-Tamimi, 2013).

The war in Iraq in 2003 has led to the loss of lives and social capital, and local resident prefer to stay, work and socialize within their neighborhood without interact with other neighborhoods resident. Many local open spaces, have become dumping sites for garbage or for sewerage and stagnant water. Major recreation areas and facilities have been closed or off limits. Therefore, Baghdad citizens are looking for alternatives of entertainment, and social interaction, e.g. traveling to different countries, extreme usage of social media and emergence of inappropriate socio-cultural behaviors (Ihsanoglu E., 2007). The ethnic relations in Iraq were strained since the last 2003 war, whereby the ethnic relations were particularly uncooperative and violent. Crisis aggravation between different ethnics in Iraq, which led to the decay of the interaction between them (Rydgren J. and Sofi D., 2011).

So one of the problems that faces Baghdad society today is the lack of amenities, recreation and open spaces led to discourage social interaction among the residents. Therefore this paper aim to determine the means to achieve and enhance social interaction

to support the community of Baghdad by achieving social-recreation spaces. Social interaction is a common social issues that exist in in most societies nowadays so it has to be the highlight this issue and try to deal with it in urban and architectural perspective. This paper inspects previous literatures and studies to provide a brief on significance of open space in social interaction and recreation especially in Baghdad. While most of the studies confirm that social interaction need an appropriate place to occur, also there are different factors that affecting social interaction in open spaces such as the design, components, distance, elements and environment of open space (Godbey G., 2009). Qualitative method will implements to answer the following questions:

- I. What are the means to achieve social interaction in green open spaces in Baghdad?
- II. What are the factors that affecting social interaction in open spaces of Baghdad community?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Community of Baghdad

When mention the historical life of Baghdad it must to deeply highlight the role of Abbasid in Baghdad. Local people (simple life) lived a simple life with high social interaction where some poor people shared the same house. Community of Baghdad was diverse in ethnic and religious, but it was open and amicable therefore, many of Muslim men married a Christian women. There were some important social events where people meet together e.g. Friday prayer, Ramadan, promenade after Eid, weddings and festivals and so on (al-Rajhy G., 2006). Iraq society passed through different changes in social, intellectual and political aspects. During British invasion there was a vast gap between the authority and local people as a result of Bedouin values of Iraqi society (neurological, revenge, hospitality, and etc.) which led to various crisis in Iraq. Iraqi society in 20th century influenced by political awareness, news and newspapers, constitutional claim, but political awareness in Iraqi society has grown under the frame of religious consciousness. Iraqi individual grew up on the disputes as a result of wars and conflicts the country experienced but it was a coherent community (Al-Wardi, 1980).

Ethnic relations in Iraq have been strained since the last war 2003, ethnic relations have been particularly uncooperative and violent. Crisis aggravation between different ethnic in Iraq led to decay the interaction between them (Rydgren J. and Sofi D., 2011). Their paper increasingly emphasized the importance of social capital, in particular interethnic social capital, as a condition for creating ethnic cooperation, social capital in this study is defined as micro-social relations characterized by mutual trust. The war in Iraq in 2003 has led to the loss of lives and social capital, and has destroyed the Iraqi infrastructure. This substantially lowers the quality of life, leads to the inability to provide essential services and renders state-building activities even more difficult. In line with the policy of the organization of the Islamic Conference, the article also emphasizes the need for reconciliation between the various groups in Iraq, an end to sectarian tensions and the preservation of the country's territorial unity as the ultimate resolution of the Iraqi question (Ihsanoglu E., 2007).

2.2. Open Space and Recreation in Baghdad

Since founding of Baghdad and has gave a special interest for recreational facilities, open spaces and parks, where Baghdad name has been accompanied with the names of paradise, garden and orchard. Tributary of the Tigris was flow in all districts of Baghdad to promote its beauty and splendor, and the vast orchards extended along the banks of these tributary. Means of historical recreation in Baghdad shared by both public and special people, Muslims, Christian and Jewish. While there was two types of recreation: 1) physical activities that take place in the open space e.g. aviculture, hunting in wild, horsemanship in open field, golf and ships race and etc., 2) intellectual activities like chess and drafts. Baghdad residents during that period gave a special interest for the design of gardens and parks that due to their historical experience in Babylon hanging gardens. There were also many types of open space in Baghdad e.g. parks, orchards, rivers blanks, zoos and mosques courtyard. So recreation means were familiar in Baghdad, and promenade was essential activity in Baghdad (al-Rajhi, 2006).

Means of entertainment and open spaces in Baghdad between 7th and 12th centuries were very variety and distinctive where first zoo has been established in 797 in Harun al-Rashid rule, which was contain various types of birds, rabbits, fishes, monkeys, lions and etc. Abbasid Caliph Al-Mutawakil also built zoological park near Baghdad city to house more than two thousand kinds of different animals, both wild and domesticated ones. In terms of its plan, it functions as an utterly opulent display of richness as well as a piece of engineering genius. The whole area covered by the park is about 53 square kilometers. A man-made river was brought to flow from the northern part of the Tigris through the park and finally through the pool to end again in the river. The whole park was densely planted with trees and bushes imported from every corner of the empire and the wild animals, also some dolphins were to be seen there. Some open spaces also used to play golf or for horsemanship (al-Samarrai, 2002).

After 18th century Iraqi society and culture have been affected by previous policies and cultures in terms of living habits, politics, society and architecture and urban fabric. Baghdad community also were mix of different religious and nationalities, so these differences have given the city a special social-cultural composition (Abdullah, 2003). The architectural heritage of Baghdadi consisted of palaces, courtyard houses, Shanashel or Mashrabiya, Kutab (schools), mosques, churches, markets, cafes, Khan, baths, gates, orchards, hierarchy streets, zigzag narrow paths, bridges and gates, outdoor cinema, television, and museum (Marouf, 1972). A lot of parks, gardens and squares has been constructed in Baghdad city at that period. Also the establishment of Parks Directorate, which is an institution interested in public spaces and park establishment, in order to improve the atmosphere and for people recreation and relaxation e.g. Najebia Public Park, King Ghazi (Umma) Park and etc., most of this parks established in early fiftieth. Also there were a lot of entertainment means in Baghdad, people did it in order to enjoy and social integration e.g. clowns and executors of magical games, promenade near Tigris, Eid habits (installing a simple games for children in neighborhoods open spaces in the Eid), cinema (outdoor cinema), television and museum (al-Tamimi, 2013). 20th revolution lead to significant changes in the structural of Iraq and its population and the number of Baghdad residents, when the new Iraqi government built houses for the local people. A lot of people moved from the south of Iraq to Baghdad that led to new

complex in Baghdad community. After 20th revolution public parks, open spaces and squares have been developed and increased. also growing the interest in theaters and cinemas and opening the first TV station in Karkh district in 1956 and Baghdadi Museum in 1970 (al-Tamimi, 2013).

Since 2003 the establishment of military-controlled zones, lengthy strips of T-walls, road-blocks and checkpoints has interrupted movement along arterial roads linking the different areas of Baghdad. These barriers have created widespread congestion and made routine journeys longer, meaning that local residents prefer to shop, work and socialize within their neighborhood without interact with other neighborhoods people (JAU, IOM and UN, 2011). They state that many local open spaces, where families would have commonly walked or children played, have become dumping sites for garbage or in winter months collection areas for sewerage and stagnant water. Recreation places such as city parks and the stadium, and activities such as walking along or boating on the Tigris have been either closed or off limits since 2003. Lack of safe public spaces means that families have little respite from the pressures of daily life.

(CAUB, 2005) determines the role of parks and gardens in the development of social system especially in Baghdad. This study confirms that most of people in Baghdad prefer to visit Zawraa Park, as a result of being the only park in Baghdad which still has some attention and care as well as it is providing a variety of facilities e.g. green open space, entertainment, water bodies, zoo, food courts and etc. This study mentions that parks have a great social-recreational effect, while parks have an important role to achieve social, psychological, cultural, aesthetic, political and economic benefits for community. The result of study also mentioned that one of factors that led to the decline the role of parks in Iraqi society are administrative negligence and poor organization, along with poor planning and design, also a lot of visitors suffer from a lack of adequate privacy, where they stressed on the importance of availability of facilities for family. Green open space are very important to improve the environment and weather of Baghdad, also it is very important to support residents activities and interaction, while the current open spaces in Baghdad are substandard in term of maintenance, management, cleanliness, services, components and events (Rikabi N. and Ali E. 2013). Existing parks in Baghdad also do not perform their role effectively, this in turn reflected on residents' interaction which limited to indoor spaces only. Municipality of Baghdad and Baghdad Provincial Council should make more efforts for open spaces and parks maintenance, construction and administration. Provide a variety of facilities especially children's facilities within this spaces could improve the function of this spaces as well as provide more parks in Baghdad could improve the interaction of community. Documents and papers of this issue are also very little and shallow, so it has been relied heavily on some literary descriptions and figures which are tenuous in the extreme. Governmental efforts toward this issue are slight as a result of political and economic issue experienced by the country since the war of 2003, also charities and the general financial allocations only belong to humanitarian crisis and living conditions.

Fig. 1: Umma Park, Baghdad after and before the War of 2003
Source: algardenia.com



In 1960



In 2007

2.3. Social Interaction and Green Open Spaces

Social interaction refers to particular forms of externalities, in which the actions of a reference group affect an individual's preferences. The reference group depends on an individual's family, neighbors, friends or peers in the context of a space (Scheinkman J., 2008). While open space is an important area in the city, it provide different recreation and sport activities for children and aged, it also enhance physical, social, mental and environmental components for cities and citizens (Carlisle R. and Stankovich A. M., 2014). Development of social relationships in urban scale should begin with careful attention to specific spaces by implementing using interaction design approaches. Specific spaces used to effectively address the sociocultural relationships of the people (Mamaghani M., et al., 2015). Social relationships vary according to the age, gender and place, where Place element is a key factor to determine the nature of social activity for all ages (Holland C. et al., 2007).

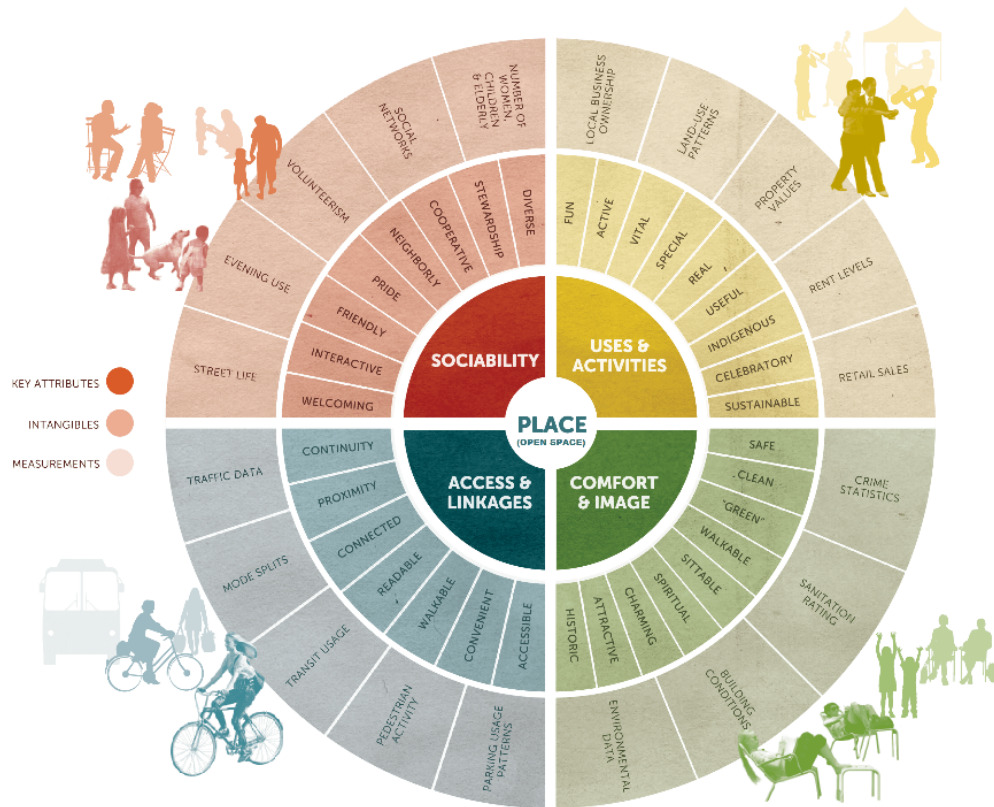
Public spaces allow people to meet on ostensibly neutral ground in planned and unplanned ways, to interact with others within the context of the whole community, so public spaces can contribute to the cohesion of communities. Therefore to achieve the social interaction must provide physical space, so parks have crucial roles to develop and enhancement cities as well as social relations, so it's not only places where people join the nature but also communicate each other socially and culturally (Kara B. et

al., 2011). Open space in the neighborhood is an available opportunity for neighbors to have communication as a friendly chats in a fenced garden or even public meetings in local parks which can be common gathering places and social-cultural interactions as results In larger scales, social public parks and vast urban lands gather people from all groups and ages and cause real feeling of being together (Soltanian and Mohammadi, 2015).

Planning and design of outdoor spaces have a great role to lead individuals to outside spaces, socializing and being together, also space design tools can be used to provide social interaction and the feeling of being a community (Uslu A. and Gökçe S., 2010). Looking, listening and talking are the activities which determine the quality of open space. Good space with good facilities and elements plays an important role in the formation of such activates and elements. These spaces reinforce social contacts and meet their psychological needs of residents while the elements of social open space include: walking trails, horse trails, gardens, children's play areas, sitting areas, and green space. (Poodeh and Vali, 2014). Individual usage and social interactions in public spaces are influenced by many factors, including how the spaces connect and design, maintenance and management of the natural and the safety and security (Holland C. et al., 2007). Good of access and linkage should be the main factor in designing a successful park follow by sociability, user and activities and degree of comfort and image factors. While park is an important space in the relationship of man and nature to promote space for physical activity, health behaviour, and can reduce some diseases, also parks provides the benefits of community interrelationship, as well as increase the value of the property, so public parks have always been an important component in an urban area (Sakip S. et al., 2014). The establishment of social and physical structure associated with the hierarchical access in residential open spaces access, in a way that people gradually go from private spaces into public spaces, creates a sense of security and belonging to the environment and lead to greater use of public space.

Easy access to public open spaces in residential areas will attract people and activities to these areas. The existence of clear marked land boundaries between public and private spaces which the person is just in public or in private spaces greatly reduces the attraction of public open spaces (Nozari, 2004). Close-to-home recreational spaces are particularly vital for older people. There is a need for better collaboration between park and protected area and health institutions. The socio-demographic characteristics affect how users interact with each other in outdoor spaces. Factors such as: age, marital status, and presence of children at home, educational attainment and annual income are presumably associated with social interaction (Haggerty, 1982). Environmental factors have a significant impact on residents and their willingness to participate in the residential open spaces. Climate is a limiting factor to use open spaces during extremely hot or cold days. Noise and air pollution as well as other factors impact directly on the residential open spaces including: fresh air, proper temperature, appropriate relative humidity, micro-climate and topography, wind factor (Poodeh and Vali, 2014). Place attachment has a great role in park utilization and social interaction, it make places more meaningful, also the emotions and a sense of pride keep the place as the centre for personal and social engagement for social interaction (Ujang N. et al., 2015).

Fig. 2: Dimensions of Successful Open Spaces
Source: www.pps.org

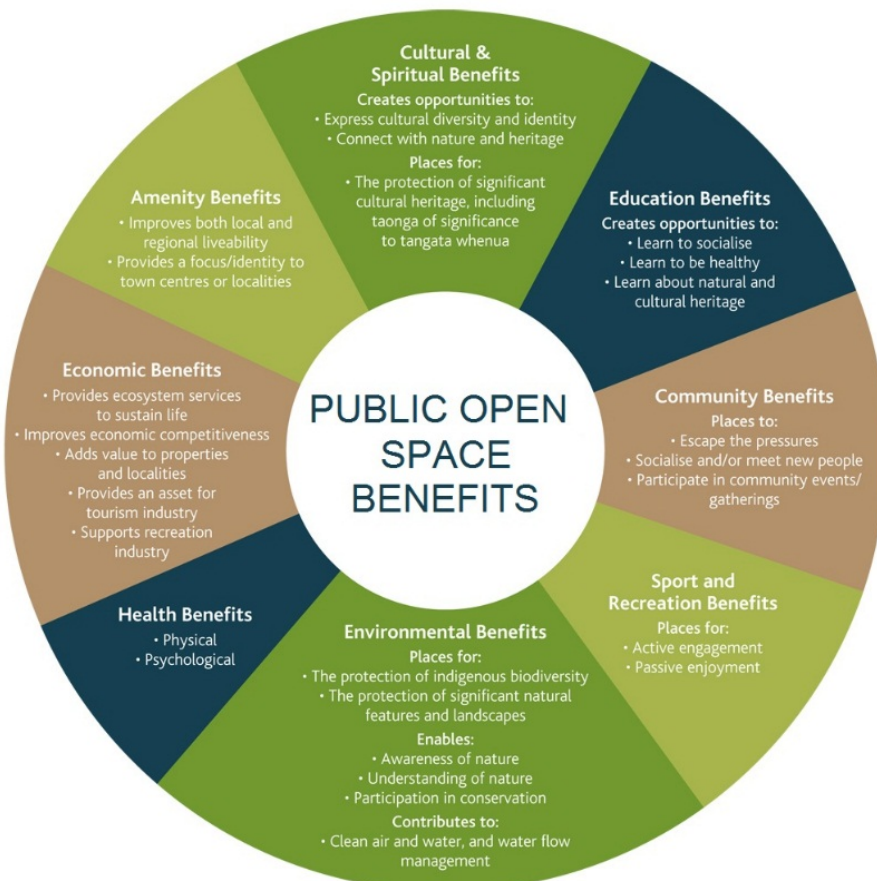


2.4. Benefits of Green Open Space

The social dimensions of public open spaces these spaces are available for everyone regardless of race, age or gender so they are democratic social places for citizens and the society. They also present a cultural identity for the area and as a unique feature declare a fixation among the locals (Soltanian and Mohammadi, 2015). Making an opportunity for some great social events to establish is one of the advantages of qualified public open spaces (Madanipour, 2001). Festivals, seminars, national and traditional events can affect the urban environment if they are managed appropriately. In addition, these events prepare public spaces which are hardly indelible. In the other words makes the city indelible and unique on its own. Urban space is not only divided to public and private but it can be differentiated by social, economic and cultural patterns. (Uslu A. and Gökçe S., 2010) state that complex social diseases can be cured through different house surroundings, parks and new spatial arrangements. Open spaces are also a kind of crystallization of social life where the citizens are living. (Romagosa F. et al., 2015) mention that the role of parks can be summarized in term of five different components include: physical, mental, spiritual, social and environmental. They also made recommendations for specific knowledge user groups, with the ultimate objective of better linking human health and well-being and protected areas policies to enhance delivery mechanisms for health promotion activities.

Outdoor recreational activity and open spaces are helping to mitigate health consequences associated with sedentary behavior (Larson L. et al., 2014). While the environment surrounding residences and its recreational and commuting opportunities are believed to affect human health and well-being, provided scientific evidence for the mechanisms of influence of the types of environments on human well-being, this study examined how the presence of and access to green spaces is related to the level of physical activity and self-rated health (Pietal M., et al., 2015). Their study demonstrated that the presence of and access to green space is evident in the suburbs, where outdoor recreation was related to leisure time physical activity and to self-rated health. Open spaces are also providing opportunities for growth, creativity, fosters social interaction such as: communication, relaxation, entertainment and a place for circulating and cohesion residential site, are quite effective in reducing pollution and improving the environment (Poodeh and Vali, 2014). Developing the urban open spaces has become an important factor in sustainable development which has a main role in environment qualification and protection of natural and historical values in cities (Mehdizadeh, 2005). Other hand (Ekinicand Z. and Saglam H., 2016) state that with the changing of the existing ideology, the urban parks which were built to design a modern urban life have become highly commercialized and vehicles to obtain economic benefits. Public spaces also are convenient tools for urban renewal strategies.

Fig. 3: Public Open Space Benefits
Source: theplan.theaucklandplan.govt.nz



3. METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the paper is to determine the means to enhance sound social interaction of Baghdadi community by achieving social-recreation spaces (green open spaces) and identify the criteria of open spaces to support social interaction and community. So this paper aims to answer the following questions: 1) what are the means to achieve social interaction in green open spaces in Baghdad? 2) What are the factors that affecting social interaction in open spaces of Baghdad community?

This paper employs qualitative content analysis according to (Krippendorf K., 1980) recommendations to design the methodology of the study, while data obtained from more than 30 source varied among articles, researches, books, Web sites, writing journals, manifestos, governmental documents and figures, regarding the importance of open spaces and green area for the community and interaction. Qualitative content analysis potentially one of the most important research techniques especially in the social science. it seeks to analyze data within a specific context, this data could be obtained from every type of recorded communication, ranging from books, newspaper articles, historical documents, medical records, Web sites, speeches, TV programs, sketches and drawings, writing journals, interviews, lectures, and so on. As a result, today this research technique is used in various fields. This technique allows for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories of coding in order to allow researchers to make inferences about the previous studies (Krippendorf K., 1980).

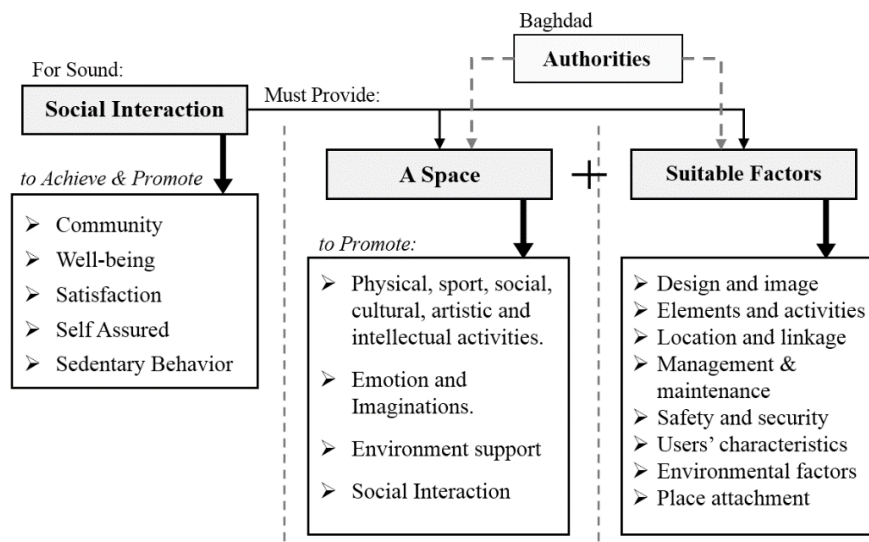
According to the problem statement, there is lack of social interaction among the residents in Baghdad. Therefore the study focuses on previous studies and researches in the field of open spaces and social communication as well as highlight the city of Baghdad between the past and the present, so Baghdad was chosen as the research area for this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Finding obtains from data summarization and analysis by using content analysis method according to (Krippendorf K., 1980) approach. The main focused of this method is to understand the means to enhance sound social interaction of Baghdadi community in green open spaces through identifying the criteria of open spaces in general to support social interaction in Baghdad. Therefore results attempt to answer the paper questions and achieve its objectives. However pervious papers and documents about the open spaces and interaction in Baghdad during various periods indicate that old Baghdad has been characterized by a very cohesive social setting coincides with wide spread of green open spaces such as parks, orchards, rivers blanks, zoo and etc. with different outdoor recreational forms, while it's lose most of the sound social constituents nowadays. Where recent studies confirm that one of factors that led to the decline the role of parks in Iraqi society are administrative negligence and poor organization, along with poor planning and design, also existing parks in Baghdad do not perform their role effectively in term of spaces, maintenance, management, cleanliness, services, components and events that reflected on residents' interaction. Otherwise content analysis shows that most of previous studies confirm that an appropriate physical open spaces allow people to meet on ostensibly neutral ground to interact with each other within the context of the whole community, so

Content analysis appears that previous literatures have many opinions about the key factor of open space that affecting social interaction of communities. Some studies confirm that good activities and elements plays an important role in the formation of open space, others state that design and layout have a great role to lead individuals to outside spaces. Socio-demographic characteristics of users in open spaces also an important criteria including; age, marital status, presence of children at home, educational attainment and annual income. While good of access and linkage should be the main factor in open spaces design follow by sociability, activities and degree of comfort are the key factors according to. A high-quality nearby recreation area with easy access are an important factors, also for some security, safety, maintenance and management are an important factor in open spaces. While environmental factors have a significant impact on residents and their willingness to participate in the residential open spaces as well as place attachment has a great role in park utilization and social interaction. So individual usage and social interactions in open spaces influenced by varied and different factors, (this factors identify an answer for the second question of the paper about the factors that affecting social interaction in open spaces of Baghdad community):

- Fig. 3: Means to enhance social interaction in Urban Fabric of Baghdad
Source: Authors



In conclusion this paper indicate that the main means to achieve social interaction in open space in Baghdad is provide an appropriate open space. Results also state that one of the most important means to enhance social interaction is to make more efforts by authorities responsible to maintenance, construction, rehabilitation and administration of open spaces and parks in Baghdad, as well as provide a suitable spaces of green spaces with an appropriate factors.

Findings of this study also confirm that existing parks in Baghdad nowadays do not perform their role functionally that reflected on residents social-recreational activities and interaction that limited into indoor spaces for limited number of times only. Therefore the results of this paper emphasize that achieving appropriate green open spaces in Baghdad city is an essential to enhance physical, health, mental, social, environmental, and aesthetic aspects for residents and city, thereby encourages social interactions in the city between citizens.

So results of this paper are useful reference for urban and landscape planners, architects, social psychologist, Municipality of Baghdad and researchers in this fields. That will be in the line with the aim of this paper to contribute in outdoor recreation and relaxation development fields and social development. The results of this study regarding to the factors of open spaces also could develop the effectiveness and efficiency of open spaces in different cities in general, especially in Malaysia where the similarity of some social and religious conditions between Malaysia and Iraq.

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