



Journal Homepage: [-www.journalijar.com](http://www.journalijar.com)

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/23434
DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/23434>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

GULF MARKETS CONSERVATION ANALYSIS AND COMPARATIVE: A CASE STUDY OF SOUQ AL-MUBARAKIYA IN KUWAIT CITY

M.Yilmaz¹ and B. I.Aksulu²

1. PhD Researcher, Department of Architecture, Istanbul Okan University, Istanbul, Türkiye.
2. Professor, Department of Architecture, Istanbul Okan University, Istanbul, Türkiye.

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 8 March 2026
Final Accepted: 10 April 2026
Published: May 2026

Key words:-

Kuwait, Souq Al-Mubarakiya, heritage conservation, Gulf traditional markets, urban identity, traditional markets comparative analysis.

Abstract

Traditional markets & souks in the Arabian Gulf areas such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Traditional markets & souks in the Arabian Gulf areas such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates are very important landmarks and a significant part of the urban architecture and traditional heritage. The traditional markets of countries represent the historical development of social interaction with trade routes of land-based or maritime routes. This interaction not only influences the market typology but also the urban morphology of the whole urban fabric. However, in Kuwait, due to the oil discovery in the 50th urban transformation and modernization movement to develop the country, it has had a big impact on the market development to attract tourism and improve the image of the city. The change of the physical and social pattern in Kuwait unintentionally had a significant impact on the authenticity and originality of the markets in the Gulf country, and specifically on "Souq Al Mubarakiya". The research investigates the conservation challenges and transformation processes of "Souq Al-Mubarakiya" in Kuwait City by preparing a comparative analysis of selected traditional markets from the Gulf area that are located on the maritime Silk trading route, including Souq Waqif in Doha, Manama Souq in Bahrain, Muttrah Souq in Oman, and Bushehr Bazaar in Iran. The research included a mixed method approach integrating historical-documentary analysis, architectural field survey, comparative market analysis, visual documentation, in-depth interviews, questionnaire surveys, and SWOT analysis to collect the results from all the methods mentioned.

"© 2026 by the Author(s). Published by IJAR under CC BY 4.0. Unrestricted use allowed with credit to the author."

As the research started with an overview of "Souq Al Mubarakiya", it got more specific on the north-east section of the Souq since it retains the most original part of the Souq in terms of architectural and spatial characteristics after the latest restoration of the Souq. The findings of the research have shown and proved that many parts of the market remain preserved and original. However, the souq has undergone significant physical and functional transformations till today, resulting in inappropriate restoration practices, façade deformation, inconsistent signage, and a change in the shop's original function. The comparative study has shown that most of the restoration and conservation

Corresponding Author:-M.Yilmaz

Address:-PhD Researcher, Department of Architecture, Istanbul Okan University, Istanbul, Türkiye.

projects on the Gulf markets have a more balanced approach in terms of commercial, heritage protection, and tourism than the current situation of "Souq Al Mubarakiya". The study concludes by using an integrated conservation approach emphasizing architectural authenticity, social continuity, heritage-sensitive redevelopment, tenant regulation, and tourism management. This research contributes to the limited literature on traditional Kuwaiti architecture and provides a plan for preserving historic markets within rapidly modernizing Gulf cities.

Introduction:-

Traditional markets, commonly referred to as "souqs," are a historical representation of the commercial, social, and cultural foundation of cities in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East. Old cities' "souqs" not only function as centers of trading, but they also act as a significant social space and interaction, which present the collective identity, architectural traditions, and spatial organization of societies in the cities. One of the important markets in the Gulf region is Souq Al-Mubarakiya in Kuwait, Kuwait City which occupies an important historical position along the maritime Silk trade networks and vernacular architecture and urban development.



Figure 1: Maritime Silk Trading

Souq Al-Mubarakiya was one of the earliest and most important commercial centers in Kuwait before the discovery of oil around the 50th. As the market reflected the traditional urban morphology of Kuwait City, it is characterized by organic pedestrian paths with narrow shaded alleys, mixed commercial shops, and socially integrated public spaces. Maritime Silk trade routes linking Kuwait to Iraq, Iran, India, East Africa, and other regional trading points had a major role in the formation of organization and shop distribution of the souq, as many countries located their trading in the souq. Having the souq close to the land-based Silk trade route and the Maritime Silk trade route made Souq Al-Mubarakiya an intersectional point between the two routes, and therefore, we can see the effect of many different cultures on the design of the souq.



Figure 1: Old City of Kuwait Redevelopment After the Discovery of Oil

Until the discovery of oil in Kuwait around 1938, rapid urban transformation and extensive modernization processes had significantly altered the traditional urban fabric of Kuwait City and had a great impact on the conservation of the market's originality. Large sections of the historical city were demolished to accommodate modern infrastructure and road systems, and contemporary development projects. These transformations weakened the continuity of traditional architecture while disrupting the original spatial and social identity of many historic districts.

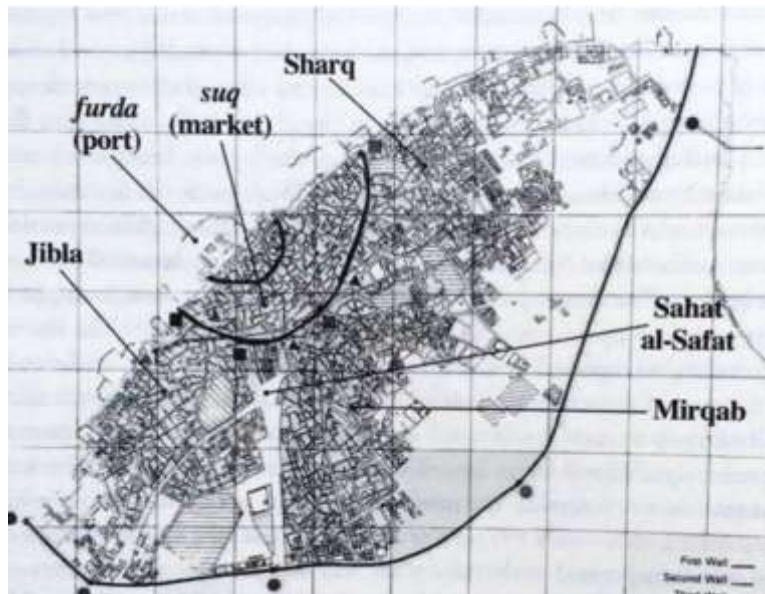


Figure 3: Pre-oil Kuwait City Urban Pattern and Enclosure Walls Constructed in 1760, 1804, and 1920

After independence from Britain around 1961, the urban transformation of Kuwait City accelerated, resulting in a wide-scale demolition of traditional urban areas (Old City of Kuwait) with extensive changes to the historic character of Souq Al-Mubarakiya. Besides that, the 2022 fire had significant physical destruction to many sections of

the market, expanding the ongoing concerns and issues regarding restoration methods that are affecting the architectural authenticity and heritage protection of the souq.

Although several restoration and redevelopment projects were implemented within Souq Al-Mubarakiya, the issue of prioritizing commercial modernization and tourism-based redevelopment rather than focusing on architectural authenticity and historical continuity affected how the souq looks today. As a result, several sections of the souq now have façade distortion due to inappropriate material use and inconsistent signage systems added with subdivision of traditional commercial units and functional transformation that differs from the original identity of the market. The preservation of historic markets in the rapid modernization of Gulf cities is an increasingly important research area in architecture and urban heritage conservation studies. Historic markets such as Souq Waqif in Qatar, Muttrah Souq in Oman, and Manama Souq in Bahrain have implemented varying conservation and redevelopment techniques that will be important comparative case studies for this research to use in evaluating the transformation of Souq Al-Mubarakiya. This study aims to investigate the conservation challenges and transformation processes that affect Souq Al-Mubarakiya by using a comparative analysis of selected Gulf and other traditional markets. Another aim of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of current conservation approaches to develop an integrated protection framework that is able to preserve both the physical authenticity & social continuity of the market. The primary objectives of the study are to investigate the historical and architectural transformation of Souq al-Mubarakiya, evaluate current conservation conditions of the market, compare Souq al-Mubarakiya with other Gulf and regional markets, and identify challenges in conservation affecting the authenticity of the Souq, formulate a proposal for an integrated conservation and management framework that's suitable for living historic markets within modernizing Gulf cities.

Research Questions and Hypothesis:-

The purpose of this research is to examine and investigate the originality of how the Al Mubarakiya souq was restored in comparison to the Kuwaiti traditional architecture, aiming to ensure the long-term preservation of an active cultural souq while maintaining its original style within the context of rapid urban transformation in Gulf cities. The research is guided by the following questions: (1) To what extent do existing conservation and restoration practices preserve the architectural authenticity and historical identity of Souq Al-Mubarakiya? (2) How has modernization and functional transformation of shops affected the physical and socio-cultural continuity of the market? (3) Which conservation and management approaches are most suitable for balancing heritage protection with commercial sustainability in active traditional Gulf markets? Based on these questions, the study hypothesizes that successful conservation of traditional Gulf markets requires integrated management approaches combining physical preservation, socio-cultural continuity, and controlled commercial adaptation.

Originality and Theoretical Framework:-

Unlike previous studies done by Kuwaiti researchers that focus on architectural documentation or restoration history such as the book of "The Old Souk of Kuwait by Mohamad R. Jamal" and "History of Architecture and Engineering in Kuwait By Sabah M. A. Al-Rayes", this research develops an integrated conservation framework linking physical authenticity (Architecture), social continuity (Interaction), and commercial transformation of shops (Function) within an active Gulf traditional markets. The study is further distinguished by its mixed-method approach combining field surveys, owners and tenants' interviews, comparative Gulf market analysis, and SWOT evaluation following the 2022 fire in Souq Al-Mubarakiya. The study adopts a theoretical framework grounded in contemporary urban heritage conservation theory, particularly the concepts of authenticity, living heritage, and Historic Urban Landscape (HUL). The Nara Document on Authenticity emphasizes that authenticity extends beyond material fabric to include function, traditions, spirit, and cultural continuity. Similarly, UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape approach recognizes historic urban areas as dynamic socio-economic systems rather than isolated monuments, and lastly, the Kuwaiti authenticity laws that were established on the 17, of April 1980, by the Kuwaiti Amiri Abdullah Al Salem Al Sabah. It is the first Law on Antiquities, which includes forty-five articles and sets the rules for identifying, owning, and protecting antiquities. In this law, antiquity is defined as "anything left of civilizations, or left by previous generations", which dates back to forty years or more when it had artistic or historical value.

Literature Review:-

One of the challenges facing historic urban environments in rapidly developing cities is heritage conservation. Traditional markets are a combination of complex heritage systems where tangible architectural heritage is combined with intangible cultural, social, and economic practices. In order to conserve such markets, in-depth research should be done to understand the spatial organization, the historical continuity of commercial activity,

collective memory, and social interaction. Within this research, the approaches to urban heritage preservation methods are based on the international heritage organizations and conservation charters, such as the Venice Charter (1964), Burra Charter (1979), Washington Charter (1987), and Nara Document on Authenticity (1994). These charters emphasize the importance of preserving authenticity, integrity, and historical continuity. Unlike isolated monuments, these traditional markets are a representation of living heritage environments that are continuously shaped by commercial activity and social interactions in urban transformation. Research approaches of this research did not focus only on physical restoration, but it included social continuity and functional sustainability while not neglecting tourism management and community participation.

Traditional Markets in Gulf Cities and Conservation Challenges:-

Traditional Gulf markets (souq) urban morphology usually consists of narrow shaded alleys and organically developed circulation systems mixed with commercial functions and internal courtyards that are adapted to the harsh climate conditions in the Gulf. Following the discovery of oil, modern planning and infrastructure projects resulted in the demolition of a great part of the old cities, resulting in many losses to the original architectural character of their markets. Recently, there has been increasing interest from governmental and public parties in heritage preservation within Gulf countries to restore and redevelopment projects that seek to balance economic and tourism development with heritage conservation. This research sheds light on Souq Al Mubarakiya in comparison to other souqs in the Gulf region to extract what action that are useful or harmful to the conservation and restoration process. Generally, from what has been observed from the example studies, heritage markets face several common conservation challenges, listed as commercial pressure and tourism-oriented redevelopment, functional transformation and changing consumer behavior, inappropriate restoration methods, loss of architectural authenticity, replacement of traditional materials, façade alteration and signage inconsistency, subdivision of commercial units, weak conservation regulations, and conflicts between modernization and heritage preservation. The research conservation plan will mainly focus on understanding these challenges and their impacts. Therefore, several strategies that combine architectural guidelines, urban regulation, social continuity, commercial sustainability, and public participation will be considered. The conservation of traditional Gulf markets requires a balance between economic sustainability and historical authenticity. Redevelopment for tourism, as many markets within the Gulf countries are going through, is transforming souqs into leisure destinations. This transformation can enhance the country's economy but might increase risks to cultural continuity and authenticity. Conservation strategies for Souq Al-Mubarakiya should be effective in preserving its commercial and social functions and preventing it from becoming a destination for tourists only.

Research Methodology:-

This study has adopted a mixed-method approach integrating historical-documentary analysis, architectural field surveys, comparative market analysis, visual documentation, in-depth interviews, questionnaire surveys, and SWOT analysis. This research methodology will be broken down into two sections, as you can see below:

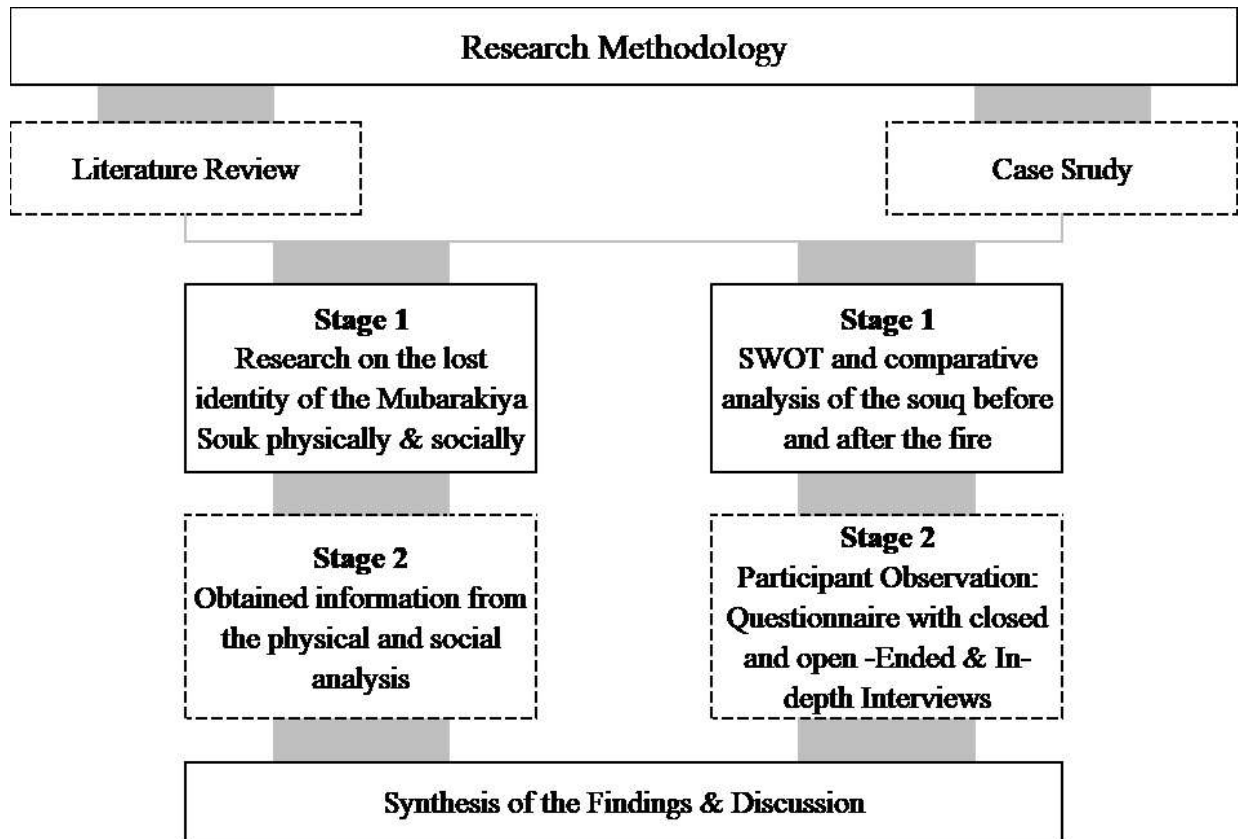


Figure 2: Research Methodology Hierarchy

The methodology was divided into two major components. The first component focused on historical and architectural investigation through archival research, historical maps, aerial photographs, historical documents, urban analysis, and literature review concerning traditional Kuwaiti architecture, Gulf markets, and conservation theory. The second component focused on comparative and empirical analysis through architectural field surveys, physical documentation, comparative urban analysis, questionnaire surveys, stakeholder interviews, SWOT analysis, and comparative evaluation with regional traditional markets. As mentioned, this study will focus on the north-eastern section of Souq Al-Mubarakiya, as that part still preserves the original spatial and architectural characteristics. Along with the information gathered above, the study won't bring real value without a comparative study between Souq Al Mubarakiya and other markets that brings attention to the historical relationship with maritime trade routes and their relevance to the development of traditional architecture and heritage in the Gulf area. The markets include Souq Waqif (Qatar), Manama Souq (Bahrain), Muttrah Souq (Oman), and Bushehr Bazaar (Iran).

Last but not least, the study shows that the change of the market's original function and the social impact have a major impact on market development over time. Questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews targeted multiple groups, including visitors, shop owners, tenants, and local users. Lastly, the collected data have been analyzed using descriptive interpretation, comparative evaluation, thematic analysis, and SWOT assessment to present the study findings and how many criteria should be taken into consideration in the evaluation and conclusion sections. The empirical part of the research was carried out through Google Forms questionnaire surveys, together with field observations and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire survey process included a total of 85 participants, including visitors, shop tenants, shop owners, local users, and stakeholders having a connection to Souq Al-Mubarakiya. The questionnaire contained closed and open-ended questions about architectural authenticity, tourism impact, conservation quality, social continuity, user satisfaction, and commercial transformation. The survey results were validated through in-situ architectural documentation, visual analysis, and comparison with selected markets of the Gulf.

Historical Evolution of Souq Al-Mubarakiya:-

Souq Al-Mubarakiya is considered to be one of the only lasting traditional and cultural symbols of Kuwait's traditional heritage from the pre-oil period till now. As the market developed organically in relation to Kuwait's maritime Silk trading route and regional trade networks (check Error! Reference source not found. connecting the city with Iraq, Iran, India, and East Africa.

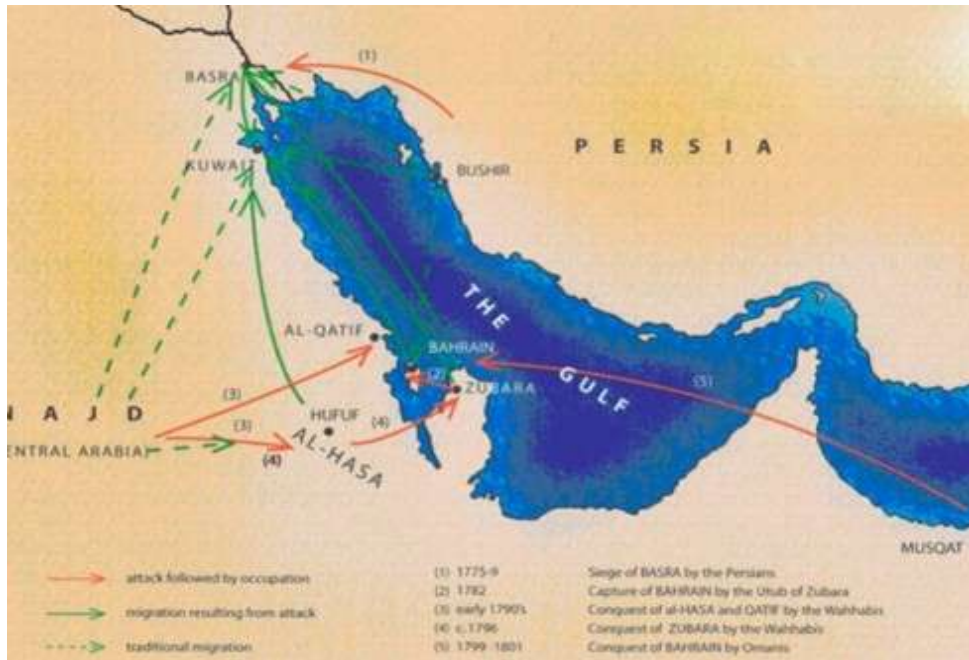


Figure 5: Kuwaiti Sea Trading Routes in the 18th and 19th Centuries

The maritime Silk trading was an important artery for the bulk transport of spices, luxury goods, and raw materials, while also serving as a vital channel for cultural and religious exchange. Through time, Kuwait gained a great position on the route due to its connection to Basra, Iraq, as it is the closest coastal harbor to Basra.

Under the influence of the spatial organization of the market on that route, which reflected traditional Gulf commercial morphology that is characterized by compact and organic circulation systems, consistent alleys, integrated social spaces, and shaded pedestrian environments. The north-eastern section of the souq represented one of the earliest constructed and developed parts of the souq, as it is an extension of the Merchants' Market that was demolished during the city's urban regeneration. Several historical pieces of evidence indicate that the first commercial activities in Kuwait emerged within that part of the souq. The growth of the urban area happened in semi-concentric patterns starting from the main harbor near the Seif Palace. Most of the photos and maps found within several research pieces are dated between 1940 and 1952. These photos and maps were taken during the agreement with the British government and construction companies on the new urban plan for Kuwait after the oil discovery. Referring to the old maps and illustrations in Figure 6, it is clear how the linear structure of the souq was created, starting from the seacoast to the Merchants' Market and into our existing section.







Figure 3: The Merchants' Market and Entrance of the Case Study

As the market has been constructed linearly, the function of the shops and land use have been distributed accordingly as follows, government and religious buildings including the Great Mosque and early government offices near the souq, gold and perfume souqs, food and spices area, butcheries and fish market, textile and fabric market, open courtyards and coffee shop as the souq have the oldest coffee shop in Kuwait (BonachieCafé). As observed, the importance of the souq comes from the variety of functions and activities it includes. Preserving this function within the souq is no less important than preserving and restoring its physical appearance. Many pictures, old maps, and shop owners' statements have been collected and analyzed in this study to review the traditional Kuwait architecture character of the market, and later on, they are presented as part of the comparison and conclusion.

Comparative Analysis of Gulf Traditional Markets:-

The development of Souq Al-Mubarakiyah cannot be understood in isolation from the broader regional and transregional trade systems that historically shaped the Arabian Gulf. While the Silk Road constituted a predominantly land-based network linking East Asia to the Mediterranean, the Gulf region functioned as a complementary maritime corridor that connected the Arabian Peninsula with India, Persia, and East Africa. The research comparative analysis investigates the transformation of the market, conservation strategies applied, architectural authenticity protection, spatial organization of shops, and socio-economic continuity of selected Gulf traditional markets in relation to Souq Al-Mubarakiya. Based on the applied analysis, the selected markets share common characteristics such as a historical relationship with maritime trade, as all markets act as a maritime port. Organic urban development, like all markets, has an intersection with a land-based trade route in the center of the city. Compact pedestrian morphology where the main artery of the market has branches that lead people to the residential part of the city. Mixed commercial functions based on what is being sold. Climatic adaptation, as all alleys are shaded to protect the shoppers from the summer heat. Lastly, heritage tourism potential as all markets now act as an attraction point for people, especially during public occasions. However, each market demonstrates different conservation approaches and redevelopment strategies.

<p>Comparative Analysis of Gulf Traditional Markets</p>	
<p>Manama Souq (Bahrain)</p>	
<p>Manama Souq represents one of the oldest traditional markets in Bahrain and maintains significant continuity of commercial activity within the historic center of Manama. The market preserves several traditional urban characteristics, including narrow pedestrian alleys, compact commercial units, and mixed retail functions. However, modern commercial activities and tourism pressures have introduced visual inconsistency and varying levels of façade alteration. Compared to Souq Al-Mubarakiya, Manama Souq demonstrates stronger continuity of traditional commercial functions but weaker architectural regulation concerning signage and façade treatment.</p>	
<p>Souq Waqif (Qatar)</p>	
<p>Souq Waqif in Doha represents one of the most prominent examples of heritage-oriented reconstruction in the Gulf region. The market underwent extensive restoration and redevelopment projects aimed at recreating the traditional architectural identity of the souq using vernacular architectural language, traditional materials, and controlled urban design guidelines. Compared to Souq Al-Mubarakiya, Souq Waqif demonstrates stronger visual consistency, more integrated tourism management, stricter architectural control, and more cohesive urban identity. However, some researchers argue that parts of Souq Waqif represent reconstructed heritage environments rather than entirely authentic historical fabric.</p>	
<p>Muttrah Souq (Oman)</p>	
<p>Muttrah Souq in Oman retains strong continuity between traditional commercial activity and historic urban structure. The market preserves narrow shaded circulation systems and strong spatial continuity adapted to local climatic conditions. Conservation interventions within Muttrah Souq have generally emphasized preservation rather than extensive reconstruction. Compared to Souq Al-Mubarakiya, Muttrah Souq demonstrates more successful integration of tourism with heritage continuity while maintaining stronger preservation of traditional urban morphology.</p>	
<p>Bushehr Bazaar (Iran)</p>	
<p>Bushehr Bazaar demonstrates important examples of climatic adaptation and traditional commercial architecture within Gulf coastal cities. The market preserves narrow shaded passages and vernacular architectural features responding to environmental conditions. Compared to Souq Al-Mubarakiya, Bushehr Bazaar demonstrates stronger continuity of traditional climatic design strategies and more coherent preservation of urban texture.</p>	

Comparative Interpretation:-

Souq Al-Mubarakiya, Souq Waqif, Muttrah Souq, Manama Souq, and Bushehr Bazaar were compared on the basis of several standardized indicators, including authenticity retention, architectural regulation, tourism pressure, functional continuity, conservation strategy, and preservation of traditional commercial activity. The comparative analysis reveals significant differences in conservation philosophy, tourism integration, architectural regulation, and heritage management among Gulf traditional markets.



Figure 4: Characteristics of Similar Souqs to Al Mubarakiyah on the Maritime Trade Route

Souq Waqif demonstrates the strongest example of integrated heritage reconstruction and tourism-oriented conservation. However, Muttrah Souq represents a more preservation-oriented approach emphasizing continuity of urban morphology. Manama Souq reflects stronger commercial continuity but weaker architectural control. Souq Al-Mubarakiya currently occupies an intermediate position between preservation and redevelopment. While important historical and architectural elements survive, the market lacks sufficiently integrated conservation management and consistent architectural regulation. The results show that Souq Waqif has stronger tourism management and visual regulation, while Muttrah Souq has a stronger preservation of traditional urban morphology and continuity of commercial identity. Souq Al-Mubarakiya retains the essential, authentic characteristics. However, irregular restoration interventions and fragmented conservation management continue to threaten the long-term preservation of the market.

Table 1: Comparative Results with Souq Al-Mubarakiyah

Market Name	Historical Role	Spatial Form	Comparative Results with Souq Al-Mubarakiyah
Souq AlMubarakiyah	Maritime redistribution market	Hybrid linear lanes & clustered alleys	Benchmark case. Combines Gulf maritime trade logic, social vitality, heritage continuity, and mixed commercial uses.
Manama Souq	Pearl trade and island mercantile center	Organic compact alleys with clustered retail zones	Similar merchant-led organic growth and continuity. More island-port oriented, while Al-Mubarakiyah had stronger inland caravan links.
Souq Waqif	Local exchange market	Reconstructed alley-based heritage fabric	Similar heritage identity today, but Souq Waqif depends more on curated reconstruction, while Al-Mubarakiyah

			preserves stronger authentic continuity.
Bushehr Bazaar	Persian Gulf port bazaar	Climatic shaded bazaar blocks & merchant houses	Strong parallels in maritime trade and environmental adaptation. Al-Mubarakiyah retained a stronger Arabian social-market character.
Muttrah Souq	Indian Ocean maritime souq	Dense, covered lanes and linear passages	Similar Arab maritime souq identity and walkability. Muttrah retained a stronger harbor identity; Al-Mubarakiyah became more integrated into the inland urban fabric.
Istanbul Grand Bazaar	Imperial commercial complex	Radial/checkered covered network	Similar importance as a symbolic market center, but architecturally far more monumental and enclosed than Al-Mubarakiyah.

The comparative analysis demonstrates several key findings for the successful conservation of traditional Gulf markets:

1. Traditional Gulf souqs evolved through organic growth linked to maritime trade, unlike formally planned inland bazaars.
2. Kuwait’s location enabled Souq Al-Mubarakiyah to become a gateway between sea trade and inland caravan networks.
3. Al-Mubarakiyah retains stronger historical commercial continuity than many reconstructed Gulf markets.
4. The souq reflects a hybrid morphology combining Arabian, Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean commercial influences.
5. Surviving historic fabric within the market remains significant for future restoration strategies.
6. Souq Al-Mubarakiyah should not solely be classified as a local market, but as one of the major surviving examples of Gulf commercial urban heritage.

Findings and Discussion:-

The data collection for the findings has been established through questionnaires, interviews, and on-site observations. The research findings were based on a social and physical study. The physical analysis has been done by drawing all the souq shops' plans and elevations, along with the material and design elements analysis. On the other hand, the social findings focused on users’ perceptions, commercial activities, cultural identity, visitor satisfaction, and the relationship between the community and the historic market. The results have been set based on questionnaires and interview responses from visitors, tenants, owners, and other users of the souq. The preservation has been prepared by field surveys, visual documentation, and comparative analysis.



Figure 8: Signage, Façade, and Protection Quality Distortion

Physical Transformation and Architectural Distortion:-

Al-Mubarakiya Souq has been through a significant physical transformation. Many restorative projects have been applied to the souq's different sections; however, the overall restoration plan was divided into several phases without a master plan. The absence of the master plan causes the souq to have different restorational and conservation strategies and therefore different applications.

Field surveys indicate major issues include façade modification, inconsistent signage, replacement of traditional materials, subdivision of shops, visual distortion, and inappropriate restoration interventions. The physical condition of several commercial units demonstrates weak coordination between tenants, owners, and conservation authorities. The study also identified substantial variation in architectural quality between different sections of the market. Some areas retain strong continuity of traditional architectural characteristics, while others have experienced substantial visual and functional transformation.

Functional Transformation:-

Most of the shops within Souq Al Mubarakiya are owned by different Kuwaiti families. As it is observed above, maintaining the original function of the shop is very important to preserve the traditional identity of the souq. However, the authority did not set a conservation plan with rules to maintain the original function of the shops. The transformation of shops' functions has significantly influenced the spatial identity of the souq. Many traditional shops have been replaced by retail and trading uses. The uncontrolled functional transformation is weakening the historical authenticity and social identity of the market.

Social and Cultural Continuity:-

Questionnaire surveys and interviews reveal strong public support for preserving the historical identity of Souq Al-Mubarakiya. Participants emphasized the importance of preserving traditional architecture to maintain social identity and to protect the historical memory and traditional activities. The findings demonstrate that Souq Al-Mubarakiya continues to act as an active social zone for Kuwaiti and foreign residents and a cultural environment rather than being oriented to tourism purposes. Many interviewees have emphasized the need for oriented social events that discuss and present the historical aspects of the souq. The event and exhibition that could be run in the souq can enhance the public awareness of the importance of preserving the souq and maintaining the traditional appearance of the souq. Besides that, workshops can be prepared for shop owners and tenants to teach them about the different restoration and conservation techniques that should be followed in maintaining the shops. Lastly, many interviews have shed light on Souq security as there are no security entrance points or security Measures to keep the Souq secure and protected.



Figure 9: Cultural Activity in Souq Al-Mubarakiya

SWOT Analysis:-

As it has been observed, the traditional markets in the Arab-Islamic city are not only a historical and commercial spaces; they act as centers of exchange, social interaction, and cultural continuity. Much research has emphasized that the value of historic markets lies not only in their architectural design, but also in their impact on social life, including craft traditions, pedestrian vitality, and the continuity of commercial functions. The SWOT analysis of this study identified several important strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting the future conservation of the market. The analysis has been divided into several categories, inspired by the findings. The categories are divided into protection and restoration, development, structure, tourism, economy, society and culture, and environmental categories. The result of the analysis on one hand, demonstrates that the Al Mubarakiyah souq still presents an important heritage value even after the distortion of many of its elements. The souq still presents cultural symbolism for Kuwait in terms of commercial and social dimensions. On the other hand, there are many operational weaknesses, including fragmented conservation methods along the different sections of the souq. Many inconsistent architectural elements, such as signage design, inconsistent use of materials, and excessive modernism style effect. The loss of traditional aspects of the souq has a big impact on how the souq is functioning since many shoppers are losing interest in getting around a souq with offices and trading corporations. The analysis further highlights important opportunities for the souq, particularly in the fields of heritage tourism, traditional craft, and educational activities. Many interviews mentioned the importance of the souq not only for Kuwaitis but also for all Gulf countries, as they visit the souq on public occasions. This can result in many conservation strategies opportunities that could position the market as a leading heritage destination within the Gulf region. Lastly, the analysis mentioned many threats related to the replacement of original craftsmen and superficial heritage branding. Connecting the younger generations with the traditional markets and culture is a crucial point that the conservation plan should take into consideration.

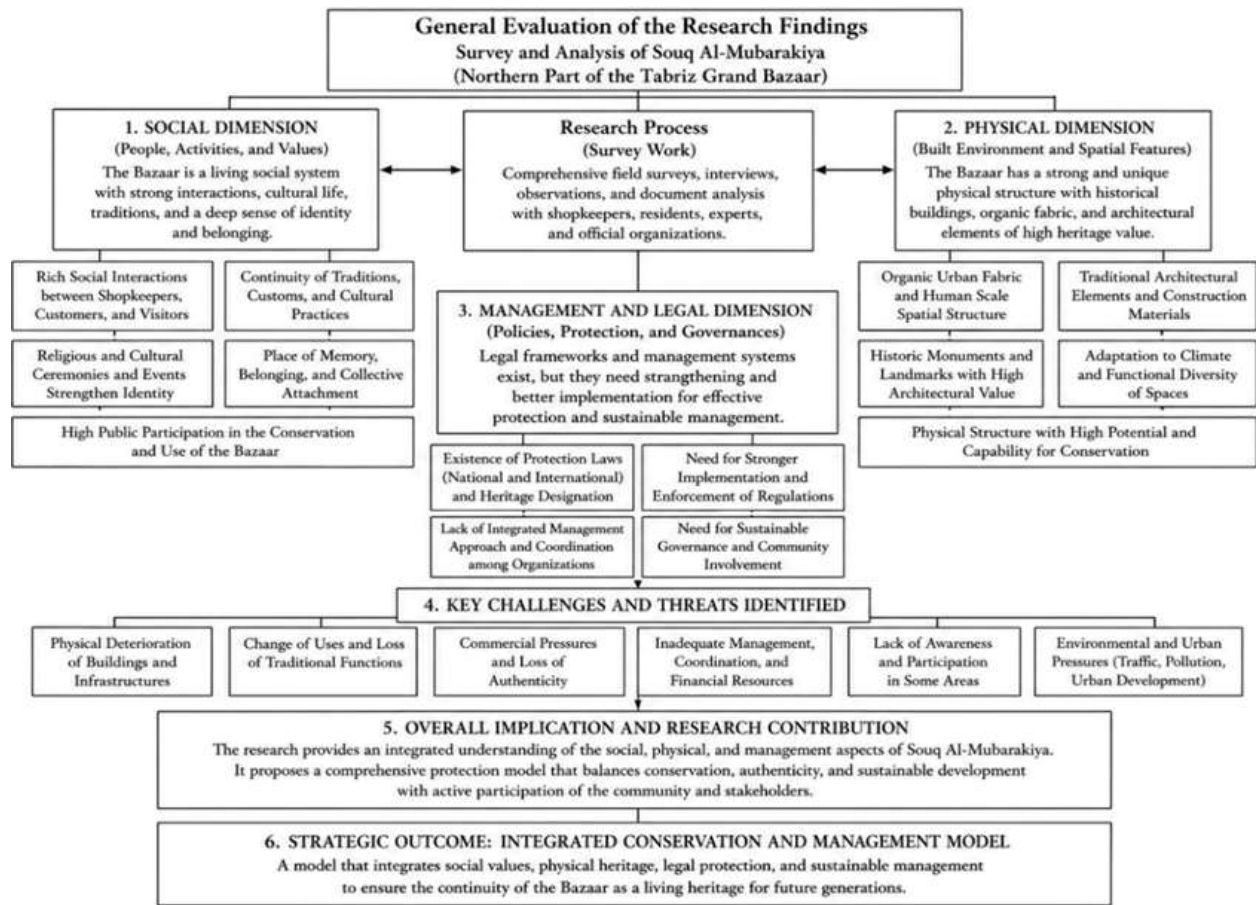


Figure 5: Survey and Analysis of Social and Physical Structure

In conclusion, the findings of this research have been collected based on site analysis and on-site surveys. The findings of the study have been divided into physical and social dimensions to not only conserve the souq physically but also to maintain a sustainable function within the souq for future generations.

Proposed Conservation Framework:-

The findings of this research demonstrate that the conservation of Souq Al-Mubarakiya cannot be approached only through isolated restoration projects without considering the other aspects. The market functions as a living urban environment where physical space, commercial activity, and social interaction are interconnected. In summary, the future protection of the souq requires an integrated conservation strategy capable of preserving both the physical architectural heritage and its socio-cultural value. The comparative analysis revealed that several traditional Gulf markets, particularly Souq Waqif and Muttrah Souq, achieved relatively successful conservation outcomes because their restoration processes are beyond façade rehabilitation and physical conservation, but focused on heritage-sensitive regulation. In contrast, many interventions implemented within Souq Al-Mubarakiya focused primarily on commercial redevelopment and visual modernization, which impacted the historical authenticity. The proposed conservation framework developed in this study, therefore, aims to establish a balanced approach between preservation and contemporary urban functionality. The framework is structured around five interrelated dimensions: architectural conservation, urban continuity, socio-cultural sustainability, tourism management, and institutional regulation.

Preservation of Social and Commercial Continuity:-

The research findings show that the relevance of Souq Al-Mubarakiya is not limited to its physical construction. The questionnaire and interview answers demonstrated that the public commitment to the souq as a social and cultural context was substantial and was linked with the traditional activities and urban life within the souq. Unlike general heritage sites, the cultural value of traditional markets in the Gulf countries relates to daily use and social interaction. Thus, conservation efforts should not only restore the structures and physical places, but also the historic roles and social activities that used to take place in the market. Therefore, the study suggests the conservation of traditional commercial activities, the promotion of locally owned enterprises, the encouragement of the continuation of traditional crafts, the safeguarding of public meeting spaces, and the incorporation of cultural festivals and traditional events into conservation planning.

Architectural Conservation and Urban Authenticity:-

One of the principal findings of the study is that the authenticity of Souq Al-Mubarakiya has been increasingly weakened through uncontrolled façade alteration, inappropriate signage systems, subdivision of traditional shops, and the use of incompatible construction materials. The proposed conservation strategy, therefore, recommends the establishment of a unified architectural conservation guideline (Master plan) for all future restoration within the souq. These guidelines should regulate façade proportions and architectural composition, signage dimensions and materials, preservation of traditional alley widths, restoration materials and color palettes, roofing systems and shading elements, treatment of openings, shopfronts, and decorative details. The proposed conservation plan should also emphasize the preservation of the spatial continuity of the traditional circulation network, which represents one of the most important characteristics of Gulf market morphology. The narrow pedestrian alleys, compact commercial organization, and human-scale spatial hierarchy contribute significantly to the environmental comfort and cultural identity of the souq. Therefore, avoiding excessive widening of circulation routes, large-scale demolition, or insertion of architecturally incompatible commercial structures should be studied and proposed.



Figure 6: Proposed Conservation and Management Plan

Tourism Management and Economic Sustainability:-

In Gulf historic markets, authenticity and commercialization exist within a complex and often contradictory relationship. Tourism-led redevelopment can simultaneously support economic sustainability while accelerating visual standardization and commodification of heritage environments. A comparative investigation revealed that tourism exerts a growing influence on the change of traditional Gulf markets. Although tourism creates significant economic opportunities and enhances cultural importance, unregulated tourism-driven renovation could damage authenticity and promote commercialization. Souq Al-Mubarakiya is currently facing increasing tourism demand due to eateries, attractions, and commercial branding. While these activities enhance the market's economic vibrancy, excessive commercialization threatens to supplant the historic urban identity with a homogenized entertainment-centric atmosphere. The proposed framework emphasizes the integration of tourism through the preservation of traditional market activities, regulation of commercial branding, restriction of visually intrusive advertisements, heritage-sensitive tourism programming, and interpretive systems elucidating the historical significance of the souq. Tourism ought to preserve the historical integrity of the market instead of converting it into a fabricated commercial setting disconnected from its authentic cultural backdrop.

Institutional and Regulatory Framework:-

One of the major challenges identified throughout the study is the lack of a holistic approach for conserving the whole market as one piece, including tenant regulations and urban control measures. The study therefore recommends the establishment of a specialized heritage authority or interdisciplinary conservation committee responsible for reviewing the current situation of the whole market, designing a conservation guideline for future projects, coordinating between different construction companies and heritage institutions, and lastly, monitoring maintenance standards and documenting all architectural changes within the market.

Integrated Conservation Model for Souq Al-Mubarakiya:-

The aim of the proposed conservation plan is to develop a long-term integrated management model that will ensure heritage preservation, economic sustainability, and urban continuity. The conservation plan of traditional markets requires constant cooperation between the protection of architecture through the Kuwait Municipalities and social activity through the antiquity's protection authority. The comparative findings of this study indicate that the long-term survival of traditional Gulf markets depends not only on the preservation of buildings but also on the urban environment in which these markets operate. Souq Al-Mubarakiya should thus be understood as a lively heritage environment, where its historical value is the result of the interplay between architecture, commerce, culture, and collective urban memory. Below is a proposal for the socio-economic conservation plan illustrated on the map of the souq. The map proposed to locate attraction points for the users next to the shops, mosque, and cafes that can host these events. Besides that, different security points have been placed on the map to start a closed secure zone for users. Different courtyards that revive projects should be placed at certain points where the souq has a combination of shops that share the same craftsmen. Educational events should also be introduced next to Al Mubarakiya school to enhance the use of the school and provide workshops for users, shop owners, and tenants that teach them more about the importance of conserving the traditional architecture of the souq, and to teach them the proper ways they should follow when they join the process of restoring the shops. Lastly, one of the big issues that impacts the market users is the insufficient parking spots and general facilities.

Implementation and Governance Strategy:-

The effective preservation of Souq Al-Mubarakiya is dependent on a number of strategies that will allow for the coordination of architectural conservation, cultural and social continuity, sustainable commercial operations, and tourist management. Research results indicate that unplanned and fragmented restoration, along with a lack of unified conservation authority, contribute greatly to the visual inconsistency in the souq. Thus, the proposed framework will be implemented as an interdisciplinary phased governance model that includes the Kuwait Municipality, Heritage Authorities, Conservation Specialists, Shop Owners, and Tourism Institutions. Implementation Phase One will include documentation and emergency conservation controls for all existing buildings. This stage should contain an architectural record of each façade, alleyway, roof system, and traditional retail unit, in addition to an identification of architecturally incompatible interventions and classification of all buildings into categories based on their relative level of need for preservation. Additionally, temporary regulations, which will limit or control modifications to building facades, signage systems, and types of materials used in construction/repair work in the souq, should be put in place at this time. A unified conservation master plan must be developed to eliminate additional piecemeal restoration projects that are currently compromising the architectural integrity of the souq. A key part of preparing a unified master plan for conserving the area will be to avoid continued piecemeal restorations of individual areas of the souq, which are causing the current fragmentation of the architecture. The second Implementation Phase will be focused on Architectural Rehabilitation and Functional Regulation in the Market. The Restoration Interventions should preserve the Proportions of the Traditional Architecture, the Alley Widths, Hierarchy of Circulation, Roofing Systems, and Commercial Spatial Organization (Traditional) as originally established by the architects who designed the Market.

Because Uncontrolled Transformation and Overwhelming Commercial Modernization have greatly diminished the Historical Identity of the Market, therefore Conservation Regulations that do not allow for an Excessive Subdivision of the Traditional Commercial Units into smaller commercial spaces should be developed and implemented to promote and encourage a continuation of traditional crafts, local businesses, and Culturally Related Commercial Activities. Surveys and Interviews using Google Forms and involving 85 respondents clearly showed an overwhelming public desire to maintain the historic identity and uses of the souk. Therefore, in order to protect this unique resource from being transformed into a tourist attraction and instead remain a thriving commercial and social space, preservation policy must seek to conserve the souk as such and not allow it to become a commodity-based tourist destination. The third implementation phase will focus on managing tourism and ensuring the long-term cultural viability of the site. Additionally, comparing Souq Waqif and Muttrah Souk also shows that tourism can be used to benefit heritage preservation, if managed through appropriate control systems. However, large-scale tourism-led developments can cause visual homogenization and the commodification of historic heritage settings. That meant it is recommended that, in addition to developing heritage sensitive tourism products, installing an educational and interpretative system for visitors about the history of the souk be included, and organizing cultural events (festival), as well as traditional crafts exhibition, be a part of this process, and regulating visually aggressive commercial signage and advertising. Organizing public awareness campaigns, as well as providing educational workshops, about the importance of conserving historical architecture, in addition to educating shop owners, tenants,

and visitors regarding preservation principles and the historical and cultural significance of traditional Kuwait architecture, is important. Long-term monitoring and government involvement are the most important aspects of this last phase. The proposed project study will recommend that an interdisciplinary conservation committee with specific responsibilities be established. The primary function of the committee would be to review all restoration proposals prior to their approval by local authorities. In addition, they would monitor maintenance standards, document any architectural changes made to properties listed in the registry, coordinate between government agencies (such as ministries) and private parties (such as property owners), and evaluate tourists' impact on the local market environment.



Figure 7: Proposed Socio-Economic Conservation Map

The implementation of this framework may contribute significantly to preserving the historical identity of Souq Al-Mubarakiya while allowing the market to continue functioning as an active commercial and cultural center within contemporary Kuwait City.

Conclusion:-

This study investigated the transformation and conservation challenges of Souq Al-Mubarakiya through a comparative analysis of selected Gulf and regional traditional markets. The research demonstrates that rapid modernization, commercial pressure, tourism-oriented redevelopment, and inconsistent restoration practices have significantly affected the architectural authenticity and spatial continuity of the market. Despite these

transformations, important elements of traditional Kuwaiti market architecture and urban identity remain preserved, particularly within the north-eastern section of the souq. Comparative analysis with Souq Waqif, Manama Souq, Muttrah Souq, Basra Souq, and Bushehr Bazaar demonstrates that successful conservation of traditional markets requires integrated approaches balancing architectural authenticity, social continuity, tourism management, and economic sustainability. The findings reveal that conservation should not be limited to physical restoration alone. Living historic markets require integrated management systems capable of preserving social interaction, traditional commercial activities, cultural identity, and urban continuity alongside architectural heritage. The proposed conservation framework emphasizes architectural regulation, heritage-sensitive redevelopment, social continuity, tourism management, and institutional coordination. The framework may also provide a transferable model for conserving active traditional markets within rapidly modernizing Gulf cities. The study contributes to the limited academic literature concerning Kuwaiti traditional architecture and demonstrates the importance of comparative regional analysis in understanding conservation strategies for historic commercial environments in the Gulf region. This research contributes to the limited academic literature concerning traditional Kuwaiti architecture and historic market conservation by providing a comprehensive investigation of Souq Al-Mubarakiya and its transformation over time. The study provides detailed architectural documentation of the north-eastern section of Souq Al-Mubarakiya, including maps, plans, elevations, historical analysis, land-use investigation, and physical condition assessment. This documentation establishes an important preservation record for future conservation efforts.

Policy Recommendations:-

Based on the findings and evaluation of this research, several policy recommendations are proposed for policymakers, conservation authorities, and urban planners responsible for the preservation of markets. First of all, the Kuwait Municipality and heritage authorities should have several meetings to design a master plan for Souq Al-Mubarakiya, organize and keep an eye on, and follow up with the restoration plans, signage systems, façade treatment, construction materials, and commercial redevelopment. The fragmented restoration approaches have contributed significantly to architectural inconsistency and visual distortion. Second, the conservation authorities should create strong control and monitoring systems to prevent wrong practices that would affect the authenticity of the souq. These regulations should include clear design guidelines for all architectural elements such as shopfronts, lighting systems, advertisements, roofing treatments, and restoration materials. Third, urban planners and governmental institutions should prioritize the preservation of traditional commercial functions and socio-cultural continuity within the souq. The research findings indicate that uncontrolled functional transformation and tourism-oriented commercialization threaten the historical identity of the market. Therefore, policies should encourage traditional crafts, local businesses, culturally related commercial activities, and public cultural events while limiting excessive entertainment-oriented redevelopment. Fourth, tourism authorities should adopt tourism management strategies that are sensitive to the protection of the heritage and work to balance economic sustainability with cultural preservation. Finally, to manage a smooth coordination between all the responsible parties, the study recommends establishing a committee involving policymakers, architects, urban authorities, tourism authorities, researchers, and shop owners that works on creating a bridge between them. Such coordination is essential to ensure long-term monitoring and heritage protection of historic market environments within contemporary Gulf cities.

Research Limitations and Future Studies:-

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Historical documents related to different parts of the souq are still incomplete, which makes the precise reconstruction of earlier phases very difficult. The market is currently undergoing many changes as well; therefore, the site will continue to develop while this study is being conducted. In addition, while the questionnaire sample provided valuable insight, broader longitudinal studies would further strengthen the understanding of changing public attitudes over time. Future research may therefore focus on comparative studies between Gulf souqs, GIS-based mapping of land-use transformation, oral history archives of merchants and traders, visitor behavior analysis, environmental comfort modelling, and economic frameworks capable of balancing rent growth with heritage continuity. A deeper study may examine how younger generations, where the digital era is more dominant, engage with traditional markets. The research undertaken in this thesis illustrates that Souq Al-Mubarakiya represents an essential part of Kuwait's urban cultural legacy. This importance can be seen as being based on several factors: the fact that it has managed to preserve many historic buildings, and its well-established reputation for the preservation of Kuwait's past is significant. Moreover, through ongoing commercial activity, social interaction with the environment, architectural features, and community participation in events held in the souq, the history of Kuwait City continues to remain physically present and socially accessible. At the same time, the study shows that the most serious threat to the souq is not physical disappearance, but the gradual

erosion of authenticity through inappropriate uses, generic commercialization, fragmented intervention, and the weakening of traditional economic culture. The market may survive architecturally while declining culturally. This distinction is central to understanding the present condition of Al-Mubarakiya. The future of the souq, therefore, depends upon a corrective conservation approach grounded in managed continuity: one that restores the relationship between space and function, protects traditional commercial identity, improves environmental quality, and establishes coherent governance. Conservation must neither fossilize the souq as a nostalgic object nor permit modernization to erase the qualities that make it distinctive. Ultimately, to conserve Souq Al-Mubarakiya is to conserve a living connection between Kuwait's past and its urban future. Its protection is therefore not only a matter of architectural preservation, but an essential component of cultural continuity, civic identity, and national urban memory.

References:-

1. Al-Rayes, S. M. A. (2024). History of architecture and engineering in Kuwait: A story of a homeland in autobiography. *That Al Salasil*.
2. Abdulhadi, J. M. (2001). *Aswaq al-Kuwait al-qadimah [Old markets of Kuwait]* (A. Y. Al-Ghunaim, Foreword). Kuwait: Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait.
3. Al-Bahar, H. (1984). Urban transformation and the historical fabric of Kuwait City.
4. Balen, K. (2015). Preventive conservation approaches in cultural heritage.
5. Fattahova, N. (2022). Fire damages sections of Souq Al-Mubarakiya.
6. Henry, A., & Jessup, H. (2018). Conservation and restoration principles in heritage preservation.
7. Lewcock, R., & Freeth, Z. (1978). Traditional architecture and urban transformation in Kuwait.
8. Makhloufi, A. (2024). Cultural heritage and identity in Gulf societies.
9. Nursanty, E., et al. (2023). Heritage conservation and cultural continuity.
10. Rodwell, D. (2007). Conservation and sustainability in historic cities.
11. Wan Mohd Rani, W. N., et al. (2018). Definitions and approaches in heritage conservation.
12. UNESCO. (1972). Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.
13. ICOMOS. (1964). Venice Charter.
14. ICOMOS. (1987). Washington Charter.
15. Australia ICOMOS. (1979). Burra Charter.
16. ICOMOS. (1994). Nara Document on Authenticity.
17. Yilmaz, M. (2026). Traditional Market Design Investigation and Protection Proposal in Kuwait City, Kuwait (Case Study: Souq Al-Mubarakiya). PhD Thesis, Istanbul Okan University.