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Article

Conducting Heritage Tourism-Led Urban Renewal in Chinese Historical and Cultural Urban Spaces: A Case Study of Datong

Hao Lei ¹ and Youmei Zhou ^{2,*}¹ Faculty of Social Sciences, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK² Department of Landscape Architecture, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, Shanghai 200092, China

* Correspondence: 20310231@tongji.edu.cn; Tel.: +86-13552412673

Abstract: Heritage tourism-led urban renewal and regeneration has recently become a critical way of creating a city brand, designing tourism destinations, and attracting property developers and investors to cities. However, current practice points to a lack of proper understanding and consideration in preserving and interpreting elements of authentic identity in the Chinese historic urban landscape. In this study, we used the ancient city of Datong, China, under urban regeneration as a case study to explore how urban history and cultural resources are manifested in preserving and reconstructing historic urban landscapes. The methods included in-depth interviews with multiple stakeholders and groups, integrated with the analysis of planning documents and field observations. By categorising and evaluating the research data, we developed a new conceptual framework with applicable measures, contributing to heritage-tourism urban regeneration and shaping place identity in both theoretical and practical aspects. The conceptual framework and its corresponding concepts and measures developed from this research could provide guidelines for academics and practitioners to explore more potential aspects and concepts that focus on the research and development of Chinese cities with historic urban landscapes.

Keywords: heritage tourism-led urban regeneration; landscape identity; historic urban landscape; intangible cultural heritage; evaluation criteria

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1. Introduction

This paper explores the ways of preserving the urban authenticity of heritage-led urban regeneration and redevelopment in the Chinese historic urban landscape. In recent decades, urban regeneration driven by preserving local historical and cultural heritage has attracted the attention of many cities worldwide, and the role of history and culture as the leading factors is also highlighted in Chinese urban regeneration [1–6]. However, although urban regeneration strategies aim to explore adaptive developing modes for the urban environment from a multi-perspective, the practice conducted in dilapidated urban areas, especially those with historic urban fabrics and ancient heritage, is often dominated by property-led redevelopment [7,8].

As a product of the development and evolutionary process of historic urban environments, the formation and development of iconic urban environments and the preservation of historic urban landscapes contribute to creating and producing place identity [8–10]. As Xie and Heath (2017) stated, the historic urban landscape is formed by elements developed throughout history and culture, all of which have shaped (and have been shaped by) the identity of individuals, communities, and cultural groups [5]. In this regard, the notion of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) was introduced by UNESCO in 2005 and 2011 [11,12] in response to the urgent call to reconcile heritage preservation and tourism-led urban development while preserving the authentic urban identity, especially in the Chinese urban context [13,14].

As one of the fastest-growing countries in the world, China has focused on redeveloping its cities to keep up with developed countries, and critics claim that many cities under modernisation-led urban development and regeneration have lost their unique identity [15]. After decades of urbanisation and urban development, the massive scale of modern and foreign elements in Chinese urban landscapes has transformed urban areas and their settings, causing the fragmentation, deterioration, and gentrification of the historic urban environment [16]. In 1994, the Ministry of Construction and the Bureau of Cultural Relics formulated the Guideline for Preparing Conservation Plans for Historical-Cultural Famous Cities, which offered a general area-based urban planning strategy in historical cities and areas. Then, in 2005, the Ministry of Construction enacted the Regulation of Conservation Plans for Historical-Cultural Famous Cities, which classified three categories of conservation: the city; the street/district; and individual structures [17]. Moreover, other relevant strategies were briefly defined in the regulation, such as the definition of boundaries, street traffic, building height controls, environmental protection, civil engineering, and hazard prevention [5,17]. The guidelines and regulations gave general and basic instructions for proposed projects conducted by the local government, design institutes, and private developers.

Within such a context, Chinese city decision-makers must explore how to reduce the risks of globalisation and modernisation-led urbanisation by preserving their heritage and historical roots in the face of identity crises. In the last decade, historical and culture-led urban regeneration or redevelopment has been implemented in many Chinese cities with historical urban areas, aiming to improve competitiveness and attractiveness by preserving, reconstructing, and enhancing local identity. This research aimed to contribute to this debate by examining how revitalisation through historical and culture-led urban regeneration is conducted in an area of conservation in urban China.

The current regeneration process of open spaces mainly focuses on reconstructing the physical environment or tangible spheres (e.g., rebuilding and repairing historical architectures) but neglects proper understanding and consideration in restoring and renovating intangible assets such as cultural character, social activities, memories, and meanings. All of this plays an important part in preserving and reconstructing the authentic place identity [4,8].

As heritage tourism-led urban renewal aims to conserve heritage, improve the urban environment, and boost the local economy, restoring and interpreting the historical and cultural elements in urban renewal to meet the needs of both local and tourist users is another issue. The lack of proper understanding and consideration of socio-cultural characters and features of different urban spaces has arguably made them monochromatic and similar due to mass cultural tourism-oriented production, which results in the ‘homogenisation’ and loss of local cultural identity [8,16].

There is less concern about the revival of ‘authentic liveness’ within the historic precinct. However, the reconstruction of the ‘authentic spatial relationship’ between heritage, new buildings, and the public historical grain has been ignored [5,18].

From the above problems, the current research and design ideas of urban regeneration in the historical Chinese context are limited to investigating historical experience embedded in the built heritage historical artefacts from the perspective of creating tourism destinations. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a logical framework and systematic tool to provide indicators for practitioners who participate in planning urban renewal processes and designing urban spaces to consider the influences of local historical and cultural resources in preserving the authentic place identity.

This paper starts with a review of the literature about local history and cultural resources in manifesting the authenticity of the Chinese historical urban context, and a conceptual framework was generated to explore the theoretical relationship between historical, cultural, and physical aspects in preserving and reconstructing the authentic identity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualising the Authenticity in the Chinese HUL

Authenticity is critical in defining the historic urban landscape and heritage conservation. As UNESCO stated in 2011, the integrity and authenticity of urban heritage need proper knowledge and planning tools for better protection [16]. However, there is a significant gap between the authenticity of heritage and the public perception, which directly affects their understanding of its multiple values, including social, cultural, aesthetic, and sense-of-place values [19,20]. As Wu and Wang (2012) suggested, the key points are ‘interpretation and communication’ [21]. ‘Interpretation’ refers to how heritage authenticity communicates the changes and evolution it has superimposed over history, and ‘communication’ refers to how visitors’ perceptions of authenticity can be improved through their experiences, how residents retain their sense of local identity, and how traders, managers, and conservation professionals deal with issues of authenticity [21,22].

Authenticity is an abstract and complex concept, while heritage authenticity is a fluid and evolving process that focuses on aesthetic or architectural aspects and includes the historical urban environment’s social, cultural, and economic attributes [9,16]. Moreover, some scholars see authenticity from a sociological point; rather than expressing one ‘true’ and ‘real’ conceptualisation of the past, authenticity should integrate with the broader social dimension to facilitate innovative thoughts and present the sensation of cultural attributes embedded in the historic urban environment [23–25]. Moreover, in 2000, the Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China were proposed by ICOMOS China as professional guidelines for the conservation of heritages, which were revised in 2015 and defined authenticity as the values and attributes that resided in the original materials, workmanship, and design of a site and its setting, as well as in its historical, cultural, and social characteristics and qualities [26,27].

In terms of perceptions of authenticity, many concepts have been explored concerning interventions of authenticity in the historic urban landscape. Wang and Gu in 2020 suggested the HUL should focus on ‘Dynamic Evolution & Development’, in which the change and development patterns of a historic site should be recognised as physical and cultural spheres with flexible and plastic characters, allowing for people’s values and ideas of conservation to change over time [6]. Similar to such concepts, Rudokas and Grazuleviciute-Vileniske (2020) examined the term pervading authenticity, which focuses on patterns of change in urban space and predicting the possibilities of urban futures that lead to a holistic and realistic narrative about a specific urban entity. Therefore, the interventions of authenticity in the Chinese historic urban landscape should incorporate both tangible and intangible values embedded in historical, architectural, cultural, social, and economic layers and form a structural expression of place identity [8–10,28–30].

2.2. Integrating History and Culture in Preserving and Reconstructing Authentic HULs

Both of UNESCO’s documents (2005 and 2011) aim to expand the focus on physical-built urban form and pay more attention to intangible dimensions and exercises, such as ‘associative connections’ (UNESCO, 2005), continuity of culture (UNESCO, 2005), and collective memory of communities [11,12]. The Valletta Principles for the Safeguarding and Management of Historic Cities, Towns, and Urban Areas states, ‘historic towns and areas are living evidence of the past that shaped them’ [12]. In this regard, the historic urban landscape helps record and document the history and cultural context of the city. Furthermore, the promotion of historic urban landscapes helps view the historic urban areas as manifestations of the public’s cultural heritage, which is a product of both tangible and intangible characteristics [31]. In addition to the fundamental role of material or tangible resources in preserving the authenticity of historical sites, the intangible resources and values embedded in a heritage site or the historic urban landscape, such as its traditional cultural events or the public’s collective memories, cannot be replicated, and this irreducible historical information forms part of the ‘authenticity’ of a heritage site and urban environment [10,30]. Therefore, UNESCO 2016 promoted Ethical Principles

for Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which emphasised that ‘authenticity should not constitute concerns and obstacles in safeguarding ICH’ [32].

The involvement of history and culture in the regeneration processes of old cities links to urban design in the aspect of reconstructing and transforming the physical environment, where the aim is to create and develop the urban landscape [33–35]. Reconstructing the historic urban environment includes restoring a traditional city’s spatial fabric—streets and squares—and conserving built forms—heritage and cultural venues. Furthermore, regarding the distinctive characteristics of places with historical and cultural values, urban regeneration should show concerns for the city’s continuity and authenticity, which are critical components of place identity [34,36]. Under such context, urban regeneration, which is led by history and culture, is seen as a new planning strategy for forming a place identity. Moreover, it helps to understand how the integration of urban spaces within the so-called ‘Entrepreneurial city’ [33] and ‘renaissance city’ [37] is critical for urban regeneration.

Under such a context, the cultural heritage-led urban regeneration of the Chinese historic urban context requests more attention to the development of ICH tourism. Traditional ideas and policies of urban regeneration could not fully satisfy the changing process of the urban environment, and future design strategies should focus on both physical constructions and built environment and connections between users and intangible elements, such as history, cultural identities, memories, and emotional experiences [38]. Therefore, the idea of integrating urban design or place-making with culture-led urban regeneration needs to focus on the design and quality of the built environment and the public realm.

2.3. Theoretical Framework: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Values of HUL

Based on the application of those conceptual models and their characters mentioned in the previous section, this research aimed to form a basic conceptual framework for the involvement of history and culture in urban regeneration in the Chinese historical urban context. As most culture-led or tourism-led urban renewal aims to reconstruct iconic districts and develop the physical environment, the critical issue is how to combine local history and cultural resources—distinctive characteristics, traditions, and customs—within the mixed modern and ancient urban context. Multiple concepts and models of integrating history and culture in urban design and urban regeneration are explored in such a context: creative city, cultural quarter, tourism precinct, heritage trail, collective social memories, and both ‘third place’ and ‘fourth place’.

2.3.1. Integrating Culture with Local Urban Design

In terms of integrating cultural elements in urban design, the appropriate involvement of cultural resources inside the urban planning strategy is able to contribute to employment and boost local economic development [38]. Furthermore, the successful integration and innovation of cultural resources in the urban planning process could trigger the evolutionary development of the territorial system by properly interacting with social factors, thus constituting a network of culturally sustainable urban renewal [37,39,40]. Under such context, two concepts relating to cultural-led urban design were reviewed to understand the theoretical relationships and influential factors of manifesting local culture in urban regeneration or urban renewal projects, such as the creativity city and cultural quarter.

Both concepts of creative city and cultural quarters emphasise that physical and design-related factors must be taken into account as broader concerns, such as the relationship of history and culture to local identity. From prior studies of the two conceptual models, it is clear that the elements of culture and cultural innovation are now firmly embedded in the practice of urban design and regeneration [8,41,42]. Moreover, culture is seen as a driver of economic regeneration, and many cities have used culture as an additional means of achieving regeneration outcomes through the designation of creative cultural districts [8].

In regenerating historical urban centres, it is necessary to avoid only focusing on urban planning’s structural logic of reconstructing functionality and physical settings [2]. Instead, this study aimed to interpret the revitalisation of the old town centre from a new

perspective and explore how local historical and cultural elements can address the problems of urban vitality and authenticity. In the literature review chapter, the researcher identified a conceptual framework formed by multiple aspects to act as guidelines for investigating local history and culture in designing public spaces.

2.3.2. Design and Planning Strategies for Tourism

As the research objectives aimed to explore the manifestation of history and culture in heritage tourism-led urban regeneration, it is necessary to understand the relationship between urban design and tourism planning. In addition to the concept of the creative city, the local cultural and historical characteristics relate to the value of the 'city brand', which aims to promote distinctive characters of tourism districts and provides opportunities for future urban development [38]. From this perspective, creating and improving the city's brand image as a tourist destination depends on the distinctive and integral atmosphere created by 'abstract images that incorporate multiple tourism elements' [43]. In order to understand the characters of designing tourism destinations in the urban context, the following two concepts were examined: tourism precinct and heritage trail.

In accordance with the idea of creating cultural districts for urban regeneration, concepts of tourism precincts and the heritage trail provide consideration in terms of tourism destinations for cultural heritage-led urban regeneration. As Su et al. (2020) suggested, understanding tourists' perceptions of tourism and visitors' perceptions of tourism destinations provides valuable information for all potential stakeholders interested in the continued development of China's tourism brand image [44]. Similar to many other historical cities in China and the wider region, there is a strong need for a sound basis for managing urban landscape change, especially in urban districts with historic urban landscapes [6]. UNESCO's recommendations on historic urban landscapes have attracted increasing attention [44,45]. However, problems remain in terms of inconsistent approaches and ineffective planning implementation. Thus, examining tourist precincts and the heritage trail offers critical thinking and frameworks for sustainable planning strategies in cultural heritage-led urban development.

2.3.3. Memory, Meaning, and Social Spaces

In addition to the involvement of local cultural resources and the design of tourism destinations, the urban renewal and regeneration projects of the Chinese historical urban context need to focus on the aspect of locals. As Sepe (2018) argued, the formation and preservation of place identity matters to a wide range of people [8]. In order to understand place identity in urban regeneration, it is significant to focus on the relationship between the set of identities related to humans and the structured diversity of meanings that affect the cultural heritage and social interactions, which are products primarily created by local users and urban environment [5,8,46,47]. Therefore, this section explores the meaning and memory embedded in historical and cultural heritage and how to preserve or create social spaces for daily users.

Based on the theories and models of planning and designing cities and urban areas in urban regeneration, it is obvious that both urban history and cultural resources play a significant key in place-making and the formation of place identity. As Sepe (2013, 2018) concludes: 'The most successful urban regeneration projects are those where there is a strong involvement of pre-existing local identity and where history recovery of the sense of place and belonging to the local community is expected' (pp. 595–613) [3,8,38]. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the involvement of both local inhabitants and tourists in preserving and transforming historic urban landscapes into cultural heritage or tourism-led urban regeneration, and to preserve and innovate the place identity.

2.4. Developing a Conceptual Framework for Urban Regeneration in the Chinese Historic Urban Context

Based on the application of those conceptual models and their characters mentioned in the previous section, this research aimed to form a basic conceptual framework for the involvement of history and culture in urban regeneration in the Chinese historical urban context. As most culture-led or tourism-led urban renewal aims to reconstruct iconic districts and develop the physical environment, the critical issue is how to combine local history and cultural resources—distinctive characteristics, traditions, and customs—within the mixed modern and ancient urban context.

As the central location of urban layout and the origin of urban cultural history, urban regeneration in many historic urban districts and centres faces complex relationships between the conservation of heritage, preserving place identity, and planning strategy [48,49]. Moreover, such old urban centres and districts provide locals with places to conduct their daily activities and create memories for different users. The preservation of memory relates to representations and expressions of interactions between users and urban cultural context, which is an important factor in avoiding the risk of homogenisation caused by globalisation and property-led urban regeneration [8,50].

In designing the conceptual framework for urban regeneration, creating integrity between all the factors—urban spaces, urban history, cultural resources, locals, and tourists—is vital in forming a sign of a healthy or energetic identity. According to Southworth and Ruggeri (2010), urban renewal cannot simply rely on the reconstruction of the original form, as the transformation of the social, cultural, memorial, and economic aspects all contribute to the evolutionary pattern of the city [51]. As the essence of a city and its residents, developing patterns and cultural contexts with proper interpretation and preservation helps to ensure a stronger, imageable, and sustainable place identity [3,51,52]. Within such a context, the strategic framework aimed to explore concepts and factors such as integrating with place-making and urban cultural context, and three primary aspects led to the general framework—built form and physical settings, cultural events and activities, and memory and meaning (Figure 1).

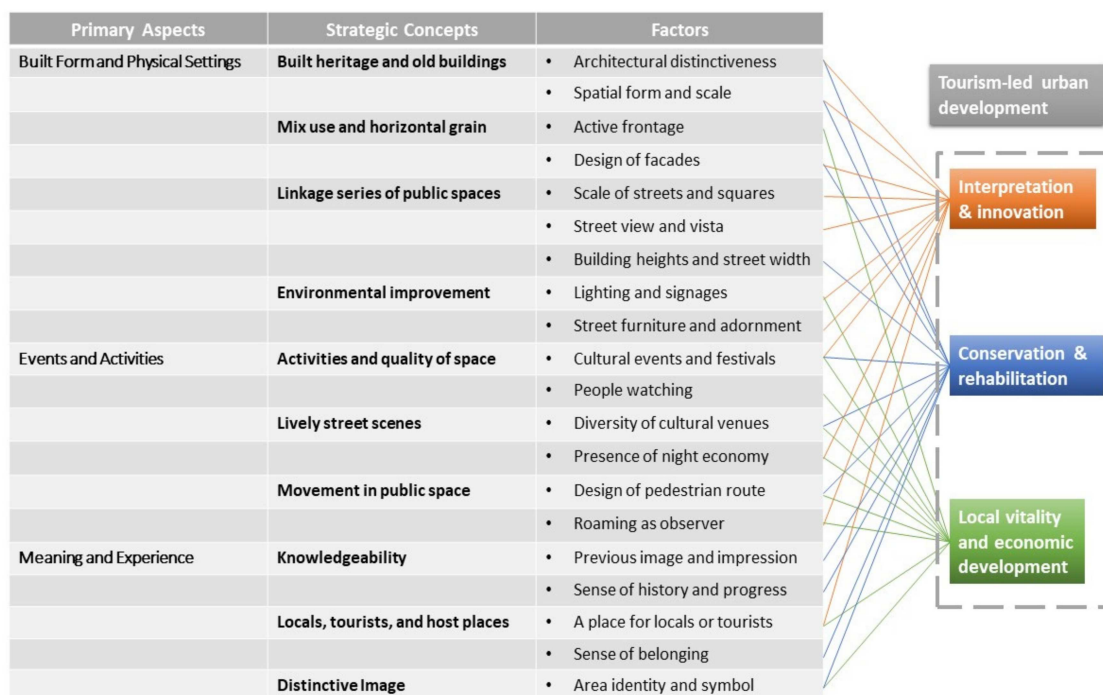


Figure 1. The conceptual framework developed from the literature review. Source: Author.

3. Research Methods

This study used the approach of case study and qualitative methods to investigate changing values in heritage-led urban redevelopment. In addition, a mixed-methods approach to data collation and analysis was used, including built environment analysis, non-participant observation, and in-depth stakeholder interviews. The mix of methods provides a complete picture of value shifts in heritage-led urban redevelopment and their impact on how different stakeholders use and feel when conducting their activities in the regenerated historic urban landscape.

Following the specificity of the research aim and objectives, the research used mixed approaches led by a theoretical framework-based synthesis. Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted in research sites alongside document analysis, observations, and photography. The semi-structured interviews focused on different groups of residents, tourists, local visitors, and urban experts and practitioners to obtain detailed textual descriptions from multiple aspects.

3.1. Semi-Structured Interview for On-Site and Off-Site Groups

This part of the interview questions focuses on various on-site groups, such as local residents, tourists, and local visitors (who live in the city region but outside the ancient urban centre), and for this reason, there are slight differences between precise questions between different groups for comprehensive responses (Figure 2). For example, questions that aimed to obtain views of the architectural distinctiveness and streetscape of specific locations (where the interview was conducted) might be difficult for off-site participants to answer. Therefore, some interviews were modified to provide sufficient responses, such as changing the specific locations to broader areas or precincts with similar characteristic features. Moreover, questions about the memory of place and sense of belonging could be difficult for tourists to answer, and interview questions focused on how such themes relate to their knowledge and improvement of experiences. The key questions of semi-structured interview was set following Table 1, which is consistent with the conceptual framework based on the literature review.

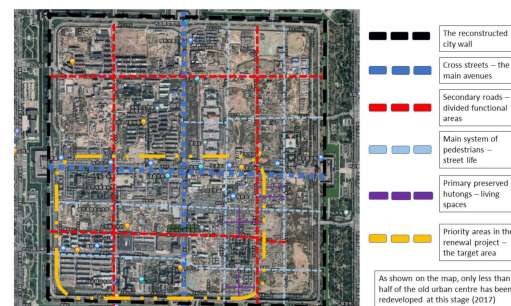


Figure 2. Selected locations of observations.

The sample size of interview participants (laypeople) was 39 male interviewees and 36 female interviewees. The total amount ($N = 75$) of participants included the following age groups: 20 s ($N = 23$), 30 s ($N = 15$), 40 s ($N = 14$), 50 s ($N = 8$), 60 s ($N = 10$), and 70 s ($N = 5$). In both on-site and off-site interviews for residents and local visitors, there were three types of respondents: residents who still live in the city centre ($N = 15$), residents who used to live in the city centre but have since moved out ($N = 21$), and residents who have never lived in the city centre but live in the urban district of Datong ($N = 9$). In the group of tourists ($N = 30$), 19 participants said it was the first time they had been to the study case, while 11 participants visited the ancient urban centre more than once. Among the interviews of on-site tourists, five sets (individual respondents or teams of two interviewed together) were foreign visitors: a couple from Eastern Europe (Ukraine and Russia), two French students, visitors from France and America, international students from Australia and

America, and a couple from the UK (Leicester). Both the interviewer and these respondents could communicate in English, which ensured the interviews' successful processing.

Table 1. The key issues designed for the semi-structured interview.

Built Environment and Physical Settings:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>First impression or overall evaluation</i> 2. <i>Built form and architectural distinctiveness</i> 3. <i>Façade design and active frontages</i> 4. <i>Environmental improvement of streets and squares</i> 5. <i>Linkage series of public spaces</i> 6. <i>Street vista and building silhouette</i> 7. <i>The design quality of the route travelled</i>
Cultural events, festivals, and activities:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Types of activities and quality of public spaces</i> 2. <i>Traditional performances and cultural events</i> 3. <i>Active and passive engagement</i> 4. <i>Night-time economy</i> 5. <i>Characteristic features and people attractors</i>
Meaning, memory, and place image:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Old city image and memorable elements</i> 2. <i>Sense of belonging</i> 3. <i>Sense of history and progress</i> 4. <i>Area identity and symbol</i> 5. <i>Influential elements for the place image</i>

3.2. Experts Interview

This research also obtained views from elite participants at the city level (such as urban experts, academic professors, practitioners, and officials involved in the urban regeneration project). Groups of elites can provide critical sources of detailed information about the political process and considerations of thematic issues. The design of the interview questions aimed to access experts' pre-existing knowledge and to assess their views on the topics within the conceptual framework and their involvement in both political and practical aspects of the whole urban renewal project. The issues include planning policies and strategies, the planning and design of public open spaces, historical buildings and iconic landmarks, places designed for tourists or locals, city image and urban legibility, and personal preferences and assessment. There were 12 experts interviewed, including the deputy director of the planning institute, Datong City Planning Department, and researchers and readers of local history and culture.

3.3. Non-Participant Observation and Photographysemi

The research methodology adopted non-participant observation, as this research-led observation approach can provide a deeper understanding in terms of considering the design quality of public space. The most obvious advantage of non-participant observation is that this implementation does not invade other users' privacy or interrupt their patterns of use (Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris, 1992). In addition to the use of an audio recorder for interviews and taking notes for observation, the researcher employed a camera to capture scenes and events that resonated with the research aim and themes from the conceptual framework. Events formed by various elements were captured within the frame of the camera's shot, enabling the researcher to 'recognise—simultaneously and within a fraction of a second—both the fact itself and the rigorous organisation of visually perceived forms that give it meaning' (Cartier-Bresson, 1999, p. 16). The observation areas are shown in Figure 1, as is the survey along with the on-site semi-structured interview.

3.4. Case Study

To understand the involvement of history and culture in cultural tourism-oriented urban regeneration and to explore different groups of users' views of the urban renewal progress in shaping and reconstructing place identity, a case study method was adopted for this research. The case study method offered a specific target—the ancient urban centre of the city Datong—to investigate how the historical and cultural elements impact the urban regeneration progress by exploring the following characteristics. Firstly, the target area was experiencing a significant transformation in the urban environment, including the out-migration of local inhabitants, the demolition of old buildings, and the reconstruction and repairment of memorial landmarks. Secondly, people from various groups (local inhabitants, local visitors, and tourists) were directly involved in or affected by the redeveloping process. Therefore, it is significant to understand historical and cultural characteristics and features embedded in the local context for the research aim and objectives.

Datong is the second-largest city in Shanxi Province, located in the northern part of the province, and it lies at the junction of Jin, Hebei, and Mongolian provinces. The city has four districts and seven counties under its jurisdiction, with a total area of 14,176 square kilometres and a total population of 3,375,000. The central city area (the ancient fortress of Datong) has a construction land area of 150.41 square kilometres and a population of 1.145 million. The ancient city of Datong is one of the first 24 historical and cultural cities approved by the State Council of China in 1982 and has a history as the capital for hundreds of years. It was also the northern Wei dynasty's capital, a minority group founded from the north to dominate the Central Plains. It later became a vital companion capital during the Liao and Jin dynasties. Due to the long history of over 1600 years, the ancient city of Datong incorporated the characteristics of many ethnic groups, which brought the city a unique combination of historical and cultural identity. As the defensive fortress along the Great Wall, the city's basic urban layout was formed in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (Figures 3 and 4).

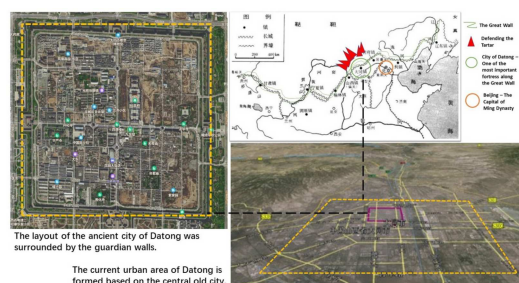


Figure 3. Location of the study area (The Chinese characters in the maps are all place names). Source: Author.

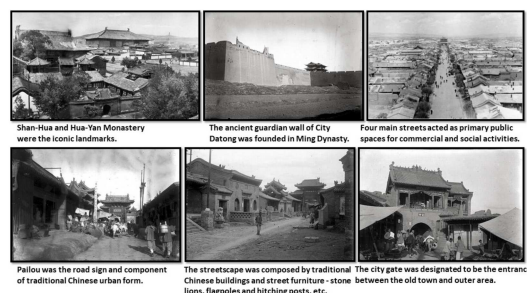


Figure 4. The basic urban form of the city Datong was formed during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Source: Datong City Planning and Design Institute, 2013.

4. Data Analysis

The researcher coded all the gathered data from the interview questions through NVivo to obtain detailed information about each framework-based thematic analysis. The

analysis of coded results in this chapter is divided into three categories based on the framework-based synthesis, including physical form, activity and event, and memory and experience. Responses from different user groups—on-site, off-site, and professionals and practitioners—for each question of the different themes are analysed comparatively.

4.1. Physical Settings and Built Environment

Analysis of responses from both on-site groups showed two categories—built form and sense of place—and the off-site local interviewees suggested that the preservation of iconic areas and events are critical components of the city image (Figures 5–7). In terms of the description and idea of the built form, both on-site groups confirmed there were significant improvements of the urban environment, which is the result of long-term urban regeneration:

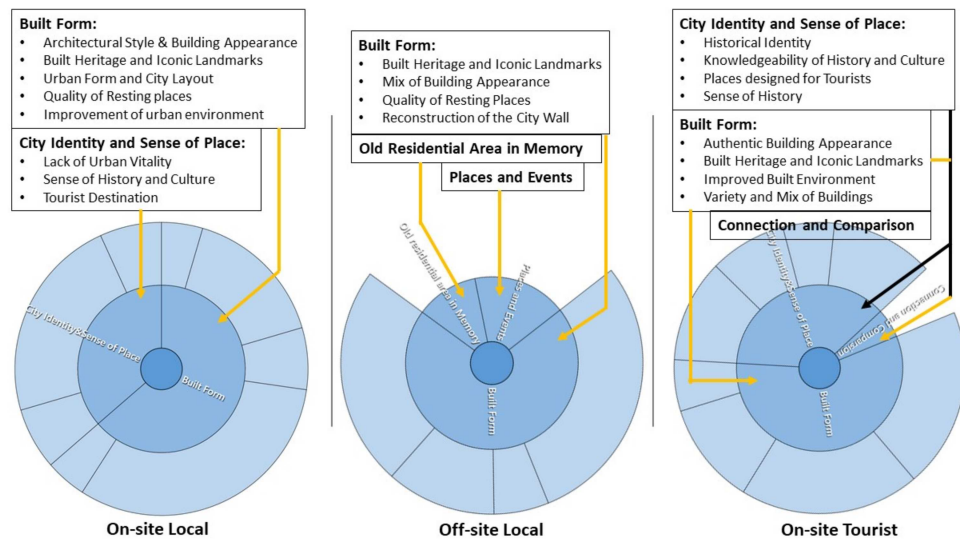


Figure 5. Results and categories—impression and image.

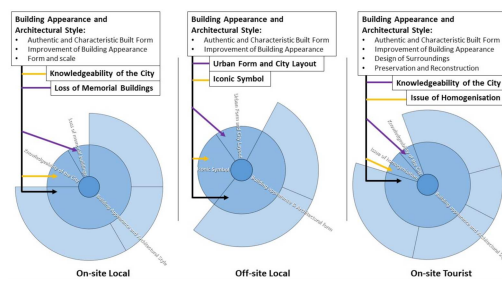


Figure 6. Results and categories—built heritage and iconic landmark.

I would mention the dramatic transformation process in the past ten years. If my foreign friends ask me about this city, I will talk about the significant improvement of the physical environment of both the inner-city core and outer-urban area.

(On-site Local—02)

In the aspect of the physical environment, this place has improved a lot. I may introduce those famous sightseeing sites combining with information about their history based on my knowledge.

(On-site Tourist—24)

In general, interviewees from all three groups confirmed the improvement of both built heritage and urban environment. However, they were aware that the unfinished progress could lead to the further transformation of the ancient city. In addition to improving the visual aspect, the local interviewee suggested that another benefit for the built heritage is

that ‘most of the old landmarks have received repairment to reinforce their structure, which made them seem strong now’ (On-site Local—17). Tourists also advised that the proper preservation and repair ‘must follow the old and traditional form and construction process’ (On-site Tourist—19). On the other hand, the presence of traditional and characteristic building appearance is critical in delivering the authentic image for interviewees from all groups:

The most critical issue is strictly following their old architectural styles and appearances to reproduce the original image of this city.

(On-site Local—02)

The urban regeneration project has rebuilt many old houses and repaired preserved built heritage in the past few years, and it is good to see historical scenes that are formed and reflected by all of them.

(On-site Tourist—03)

Most of the city wall is rebuilt during the regeneration project, while its constructing process followed the old form and layout to reproduce the old image of this city.

(On-site Tourist—27)

I miss the Five-Dragon Screen near my old home. After so many years, the unique design and materials of that symbolic place still give me a sense of history, like an observer of the city.

(Off-site Local—02)

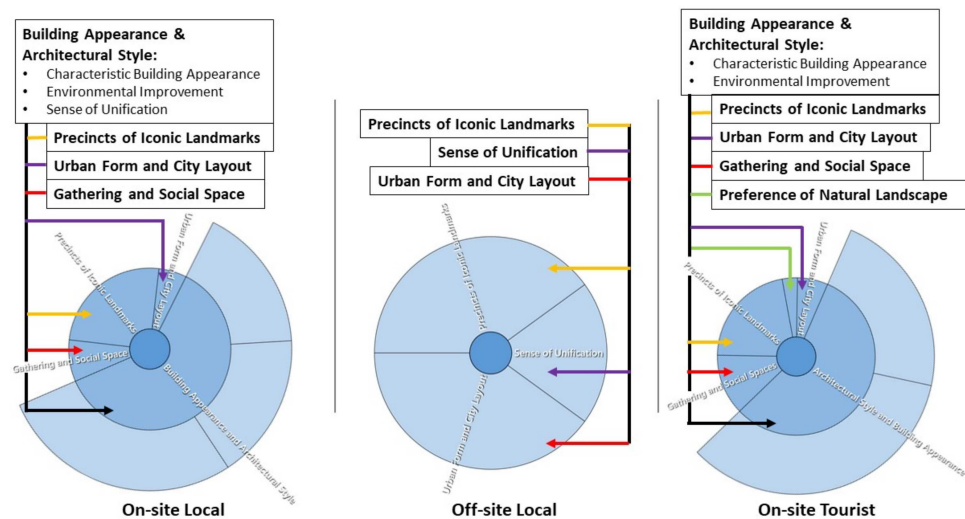


Figure 7. Results and categories—building and surroundings.

Interviewees also considered the design of the surrounding area of built heritage as elements that contribute to the formation of the characteristic precinct: ‘The surroundings of Wen Temple have several problems—the buildings are a bit taller than the original height, and too many houses got crowded in that area, while the architectural details and decorations are better than other places’ (Off-site Local—15). Furthermore, the expansion of built form of some landmarks after been reconstructed could affect an old ambience of the place as ‘most of them have occupied massive spaces after the regeneration’ (On-site Local—10).

For on-site tourists, the sense or presence of history is significant in delivering the authentic street scene. Both the traditional design characteristics and the reason for choosing such style and appearance are necessary, as tourists would like to know ‘the connections between those signboards, facades, and the buildings behind them’ (On-site Tourist—11). Furthermore, the music played by some stores and shops to attract visitors could act as

components of the old atmosphere, and a tourist participant indicated that loud pop music would damage the 'sense of harmony' (On-site Tourist—07).

Finally, the presence of the developing process of streetscapes is another target that needs interpreted by all the streetlights, building illuminations, and signboards. As components of forming streetscape, interviewees also mentioned that 'those elements might become a unique combination after ten years though they look a bit brand-new now' (On-site Tourist—30).

4.2. Activities and Quality of Public Open Spaces

Three categories were identified from responses of local users—personal activities, social activities, and shopping and dining (Figure 8). Local users who prefer walking and roaming in the case study areas by themselves were affected by the factors of ancient design style and changes of built form (building appearance, streetscape, and open spaces), the quality of resting places, and the historical sense of place. Although most buildings with ancient formations were built or recovered, their qualities and design style still act as critical factors that affect their roaming experiences:

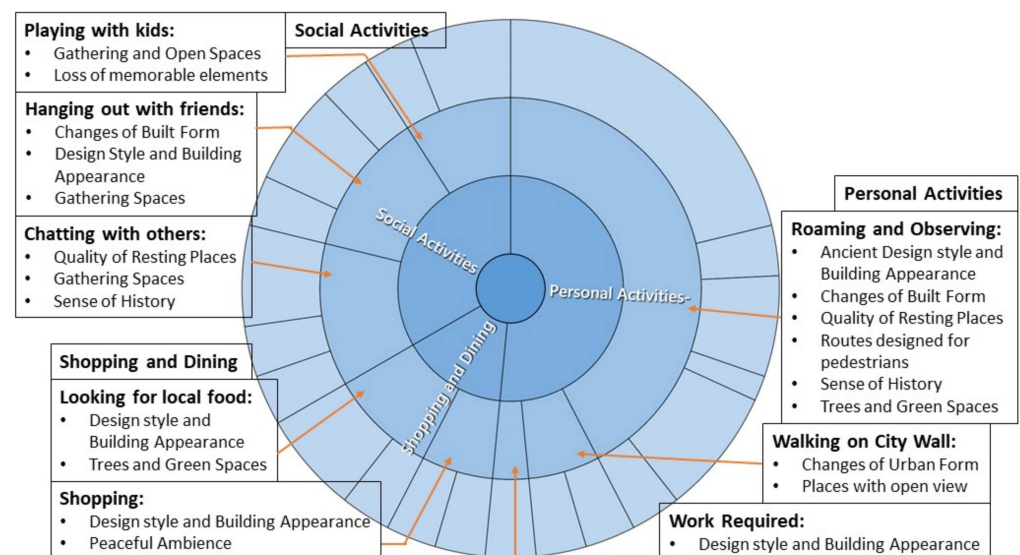


Figure 8. Results and categories of on-site locals' responses—activities and influential factors.

I prefer roaming in this inner-city while keeping an eye on what kind of elements have changed, disappeared, or got created along my route.

(On-site Local—05)

There is nothing too much to see. Many architectural details and decorations got worn out already from my observation.

(On-site Local—06)

We enjoy wandering in the city and taking a break in this roofed gallery, and you cannot imagine doing this here in the old days with the horrible environment.

(On-site Local—07)

The old-style buildings and spaces combining with activities could attract a lot of visitors to come here.

(On-site Local—15)

The presence of trees and green spaces and a designed route for pedestrians were advised by individual participants as elements that could help to improve their walking experiences. The historical sense of the city could be identified from terms of 'historical feeling', 'lovely ambience', and 'atmosphere' from various responses, and interviewees

considered enjoying those senses as their motivation. One interviewee who works as a tour guide in the ancient city area complained about the unfinished regeneration project. However, he still agreed that ‘the recovered built form attract tourists to see the reconstructed buildings and experience the urban form’ (On-site Local—22).

4.3. The Expression of Urban History

Responses from all three groups mentioned identity and city image and knowledgeability of the ancient town area (Figure 9). Terms of ‘tourist destination’ and ‘distinctive identity’ were mentioned by on-site local and tourist interviewees, and local participants accepted the official identity of the ancient city as a tourist destination; tourist participants wished to see ‘characteristic’ components of a distinctive city image:

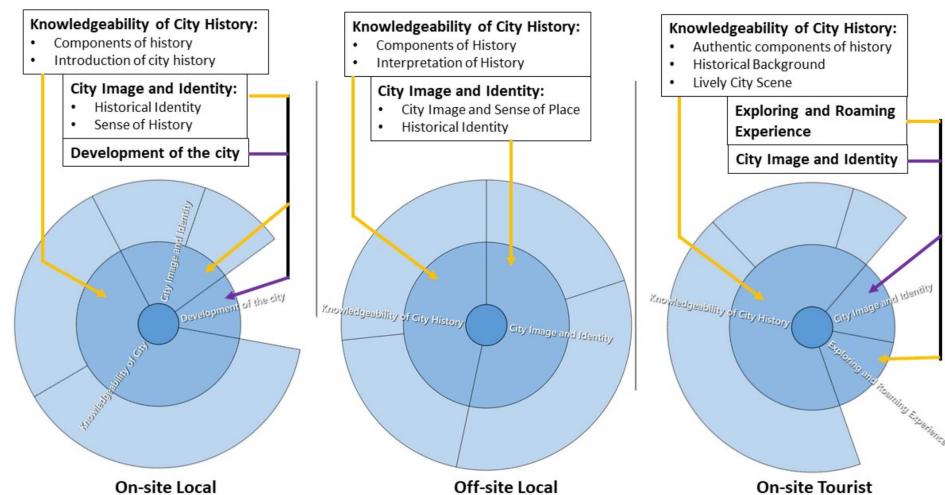


Figure 9. Results of theme—revival of urban history.

It (revival of urban history) should be helpful as offering a new identity of a certain historical period of the city to this tourist-destination.

(On-site Local—24)

They are unique components that form the image of this city, and they are the reason that attracts us to come to this place as we would love to see anything distinctive.

(On-site Tourist—01)

They are very necessary if I bring any friend to here, we all want to see something different, something that other places do not have.

(On-site Tourist—04)

According to the responses of on-site locals, the preservation of old buildings and iconic landmarks could recall certain memories of local interviewees, and old traditional events help to bring back scenes in the past:

When I went to the old city of Xi’an, which is also surrounded by a city wall and a moat, the most impressive image is seeing fishes swimming in the moat after a heavy rain, and that experience is very memorial.

(On-site Local—11)

When I was a child, there were so many activities that we would do at each festival, such as watching the burning bonfire and fireworks as well as enjoying different local foods.

(On-site Local—12)

For example, birds were flying around the Drum Tower in the old days, which was a memorial scene for most old residents like me.

(On-site Local—21)

The elements and views of each thematic concept showed in different categorised tables indicate the perspective of each selected group users' assessments and preferences on designed themes from each aspect. Furthermore, a cross comparison between sub-groups (such as first-time visitors and repeat visitors) led to richer opinions and assessments of different topics. Based on elements that were categorised and interpreted, the summary of each aspect explores the links between the different themes and local historical and cultural resources in the process of shaping the impression of the city.

5. Discussion: Valuable Indicators Developed in the Research

Based on the conceptual framework developed in the literature review, several findings were obtained from the data collection conducted in the case study, including semi-structured interviews of different groups, non-participant observation, and photography. Findings that emerged in the chapter of research analysis focused on examining the significant concepts and factors relating to designing urban public spaces in the context of the heritage tourism-led urban regeneration of the ancient city of Datong. Following the findings from the research analysis, this section discusses the relevant concepts by integrating them with the conceptual framework and prior studies. Therefore, to explore local history and culture integrated and expressed in the reconstructed streetscape, the research analysis organised three primary findings, delivering a sense of unity and diversity, creating street frontage as social spaces, and designing street furniture as indexical characters.

5.1. Integrating Façade Design and Active Frontage

As mentioned in the research analysis, the design of streetscapes is critical in influencing local users' and visitors' visual experiences and movements by forming a sense of unity and diversity. The culture and tourism-led urban regeneration projects have significantly improved the urban environment. In the aspect of design style and building appearance of streetscapes, the key to integrating local historical and cultural elements in the façade design is to use visual aesthetic expressions. Aesthetic appreciation and preferences of different users showed significant relationships with the design style of facades, the mix of building appearances, the spatial scales, and the sense of unification. According to the research analysis, unity not only refers to the order of visual aesthetics created by the design of facades but also indicates a sense of historical progress formed by the mix of buildings built in different periods of the developing urban pattern. In addition, components of creating visual orders, such as the sense of rhyme and pattern, appreciation of rhythm, and recognition of balance and unity, show close relationships with the expression and knowledgeability of local history and culture in a tangible way.

As the basic components of each city and town with a long history, iconic landmarks are essential in forming the urban form and sense of place. Moreover, built heritage and iconic landmarks are narratives that describe and illustrate place identities and surrounding areas. In such a context, the relationship between landmarks and the design of the surrounding built environment is critical in creating unified images and enhancing shared cultural and historical consciousness [3]. Therefore, the first principle is to deliver a visual and spatial balance between iconic landmarks and their surrounding areas. Furthermore, the streetscape's design quality should draw on the adjacent built heritage and iconic landmarks, and it is necessary to preserve the old street layout and urban fabric in a proper way. As the built heritage and iconic landmarks are essential in forming area identity in each precinct, the second principle is to preserve the original identity of zones and precincts based on their old functional, historical, and cultural characteristics.

5.2. The Kinaesthetic Experience

In addition to the diverse buildings along the streets, the street vistas also contribute to developing the authentic streetscape when different users travel and wander in the research area. Prior studies in the literature review mention the importance of the height-to-width ratio in creating a sense of enclosure and preserving the old street vista [53–55]. Moreover,

the feelings of exploring the old narrow streets and gathering in the open spaces were identified in the research results as experiences that are affected by both spatial conditions and the streetscape quality. The narrow streets and alleys provide pedestrians with a sense of exploring old street scenes, and open spaces provide them with an open and clear vision (Figure 10).

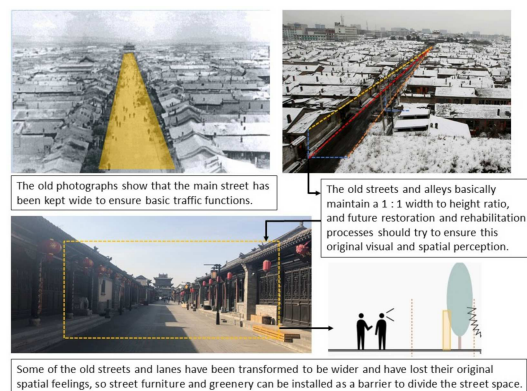


Figure 10. Preserving and designing the height-to-width ratio of old streets are necessary to reconstruct the old urban scenes and street vistas. Source: Author.

The arrangement of different scaled spaces could lead users to conduct social and leisure activities. For example, tourists only explore more in the old town if there are enough characteristic attractors as tourism activities that are similar to the definition of optional activities, which are participated in if there is a wish and if time and place make it possible [5,56,57]. Furthermore, local visitors and tourists mentioned the experience of roaming in narrow alleys and gathering in open spaces, and the keys to improving their travelling quality are the design style of streetscapes, combining ways in spaces of different scales, and the presence of people attractors (characteristic shops and venues, traditional activities).

The design quality of public spaces and streetscapes influence pedestrians' movement in the old town, as prior studies mentioned when exploring relationships between design and activities [57–60]. Furthermore, the environmental improvement significantly influenced local residents' activities, as people wished to have more open spaces to conduct social activities. In general, local visitors (who live outside the old town) preferred to take the whole urban centre as a huge theme park or shopping village. Therefore, the design quality and ancient building appearances influence the local users' moods and the place's atmosphere when integrating with specific activities (social, leisure, shopping, etc.), as the ambience of places influences their emotions in conducting or even enjoying specific activities.

In addition to the 'mood' and 'atmosphere' described by people who prefer conducting social and leisure activities, tourists suggested that the quality and presence of people attractors had a significant influence on triggering their emotions in further activities. For example, if tourists felt the surrounding environment was not attractive enough or failed to meet their expectations of the place image, they would prefer to find a café or restaurant to rest instead of exploring other places of the destination.

In addition to creating spaces for socio-cultural activities, creating a good urban environment at night means understanding how residents and visitors use and assess urban spaces in reconstructing the old townscape. The nightlife is different from life in the daytime, as users' visibility and motion are affected by the public spaces' dark environment. Therefore, it is significant to utilise the streetlight, illumination, and presence of signages and advertising for the visual perception and the need to feel safe. Moreover, dividing and designing specific streets and zones for night-time activities (commercial and leisure) could help create lively urban areas in the old town, and quiet places with well-

designed illuminations are critical, as residents wish to have a peaceful and safe night-time experiences (Figure 11).

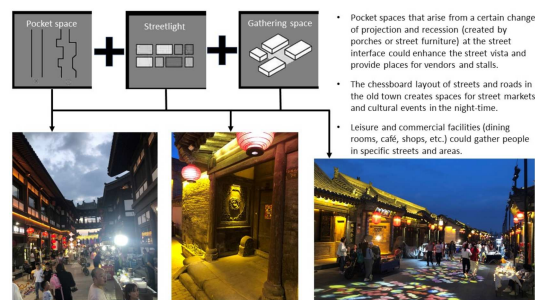


Figure 11. Lights, people attractors, and semi-public spaces help to attract users and conduct night-time activities. Source: Author.

5.3. Cultural Activities and Events in the ‘Shared Space’

The idea of shared space emphasises the social centrality and commercial and leisure opportunities in the city centre [58]. By properly integrating local history and cultural expressions, the design and arrangement of diverse cultural activities, traditional events, and festivals contribute to a sense of authenticity. Moreover, the improved living environment was brought about by redevelopment, and such places and venues should offer more places to meet their daily needs. Moreover, properly designed facilities and spaces with street furniture are necessary to provide suitable places for users to engage positively and negatively. According to Carmona et al. (p. 201), where people choose to sit or linger in public space is often based on opportunities for people-watching, which could be related to the life and activity within the area combined with the movement of pedestrian flows [52]. As the primary form of passive engagement, people-watching is mainly triggered by the presence of other people and their activities [52,57,61]. Therefore, the diversity of events and activities are the major attractors for observers to conduct people-watching, and the resting settings and facilities (benches, stairs, open-air coffee seating, and so on) with shelters provide a better experience for the users or observers. In this regard, street markets, groceries, and dining places are necessary to fulfill their needs and provide opportunities for visitors to interact with locals (Figure 12). Furthermore, according to the research results, the atmosphere and lively street scenes inspire visitors to engage in activities, as the crowd gathering is a powerful attraction.

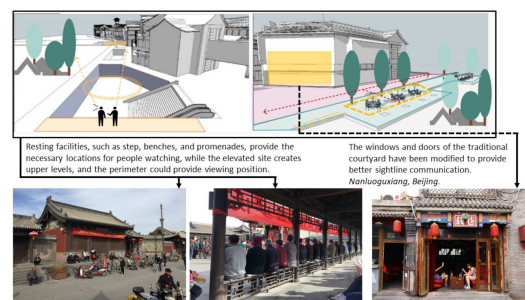


Figure 12. Creating shared spaces for all user groups contributes to the quality of the immersive experience. Source: Author.

In addition to preserving such activities and events, daily users and urban experts suggested that the renovation of specific events might be necessary to meet different user groups’ requests to preserve their traditional lifestyles. In this regard, cultural activities that provide interactions between locals and tourists are essential in creating a lively urban environment. Moreover, the old town’s historical and cultural background needs to be incorporated into the preservation and innovation of cultural activities. Cultural

activities combined with traditional architectural styles and site design could create unique experiences where tradition and modernity meet, such as local food culture and carnivals in the square surrounded by traditional buildings (Figure 12). Such organised cultural-led events and festivals could create a unique temporary environment and provide participants (or observers) chances to have an immersive and non-routine experience [62–64].

Besides traditional cultural events and festivals held daily, respondents suggested that activities with locals' involvement are critical in providing lively urban scenes. Furthermore, due to the climate factor, as the winter temperatures in northern Chinese cities reach freezing point, using indoor activities to connect and interact with outdoor spaces (such as the outdoor business space of a bar and restaurant) is another solution (Figure 13). Furthermore, the presence of specific cultural festivals and activities is necessary to create unique experiences, as these folklore events combined with well-designed venues and places can attract more visitors and boost the commercial vibrancy of the surrounding area.



Figure 13. Creating shared spaces for all user groups contributes to the quality of the immersive experience. Source: Author.

5.4. Collective Memories and the Sense of the Historical Process

The environmental improvement, iconic landmarks, and changes in the urban fabric are the primary factors that form the image of the old town in the past and present. On the other hand, the design quality of the built environment, memories of places, and traditional cultural events are critical factors in influencing foreign visitors' comparisons between the current situation of the townscape and their expected image of the city. For example, narrow streets and alleys with traditional houses bring back residents' memories of the past and show visible or tangible parts of the city's history and culture for local visitors and foreign tourists. Therefore, the old urban scene is another critical factor in enhancing residents' and local visitors' sense of belonging, and such images with authentic attachment attract tourists by delivering a unique experience (Figure 14). Furthermore, prior studies have shown that the formation of a place image closely relates to the collective memory of different stakeholders. Therefore, the information gathered by individuals about different aspects of a place helps to create a cluster of 'frames of reference' to describe the destination [1,8,65].



Figure 14. Details relating to the old living activities are essential in creating the authentic urban scene. Source: Author.

As mentioned in the literature, the authenticity of a historical city is expressed by organised historical and cultural characteristics, which are closely influenced by collective memories (92Lynch, 1964; 76Wang, 2011; 91Sepe and Pitt, 2014). In terms of preserving

the collective memories, the environmental improvement brought by the ongoing urban regeneration should focus on preserving the local character of buildings and social spaces in residents' memories. Important meetings and social places (old city squares, shopping malls, and their surroundings) help form 'social imageability' (Southworth and Ruggeri, 2010), which is derived from the shared meanings generated by involving individuals (residents and visitors) with a place. Furthermore, locals and tourists who remember the old urban scene before launching the urban renewal paid more attention to monuments, the architectural style of buildings, descriptions on the city walls, and cultural events in their memories. These results further support the concept of 'urban reminder', which describes the traces of places and events in the memories of people who reside or were used to living in the old town [6,66,67].

5.5. Influential Factors of Urban Legibility and City Image

The research results suggested that elements with characteristics shaping the urban landscape act as symbols and signs, representing something shared within the inner relationship, constructed through social and cultural systems [52,68]. As mentioned in the literature review, the place image is a product of feelings and impressions created by individuals' perceptions and understandings of the place identity, which is formulated by the presence and expressions of local history and culture [1,3]. As one of the most integrated expressions of history and culture, the urban landscape comprises symbols, meanings, and values [52]. The research results organised multiple symbolic elements in delivering place images for different users, including urban form (architectural distinctiveness, streetscape, and urban fabric), iconic landmarks, social spaces, cultural activities, quarters, and zones. All the characteristics provide more detailed information for selecting symbolic signs, representing something shared within the inner relationship, which are constructed through social and cultural systems [1,10,68,69].

In order to deal with the issue of homogenisation and to form a distinctive place identity, the interpretation of local history and culture should closely relate to the legibility and knowledgeability of the old town. Therefore, the hierarchy and network of forming urban identity could be a beneficial strategic model for identifying zones and routes' historical and cultural characters.

5.6. Regeneration in Practice: Value Recognition and a New Conceptual Framework

Based on the previous discussions of concepts and criteria set in the theoretical framework, research findings help to generate and organise new concepts and to develop a conceptual framework for the research aim (Figure 15). This new conceptual framework was modified on the analytic conceptual framework developed in the literature review chapter, in which the relationship between place-making and urban regeneration and corresponding criteria in the Western and Chinese contexts were examined to lead the research (Table 2).

As the research aims to explore how urban history and cultural resources are made manifest in preserving and reconstructing urban spaces of historical Chinese cities, the conceptual framework developed in this research offers an integrated aspect of interpreting historical and cultural elements in the historic urban landscape. Then, the illustration of such concepts helped to form a detailed table with key factors and applicable measures that aim to understand and assess the interpretation and involvement of historical and cultural resources in preserving and reconstructing the place identity of the historic Chinese urban landscape. Moreover, the research aimed to gain insight into the heritage tourism-led renewal of the ancient Chinese urban area (and the old townscape) within the context of conservation-led urban renewal. In this sense, this newly developed conceptual framework provides new themes and concepts for the old town of Datong and other cities with a historic urban landscape and that are undergoing heritage tourism-led urban regeneration.

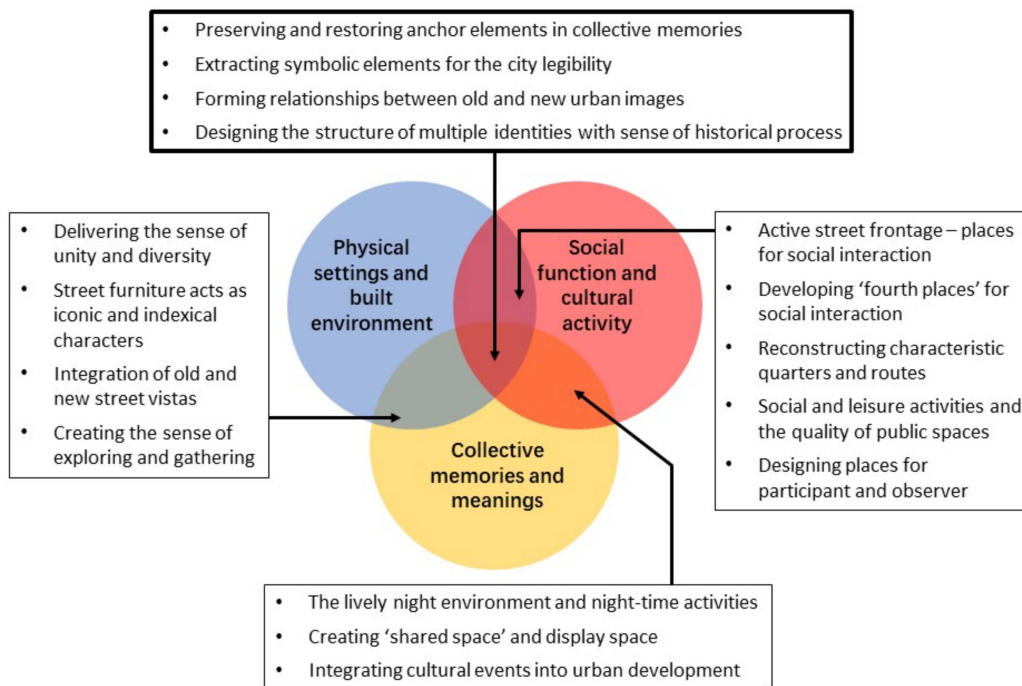


Figure 15. The conceptual framework developed in this research. Source: Author.

Table 2. The new conceptual framework developed in the study.

Primary Aspects	Concepts Developed in Research Findings	Strategies and Applications in the Case Study
Integrating façade design and active frontage	Delivering a sense of unity and diversity	Filter and innovate iconic elements in delivering the visual order of unity. Focus on the personalisation of street frontage and preserve the historical context expressed in the diverse horizontal grain.
	Active street frontage—places for social interaction	Preserve and restore old gathering and meeting places for locals and tourists to conduct social and leisure activities. Design street spaces as ‘fourth places’—pocket spaces, street corners, and places with shelters and resting facilities.
	Integration of old and new street vistas	Strengthen the sense of place by integrating street vista and building heights. Preserve the old street scale and the original sense of enclosure.
The kinaesthetic experience	Creating a sense of exploring and gathering	Improve pedestrians’ emotions by creating people attractors for both locals and tourists. Preserve old street vistas by integrating street spaces, characteristic places, and socio-cultural venues. Utilise the streetlight, illumination, and presence of signages and advertising for the visual perception and the need to feel safe.

Table 2. Cont.

Primary Aspects	Concepts Developed in Research Findings	Strategies and Applications in the Case Study
Cultural activities and events in the 'shared space'	Social and leisure activities and the quality of public spaces	Consider the interaction between locals' activities and visitors' participation to improve different users' experiences. Restore cultural facilities and re-designing existing functional and gathering places to form cultural quarters.
	People-watching is a way of interacting with different users' activities	Street furniture acts as part of the environmental improvement for encouraging interactions. Integrate open-air, semi-open, and indoor public spaces to form a vibrant urban environment.
Collective memories and the sense of the historical process	Forming connections between old and new urban images	Preserve iconic places and memorable buildings for locals to reconstruct their emotional connections with the city. Restore elements and streetscapes relating to the daily activities to restore the old living scene.
	Preserving and renovating elements to create the 'urban reminder'	Restore and make important and pleasurable places in the collective memory of local people. Create the ambience and atmosphere of specific places formed by architectural style, traditional activities, and cultural events.
Influential factors of urban legibility and city image	Extracting symbolic elements for the urban legibility	The iconicity and indexicality of legible place images help illustrate the past's authentic and distinctive urban image. Recreate existing landmarks or distinctive places to form visitor attractions linked to the pre-existing knowledge and expectation of the place.
	Designing the structure of multiple identities with a sense of the historical process	Consider the old urban form and the historical development as the basic layer of forming place identity. Design quarters and routes following the mental map of different users, including physical settings, social relationships, cultural events, and collective memories.

6. Conclusions

In this research, the exploration and assessment of historical and cultural elements in shaping the place identity of urban regeneration were only carried out in one case study—the ancient town/urban centre of Datong. A future study will employ a wide range of Chinese cities in heritage conservation and tourism-led urban renewal to conduct the research based on the developed methodology for further comparative studies. The first stage might include historical towns, cities, and urban areas with similar historical, cultural, geographical, and morphological backgrounds and characters. It might include the comparative analysis of the historic urban centre of Xi'an, the ancient town of Pingyao, and the historical streets and districts of Beijing, as those targets could show better compatibility with the research methodology. The next stage could move on to the historical urban context of cities and towns in southern China, such as Suzhou, Lijiang, Fuzhou, and others. Targets with different morphological characters and cultural contexts could provide information and data in multiple aspects, contributing to developing and refining a comprehensive research methodology. Moreover, applying the research methodology to multiple sites with different environmental conditions could also form a cross-case analysis, in which the results would be compared and integrated to improve validity and adequacy.

The theoretical extensions obtained through the qualitative approach in this study can be used as a theoretical basis and guide in subsequent studies to deepen them in a quantitative manner. For example, the weighting of the indicators applied to the assessment of this holistic framework and the extent to which the different aspects of the new framework have

a greater impact on the psychological and perceptual aspects of residents' and local visitors' mental health, sense of belonging, place attachment, etc., could be verified and measured through data calculations. The wide scope of this thesis for future research is to provide a new, more comprehensive, and in-depth examination of heritage tourism-led urban regeneration in China, which contributes to knowledge and paves the way for extensive future research.

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