

Article

# Urban Heritage Conservation and Rapid Urbanization: Insights from Surat, India

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**Abstract:** Currently, heritage is challenged in the Indian city of Surat due to diverse pressures, including rapid urbanization, increasing housing demand, and socio-cultural and climate changes. Where rapid demographic growth of urban areas is happening, heritage is disappearing at an alarming rate. Despite some efforts from the local government, urban cultural heritage is being neglected and historic buildings keep being replaced by ordinary concrete buildings at a worryingly rapid pace. Discussions of challenges and issues of Surat's urban area is supported by a qualitative dataset, including in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups with local policy makers, planners, and heritage experts, triangulated by observation and a photo-survey of two historic areas. Findings from this study reveal a myriad of challenges such as: inadequacy of urban conservation management policies and processes focused on heritage, absence of skills, training, and resources amongst decision makers and persistent conflict and competition between heritage conservation needs and developers' interests. Furthermore, the values and significance of Surat's tangible and intangible heritage is not fully recognized by its citizens and heritage stakeholders. A crucial opportunity exists for Surat to maximize the potential of heritage and reinforce urban identity for its present and future generations. Surat's context is representative of general trends and conservation challenges and therefore recommendations developed in this study hold the potential to offer interesting insights to the wider planners and conservationists' international community. This paper recommends thoughtful integration of sustainable heritage urban conservation into local urban development frameworks and the establishment of approaches that recognize the plurality of heritage values.

**Keywords:** urban heritage conservation; historic urban landscapes; urban planning and management; cultural heritage; Surat's heritage; sustainable development

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## 1. Introduction

The challenges faced by urban areas in South Asia today are steep and are at the forefront of the development of inclusive cities. Today, South Asian urban areas are among the largest and densest in the world, home to approximately 1.77 billion people, with the Indian urban population projected to double by 2050 from 410 million urban residents in 2014 to a staggering 857 million in 2050 [1]. Consequently, the urban fabric is experiencing issues such as growing informality, housing shortages and increasing rural to urban migration. India is arguably known as one of the most popular

destinations for cultural tourism with rich and varied histories and traditions that allow for the exploitation of opportunities offered by cultural heritage [2]. The country has a considerable number of heritage assets, including 38 sites inscribed on the World Heritage list with 30 cultural properties, seven natural sites, and one mixed site, as well as over 3,600 centrally protected monuments under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) [3]. Additionally, there are 13 elements of intangible cultural practices and expressions on the UNESCO list. However, this rich heritage is facing major threats in urban areas and structures considered to be of national, state, or local importance in India, and remain under threat from urban pressures, neglect, vandalism, and demolition. Despite the intensification of urban growth in India's cities, restoration efforts to safeguard valuable heritage assets remain visible at only a few places of historic significance [4–6], and cultural heritage issues have not been mainstreamed into the overall urban planning and development framework

International consensus exists on the role played by heritage in achieving sustainable development. In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were unanimously adopted by United Nations (UN) member states resulting in a wide-ranging set of 17 goals and 169 targets aimed at poverty reduction, leaving no-one behind, and advancing the health and well-being for all by 2030 [7]. Out of the finalized SDGs, Goal 11 is the United Nation's strongest expression of the vital role cities and urban environments play in the global landscape. There are sporadic explicit references to cultural aspects in the 17 goals and these include: target 11.4, which focuses on the strengthening of efforts to protect and safeguard the world cultural and natural heritage; target 4.7, which gives emphasis to the promotion of knowledge and skills and the appreciation of cultural diversity; targets 8.9 and 12.b, which focus on sustainable tourism and local culture aligned with target 14.7, which gives attention to the sustainable use of aquaculture and tourism [8]. All of the targets have specific implications in the field of culture. These targets give light to the growing consensus that the future of our societies will be decided in urban areas of which culture plays a key role [1, 9, 10]. The 2016 United Nations New Urban Agenda recognizes both tangible and intangible heritage as a significant factor in developing vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive urban economies, and in sustaining and supporting urban economies to progressively transition towards higher productivity [1, 7, 11].

Furthermore, the global discourse has focused on this crucial role of heritage in the context of urban development and heritage conservation. In particular, the UNESCO recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) [12, 13] has synthesized these elements by proposing a holistic understanding of urban historic areas through all-inclusive approaches [14]. On the 10 November, 2011, UNESCO's General Conference adopted the new recommendation on the HUL as an additional tool, a "soft-law" to be implemented by Member States on a voluntary basis. This document conceptualizes urban heritage as the multi-layering of cultural and natural values and attributes that go beyond the notion of "historic center" or "ensemble" to encompass a much broader urban geographical context [12, 13, 15]. This value is often constructed through processes of selection criteria appropriated internationally or nationally and objectified to become worthy of political, economic, and touristic attention and conservation. There is therefore a need to safeguard and respect the inherited values and significance of cultural heritage in cities.

In line with the main entry points for culture heritage in the achievement of sustainable development, this paper aims to explore the landscape of urban heritage conservation in the Indian city of Surat as an instrument to a better understanding of challenges and pressures that threaten the implementation of heritage conservation policies within rapidly growing urban contexts, beyond the international principles and criteria.

This paper is structured in seven sections. Following the introduction (Section 1), a focus on Surat allows for proper contextualization of this study (Section 2). The research methodology is presented in Section 3. The chosen research strategy stems from the epistemological paradigm of interpretivism based on the empirical qualitative dataset (Section 4), including policy and planning documents, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and direct observation of two sub-cases, i.e., the two historic precincts of Surat (1) Gopi Surat Central Zone and (2) Rander Gamtal. Section 5 discusses the data by articulating the six thematic areas emerged from the findings (Sections 5.1–5.6):

- Surat's built heritage,

- Urban heritage management,
- Valuing heritage: intangible dimension,
- The emerging local community awareness of heritage conservation,
- Urban development and real estate pressures,
- Cultural heritage and climate change.

As a result, this paper draws recommendations for the development of a sustainable urban heritage framework that includes: (6.1) holistic urban heritage legislation, (6.2) identifying and mapping the city's heritage values and preserving local identity and sense of place, and (6.3) developing local urban heritage and planning expertise, skills, and knowledge. Inclusive community and stakeholder engagement are central to the successful integration of urban heritage conservation. Section 7 concludes the paper by summarizing the findings and detailing areas of future research.

## 2. Setting the Context: The City of Surat and Its Heritage, an Overview

The city of Surat (Figures 1 and 2) is currently urbanizing rapidly with demands of urban sprawl and development [3, 16]. According to the census taken in 2011, Surat's urban district had a population of 4,849,213 people although the actual population may exceed these figures due to rapid development in Surat's metropolitan region [17, 18]. Surat's urban context includes social cohesion challenges, increasing rural to urban migration, rising housing demands, and considerable stress on city management and resources [19]. Yet, in the context of these urban pressures, there is an evolution of approaches recognizing tangible and intangible heritage as strategic assets in creating cities that are more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable [10, 20, 21]. Surat has a diverse and vibrant heritage that has created and shaped the cultural identity of the city. Historic social practices and processes have remained interdependent and reciprocal with Surat's built fabric. However, urban heritage conservation is not perceived as a priority when considering other urban development objectives [16, 22]. Cultural heritage continues to remain marginal in urban development agendas, often overlooked in the context of urban poverty, social inequalities, and a severe lack of basic infrastructure [11]. Although it is evident that effort is being made to improve sustainable planning and heritage conservation [17, 19, 22], there exist significant challenges that limit the impact and scope of these initiatives.

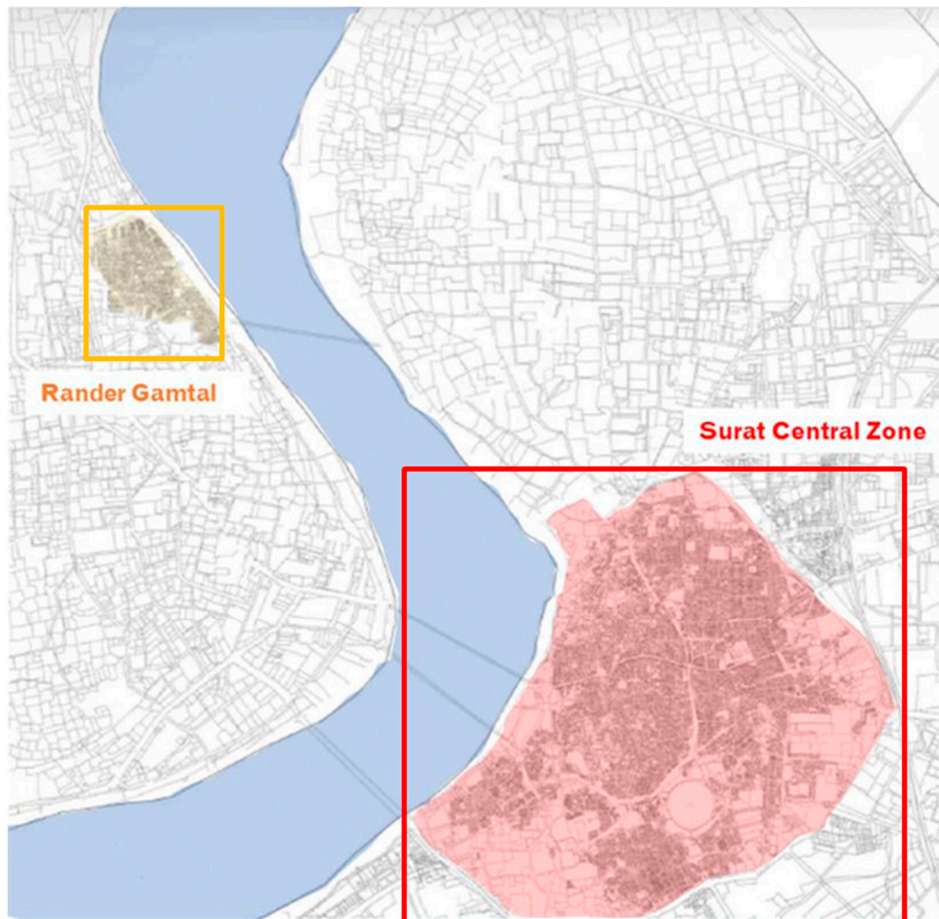
Having survived numerous historic invasions and power structures, Surat is presently in the top ten largest cities in India and recognized as one of the fastest growing cities (Figure 1) [19]. The strategic location of the city aided in forming historic overseas links with the rest of Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, which date back from 300 BC. These trading connections influenced the living patterns and built heritage in Surat, particularly in the historic precincts Gopi Surat Central Zone and Rander Gamtal. Historically, Surat's heritage conservation was mostly concerned with safeguarding the remains of architectural monuments. Key historic monuments include major development by Malek Gopi, a rich trader in 1496-1521 AD, the establishing of silk and cotton factories from the 1600s, the construction of the inner-city wall in 1664 AD, and the outer-city wall in 1715 AD [18]. The city of Surat grew in the 17th and 18th centuries to become an established and formidable export and import center of India. Settlement in Surat continued to develop with custom houses and gardens along the River Tapi and Surat's fort. By 1901 AD, the diamond cutting industry was established and began exporting diamonds to the United States of America from the 1970s. Currently, 80 percent of diamonds of the world are cut in Surat [19] and the jewelry and textile industry has allowed a steady flow of wealth into the city. The evolution of the concept of heritage preservation has developed in parallel with the evolution of Surat, becoming a practice that goes beyond tangible assets and possesses a human and socio-cultural element [15]. However, the practice of conservation in Surat still lags behind the actualization of this diverse concept. The city lacks an official holistic values-based approach that specifies the significance of Surat's historic areas whilst taking into account the existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-economic and environmental factors, and local community values [14, 15].

The Surat Municipal Corporation is the main government body in Surat responsible for urban planning schemes, alongside the Surat Urban Development Authority (SUDA) (which includes the

municipal corporation area) and the Hazira Development Authority, which governs the port and industrial hub located downriver from Surat city [23]. SUDA is responsible for preparing the area development plan and for controlling unauthorized developments. The South Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry is influential in Surat's governance structure as it takes the lead on several critical regional and city development initiatives [24]. Achieving urban sustainability is of significance in Surat as it is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The city lies in a flood plain area and the southwest area of the city hosts a number of creeks. Natural disasters have been recurrent and devastating, such as a plague in 1994 and floods in 2006 and 2008. Surat's climate change predictions and risk profile all indicate an increase in rainfall, with monsoons dominated by heavy spells of rain combined with longer dry spells, leading to an increase of floods [19, 23].



**Figure 1.** The city of Surat [Source: Author (modified arcGIS) map].



**Figure 2.** Surat Central Zone and Rander Gamtal. [Source: Author (modified arcGIS) map].

### 3. Research Methodology

The research strategy of this study is based on a single case study, i.e., the city of Surat. This city was purposely selected for two reasons. Firstly, this research is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council investigating Surat as a case study for urban heritage conservation. Secondly, the richness and diversity of Surat's heritage combined with the city's rapid urbanization trend reflects a need for investigation into the conservation of its urban heritage and the challenges being faced. This study area therefore presents an opportunity for the development of holistic and sustainable approaches towards the preservation of Surat's urban heritage.

In line with the research goals of articulating a discourse on challenges and issues related to the implementation of heritage conservation policies in growing cities, the research strategy stems from the epistemological paradigm of interpretivism and mainly rests on qualitative research methods. These latter are often seeking to understand processes and cultural and contextual meanings. Therefore, giving emphasis to the need for enquiry through an inductive approach that attempts to understand the experiences with a goal to present a credible representation of the interpretations of those experiences [25]. A variety of sources were used to obtain data for triangulation purposes. The main advantage of using triangulation is that it allows for the evaluation of different sources of information to investigate concepts on the basis that a consensus of the findings will yield more robust results [26].

As anticipated, the empirical dataset is based on qualitative data, including policy and planning documents, interviews, focus groups, and direct observation of two sub-cases, i.e., the two historic precincts of Gopi Surat Central Zone and Rander Gamtal (Figure 2). Policies and strategies have been chased at multiple scales (national and city wide), while direct observation of physical urban fabric has been conducted at a neighborhood scale. A visual illustration of the research methodology and instruments is offered with Figure 3. Qualitative primary data was collected in September 2018 by a



team of 3 UK and 3 Indian researchers. A total of 34 stakeholders participated in focus groups and 10 stakeholders in the interviews prepared by UK and Indian researchers (Figure 3).

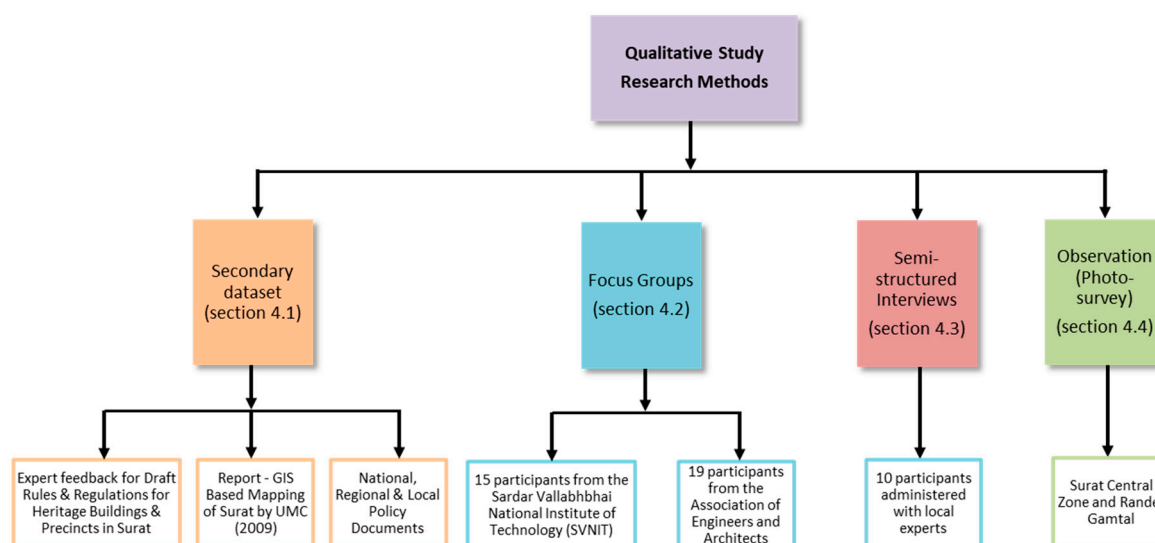


Figure 3. Dataset Outline.

## 4. Data Presentation

### 4.1. Secondary Dataset: Policy and Planning Documents, Strategies, Regulations

First, documents relevant to India's cultural heritage and the city of Surat were collected and analyzed (Figure 3). All relevant policies and regulations in force nationally, regionally, and locally were systematically gathered and considered, including national laws, policies, and governance of heritage conservation in India, Gujarat, and Surat. This also included key reports discussing the impact of climate change on the city of Surat including the vulnerability assessment (2010) on Surat undertaken by The Rockefeller Foundation's Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network (ACCCRN) [23] and Surat Resilience Strategy [19]. All relevant previous surveys and investigations on Surat heritage were systematically collected and analyzed. Incidentally, the team of researchers provided the City of Surat with expert feedback on the draft regulation "Rules & Regulations for Heritage Buildings & Precincts in Surat" [27]. This is a local regulation aimed at the conservation of all the listed heritage buildings and sites and identified precincts, as listed by Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) in 2009. The project team conducted an in-depth study of the GIS-Based Mapping of Living Heritage of Surat For Improved Heritage Management in Surat prepared by the Urban Management Center in 2011 [17], which still forms the basis of the knowledge of the local heritage in Surat. The desk analysis of the documents was complemented with primary data collected in Surat in September 2018 and is discussed in the next sections. The document analysis revealed a failure to encompass a broader urban geographical context for urban heritage when considering the preservation of cultural heritage. The perspective demonstrated from the analysis suggests heritage conservation in Surat is side-lined when considering other urban development objectives such as housing and infrastructure. The documents were discussed with local practitioners and with city planners with the aim of checking the level of accuracy of the work, how the studies were generating impact on actual heritage conservation policies, and how far the current situation was with respect to the study.

### 4.2. Focus Groups

Two focus groups were organized with local academics, decision makers, and practitioners to capture different views and perspectives on heritage conservation in Surat (Figure 3). The goals of the two focus groups were more general and categorized into two sections of discussion. Firstly,

discussing with local experts about heritage conservation to gauge their view on principles and criteria applied in Surat. The second goal was the exploration of how to raise awareness about the importance of heritage conservation for local identity. Gathering a total of 15 participants, focus group 1 was arranged at the Sardar Vallabhbhai National Institute of Technology (SVNIT). Focus group 2 was arranged by the Association of Engineers and Architects and gathered 19 participants. Engaging with the stakeholders in heritage was imperative for discussing key urban conservation issues in Surat. The diversity of participants in focus group 1 allowed for an exploration of the challenges in urban heritage conservation in Surat. The discussion in focus group 2 centered around national and local initiatives to develop a smart, sustainable, and resilient Surat. In both focus groups, the researchers understood that though conservation of heritage was considered important in principle, still different views on what should be included in heritage and how to conserve persisted. This revealed a disconnection between the national legislative framework for heritage conservation and local guidance provided by local authorities. The focus groups proved to be crucial for the facilitation of understanding meanings attached to issues in contexts that had not been interrogated in advance by the project team. The transcripts and informal notes taken were analyzed as a means of providing a coherent method for reading the interview material in relation to the questions. The aim of the analysis was to draw out salient dimensions related to urban heritage conservation in Surat.

#### 4.3. Semi-Structured Interviews

As a final step, further qualitative empirical data was conducted with 10 semi-structured interviews administered with local experts on heritage conservation (Figure 3), sampled by selecting them across both the public and private sector (Table 1). Furthermore, the focus groups assisted in providing a diverse sample for the expert interviews. The interviews were used to undertake in-depth exploration of emerging issues from the focus groups, observation, and documentary evidence. Perspectives were sought for the interviews from respondents from the built environment as well as those concerned with intangible heritage. This included a local yoga teacher who drew on his experience and skills and enabled a kind of storytelling about Surat's heritage. These additional perspectives assist in highlighting the interconnection between tangible and intangible heritage. Other stakeholders who contribute significantly to strategic planning of heritage in Surat such as the local Government (Surat Municipal Corporation) officials, heritage architects, and consultants were consulted. The details of the interviewees are listed below in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Semi-structured local expert interviewees.

Interview Code	Local Expert Group	Affiliated Organization	Role
I1 & I2	Local Government	Surat Municipal Corporation	Heritage experts from Surat Museum
I3	Public University	Sardar Vallabhbhai National Institute of Technology (SVNIT), Town and Regional Planning	Heritage Consultant
I4	NGO	Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)	Heritage Architect
I5	Private & Local Government	Local Organisation & Surat Municipal Corporation	Art historian & Heritage Cell Officer
I6	Private	Local Organisation	Heritage Architect
I7	Local Government	Surat iLAB & Surat Smart City	Officer
I8	NGO & Local Government	Resilience Surat as part of the Rockefeller Foundation 100 Resilient cities project	City Resilience Officer

I9	Public University	National Institute of Technology (SVNIT), Town and Regional Planning	Heritage Proprietor & Industrialist
I10	NGO	Patanjali Yog Prashikshan Samiti, Surat	Yoga expert

The interview schedule consisted of three broad thematic sections. The first section contained points of discussion exploring the conceptualization of heritage in India and Surat and the heritage conservation landscape, including questions such as: “Can you describe how international frameworks (e.g., UNESCO World Heritage Convention) have shaped efforts towards conserving Surat’s heritage?”. The second section discussed the challenges in conserving Surat’s heritage, e.g., “What are some of the challenges you face in integrating cultural heritage in your practice and how do you overcome these challenges?”. The third section encouraged the respondents to provide recommendations on how to develop sustainable heritage conservation approaches in Surat. The semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity for the respondents to discuss these themes in greater depth with reference to their practice and experience.

#### 4.4. Direct Observation and Photo-Survey of Two Chosen Historic Precincts

The observation of the city was undertaken as a visual tool to support the understanding of heritage conservation in Surat (Figure 3). Fieldwork was conducted in Surat’s historic areas, Gopi Surat Central Zone and Rander Gamtal (Figure 2). The observation was based on the study conducted by the Urban Management Centre for the Surat Municipal Corporation [17]. GIS maps of the historic areas were used to identify sub-areas in the two historic areas showing highest concentration of historic buildings and further investigate the state of conservation and actual context situation. Fieldwork was conducted both by car/motorbike and by walking during working days, morning and afternoon. Photographs were taken both to document the state of conservation of the built environment and to capture people using it. The direct observation and photo-survey of the two areas allowed understanding of some of the main challenges to heritage conservation in Surat. Although there are some efforts to restore key monuments such as the fort and castle restoration, Surat’s heritage remains neglected and increasingly in desperate need of urgent attention. This is further discussed in the following sections, covering findings from all the empirical data gathered by the team.

## 5. Data Discussion and Findings

This section discusses the findings from evidence gathered through the secondary dataset, interviews, focus groups, and photo-survey discussed above. Data analysis has been conducted through content coding of interviews, focus groups, and direct observation notes. Photos shown in this section are taken as part of the direct observation and photo-survey of the two chosen historic precincts. Furthermore, the representation of cultural heritage from the document analysis is included in this data discussion. Six thematic areas of discussion emerged from the findings. Two dominant paradigms of heritage conservation exist in Surat. The first is a traditional paradigm in which built heritage (Section 5.1) is a central focus with restoration efforts concerned with monumentalism and heritage experts largely responsible for maintaining and preserving heritage assets. This is reflected in the lack of integration of heritage conservation within local planning documents (Section 5.2). The second paradigm is underdeveloped in practice and exists largely in emerging discourse. It is concerned with values-based approaches to heritage and the holistic inclusion of intangible attributes (Section 5.3). The findings revealed that the local community lack the understanding of the values of heritage and how to care for Surat’s heritage assets (Section 5.4). As a result, development projects for new infrastructure are usually insensitive to the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage (Section 5.5). The final thematic area is concerned with the relationship between cultural heritage and climate change (Section 5.6).

### 5.1. Surat’s Built Heritage



Surat's built fabric reflects the powers that have historically dominated and influenced the city, including the Hindus, Muslims, French, Dutch, Portuguese, and the British. As a port city located on the western part of India in the state of Gujarat (Figure 1), Surat has an established heritage with a diverse portfolio of tangible heritage assets. Although, the city does not have a UNESCO World Heritage site, six sites are listed by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and acknowledged as "Monuments of national importance" in Surat. These include (1) Dargah known as Khawaja Dana Saheb's Rouza; (2) Old English Tombs; (3) Tomb of Khawaja Safar Sulemani; (4) Old Dutch & Armenian Tombs & Cemeteries; (5) Ancient site comprising S.Plot No.535 and (6) Fateh Burj [3]. This markedly adds to the promotion of Surat's urban heritage. This pride in Surat's heritage was demonstrated in the interviews, as illustrated in the quote below by the Heritage Consultant.

*Surat is one of the oldest economic hubs and hence the impact of various cultural eras from all over the world. This has been the result of our old city houses and buildings (I3, Heritage Consultant, Expert Interviewee).*

Despite this recognition, Surat does not have an official register of heritage assets of historical importance or protected monuments. Heritage sites across the city reflect elements and motifs that tell its own individual story through its design, material, woodwork, cornicing, paint, color, and landscaping of that era. Building materials evolved depending on the influence at that time. Local traditional houses used timber for the main house construction. Indeed, the use of other construction materials such as brick and concrete demonstrated external influence as shared by the Heritage Architect.

*The construction techniques of the housing are quite similar..., but the decoration is different. The housing inside are very simple but the façades instead are very different, because they are an expression of social distinction and power (I6, Heritage Architect, Expert Interviewee).*

Surat's built heritage also has a historic economic impact. It reflects cultures of the settlers as well as the economic growth and status of their owners. The house form has evolved over the centuries responding to modernization and contemporary living and the rise of industry. Indeed, some historic buildings no longer exist; however, in terms of boundaries identification of the two main historic areas in the city of Surat and in terms of heritage classification, including the articulation of the historic traditional houses into 4 typological influences (i.e., vernacular, colonial (Gothic and Renaissance), Art Deco, and Arabesque) are still current. Different architectural languages are visible in the house form such as the facades, the layout, plan form, and hierarchy of spaces. In particular, the front façade is a crucial reflection of the owners sociocultural, political, and economic status and beliefs. The vernacular architecture depicts houses built from local resources and with local traditions, often with wooden facades, large brackets, and overhanging eaves. The carvings in the wooden columns are highly decorated, reflecting animal, bird, and floral patterns. Surat's colonial influence resulted in forms of Gothic and Renaissance styles (Figure 4). The Arabesque style includes the use of repetitive geometric patterns on the facades and the buildings are made completely in brick and lime. Façade divisions using decorative art forms built with modern industrial material reflect the influence of the Art Deco style.



**Figure 4.** House façades in Rander and Gopipura showing colonial style influences and elements with Art Deco influences (Source: authors' photos).

The design and ornamentation of certain structural elements are great examples of the cross-cultural influences in Surat and richness of its patrons. For example, columns and brackets can be found in Surat's heritage buildings, with detailed carving and embellishment often bearing floral, animal, and bird carvings and general geometric patterns with associated meanings. Figure 5 shows the beautification applied to carvings on the Chintamani temple column. Additional elements of focus central to Surat's heritage architecture are the windows and doors (Figure 5). These are often found to be symbolically decorated with meaningful motifs, dominating the façade in a predominantly symmetrical composition.



**Figure 5.** Interior temple pillar decoration in Gopipura (left) and door and window design and decoration of heritage houses in Gopipura (Source: authors' photos).

Restoration efforts for Surat's built heritage have focused predominantly on monuments as these were deemed to have historical and architectural importance [17]. As a result, heritage properties not fitting this criteria had a lack of maintenance and investment, thus amplifying their vulnerability. The findings from the direct observation as recorded by the photo-survey demonstrated that Surat's heritage is increasingly at risk, neglected, and in desperate need of urgent attention as shown in Figure 6. The SMC has made notable yet limited efforts to restore key monuments such as the fort



and castle restoration (Figure 7). An example of the commitment to heritage restoration is the development of the city's first heritage precinct at Chowk Bazar [16]. Under this project, 11.5 hectares of land around Surat's fort are currently being redeveloped including Surat's castle and moat, Suryaputri Udyan up to the river edge, Frazer promenade, and Shanivari along the river bank. The field visits and discussions with a local conservation architect and 60 selected architecture students from across India established the core focus of efforts on monument restoration such as Surat's fort. Surat's fort was built in the year 1540–41 for protection against the Portuguese raids. The fort currently has twelve-meter-wide battlements and four-meter-thick walls.



**Figure 6.** Dilapidated heritage buildings in need of restoration in Rander Gamtal (Source: authors' photos).



**Figure 7.** Redevelopment occurring alongside the old Surat fort walls.

## 5.2. Urban Heritage Management

While there is a superabundance in policies and practices on heritage at an international level, the context is different in India. In fact, India also differs from other countries in the Asian region. For example, countries such as Sri Lanka and Bhutan have clearly defined policies regarding urban heritage [1]. India in contrast has an institutional framework dedicated to heritage protection, but lacks a strategic focus on urban heritage. Heritage legislation has largely developed as a result of a fear that development changes and pressures will erase the history of places [28, 29]. The urban development models followed since independence have irrevocably altered many historically important towns and cities [27]. The decentralization of power to local bodies is given in the 74<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution. This therefore empowers local bodies to act proactively and develop processes and practices that suit their context. These local mechanisms feed into the state's acts and legislation. The fragmentation and complexity of the current governance systems have not provided a favorable ground for culturally sensitive urban development strategies. The national system does



not allow for the translation of fundamental steps in heritage conservation at a local level such as the identification of heritage and the provision of regulations that prevent demolition and regulate new developments [30].

At a state level, Gujarat's inclusive urban development policies lack consistent integration of heritage issues [30]. At a local level, Surat's policy instruments on heritage conservation are underdeveloped and there are no specific local policies or strategies on heritage conservation in place yet. An attempt to produce guidelines for the conservation of heritage based on a study conducted by the Urban Management Centre for the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) [17] has been made, but still the local authority struggles to implement it. The SMC considered the National Institute of Urban Affairs (2015) studies in preparing the draft for the "Rules & Regulations for Heritage Buildings & Precincts in Surat" [27]. The team of researchers provided the SMC with expert feedback on the draft regulation as part of the documentary analysis. The analysis revealed a significant focus on monuments in Surat, overlooking associated intangible attributes. Additionally, the regulation failed to encompass a broader urban geographical context of urban heritage that goes beyond monuments and integrates the multi-layering of cultural and natural values. This implies that heritage conservation is not perceived as a priority when considering other urban development objectives [16, 22]. The existence of a top-down approach to governance in Surat leads to the exclusion of communities in the practice and processes of urban planning. Cultural heritage continues to remain marginal in discussions about urban development agendas, often overlooked in the context of urban poverty, social inequalities, and a severe lack of basic infrastructure [11]. Although it is evident that effort is being made to improve sustainable planning and heritage conservation, there exist challenges that limit the impact and scope of these initiatives.

### 5.3. Valuing Heritage: Intangible Dimension

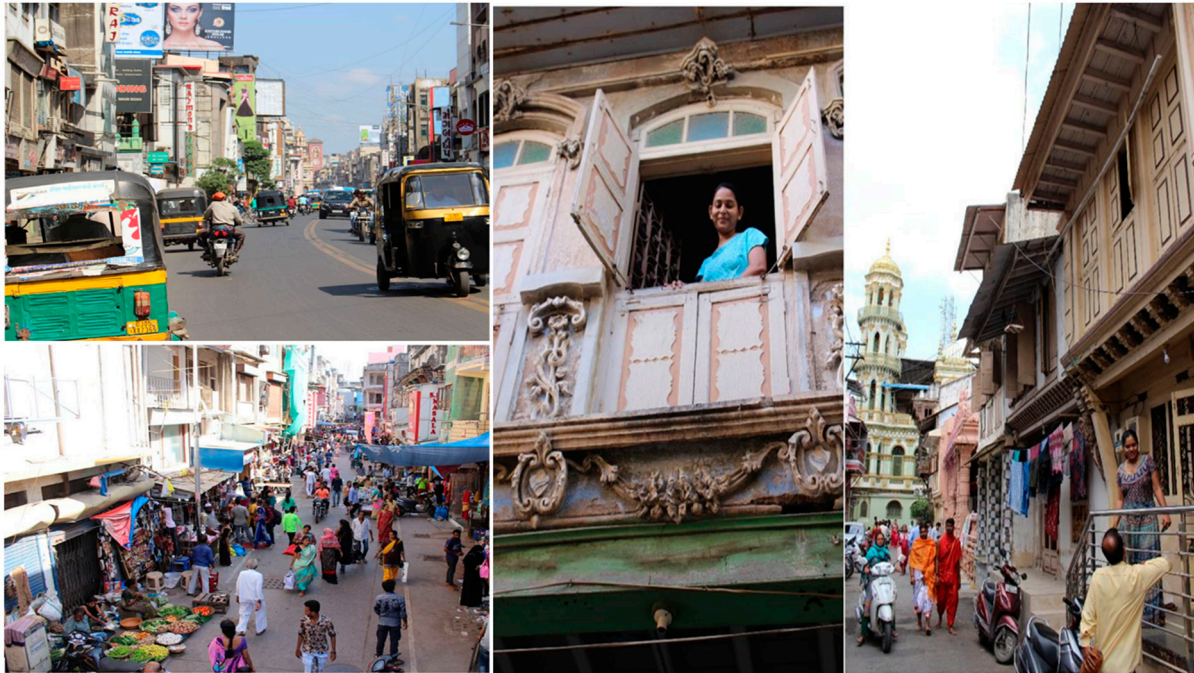
The city of Surat has a diverse and vibrant economic and sociocultural fabric (Figure 8). Tangible and intangible cultural heritage is represented, developed, and protected in Surat, and is depicted as diverse and multidimensional [31, 32]. Heritage is a concept that is difficult to define, what it means and how it has been presented, re-presented, developed, and protected, set against a back-drop of demands and motivations is multidimensional [33, 34]. In the drive to define traditions and identities in a community [34], the notion of "heritage" is developed [21]. Living expressions and practices of heritage are also often misunderstood and treated as ambiguous due to its complexity and variation [35, 36]. The interrelationship between history/the past [33] and heritage is recognized in literature-defining heritage as elements of the past for contemporary society to inherit, record, conserve, and pass on to future generations [5, 37]. In this landscape, urban heritage plays a fundamental role in reinforcing cities' identities through the integration of heritage and historic urban area conservation, management, and planning strategies into local development processes and urban planning aids [20, 38]. It allows for the broader urban context to be considered with the interrelationships of heritage and its physical form, spatial organization, connection, and values. Throsby [39] highlights the need for acknowledging the "interconnectedness of economic, social, cultural, and environmental systems". Thereby positioning cultural heritage as the "glue" among the multidimensions of sustainable development. This approach extends beyond the notion of monuments and historic centers and includes social and cultural practices and values, economic processes, and the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity [38]. It reinforces the integral role cultural heritage can play as a key resource in urban sustainable development.

The concept of Surat's heritage is associated closely with broader notions of local identity, memory, and nationalism [40-42]. Scholars [4, 37, 43-45] have argued that heritage is an essential element of national representation with the potential to perpetually remind citizens of the symbolic foundations upon which a sense of belonging is based. It is therefore presented or re-presented as something of special value or significance relating to the past. This dynamic history has created and shaped the cultural identity of the city of Surat. Historic social practices and processes have remained interdependent and reciprocal with Surat's built fabric. The built environment is a crucial space for expressing traditional and spiritual activities that are still actively imprinted on urban life as shown

in Figures 8 and 9. As the heritage architect explains below, Surat's tangible and intangible heritage are interdependent.

*The city of Surat has kept the heritage and survived invasion and calamities. The people's spirit is inclusive and festive...Surat is an amalgamation of many traditions and communities. It is a base for many crafts. The city has a lot of harmony, which has its footprints in a way of amalgamation in the built heritage and intangible heritage (I4, Heritage Architect, Expert Interviewee).*

The photos (Figure 8) below show how lively Rander Gamtal historic area is and the role played by tangible and intangible heritage in shaping the place and in adding quality to the urban environment and in enabling the consolidation of the social bonds.



**Figure 8.** Vibrant city of Surat (top left—Station road known as Rajmarg Surat); Street markets of Surat (bottom left—Chauta bazar); Daily life embedded in urban fabric (middle); Residents using urban traditional areas (Rander Gamtal) for small retail or everyday traditional activities (right) (Source: authors' photos).





**Figure 9.** Festivals and traditions are still very lively and fully embedded in the city’s everyday life. (Source: [46] Uttarayan—The festival of kites left and middle); (Source: authors’ photos top and bottom right).

At present, there is no standard classification and valorization approach towards the cultural heritage in Surat. The paucity in recognizing the pluralistic values of Surat’s tangible and intangible heritage leaves to question what type of heritage should be preserved, for what reason, and by whom [14, 47]. Consequently, heritage assets that have significant attached values to citizens are left out of local government efforts to raise awareness and promote heritage tourism. The articulation of heritage values allows for the consideration of decisions for heritage assets to give a “heritage status and significance” and therefore the assessment of these values attributed to heritage is a very important activity for the achievement of sustainable urban conservation [48]. Despite the fact that values are widely understood to be critical to heritage conservation, there is still a paucity of knowledge about how plural heritage values can be used to assess tangible and intangible heritage [49]. Expert interviewees pointed, as described below, that local politicians are not concerned with the value assigned to Surat’s cultural heritage. Without political buy-in and commitment, heritage is left at the margins of urban development.

*Elected people, local leaders... They even do not bother about the value of these heritage buildings, they would rather demolish them and replace with new buildings (I3, Heritage Consultant, Expert Interviewee).*

*So far, we have not been able to capitalize the value of the history and of the heritage, this city has been always well known for trade and commerce, not for its history (I8, City Resilience Officer, Expert Interviewee).*

Without the acknowledgment and appreciation of Surat’s culture and values, opportunities for establishing social cohesion and connectivity are missed. Surat’s urban fabric is under consistent pressure to “modernize”, leading to the continuous disappearance of traditional skills and crafts that are part of the intangible cultural heritage [21, 36]. Expert interviewees commented on the depreciation of a sense of place and belonging in Surat due to the various physical environmental challenges mentioned above and the increase in population.

*Most of the heritage sites are present in the middle of the city, but due to blindly following the Western culture, people neglect their own heritage and culture (I9, Heritage Proprietor & Industrialist, Expert Interviewee).*

Social connectivity and cohesion are weak and therefore there is a lack of interest in engaging with Surat’s heritage [19]. This challenge is exacerbated when considering migrant populations who have settled in Surat primarily for industrial activities and have no inherited sense of responsibility to conserve and value Surat’s heritage.

#### 5.4. The Emerging Local Community Awareness of Heritage Conservation

There was agreement in the findings that the local community lack education, language, and understanding about the values of tangible and intangible heritage and how to care for these heritage assets. Cultural heritage can promote contact, exchanges, and reciprocity, particularly when people engaging with heritage are not considered as passive consumers but as creators, distributors, and decision makers [50]. Expert interviewees highlighted the need for citizen participation in urban heritage conservation as illustrated by the quotes below.

*Surat is experiencing constant dense growth of the CBD and acute migration. There is a need for an active dialogue with people and making them aware of our rich history. People’s participation will bring awareness about the many layers of history. It will facilitate the connection of the footprints about history and the immediate past (I6, Heritage Architect, Expert Interviewee).*

*The local community has a crucial role to play in promoting the pride of our heritage. There should be more involvement of various activities related to heritage (I3, Heritage Consultant, Expert Interviewee).*

The rise in modern practices leaves little room for recognition of traditional activities and processes [51]. Some efforts to build heritage awareness have already been created as discussed in the sections above. However, there is no existing formal strategy to engage with urban communities about Surat's diverse heritage and how to preserve it. Increased awareness about history, story, and the reality about heritage monuments and intangible heritage can instill a sense of pride in the local community [52, 53]. Younger generations with digital access to global agendas on sustainability and heritage identity have a growing interest in visiting and taking steps to restore heritage sites in Surat [54]. However, Surat's underdeveloped heritage tourism industry reduces the interest and exploration of heritage. Thus, contributing to the paucity of understanding of the significance and value of heritage [22]. An expert interviewee representing the local municipality commented on the need to develop the tourism industry with a view to stimulating interest from the locals and to urge them to understand and appreciate the value of the heritage.

*Now tourists are coming to the city for business and go away after the visit, so we are trying to offer something that might induce those people to go with the family and to spend time and money around the city. Surat should not only be for business, but also for tourism. If tourists were paying attention to the buildings, then the locals would understand and appreciate the value of the heritage (I1 & I2, Surat Municipal Corporation Museum, Expert Interviewee).*

The fieldwork revealed that the compartmental thinking and fragmentation in Surat's heritage landscape is largely attributed to the absence of skills and knowledge amongst decision makers in Surat's local government and heritage organizations. The current approaches to heritage conservation in Surat are described in the interviews as "artificial" and "copying the West". Without proper training that focuses on solutions and techniques catering to the uniqueness of Surat's urban context, heritage assets will continue to decay and vanish. There is a need to innovate and develop solutions through communication, cooperation, and collaboration with multiple disciplines. Few of the heritage experts and decision makers can use the digital technology [55] needed for restoration, and there is generally a lack of interest and awareness to learn these crucial skills [56, 57]. Therefore, heritage conservation strategies lack any digital innovation and technique.

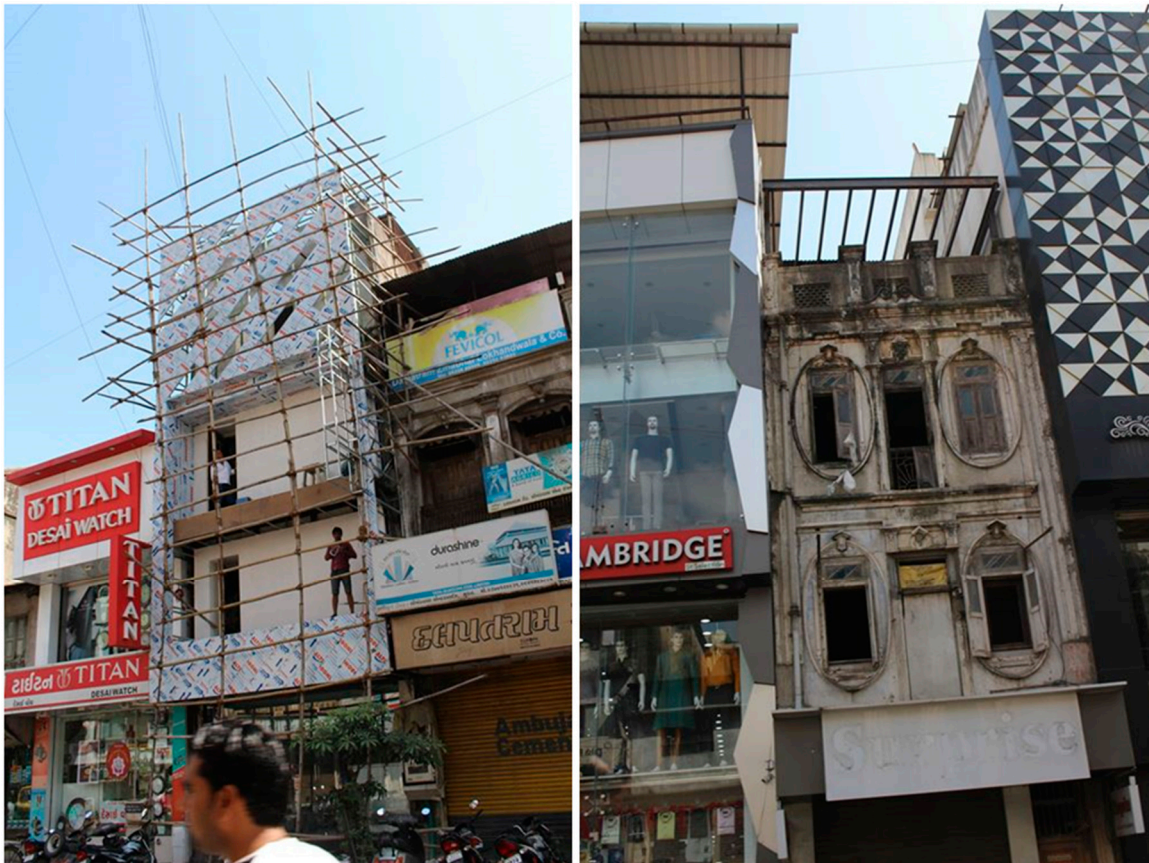
### 5.5. Urban Development and Real Estate Pressures

Surat faces the urgent task of providing new infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing population. People from rural areas and other less-developed towns and cities are migrating to Surat in search of employment opportunities in expanding and established sectors such as the textile trade and diamond business [19]. Consequently, Surat is experiencing real estate pressures for new infrastructure and commercial developments that can house more people and add increased value to the land (Figure 10). There is an existing conflict between the need to preserve heritage and its urban fabric and modernization projects to meet economic objectives. Providing urban infrastructure to meet the rise in population while protecting the integrity and authenticity of its heritage remains a distinct challenge [58]. Development projects for new infrastructure and commercial developments are often based on standardized solutions that are intended to generate immediate revenues [1]. However, they are usually insensitive to the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage [28, 59]. The interpretation given by local experts on the impact of such a rapid urbanization on local heritage was twofold as illustrated below. Through the analysis of both interviews and focus groups data, the researchers understood that (1) rapid urbanization boosts the property market to produce more housing, hence old buildings are replaced with new buildings with higher densities and (2) the replacement of newcomers weaken the affection that local communities still have for local heritage, since newcomers are often not aware about the heritage value and local identity.

*Surat is experiencing an increasing population at a very fast rate and very rapid urbanization. This creates significant problems to create heritage awareness, identifying and awaiting opportunities (I7, Officer, Surat iLAB & Smart City, Expert Interviewee).*

*The problem is not just about land value, is also about money. They go up and up because they do want to rent to more and more people (I4, Heritage Architect, Expert Interviewee).*

*Urbanization is a threat because young generation left the historic city and new owners replaced traditional owners, and found old housing unsuitable to accommodate contemporary lifestyle (I1 & I2, Surat Municipal Corporation Museum experts, Expert Interviewee).*



**Figure 10.** New development and heritage building (Rajmarg) (Source: authors' photos).

The rise in the real estate market has increased the land value in certain areas resulting in housing that are unaffordable for low-income groups and therefore remaining vacant. Developers are buying land in the historic areas, demolishing heritage buildings and replacing them with modern housing with higher density to increase the land value (Figure 10). As a result, heritage buildings and their surrounding areas are falling rapidly into decay. Furthermore, the attractiveness of contemporary ways of living are leading to many people leaving traditional houses and the historic parts of Surat because of unsuitability [17]. Some heritage houses, as designed according to the Indian tradition, lack adequate infrastructure such as toilets, sewage systems, and water pipes. Implementing contemporary infrastructure such as an air conditioning unit, bathroom, or flush toilets that is compatible with the old fabric in heritage buildings can be a challenge.

The photo sequence Figure 11 refers to different buildings captured in the same day (Figure 11a–d). However, it shows the typical trend happening in the two areas of Rander Gamtal and Gopi Surat Central Zone (Figure 2). Historic traditional buildings are often 2 or 3 storey buildings, built of traditional materials such as bricks (Figure 11a). In a leapfrogged but yet systematic way, they are replaced by individual landowners/builders with concrete buildings, allowing to push the density higher. Figure 11b shows a single traditional building demolished. This is happening in a leapfrogged



way, ending up in chunks of the historic precincts being replaced with scattered interventions. On one hand, this makes the process of destruction of the traditional heritage slower, on the other hand, this process is happening silently but in a growingly pervasive manner and is spoiling the identity and the value of the historic urban fabric. Figure 11c shows the typical higher rise building replacing the previously existing traditional one. The last image (Figure 11d) clearly shows how the new building follows a kitsch aesthetic, replacing the sophisticated elegance of traditional architecture with bombastic, inconsistent, and ungrounded architectural features. Still, it also clearly shows how the owner considers such replacement aesthetically appealing since the façade looks quite willingly manicured. This corroborated the finding from the interviews and focus groups, regarding the necessity to raise awareness across the locals on the value of traditional heritage.



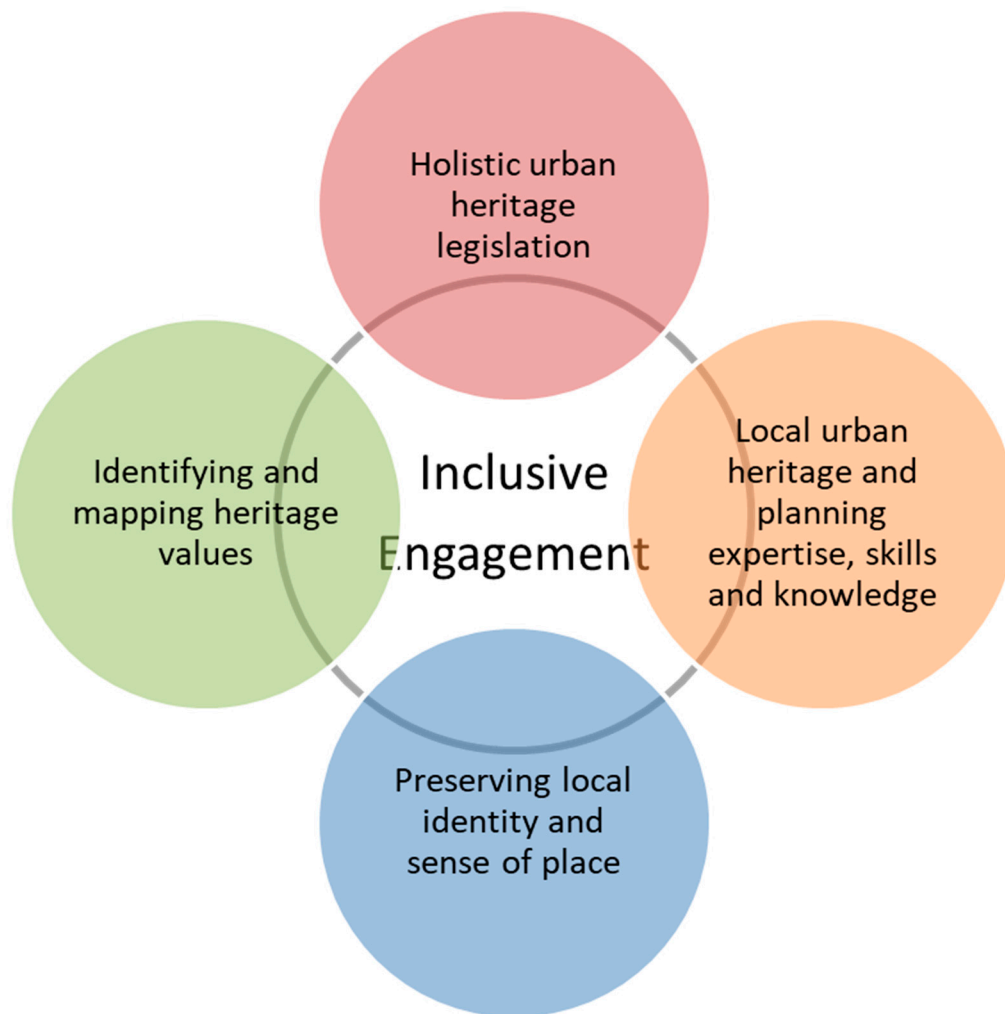
**Figure 11.** Photo sequence of new developments in historic area, Rander Gamtal. (a) Brick traditional buildings, (b) demolished single traditional building, (c) high rise development, (d) Replacement building with new features (Source: authors' photos).

### 5.6. Cultural Heritage and Climate Change

The impact of climate change on heritage has wide consequences ranging from structural damage, atmospheric moisture and temperature changes, and new interactions between natural and anthropogenic factors to more socioeconomic factors such as tourism demand and supply. Findings from the literature analysis suggest that the cultural aspects (social and spatial) are increasingly being considered for achieving environmental sustainability [23, 60, 61]. At a state and local level, there is a paucity of evidence of policies/measures that take into account traditional and local community knowledge in assessing the possible impact of climate adaptation on cultural heritage elements and practices. Indeed, at an urban scale, assessing the value of heritage resources is required for various reasons, such as, assessing vulnerabilities, adequately defining conservation priorities and directing funding [61]. Disaster management and risk mitigation policies with a heritage focus remain largely insufficient, particularly in view of Surat's vulnerability to repetitive flooding. Indeed, there lacks an established discourse in the area of sustainability and inclusive urban development concerning the relationship between cultural heritage and climate change. Efforts worth mentioning in addressing this gap include the 100 Resilient Cities (RC) Challenge which seeks to work with cities around the world to build resilience and tackle social, economic, and physical challenges that are faced by cities in an increasingly urbanized world. As a result, Surat introduced the Surat Resilience Strategy [19] as a platform to help address the critical question of what can be done to protect and improve the way of life of citizens of Surat in the present and in the future. The approach for developing and implementing this strategy is one of diverse collaboration, involving stakeholders such as the Surat Climate Change Trust (SCCT) and Surat Heritage Cell. However, there is an absence of specific measures on heritage sites to reduce the exposure and vulnerability of people and ecosystems to the risks and hazards of climate change. The strategy focuses heavily on social sustainability but fails to consider traditional and local community knowledge in assessing the possible impact of climate adaptation on heritage elements and practices. Similarly, the vulnerability assessment on Surat undertaken by The Rockefeller Foundation's Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network (ACCCRN) [23] highlights heritage as a strength in the profile description of Surat with no further explorations concerning cultural heritage and climate change.

## 6. Recommendations: Sustainable Urban Heritage Framework

Surat's heritage conservation efforts need to be located within the context of the city's socioeconomic and physical infrastructural urban pressures, needs, and demands. The diverse challenges discussed in the section above indicate the crucial necessity for a focus on sustainable urban heritage conservation in Surat. As highlighted by the UN Sustainable Goals (SDG 11), cultural assets represent an essential resource for sustainable and inclusive human development and to progress cities' social resilience [1]. At a local level, the recommendations discussed in this section demonstrate that Surat is a relevant qualitative case study for exploring the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach in different urban contexts that experience similar elements of heritage conservation [12, 13, 62]. The findings have shown that Surat is a diverse urban settlement with multi-layers from the physical socio-cultural environment. Therefore, learning from the qualitative study of Surat and the HUL approach, more general recommendations can be drawn to address the inclusive local management of heritage resources as illustrated in the framework in Figure 12. These recommendations include developing holistic urban heritage legislation (6.1), identifying and mapping the city's heritage values, preserving local identity and sense of place (6.2), and developing local urban heritage and planning expertise, skills, and knowledge (6.3). Inclusive community and stakeholder engagement are central to the successful integration of urban heritage conservation (Figure 12). Using the HUL approach as a guiding framework [12], Surat Municipal Corporation and other local heritage stakeholders together with the inclusive participation of Surat's residents, can reinforce local identity, local distinctiveness, and local tangible and intangible values.



**Figure 12.** Integrated Urban Heritage Model.

### 6.1. Holistic Urban Heritage Legislation

On a national level, heritage policies need to be integrated with planning interfaces. The national Planning Act has good capacity for spatial control and regulation, but needs to broaden when dealing with cultural assets [63]. Surat has committed to becoming a resilient, smart, and sustainable city facilitated by international and national programs, and therefore, the protection of cultural heritage should be central to fulfilling these goals. To this extent, the recognition and appreciation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage will enhance social cohesion and create a sense of place and belonging. These benefits can only truly be actualized through the development of urban heritage policies that integrate heritage protection into urban planning legislation and practice. Not only monuments but also traditional housing and local heritage should be targeted by local planning policies, by embedding heritage conservation principles within the local planning instruments such as plans and guidelines. Surat's local policies must go beyond monumentalism and instead address the heritage and its urban fabric as well as associated interdependent intangible heritage [10, 21]. This can be financially viable by combining in an integrated strategy of the concepts of resiliency and heritage conservation. Intersections between heritage conservation, social cohesion, resiliency, and local identity (Resilient City and heritage conservation) may support interventions leading to a better appreciation of the value of traditional housing and local heritage and elicit a more responsible approach from developers/local owners. Furthermore, disaster management and risk mitigation policies with a heritage focus will establish a discourse in the area of sustainability and inclusive urban development concerning the relationship between cultural heritage and climate change. Still, limitations and constraints to the demolition of traditional buildings must be included in the local



planning policies in support of two areas, firstly, a better understanding of what must be valued by the community, and secondly, to make sure that conservation policies are endorsed consistently in the two historic areas of Rander Gamtal and Gopi Surat Central Zone (Figure 2). It should not be expected that the real estate market will acknowledge the value of heritage unless constraints and limits are imposed by local authorities when a gap in national conservation policies exists.

### *6.2. Identifying and Mapping Heritage Values and Preserving Local Identity and Sense of Place*

A vital part of any sustainable approach is to recognize and understand the values linked to Surat's heritage. Thus, moving away from a material-based approach, also referred to as "authorized heritage discourse" [34, 64, 65] or an expert-driven approach that places the conservation of heritage solely in the hands of heritage authorities. Universal solutions that solely focus on monuments and do not embrace the intangible associations with heritage sites, nor their management systems and practices tend to oversimplify the complex reality of Surat's heritage landscape. A values-based approach places the people of Surat at the core of conservation. This approach is largely based on the Burra Charter (ICOMOS) and has been further developed to recognize the plurality of values, voices, and perspectives in the practice and interpretation of heritage conservation. The inclusion of the local community in decision making about Surat's heritage is prioritized in the discussions of solutions. This is with the view to democratize heritage and increase community participation. Initiatives such as U-Turn awareness programs reflect significant action from the local people of Surat to organize resistance to prevent the demolition of heritage buildings [19]. In this context, a values-based approach builds on the growing momentum and makes concerted effort to engage the whole range of stakeholder groups throughout the conservation process [66]. The youth have a crucial role to play in the success of community awareness. Intergenerational approaches encourage older people and the younger generations to share and learn about heritage together and in a meaningful and impactful way. Surat's educational institutes, schools, and colleges can facilitate this learning and allow for a high level of engagement with tangible and intangible heritage.

In rapid urbanization conditions, local communities are often replaced at a rapid pace too, by becoming less resilient to change and therefore not capable to advocate for their own identity preservation. Again, it should not be expected that disenfranchised local communities will be strong enough to advocate for local heritage conservation, it is a duty of local authorities to impose limits and constraints to the demolition of local heritage. Successfully integrating the historic environment into urban planning management includes identifying and recognizing the complex elements that make Surat distinctive and create a sense of place and identity.

### *6.3. Local Urban Heritage and Planning Expertise, Skills and Knowledge*

Heritage buildings are perceived for the most part as a financial liability and non-priority topic in Surat's investment discourse. This is partly due to the costs, skills, and resources needed to restore the buildings and the surrounding urban fabric. Surat's heritage practitioners lack a strong evidence base for their decision-making in heritage improvements and the quantification of damage to historic materials [19]. The effective use of technology in the heritage sector in Surat has significant potential to contribute to an accurate and informed understanding of the heritage sites, buildings, and interiors. Therefore, heritage professionals and decision-makers need to gain skills and knowledge to identify innovative solutions as well as to seek synergy with other disciplines and fields of work. Resilience building can be combined and associated with heritage conservation, to empower local administrators in their role of endorsing heritage conservation. Organizations such as the ASI and INTACH need to develop formal systems that recognize and support the conservation of heritage as an interdisciplinary effort [67, 68]. The Smart City program could support the implementation of new technologies facilitating knowledge sharing on local heritage.

## **7. Conclusions**

This paper has examined the context of the challenges in Surat and the efforts made with the view to make heritage an integral part of urban planning and management. A presentation of the conceptualization of urban heritage conservation within the city of Surat has been made. The discussion is situated in the context of a growing global discourse on the crucial role culture plays in sustainable urban development. The city of Surat is explored as an exemplar study through qualitative fieldwork. Although Surat has made deliberate steps in addressing its urban heritage, the existing challenges are considerable. The findings from this study highlight the need for decision-makers in the heritage sector to acknowledge Surat's multi-layered and diverse cultural heritage as a critical resource preserved through community engagement. Furthermore, the findings reflected the diversity in Surat's built architectural heritage that demonstrate the typological influences (i.e., vernacular, colonial (Gothic and Renaissance), Art Deco, and Arabesque). The absence of structured approaches can be presented as an opportunity for the design of locally defined participatory processes that promote the diverse transformation of cultural heritage.

Future research can focus on community-based negotiation of urban cultural representation. Surat is not an isolated case, the narrative on this case study reflects current trends and challenges on conservation of heritage assets in rapidly-growing urban areas. Thus, considerations and recommendations are indeed relevant to the larger heritage cities' planners and the conservationist international community. The inclusive development of urban heritage has the potential to foster a shared cultural identity experiencing both material (tangible) and socio-psychological (intangible) remnants of the nation's past and bringing pasts, peoples, places, and cultures into performative contestation and dialogue. Unifying these separate elements to present a coherent story and sustainable representation of urban heritage, however, remains a priority area for future research. Additionally, this paper recommends future research should be supported with comprehensive statistical and geo-spatial heritage data that can allow for the investigation of the role of urban heritage with broader urban issues.

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