

## BRIDGING THE GAP IN INJUSTICE URBANISM

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### ABSTRACT

Cities are often divided by invisible borders, and this demarcation is man-made, with some areas featuring large infrastructure, well-maintained parks, gardens, and upscale residential areas. In contrast, other areas are characterized by severe deprivation, inadequate housing, inadequate services, poor recreation and cultural facilities, deterioration, and scarce infrastructure investment. These tangible differences come as symptoms of intangible and persistent divisions in society that distribute unequal opportunities and freedoms among the population. The research problem has shown the lack of clarity and diagnosis of urban problems that led to the emergence of the urban gap in cities. This paper focuses on breaking down the difficult edges created by the urban zoning of the city that would enhance interactions between communities and social classes through a practical study on a selected sample (Al-Hussein neighbourhood and Al-Intisar neighbourhood, Al-Muthanna, Iraq). The research concluded the importance of finding appropriate architectural and urban solutions and strategies to cross the urban inequality gap and achieve justice.

**Keywords:** urban gaps, urban problems, urban injustice, divisions, deprivation, boundaries

### INTRODUCTION

Some cities are far from providing equal conditions and opportunities for their communities. The separation between uses and degrees of prosperity is so clear that the rich live in well-serviced neighbourhoods, gated communities and well-built formal settlements, while the poor are confined to inner-city or informal settlements and semi-urban slums (Mekawy & Yousry, 2012). The urban divide emerges as one of the main paradoxes in cities where equal access to urban services and opportunities is often constrained by all kinds of visible and invisible barriers (UN-Habitat, 2010). Large sections of society

are often excluded based on pre-determined traits such as gender, age, race or traits over which they have little control, such as where they live (poor neighbourhoods versus rich neighbourhoods) or what they own (income and social status). Therefore, this narrow perspective ignores marginalised groups' actual and potential contributions in building cities and thus can only delay progress towards sustainable and inclusive development (van Ham et al., 2016). Various forms of exclusion marginalize the vast amounts of human capital ready to be mobilized for a sustainable city. So, the city fails to absorb its poorer residents, regardless of the social and cultural riches they may contribute (UN-Habitat, 2011). The urban divide

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between “haves” and “have-nots” opens a gap – or a deep wound – that can result in instability or at least generate high social and economic costs not only to the urban poor but also to society as a whole (Marom, 2019). Therefore, the research seeks to reunify social and economic classes through genuine architectural and urban strategies through which the urban divide can be crossed.

## URBAN DIVIDE

It is a metaphor for the spatial segmentation of the urban fabric, refers to the growing divisions and inequalities that exist within our cities and societies, and represents one of the major paradoxes of our time (Avni & Yiftachel, 2014). The urban divide leads to a potential conflict between marginalized slums, degraded areas, and prosperous and luxurious communities (Little et al., 2014). The urban divide leads to many associated problems such as dissonance in urban land use and physical characteristics of space, spatial disintegration, general lack of integration in the city, increasing segregation of functions, and segregation in the distribution of essential services (Solari, 2012). This separation is more like a random patchwork tapestry where the different pieces are grouped due to practical necessity, rather than a harmonious tapestry of a variety of shapes and patterns forming a meaningful whole (Altinok & Cengiz, 2008).

The urban divide can be characterized by various forms of inclusion/exclusion, integration/marginalization, wealth/poverty, equality/inequality, formality, and informality. Those on the wrong side of the divide are excluded from the benefits of urbanization and prosperity. They are deprived of urban advantage (van Gent et al., 2009). The physical and social distance between slums and affluent neighbourhoods constitutes a spatial poverty trap characterized by six distinct challenges: (a) strict job restrictions; (b) high rates of gender disparities; (c) deterioration of living conditions; (d) Social exclusion and marginalization; (e) lack of social interaction and (f) high crime rate (UN-Habitat, 2010). Therefore, the apparent spatial inequalities in many cities are the product of both

social and economic disparities, larger processes of urban development and governance, and institutional exclusion of specific groups, where the urban divide results from social, economic, political and cultural exclusion (SDD, 2011). As a result of the multiplicity of problems that lead to the emergence of urban gaps, we will focus on a group of the most important and most frequent urban gaps in the city and the strategies and mechanisms of filling them that are adopted by the research, the most important of which are:

### Access Gap

Access restrictions significantly contribute to people’s deprivation and marginalization, resulting in disproportionate poverty, deprivation, and exclusion rates (Irani & Rahnamayiezekavat, 2021). Socially and economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods lag in access to infrastructure benefits, for example, restricting access to quality green and safe public spaces to low-income and minority communities. And if they are found within these neighbourhoods, they are of lower quality, less maintenance, and smaller compared to more affluent neighbourhoods. In contrast, wealthier communities have better advantages through the better presence of parks and other open spaces in their neighbourhoods (Landry & Chakraborty, 2009). The concept of access is not necessarily limited by proximity to the city’s infrastructures, but through the actual use and benefits that they provide to people of different affiliations, without creating psychological or physical barriers to accessing them (Rofé et al., 2015).

### Urban Planning Policy Gap

The lack of planning policies on urbanization and chaotic development problems such as the unmanageable flow of population into cities, thousands of illegal buildings, urban overcrowding, poor quality of life leading to social and structural inequalities, poor living and environmental conditions in some neighbourhoods, and poor access to basic services (Baftijari et al., 2007), thus leading to a lack of job and housing security, as well as a lack of policies

that contribute to meeting their needs, and as a result slum dwellers are left bearing the suffering of the structural and social inequalities left by the urban planning policy gap in their lives, bodies and health (Rashid, 2009).

### **Communication Gap**

Many reasons led to social stratification and the emergence of the communication gap between societies, the most important of which are related to the construction of the urban fabric and the effects of infrastructure in terms of its presence or absence, as infrastructure has always played its role in strengthening unspoken divisions, isolating societies, containing their expansion, and separating them physically from nearby schools, parks, or communities (Jaeger et al., 2007). Infrastructures can be a symbol of zoning about the disruption they create within the urban fabric and the consequent social and cultural disruption, which in turn contributes to urban zoning and all the negative effects that we currently see in society as a whole (Powers, 2016).

## **STRATEGIES FOR BRIDGING THE URBAN DIVIDE**

### **Access Strategy**

Accessibility can facilitate the full and effective participation of all, through:

1. easy access to transportation, public spaces and public services by providing integrated transportation facilities and services with reliable and affordable access to all. Inclusive transportation also requires continuity of accessibility across the travel chains. All elements of the journey from the starting point to the final destination include entrances that are easily accessible to all. In addition, social justice requires that low-income users not bear exorbitant transportation costs to ensure opportunities for full and effective participation in social, economic, cultural, and political life (Litman, 2017).

2. reducing psychological barriers hindering access, such as fear of crime, by reducing exposure to physical and social risks (Biazzo et al., 2019).
3. reducing physical obstacles to accessing the physical environment, transportation, employment, education, health, services and information by providing permeable public spaces, pedestrian-friendly landscaping, useful and well-designed furniture and amenities, such as benches, lighting, public toilets, and bicycle parking/paths (DESA, 2016).

### **Urban Planning Policies Strategy**

Urban planning policies play an important role in combating poverty and apartheid while promoting more sustainable and inclusive urban development (Bolay, 2020) by protection from urban heterogeneity through the proximity of services and facilities and avoidance of zoning, neighbourhood fragmentation, and closed communities (Purwantiastning et al., 2015), managing the proliferation of informal settlements through the more comprehensive implementation of existing legislation and increasing alternative housing options for the poor as well as increasing the availability of serviced land at affordable prices for the poor. In addition to reforming the financial mechanism for the production of social or low-cost housing to provide loans and credits that the middle class and the urban poor can obtain, monitoring rental markets so that the urban poor can be assisted and protected, through a policy program of tiered regulation guided by the concept of subsidized minimum rent levels, the government should also encourage the construction of public/private rental housing units as part of social housing policies (UN-Habitat, 2011).

### **Communication Strategy – Reconnecting Communities and Repairing Broken Relationships**

A communication strategy provides a social or spatial network that connects people and places together by reshaping or reconnecting the urban fabric, creating a more permeable city, where there

are no hard boundaries between communities by understanding the social and economic dynamics of the community (*Public life...*, 2015), investigating the impact of infrastructure on surrounding communities, the search for a location where the urban divide and social stratification within society have strengthened, the search for areas that can be “activators” to tie the urban fabric back together which represents a solution to repair the broken urban fabric destroyed by decades of uncontrolled growth of infrastructure by designing a project that serves the surrounding community and brings its citizens together in an educational environment (Jian et al., 2020). and defining a program that helps bring together stratified and dispersed societies; thus providing physical and visual communication across barriers that would have been impenetrable within societies (Powers, 2016), added to this the use of equitable urban renewal provided that this improvement meet the needs of current and future generations while achieving justice and equity (Bianchi, 2019).

Finally, several main and sub-indicators were reached based on which the practical study of the research was measured and the questionnaire form was built as shown in Table 1.

## METHODOLOGY THE CASE STUDY

Two opposite neighbourhoods separated by the Euphrates River were elected: Al-Intisar neighbourhood and Al-Hussein neighbourhood in the city of Samawah, the centre of Al-Muthanna Governorate in Iraq for the practical study. Their locations are shown in Figure 1. The total area of the elected sample is 137.4 hectares without the river, 63.2 hectares for the Al-Intisar neighbourhood, in which 9,688 people live, with a total of 973 families, and a population density of 153.2 people/hectare, with a growth rate of 5.9 and 74.2 hectares for Al-Hussein neighbourhood, in which 7788 people live, with a total of 690 families. With a population density of 105 people/hectare, and a growth rate of 3.8 (from 1997 to 2019 according to the data of the Department of Statistics in the Governorate of Muthanna), the study area is located between two important bridges that were newly established, namely, the North Samawah Bridge from the east, and Barbouti Bridge from the west, which are separated by a distance 1 km approx. The Al-Intisar neighbourhood is usually inhabited by the middle to poor class, while the Al-Hussein neighbourhood is inhabited by the sons

**Table 1.** List of indicators of the final theoretical framework

Indications	Sub-indicators	
access strategy	Public transportation is user-defined and available at more than one point in the neighbourhood	X-1
	Easy access to electricity networks	X-2
	Easy access to sewage networks	X-3
	Physical barriers to accessing the built environment	X-4
	Psychological obstacles that prevent access to certain places	X-5
Strategies to enhance urban planning policies	The spread of informal settlements	X-6
	Sufficient diversity of activities in the neighbourhood	X-7
	Monitoring the rental markets	X-8
	Financing for the purchase and lease of land	X-9
	Low-cost social housing	X-10
Communication strategy	equitable urban renewal in the area	X-11
	Infrastructure obstructions	X-12
	Spaces that help the region to strengthen the links between them	X-13
	Programs that target and help bring together scattered communities	X-14

Source: own elaboration.





**Fig. 1.** Study area and boundaries  
Source: own preparation based on Google Earth maps.



of the wealthy class. Several reasons prompted us to choose the site, the most important of which is that this sector is an essential part of the city of Samawah. There is a different mix of social and cultural levels in both neighbourhoods, and there are clear differences in terms of urban level and infrastructure services for both neighbourhoods. Lack of development projects aimed at bridging the gap between the two neighbourhoods. There are clear differences in the availability of activities and services in both neighbourhoods, attracting the people of the upper and middle class closer to the upper class to live in the Al-Hussein neighbourhood; in contrast, people are not attracted to live in the Al-Intisar neighbourhood due to the feeling of insecurity, and the lack of attractive activities. The presence of two physical bridges that opened not too long ago was not enough to bridge the gap between the two neighbourhoods.

The research adopted several methods in measuring the local practical experience to verify the hypothesis and achieve the goal of the research, as shown in Figure 2:

First: The method of analytical field survey: collecting information about the study area through the analytical field survey, including a direct visit to the site and taking pictures of the study area, and collecting and reviewing the concerned departments in the governorate to obtain information, laws and existing instructions, the most important of which is the basic plan, which confirms that it is not permissible to use the lands unless the required use is by what was decided in the basic plan, where the use of the two neighbourhoods was for residential

purposes at a rate of no less than 200 m for the housing unit in the two neighbourhoods. Dredging the river and its vicinity for agricultural and recreational purposes, determining the conditions for obtaining a building permit in them, identifying the penal laws used by municipal officials that are imposed on abuses, and identifying the controls of residential construction and commercial streets in them, and they were analyzed according to the indicators of the theoretical framework for diagnosing urban problems that led to the emergence of gaps in the study area.

Second: The questionnaire method: the measurement of the indicators of the theoretical framework shown in Table 1. where the question is as follows: “Were they achieved?” with yes, no, or somewhat. The questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of the residents of the two neighbourhoods (20 individuals from each neighbourhood), i.e. a total of 40 as a total number of respondents, where the authors assumed that the sample size was sufficient for logical thinking and generalization of the results obtained, either using the method of statistical analysis in percentage and formulating graphs Through Microsoft Excel (The survey was conducted on [05.12.2020]).

The questionnaire included 55% of men and 45% of women. The respondents were mostly young people: 70% were between the ages of 20–35, 20% were between the ages of 35–50, and only 10% were 50 years and over. In the Al-Intisar neighbourhood, 20% of the respondents work in the private sector, while 35% of them work in the government sector, and 45% of them are without work. As for the Al-Hussein neighbourhood, 55% of the respondents work in

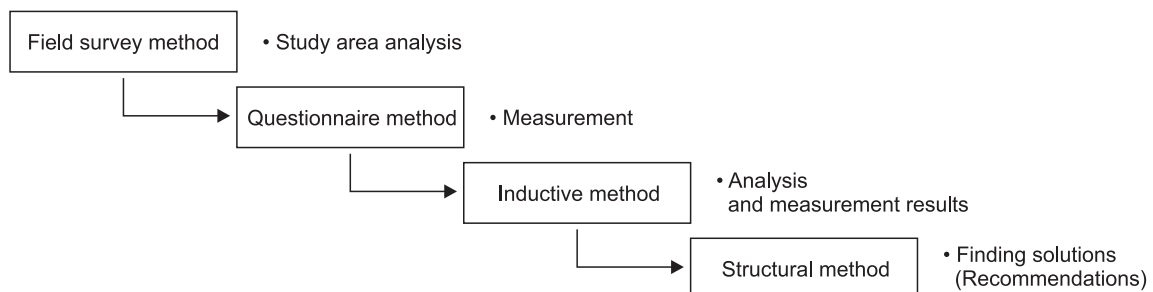


Fig. 2. The methods used in the practical study  
Source: own preparation based on Author.

the private sector, while 30% of them work in the government sector. And 15% of them are without work. Respondents in the Al-Intisar neighbourhood reported that 45% of the neighbourhood’s residents did not complete their education or left it in the primary stages and that 35% of them completed secondary education and only 20% of them completed university education. As for the Al-Hussein district, 15% of the Only of the neighbourhood’s residents did not complete their education or left it in the primary stages, 35% of them completed secondary education and 50% of them completed university education.

Third: The inductive method: access to the analysis and measurement results by comparing the results achieved in the two methods and adopting the statistics approach using the (Microsoft Excel Worksheet) program.

Fourth: The method of analysis and structural construction: access to solutions (strategies), conclusions, and recommendations by analyzing the possibility of applying the proposed solutions based on (strategies for bridging urban gaps in the city) leading to the development of a development proposal in the study area.

## RESULTS

To reach the results of measurement and analysis, the inductive method was adopted by comparing the results achieved with the two methods. The first is the field survey conducted by the researcher, and the second is the questionnaire method, through which

a set of conclusions and readings were reached for the extent of the emergence of the urban gaps that the study focused on, to reach after that the methods and mechanisms of bridging them structurally.

### The access gap

The extent of the access gap, which is illustrated in Figure 3, was measured using the information that was obtained from the field survey method and the resolution method, as follows:

As for public transportation in the two neighbourhoods, there is a public means of transportation, which is small buses, at nominal prices in both neighbourhoods, and the river transport is not activated, even though the two neighbourhoods extend on the river from one of its sides. As for the pedestrian axes in the Intisar neighbourhood, they suffered from poor services, some of them are unpaved and unsuitable for walking and filled with excesses and devoid of the simplest furniture for the streets, such as seating, landscaping and others, while we find them in the Al-Hussein neighbourhood wider and furnished with lighting, landscaping and some benches.

In the Al-Intisar neighbourhood, we concluded that there were poor services, as the neighbourhood suffered from a lack of sanitation services, water and electricity services were very bad, and its streets are unpaved. As for the Al-Hussein neighbourhood, it is good in terms of the aforementioned public services.

About the presence of psychological obstacles such as fear of crime, we find them in the Al-Intisar

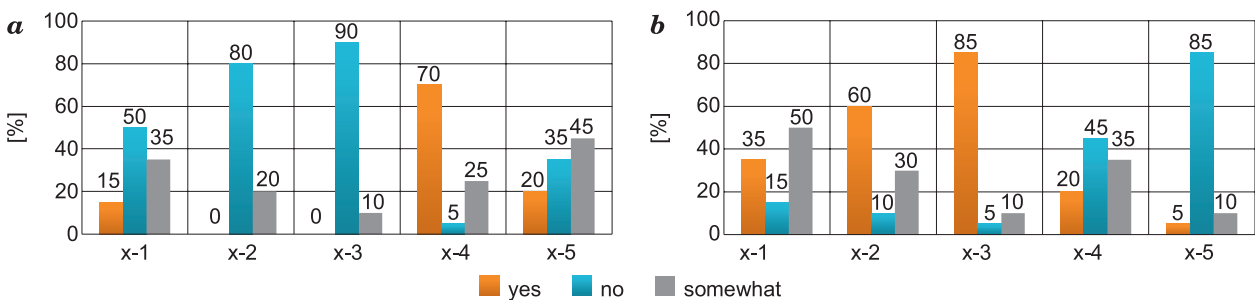


Fig. 3. The results of achieving the access strategy in Al-Intisar neighbourhood(A) and Al-Hussein neighbourhood (B) – % of respondents’ answers (05.12.2021)

Source: own analysis based on the results of the survey questionnaire.



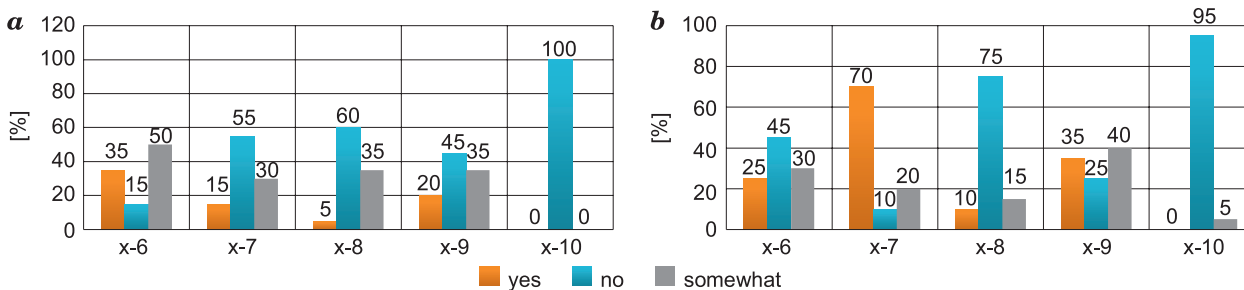
**Fig. 4.** The difference in access services between the two neighbourhoods  
 Source: authors' photographs.

neighbourhood in a greater percentage than in the Al-Hussein neighbourhood. As for the physical obstacles are found in a greater percentage in the Al-Intisar neighbourhood, where the streets are not fully serviced (see Fig. 4).

**Urban Planning Policy Gap**

On the urban level, The results of the questionnaire shown in figure 5, that most of the buildings of the Al-Intisar neighbourhood are poorly executed, and not fully finished, which gives the appearance of a poor building that does not have an identity or a distinctive architectural character. On the other hand, the Al-Hussein neighbourhood has most of the houses in it with complete finishes, and with modern architectural designs. As for the slums, we find that

they appear in the Al-Intisar neighbourhood along the agricultural lands extending on the Euphrates River to turn into irregular residential purposes. There is not enough diversity of activities in the Al-Intisar neighbourhood. On the other hand, we find their diversity in the Al-Hussein neighbourhood. As for the rental markets, we find that they are not subject to supervision, as their wages rise in the Al-Hussein neighbourhood. As for the financing in the form of loans to buy and rent land, we find that there are limited opportunities for the low-income residents of the Al-Intisar neighbourhood, with complex conditions. And the absence of any housing complexes within the Al-Intisar neighbourhood despite the availability of sufficient spaces. On the other hand, the Al-Hussein neighbourhood contains an expensive residential complex (see Fig. 6).



**Fig. 5.** The results of achieving the urban planning policy strategy in Al-Intisar neighbourhood (A) and Al-Hussein neighbourhood (B) – % of respondents' answers (05.12.2021)  
 Source: own analysis based on the results of the survey questionnaire.



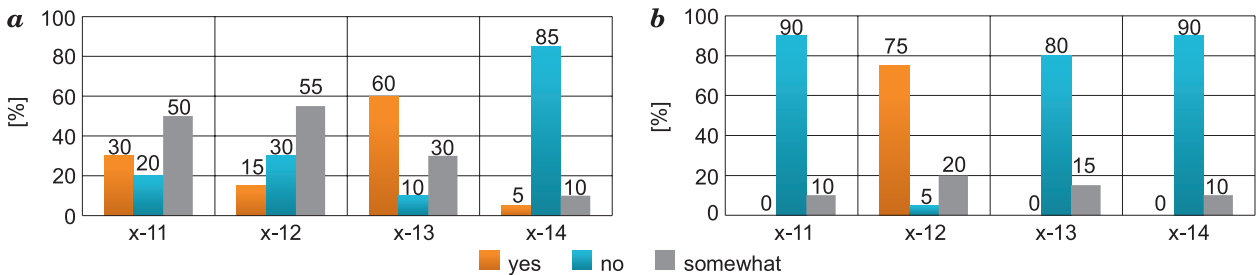


**Fig. 6.** Explanation of the urban planning policy gap between the two neighbourhoods.  
 Source: authors' photographs.

### Urban connectivity gap

The results of the field survey and the questionnaire whose results are illustrated in the figure 7 showed the communication gap, Al-Intisar neighbourhood is devoid of any space for a family

gathering, whether recreational, gardens or children's playgrounds, it contains a group of gathering spaces planned within the neighbourhood some of which are implemented while the other is under implementation, represented by parks and gardens for families to gather and playgrounds for children (see Fig. 8). We find



**Fig. 7.** The results of achieving the urban connectivity strategy in Al-Intisar neighbourhood (A) and Al-Hussein neighbourhood (B) – % of respondents' answers (05.12.2021)  
 Source: own analysis based on the results of the survey questionnaire.



**Fig. 8.** The difference is in the gathering places and the connection of both neighbourhoods  
 Source: authors' photographs.

many obstacles caused by the lack of infrastructure in the Al-Intisar neighbourhood when compared to the similar quality in the Al-Hussein neighbourhood, which contributed to increasing the gap between the two neighbourhoods. There are also no significant programs targeting poor families and helping to bring together dispersed communities. Regarding urban renewal, in previous years, no urban renewal projects took place at the urban level, except for some single and fragmented projects the most important projects is affecting the level of both neighbourhoods is the construction of the Barbuti bridge and North Samawah bridge where they strengthened the connection between the two neighbourhoods after it was almost non-existent, but these two projects were not enough to bridge The multilevel gap between the two neighbourhoods.

## DISCUSSION

In the light of the literature and after identifying the urban gaps in the field of practical study, the research discusses an analysis of the possibility of applying the proposed solutions within three important strategies to break the hard fears in cities, where the role of *the access strategy* is linked to the development of the urban spatial structure and linking the gaps in the city (Krzywnicka & Jankowska, 2021) through:

Connecting the two neighbourhoods with an effective integrated public transport between the two neighbourhoods, instead of being separate in the past, and extending it to include all the surrounding main streets, and the integration of the pedestrian movement network without obstacles to achieve access to places and activities by the residents of both neighbourhoods. Activating the river transport to enhance the interconnection of the two neighbourhoods, after it was neglected and became ineffective in the past, activate all axes leading to the river, activating the bridge to be not only for cars but also a dynamic axis dedicated to pedestrians that contains a variety of activities, addressing the lack of access to infrastructure services that Al-Intisar

neighbourhood suffers from, as well as Al-Hussein neighbourhood, removing the psychological obstacles (fear of the crime, class discrimination among the residents of neighbourhoods) from which the neighbourhood suffers.

Further fragmentation imposed by ongoing societal transformations, providing opportunities for interaction and facilitating city management at various spatial and administrative levels (Onyango et al., 2021) can also be avoided through *the strategy of enhancing urban planning policies* to enhance opportunities through:

Avoid uncontrolled and unplanned “urban sprawl” in both neighbourhoods, and work to remove encroachments, especially those based on agricultural lands and near the river, protection from urban heterogeneity through the proximity of services and facilities and avoiding zoning, the fragmentation of neighbourhoods, and the closure of these neighbourhoods, monitoring the rental, buying and selling markets to make them suitable for both neighbourhoods, providing loans and credits that the middle and weak classes can obtain, building public/private rental housing units equipped with services as part of social housing policies.

In addition to using the *communication strategy* as the backbone of the diverse fabric of the city to provide a social or spatial network that connects people and places together in the two neighbourhoods, providing access and opportunities for all (Powers, 2016) through:

Creating more permeable neighborhoods, in which the infrastructure does not create solid borders between communities, but rather it becomes the means to bring and mix them together by making the bridges linking the two neighborhoods (North Samawa Bridge and Barbuti Bridge) not only as a means of transporting cars, but rather making it a dynamic hub that contains attractive activities for the residents of the neighborhood, enhancing interactions and experiences between the two neighborhood residents by activating activities along the river’s edges, alienation and separation that you feel due to the different social classes, by

proposing the establishment of a green bridge for pedestrians that contains a variety of activities that attract pedestrians from both neighborhoods to meet and exchange conversations, find areas that can be “activators” to tie the urban fabric and communities together, such as farmland along a river, and design a project that serves the surrounding community and brings its citizens together in an educational setting. It requires the existence of urban renewal projects that contribute to the development of the two neighbourhoods, and improve the quality of life and the well-being of residents, especially the Al-Intisar neighbourhood.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the information we have collected, it is clear that social and economic classes are reunified through simple architectural and urban strategies. The hard edges created by infrastructure must be broken to create a more permeable city, which will enhance interactions between communities through an architectural intervention focusing on bringing people together in an open and educational environment where the gap created by social stratification can be bridged. By understanding the causes of stratification and its pressure on society, one can then strive to reform and unite a fractured society. Many neighbourhoods face this urban divide, so it requires much sustainable effort that includes multiple strategies to bridge the urban divide. Accordingly, we made our recommendation for the functional study area, which focused on unifying the two neighbourhoods and removing the physical and moral boundaries between them to reach urban justice by following three essential strategies, which are the access strategy, the strategy of enhancing urban planning policies, and the communication strategy. It is possible to mitigate the adverse effects of the urban injustice gap by stitching the urban fabric and reconnecting it together to reach more mixed communities with no barriers between them.

**Author contributions:** authors have approved the final version of the article. Authors contributed to this work as follows: M.S. and M.A. developed the concept and designed the study, M.S. collected the data, M.S. analysed and interpreted the data, M.S. prepared a draft of the article, M.A. revised the article critically for important intellectual content.

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