

## UNVEILING HERITAGE PERCEPTIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AUTHENTICITY AT UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE AND NON- DESIGNATED SITES IN LAHORE

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### **Abstract**

*This research paper investigates the shifting perceptions and experiences of visitors at culturally significant heritage sites within Lahore's urban fabric, focusing on the Lahore Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Wazir Khan Mosque, an important architectural landmark. As tourist numbers increase and both designated and non-designated sites face challenges of preservation and restoration, understanding the factors influencing visitor perceptions becomes crucial. The study examines the impact of authenticity, preservation efforts, and visitor management strategies on the perceived value and authenticity of these sites. Through a comparative analysis of visitor experiences and perceptions at both designated and non-designated sites, the research aims to uncover nuanced insights into the dynamics shaping heritage tourism and management strategies in Lahore. By elucidating these factors, the study contributes to the discourse on heritage conservation and tourism management in rapidly evolving urban contexts.*

**Keywords.** World Heritage ,Wazir Khan Mosque, Unesco, Tourism, management.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

*In a world that gets smaller daily with technology and new modes of travel and exploration, people of all kinds set out to discover the history that becomes within reach. Tourists visit destinations in search of specific experiences or to rekindle a feeling of belonging with a piece of their own past (Lowenthal, 1990). That past viewed from today, however, is deemed heritage, or a commoditized past that gains value in the present (Ashworth, 1997; Goulding, 1998; McKercher and Du Cros, 2002; Orbasli, 2000; Timothy & Boyd, 2003). In order to give hierarchy to the pieces of history considered most useful, UNESCO designates some sites as World Heritage, drawing more visitors and greater attention to their care and promotion. UNESCO designates sites as World Heritage Sites due to their cultural, historical, scientific, or other significant qualities. "Cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity" is what the sites are said to possess.*

*Increasing numbers of visitors and higher traffic leaves tourism and heritage managers with new challenges for preservation and restoration work of these World Heritage sites (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002). There are also important architectural sites that are not given this designation. Many are important to local or national cultural identity and still being found on "must-see" travel lists. When they are closely knit in a city's fabric with designated sites, non-designated sites too become overwhelmed with visitors.*

*As a response to increased tourist traffic, the environment, and aged materials, preservation and restoration measures mitigate damage and provide preventative strategies to protect the longevity of architectural treasures. Long periods of work, scaffolding, too-evident repairs, and even wholesale changes have the ability to change visitor perceptions (Naoi, 2003). Authenticity, or the connotation that something has authority, "a sense of the real or the unique", plays a major role in those perceptions as well as management of heritage sites (Wang, 1999, citing Sharpley, 1994: 130). Visitors seek authentic experiences and authentic spaces in which to have those experiences. The challenge is discerning the difference in perception and experience between designated and non-designated sites. This research will focus on discovering which factors change that perception.*

## **OVERVIEW**

*Lahore is Pakistan's second-largest city and is considered historically significant. Its strategic location on major commerce and invasion routes to South Asia sets it apart. Its history began in 1000 BC, when the Hindu ruler Loh, laid the groundwork for it. Since the arrival of Mahmud of Ghazni in 1000AD, the city of*

Lahore has seen growth, devastation, and cultural transformation through Sultanate, Mughal, and Sikh eras (Kabir, N., Abbas, G., & Hayat, K. 2017). Monuments and relics have evolved throughout time. While Lahore is home to UNESCO World Heritage site of the Lahore Fort and Shalimar Garden, the focus of this proposal is on the co-listed works of Lahore Fort and their juxtaposition to Wazir Khan Mosque, a tentative World Heritage site. The Lahore Fort is a citadel located in Lahore. The fortress is located at the northern end of the walled city of Lahore and has an area of more than 20 hectares (49 acres). The Fort is irregular in layout, measuring 427 meters east-west and 335 meters north-south. This Fort showcases the entire history of Mughal architecture. It comprises 21 significant monuments, some of which date back to the reign of Emperor Akbar. The Lahore Fort is famous for having been nearly totally rebuilt in the 17th century, when the Mughal Empire was at the peak of its magnificence and luxury.

The Wazir Khan Mosque is a 17th-century mosque in Lahore that was erected during the time of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. It was erected by Wazir Hakim Shaikh Ilm-ud-din Ansari. The construction began in 1634. The mosque, located at a short distance from the Lahore Fort, gained political significance when it was designated as the official venue for the Emperor's Friday prayers. Both sites draw visitors looking to experience Lahore's "must-see" architecture. In the past, the Wazir Khan Mosque and its square served as a unique and significant feature that punctuated the Walled City's urban fabric. This thoroughfare connected Delhi Gate and the Lahore Fort. Situated approximately 260 meters (853 feet) away from Delhi Gate and encircled by the Walled City's dense, organic urban fabric, the Wazir Khan Mosque complex is the focal point of a historic ensemble that exemplifies the patterns of early 17th-century urban design.

This study focuses on the visitor experience at each site, questioning the role of authenticity and the visitors' own impacts in its creation. Using methods that draw upon tourists' own knowledge and senses, their reactions to historic and present conditions, and information from tourism managers, the result will be to ascertain the nature of perceptions in two sites that drive the local cultural agenda.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

As authenticity is a primary motivational factor in the interest of heritage, it can create different experiences and understandings of heritage sites frequented by tourists. Sites may be deemed heritage for many different reasons in contexts across the world, but only an elite group are given the title World Heritage. Further, despite their designation, these places may be located in close proximity and impact the visitor flows between, the overall experience of, or perceptions of authenticity between one another. This leads me to the question:

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*What are the differences between tourist perceptions of authenticity in UNESCO-designated World Heritage architectural sites in comparison to non-designated sites?*

### **RATIONALE**

*There are both theoretical and practical implications in finding the perception differences between World Heritage designated sites and non-designated sites. Theoretically, the integration of what we know currently about tourist behaviour in response to heritage as well as the premises of authenticity for managing heritage will help create models for preservation, restoration, and interpretation of sites. There is a need to differentiate requirements for experience at different kinds of sites in response to visitors. We can classify authenticity perceptions and their management implications (Goulding, 1998) and kinds of authenticity (of objects and of experiences) (Wang, 1999). However, it will be more powerful to merge the two approaches in studying the built environment. Further, if we understand that tourists make their own perceptions of authenticity (Wang, 1999), when there are two sites in near proximity, we may find connections in how the authentic nature of one site may influence the perceptions of the second site.*

*Practically, we can use the data and responding theories to create more mindful interpretations of heritage. Tourists are motivated to travel to heritage destinations by authenticity (Chhabra, 2010; Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003). Motivations have great implications for management. I surmise that managing different kinds of sites in close proximity with seemingly different kinds of authenticity is a new challenge with new data. Visitors also seek meaningful interactions and through careful consideration of visitor perception and behaviour in response to different types of heritage we may create better interpretations (Moscardo, 1996). Different sites with diverse histories require careful consideration and presentation to the public. A more meaningful or direct interpretation approach allows for a complete experience, something visitors generally seek (Moscardo, 1996). Perceptions have implications for interpretation and management regardless of the heritage designation.*

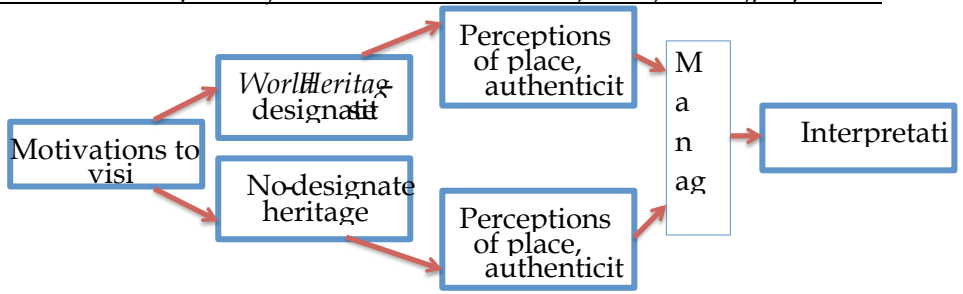


Fig. 1: Rationale interpretations- Assuming motivations to visit heritage sites (regardless of designation are the same), we can find what differences occur in perception outcomes. Differences in turn impact management and allow for more mindful interpretation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### PERCEPTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY IN TOURISM

Widely studied and theorized, authenticity in tourism asserts itself as a central theme in tourist experience and perceptions of travel. The concept of authenticity in relation to tourism motivations was initially introduced by MacCannell (1973). He clarified how tourists relate to places and spaces they consider authentic and their pursuit of the most genuine travel experiences. However, since MacCannell (1973), numerous other academics have investigated authenticity in a variety of ways. Edward Bruner's concepts of authenticity (1994) are described by Krosbacher and Mazanec (2010) as "multilayered and understood differently by different groups." Individuals differ in their understanding of authenticity and, consequently, in their opinions about what defines authenticity. For the purposes of this exploration, authenticity may be categorized in the literature generally as in experience or as in objects, but the two are continually interrelated (Wang, 1999).

### TOURED OBJECTS

To create a more varied experience and a sense of existential authenticity, tourists might adjust their perceptions to change their experience. Wang (1999) divides authenticity into three smaller groups: existential, constructive, and objective. The next section will examine existential authenticity. Speaking to the authority of original objects (as in a museum context) is what is meant by objective authenticity. This may pertain to historical artifacts or the acceptance of the content being toured as authentic (Gant, 2013). What Boorstin (1964) called "pseudo-events," in which travellers accept the production of culture that their destination is offering them, may also be connected to objective authenticity.

Constructive authenticity is an expected imagery or belief of trueness by tourists on that which they trust to be authentic. Wang explains that this perception also deals with "historical verisimilitude' or representation" (1999: 354) by which

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*object imitations may be reliable for resembling the original. However, Cohen (1995) explains that in the post-modern sense, tourists actually do not care about the object's true nature, but whether or not it enhances their experience. Thus, we may argue that reproduction, in Cohen's eyes, will be acceptable to the tourist gaze and their hopes of consuming an experience true to the culture they perceive they are visiting.*

### **TOURED EXPERIENCES**

*The objective of tourist destinations is to constantly provide visitors the impression that they are experiencing the most genuine experiences possible in relation to Erving Goffman's (1959) and MacCannell's (1973) development of the front-back dichotomy. According to MacCannell, travelers are always looking for the most authentic experiences; however, even if they are persuaded of a genuine encounter, one person may find an artificially created object or one with "staged authenticity" to be untrue. Consequently, object and experience are directly related in MacCannell's conceptualization.*

*On the other hand, Wang's concept of existential authenticity, in which he explains is long standing in many disciplines and with many authors including Heidegger (358), relates to the idea that has nothing to do with toured objects, instead it is related to "an existential state of Being activated by certain tourist activities" (359). In this mode of authenticity, a tourist is looking to be centered in one's true self for a purer existence. Wang relates this kind of authenticity to nostalgia and inner states of perception of the world in which the tourist belongs.*

*Using the Heideggerian view of existential authenticity, in which one gains authenticity through experience and being one's self according to one's nature or essence and not through daily life, Steiner and Reisinger (2006) advocate for the construction of a framework through which new views of tourism, tourists, and hosts can be achieved. The notion of possibilities and being able to choose among them as what makes us human, as defined by Heidegger, sets a stage on which we can view tourism and the authenticity or inauthenticity of action; that is, not all people are authentic or inauthentic at all times and thus, even tourists can choose. The characteristics of authenticity and inauthenticity as developed by Heidegger further support the claim of the authors for the use of this framework as they apply them to common instances and occurrences in tourism and tourist behaviors, especially through notions of heritage tourism in which people have the ability to identify with the past for enlightenment.*

### **AUTHENTICITY IN HERITAGE**

*Heritage, as explained earlier, is a commoditized past consumed in the present, generally by tourists. Gant (2013) argues that places and objects become inherently less authentic as they are preserved or restored. Work by Ashworth and*

Tunbridge (2000) supports this claim as they reason that heritage is simplified through restorative processes in order to be consumed. However, it is through commodification that we may save heritage objects and places. Chhabra, Healy, & Sills (2003) discuss the nature of staged authenticity in the capacity of events. In their study they found that despite the removed nature of the event from its true location, participants were more interested in the authentic experience the heritage event offered. In a practical case, Goulding (1998) classifies visitor perceptions and behaviors into categories based on the way in which they interacted with heritage sites. Each category (existential, aesthetic, and social) related to the way in which the tourist respondent perceived authenticity. Through this categorization, she is able to make recommendations about a heritage site may be viewed and subsequently managed.

### **FURTHER STUDY**

The management and preservation of heritage sites and objects depend on authenticity, so it's critical to comprehend how experience and object authenticity affect the choices made by site managers and tourism officials. In the framework of a heritage site, the two categories are not totally distinct. Authenticity may be examined from the perspectives of tourism and heritage to help people better understand how visitors will engage with every place.

Wang (1999) advanced the concept of conservation with his idea of constructive authenticity. We may conclude that heritage sites and architecture are examples of objects that can be replicated. In order to fully comprehend the intimate interactions that travelers have with their destinations, existential authenticity as a sense of self may also be connected to existential phenomenology and sense of place theories.

As the architecture of today and the recent past becomes history of the next age, we will rely on preservation and restoration efforts to keep our heritage alive. Despite simplification (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000), we will share it with others, tourists, future generations in a fashion most relevant to the value it has as a commodity. The perceptions of the visitors of today will affect the way in which we may perceive heritage in the future.

### **RESEARCH PLAN**

In order to gather data, surveys, interviews, and photo elicitation methods. Tourist populations at each site were surveyed over a period of three weeks, with a smaller sample to be interviewed and a photo elicitation study to be conducted.

### **SITES**

The two sites to be studied are the Lahore Fort designated as World Heritage sites, and the Wazir Khan Mosque, a non-designated site. The Wazir Khan Mosque lies at a 1-kilometre distance from the Lahore fort through a series of narrow hawker-filled streets. The Lahore fort is located at the northern end of [Walled city of Lahore](#).

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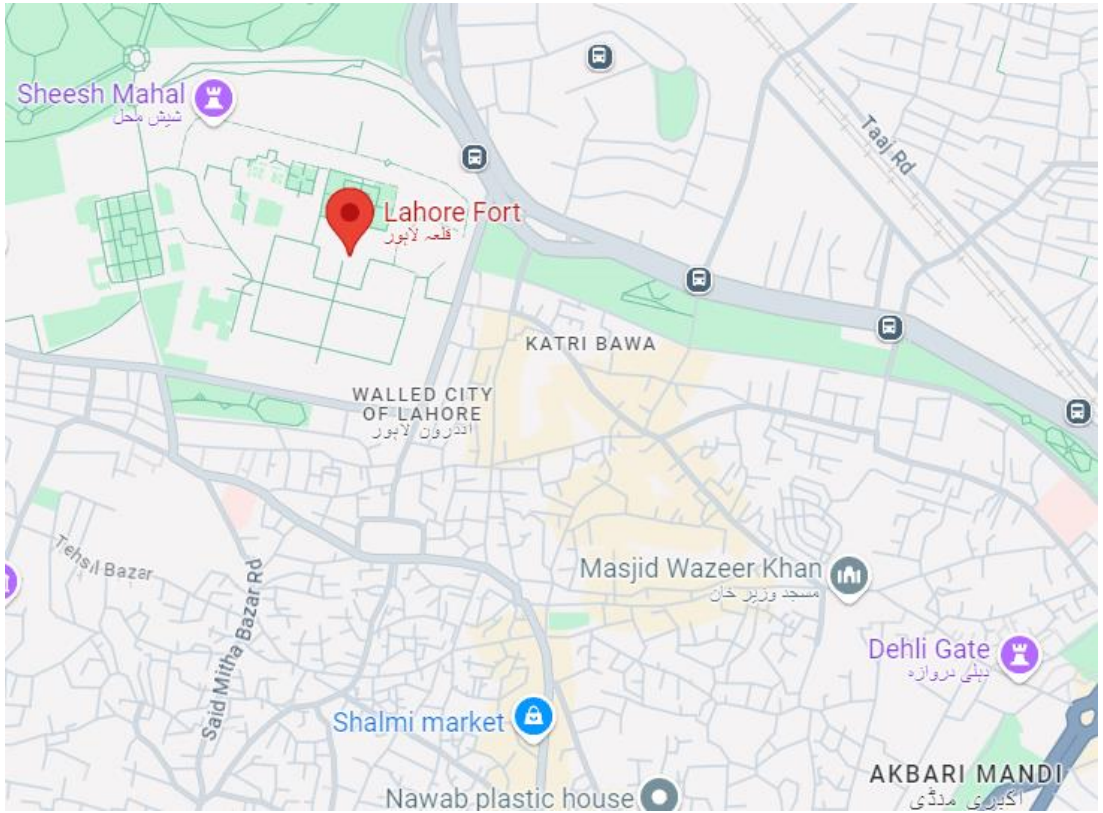


Fig. 2: Map of chosen sites- Lahore Fort, Masjid Wazir Khan.

### SAMPLE

Collected data from the tourist populations that visit the sites indicated, managers of these sites including city officials and building administrators, and tour groups through a careful cooperation with tour companies visiting these sites. An estimated 500-700 total responses between in-person surveying were completed for the research.

### SURVEYS

Cross-sectional surveys, in which a particular factor such as perception is measured at a specific point in time, in multiple languages (English, Punjabi, Urdu) were administered to study participants in each site. Questions included awareness of knowledge of the sites, judgment of authenticity, overall experience, and to what degree tourists care about the authentic nature of the sites. Open-ended questions following each rating scale allow participants to provide reasoning for their answer.

### EXAMPLES

Awareness and Knowledge:



1. Are you aware of the historic significance of Lahore Fort? [ ] Yes [ ] No
2. Are you aware of the cultural and architectural importance of Wazir Khan Mosque? [ ] Yes [ ] No
3. How would you rate your knowledge of the historical and cultural heritage of Lahore? (On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very low and 5 being very high)

*Perceptions of Authenticity:*

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how authentic do you perceive Lahore Fort to be? (1 being not authentic at all, 5 being extremely authentic)
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how authentic do you perceive Wazir Khan Mosque to be? (1 being not authentic at all, 5 being extremely authentic)
6. What factors contribute to your perception of authenticity at Lahore Fort?
  - Preservation efforts
  - Interpretation (signage, guided tours, etc.)
  - Historical documentation
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
7. What factors contribute to your perception of authenticity at Wazir Khan Mosque?
  - Preservation efforts
  - Interpretation (signage, guided tours, etc.)
  - Historical documentation
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
8. How important is authenticity to your overall experience when visiting historical sites? (On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not important at all and 5 being extremely important)

*Architectural Importance:*

9. Do you believe the architectural features of Lahore Fort significantly contribute to the overall experience of historic Lahore? [ ] Yes [ ] No
10. Do you believe the architecture of Wazir Khan Mosque is integral to the experience of historic Lahore? [ ] Yes [ ] No
11. What specific architectural elements do you find most significant at Lahore Fort?
12. What specific architectural elements do you find most significant at Wazir Khan Mosque?

*Interpretation Impact:*

13. How does the interpretation provided at Lahore Fort enhance your understanding of its historical significance? (Open-ended)
14. How does the interpretation provided at Wazir Khan Mosque enhance your understanding of its historical significance? (Open-ended)
15. How important is the quality of interpretation to your overall experience at

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historical sites? (On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not important at all and 5 being extremely important)

### **INTERVIEWS**

Direct communication with study participants allows for a deeper and more expansive analysis of the questions visitors were asked to answer. Questions were designed to gain a complete picture of participant motivations for their visit to each site, their perceptions of authenticity, the extent to which they understand the heritage presented, the degree to which the interpretation of the site helps with its authentic feeling, and their overall site impressions.

### **PHOTO ELICITATION**

Using archives, images were acquired of the different monuments constituted in the Lahore fort and images of the Wazir Khan Mosque as well to use them as points of comparison for tourists looking at historic images as compared to the present-day setting. I wonder if the images evoke any kind of change in perception of the historic identity or authentic integrity of the sites.

### **CONCLUSION**

The survey data collected from tourists visiting Lahore Fort and Wazir Khan Mosque offers invaluable insights into tourist perceptions of authenticity at UNESCO-designated World Heritage architectural sites compared to non-designated sites. Initially, the findings reveal a notable disparity in awareness and historical knowledge between the two sites. While a majority of respondents were familiar with Lahore Fort's historic significance, fewer were aware of the cultural and architectural importance of Wazir Khan Mosque. This discrepancy underscores the profound impact of UNESCO designation in elevating a site's global recognition and attracting greater tourist interest. Moreover, the data highlights nuanced differences in authenticity perceptions between the designated and non-designated sites. Participants consistently rated Lahore Fort higher in terms of authenticity, citing its well-preserved structures, extensive historical documentation, and immersive interpretative experiences. Conversely, perceptions of authenticity at Wazir Khan Mosque were more varied, with some expressing concerns about the extent of restoration work and the mosque's integration into later developed urban square surroundings disrupted by renovation efforts. The survey also underscores the crucial role of architectural integrity and historical context in shaping visitor experiences. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the architectural features of Lahore Fort, such as the Jahangir Quadrangle and Sheesh Mahal, significantly contributed to their overall experience and perception of authenticity. However, opinions regarding the authenticity of reconstructed elements, such as the Diwan-i-Aam, were more divided, reflecting ongoing debates within the heritage conservation community about the

balance between restoration and preservation. Additionally, the data emphasizes the importance of interpretation in enhancing authenticity perceptions. Participants indicated that informative signage, guided tours, and interactive exhibits significantly enriched their understanding of the sites' historical significance and cultural context. Effective interpretation not only fosters a deeper appreciation for the authenticity of the sites but also helps mitigate potential concerns about restoration interventions. Furthermore, the survey suggests that authenticity perception is not solely determined by official designations or preservation efforts but is also influenced by the interpretive context provided to visitors. Quality and depth of interpretation significantly impact understanding and appreciation of the heritage presented at both Lahore Fort and Wazir Khan Mosque. Effective interpretation, tailored to the unique historical narratives and architectural features of each site, has the potential to bridge the authenticity gap between designated and non-designated sites. In conclusion, the findings underscore the multifaceted nature of authenticity in heritage tourism and the importance of holistic management approaches in preserving and promoting Lahore's cultural heritage. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders, including site managers, city officials, and tour operators, are essential to enhancing the authenticity and accessibility of heritage sites. By addressing the disparities in perception and experience between designated and non-designated sites, Lahore can emerge as a model for sustainable heritage conservation and tourism development in rapidly evolving urban contexts.



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