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ASSESSING POST-PARTITION TRANSFORMATIONS AND CONSERVATION PRESSURES IN THE HISTORIC URBAN FABRIC OF KUCHA VAHRIAN, WALLED CITY OF LAHORE

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The Walled City of Lahore (WCL) is a layered historic settlement whose architectural character and street hierarchy were produced through long-term incremental accretion and later reworked through successive political eras and the demographic rupture of 1947. This study documents post-partition transformations and current conservation pressures in the historic urban fabric of Kucha Vahrian, a neighborhood selected through a pilot survey because it exhibits a mixture of long-term and newer residents, the coexistence of historic and non-historic buildings, and visible pressures from encroachment and commercially driven construction. Drawing on conservation scholarship and comparative neighborhood interventions, the study defines ten operational parameters that capture common modes of fabric change: retention of original materials, facade ornamentation, and structural components; compatibility of retrofitting; avoidance of inappropriate spatial additions; retention of natural light and ventilation; retention of original doors and windows; proper installation of utility lines; retention of plinth levels; and avoidance of encroachments. Empirically, the parameters were applied through a structured observation sheet to 16 built units in Kucha Vahrian during repeated field visits in 2018–2019, supported by photographic documentation and systematic field notes. The physical survey evidence was triangulated with semi-structured conversations with residents and structured interviews with officials of the Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA), derived from a close reading of the Walled City of Lahore Act (2012) and associated building regulations. The findings show that post-partition land-use conversion, subdivision of large compounds, construction over former open and communal spaces, and incremental unregulated additions have collectively reduced heritage legibility, environmental comfort, and structural safety. Interviews further reveal a persistent gap between statutory intent and neighborhood practice: residents report limited awareness of regulations and little access to practical, locally relevant guidance on heritage-compatible repair and services integration. On this basis, the paper proposes a long-term conservation pathway centered on permanent technical capacity within the WCLA, repeatable neighborhood-level diagnosis, and sustained community-based counseling and training.

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INTRODUCTION

Historic cities endure through layered accretions rather than static permanence. Their material continuity is sustained through cycles of repair, adaptation, subdivision, and reuse, while their legibility depends on whether these changes preserve relationships among streets, plots, facades, thresholds, and shared spaces. The Walled City of Lahore exemplifies such layered urbanism: a dense settlement shaped by precolonial morphologies, colonial interventions, and postcolonial socio-economic restructuring [Glover, 2007, Gulzar, 2017, Qadeer, 1983, Shahzad, 2002, Haroon et al., 2019]. Although the Walled City is widely recognized as a heritage landscape, its significance lies not only in individual monuments but also in the continuity of everyday urban fabric, including street hierarchies, residential compounds, plinth conditions, service patterns, and the expressive surface of building fronts.

Urban history repeatedly demonstrates that cities survive by absorbing successive civilizational, political, and social layers [Freeman, 2014]. Yet this endurance does not guarantee integrity. In dense historic environments, incremental change can either maintain inherited spatial logic or erode it. The distinction is central to conservation theory, especially in contexts where the street, courtyard, facade, and threshold operate as mutually reinforcing parts of a living urban system [Lynch, 1960, Petruccioli, 2007, van der Werf et al., 2016]. In Lahore, the challenge is sharpened by the coexistence of inherited domestic forms and contemporary development pressures, which often introduce incompatible materials, services, and additions into a fine-grained urban fabric.

The demographic rupture of 1947 is a particularly important inflection point in understanding present-day conditions. Partition reconfigured ownership, occupancy, and social memory across Punjab, producing long-term changes in domestic use, property fragmentation, and the symbolic status of urban space [Kaur, 2006, Singh, 2007]. In Lahore, these changes were not merely demographic. They affected the organization of havelis and courtyard houses, the treatment of semi-private space, the role of neighborhood-based social networks, and the conversion of residential properties to commercial or mixed use [Adeeb, 2018, Shahzad, 2002]. The resulting transformations did not unfold as singular interventions; they accumulated gradually through household-level decisions, infrastructural improvisation, and partial rebuilding.

Recent regulatory efforts, particularly through the Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA), have created an institutional framework for conservation and development control [Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, 2012, Government of the Punjab, 2017]. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks depends on whether they can address everyday neighborhood-scale change rather than only high-visibility monuments or corridor-based upgrades. Existing research has documented heritage value, architectural character, infrastructure impacts, and selected conservation initiatives in the Walled City [Haroon et al., 2019, Shahzad, 2011, Salman et al., 2018], but there remains a need for a reproducible diagnostic approach that links observable physical transformations to regulatory practice and lived neighborhood conditions.

This paper addresses that gap through a focused study of *Kucha Vahrian*, a neighborhood selected as a pilot case because it displays the co-presence of historic and altered buildings, long-term and newer residents, and strong evidence of pressure from encroachment and commercially motivated construction. The article pursues three questions. First, what recurrent forms of post-Partition transformation are visible in the present-day fabric of *Kucha Vahrian*? Second, how do these changes affect material authenticity, environmental performance, and spatial legibility? Third, why do formal conservation regulations translate only partially into everyday neighborhood practice?

Methodologically, the paper develops and applies a ten-parameter neighborhood audit across 16 built units, triangulated with resident conversations, official interviews, and document analysis. Conceptually, it advances a view of conservation in the Walled City as a problem of maintaining relational urban fabric rather than

merely preserving isolated artifacts. Practically, it proposes a long-term conservation pathway centered on permanent technical capacity, repeatable local diagnosis, and community-based repair guidance.

HISTORIC URBAN FABRIC, POST-PARTITION CHANGE, AND CONSERVATION IN CONTEXT

The historic urban fabric of Lahore cannot be understood only as a collection of architecturally valuable buildings. It is also an ensemble of spatial conventions, material practices, and social meanings embedded in houses, streets, and neighborhood thresholds. The haveli and related domestic forms in South Asia historically mediated between inner and outer space through layered thresholds, controlled openings, courtyards, and differentiated degrees of privacy [Bryden, 2004]. In the Walled City, such forms were complemented by decorated timber components, carved details, articulated facades, and carefully proportioned street edges, all of which contributed to architectural identity and neighborhood cohesion [Aamir, 2018, Shahzad, 2002]. The plinth, moreover, served not only as a construction element but also as a device shaping the social and visual life of the street [van der Werf et al., 2016].

This fabric was altered over time by colonial planning, new construction technologies, and changing aesthetic preferences. Lahore's modernization under colonial rule introduced new administrative priorities, new infrastructural systems, and new representational forms of urban order [Glover, 2007]. The material distinctions between supposedly permanent and impermanent architectures, including the cultural coding of robust and makeshift building, also carried administrative and political weight in South Asia [Cowell, 2016]. Later, the coexistence of indigenous and colonial-era stylistic traditions created a heterogeneous visual field whose traces remain visible in Lahore's built environment [Ovais, 2016]. Such heterogeneity is not itself a problem for conservation; the issue is whether new interventions remain legible within the inherited logic of the place.

Partition intensified this tension by abruptly changing property occupation, household size, tenure practices, and the social organization of neighborhoods [Kaur, 2006, Singh, 2007]. In Lahore, memories of streets, homes, and neighborhood affiliations remain central to urban identity [Adeeb, 2018]. Yet the material consequences of this rupture were more than mnemonic. Large houses were subdivided, open spaces were built over, and the capacity for routine maintenance declined or became unevenly distributed. In postcolonial Pakistan, urban development patterns further encouraged piecemeal transformation, often with limited regard for historic settlement logic [Qadeer, 1983, Rahmaan, 2017]. What emerged was not a singular break with tradition, but a cumulative process in which domestic adaptation, market pressure, and service retrofitting progressively altered the inherited morphology.

Conservation scholarship has long warned that historic environments are vulnerable not only to demolition but also to inappropriate adaptation [Feilden, 2003, Qureshi, 1994]. In South Asia and comparable settings, the challenge is especially acute in living settlements where residents must reconcile heritage constraints with changing household needs. Research from Pakistan has shown the value of community-based conservation, place-sensitive revitalization, and locally informed decision-making [Mumtaz, 2017, Khan, 2015]. Studies of specific historic neighborhoods, including Gali Surjan Singh in Lahore, have also demonstrated that the social life of residents and the physical life of buildings must be addressed together [Salman et al., 2018]. Comparable regional experiences, from Srinagar to Nicosia and Peshawar, show that conservation succeeds only when institutional frameworks are matched by on-ground advisory capacity and neighborhood participation [Shah et al., 2018, Petropoulou, 2007, Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, 2012].

At the same time, not all change should be treated as inherently destructive. Contemporary scholarship on evolving houses and urban adaptation emphasizes that transformation is often driven by rising household aspirations, energy needs, livelihood shifts, and new patterns of domestic practice [Khalid and Sunikka-Blank, 2018]. Architectural thinking on dense Asian urbanism likewise suggests that adaptation must be distinguished

from erasure; the critical issue is whether change remains compatible with the spatial, climatic, and material intelligence of the inherited environment [Goad, 2005, Singh et al., 2009]. In other words, the conservation problem in places such as the Walled City is not simply how to stop change, but how to discipline it so that urban fabric remains legible, habitable, and culturally meaningful.

The present study builds on this literature by treating post-Partition transformation as a socio-spatial process rather than as an exclusively aesthetic decline. It examines how cumulative micro-scale modifications alter the relational fabric of a historic neighborhood, and how regulatory institutions might respond through diagnostics, technical guidance, and long-term capacity rather than only reactive enforcement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopts a qualitative-dominant, mixed-evidence case study design. It combines systematic physical observation of built units with interview-based institutional and resident perspectives, supported by documentary analysis of applicable statutory instruments. The design is intentionally diagnostic rather than statistically representative. Its purpose is to generate a repeatable method for neighborhood-scale conservation assessment in dense historic settings, and to identify recurrent modes of transformation that may not be visible through monument-centered surveys alone.

The case study was conducted through repeated field visits during 2018–2019. The analytical unit was the built unit as it presents itself to the street and immediate shared neighborhood environment. Sixteen built units were selected within *Kucha Vahrian* through purposive sampling to capture a range of conditions: relatively intact historic structures, partially altered structures, heavily modified structures, and non-historic insertions affecting the continuity of the street edge. This strategy is consistent with exploratory conservation research in environments where the objective is pattern recognition and interpretive depth rather than statistical generalization.

A structured observation sheet was developed using ten parameters derived from conservation literature, vernacular environmental logic, and Walled City regulatory concerns [Feilden, 2003, Qureshi, 1994, Shahzad, 2011, Singh et al., 2009, van der Werf et al., 2016]. Each parameter was assessed through direct observation, comparative photographic documentation, and field notes. The parameters are defined in Table 1.

Each unit was evaluated holistically rather than through a mechanical scoring system. This decision was methodologically important because the same visible alteration may have different implications depending on building type, street width, adjoining conditions, and cumulative neighborhood effect. The structured sheet nevertheless ensured inter-visit consistency by requiring the observer to document each parameter for every unit in the sample.

Field observations were accompanied by photographic documentation and systematic notes recording building condition, signs of alteration, apparent material substitution, service intrusion, use conversion, street occupation, and environmental effects such as blocked light or ventilation. Photographs were used analytically rather than illustratively. They enabled repeated cross-checking of facade treatment, additions, and plinth conditions, and helped distinguish between isolated deterioration and patterned transformation.

To interpret the physical evidence, the study incorporated semi-structured conversations with residents and structured interviews with officials associated with the WCLA. Resident conversations focused on perceived building history, maintenance decisions, practical constraints, awareness of conservation regulations, and experiences of repair or modification. Official interviews focused on regulatory interpretation, enforcement challenges, technical review processes, and the availability of neighborhood-level advisory mechanisms.

Table 1: Operational parameters used for neighborhood-scale conservation diagnosis

Parameter	**Analytical meaning**
Retention of original materials	Whether traditional or historically compatible materials remain legible in walls, facades, flooring, timber elements, and finishing layers.
Retention of facade ornamentation	Whether carved woodwork, decorative brackets, moldings, projected balconies, and related expressive elements survive without crude replacement or concealment.
Retention of structural components	Whether load-bearing walls, timber members, roofs, and significant inherited structural systems remain intact rather than being replaced by incompatible systems.
Compatibility of retrofitting	Whether repairs and service upgrades are integrated in a technically and visually compatible manner.
Avoidance of inappropriate spatial additions	Whether rooftop rooms, cantilevered projections, enclosed balconies, and other additions respect the scale and logic of the original building.
Retention of natural light and ventilation	Whether former openings, courtyards, shafts, and passive environmental pathways remain functional.
Retention of original doors and windows	Whether thresholds, shutters, frames, and opening proportions survive or are replaced by incompatible standardized products.
Proper installation of utility lines	Whether electrical, communication, and service lines are routed and fixed with minimal visual and structural damage.
Retention of plinth levels	Whether plinths remain visible and functional as historic street interfaces rather than being buried, broken, or altered.
Avoidance of encroachments	Whether temporary or permanent occupation of shared space compromises circulation, facade visibility, drainage, or street character.

The interview material was used for explanatory triangulation rather than frequency counting. In other words, it served to clarify why certain transformations recur and why statutory intent is not consistently realized in practice. Because the study involved non-invasive environmental documentation and voluntary discussion of buildings and neighborhood conditions, verbal informed consent was deemed sufficient for participation.

The Walled City of Lahore Act 2012 and the 2017 building regulations were read closely to identify the statutory basis for controlling alterations, regulating repairs, and preserving heritage character [Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, 2012, Government of the Punjab, 2017]. The documents were then interpreted alongside field evidence in order to identify gaps between rule, understanding, and implementation.

Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, the physical survey identified recurrent transformation patterns across the 16-unit sample. Second, these patterns were interpreted in terms of their effects on authenticity, legibility, environmental performance, and structural risk. Third, resident and official testimony was used to explain the practical conditions under which such changes occur. This triangulated strategy increases reproducibility by making explicit not only what was observed, but how observations were interpreted and checked against institutional and lived perspectives.

RESULTS

The most consequential pattern observed in *Kucha Vahrian* was the cumulative reduction of spatial generosity through subdivision and infill. Buildings that originally depended on courtyards, light wells, and semi-open transitional space had frequently been reorganized into smaller functional compartments. In several cases, the logic of the original domestic layout had become difficult to read from the street because internal reconfiguration had generated new openings, blocked former ones, or introduced ad hoc rooftop or rearward accretions.

This pattern is consistent with a broader post-Partition restructuring of occupancy and household use. What had once functioned as larger compounds or extended-family residences appears, in many cases, to have shifted toward smaller, more intensely used units. The physical consequence is not only formal change but the erosion of the spatial gradient between private interior and neighborhood street that historically characterized haveli-type environments [Bryden, 2004]. As these internal and threshold relations weaken, the street loses part of the logic through which historic domestic architecture once contributed to a coherent urban sequence.

The loss of former open space also had clear environmental implications. Where infill reduced internal voids or obstructed ventilation pathways, buildings showed greater dependence on artificial measures and diminished passive performance. In a climatic context where vernacular construction historically relied on calibrated openings, shaded facades, and air movement, such change is significant [Singh et al., 2009]. The result is not simply a shift in plan efficiency; it is a reduction in the environmental intelligence of the inherited building fabric.

A second major pattern was the simplification or replacement of facade elements that once gave the street architectural depth and visual identity. Decorative timber work, carved details, traditional opening proportions, and layered surface articulation had often been removed, concealed, or replaced with standardized contemporary treatments. In some cases, newer finishes flattened the visual hierarchy of building fronts; in others, replacement doors and windows altered the scale and rhythm of the elevation.

The loss of decorative and crafted elements is especially consequential in the Walled City, where the identity of a street is partly carried by everyday detail rather than monumental scale. Timber carving and facade ornament historically acted not as superficial embellishment but as markers of artisanal skill, domestic status, and local architectural language [Aamir, 2018]. Once such elements are removed, the building may remain standing, but its cultural legibility diminishes. This process was visible in *Kucha Vahrian* as a shift from textured, layered, materially expressive fronts toward visually thinner and less place-specific elevations.

Material substitution also affected authenticity at a deeper level. Some retrofits employed contemporary materials that neither matched the physical behavior nor the visual character of traditional assemblies. This is important because conservation-compatible repair is not merely a matter of appearance. Inappropriate materials can alter moisture movement, thermal performance, joint behavior, and the maintenance cycle of the host structure [Feilden, 2003, Qureshi, 1994]. In dense historic neighborhoods, such mismatches can also accelerate visible patchwork and contribute to a general sense of dissonance within the street scene.

The study also found that service insertion has become one of the most visible agents of transformation in the neighborhood. Electrical, communication, and other utility lines were frequently installed in ways that compromise facade legibility and, in some cases, potentially affect structural surfaces. This finding aligns with earlier work showing that infrastructural services can reshape traditional architecture and urban fabric when introduced without design coordination [Shahzad, 2011]. In *Kucha Vahrian*, the problem was not modernization per se, but its unintegrated implementation.

Retrofitting presented a similar tension. Buildings clearly require adaptation to remain habitable, es-

pecially in contexts where household composition, energy use, and domestic practice evolve over time [Khalid and Sunikka-Blank, 2018]. Yet the field evidence suggests that, in the absence of routine technical counseling, adaptation tends to be executed through short-term problem solving rather than conservation-compatible integration. Surface-mounted conduits, visually intrusive fixtures, patched materials, and irregular additions solved immediate needs while contributing to cumulative heritage loss.

This finding supports the argument that dense historic neighborhoods need an intermediate layer of institutional practice between prohibition and neglect. Residents rarely possess the technical knowledge needed to reconcile conservation principles with repair, service installation, and livelihood pressures. Without such guidance, even well-intentioned maintenance may damage the historic environment.

Plinth conditions in *Kucha Vahrian* were also frequently compromised. In some locations, plinths had been partially obscured, broken, or visually detached from the building front by street-level modifications, surface accretions, or adjacent occupation. This matters because the plinth is not an incidental base element. It is a crucial mediator between building and street, contributing to elevation, drainage, visual order, and everyday social use [van der Werf et al., 2016]. Where plinth continuity is weakened, the pedestrian reading of the street becomes fragmented.

Encroachments intensified this problem. Temporary and semi-permanent occupation of narrow shared spaces affected movement, facade visibility, and the perception of street width. In a historic environment, such encroachments accumulate rapidly because the public realm is already spatially compressed. Their effect is therefore disproportionate: even small appropriations can disrupt circulation and weaken the visibility of architectural elements that depend on close-range street experience.

These conditions also bear on urban imageability. The intelligibility of a historic street depends on coherent edges, legible thresholds, and a recognizably ordered relationship between movement and enclosure [Lynch, 1960]. Where plinths are obscured, facades simplified, and encroachments multiplied, the street becomes harder to read as a historic environment even if many original structures still survive physically.

Interviews with officials and conversations with residents revealed a persistent gap between regulatory intent and neighborhood practice. On the institutional side, the WCLA framework establishes authority to regulate construction, demolition, and alteration in the Walled City [Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, 2012, Government of the Punjab, 2017]. On the resident side, however, awareness of specific conservation requirements appeared limited, and practical guidance on how to undertake compatible repair was often absent. This produced a familiar implementation pattern: rules exist, but everyday decision-making is driven by affordability, urgency, and imitation of nearby informal practices.

The gap was not simply informational. It was also organizational. Effective neighborhood conservation requires repeated observation, technical advice, and mediation between household need and regulatory expectation. When institutions operate largely through episodic inspection or project-specific restoration, routine low-intensity transformation continues unchecked. In this respect, *Kucha Vahrian* demonstrates that the conservation problem in the Walled City is not only a lack of law, but a lack of permanent neighborhood-scale technical presence. Table 2 summarizes the principal transformation patterns identified in the pilot sample and their implications.

Table 2: Observed transformation patterns and their conservation implications in *Kucha Vahrian*

Transformation pattern	**Dominant effect**	**Conservation implication**
Subdivision of larger residential units	Loss of spatial coherence	Weakens the legibility of inherited domestic typologies and intensifies pressure on shared services.
Infill over courtyards or open voids	Reduced light and ventilation	Diminishes passive environmental performance and undermines climate-responsive building behavior.
Replacement of original doors and windows	Loss of proportional and material authenticity	Erases facade character and reduces continuity of thresholds and opening rhythms.
Removal or concealment of ornamentation	Visual flattening of the street edge	Reduces artisanal identity and weakens the everyday heritage value of non-monumental buildings.
Incompatible repair materials	Material dissonance and possible technical mismatch	Risks long-term deterioration while disturbing the visual coherence of the historic fabric.
Surface-mounted utility lines and fixtures	Visual clutter and possible damage to surfaces	Converts modernization into a source of heritage degradation rather than an integrated upgrade.
Rooftop or facade accretions	Altered massing and profile	Interrupts the scale logic of the street and weakens the readability of the original building form.
Plinth disruption or concealment	Loss of street-interface integrity	Affects drainage, pedestrian experience, and the social function of the building base.
Encroachments into shared space	Restricted movement and facade visibility	Produces cumulative narrowing of the public realm and reduces the legibility of the street as heritage space.
Commercial conversion of residential fronts	Functional and visual reorientation	Encourages short-term alterations that privilege display or storage over architectural continuity.

DISCUSSION

The evidence from *Kucha Vahrian* suggests that post-Partition transformation should be understood as a cumulative neighborhood process rather than as a series of isolated building defects. The study area illustrates how demographic rupture, property subdivision, informal modernization, and market adaptation can progressively rework the inherited logic of a historic settlement. Importantly, this does not mean that all change since 1947 has been destructive in the same way. Some changes reflect the unavoidable adaptation of living neighborhoods. The central issue is that, in the absence of sustained technical mediation, change has tended to become materially incompatible, visually disruptive, and spatially disorganizing.

This interpretation aligns with wider debates on conservation in inhabited historic areas. Pakistan-based scholarship has repeatedly emphasized that conservation cannot succeed through façade-oriented or monument-centric intervention alone [Mumtaz, 2017, Qureshi, 1994]. Research from Bhera has shown how moder-

nity can deplete historic settlement character when change is not guided by contextual understanding [Bukhari et al., 2016]. Lessons from Saidpur Village similarly indicate that revitalization efforts must negotiate between tourism, development, and authenticity [Khan, 2015]. The Gali Surjan Singh case in Lahore reinforces the importance of integrating architectural and social analysis rather than treating buildings as detached artifacts [Salman et al., 2018]. Comparable cases from Srinagar, Nicosia, and Peshawar further demonstrate that regulatory recognition alone does not ensure meaningful conservation unless local institutions can work closely with residents and ordinary buildings [Shah et al., 2018, Petropoulou, 2007, Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, 2012].

The findings also speak to a broader theoretical distinction between adaptive continuity and fabric amnesia. In dense South Asian settings, architecture often evolves through layered occupation and negotiated additions. Architectural discourse on tropical Asian urbanism recognizes that adaptation can be productive when it remains rooted in inherited logics of climate, craft, and spatial order [Goad, 2005]. The problem in *Kucha Vahrian* is that many observed changes do not operate as informed adaptation. Instead, they sever connections among building envelope, street character, environmental performance, and neighborhood identity. In this sense, the fabric is not merely being updated; it is gradually losing the internal rules through which it once cohered [Petruccioli, 2007].

Environmental performance is an especially important dimension of this process. Traditional settlements in South Asia commonly embed passive climatic intelligence in wall thickness, opening placement, shaded thresholds, and internal voids [Singh et al., 2009]. When courtyards are infilled, openings altered, and standardized materials inserted without attention to building behavior, the result is not only a heritage issue but also a comfort and energy issue. This observation resonates with recent research showing that changing domestic aspirations and practices in Pakistan are already reshaping the performance of evolving houses [Khalid and Sunikka-Blank, 2018]. Conservation policy in the Walled City should therefore avoid treating historic form and contemporary habitability as opposites; properly managed, they can reinforce one another.

A further insight concerns the public realm. The neighborhood street in the Walled City derives much of its heritage significance from human-scale visual experience. Here, Lynch's concept of imageability and contemporary work on plinths are especially relevant [Lynch, 1960, van der Werf et al., 2016]. Historic legibility depends on coherent street edges, readable thresholds, and visible cues of use and construction. When plinths are buried, facades are flattened, encroachments multiply, and utilities become dominant visual elements, the cumulative effect is a loss of urban readability. This is also where the risk of renewal without sensitivity becomes salient: poorly managed upgrading can produce a sanitized or distorted environment that weakens lived heritage even while claiming to improve it [Uzun, 2003].

Finally, the Lahore case should be seen in relation to the city's longer historical layering. The Walled City has absorbed Mughal, Sikh, colonial, and postcolonial transformations, and its very survival depends on selective adaptation [Freeman, 2014, Glover, 2007, Ovais, 2016]. The task, then, is not to freeze a single moment in time, but to define what kinds of change remain compatible with the inherited urban grammar. That grammar includes materials, facades, plinths, thresholds, street proportions, and social uses, but it also includes less visible qualities such as environmental responsiveness and spatial hierarchy. Conservation policy becomes effective only when it protects this grammar while still enabling residents to live, repair, and adapt.

TOWARD A LONG-TERM CONSERVATION PATHWAY

The findings suggest that a viable conservation strategy for *Kucha Vahrian* and similar neighborhoods must move beyond episodic restoration and toward continuous neighborhood stewardship. Three linked interventions are especially important.

First, the WCLA requires a permanent technical support function dedicated to ordinary buildings and everyday repairs. At present, the greatest threats to fabric continuity often arise not from major redevelopment alone, but from repeated low-intensity changes undertaken without guidance. A standing technical cell could review small repair proposals, advise on compatible materials and service routing, document recurrent violations, and provide model solutions tailored to dense historic conditions.

Second, conservation management should incorporate repeatable neighborhood-scale diagnosis. The ten-parameter framework used in this study can serve as a simple but effective audit tool for identifying where fabric is most vulnerable and what kind of intervention is needed. This would allow authorities to shift from reactive enforcement toward anticipatory monitoring, with regular updates capturing changes in plinths, facades, utility installations, additions, and encroachments.

Third, community-based counseling and training should be treated as a core conservation instrument rather than an optional supplement. Community-focused approaches in Pakistan have already shown that residents are more likely to support conservation when guidance is practical, locally intelligible, and tied to everyday repair decisions [Mumtaz, 2017]. In *Kucha Vahrian*, many of the observed transformations appear linked less to deliberate disregard than to the absence of accessible technical alternatives. Craft revival, maintenance manuals, demonstration repairs, and localized advisory sessions could therefore have significant long-term impact, especially where historic features such as timber work and traditional openings remain partially intact [Aamir, 2018]. Table 3 translates these priorities into an action matrix.

Table 3: Proposed conservation pathway for *Kucha Vahrian* and comparable neighborhoods

Priority area	**Lead mechanism**	**Expected outcome**
Routine repair guidance	Permanent WCLA technical cell	Residents gain access to conservation-compatible advice before making small but consequential alterations.
Neighborhood condition monitoring	Repeatable ten-parameter audit	Authorities can identify fabric decline early and prioritize intervention at street and cluster scale.
Utility-line management	Standardized technical detailing for historic streets	Modern services are integrated with reduced visual and structural damage.
Plinth and street-interface protection	Micro-level public realm guidelines and enforcement	Street legibility, circulation, drainage, and social use are preserved.
Craft and feature retention	Training, demonstration projects, and material guidance	Surviving timber work, openings, and facade details are repaired rather than replaced.
Resident awareness	Counseling, printed guides, and localized meetings	Regulatory knowledge becomes practical and actionable rather than abstract.
Control of additions and encroachments	Incremental review and negotiated compliance	Spatial accretions are redirected toward compatibility instead of unregulated expansion.
Pilot-to-policy scaling	Replication in adjacent neighborhoods	Conservation shifts from isolated projects to neighborhood-based urban management.

The significance of this pathway is that it treats heritage management as an embedded urban service. Such an approach is better aligned with the realities of the Walled City than a model focused only on exceptional buildings or one-off restoration schemes. It also recognizes that sustainable conservation depends on aligning household necessity, craft knowledge, technical review, and public regulation.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined post-Partition transformations and current conservation pressures in the historic urban fabric of *Kucha Vahrian*, Walled City of Lahore, through a structured neighborhood-scale assessment of 16 built units supported by interviews and document analysis. The study showed that the most consequential threats to fabric continuity are cumulative rather than singular: subdivision of larger properties, infill over open spaces, loss of ornament and original openings, incompatible retrofitting, exposed utility systems, plinth disruption, and encroachments into shared space. Taken together, these processes reduce material authenticity, environmental responsiveness, and the legibility of the neighborhood as a historic urban environment.

The paper also demonstrated that the regulatory presence of conservation law is not, by itself, sufficient to secure fabric continuity. The critical gap lies in implementation at the scale of everyday repair and adaptation. Residents require practical guidance, and institutions require permanent neighborhood-level technical presence if regulations are to shape ordinary building practice. Without such mediation, the Walled City remains vulnerable to slow-form degradation that is individually minor but collectively transformative.

Conceptually, the article argues for a shift in conservation thinking from monument-centered preservation toward the protection of relational urban fabric. In the Walled City, heritage value inheres in ordinary streets, thresholds, plinths, facades, openings, and environmental pathways as much as in formally recognized landmarks. Methodologically, the ten-parameter framework offered here provides a reproducible basis for diagnosing such conditions in other neighborhoods. Practically, the study proposes a conservation pathway based on permanent technical capacity, repeatable neighborhood audits, and community-based counseling.

Because the present study is a pilot case, it does not claim statistical generalization to the entire Walled City. Its contribution lies instead in demonstrating a robust method and a coherent explanatory model for understanding how post-Partition change and present-day governance interact in a living historic settlement. Future research can extend this framework across multiple neighborhoods, compare transformation trajectories under varying socio-economic conditions, and develop more granular inventories linking physical change to household histories, tenure patterns, and service infrastructures. Even at this pilot scale, however, the evidence is clear: the long-term conservation of Lahore's historic urban fabric will depend less on isolated restoration and more on the institutionalization of everyday, neighborhood-centered stewardship.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The observation sheets, field notes, photographic records, and coded interview summaries generated during the study are available from the authors on reasonable request.

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