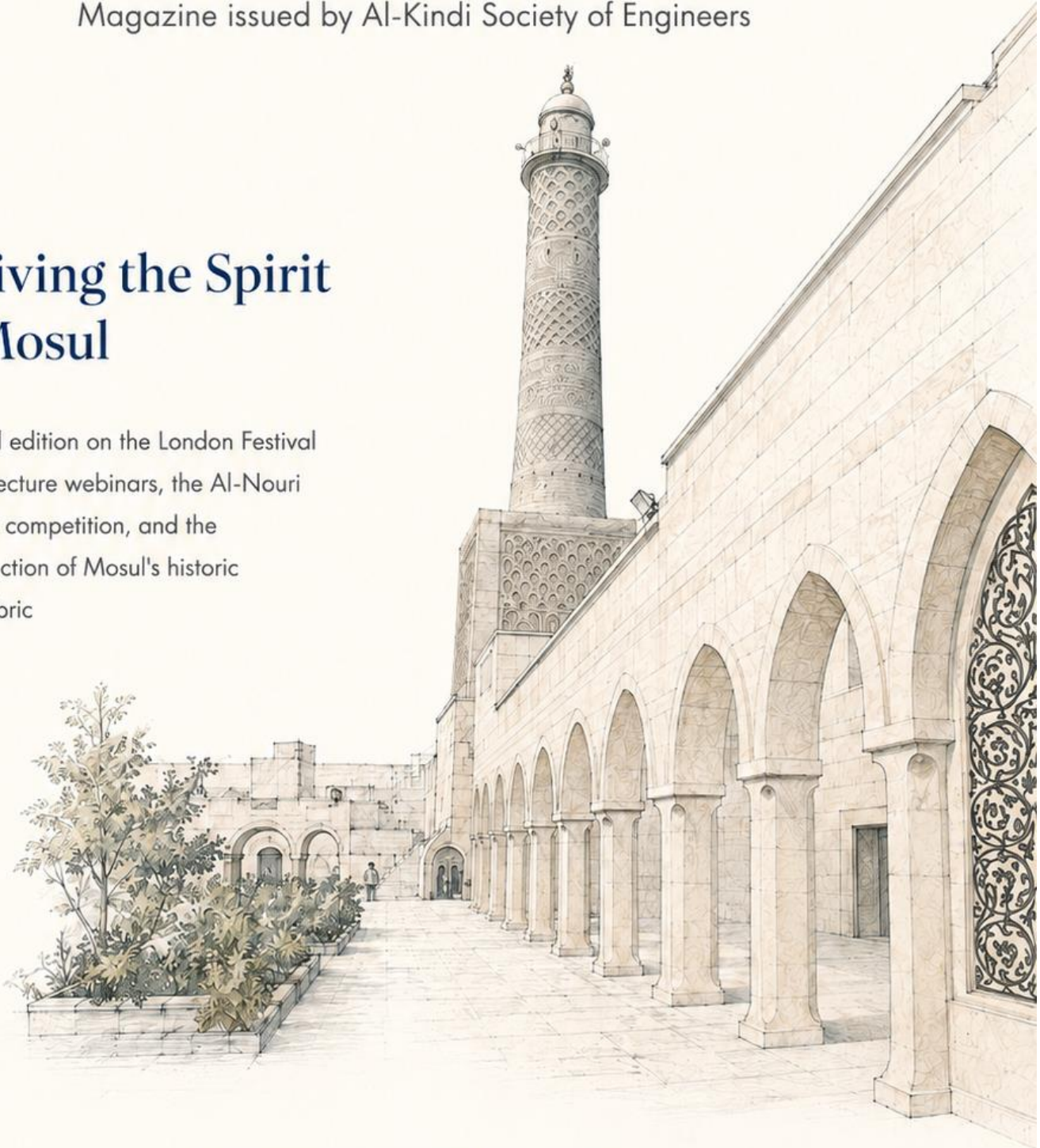


# AL MOHANDIS

Magazine issued by Al-Kindi Society of Engineers

## Reviving the Spirit of Mosul

A special edition on the London Festival of Architecture webinars, the Al-Nouri Complex competition, and the reconstruction of Mosul's historic urban fabric





Source note: This edition draws on the Al-Kindi Society of Engineers' London Festival of Architecture webinar series on Mosul's historic reconstruction, held in June 2021, and on UNESCO's publication *Revive the Spirit of Mosul: The Rebirth of a City — A People's Hope, a Story of Reconstruction, 2018–2025*. Additional context is taken from UNESCO's public reporting on the Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative. Image credits should follow the individual credits provided in the source material.

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## Editor's note

In June 2021, I hosted a series of seven webinars for the Al-Kindi Society of Engineers as part of the London Festival of Architecture. The series followed the work surrounding UNESCO's Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in London, UNESCO and their partners.

The timing of these webinars matters. They took place before the Al-Nouri Complex and other landmarks had been rebuilt, while key design decisions were still open and the debate around reconstruction was active. The series brought together the five shortlisted design teams for the Al-Nouri Complex, local digital heritage practitioners from Mosul, and UNESCO project teams working on the ground.

This special edition does not treat the reconstruction of Mosul as a simple success story. It records a more difficult and more useful conversation. Alongside the design presentations and UNESCO updates, the webinars captured serious concerns raised by Iraqi architects, engineers and heritage specialists. Figures within the Iraqi architectural community, including voices associated with the modern Iraqi architectural tradition such as Maath Alousi, Ihsan Fethi, Ali Al-Musawy and others, questioned whether an international competition was the right mechanism for a site of such religious, cultural and national significance.

The criticism was not only about style. It was about authority, memory and meaning. Some argued that the Al-Nouri Mosque should not be treated as a conventional public project or as a field for architectural experimentation. Others objected to the language of plazas and open civic space being applied to a sacred mosque courtyard, or warned against introducing forms that might appear detached from Mosul's architectural character. A recurring concern was that local architects, historians and worshippers should have had a stronger role before the design outcome was selected, not only after it.

These arguments are part of the value of the archive. They show that reconstruction is not only a technical task of rebuilding walls, domes and minarets. It is also a negotiation between memory and design, faith and public life, local ownership and international expertise. The webinars reveal this tension clearly: five design teams offered different visions for the Al-Nouri Complex,

while Iraqi commentators challenged the assumptions behind some of those visions. That debate remains relevant to Mosul's architectural future.

This edition of Al-Mohandis returns to those discussions in detail. It records the design strategies, Q&A exchanges, disagreements, technical insights and local perspectives that emerged during the webinar series. It also connects the 2021 conversations with UNESCO's later public reporting on the reconstruction of Mosul and with a wider question that now faces the city: after the catastrophe of 2014–2017, what kind of modern architecture should Mosul produce?

Mosul's reconstruction is therefore not only a story of restored landmarks. It is a story about professional responsibility, cultural memory, local skills, public trust and the future identity of an ancient city.

Haval Kadhem

Programme Director

Cultural Heritage and Outreach

Al-Kindi Society of Engineers

**01****Mosul now: architecture after reconstruction**

From damaged fabric to reconstructed landmarks - what the webinar archive means today



The seven webinars belong to June 2021. Their significance is clearer now: the ideas, anxieties and public questions they recorded anticipated the technical and civic challenges that later defined Mosul's reconstruction.

In 2021, Mosul's architectural future was still being argued in drawings, Zoom rooms, competition boards and public questions. The Al-Nouri Complex had not yet returned to the skyline as a completed landmark; Al-Hadba was still a wound in the collective image of the city; historic churches and houses were still in phases of stabilisation, documentation, tendering and training. The London Festival of Architecture webinars captured that uncertain middle moment.

By 2025, UNESCO publicly reported that its Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative had mobilised US\$115 million and 15 partners, including the United Arab Emirates and the European Union. It reported the rehabilitation of 124 historical homes, renovation of more than 400 classrooms and creation of more than 7,700 local jobs. The heritage programme included Al-Nouri Mosque, Al-Hadba Minaret, Al-Saa'a Convent and Al-Tahera Church, with the major landmark works completed around the end of 2024 and into early 2025.

The current situation therefore makes the webinar archive more, not less, important. The rebuilt city is now visible; the questions behind it are easier to forget. Yet architects need those

questions. A reconstruction that looks resolved can hide the conflicts that shaped it: the balance between religious sanctity and civic accessibility; between international design and local authority; between faithful reconstruction and contemporary intervention; between trauma as memory and trauma as something the city wishes to overcome.

Modern architecture in Mosul cannot be reduced to a style. It must become a method. The city needs buildings that respond to climate, density, memory and social life; that use local craft without freezing it as nostalgia; that absorb digital documentation as a working tool; that create jobs and build skills; and that recognise the special status of sacred and historic places. Mosul's future architecture will be judged not only by facades, but by whether it helps residents return, repair, teach, worship, work and trust public space again.

The webinars show that Mosul's reconstruction is not only a UNESCO story or a competition story. It is also a professional story for Iraqi architects and engineers. The strongest discussions came when the audience challenged the design teams: What about traffic? What about the sanctity of the mosque courtyard? What about local consultation? What about Iraqi architects? What about corruption, transparency and the release of survey data? Those questions were not interruptions. They were part of the architecture.

This issue therefore treats the webinars as a living professional archive. Each article below reconstructs the event in detail: what was presented, what was debated, what was unresolved, and what it tells us about architecture in Mosul today.

*A rebuilt Mosul should not be read only as a set of completed landmarks. It should be read as a field of decisions about memory, public space, labour and local authorship.*

## 02 Courtyards Dialogue

First prize: collective memory, open courtyards and the contested public life of the mosque



**FIRST PRIZE**  
SUBMISSION NUMBER  
117

**Webinar Invite**

IDENTIFICATION NUMBER:  
188977037

COUNTRY:  
EGYPT

TEAM:

- Salah El Din Samir Hareedy, *Team Leader*
- Khaled Farid El-Deeb
- Sherif Farag Ebrahim
- Tarek Ali Mohamed, Noha Mansour
- Ryan
- Hager Abdel Ghani Gad
- Mahmoud Saad Gamal
- Youssa Muhamed El-Baha

Zoom ID: 959 3076 5070  
Passcode: LFA2021

Monday June 28 2021  
10:00 (BST) | 12:00 (BGT)

**PROJECT**  
*Courtyards Dialogue*

### WEBINAR RECORD

<b>Project</b>	Courtyards Dialogue
<b>Prize</b>	First prize, UNESCO international competition for the rehabilitation of the historic Al-Nouri Complex.
<b>Country / team</b>	Egyptian team led by the late Dr Salah Haridi, with Khaled Farid El-Deeb presenting the design in the webinar.
<b>Central thesis</b>	Return the visual collective memory of the mosque while extending the complex as a civic, educational and community landscape of courtyards.
<b>Main debate</b>	Whether an open plaza and multiple access points could preserve the sanctity of the mosque and its courtyard.

The first webinar opened the series with the winning design and set the tone for every discussion that followed. The presentation began with Mosul's history, the 2017 destruction and the symbolic place of Al-Nouri Mosque and Al-Hadba Minaret within the old city. Khaled Farid El-Deeb framed the project not as a simple reconstruction exercise but as a story of memory, design philosophy and civic recovery.

The team identified three fundamental questions. Should the mosque be reconstructed according to its earlier historical form, before the 1944 rebuilding? Should it return to the form remembered by most residents before 2017? How could new buildings be integrated with Mosul's traditional architecture, and how could the project help a society injured by war? The team's answer was collective memory: the image that people living in Mosul had carried in their minds was the pre-2017 mosque. For the design team, giving that image back mattered.

That decision did not mean copying everything without change. The team proposed reconstructing the main visual image of the mosque while reorganising functions. The portico that had formerly been attached to the prayer hall was moved away to create a new intermediate space. This allowed the insertion of a women's prayer area, an extension to the prayer hall and a shaded outdoor summer prayer space. The roof strategy introduced north-oriented daylight openings to improve light quality while avoiding direct sun in Mosul's intense climate.

The design also expanded beyond the mosque. It included educational buildings, an institute, a secondary school, a festivities hall, ablution facilities, administrative buildings, a community centre and a small museum near Al-Hadba Minaret. Historic buildings in the extension area were integrated into the new programme rather than treated as isolated ruins. Brickwork inspired by Al-Hadba was used as a visual link between new construction and the traditional material memory of the site.

The project title was crucial. 'Dialogue' was not presented as an assumption that Mosul had suffered an internal civil war. When the moderator challenged the team on this point, the response was that dialogue was needed not only between opposing groups but among all members of a hurt society. After massive destruction, people need places to meet, rebuild confidence and recover public life. In that sense the courtyards were both architectural and social devices.

The most controversial element was the open plaza. The team argued that the plaza should not be reserved exclusively for worshippers. It could extend the prayer area during Friday, Ramadan or Eid gatherings, but at other times it should be open to the wider public. This was presented as a way to reconnect the mosque with the urban life of Mosul rather than enclosing it behind a rigid boundary.

Audience questions exposed the difficulty of that proposition. Dr Lathe Jaburi, speaking from knowledge of Mosul, asked about traffic and the tight urban fabric. The team answered that the education components were modest and that the competition brief set the programme, but acknowledged that broader traffic impact outside the site was not their main focus at the competition stage. Another audience question asked about energy, solar panels and ecological measures. The team answered that those would be developed in the next design phase, with roofs potentially used for solar panels and energy reduction strategies.

The strongest exchange concerned sanctity, or horma. Critics argued that a mosque complex is not simply a recreational public space. It requires cleanliness, conduct, threshold and reverence. The team responded by distinguishing between the sacred prayer areas and the external plaza. The mosque and enclosed prayer spaces would remain protected and controlled, while the public plaza outside could remain open and managed. Entrances could be secured without creating barriers that separate people from the complex.

The significance of this webinar is that it made the central conflict explicit. Reconstruction in Mosul is not only about authenticity of form. It is about the social rules of space. A courtyard can be read as civic openness by one group and as dilution of sanctity by another. The winning proposal depended on a belief that public life and religious dignity can coexist if carefully managed. Whether that balance is fully accepted remains part of the ongoing architectural conversation.

*The first-prize proposal made collective memory its anchor: restore the image people remember, then use courtyards to reconnect the mosque to the city.*

# 03 Child at Home

Second prize: reconstructing the city through innocence, play and the right to feel at home



**SECOND PRIZE**  
SUBMISSION NUMBER  
88

**Webinar Invite**

IDENTIFICATION NUMBER:  
1288/05238

COUNTRY:  
INDIA

TEAM:  
• Gurjit Singh Matharoo, Team Leader  
• Avneesh Tiwari, Team Leader  
• Jain Savi Sanjay Vimmi  
• Neha Rane

WEBSITE:  
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Zoom ID: 938 0379 8365  
Passcode: LFA2021

Monday June 28 2021  
13:00 (BST) | 15:00 (BGT)

**PROJECT**  
*Child at home*

## WEBINAR RECORD

<b>Project</b>	Child at Home
<b>Prize</b>	Second prize.
<b>Country / team</b>	India; presented by Gurjit Singh Matharoo and Avneesh Tiwari.
<b>Central thesis</b>	The child is the most forgotten and traumatised user; architecture should give back alleys, terraces, courts, water and familiarity.
<b>Main debate</b>	Is the proposal a mosque, a school playground, or a broader civic institution?

The second webinar shifted the emotional centre of the series. Instead of beginning with the mosque as monument, the team began with a child. The project title, Child at Home, was not sentimental decoration. It was a method. Because the competition brief included a school, the team asked who would actually inhabit the future complex. Their answer was the child who had lost home, street, school, river, shade and everyday security.

The team spoke with unusual self-awareness about the role of architects. They asked whether architects arriving from outside could become another form of intruder, imposing ideas on a

wounded place. Their solution was to take a back seat and act as facilitators. The design task became: identify what the child has lost and see whether architecture can return some of it.

That led to a design vocabulary of endless alleys, embracing terraces, intimate courts and water as a remembered way of life. The team argued that restoration alone was not enough because the brief required additional functions. Instead of treating the site as a fenced plot, they tried to recover older urban traces: lanes, footprints, historic alignments, landscape fragments and the looser growth pattern of Mosul's old fabric.

A key move was looking further back than the pre-2017 condition. The team asked why the project should restore only the condition of three years earlier when the site had a much longer history. They studied earlier stages, including the prayer hall's larger footprint, and used these findings to absorb required functions such as the women's area and VIP area without forcing an alien geometry.

The school became an equal protagonist. Educational functions were arranged around courtyards, verandas, stairs, ramps, terraces and loops of circulation. Heritage houses were adapted as library, canteen and tea houses. Old walls remained as fragments within the new design. The architects wanted children to encounter the complex as a place of discovery, not intimidation.

Water was perhaps the proposal's most evocative element. The team remembered Mosul as a city shaped by the Tigris, where water belonged to daily life rather than only symbolism. Small water pools at different levels were proposed for play and relief. The landscape was described as multifunctional: during religious occasions it could support prayer and gathering; otherwise it could belong to children and the city.

This claim generated a pointed audience question: is this a mosque or a school playground? The team answered that the brief itself required substantial educational functions; by area and programme the project was not only mosque restoration but a larger institutional complex. The public square could serve religious activity when needed and children's life at other times. This did not dismiss the mosque but placed it within a living urban environment.

Asked about heritage conservation experience, the team described work after the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, where damaged palaces used as schools were repaired and retrofitted rather than

demolished. This experience shaped their belief that heritage can remain useful. They also acknowledged that they had not consulted Iraqi architects or Moslawi experts during the competition stage, but argued that the design was open-ended and would require local expertise in later phases.

For Iraqi architecture students, the team offered a practical lesson: take part in international competitions because they force learning. Mosul became part of their life for three months, they said, opening questions of culture, politics, history and society. At the same time, they criticised the heaviness of competition requirements, suggesting that more flexible formats might allow designers to spend more time on ideas and less on production.

Child at Home remains important because it asks reconstruction to be measured by a vulnerable user. A city has not recovered simply because a monument is rebuilt. It recovers when a child can walk, learn, play, recognise fragments of home and inherit a city that does not frighten her.

*The child was not a metaphor only; she was the design brief translated into human terms.*



UNESCO field work at Al-Nouri. Image: UNESCO, used for editorial context.

# 04 Oasis of Peace

Third prize: clarity, portico, alabaster and the community as a construction partner



**Webinar Invite**

**THIRD PRIZE**  
SUBMISSION NUMBER  
85

**IDENTIFICATION NUMBER:**  
1241625490

**COUNTRY:**  
SPAIN

**TEAM:**

- Francisco Javier Maroto Ramos, *Team Leader*
- Pedro Garcia Martinez
- Antonio Palomino Bueno
- Jose Alberto Palomino Bueno
- Maribel Sánchez Fernández
- Rocío Sánchez Córcoles
- Manuel Albaladejo Garre
- Francisco Jesús Aparicio Buendía
- Jonathan Andrés Ríos Armijos

**Zoom ID: 956 6595 9073**  
**Passcode: LFA2021**

**Monday June 28 2021**  
**15:00 (BST) | 17:00 (BGT)**

**PROJECT**  
*Oasis of Peace*

## WEBINAR RECORD

<b>Project</b>	Oasis of Peace
<b>Prize</b>	Third prize.
<b>Country / team</b>	Spain; presented by Pedro Garcia Martinez with team participation including Javier Maroto.
<b>Central thesis</b>	A clear portico organises the complex, keeping the mosque primary while using simple construction and local participation.
<b>Main debate</b>	Andalusian memory, local consultation, jury criteria and whether competition is the right tool for heritage sites.

The third webinar brought a quieter but highly disciplined architectural position. Oasis of Peace was built around clarity. The team began with two questions: how could a proposal empathise with the devastated conditions of Mosul's inhabitants, and how could the construction process reinforce community bonds from the beginning rather than only after completion? Their answer was a design simple enough to be understood, built and participated in.

The main organising device was a portico running around and through the site. It divided the complex into two primary zones: one related to educational functions, the other shaping the

prayer courtyard and approach to the mosque. The portico was not a decorative arcade. It was circulation, shade, threshold, entrance, boundary and civic structure at once.

The team took clues from historic houses near the site, especially courtyards flanked by porticoes, rooms and shaded edges. Alabaster was identified as a material memory of Mosul, valued both for its local association and its translucency. This material logic later informed the mosque reconstruction strategy.

In the proposal, the school entered beneath the portico and generated a covered playground. The institute of architecture, cafeteria and auditorium had their own entrances. One retained house was adapted as a foyer for the auditorium. The administrative building was placed to the north above the car park. In front of the mosque, a delicate sheet of water was proposed to reflect and underline its importance.

The portico's height was carefully controlled. It had to be high enough to create generous covered space and accommodate functions of different scales, but lower than the mosque so it would not compete with the sacred building. This concern for hierarchy ran through the proposal: the new framework should serve the mosque, not overpower it.

At construction level, the team believed the simplicity of the design would allow participation by local inhabitants. Tasks could involve apprenticeships, use of local knowledge and continuity of craft. The proposal suggested that construction itself could become a way of restoring community confidence. This was a recurring theme across the series but expressed here with unusual clarity: build simply enough that the people of Mosul can take part.

The mosque reconstruction strategy used recovered stone, including alabaster fragments, returned to their original positions where possible. Missing enclosure walls would be rebuilt with a double-wall system, potentially using rubble from the immediate vicinity. The building could then be said to rise from the ashes of the city itself. Alabaster cladding could reproduce carved details while filtering light during the day and glowing at night.

The Q&A explored the team's Spanish background. Audience members sensed an Andalusian atmosphere in the project. The team answered that Spain's Islamic and Andalusian architectural inheritance is embedded in their way of reading courtyards, water, shade and the

relationship between city and community. It was not a direct stylistic quotation but a cultural memory carried into design thinking.

Asked whether they had worked in the Middle East, the team said no, but described the project as the type of challenge they wished to engage: not a normal client commission, but a community reconstruction process. Asked whether they had consulted Iraqi architects or historians, they acknowledged that the competition schedule did not allow direct local consultation, but argued that any developed project would require collaboration with Iraqi experts, archaeologists, historians and the local community.

The team also commented on competition formats. They praised the documentation and jury but noted that requirements for extensive prior experience can exclude younger local architects with strong ideas and deep knowledge of place. This point is highly relevant for Iraqi practice. A competition can open global imagination, but it can also privilege teams already fluent in international submission culture.

Oasis of Peace is therefore less about spectacle than about legibility. Its portico offered a way to calm the complex programme, give the mosque hierarchy, involve local construction and create a civic sequence that could be inhabited by worshippers, students and visitors.

*The portico was the project's instrument of order: a shaded civic line that made complexity legible without competing with the mosque.*

# 05 Dialogue Between Plazas

Fourth prize: two public rooms, four gates and a calm civic sanctuary in the old city



**Webinar Invite**

**FOURTH PRIZE**

SUBMISSION NUMBER  
26

IDENTIFICATION NUMBER:  
1457960734

COUNTRY:  
MEXICO - BELGIUM

TEAM:  

- Productora S.A. (Wonne Ickx, Carlos Bedoya, Victor Jaime, Abel Perles ), Team Leader
- Asli Cicek
- Andrea Monroy
- Diana Fonseca
- Sofia Valdivinos
- Ray Keraman
- Ana Reed
- Erik Castaneda,
- Yael Saadla
- Diego Velazquez
- Pablo Manjarrez
- Fidel Fernandez

WEBSITE:  
productora-df.com.mx

Zoom ID: 928 2268 9444  
Passcode: LFA2021

Monday June 28 2021  
16:00 (BST) | 18:00 (BGT)

**PROJECT**  
*Dialogue between plazas*

## WEBINAR RECORD

<b>Project</b>	Dialogue Between Plazas
<b>Prize</b>	Fourth prize.
<b>Country / team</b>	Mexico, Belgium and international collaborators; Productora, Asli Cicek and restoration specialists including Diana Fonseca and Andrea Monroy.
<b>Central thesis</b>	Create two linked plazas - one mosque-related and one civic - with four gates, arcades, palms, roofscapes and careful conservation.
<b>Main debate</b>	International competition, healthy distance, local expertise and how to remember war within reconstruction.

The fourth webinar was perhaps the most spatially explicit. Dialogue Between Plazas imagined the Al-Nouri Complex as a calm public interior within a dense city. Its main idea was not one object but two connected urban rooms: a Grand Plaza before the mosque and a smaller civic plaza serving the school, festivities hall, institute and administrative functions.

The team began from several principles. The complex should be more than a place of religion, education and history; it should also offer calm and silence in the city. The mosque's presence should be returned to the street. Architecture should provide shade and coolness alongside

vegetation. Traditional materiality and bioclimatic understanding should be treated pragmatically, not romantically.

A simple geometric contour embraced the site. On the southern side, the perimeter was pushed northward so that the mosque facade could face the city again. Four gates were introduced from the cardinal directions, recalling historic city thresholds. Each gate responded to its context: a grander western entrance, a more modest southern edge near the mosque, a northern sequence toward the minaret, and additional access linking the complex to its surroundings.

The Grand Plaza extended the mosque courtyard and was framed by an arcade giving access to religious functions such as ablution and tombs. Sixteen tall palms gave shade and dignity. The Civic Plaza, by contrast, was a more active urban room with eighteen palms, a water feature and immediate links to education and cultural facilities. Children leaving school, visitors attending events and people entering the institute could all use this civic space.

New buildings were concentrated along a strip so that cars and service functions remained away from the courtyards. Historic houses were literally embraced by new volumes: protected by new roofs and facades, visible inside the contemporary public buildings and treated as part of the visitor experience. Roofs were designed as an architectural layer, not an afterthought. Openings, terraces, skylights, rainwater collection and rubble roofs created a second landscape above the courtyards.

One of the most memorable elements was the hypostyle hall, where two arcades and the two plazas met. Brick columns supported a large roof, creating an inside-outside room with changing views across the complex. The use of columns also allowed relatively simple spans and construction logic. Water management was integrated through features connected to the ablution fountain, a contemplative patio, tanks, roof harvesting and recycling.

The restoration strategy for the mosque involved close attention to culture, religious customs, artistic expression, construction systems and the colour of the landscape. The team proposed removing incompatible later interventions such as concrete slabs where they prevented conservation. The dome structure would be stabilised with steel rods that could remain visible and serve decorative purposes with chandeliers. New slabs would use wood and gypsum to

recall traditional systems. A specially designed carpet would organise prayer spaces inside and relate to the pavement grid outside.

Bioclimatic thinking was central. The team studied traditional strategies for climate control in Iraq and the wider region, proposing to use three minaret-like elements as wind channels for passive cooling of the mosque. This was one of the strongest technical imaginings in the series: heritage forms not as symbols only, but as environmental devices.

The Q&A focused on team motivation and local consultation. The team said they had not consulted Iraqi experts or historians before submission, but expected that such engagement would occur after the competition phase. They argued that international competitions allow an external or 'healthy distance' that can produce new readings of a site, while acknowledging that foreign architects should not lead the entire process alone.

The debate on competitions was direct. International formats bring global visibility and comparative experience, but local architects may be less familiar with the graphical and procedural codes of competition culture. The team suggested that the winning team should later collaborate with local architects, engineers, contractors, historians, social workers and community members.

Asked what they might have done differently, the team reflected on economy and grandeur: how to create spaces with dignity and beauty without producing expensive architecture inappropriate to a recovering city. They also raised the question of war memory. Should destruction be erased, or should some traces remain? Their idea of rubble roofs was one answer: use remnants as thermal mass and as a quiet reminder of history.

*The proposal treated public space as architecture: two plazas in dialogue, each with its own temperature, hierarchy and social rhythm.*

# 06 Restore Continuity

Fifth prize: voids, fragments, time and restraint against seductive images



**FIFTH PRIZE**  
SUBMISSION NUMBER  
59

**IDENTIFICATION**  
NUMBER:  
1337851337  
COUNTRY:  
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES  
FRANCE

**TEAM:**

- Clement Blanchet, *Team Leader*
- Mattia Malavenda,
- Clotilde Berrou,
- Marc Kauffmann,
- Lola Garcia,
- Isabelle-Camille Tertrais
- Simon Parrilla
- Romain Ricciotti,
- Hellen Almosstafa,
- Samir N. Saddi
- Philippe Gimet-Operel
- Pierre-Marie Thibault-Aldela
- Fabrice Merizzi
- Yves Ubelmann
- Christina Chelarescu
- Laure Le Guillou
- Camille Pepin
- Shantanu Sang
- Angelo Trinca
- Patrycja Wyparło

**WEBSITE:**  
clementblanchet.com

**Webinar Invite**

**Zoom ID: 990 2461 3756**  
**Passcode: LFA2021**

**Monday June 28**  
**17:00 (BST) |**  
**19:00 (BGT)**

**PROJECT**  
*Restore continuity with the history and soul of Mosul*

## WEBINAR RECORD

<b>Project</b>	Restore Continuity with the History and Soul of Mosul
<b>Prize</b>	Fifth prize.
<b>Country / team</b>	United Arab Emirates / France and international collaborators; presented by Clement Blanchet and Samir Saddi.
<b>Central thesis</b>	Design the void, respect the organic urban texture, and reconstruct the mosque through recovered fragments held honestly in time.
<b>Main debate</b>	Research, low-tech versus high-tech, Iraqi participation, competition process and the danger of losing the recognisable Al-Nouri identity.

The fifth design webinar brought the most philosophical language of the competition series. The project was introduced as a collective research process, almost a form of cultural group therapy. The team had worked across multiple countries and disciplines, including architecture, engineering, archaeology and digital reconstruction. They framed the proposal as a process rather than a result.

The first design idea was the void. Instead of imposing an authoritarian masterplan, the team wanted to understand Mosul's organic urban texture: patios, streets, courtyards and the spaces between buildings. They argued that the city could grow if the unbuilt was carefully structured. The design therefore aimed to control the void in order to guide the massing, rather than designing buildings first and leftover spaces second.

This approach led to a textured site plan in which programme was embedded within a continuity of urban spaces. School, sport, art centre and mosque were organised as part of a broader fabric. The ambition was to avoid a forced shape or technological display. Modernity was not rejected, but it was to be integrated quietly, without turning the complex into a shiny object detached from Mosul.

The mosque reconstruction strategy was the most distinctive component. UNESCO had recovered and stored fragments from the destroyed mosque. The team proposed using precise technology to locate these pieces in their original three-dimensional positions, embedding them into a new concrete layer. The image was powerful: history frozen, fragments suspended honestly within a new volume. The mosque would become neither a perfect replica nor a completely new object, but a record of time.

Externally, the envelope was imagined as a negative of the original ornamentation, a photographic imprint of lost history. The building would represent time rather than hide it. The minaret was also considered in relation to light and natural ventilation, connecting symbolic reconstruction to environmental performance.

Samir's contributions placed the project within a wider Arab context. He emphasised that the Middle East will continue to face enormous restoration and reconstruction needs, and that solutions cannot be only high-tech or visually seductive. They must respect genius loci, local materials, budgets, timelines and community expectations. He regretted that the competition jury did not include a presentation stage for shortlisted finalists, arguing that drawings alone cannot communicate the full depth of research and intention.

The team repeatedly contrasted seductive images with restraint. They said they began with attractive architectural images but chose to restrain themselves because destruction in Mosul was not only about stone. It was about people and their lives. Architecture should last, not simply perform technological sophistication. Clement criticised a contemporary tendency

toward over-sophisticated systems that trap users inside the logic of technology. He preferred pragmatism, low-tech where possible and a bottom-to-top process in which people participate in construction.

Audience questions brought the political and professional stakes to the surface. One question asked whether the competition process excluded Iraqis and Iraqi experts. The team explained that they had tried to include an Iraqi architect but could not do so within the time available. Samir then turned the question back toward the system: how many Iraqi teams submitted among the total entries, and what prevented more from doing so? This became an important lesson for future competitions.

Another audience member said that the proposal's external images no longer felt like the Al-Nouri Complex. Clement answered that reconstructing exactly as before could become a fake lie, while the team's intention was to reconstruct the balance between what was and what could become. He acknowledged that the images may have shown the contrast too strongly, but insisted that the contrast was the project's central idea.

This webinar matters because it resisted closure. It did not offer comfort. It insisted that reconstruction must wrestle with time: what to restore, what to expose, what to transform, and how to avoid the false innocence of pretending destruction never happened.

*Restore Continuity asked whether a rebuilt mosque should copy the past, erase the wound, or hold the surviving fragments in an honest architecture of time.*

07

## Mosul Historic City: A Virtual Tour

Digital heritage, community archives and live walks through Al-Nouri, Al-Saa'a and Al-Tahira



بمصر من دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة  
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Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



#ReviveTheSpiritOfMosul

سفارة جمهورية العراق في لندن  
Embassy of the Republic of Iraq



### WEBINAR RECORD

<b>Title</b>	Mosul Historic City: A Virtual Tour
<b>Series position</b>	Sixth webinar in the seven-part series.
<b>Speakers</b>	Mohammad Al-Hashemi and the Al-Ghad Radio / Kaf Lab VR team; UNESCO site engineers and archaeologists including Omar Taka, Omar Tawil, Anas and colleagues from Iraqi institutions.
<b>Central thesis</b>	Mosul's recovery requires both physical restoration and digital reconstruction of memory, especially where archives are missing.
<b>Main debate</b>	The role of young local professionals, community-sourced imagery, virtual reality and on-site engineering in reviving the city.

The sixth webinar changed the mode of the series. After five design presentations by competition teams, this session moved into the city itself. It combined digital heritage work by young Moslawi teams with live and recorded UNESCO site tours. It therefore connected imagination, technology, rubble, storage, archaeology and labour.

Mohammad Al-Hashemi opened by introducing Al-Ghad Radio, founded in 2015 to communicate with people during the occupation, and Kaf Lab, a Mosul-based innovation hub

and incubator. The VR Lab grew from young architects, 3D artists and media producers using technology for preservation. The point was not technology for its own sake; it was documentation, communication and community recovery.

The team described Mosul as Iraq's second-largest city, a historic trade hub and a place shaped by Assyrian, Syriac, Islamic, Gothic and other architectural layers. Its alleys, contrasts of scale, colours, forms and merged house layers created a medieval urban texture. But ISIS destroyed hundreds of heritage sites, leaving mosques, churches and houses damaged or lost. Just as serious was the archival gap: for many sites, only a small number of images survived.

The VR Lab used two main methods. Surviving sites could be captured through photogrammetry, combining drone footage, high-resolution photography and algorithms to create textured 3D models. Destroyed sites required a different pipeline: old photographs, drawings, plans and community-sourced evidence were combined into 3D models, textured and then used in VR, video and online platforms.

Yahya Hawi explained a crucial communication lesson. VR headsets are not accessible to everyone, so the team expanded beyond virtual reality into social media videos, rendered sequences, online 3D model platforms and virtual production. They studied storytelling because heritage documentation must hold public attention. The model alone is not enough; people need narrative, emotion and relevance.

The collaboration with UNESCO became especially important during the Al-Nouri competition. Because the pandemic limited site access, the VR Lab provided 3D models and context to competition participants. Al-Ghad Radio also became Google Arts & Culture's first Iraqi partner, contributing to an exhibition on the art and soul of Mosul. The webinar emphasised that digital heritage can amplify local voices globally, not merely serve specialists.

The second half of the session moved to the UNESCO sites. At Al-Nouri, Omar Taka introduced the extension area, prayer hall and remaining structures. UNESCO had removed thousands of tons of rubble and explosive remnants, then secured the dome, arches and pillars with timber supports. Abdulrahman from the Nineveh Antiquities Department explained documentation and storage of stones, bricks, decorative minaret pieces and pottery from excavations around the base.

The Al-Hadba base was shown as a technical and symbolic problem. The minaret had been about 55 metres high, with lower and upper bases and a cylindrical shaft. The remaining base required safety measures, soil investigations and monitoring to understand underground water and stability before reconstruction.

The tour then moved to Al-Saa'a Church, the Dominican Fathers' church. Omar Tawil described its history: construction began in 1866, finished in 1873, with the tower completed in 1882. It had two domes, a large hall, a choir, an organ, the first school for girls in Iraq and a health centre. The church had been looted and damaged, and the library loss was described as a heritage disaster. UNESCO removed around 1,600 tons of rubble, secured the site and began laser scanning for 2D and 3D models.

The final virtual stop was Al-Tahira Church. Anas described a complex containing the Armenian church, the new Al-Tahira, the older Al-Tahira and a school. The area was remembered as a place where Muslims and Christians lived together, with church bells and the call to prayer heard in the same space. The project involved rubble removal, emergency stabilisation, design work, local contractors, Moslawi workers and storage of recovered stones and column pieces for reuse.

The Q&A highlighted the emotional meaning of local engineers working on their own city's landmarks. UNESCO staff spoke of honour, family-like teamwork, job creation and capacity building. More than a technical tour, the webinar showed a city learning to record itself, repair itself and train a new generation through the reconstruction process.

*The sixth webinar made Mosul visible not as a competition site, but as a working city of scans, stones, storage racks, young digital artists and engineers on damaged ground.*

**08**

## Rebuilding Historic Landmarks

UNESCO's programme overview: Al-Nouri, Al-Hadba, churches, houses, schools and the politics of consultation

Webinar Invite

### Reviving the Spirit of Mosul by rebuilding its historic landmarks

Tuesday June 29 2021  
12:00 (BST) | 14:00 (BGT)

Zoom ID: 950 4165 8252  
Passcode: LFA2021



#### WEBINAR RECORD

<b>Title</b>	Reviving the Spirit of Mosul by rebuilding its historic landmarks
<b>Series position</b>	Seventh and concluding webinar.
<b>Speakers</b>	UNESCO colleagues including Nuria and Gemma Houston, with Paula answering written questions.
<b>Central thesis</b>	Revive the Spirit of Mosul is built on heritage, education and cultural life, with landmark restoration, historic houses, job creation and training operating together.
<b>Main debate</b>	Why an international competition, how consultation worked, whether Iraqi architects were sufficiently involved, and how transparency is managed.

The final webinar placed the entire series inside UNESCO's programme structure. It opened with the Ambassador of Iraq's message, then moved to presentations on the UAE-funded landmark project and the EU-funded historic houses and urban rehabilitation work. This session is essential because it explains the machinery behind reconstruction: phases, committees, funding streams, jobs, training, technical investigations and consultation.

Nuria introduced the Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative as having three pillars: heritage, education and cultural or intellectual life. The UAE-funded project fell mainly under the heritage pillar and focused on three monumental landmarks: the Al-Nouri Complex, Al-Tahira Syriac Catholic Church and the Conventual Church of Our Lady of the Hour, Al-Saa'a. Its two outcomes were physical rehabilitation of historic spaces and the skills development and employment that reconstruction could generate.

The Al-Nouri work was explained in two phases. Phase one meant securing the site: explosive clearance, rubble removal and temporary stabilisation. Phase two meant design and reconstruction. The dome, arches and pillars required large timber stabilisation works, carried out by local carpenters and woodworkers. The State Board of Antiquities and Heritage participated in screening, assessing and cataloguing fragments recovered from rubble.

The Al-Hadba Minaret demanded additional investigation. Because the minaret had already been structurally unstable before 2017 and then suffered severe destruction, UNESCO installed monitoring systems, undertook core drilling to understand masonry stratigraphy, carried out direct investigations to locate earlier interventions and performed geophysical and soil investigations. The stated decision was to rebuild the minaret as it was and where it was.

The presentation also clarified that the prayer hall shown in pre-2017 images dated from 1944, while the complex and minaret are much older. This distinction matters because public memory, historical origin and architectural authenticity do not always point to the same answer. UNESCO stated that the prayer hall would follow the building as it existed before destruction in 2017, while the minaret was outside the competition scope.

Consultation mechanisms were then explained. UNESCO used a Joint Technical Committee with Moslawi and Iraqi experts, engineers, architects, local community representatives, the University of Mosul and government institutions. A Joint Steering Committee functioned as a higher decision-making body, including ministries, endowments and donor representatives. These formal mechanisms were supplemented by regular technical meetings with the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage and other local stakeholders.

Gemma Houston's presentation covered the EU-funded work on historic houses, palatial houses, a child-friendly school and Al-Aghawat Mosque. The wider objective was economic recovery through job creation, skills development and training for vulnerable youth in heritage

reconstruction. She described the old city context starkly: one of the largest urban battles since the Second World War had left much of Mosul's physical infrastructure damaged, with thousands of buildings levelled or severely damaged.

The historic houses project began with detailed analysis of Mosul's old houses, including courtyard organisation, climatic response, privacy, decorative features and alabaster framing around doors and windows. The first phase focused on 44 houses around the Al-Nouri Complex, conceived as a super-block approach. This was not shelter repair only. UNESCO reconstructed whole houses and upgraded surrounding infrastructure, including water, electricity, sewage, drainage, paving and lighting.

The challenges were severe: rubble, density, unexploded ordnance, improvised explosive devices and occasionally human remains. Every house had a different ownership, damage category and architectural condition. Owners were consulted about repairs and reintegration of historic features. Local stakeholders were consulted before tender release. Local contractors, craftsmen and trainees were integrated into construction.

The training component was one of the strongest parts of the presentation. Youth undertook construction skills training and then joined sites to learn from specialist craftsmen. Women trainees participated, including in electrical work. Alabaster repair, lime mortar, stone rebuilding and in-situ conservation became practical skills, not only heritage concepts.

The Q&A returned to the most persistent controversy: why hold an international competition for the Al-Nouri Complex? UNESCO answered that the competition put Mosul on the international scene in a positive way after years of negative visibility, and allowed architects and specialists around the world to contribute ideas. UNESCO also emphasised that the competition was for conceptual design and that the winning team would be required to partner with an Iraqi firm for detailed design.

Audience questions about Iraqi frustration and lack of consultation led UNESCO to mention bilateral meetings, the Joint Technical Committee and a University of Mosul survey of 700 people. It also acknowledged that consultation would need to continue during detailed design. Dr Ali Al-Musawy then made the strongest critique: a mosque of this significance should not be treated as a matter of architectural opinion. The courtyard, he argued, is not simply a plaza; it carries the sanctity of the mosque.

UNESCO responded that the prayer hall and Al-Hadba would be rebuilt to match their pre-2017 form and that the brief shaped creativity within clear guidelines. The exchange did not end the disagreement, but it made clear the central lesson of the whole series: technical reconstruction and cultural legitimacy must move together.

*The seventh webinar showed that rebuilding Mosul is a system: donors, committees, owners, trainees, contractors, fragments, surveys, design briefs and public challenge.*

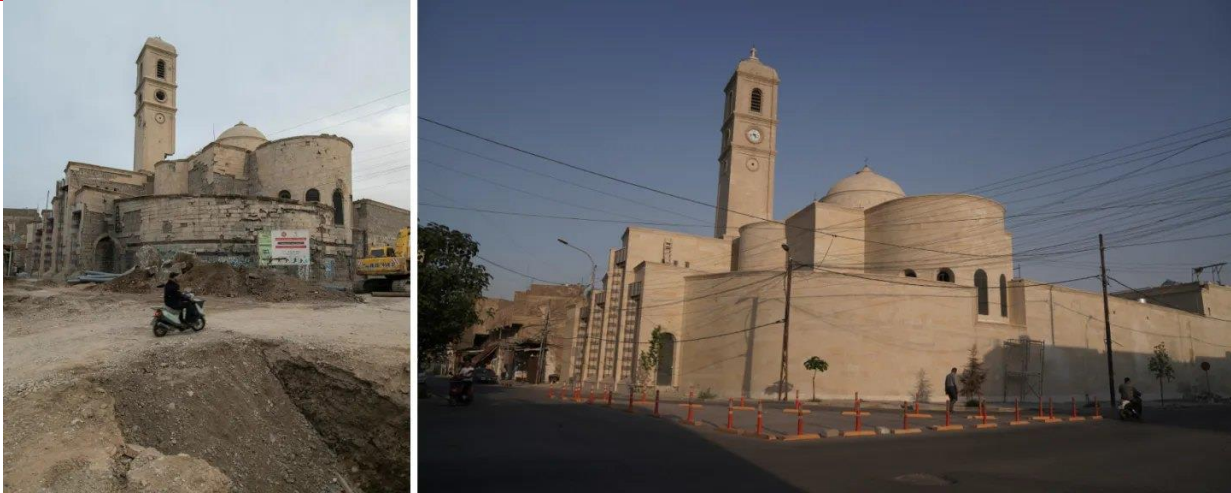


Heritage houses before and after reconstruction. Image: UNESCO.

## 09

## What the seven webinars reveal

A synthesis for architects, engineers and heritage professionals



The webinars viewed together form a professional map of post-conflict architecture: memory, children, clarity, plazas, fragments, digital records and programme delivery.

### Collective memory is not the same as historical origin

Several webinars returned to the distinction between the earliest Al-Nouri Mosque, the 1944 prayer hall and the pre-2017 image remembered by residents. The winning team prioritised collective memory because that image lived in the minds of contemporary Moslawis. UNESCO later clarified that the prayer hall was to follow the pre-2017 form, while Al-Hadba would be rebuilt as it was and where it was. This shows that heritage reconstruction must negotiate between archaeological chronology, public memory and religious continuity.

### The courtyard is the most contested architectural element

The courtyard/plaza appears in almost every proposal: Courtyards Dialogue opens it, Child at Home gives it to children when not used for prayer, Oasis of Peace frames it with a portico, Dialogue Between Plazas splits it into sacred and civic rooms, and Restore Continuity treats voids as the key to the city. The debate over horma shows why this element is politically and religiously sensitive. A courtyard can be worship space, civic plaza, school playground, route, memory field or climate device. Its management matters as much as its shape.

### International competition is both opportunity and problem

The design teams generally valued the competition for its seriousness, documentation and global reach. Yet many also acknowledged the limits: tight schedules, limited local

consultation, complex requirements and the risk of excluding local architects unfamiliar with international competition culture. UNESCO defended the competition as a way to return Mosul to a positive international scene, while critics argued that sacred heritage should not be left to architectural opinion. Future competitions need stronger local co-authorship before and after jury selection.

## **Modernity in Mosul must be climatic and social**

The strongest design ideas were rarely about spectacle. They were about shade, courtyards, water, wind, local materials, brick, alabaster, lime, gypsum, roof terraces, craft and participation. In Mosul's climate and dense urban fabric, modern architecture should not mean imported glass objects. It should mean contemporary intelligence applied to old environmental wisdom and current social needs.

## **Digital heritage has become part of reconstruction**

The VR Lab presentation changed the meaning of architectural documentation. Photogrammetry, 3D modelling, online viewers and virtual production do not replace stone conservation, but they make memory shareable, support remote design, engage young people and fill gaps where formal archives failed. Mosul's reconstruction now includes a digital layer that future heritage professionals should treat as infrastructure.

## **Reconstruction is labour policy**

The final webinars made clear that restoration is also job creation, training and economic recovery. UNESCO's public reporting later emphasised thousands of local jobs and training for craftsmen. The webinars already showed this logic in progress: timber stabilisation by local carpenters, stone sorting by archaeologists, laser scanning by local specialists, and youth trainees learning lime mortar, alabaster repair, electrical work and other trades.

## **Architecture must preserve disagreement**

The most valuable parts of the series were not the smooth presentations but the difficult questions. Traffic, sanctity, local consultation, Iraqi participation, transparency, competition criteria and recognition of Al-Nouri's identity all appeared repeatedly. These debates should not be edited out of the story. They prove that Mosul's architecture is alive because people care enough to argue about it.

# 10

## Recommendations for future work

Turning the webinar archive into a professional agenda for Mosul and Iraq



### Create a formal heritage design protocol

Every major reconstruction project should begin with a shared protocol covering historical evidence, public memory, religious requirements, archaeological procedures, urban access, climate, materials, ownership and consultation. This would reduce the risk of treating each site as a one-off dispute.

### Make local co-authorship mandatory from the start

International expertise can add value, but local architects, engineers, historians, craftsmen, religious authorities and community representatives should be embedded before concept development, not only after competition results.

### Use two-stage competitions with public dialogue

For sacred or symbolic sites, shortlist several teams, then require live presentations, Q&A, local review and community display before final selection. This would answer the repeated concern that drawings alone cannot explain the depth of a proposal.

### Publish consultation summaries in accessible form

If surveys and technical studies inform the brief, their conclusions should be released in Arabic and English. The public does not need every raw document, but it needs to understand how decisions were made.

## **Treat the courtyard as a managed sacred-civic threshold**

The Al-Nouri debate shows that plaza language is insufficient. Future designs should define zones, behaviours, cleaning regimes, prayer expansions, public use, gendered access and security protocols with religious and community stakeholders.

## **Build a permanent digital heritage archive**

The work of Kaf Lab, Al-Ghad Radio and the VR Lab should be developed into a long-term Mosul digital archive with university, municipality and UNESCO partnerships. It should include 3D scans, oral histories, old photographs, drawings, fragments and restoration records.

## **Make training visible**

Every reconstruction site should display what skills are being taught and who is learning them. Skills are part of heritage. Alabaster repair, lime mortar, gypsum, carpentry, brickwork and scanning are as important to the city's future as the completed facade.

## **Allow contemporary architecture, but demand humility**

The webinars repeatedly show that Mosul does not need fake historicism or imported spectacle. It needs a disciplined contemporary architecture that understands density, shade, memory, material continuity and the moral weight of rebuilding after violence.

## **Keep the debate open**

Al-Mohandis can become a platform for continuing professional review: publishing project updates, critiques, student responses, technical case studies and interviews with Moslawi architects and residents.

## 11

## Reviving the Spirit of Mosul

A status summary of the UNESCO programme as of 2025



UNESCO launched Revive the Spirit of Mosul in 2018, one year after the liberation of the city, as a reconstruction programme built around a clear proposition: Mosul could not be rebuilt through infrastructure alone. Its recovery required heritage, education and cultural life to work together as a civic and psychological framework for return.

The initiative treats Mosul as a city of links. Its name is associated with the idea of junction and connection, and its urban history reflects more than 2,500 years of cultural, religious and linguistic plurality. The Old City's mosques, churches, alleyways, markets and houses were therefore not treated as isolated monuments, but as a connected social fabric.

By 2025, UNESCO reported the completion of landmark works including Al-Nouri Grand Mosque, Al-Hadba Minaret, Our Lady of the Hour Convent and House of Prayer, Al-Tahera Church and 124 heritage houses. The initiative also renovated classrooms, supported cultural activity and trained teachers, craftsmen, engineers and young workers.

The initiative was designed at the scale of the city, not only the scale of individual buildings. UNESCO framed Mosul's recovery through three interdependent pillars: heritage, cultural life and education. This made the programme unusually broad: it combined conservation work, demining, job creation, school rehabilitation, cultural programming, professional training and community engagement.

The numbers also reveal the technical nature of the work. UNESCO reports that 45,000 original bricks were recovered from Al-Nouri Mosque and Al-Hadba Minaret, and that 8,718 historical fragments were recovered, cleaned and catalogued from the four main sites. The programme also notes that 83 tons of wood were used to consolidate the structure of Al-Nouri Mosque during emergency stabilisation.

The initiative's relevance for architecture is that it reconnected reconstruction with urban repair. Work around the main sites included houses, roads, drainage, lighting and local services. In this sense, heritage was not presented as a decorative layer added after reconstruction, but as the organising force of recovery in the Old City.

Measure	Reported outcome
<b>Funding mobilised</b>	US\$115m (US\$50.4m from the UAE and US\$48.2m from the EU)
<b>Partners</b>	15 countries and international organisations
<b>Religious monuments</b>	4 emblematic monuments rebuilt
<b>Heritage houses</b>	124 houses rehabilitated in the Old City
<b>Jobs</b>	7,700 local jobs created
<b>Training</b>	2,800 TVET graduates; 5,000+ education actors and parents trained
<b>Schools</b>	404 classrooms renovated in Nineveh, including 109 in Mosul
<b>Site clearance</b>	12,047+ tons of rubble removed; 115 explosive devices extracted

## The symbolic core: Al-Hadba and Al-Nouri

The most visible symbol of the initiative is the return of the Al-Hadba Minaret and the Al-Nouri Mosque Complex. Al-Hadba was built in 1172 as part of the religious complex established by Nur al-Din. Its 45-metre height, ornamental brickwork and famous lean made it the defining element of Mosul's skyline and a national symbol, including through its appearance on Iraq's ten-thousand-dinar banknote.

UNESCO records that a survey with the University of Mosul found that 94% of consulted Moslawis wanted Al-Hadba restored exactly as it was before destruction. This shaped the reconstruction principle: the minaret would return "as it was and where it was". The reconstruction required structural, geological and archaeological investigations; the remaining base had to be secured, cleaned and stabilised before the new shaft could be rebuilt in brick masonry.

Al-Nouri Mosque carried a different but equally intense meaning. Built in the second half of the 12th century, it became the Great Mosque of Mosul. Its 2017 destruction was both material and symbolic. UNESCO's publication notes that a 2020 residents' survey found that 70% of people in Mosul wanted the prayer hall rebuilt as it was before destruction, but with improvements such as larger ablution areas, administrative rooms and a garden.

The international design competition launched in 2021 must be understood against this background. It was not an unrestricted design exercise over the historic core. The competition offered conceptual design proposals for the wider rehabilitation while the prayer hall and minaret were governed by strong expectations of continuity. The winning Egyptian team finalised detailed design in 2022 in collaboration with the University of Mosul and local experts.

The process also generated new knowledge. During site works in 2021, archaeologists discovered four buried rooms, probably used for ablutions, dating to the 12th century. UNESCO reports that the discovery has been integrated into the reconstruction design as a museum space explaining phases of the mosque's history. In 2024, six bombs hidden by Daesh inside Al-Nouri Mosque walls were also discovered and safely disposed of.

## Churches, coexistence and manuscripts

Reviving Mosul's spirit also meant rebuilding sites associated with the city's Christian communities. The Convent of Our Lady of the Hour, known locally as Al-Saa'a, was first built from 1866. It combined religious, cultural and social functions: church, seminary, schools, hospital, printing press and a later school for women teachers. Its clock tower, financed in the 19th century, became a second marker of Mosul's skyline alongside Al-Hadba.

The convent's reconstruction began with site security and clearance of unexploded ordnance. Detailed design was prepared with Iraqi authorities, the Dominican Order and local stakeholders. Reconstruction began in April 2023, funded by the UAE. UNESCO reports that three new bells, Gabriel, Michael and Raphael, were cast in Normandy and installed in the clock tower, allowing the sound of the convent to return to the city. The rehabilitation was completed in January 2024, while the House of Prayer was completed in February 2024 with French support.

Al-Tahera Church represents another layer of Mosul's religious and urban memory. Built in 1859 and opened in 1862, it was almost completely destroyed in 2017. The reconstruction had to address collapsed roofing, destroyed arcades, vaults and external walls. UNESCO reports that the 650-square-metre site was demined, stabilised and cleared, with more than 6,000 heritage elements recovered for possible reuse.

The conservation work at Al-Tahera also created training opportunities. Internal alabaster surfaces were restored and original painted floral decorations were revealed. Thirteen students from the Fine Arts Department at the University of Mosul, including 30% women, received hands-on conservation training. The restoration was completed in August 2024 and the church was handed back to the Christian community in September 2024.

The initiative also supported the rescue and digitisation of ancient manuscripts. The Mosul library collections included Syriac, Aramaic, Muslim, Jewish and Yezidi materials. UNESCO supported conservation laboratory work and digitisation efforts connected with the Digital Centre of Eastern Manuscripts, preserving the intellectual record of coexistence.

## Returning life to the Old City: houses, families and skills

A city cannot return through monuments alone. One of the initiative's most important urban achievements is the rehabilitation of 124 heritage houses in the Old City with European Union support. UNESCO's work included not only walls and architectural features, but also electrical networks, septic tanks, drainage, road surfacing and public lighting. This made the house programme an urban recovery project, not simply a shelter intervention.

Before reconstruction could begin, neighbourhoods had to be made safe. UNESCO reports that 2,107 tons of rubble and 21 unexploded ordnance items were removed from the heritage house areas. By February 2024, 122 houses and two palatial houses - Suliman al Sayegh and Al Zyada - were completed and handed over. Around 170 families and more than 700 people benefited from the rebuilt houses.

The architectural value of these houses lies in Mosul's traditional materials and spaces: courtyard organisation, carved stone, alabaster surfaces, arches, decorated openings and internal privacy. The reconstruction therefore used traditional techniques and materials wherever possible to maintain the identity and urban integrity of the Old City.

The house programme was also a labour and training programme. It generated more than 3,500 local jobs in Mosul. An apprenticeship programme trained young people in bricklaying, masonry, electrical installation and carpentry, with more than 937 young men and women receiving training. Another programme supported marble, stone and alabaster carvers and helped small-to-medium enterprises in Mosul.

Professional training extended beyond houses. UNESCO's TVET programme reached 2,800 trainees, including 18% women. Around 80% of graduates joined on-site work-based training on historic building rehabilitation. A further training programme with ICCROM and the University of Mosul targeted architects, engineers, archaeologists and craftspeople to rebuild Mosul's local pool of heritage professionals.





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