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The Urban Sensory Ambiance of Batroun’s Old Patrimonial Souk in the Face of Overtourism

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ABSTRACT

The old patrimonial souk of Batroun, in northern Lebanon, is undergoing deep change due to overtourism. Once a center for local trade and crafts, the souk has shifted since the early 2000s toward tourism and commercial entertainment. This change has disrupted its multisensory ambiance, altering how long-term residents perceive, use, and emotionally connect with space. While efforts to preserve heritage are underway, they often focus more on visual and economic appeal than on lived experience, causing tension between cultural preservation and tourist development. This study fills a gap in heritage and urban studies by using Jean-Paul Thibaud’s “commented city walks” method to explore how residents describe and sense these changes. Fieldwork shows that residents increasingly feel dislocation and solastalgia as daily social rituals and sensory familiarity fade in favor of overtourism. The research adds to the growing field of urban sensory studies by demonstrating how sensory perception can help identify cultural loss in heritage sites. It also highlights the need for participatory, sensory-based planning approaches that consider the lived experiences of local communities. By viewing sensory co-construction as a potential bridge between tourism and preservation, the study promotes more inclusive urban transformation models. By foregrounding lived and actual urban sensory experiences, this research not only contributes to the field of urban sensory studies but also aligns with the journal’s aim of examining the socio-economic effects of modern urban transformation driven by overtourism, suggesting pathways toward more inclusive and resilient futures in heritage settings.

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Highlights:

- Overtourism alters auditory and olfactory ambiances in Batroun’s old patrimonial souk.
- Commercial transformation displaces traditional spatial practices and social rituals.
- Heritage commodification generates solastalgia and dislocation among residents.
- Participatory sensory methods reveal inequalities in residents’ lived experiences.

Contribution to the field statement:

This study advances urban sensory studies by applying Jean-Paul Thibaud’s “commented city walks” to Batroun’s old souk, revealing how overtourism disrupts multisensory ambiances and dislocates residents’ sense of place. By integrating concepts of dislocation and solastalgia, it contributes new methodological and theoretical insights into the socio-economic consequences of contemporary urban transformation in heritage contexts.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, many cities facing economic crises and global challenges have turned to tourism-led strategies as a tool for revitalisation and economic growth. While such initiatives often succeed in attracting investment and visitors, they also generate uncontrolled growth in tourist numbers, producing what the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, n.d.) defines as *overtourism*: the impact of tourism on a destination in ways that excessively affect residents' quality of life and/or negatively influence visitors' experiences. Beyond questions of spatial and economic management, overtourism has profound implications for the urban sensory ambiance— the atmospheric quality of city spaces as experienced through the senses. This ambiance extends beyond visual aesthetics to include auditory, olfactory, tactile, and thermal dimensions that profoundly shape how people perceive, interpret, and emotionally engage with urban environments (Thibaud, 2015). Thibaud identifies five interrelated elements—spatiality, temporality, sociability, sensoriality, and affectivity—that together explain how the multisensory experience of place is co-constructed by its users.

The impacts of overtourism on sensory ambiance are increasingly evident in historic urban centres, particularly UNESCO-listed sites across Europe. Digital platforms such as Airbnb have accelerated tourism influxes, leading to disruptions in local soundscapes, socio-temporal rhythms, and the intimacy of public and semi-public spaces. Studies show that such transformations commodify neighbourhoods for tourist consumption, creating heightened noise, visual and olfactory pollution, resident displacement, and the erosion of cultural identity (Degen & Rose, 2012; Celata & Romano, 2022; Abbasian et al., 2020; Mazzamuto & Picone, 2022). Municipalities have responded with varying regulatory strategies: Dubrovnik restricted cruise ship entries (Abbasian et al., 2020), Venice proposed entry fees for day-trippers (Bei & Celata, 2023), and Paris and Amsterdam imposed caps on short-term rentals alongside licensing systems and compensation mechanisms. Florence, in turn, prohibited tourist key lockboxes in its historic districts as part of the *Tourism Sustainable & Liveable City* initiative (Seraphin et al., 2018). Some regulations specifically address sensory disruption, for instance, Amsterdam and Venice restrict cruise traffic to protect environmental and sensory conditions, while Prague limits late-night guided tours to preserve nocturnal tranquillity. Collectively, these efforts reflect a growing recognition that sustainable tourism must preserve not only spatial and economic integrity but also the sensory environments that underpin lived experience (Thibaud, 2015).

Scholars have also underscored the significance of sensory heritage in historic environments. Sadiq, Elghonaimy, and Asvar (2025), using phenomenological and experiential mapping approaches, argue that architecture is apprehended not only through vision but also through tactile, auditory, olfactory, and kinesthetic senses. They emphasise that materials, spatial configurations, sounds, and light co-constitute emotional ambiance, and advocate for conservation strategies that protect these sensory dimensions as essential aspects of heritage sustainability. Similarly, the concepts of *dislocation* (Goetz & Nancy, 2018) and *solastalgia* (Albrecht, 2020) have been applied to urban contexts to describe the emotional distress residents experience when transformations erode their affective and relational ties to place. Case studies from Venice (Bertocchi & Camatti, 2022), Barcelona (Álvarez-Sousa, 2021), and Dubrovnik (Abbasian et al., 2020) illustrate how overtourism generates precisely such feelings of loss, alienation, and cultural dislocation.

While much of this research has centred on large European metropolises (Bei & Celata, 2023), smaller-scale Mediterranean patrimonial sites remain comparatively underexplored. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the old patrimonial souk of Batroun, located 54 km north of Beirut. Continuously inhabited since the Early Bronze Age, Batroun bears the imprint of successive Assyrian, Seleucid, Roman, Byzantine, Crusader, and Mamluk periods, later reconstructed in the 19th century. Its souk, with sandstone architecture, corbelled balconies, and labyrinthine alleys, stands as a testament to this layered history. Archaeological features such as the Roman theatre, Crusader fortifications, and the Sea Wall—interpreted variously as a quarry, defensive barrier, or storage zone (Viret, 2005; Salamè-Sarkis, 2009; Sanlaville, 1978) which reinforce its cultural significance. In addition to its archaeological and architectural value, Batroun has been a Christian pilgrimage centre, with landmarks such as the Basilica of Saint Stephen. Yet, following Lebanon's civil war, the souk declined into a



“ghost market,” losing its artisanal base. Renovation initiatives launched in the early 2000s reactivated the area, but they also triggered real estate speculation, commodification of space, and tensions between residents and investors. More recently, crises such as Lebanon’s financial collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beirut port explosion have further destabilised socio-economic life while accelerating the souk’s transformation into a spectacle-driven, tourist-oriented environment.

Within this context, the present study investigates how overtourism reshapes Batroun’s multisensory ambiance and affects local experiences of identity, belonging, and continuity (Ruby, 2021). Employing Jean-Paul Thibaud’s (2002, 2013a) *commented city walks* method, it explores how long-term residents narrate and interpret sensory changes in their environment under the pressures of crowding, commercialisation, and aesthetic rebranding. By foregrounding participatory, sensory-based methodologies, this research highlights how embodied knowledge reveals disruptions often overlooked in conventional heritage and urban planning frameworks.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on a small Mediterranean heritage city, offering insights distinct from metropolitan European contexts. It demonstrates how overtourism disrupts multisensory ambiances, displaces traditional practices, and generates socio-cultural tensions that gradually marginalise residents in favour of tourists and investors. Ultimately, the study argues that participatory and sensory-centred revitalisation strategies can co-create ambiances that sustain cultural continuity while enhancing urban resilience.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative methodological framework to investigate the transformation of Batroun’s old patrimonial souk and its implications for urban sensory ambiances. The approach integrates spatial analysis and experiential inquiry, enabling a holistic examination of how architectural modifications, functional shifts, and processes of commercialisation linked to overtourism reshape the souk’s sensory identity. The research begins with an assessment of the spatial and functional evolution of the souk, focusing on physical alterations, changes in use, and the reconfiguration of spatial identity. Cartographic surveys are used to map these transformations and to identify areas most affected by commercial pressures and tourist flows.

To examine the embodied experience of the souk, the study applies the method of “commented city walks” [parcours commentés] developed within urban sensory studies (Thibaud, 2002, 2013a). This participatory technique involves accompanying residents along routes of personal or habitual significance within the souk, during which they articulate their perceptions, affective responses, and memories in real time. These walks are documented through audio recordings, field notes, and visual materials, generating an in-situ record of how sensory ambiances are produced and perceived.

The commented city walk approach emphasises co-presence between researcher and participant, situating observation within the lived context of urban environments (Thibaud, 2002, 2013a). It captures the relational and affective dimensions of sensory experience, examining how ambiance emerges through the interplay of spatial arrangements, materiality, temporality, and human interaction (Thibaud, 2015). This is particularly relevant in the case of Batroun’s patrimonial souk, where traditional practices intersect with touristic dynamics, producing a layered and contested sensory landscape. By combining spatial surveys with embodied methods, the study interrogates how transformations in the souk’s architecture and functions shape sensory perception and influence residents’ sense of place (Chelkoff & Thibaud, 1992). The methodological design thus contributes to advancing a deeper understanding of the sensory identity of historic urban environments and informs participatory strategies for heritage preservation that prioritise lived experience.

2.1 Study Design and Setting

The methodological design is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of Batroun’s sensory ambiance in the wake of restoration and conversion efforts. The framework integrates three key components:

1. Commented city walks (Thibaud, 2002, 2013a) to capture sensory narratives in real time.



2. Sensory data collection (audio, visual, and field notes) to document ambient qualities.
3. Semi-structured interviews with diverse stakeholders (residents, shop owners, municipal actors) to contextualise sensory experience within broader socio-cultural dynamics.

This integration foregrounds the primacy of sensory engagement in the study of urban ambiances, recognising that “the world is experienced both as a world of objects from which we act and orient ourselves, and as a world of qualities with which we vibrate and are in harmony” (Margier, 2020, p. 209).

Table 1: Steps for applying the "commented city walk" method.

Step	Description	Key Details
A. Selection of Participants	Identify suitable participants for capturing lived sensory experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Residents or regular users of the space (e.g., shop owners, local walkers, artisans). - Ensure diversity in age, gender, and background. - 4–10 participants per session is optimal.
B. Preparation Phase	Prepare the urban site and research framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Select specific zones/paths (e.g., Batroun’s old souk). - Provide maps or visual references. - Design semi-structured guides (themes + flexibility).
C. Walking Interview (“Commented City Walk”)	Conduct embodied and narrated exploration of urban space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants guide researcher through space, sharing perceptions, memories, feelings, and sensory cues (sounds, smells, light, textures). - Sessions recorded (audio or audio–video). - Researcher listens/observes, prompts gently. - Duration: ~25 minutes per walk.
D. Post-walk Discussion (Optional)	Deepen reflection and triangulate sensory insights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct debriefing interviews to clarify observations. - Use images or playback excerpts for participant feedback.
E. Data Processing	Analyse and synthesise sensory narratives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transcribe and code verbal/sensory expressions. - Map sensory hotspots and discomfort zones. - Cross-compare across participants’ walks.

2.2 Participants or Subjects

A central component of the study is the use of “commented city walks” (J.-P. Thibaud, 2013a), which involve collecting sensory perceptions from residents and visitors of the old patrimonial souk. The sample includes current residents who still inhabit the souk, former residents who lived in the souk, short-term renters who lease their homes through rental platforms, particularly following the restoration and conversion process, visitors who frequent the souk during the day and at night, business owners and tenants of retail shops and restaurants operating in Batroun’s old patrimonial souk, and professionals who previously worked in the souk and recent tenants who have established new businesses in the area. This selection facilitates a comparative understanding of how different user groups perceive and negotiate the shifts in spatial ambiance and social rhythms of the area.

By conducting sensory observations across these diverse groups, the study aims to map the impact of urban transformation on the lived experiences and spatial ambiances within the souk.

The table 2 below shows the age ranges of people who have been in Batroun Souks before the restoration and renovation that started in 2000 (<25 or >25), those who were in Batroun when it was identified as a ghost city (before 2000), and the older generation who knew the old patrimonial souk of Batroun when it was filled with artisanal workshops and merchants (>60). We have all participants' consent to share their participation and experiences, as they have provided a testimony to share.



Table 2: Participants in the “Commented city walk” experience.

Participant Group	Description	Age Range	Number of Participants
Current Residents	People who currently live in the old souk	> 60	< 5
Former Residents	Individuals who used to live in the old souk	> 60	< 5
Short-term Renters	Hosts or tenants using rental platforms (e.g., Airbnb) after restoration	< 45	< 5
Daytime Visitors	People who visit the souk during the day	< 25	> 30
Nighttime Visitors	People who frequent the souk at night	< 25	< 10
Business Owners	Owners of shops, cafes, or restaurants in the souk	< 25	< 5
		> 45	< 5
Long-term Tenants	Individuals who lease and operate businesses in the souk	> 45	< 5
Municipality, Batroun Committees, and organizers	Municipality of Batroun employees who provided Batroun Map, and Batroun committees and organizers	<45	3
		>45	3

The study draws on testimony from Professor Paul Abi Khattar Zgheib's childhood, when he lived in Batroun's old souks. He shares his childhood memories based on sensory experiences and ambiance, and his recently created “commented city walk” through Batroun's alleys, recorded with sounds and photos, aims to depict old Batroun through residents’ lived experiences and memories. It also captures the real sensory experience of a typical visit to Batroun's historic souks.

2.3 Materials and Equipment

The study employed a range of materials and equipment to facilitate the application of the Commented City Walk methodology in Batroun’s old patrimonial souk.

Primary data collection relied on:

- Audio and video recorders for capturing real-time verbal narratives during the walks.
- Smartphones were used for geo-referencing via GPS and taking environmental photographs.

To support olfactory tracking and environmental sensory logging, pre-designed sensory mapping sheets were distributed to the research team for manual annotation.

The materials can be highlighted as:

- Audio recorder (or smartphone with quality mic).
- Optional: GoPro or body cam for video documentation.
- Map/plan of the area.
- Notepad or observation sheet.
- Camera for visual documentation of key places or sensory cues.

2.4 Procedures and Protocols

The research adopted the “*Commented City Walks*” method as developed by Jean-Paul Thibaud(J.-P. Thibaud, 2002, 2013a), focusing on a step-by-step immersive engagement with participants as they traverse familiar urban routes.

- Walks took place at different times of the day, morning, afternoon and night, to capture variations in sensory ambiance and social activity.
- Participants were selected from various categories (residents, former residents, visitors, business owners, and others) and invited to walk a route of their choice within the old souk, typically lasting around 20 minutes.
- Before each walk, participants were briefed on the process and asked for their consent.



- Each walk was accompanied by a researcher who ensured minimal interference while encouraging participants to share sensory impressions, emotional reactions, and memories triggered by specific urban cues (visual, auditory, olfactory).
- Comments were recorded in real-time using voice recorders, and environmental data such as ambient sounds and air scents were logged simultaneously.
- After completing the walk, participants took part in a 15–30-minute post-walk interview to elaborate on specific observations and discuss perceived changes in ambiance due to overtourism. It was more identified as a group discussion, specifically with the young generation, counted as tourists.
- Each walk and follow-up session were documented with visual data (photos, annotated maps, and sensory logs) for contextual analysis.
- Throughout the process, safety, anonymity, and ethical handling of personal data were prioritized to ensure accessibility and participant comfort

2.5 Data Analysis

Photographs and soundscapes were used to triangulate findings and deepen the understanding of the souk's sensory ambiance. Through collaborative discussion, the qualitative and spatial data showed how overtourism transforms the embodied and emotional experience of the space.

3. Results

The methodological framework of the commented city walk enabled a nuanced examination of how spatial and social transformations shape the sensory ambiances and identities of Batroun's old patrimonial souk. This approach resonates with the conceptual work of Amphoux (1993), who highlighted the ternary rhythm of *familiar ambiance*, *lived ambiance*, and *sensory ambiance* (*ambiance connue*, *ambiance vécue*, *ambiance sensible*) as critical dimensions through which urban atmospheres may be interpreted. In *La valse des ambiances* [The waltz of ambiances], Amphoux describes these ambiances as distinct yet interwoven perceptual layers—knowledge, life, and meaning—that characterise urban experience. Subsequently, Amphoux, Thibaud, and Chelkoff (2004) formalised this conceptualisation into a methodological framework that informed the present study.

3.1 A Child's Olfactory Journey Through the Alleys of Batroun

The experiential dimension of Batroun's patrimonial souk is deeply embedded in olfactory memory, demonstrating how scent functions as a formative element in the construction of place identity. Childhood recollections of the souk reveal a sensory cartography structured through distinctive odours. Each street, shop, and workshop contributed an "olfactory signature," acting as silent yet vivid markers of both time and space.

For instance, mornings in Batroun often began with the earthy aroma of freshly sawed and sanded wood emanating from carpentry workshops. These scents not only anchored daily routines but also evoked imaginative associations—wood shavings became symbols of adventure, transformed into imagined treasures or gateways to exploration. Progressing through the alleys, the olfactory atmosphere shifted abruptly near the blacksmith's forge, where the acrid odour of heated iron was accompanied by the rhythmic resonance of hammer against metal. This multisensory experience integrated sound and smell, reinforcing the perception of the space as one of productivity and resilience.

Equally significant was the refreshing scent of citrus from the lemonade vendor's stand, which introduced an atmosphere of vitality and playfulness. The lingering trace of lemon oil on the hands symbolised both immediacy and continuity, embedding the sensory experience within the rhythm of everyday life. Further along, the maritime scent of Batroun's harbour—an intermingling of salt, seaweed, and freshly caught fish—reinforced the town's coastal identity and extended the sensory narrative of childhood exploration into maritime imaginaries. The olfactory presence of the butcher's shop, with its blend of raw meat and spice, closed the sensory cycle of daily life by evoking communal rituals of food and family gatherings. These recollections illustrate how olfactory experience contributes to what Proust metaphorically termed "madeleines," sensory triggers that reactivate

memories with striking immediacy. In Batroun, such fragrances constitute more than personal recollections; they embody the socio-cultural fabric of the souk, functioning as enduring sensory imprints that bind past and present.

3.2 Contemporary Journey of the vanishing Scent and sound of Home

In the contemporary period, the sensory landscape of Batroun's patrimonial souk has undergone significant transformation. The compounded effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lebanon's severe economic collapse, and the Beirut Port explosions of 2020 have reshaped both domestic and international tourism flows. With a decline in Beirut-centred tourism, visitor activity increasingly shifted toward northern Lebanon, and particularly to the historic souk of Batroun. This intensified influx of visitors, layered onto an already fragile economic context, has profoundly altered the sensory ambience and cultural identity of the souk.

The geographical scope of the present study focused on a specific route beginning at St. Stephan's Church and concluding at the Batroun citadel—colloquially referred to as the "Diaspora Village." This route included Street 14, turning right onto Street 1106, and continuing along Street 11 (see Figure 1). Historically, this section of the souk was characterised by a socio-spatial structure dominated by artisanal economies. Street 14, in particular, hosted a variety of small craft businesses—including a bakery, a dressmaker's atelier, multiple carpentry workshops, and a specialised shop for carpentry tools. These commercial activities often coexisted with domestic life, as property owners typically resided on the upper floors of their workshops, thereby reinforcing a traditional live-work arrangement. The juxtaposition of past and present illustrates a dual narrative: on one hand, the persistence of sensory memory as a formative layer of place identity; on the other, the gradual erosion of these sensory markers under the pressures of economic crisis, shifting tourism, and cultural transformation. Together, these findings underscore the methodological significance of the commented city walk in capturing the ambivalent dynamics of continuity and change in urban sensory ambiances.



Figure 1. The chosen path for "commented city walk" in Batroun's old patrimonial souk.

Over time, the socio-economic dynamics of this area have undergone a significant transformation. Most of the original proprietors have passed away, and the artisanal heritage associated with the area has experienced a notable decline. The younger generations, many of whom have obtained university degrees in unrelated fields or have shown little interest in continuing traditional crafts, have largely disengaged from these professions. As a result, the ground-floor commercial units that once hosted artisanal practices are now either vacant or converted into tourism-oriented businesses such as restaurants, boutique shops, or entertainment venues. Meanwhile, the upper residential levels have been repurposed into short-term accommodation, including hotels and Airbnb rentals, further contributing to the commercialization and reshaping of the historic urban fabric. We can see this in the

figure 4 where we note the street 14 ambiance and the houses turned into short term accommodation in the upper floor.

Recently, the sensory landscape of Street 14 in Batroun's old patrimonial souk has experienced a profound change. The scent of home-cooked meals, once a characteristic feature of the area, has become increasingly rare. Today, only a few residential units remain occupied by long-term residents, specifically two apartments upstairs and a single ground-floor dwelling, while many traditional homes have been converted into tourist accommodations.



Figure 2. Ambiance of Street 14, with shops and workshops on the ground floor and residences or guesthouses above. © Photo: Prof. Paul Abi Khattar Zgheib.



Figure 3. Guesthouses on the ground floor and residences above in Street 14. © Photo: Prof. Paul Abi Khattar Zgheib.

The former carpentry workshops, now transformed into restaurants, pubs, or street food vendors, emit new dominant olfactory cues, such as the pervasive smell of fast food, alcoholic drinks, and nargileh (waterpipe smoke). The sound environment has undergone significant changes. Where once the street was filled with the sounds of neighbourly conversations and the subtle rhythms of domestic life, it is now dominated by amplified music from hospitality venues, tourist chatter, kitchen noises, the bubbling of nargileh pipes, and the mechanical sounds of tuk-tuks and electric golf carts moving through the narrow streets.

Other sensory elements that were once common, such as the distinct scent of freshly laundered clothes or the aroma of morning coffee shared among neighbors, have largely disappeared. These have been replaced by the sounds and smells associated with commercial activities, such as the deliveries of goods to local restaurants and guesthouses. We can see in figure 3 a whole yard with its surrounding houses transformed into guesthouses.



Figure 4. The sensory landscape of Street 14 in Batroun’s old patrimonial souk.

A similar pattern of transformation can be seen along Street 1106 as in the Figure 5. Traditionally made up entirely of private homes, this area has experienced uneven yet notable change. The right side of the street keeps its residential feel; however, the left side shows signs of tourism development. While one house remains in its original state, another has seen its courtyard turned into a fast-food restaurant, and two more properties have been completely redesigned into guesthouses, reflecting a broader trend of commercialization and spatial reorganization.

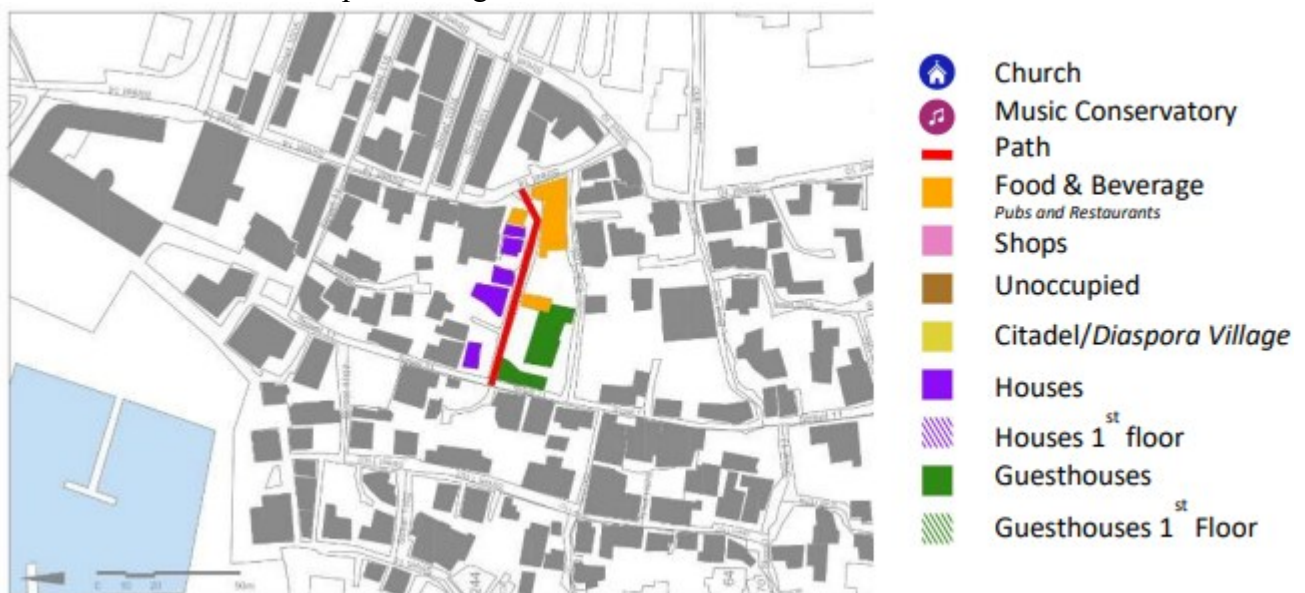


Figure 5. The sensory landscape of Street 1106 in Batroun’s old patrimonial souk.

Along Street 11, extending from the intersection with Street 1106 toward the Church of Our Lady of the Yard, next to the area commonly referred to as the Diaspora Village and historically known as the Citadel, significant renovations have been undertaken. You can note this path in the figure 8. Many plots along this route, including traditional Lebanese homes with high ceilings, have been restored. These properties are still partly inhabited by long-term residents or have been converted into tourist accommodations, contributing to the area's ongoing transformation. Unlike neighboring streets, the sound environment here is distinctly different. The absence of concentrated restaurants, pubs, or street

food vendors results in a quieter, less commercial soundscape. Aside from a single Italian restaurant near the limits of the Citadel, the main sounds come from other sources. You can hear religious hymns from nearby churches blending with the occasional hum of tuk-tuks and electric golf carts moving along the pedestrian street. These mechanical noises are accompanied by traditional oriental music emerging from the newly opened conservatory, as in figure 6, housed in a restored old patrimonial building on plot 427 at the edge of the Diaspora Village. The combination of sacred music, machinery, and cultural sounds creates a unique and layered auditory experience. The scent profile here is also mixed. At the start of the street, the smells of home-cooked meals still linger, reflecting the presence of residents. As you move toward the Citadel, these scents are gradually replaced by the aroma of Italian cuisine from the restaurant and the sweet smell of brioche and pastries from KOKO's bakery further along the route, as in figure 7.



Figure 6. The music conservatory was restored, and it opened its doors in the early 2025. © Photo credit to Prof. Paul Abi Khattar Zgheib.



Figure 7. The old patrimonial House, where we note the entrance to KOKO's bakery on the ground floor, and his residence on the upper floor. © Photo credit to Prof. Paul Abi Khattar Zgheib.

This section of Street 11 offers a heightened physical sensory experience. While olfactory stimuli are less intense, the shape and narrowness of the street require heightened body awareness for movement and navigation. When the street narrows near the Diaspora Village, pedestrians often press against building walls or step aside to avoid oncoming tuk-tuks and golf carts. This space constriction

enhances bodily engagement with the environment, creating a sensory ambiance that is both intimate and dynamic yet constrained.

As you approach the Diaspora Village from the entrance near Lina's, beside the Church of Our Lady of the Yard, the auditory experience continues and intensifies. In this transitional space, a layered soundscape develops, where the ambient noise of food preparations from nearby restaurants blends with background music from these eateries. These sounds intertwine with the sacred hymns from the nearby church, forming a complex acoustic environment. The scene is further animated by the lively chatter of tourists and the rhythmic music from passing tuk-tuks and golf carts, creating a vibrant mix of sacred, commercial, and entertainment elements sounds.

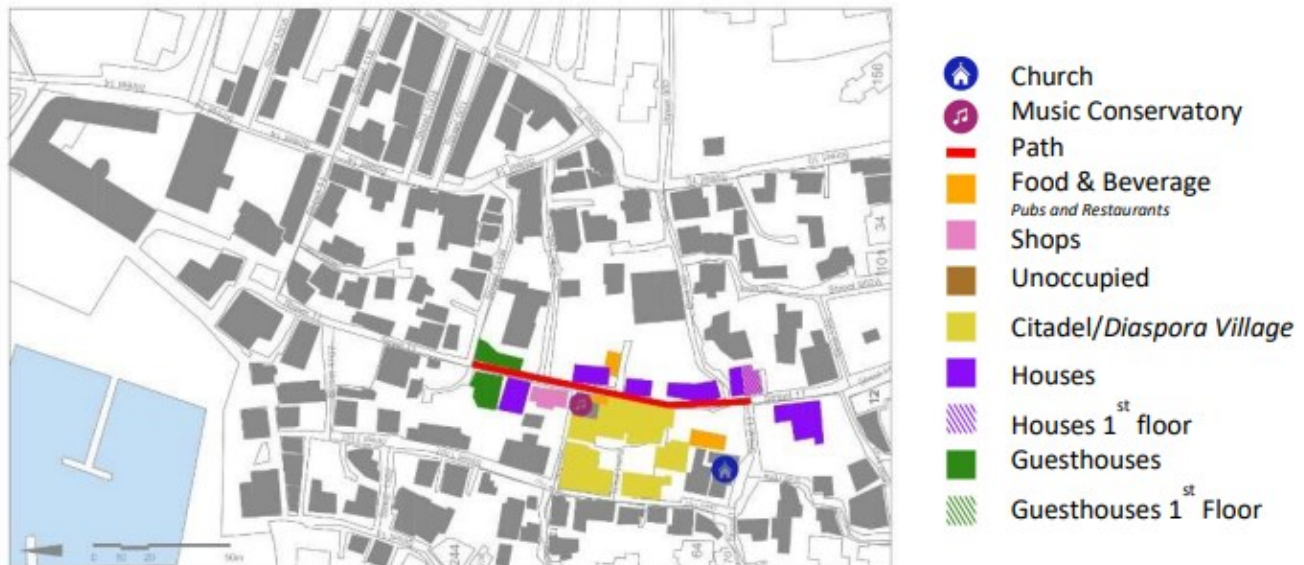


Figure 8. The sensory landscape of Street 11 in Batroun's old patrimonial souk.

3.3 Dislocated belonging and the scent of loss

The modern journey through Batroun's historic souk exposes a deep disconnect between memory and experience, between the familiar sensory rhythms of the past and the fragmented, commercialized atmosphere of today. What used to be a space filled with the everyday scents and sounds of home life, artisanal work, and community interaction has now been transformed into a tourist attraction, visually preserved but sensorially foreign. For longtime residents, this change is more than just spatial or economic; it is profoundly existential. As the smells of homemade meals, wood shavings from carpentry shops, and morning coffee fade beneath the overpowering presence of fast food, hookah smoke, and loud music, the souk's sensory identity becomes increasingly unrecognizable (figure 9). This loss of familiarity triggers a form of solastalgia, as defined by Glenn Albrecht for being a distress experienced when one feels emotionally displaced in a place that was once home (G. Albrecht, 2006). Here, residents stay physically in their neighborhoods, but the environments that once grounded them have disappeared. They are, in essence, at home yet no longer feeling at home, mourning a place that still exists physically but has lost its lived sense of familiarity meaning (Liu, 2024).

This loss is not only internal. It is also social and visible in the empty thresholds and shuttered workshops once animated by generational craft and community exchanges. The children of artisans, now university graduates or labor migrants, have not inherited the professions or the spaces of their parents. Instead, the ground floors of their family homes have become restaurants or shops, while upper floors are rented to temporary guests. The residents who remain, as in figure 10, bear witness to a kind of "dislocation", as described by Benoît Goetz (Goetz & Nancy, 2018): "not one of physical removal, but of emotional and symbolic displacement". They experience a disconnection not only from their past, but also from their former neighbors, whose departures, often driven by economic insecurity, signal a larger separation of collective belonging. The souk, once a shared living environment, is now an increasingly fragmented urban stage curated for others. *"The sensible encompasses both the sensory,*

the signifier (the meaning given to what is experienced by the senses), and the qualifier (the feeling, the emotional connection, etc., that this can produce). The sensitive approach we are talking about then encompasses these three connections." (Manola, 2020)



Figure 9. The ambiance in the old patrimonial souk, street 14, where we can notice the pubs taking over the old crafts workshops. © Photo credit to Prof. Paul Abi Khattar Zgheib.



Figure 10. The resilience of the inhabitants of the old patrimonial souk, street 14, side by side with the pubs and restaurants. © Photo credit to Prof. Paul Abi Khattar Zgheib.

This sensory and social transformation is particularly evident along the route from St. Stephan's Church to the Citadel, now known as the Diaspora Village. While the visual heritage of the area may be preserved through stone restoration and aesthetic regulation, its sonic, olfactory, and proprioceptive dimensions have undergone dramatic alterations. What once evoked stability and communal rootedness now evokes movement, noise, and fleeting presence. Even the body navigates the space differently hugging walls to avoid tuk-tuks and golf carts in streets once walked freely by barefoot children and elderly neighbors greeting one another.

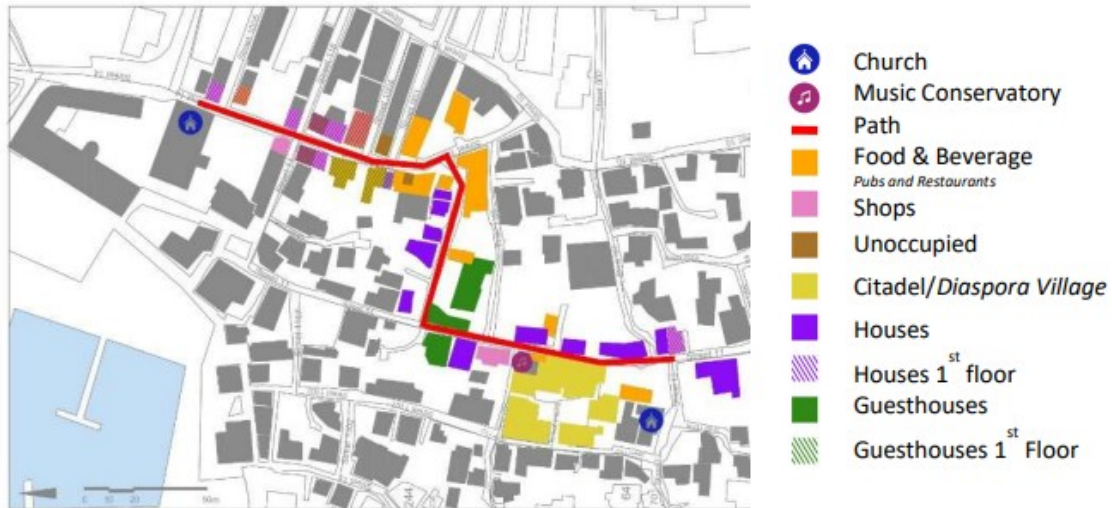


Figure 11. The sensory landscape in Batroun’s old patrimonial souk.

Tracing the sensory reprogramming of this familiar urban journey, as in figure 11, this research uncovers the complex connection between place, identity, and ambiance. It demonstrates that heritage cannot be limited to architectural preservation or economic revival alone. Instead, it must also include protecting the intangible, sensory, and emotional aspects of a place that foster a sense of belonging. The transformation of the souk, driven by economic development, has caused significant emotional and cultural dislocation for those who still live there. You can note below in Table 3, the sensory comparative study, as identified by the participants, in street 14, street 1106, and street 11; from Saint Stephan Church to The Diaspora Citadel.

Table 3: The sensory comparative study. Summary of Olfactory and Auditory cues within each of the streets

Street	Olfactory Cues	Auditory Cues
Street 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fading scents of home-cooked meals and morning coffee - Strong presence of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast food • Alcohol • Nargileh smoke - Loss of artisanal smells (wood, bread, laundry) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Replaced neighborly sounds with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loud music from pubs/restaurants • Tourist chatter • Kitchen clatter • Bubbling of nargileh • Sounds of tuk-tuks/golf carts
Street 1106	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mixed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some home-cooked food still present • Fast food from a courtyard-turned-restaurant - Signs of gradual shift to tourist-oriented smells 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Softer than Street 14 but changing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential quiet on one side • Noise from restaurants/guesthouses on other - Transitional, with increasing tourist noise
Street 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begins with lingering home-cooked scents - Further down: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Italian cuisine • Fresh pastries (KOKO’s bakery) - Overall more diverse and subtle olfactory presence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Layered soundscape: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church hymns • Tuk-tuks/golf carts • Oriental music from conservatory • Background music from restaurants - Quieter than Street 14; more varied

To address this, urban and heritage planning must go beyond superficial aesthetics and visual stories. They need to focus on the lived and atmospheric qualities of a place, actively listening to the voices



and sensory memories of residents who have not left but increasingly feel alienated in their own homes. Only then can we develop regeneration strategies that are not only sustainable and inclusive but also honor the deep relational bonds that make a place feel like home.

4. Discussion

4.1 Residents between struggle and the search for a home

The transformation of Batroun's old patrimonial souk provides a poignant illustration of how tourism-induced urban change manifests at the level of sensory and socio-cultural experience. Observations reveal an ongoing tension between residents' everyday life and the spectacle of tourism. From balconies overlooking the streets, inhabitants are often seen observing passers-by, their expressions reflecting quiet unease. In other instances, residents attempt to maintain their daily routines within an environment increasingly dominated by high-profile restaurants and hospitality venues. This juxtaposition highlights the dual effect of tourism: while it creates new economic opportunities, it simultaneously produces forms of existential distress akin to what Albrecht defines as *solastalgia*—a condition in which individuals experience a sense of loss and disconnection in the midst of their unchanged geographic locale (Chang, 2023).

This condition is not unique to Batroun but reflects broader global patterns observed in other historically significant urban environments grappling with overtourism. Comparative cases from Algiers' Casbah, Venice, Barcelona, Penang, and Saint-Malo illustrate similar themes: the commodification of heritage, symbolic and physical displacement of local populations, and the gradual erosion of place-based identity, ambiance, and memory (Bertocchi et al., 2020; Ghaderi et al., 2012; Mazzamuto & Picone, 2022).

In the Kasbah of Algiers, another UNESCO World Heritage site, transformations are shaped less by market-driven gentrification than by state-led "preservation" strategies. Such top-down interventions have often overlooked resident participation, resulting in relocations that sever deep-rooted sensory and emotional ties between inhabitants and their environment (Djedi & Belakehal, 2023). While the material fabric is conserved, the intangible atmospheric and lived dimensions—sounds, scents, and patterns of social interaction—are increasingly lost. In this context, Goetz's concept of dislocation becomes particularly relevant, referring not only to the physical displacement of residents but also to their symbolic separation from spaces once central to their belonging (Goetz & Nancy, 2018).

Venice offers perhaps the most emblematic example of overtourism's consequences. With more than 25 million visitors annually, the city has effectively transitioned into what Seraphin et al. (2024) term a "hyperreal museum": a preserved façade devoid of the lived vitality that once animated it. Traditional auditory and olfactory cues have been replaced by the noise of rolling suitcases, water taxis, and amplified tourist activity. A similar trajectory is observed in Barcelona's Gothic Quarter, where long-term residents have been displaced by short-term rentals and traditional housing converted into temporary hospitality infrastructure. Despite emerging regulatory frameworks in these cities, Batroun remains at an early stage of implementing such policy interventions.

Other cases highlight temporal instability. In Saint-Malo, France, tourism produces seasonal volatility: the walled city becomes saturated during the summer months yet nearly deserted in winter. Batroun exhibits a parallel pattern, animated only in autumn through events such as *Capitale de Noël*. This fluctuation generates unstable urban identities and a "sensory void" during off-seasons, undermining the coherence of everyday life for remaining residents. In Penang, Malaysia, comparable dynamics prompted authorities to restrict short-term rentals and introduce heritage protection frameworks, albeit with mixed results (Ghaderi et al., 2012). Collectively, these examples echo Batroun's sensory disjunction between preserved patrimonial structures and an altered experiential fabric within the renovated souk.

4.2 Dislocation of Atmosphere and Belonging

Across these diverse urban settings, including Batroun's patrimonial souk, a consistent pattern emerges: heritage sites increasingly function less as spaces of belonging and more as venues for



consumption, overtourism, and visual spectacle. This shift interrupts sensory continuity—particularly auditory and olfactory—alongside social interaction, directly shaping how residents experience and engage with their environments. A comparative overview of these disruptions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Comparative summary between traditional elements and contemporary disruptions across auditory, olfactory and social dimensions.

Dimension	Traditional Elements	Contemporary Disruptions
Auditory	Church bells, everyday conversations, artisanal workshops (e.g., butchers, carpenters)	Loud music, traffic, commercial noise
Olfactory	Smells of home-cooked meals, coffee, fresh laundry, woodwork	Odors from fast food, alcohol, street vendors
Social	Stable, intergenerational communities with shared memory	Transient populations, tourism-driven interactions, erosion of communal belonging

In these transforming urban environments, solastalgia expands beyond an individual emotional response to function as a broader cultural and environmental indicator of displacement. As Albrecht (2006) explains, “solastalgia is the homesickness you have when you are still at home” (p. xx), encapsulating the psychological distress experienced when environments are transformed beyond recognition. Unlike displacement through relocation, solastalgia emerges when “home” itself becomes unfamiliar, rupturing continuity, memory, and identity.

Simultaneously, Rosa’s (2018) concept of resonance—defined as a dialogical relationship in which subject and world meet and mutually transform—becomes increasingly diminished in heritage spaces overtaken by tourism and commercialisation. Resonance depends on mutual responsiveness and temporal depth, yet in patrimonial contexts reshaped by market logics and accelerated consumption, the constructed environment ceases to respond to lived experience. Instead, spaces become silent, transactional, and indifferent. Rosa (2018) warns that in a world driven by acceleration and instrumental rationality, “the world becomes silent” (p. 298). Batroun’s case exemplifies this condition, as spaces once fostering belonging and identity are reconfigured to serve global markets, privileging visibility over vitality and consumption over connection.

4.3 Interpretation of Key Findings

The comparative analysis of sensory experiences before and after the renovation of Batroun’s old patrimonial souk reveals profound disruptions to its multisensory ambiance. These transformations have reshaped how space is navigated, inhabited, and emotionally experienced by long-term residents. The auditory environment, once marked by artisanal sounds and everyday neighbourly exchanges, has been supplanted by a distinctly touristic soundscape characterised by rolling luggage wheels, amplified commercial music, casual tourist chatter, and the ambient noise of outdoor dining. Similarly, the olfactory landscape has undergone a marked shift: familiar scents of home-cooked meals, freshly laundered clothes, and morning coffee shared among neighbours have been replaced by odours of fast food, nargileh smoke, and exhaust from delivery trucks servicing hospitality venues. As a result, spaces formerly reserved for communal interaction—such as morning gatherings—have been eroded.

Applying Thibaud’s methodology of “commented city walks” proved critical in uncovering residents’ lived sensory connections with the souk. This approach revealed a perceived atmospheric rupture caused by overtourism and a corresponding sense of dislocation. Residents reported feelings of alienation, indicating that the current environment no longer reflects the Batroun they once knew. Traditional rhythms of neighbourhood life—including spontaneous visits, leisurely walks, and rituals such as morning coffee—have been replaced by congestion, tourism waste, and the reduction of communal spaces. Those who resisted converting their homes into rental or commercial properties



described a sense of emotional and physical exhaustion due to the transient occupation of their surroundings.

This evidence reflects a broader emotional and sensory disconnect, whereby attachment to place and spatial familiarity are greatly diminished. The findings resonate with Goetz's concept of urban dislocation, wherein spaces cease to be clearly defined as either "places" or "non-places," instead existing within ongoing processes of creation, transformation, and decay that undermine urban life (Goetz & Nancy, 2018). As residents have remarked, Batroun "is no longer the city we know." Such sentiments parallel Albrecht's (2006) and Martouzet's (2022) articulation of solastalgia, defined as the psychological distress resulting from environmental change while one remains directly connected to home. Collectively, these findings emphasise the need for sensory-based and participatory design strategies in heritage renovation and urban renewal. Designing with and for residents is critical for maintaining sensory, emotional, and cultural bonds to place. Failure to do so risks deepening alienation and eroding urban identity amidst the pressures of mass tourism.

4.4 Comparison with Previous Studies

This study contributes uniquely to heritage and overtourism research by applying Thibaud's (2002, 2013a) "commented city walks" methodology within a patrimonial context undergoing rapid transformation. While the method has previously been employed to examine sensory experiences in modern urban environments—often linked to mobility, gentrification, or transitional urban landscapes (Söderström, 2020)—it has not been widely applied to heritage sites under intense tourism pressure. This research therefore extends the method's scope to a historically layered and culturally significant context such as Batroun's patrimonial souk.

Prior investigations of overtourism in heritage cities such as Venice (Seraphin et al., 2018), Barcelona (Milano et al., 2019), and the Kasbah of Algiers (Djedi & Belakehal, 2023) have generally relied on macro-analytical tools, resident surveys, or socio-economic indicators. While valuable for generating structural and quantitative insights, these approaches often overlook the embodied, sensory, and emotional aspects of how space is experienced and transformed (Augoyard, 2021). In contrast, the "commented city walks" methodology privileges lived, narrated sensory accounts, allowing for the identification of subtle disruptions in spatial and atmospheric perception (Thibaud, 2004; Thibaud, 2011).

The results of this study show that the method is particularly effective in revealing ambiance dislocation, a progressive erosion of the sensory identity of space as experienced by long-term residents. Such ruptures are especially evident in soundscapes—shifting from artisanal rhythms to touristic noise (Thibaud, 2013b)—and smellscapes—transitioning from domestic to commercial odours (Balez, 2024). These sensory disruptions are closely tied to the decline of everyday routines and community rituals, signalling a loss of spatial belonging and emotional continuity.

4.5 Strengths and Limitations

The principal strength of this study lies in its innovative application of Thibaud's (2002, 2013a) "commented city walks" methodology to a patrimonial setting affected by overtourism. This approach generated rich, in-situ insights into residents' sensory and emotional experiences, exposing phenomena such as dislocation and solastalgia that are frequently overlooked in more conventional heritage or tourism research.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study's relatively small sample size may not fully capture the diversity of resident experiences. Furthermore, sensory data is inherently subjective, raising questions about its generalisability. However, within the framework of "commented city walks," repetition and redundancy of sensory accounts are considered reliable indicators, thereby strengthening the interpretive value of the findings. Finally, the research was conducted over a limited timeframe, preventing consideration of seasonal or long-term variations. Despite these constraints, the study establishes a robust foundation for expanding the use of sensory and participatory methods in heritage and urban transformation research.



4.6 Implications and Future Directions

The findings underscore the importance of integrating sensory and participatory approaches into heritage site planning, particularly in contexts subject to overtourism. The disruptions identified here demonstrate that sensory environments significantly shape residents' sense of belonging and place identity. Consequently, policymakers, planners, and designers are urged to adopt people-centred strategies that safeguard sensory and cultural continuity alongside economic development.

Future research should extend the application of the “commented city walks” methodology to other patrimonial and urban contexts, particularly across longer timeframes, to account for seasonal variations and longitudinal changes in urban atmospheres. Expanding this methodological approach promises to enrich understandings of how heritage sites are lived, sensed, and transformed under the pressures of tourism and globalisation.

5. Conclusion

The investigation of Batroun's old patrimonial souk demonstrates how overtourism profoundly disrupts the multisensory ambiance of historic environments. Once defined by artisanal sounds, domestic smells, and neighbourly exchanges, the souk has gradually shifted toward a touristic soundscape and olfactory landscape dominated by commercial activity, amplified music, and transient presences. Through the application of Thibaud's “commented city walks,” the study captured residents' lived sensory experiences, revealing the extent to which these transformations erode emotional bonds to place, producing feelings of dislocation and solastalgia. These insights reinforce the significance of sensory dimensions in understanding heritage transformation beyond visual and economic metrics.

The findings further highlight that heritage preservation, when driven primarily by aesthetic and commercial logics, risks neglecting the intangible sensory and cultural continuities that sustain community identity. Batroun's case illustrates that preservation strategies cannot be reduced to architectural façades or tourist branding; they must also engage with the affective and atmospheric qualities that shape belonging. By incorporating residents' sensory narratives, urban planning can move toward more inclusive and participatory approaches that mitigate alienation and reinforce local attachment to place. Such strategies are crucial in contexts where tourism simultaneously promises economic revitalisation and generates cultural estrangement.

Nevertheless, this study recognises its limitations. The relatively small and localised sample, coupled with the subjective nature of sensory accounts, constrains the generalisability of findings. While repetition across narratives strengthens the interpretive validity of the results, broader and longitudinal research would be required to capture seasonal shifts and wider community perspectives. Comparative studies across different heritage cities would also allow for a deeper understanding of how varying management models shape urban sensory ambiances.

Future research should therefore expand the methodological use of “commented city walks” and sensory mapping tools to other patrimonial contexts. Integrating these approaches with policy analysis and participatory design frameworks would allow planners and heritage managers to better align conservation strategies with the lived realities of residents. By foregrounding the sensory and emotional layers of heritage experience, this study contributes to urban sensory studies and underscores the necessity of people-centred approaches in addressing the challenges of overtourism. Ultimately, safeguarding the multisensory identity of places like Batroun's souk is not only about conserving history, but also about sustaining the everyday atmospheres that make heritage meaningful and alive.

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Darine Zacca: Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Data curation; Formal analysis; Writing – original draft; Visualization; Project administration; Validation. Paul Abi Khattar Zgheib: Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Formal analysis; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing; Visualization; Resources; Validation. Both authors co-developed the research structure, conducted fieldwork together on-site in Batroun, and collaborated on the interpretation of results and articulation of the article. The manuscript was built jointly from its conceptual foundation through to the final details. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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