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## **AN EMPIRICAL EVALUATION OF TOUR GUIDE AND TOURISM POLICY: THE CASE OF BABYLON IRAQ**

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### **Abstract:**

The tour guide service is becoming increasingly important due to the booming tourism industry in Iraq; yet, it has been linked to low service standards, insufficient help, and inadequate training for tour guides. This research aimed to learn how Babylon's decision-makers and tour guides view the city's recent progress in the tourist industry and also to determine the role and responsibility of the decision-makers regarding tour guides in Babylon, the processes of participation, and the implication of challenges for tourism. The case study approach was utilized to analyze the Babylon tourism policy and planning system's major stakeholders' responsibilities, activities, and interactions. The case study began in 2023 when the last Babylon tourist plan was created; we acquired all of the information we needed for the study. The case study method has been generally praised as a powerful tool for understanding tourism policy. The implication of the research contributed to this study's interviews taken in Iraq and Babylon has made it possible for us to highlight the significance of such study in the tourism industry's adoption of sustainable practices and their contribution to the expansion and dissemination of sustainable tourism. According to the study's findings, Babylon's decision-makers and tour guides were well aware of the city's inadequate tourist infrastructure and the industry's struggles to keep up with rising visitor numbers. It will take years to complete the many building projects planned for Babylon.

### **Keywords:**

Tourism Policy, Tour Guide, Service Quality, Babylon City

## Introduction

The tourism industry has become a subset of all businesses that have received goods and services directly to facilitate interaction, pleasure, and leisure activities. While tourism has benefited the country financially and culturally, it has also been hailed as one of the most important economic engines for growth and development (Yuan et al., 2019). The success of any endeavour in the tourism business is directly tied to the quality of the service provided. Delivering high-quality services can help organizations acquire a competitive edge and differentiate themselves in the tourism industry more successfully (Foo et al., 2021). In addition, academics and researchers focus their efforts on tour guides and tourist growth. Tour guides are prominent members of the tourism sector who contribute to forming travellers' initial perceptions of destinations and their experiences (Kuo et al., 2018). As a result, tourism experts frequently view tour guides as vital components of tourism services, goods, and experiences (Khalifah & Mustafa, 2019).

Nonetheless, this served as the impetus for the Iraqi government to focus on tourism growth under the Iraq Vision by 2027 (ALmasoodi et al., 2023). In contrast, this prompted the Iraqi government recently to focus on tourism development under the Iraqi vision for the future, aiming to wean Iraq from oil and diversify its economy through tourism. In 1973, Iraq received 500,000 foreign tourists. Their percentage was 25% compared to the percentage of domestic tourism. According to M. N. Ali et al. (2019), Iraq was a top-rated tourism destination for travellers from many nations, including Japan, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. In 1989, Iraq had 1,906 hotels capable of entertaining around 5 million guests. However, tourism collapsed in 1990 due to wars and an economic blockade on Iraq, while 15,000 international tourists visited Iraq in 1997. Tourism surged in Iraq following 2003. In 2010, Iraq saw almost 5 million tourists. Following 2014, the number of visitors visiting Iraq declined due to ISIS' control over several areas in Iraq (Nawar, 2016).

Nonetheless, since the start of the Iraq war in 1990, the Iraqi tourism business has received insufficient attention, particularly in light of the frequent crises and wars. This low priority by policymakers is compounded by a negative perception of the destination due to security concerns, political instability, poor leadership, and judgment by tourism officials, and Sanctions (Morakabati, 2011; Khodadadi, 2016; Ghaderi et al., 2017; Sadq et al., 2021). Moreover, sanctions imposed by the international community have worsened these concerns. In addition, Iraq is located in a region with a long history of political unrest and military strife. Some examples of political unrest in the region are the US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and the Arab Spring movement. According to the current Iraqi government, improving regional security could increase the income contribution from the foreign tourism sector (Faeq, 2022). Additionally, the quality of tourist services will be emphasized as a critical component of consumer satisfaction and enjoyment since it stimulates repeat visits to historical places such as (Babylon)—besides, methods for boosting customer satisfaction and loyalty without sacrificing the quality of service (ALmasoodi & Rahman, 2023). Notably, Iraq has lobbied for the Babylon site's preservation since 1983, and they have been included in the United Nations distinguished list. One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, this city became famous due to its spectacular hanging gardens (Al-Quraishi et al., 2021). Therefore, Iraq's tourism industry remains a significant concern, especially given the country's ambitions to join the ranks of the world's leading (Nikjoo et al., 2020). Essentially, tourism is crucial to realizing this vision. People in Iraq are also curious as to whether or not the tourism industry will be able to lessen the country's future dependency on the oil industry.

Despite growing interest in analysing the outcomes and process of tourist policymaking, relatively little systematic or extensive evaluation of policy outputs has been conducted so far (Mura et al., 2017). Tourist regulations and legislation should be created so that the tourism industry may play a significant role in deciding their tourism advantages (M. A. A. Jassim, n.d.). Unfortunately, there is a clear void in frameworks that establish universally applicable standards against which policy papers can be evaluated. As a result, research evaluating and comparing the efficiency of tourism policy texts in achieving specific objectives are few and far between (Alsaad & Lazim, 2023a). As such, this research aims to identify this void through interviews with decision-makers, a framework for evaluating tourism policy documents in developing tourism regarding the characteristics that enable and hinder tour guide activities.

**Table 1: Development Plan In Iraq Light Of NDP 2018-2030 Goals**

Key targeted sectors	Targeted subsector	Areas of focus for development based on evidence
Tourism	• All relevant subsectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human resources (training)</li> <li>• Service quality and certification</li> <li>• Promotion and advertisement</li> <li>• Strategic partnerships</li> </ul>
Communication and IT industries	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Repair and maintenance services</li> <li>2. Internet Service Providers</li> <li>3. Website development and specialized software</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographic expansion/diversity (all)</li> <li>• Marketing and strategic partnerships</li> </ul>
Construction and housing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Infrastructure and essential services (water, electricity, sewerage system, etc.)</li> <li>2. Housing</li> <li>3. Civil installations (roads, bridges, dams, specialized buildings, etc.)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small businesses mergers</li> <li>• Product mix and diversification</li> <li>• Engineering, architecture, and designing</li> </ul>
Transport and logistical services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Freight trucking services</li> <li>2. Inter-sectoral linkages (Forward and backward)</li> <li>3. Small business merger</li> <li>4. Transport cost reduction</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multimodal transport services</li> <li>• Segmental connections</li> <li>• Small Business Inclusion</li> <li>• Reducing transportation costs</li> </ul>

Source: (ALI Akram Neamah; AA Obaid,2022)

Researchers examined how much of an impact tour guides have on the emotional experiences of their tourists (Min, 2016; Alrawadieh et al., 2020; Magano et al., 2021). Remarkably, one of the tour guide's responsibilities was to assist visitors to tourist locations, even though they typically made special trips with tourists to show them major Babylon sites. Therefore, as tourism proprietors, tour guides ensure the tourists' satisfaction and enjoyment throughout their journey (Ande et al., 2023). According to previous research, the tour guide service has a beneficial effect on visitor satisfaction (Bowie & Chang, 2005; Huang, 2010; Chan et al., 2015; Kuo et al., 2018; Li et al., 2021; Anđelković et al., 2022). Therefore, numerous studies demonstrate increased satisfaction in returning visitors' loyalty to the Babylon site (Klenjánszky, 2017; Chabuk et al., 2017; Al-ADDAL, 2020; Rahmiati et al., 2020; Nema, 2022; Wahhab Ajeena, 2022).

**Table 2: Activities of the Ministry of Tourism 2022.**

Activity	Number	Male Participants	Female Participants
Tourisme Courses	37	115	74
Workshops	25	112	33
Seminars	23	77	31
Courses for Mixed Sector (In/Out)	28	78	18
Total Cost (in Millions)	15.2	-	-
Participation of tourism Staff in Specialized Courses	433	282	151
Participation of Mixed Sector & Private Sector Employees in Training Courses	96	51	45
Issuing Graduation Documents	135	96	39
Certified by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	26	-	-
Issuing tourism Clearance Booklets	14	-	-
Preparing Training Certificates	180	123	57

Source: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities, Training and Development Department, year 2022

The table shows that 433 tourism employees have enrolled in targeted training, but it is essential to determine if that quantity is reasonable given the workforce's size and needs. The department's ability to train employees and how well it fits the ever-changing demands of the tourism business should be reviewed carefully. Furthermore, concerns have also been raised about the efficacy of partnerships between public and private institutions in encouraging professional development in the tourism domain, given that only 96 participants came from the private sector. This problem could reduce the industry's responsiveness to emerging needs. The problem of inadequate training within the Ministry of Tourism and Culture is complex and calls for many solutions.

The authority's head, Dhafer Mahdi Abdullah, also stated that 1,000 bilingual Iraqi tour guides had been sent abroad to train through the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs (as reported by Mawazine News (29/03/2023)). Recently, this announcement was made by the Tourism Authority, affiliated with the Iraqi Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities division. Emphasize the need for tour guides to develop cognitive and behavioural skills to increase competitiveness (Kassawnh et al. 2019). The infrastructure development at world-famous tourist spots has increased the demand for tourism and tour guides (Weiler & Black, 2015).

The tourism industry is sensitive to political and security climates, but security remains the most severe issue.

### **Tourist Heritage - City of Babylon**

Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) is a popular tourist destination for its rich history and wealth of archaeological sites. The area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers is home to some of the world's oldest towns and is usually considered the birthplace of humankind. The archaeological site of Babylon was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2019. Notably, in 1998 and 2008, Berlin was the site of two significant conferences about Babylon. In 2008, there were big Babylon shows in Berlin, Paris, and London (Pedersén, 2021). The Berlin Museum started the project in work with the British Museum and the Louvre in Paris. Babylon was the capital of the ancient Babylonian Empire (Nema, 2022). Consequently, the Sumerian civilization of southern Mesopotamia is credited with being the birthplace of urbanization, centralized governance, literacy, the wheel, mathematics, astronomy, and other foundational components of modern society.

Arguably, they were classified by subsequent civilizations such as Akkad (the world's first empire), Babylon (the first polity to codify laws), Assyria (which controlled a large swath of the Middle East from Iraq to Egypt), and others (Beaulieu, 2018). Numerous ancient sites in Iraq have been excavated, especially those close to major urban centres. As such, famous landmarks, including the Ziggurat (the biblical Tower of Babel's inspiration), the Hanging Gardens (one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World), and the Ishtar Gate have all been restored in recent years, making Babylon an attractive day trip from Baghdad (Beaulieu, 2018). The Neo-Assyrian metropolis of Nineveh in Iraq, a rival to Babylon, has undergone extensive restoration and reconstruction. However, this historic Babylon site is situated on the Western bank of the Euphrates River, nearly 90 miles south of Baghdad. Mesopotamia, a part of Iraq, is generally recognized as the cradle of civilization because its history dates back more than 5,000 years and contains some of the world's oldest cities (Al-Ansari & Kamel, 2018).

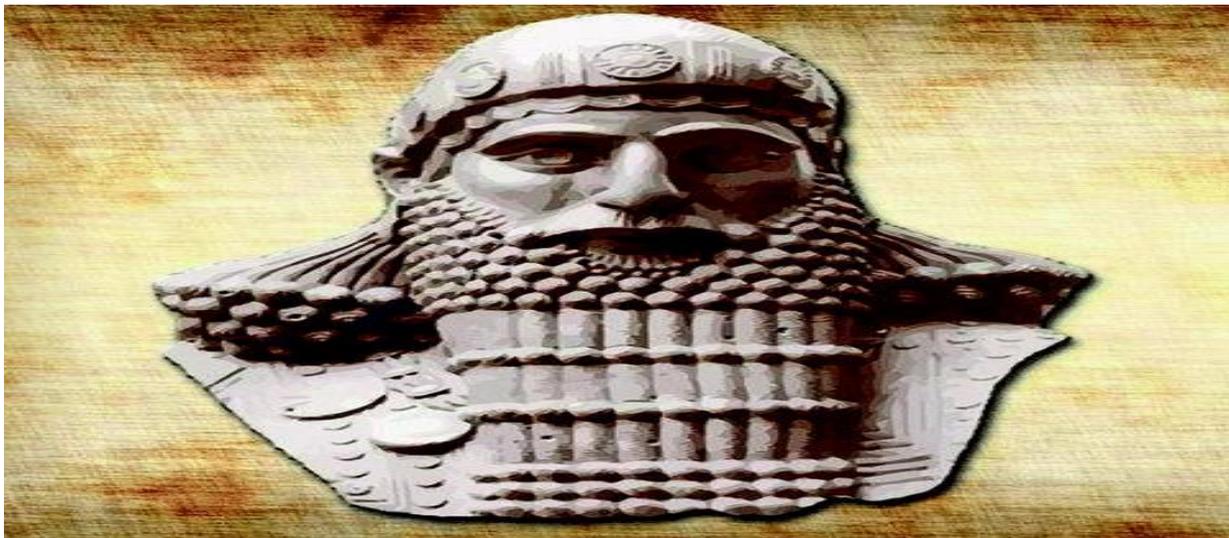
Hammurabi, who authored the first canon of rules in human history, included 282 laws governing administration, construction, and justice. Successor civilizations to Akkad, the world's first empire, Babylon, the first state to codify laws, and Assyria, which ruled most of the Middle East from Iraq to Egypt, developed these advances throughout time. The city was one of the prominent and largest cities under the rule of Hammurabi (Forti et al., 2022; Heinz, 2012). Moreover, the city was heavily populated in the past, with gigantic walls and different temples and palaces. Famous artifacts and structures of the city include the temple of Marduk, the stelae on which the code of Hammurabi was written, and the Ishtar Gate artifacts are among the Seven Wonders of the World, known as the Babel Tower (Beaulieu, 2018).



**Figure 1: Wall Relief From Ancient Mesopotamia**

(Source: Wahhab Ajeena, 2022)

The Ishtar Gate is a significant route into the city. This route was dedicated to Ishtar, the goddess of war and love of Babylon; the gate measured 38ft high. The gate was built with mud bricks during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. Therefore, the famous tower of Babel rose above the city (Beaulieu, 2018). Mainly, Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC) was unquestionably the world's most significant metropolis at the time. Since Old Babylonian times, it had been a sizable metropolis. However, Nebuchadnezzar's development and massive rebuilding using well-baked brick instead of the typical unbaked mudbrick made it remarkable. Babylon was the world's largest city, surpassing even Nineveh in size (Seymour, 2014). The political and economic foundation for this growth was the fact that Babylon was the capital of the Neo-Babylonian empire, which had succeeded the Neo-Assyrian empire as the preeminent political entity in the Middle East and was founded by Nebuchadnezzar's father Nabopolassar (625-605 BC).



**Figure 2: King Nebuchadnezzar**

(Source: Al-Ansari & Kamel, 2018)



**Figure 3: Soldiers near the Ishtar Gate, Babylon**

(Source: Habeeb & Weli, 2020)

Babylon governorate is home to numerous historical, religious, and tourist attractions, including the ruins of ancient Babylon, Kish, Borsippa, sacred shrines dedicated to Job, the Prophet of God, and Imran (peace be upon him). In addition to the Al-Hindiya dam and the Al-Mahanawiya Island (about 800 acres in size), there are several tourist destinations in and around Babylon (M. Chabuk & Alamiri, 2023). The economies of tourism and agriculture remain vital to Babylon. Because of its abundant renewable resources and agricultural output, promoting its tourism industry can significantly impact the local economy. Initially, one way to do this is by focusing on historically significant areas rich in culture and nature; doing so would stimulate the local trade market and boost the economy. Notably, these poles represent a crucial model for attracting newcomers tourists, expanding existing communities, and allocating resources (Habeeb & Weli, 2020).

**Table 3: Information About Several Archaeological Sites In Iraq**

Site	Image	Location	Criteria	Area ha (acre)	Year	Description
Babylon		Babylon Governorate  "11'32°32 N 44°25'15 "E	Cultural: (iii)(vi)	1,054.3 (2,605)	2019	Babylon, once Hammurabi's capital, expanded during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II to become the biggest city in ancient Mesopotamia.

Source: (Management Plan of Babylon Property Nominated by the Government of Iraq in January 2018 for Inscription on the World Heritage List, n.d.)

The Commission of Tourism (in operation since 1996) and the Commission of Heritage and Antiquities were formerly in charge of maintaining Iraq's tourist sites (active since 2000). Although each former commission still has its representative, the Iraqi Parliament consolidated them into a single entity 2012 from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (Talib et al., 2018). To reduce the number of government agencies from 33 to 22, the Tourism and Antiquities Ministry was folded into the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities in 2015. Fortunately, Iraq issued visas to citizens of 37 countries at all airports in March 2021 (Mohammed, 2018). Recently, the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, China, the European Union, South Korea, Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have all been part of this group. The government has enacted regulations designed to do just that to attract more tourists and foreign investors.

In addition, UNESCO voted on Friday, July 5, 2019, during its conference in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, to inscribe the ruins of the Iraqi city of Babylon as global heritage, sparking widespread celebrations throughout Iraq. However, it is conditional on the Iraqi government removing all waste from the city. Subsequently, waste is associated with the aftermath of the sectarian war from 2005 to 2010, which damaged several of Babylon's structures, remnants of the fight against the Islamic State organization, and other waste. Furthermore, tourism demand is susceptible to security and personal safety (Al-Hamarneh & Steiner, 2004); (Yun & MacLaurin, 2006). Case studies from the last decade show that news in the media on terrorist acts, conflicts, and political instability have led to extended crises in tourism, harming or destroying the business for extended periods (Avraham & Ketter, 2008); (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006).

## Tourism Policy Environment in Iraq

Defined tourism policy is the measures numerous entities use to accomplish specific tourism development objectives. Goeldner defines tourism policy as a set of guidelines directly affecting a destination's long-term development and daily functioning (Metodijeski & Temelkov, 2014). However, the term "tourism policy" is unclear, and the scope of tourist policy study is relatively broad. The tourism industry in Iraq significantly contributes to Iraq's national and regional economies (Omer & Yeşiltaş, 2020). Mainly, Iraq's tourist industry is the country's second-largest employer after the oil industry. Cultural and religious sites are Iraq's top draws for visitors (R. H. Jassim, 2023).

The country of Iraq, which the United Kingdom (UK) occupied during World War I before declaring independence, is a popular tourist destination, especially among those interested in religion (Alsaad & Lazim, 2023; Faeq et al., 2021). As such, Iraq in the Middle East, located between Iran, Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait in the Persian Gulf, with approximately 40 million people (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). Iraq has several tourist attractions, including holy sites, rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, mountains running north to south, and various symbolic caves (M. N. Ali et al., 2019). Mainly, Iraq is home to some of the world's most beautiful mountains and rivers from north to south and across the country, historical civilizations, sacred and religious sites, and other tourist attractions. Despite these benefits, the country's tourist sector is not contributing as much as it should to the growth of the tourism industry worldwide.

The tourism product is characterized by five essential elements: the characteristics that attract tourists, such as the natural, architectural, cultural, and social characteristics, and the facilities and services available, such as hotels and restaurants services—access to the destination, infrastructure, transportation, and practical elements such as time and cost and averred that the destination image affects the future expectations of tourists and the total cost of a complete visit (Wilde & Cox 2008). In addition, Iraq was witnessing a state of instability after the US occupation of the country in 2003; the political situation directly affected services and the tourism sector (Nawar 2014). Usually, it is considered one of the factors of expulsion in political instability, whether at the internal level or if the political situation is suffused by instability at the regional level sector. Furthermore, this will directly affect tourism in Iraq. The literature and field studies indicate that political factors are the basis for tourism.

Notably, millions of people of many different nationalities visit Holy towns and locations across Iraq annually, making religious tourism the most popular type in the country (Gorji et al., 2022). According to official Iraqi media, 21,198,640 million foreign and local religious tourists enter Iraq during the 2022 pilgrimage, making it the country's largest yearly gathering. Year after year, the numbers have increased, and 2023 was even higher. Overall, this event happens 40 days after Ashura, which remembers the day that Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, died in the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD, on the 10th day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar (Basee et al., 2023). However, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, Iraq earns approximately \$3.7 billion yearly from tourism. Apart from this, Iraq's economy is gradually failing due to war costs and collapsing oil prices, and several ministries are cash-strapped (Abood & Al-Hussein, n.d.). Due to Iraq's free-market economy, most private enterprises operating in the country are foreign-owned.

**Table 4: Number Of Tourists For Religious Visits In Iraq (2016 - 2023)**

No	Number of local and foreign tourists	Years
1.	11,210,367	2016
2.	13,874,818	2017
3.	15,322,949	2018
4.	15,229,955	2019
5.	14,553,308	2020
6.	16,327,543	2021
7.	21,198,640	2022
8.	22,019,164	2023

Source: The Central Bank of Iraq Statistical Bulletin, tourism Annual Department of Statistic 2023

The Communications Department of the Holy Abbas Shrine has utilized an electronic visitor counting system at the main entrances to the holy city of Karbala for the past eight years to track pilgrimage attendance numbers (Jabbouri, 2023). Meanwhile, the Kafil Center for Information and Statistical Studies monitors the costs and benefits of various services in Karbala as a holy city. According to this electronic system tallying visitors at the four primary gates of Baghdad-Karbala, Najaf-Karbala, Babil-Karbala, and Husseiniya-Karbala, approximately 22,919,146 pilgrims came to the holy city of Karbala from the 1st to the 20th of Safar Al-Khair in 2023. Religious tourism has gained prominence as one of the three most significant global industries in the 21st century (Griffin & Raj, 2017), owing to its substantial impacts on the political, social, and economic growth of destinations. Yet despite Iraq's abundant religious and historical attractions, the country's tourism industry remains underdeveloped (Alsaad & Lazim, 2023b).

Additionally, characteristics hold a significant position regarding the information for Babylon. Due to ancient places and historical importance, Babylon is considered among those areas that hold ancient importance and has become a point of attraction for visitors worldwide (Al-Bawi & Jasim, 2016). As such, the information regarding the places is based on events that made places like Babylon necessary. Further, these places provide information about ancient times and reflect the cultural aspect of Babylon. Therefore, the information on such ancient places as Babylon helps make information significantly attached to historical importance as it adds information to the tourism guidance. Notably, the activity of tourism and travel companies in Babylon amounted to 1.491.522 million dinars in 2019.

### Methodology

The case study approach was utilized to analyse the Babylon tourism policy and planning system's major stakeholders' responsibilities, activities, and interactions. The case study begins in 2023, as that is when the last Babylon tourist plan was created; we acquired all of the information we needed for the study. The case study method has been generally praised as a powerful tool for understanding tourism policy. Dredge (2003) contends that a case study method, undertaken at the level where tourism destination planning and management happens, is necessary to acquire a deeper knowledge of networks' roles, effects, and dynamics over time

and location. A case study approach is useful for examining how stakeholders and interest communities actively engaged in destination management emerge and address difficulties due to the unique cultural and socioeconomic factors that may be at play within tourism policy and planning systems.

The researcher interviewed the tourism section of interested stakeholders and decision-makers who are involved in or knowledgeable about the tourism sector: the hospitality industry leaders, tour guides, state officials, and other local community leaders. Interviewees ranged from people experienced in local tourism—conducted interviews in person, some over and by telephone, and some came face-to-face with 18 persons. After obtaining the interview data, each participant's responses were rewritten on separate papers. Interviewees were asked to share their perceptions of the travel industry in Iraq and their hopes and predictions for the future. Moreover, this report is based on the interviewees' ideas, feelings, and views. It has not meant a thorough, accurate portrayal of popular opinion. The validity and dependability of the interview are important considerations. The eleventh persons interviewed represent official decision-makers from (Baghdad and Babylon) and eight guides and tourism business owners from Babylon. The questions were written in English and then translated into Arabic. Each question's responses were rewritten and put together on different papers to group the answers to a particular question. The answers to each question were categorized, and relevant data were put in each category.

## Results

The findings are arranged in accordance with the overarching themes and subthemes that developed during the coding phase, as well as the theoretical framework that guided the study and the questions asked during the interviews. A look at how Iraqi decision-makers see tour guides and Babylon City is provided first. Then, the perspectives of tour guides on Babylon City and the role they play in the country's current tourism development are presented.

### *Personal Interviews Findings and Interviews Analysis*

This section discussed how theme analysis is conducted, transcribed interviews are coded, emerging codes are recognized, and themes are developed. The code is the label assigned to specific data elements contributing to a theme (Almasooudi et al., 2023). However, this chapter's approach combines the information gathered from the Iraqi decision-makers and tour guides during the interview. It discussed the implications of Babylon's tourism policy approach briefly. Interviews were conducted with official decision-makers in Baghdad and Babylon. Also, Decision makers expressed their opinions and optimistic perceptions of the plans for tourism development in Babylon. Their opinions and perceptions are summarized; the most important codes and themes are listed in Table 5

**Table 5: Key Themes and Codes**

Categories	Items	Category
Theme 1: Infrastructure	1. Accommodation 2. Tourist attraction 3. Investments	Analysis of Responsibilities of Key Decision-makers

Theme 2: professional development to courses and Challenges	1. licensing approval 2. Lack of Funding	and Guidelines for enhancing the standard of tour guide services
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Source: Fieldwork (2023)

### ***Analysis of Key Decision Makers and Responsibilities***

A qualitative approach, a case study technique with essential stakeholders and tour guides during interviews, was used through (19) semi-structured interviews with identified key stakeholders to determine their impression and opinion on government adoption in Babylon. Local government officials and Parliament members were chosen for the interview. From Table 5.31, all interviewees agreed that successful tourism strategies and policies had been achieved in Babylon. However, decision-makers were more optimistic about tourism development features.

### ***Theme 1: Infrastructure***

By fostering practical cooperation between local government and central government, the local government serves as a voice for locals administers the city and promotes the expansion of artistic and cultural endeavours. Additionally, the local government is a local organization in charge of social, economic, and environmental development that should implement top-down knowledge transfer practices (Almasoodi et al., 2023). They also play an essential role in developing and implementing the state vision for tourism sector growth and needs (Ward, 2005). However, the local Government is also responsible for promoting Babylon, and a tourism strategy typically includes accommodation, investment in the city, and tourist attractions. The government and the Ministry of Tourism are the significant Decision-makers in this issue. Since the conflict in 2003, infrastructure and human potential have been undeveloped, and the IS takeover made matters worse. Security spending consumes a considerable portion of the state budget compared to other crucial areas like health, education, and the environment (Bilmes, 2013). Societal capital and social peace have been severely damaged by violence. Sectarian-based proportionality refers to selecting candidates for new positions based less on their professional qualifications and more on their particular racial or religious affiliation.

Different facets of the tourism business were explored in developing an all-encompassing Iraqi tourism strategy. Additionally, it offered ways to develop the industry over the short, mid, and long terms and identify possible tourism goods for eco-tourism, religious tourism, and cultural tourism (Qasem, 2022). A National Strategic Framework for Tourism was developed due to the initiative, focusing on institutional growth for Babylon's recently authorized Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and tourism development plans (Hu & Wall, 2013). Every document was detailed and based on discussions with government representatives and businesspeople in the private sector; as a result, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities formally approved them. The National Development Strategy of Iraq for 2020–2028 incorporates the critical components of their Action Plans (Fahad, 2020). Through several strategies, including giving tourism a more significant role, Pillar 1 of the National Development Strategy of Iraq seeks to reinforce the foundations of economic growth (Heidari et al., 2020). Considering the potential effects of the tourism sector, UNESCO chose to work with the Iraqi government to create a National Travel Policy. The project's primary goal was to increase the ability of relevant government institutions, particularly the State Board of Tourism, to plan the tourism industry strategically and to promote eco-, cultural-, and religious tourism.

### **Code 1: Investments**

The total negative foreign direct investment (FDI) in Iraq in 2018 was only \$5 million (representing -1.3 percent of GDP in 2019) (Shahriar et al., 2019). Due to the COVID-19 epidemic limits on travel between Iraq's surrounding countries, it is anticipated that foreign direct investment will increase considerably further by 2025. Regional foreign direct investment should follow once trade relations return to normal. Most participants discussed the new tourist investments that have driven many projects to recovery in Babylon. Most respondents have viewed this critical issue positively, claiming that planning processes are to blame. Thus, for foreign tourist investments, Babylon's decision-makers stated that Babylon is a prime example of a destination that attracts foreign investors. In addition, a few individuals mentioned the enhanced multiplier effects and employment resulting from these expenditures. To draw visitors and entrepreneurs, Iraq eliminated visa restrictions for nationals of many economically significant nations (Matthews et al., 2020). One of the decision-makers described it as follows:

*R1: ...He emphasized that the Ministry of Planning's investment plan includes establishing the Babylon Tourism Department, "Al-Hilla," supervised by the "Babylon Governorate" and the Tourism Authority. The conversation also addressed the investment made by the Babylon Hotel to build a long-term tourist plan to eliminate the difficulties that existed in the previous stage.*



**Figure 5: A five \_ star hotel in Babylon (2022)**

Despite the government's efforts to improve its economic policies, international investment is discouraged by Iraq's security and political unpredictability. Corruption and insufficient investment laws are significant barriers; pipelines, oil refineries, and export facilities must be significantly upgraded to enhance oil production. Since 2017, most gas fields, including the main gas field in Anbar, have stopped producing gas since the government has not been able to invest enough in the necessary technologies (Drebee et al., 2021). In addition, employee entry into the oil fields in Basra and Dhi Qar has periodically been blocked by demonstrations protesting socioeconomic inequality. All these problems stopped tourism investment in the province of Babylon. The lack of support policy to draw local and foreign tourism investments is one of the issues this sector has in Iraq, which requires the state to consider these challenges (Mehdi, 2018).

*R2: .... emphasized growing and renewing the governorate in tourism and archaeology. In addition, he provided all the necessary resources for*

*cooperation between the governorate and the Tourism Authority. He added that the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities had created an organizational structure for old and historic markets by performing field surveys and tracing the markets past activities. Consequently, it has devised detailed measures to restore tourism to these souks in partnership with relevant authorities such as the province of Babylon.*



**Figure7: Babylon Province (2022)**

A few decision-makers added that 60% of these projects are postponed because of poor management and corruption (Chappell, 2021). Therefore, some decision-makers claimed that working on such initiatives is not the best option over the long term. In addition to improving the country's infrastructure, constructing tourist attractions like hotels, museums, and restaurants will benefit Iraq's construction industry (Oumazzane, 2021). The tourism sector can manage, run, and maintain sector-specific infrastructure and create additional job possibilities beyond construction work, such as those for tour guides, operators, and travel agencies. In addition, a rise in tourism to Iraq's historical and archaeological sites will help the country's archaeologists get the skills they need for excavation, restoration, and reconstruction. The Iraqi government is now developing a route to Saudi Arabia. In January 2021, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, the prime minister of Iraq, gave instructions for the project's completion; the pilgrimage route was planned it was delayed due to the coronavirus outbreak and the financial crisis in Iraq (Yasin et al., 2020).

*R3: She said that for developing tourist destinations under various names, the Iraqi stakeholders work with the Iraqi Ministry of Tourism and its subordinate departments to provide recommendations. Reveals that particular geographical location, Infrastructure, transportation, and sophisticated communication mean High cultural and social awareness, availability of human resources, transparency of information, and modern general administrative systems Climate favourable to tourism, availability of investment incentives, and government support for tourism Availability of cash from the public and private sectors, and The provision of feasibility*

*studies for tourism projects are seen as "Key" to attracting and stimulating investment in the tourism sector.*

Regarding tourism-related overseas investments, decision-makers must address the difficulties and concerns in implementing tourism initiatives. In addition to this, in particular, to offer complete protection to investors in Iraq, one factor that transmits and attracts tourism is active engagement and interest in Babylon for its own sake (Mortara et al., 2014). Investment is one of the essential strategies to attract tourists to Babylon as part of the participation process. Every firm in the new Iraq must utilize the experiences of established nations, such as Malaysia, and convey this information to the relevant decision-makers in the most effective manner possible to take advantage of the country's phenomenal growth.

*R4: ...He said that the decision-makers play an essential role in developing the tourism sector in Iraq by following up on tourism development projects and supporting this activity. Furthermore, he added participation in exhibitions held abroad to see the latest developments in this field globally, the development of tourism companies and investment through them, and the promotion of tourism in Iraq. He added, saying. Tourism income represents a key indicator of tourism activity in Babylon, where statistics have indicated a continual rise in it according to a multiplicity of tourism areas and patterns, which has led to diversity and overcrowding in tourism organizations and the activities and programs of these organizations.*

Regarding infrastructure, Babylon's decision-makers agreed that tourism growth enhanced the look of the city, its roads, gardens, and other public spaces and services. From the perspective of the decision-makers, this enhancement occurred before the city's tourism industry developed. The interviewees discussed trade transactions as a result of tourism. Those decision-makers expressed strong enthusiasm. They concentrated on domestic travel and its contribution to the city's commercial climate. Business owners were partially in agreement, although they largely agreed that foreign tourists should be our primary market for trade. A decision maker said:

*R5: This information was obtained through an interview with Mr (H). the representative of the Tourism Authority. Other than that, stakeholders have built up a few relationships with other stakeholders in the tourism industry through the partnership. For example, this year, the General Commission of Tourism and Antiquities is participating in the "meeting" of the Committee for the Development and Modernization of the Strategy alongside delegates from Committee member states (the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Iraq,*

*Libya, and Mauritania). Several paragraphs were discussed by the committee at the meeting.*

Some responsible decisions issued by the government noted the slowdown in tourism plans. According to them, this ignorance makes it extremely difficult to adopt additional, beneficial behaviours to alter their perceptions rather than normal behaviours like lectures, social gatherings, and clear strategies. Some survey participants mentioned how economic advantages, such as those from smaller tourism projects, should be evenly dispersed. Additionally, the tourism industry will be able to earn money due to the rehabilitation of Iraq's archaeological sites (Desai, 2011). Thus, the tourism sector will be able to grow its earnings, and tax revenue will rise for the government. Some have suggested that cooperation and partnerships inside and among different tourism groups are crucial for offering a more comprehensive range of experiences to all parties concerned. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the government's Iraq role in developing strategies in Babylon (Murray & Woods, 2014).

A tourist strategy must be created to provide a plan for the future of the tourism sector. All tour operators, their employees, and anybody else operating in the tourism business must abide by the rules and regulations particular to tourists. As a result, despite only recently opening its doors to tourists, Iraq has already experienced a surge in visitor numbers. In addition, after decades of warfare and the actions of the previous Baath administration, which caused the world to forget about Iraq's significant archaeological sites, entry visas are now issued to many foreign nationals upon arrival in Baghdad (Al-Suraifi & Swadi, n.d.). A tourist strategy is needed for Babylon County. Observers in the tourism industry claim that stakeholders' shared goals and aspirations are essential to aid "planning" and raise service standards. As a result, aiming high is possible for Babylon County. He responded that the Iraqi government is working to grow the country's tourism business despite the lack of infrastructure. In addition, over time, Iraqi archaeological sites have undergone rehabilitation.

In March 2019, Iraq concluded an agreement with Egypt and Jordan in all fields, presenting a chance for long-term sustainable development in nations that have experienced external shocks over the past thirty years (Korany & Dessouki, 2019). More crucially, the leaders of all three nations have demonstrated a political commitment to putting economic integration into practice. Accordingly, the following actions are suggested for effective implementation: Develop the tourism industry in Iraq with the assistance of Jordanian and Egyptian hotel chains. Once the industry is established, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq can work together to promote Iraq's health tourism services and the tourism industries in Jordan and Iraq. Early in the partnership's development should be time for institutional development.

It is clear why collaboration is attractive economically and politically for these nations. Egypt is looking for ways to increase the markets for its products and friends for its aspirations to lead the area politically. Jordan is a little nation surrounded by larger, more powerful neighbours in a volatile area. Iraq, an oil-rich country, Iraq is emerging from decades of conflict and internal instability. Additionally, it has a long border with Iran and Turkey, both of which have a history of hostilities. They are prepared to meddle in Iraq's domestic affairs to advance their goals. By working together, the three nations can represent a unified political and economic front with 150 million residents, more than \$500 billion in gross domestic product, and access to important trade routes, markets, the tourism sector, and political and economic

connections. It is centered on the tourism industry, and the new ABC Agreement does not either. Since Egypt and Jordan have a wealth of tourism-related experience, including the business and operational management of significant tourism projects, Iraq would gain from collaboration with them. Egypt's tourism industry contributed 5% to its GNP in 2019, while Jordan's contributed 15%. However, compared to Iraq's \$207.89 billion GDP, tourism barely generates \$955 million.

The potential to draw a new type of religious tourism, along with visiting historical and archaeological sites as well as the exotic marshlands in southern Iraq, has significantly increased in the wake of Pope Francis's 2021 visit to the birthplace of Abraham close to the ancient city of Ur in what is now southern Iraq (Almawla, 2021). An Iraqi official predicted that 2021, some 13,000 tourists would go to the location. As a result, the Iraqi government intends to construct a new airport close to that historic city. However, investments in current tourism infrastructure and management expertise are required to grow this industry, which can aid in economic diversification.



**Figure 9: Pope Francis's 2021 Visited in Iraq**

### **Code 2: Accommodation**

AFP reports that more than 107,000 tourists entered Babylon in 2018, including more than 300 from France, Norway, Britain, Australia, the United States, and Turkey, among others, compared to approximately 30,000 in 2020—approval of opening a tourism institute and issuing licenses to tourism businesses in Babylon. Additionally, the ministry agreed to grant a work permit to a group of local tourism companies that would contribute to managing tourist groups to revitalize the province's tourist reality. In addition, according to Ahmed Aziz, director of Babylonian antiquities, "the archaeological city frequently receives delegations." Many international tourists. The Tourism Authority in Babylon has approved only 38 companies specializing in tourism, whereas there are over 100 fictitious and unlicensed companies.

*RI: "... that the investment made by the Babylon Hotel to build a long-term tourist plan eliminates the difficulties in the previous stage. Dr. Hassan Mandeel, the governor of Babylon, emphasized growing and renewing the governorate in tourism and archaeology. In addition, he provided all the necessary resources for cooperation between the governorate and the Tourism Authority. He added that the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities had*

*created an organizational structure for old and historic markets by performing field surveys and tracing the markets past activities. Consequently, it has devised detailed measures to restore tourism to these markets in partnership with relevant authorities such as the province of Babylon.*

Similar structural obstacles impede the development of the tourism sector in Babylon. In addition, in several industries, the use of informal labour has increased due to these problems. As a result, the tourism sector in Iraq now contributes insufficiently to the GDP and cannot make a significant enough contribution to economic diversification or job creation (Dixit & Rzgar, 2019). However, the most significant obstacles to foreign investment continue to be widespread corruption and the unpredictability of politics and security in the nation. Other issues that deter international investment include the need for visas, electricity shortages, customs rules, and ineffective dispute settlement procedures. The ongoing security, political unpredictability, and COVID-19 confinement restrictions have made it difficult to make long-term plans and have diminished Iraq's appeal as a location for investments. In addition, the already troubled economy is made worse by the flawed legal system and widespread corruption.

Babylon deserves special attention as a starting point for decolonizing archaeology and heritage practices, particularly in Iraq, as it is the prototypical case study of the Middle East's US-European plunder of cultural assets. In this way, an Iraqi and Middle Eastern audience could find a critical assessment of the nation's archaeology, cultural legacy, and modern techniques essential to overcome the inherent darkness and despair that surround this line of activity. In addition, the famous Babylon (Iraq) location Perhaps not surprisingly, historical and heritage practices have generally not changed despite the cultural pollution in the Middle East, where Iraq has lost 100,000 artifacts and manuscripts—again due to British Wars (Kathem & Kareem Ali, 2021). Fortunately, the Iraqi city of Babylon was added to the list of World Heritage Sites in 2019 (Seabra & Paiva, 2020).



**Figure 10. 4 Babylon was added to the list of World Heritage Sites in 2019.**

Babylon has been added to the United Nations' list of World Legacy sites, gaining the respect that archaeologists and Middle East specialists have long sought for Iraq's historical heritage. According to UNESCO, Babylon, a city south of Baghdad, now be included on the World Heritage List, which now includes roughly 1,000 locations. The capital of the Babylonian

Empire originally stood at a more than 4,000-year-old location (Dehshiri & Soleimani, 2019). Moreover, it encompasses the rural and agricultural areas that surround the historic city. The United Nations called Babylon "unquestionably one of the most important ancient sites in the world." However, according to UNESCO, American troops and contractors in Iraq caused extensive damage by driving heavy trucks across sacred routes and bulldozing hilltops (Bahrani, 2008).

Due to the rising demand for travel worldwide and the fantastic existence of international hotel chains, decision-makers confirmed that they would be reviewing plans for Babylon. According to decision-makers, present Babylon is a residential tourism destination with various high-quality experiences. In fierce competition with the surrounding nations, Babylon must be the region's top tourist destination to compete with its neighbors. The strategy also takes on community issues by enlisting the help of locals in the tourism industry (Martins, 2018). While these concerns are raised, they are done so in broad terms. Most interviewees, as business owners, were critical of the potential financial gains for Iraq from the development of such promotional campaigns. One decision maker said:

R2: .... *A variety of parties' cooperation is necessary for us. With their active participation and keen interest, I hope they will be able to demonstrate their shared authority. Despite Iraq's status as one of the region's most popular tourist hotspots, attracting investment in the past few years has proven challenging (Babylon). Because of this, the government of Babylon is backing plans to open up tourism-oriented hotel construction and renovation projects.*

R3: *She said there is a lack of financial funding and no collaboration and partnership with various stakeholders that can achieve their goals in the tourism industry collaboration. It also benefits Babylon County's tourism plan. Tourism sector observers say stakeholders' shared vision and dream are crucial to help "planning" and improve service quality. Babylon County is positioned to aim high. He replied that the Iraqi government is attempting to boost its tourism industry despite lacking infrastructure.*

A typical local community comprises plans to identify deficiencies and address them through tourist partners or event sponsors that form a mutual benefit for economic or branding facilities, as well as the creation of business partnerships between local businesses and customers (Wanner et al., 2020). In addition, to make cities more vibrant and to provide aid and support for neighborhood-based initiatives, the local community society collaborates closely with administrative city and town groups, private entities, and communities, and collaborations with local and international partners. The most prevalent type is private corporations in the nation. There are a few foreign companies with offices in Iraq. Joint ventures are feasible but lack legal standing. If a foreign firm wishes to register in Iraq, it must have 51 percent Iraqi ownership, according to Company Law 21/1997 (Al-Htaybat, 2018). The CoR amended law 21/1997 in June 2019 to officially recognize "foreign corporations" as a legally permitted company

structure (Al-Omari & Hamid, 2022). The new budget bill 9-2018 also contains modifications to tax law.

### ***Code 3: Tourist Attraction***

It makes sense that infrastructure would first be set up to support official and commercial travel. Local and foreign tourists will increase as new services, facilities, and attractions are available. There is no shortage of optimism among Iraqis. The general coordinator of Iraq's tourism bureau, Rauf al-Ansari, claimed that the country would one day welcome 10 million visitors annually (McGahey, 2006). Some decision-makers provided contradictory examples, such as Iraqi Marshes as a tourist destination. According to them, acculturation is increasing among Iraq's youth. However, this phenomenon may be explained by the distance from tourist attractions. Accordingly, the study revealed that the extent of tourism's moral effects should be based on ' tourism participation in Babylon. Someone said.

*R1: "... The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities had devised a precise strategy to monitor Babylon's tourism industry. Aside from providing resources and experience, the authority offers services and expertise to investigate tour guide development initiatives. However, tourism in Babylon should be regulated, and a measurement system should be put in place in light of the fierce rivalry in the international tourism sector.*

Decision makers argued that these art projects would develop the Babylon area, while stakeholders argued that they would develop only their businesses. On the other hand, decision-makers believed that business owners are not involved in such projects, which should be their priority. Nevertheless, it might be changed to promote foreign investment, which would help Iraq's financial situation. Furthermore, Iraq has become very competitive in drawing tourists to her country by coordinating tour programs at attractive prices, organizing publicity and promotion campaigns, and creating hardships that would attract tourists' attention. All these things impose on the particular State that responsibilities must be provided if he wants to have a thriving and robust tourism industry; therefore, as a starting point, we must first define the notion of development before investigating the concept of tourism development (Heidari et al., 2020).

*R2: ...For the sake of our Babylon, we (as stakeholders) are the primary beneficiaries of this development; however, to avoid appearing egotistical, it is essential to note that the majority of Babylon's population does not benefit pretty enough to compensate for the rising cost of goods and services in Babylon."*

The new government is having trouble handling the economy and has been unable to stop more looting and destruction. The country was managed on a management budget due to the CoR's decision to postpone the budget because of some problems (Blanchard, 2019). The price of goods, particularly the market, soared due to the suspension of export and import operations. However, Inadequate access to tourism services and investment, challenging procedures for the registration and dissolution of investment, a lack of potential competent employees,

obsolete legislation, a lack of regulations, and executing authorities all impede the activities of the private sector. The absence of a constructive public-private sector interaction, inefficient infrastructure and energy supplies, inadequate market expertise, excessive red tape, pervasive corruption, and unfavourable public sector competitiveness are among the issues the private sector faces (Gunter & Smeral, 2016).

**Market and Competition** Since 2003, Iraq has gradually accepted market economic concepts (Abdulkadhim Dadoosh & Mustafa Alomary, 2022). However, Shariah continues to serve as the nation's primary legislation source, and most jobs in the nation are held by the public sector, including the vast number of banks and corporations that are still publicly or semi-publicly traded (Mamshae, 2019). In contrast, the private sector is characterized by a small number of large corporations, numerous SMEs, and a sizable number of microenterprises. Both domestic and foreign investors are eligible for incentives under the National Investment Law (Fahad, 2020). The Iraqi authorities affirm that as long as legitimate documents support the underlying transactions, there are no limits for capital or current account transactions involving currency exchange. However, it is still not apparent whether currency convertibility is utterly unrestricted in exchange (S. H. Ali & Jameel, 2021). Provisions in the National Investment Law provide investors with banking and capital transfers inside and outside Iraq. Additionally, it allows investors with an investment license to benefit from 10-year tax and charge exemptions (Fahad, 2020).

### **Theme 2: Professional Development To Courses And Challenges.**

The plans are to improve the tourism industry and assist tour guide companies in Iraq. For this purpose, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has developed and implemented licensing regulations for tourism activities (Branch et al., 2020). In addition, it has included tourism quality criteria for Iraq to achieve a competitive advantage in service tour guides and set up requirements for consumer protection.



**Figure12: Training Courses For Tour Guides**

#### ***Code 1: Licensing And Approval***

Despite the growth in tourism worldwide, tour guides' contribution to increased customer satisfaction is not getting enough focus in Babylon (Mohamed & Alkholy, 2021). It is important to remember that tour guides are the public face of a country or region, and as such, they have much influence over whether or not visitors return. As competition has increased in the tourism industry, so has the importance of providing excellent customer service if

businesses hope to attract more visitors. The policies or strategies for enhancing the quality of tour guide services in Iraq necessitate the provision of professional training courses by travel agencies in Iraq. Subsequently, this is described by one of the decision-makers:

*R1: The Development and Education Department of the Tourism Facilities Department of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities held an advanced course in tourism guidance and the development of tourist guides, with the participation of a large number of travel and tourism companies, private sector representatives, and Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities employees. This was announced by the Director General of the Department of Relations and Information, Qassem Taher Al-Sudani, who noted that the purpose of holding this course is to improve tourism work and organize the work of receiving and accompanying tourist groups coming to Iraq by employing individuals with extensive experience and high physical fitness who are adept at dealing with tourists.*

It is noteworthy that this course comes within the plan of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities to promote the tourism and antiquities sectors in Iraq, as it will continue for two months, during which the trainee will be given a certificate that allows him to work as a tourist guide to accompany the tourist groups coming to the country. The government has made significant efforts to regulate the entities responsible for such activity to attract tourists due to the legislature's recognition of the significance of tourism as a source of economic activity for the country (Noorullah & ALMustawfiy, 2021). This includes restricting the organization of tourist trips and other tourism-related services to specific businesses, such as tourism offices and businesses, and working toward preparing knowledgeable and capable individuals known as tour guides and escorting tourists to tourism sites. Through an arrangement known as a "tour guide contract," tourism offices and such guides work together to guide their customers (Shubbar & Kathem, 2019). The legal framework of this contract pertains to Iraqi law and is investigated in this interview.

*R2: ... The Training and Rehabilitation Center for Tourist Guides is currently training courses, as confirmed by Muhsin Sadkhan Al-Suwaidi, director general of the Tourism Facilities Department; he also noted that the guide or tour guide is considered an ambassador for the country while accompanying any tourist group visiting Iraq, so the availability of special conditions for the person wishing to work in this field, such as language, performance, and culture, is necessary*

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities prepares its tourism plans based on the general vision and theses of the state. However, the tour guides are the ones that complement the success of tourism development, and the ministry puts all the support into these tour guides. Because of the intense competition in the international tourism market, it is time to set regulations and a measurement system to ensure the quality of tourism in Iraq. In addition, build growth strategies for tour guides through the ministry's divisions and agencies. The state implements a standardized testing program to ensure that all tour guides meet the same standards

(Nejmeddin, 2020). Conditions for applying for a tour guide license: anyone citizen of the Republic of Iraq is at least 18 years old, has completed high school or a specialized secondary school, is in good health, and has basic knowledge. In addition, language skills catering to tour guides' needs are eligible to take the Tour Guide Qualification Examination. Those who pass the examination will receive a Tour Guide Qualification Certificate from the Tourism Administration Department of the State Council or the Tourism Administration (Shubbar & Kathem, 2019).

Thus, work is underway to expand the line in tourism development by encouraging tour guides to develop and improve services in tourism accommodation. However, in the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, decision-makers devise strategies and development plans for tour guides. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has organized the tour guides profession to promote the role of tourist guides to provide different services while accompanying tourists and provide them with correct information on tourist sites in a proper manner, as well as pushing up the levels of provided tourism services in Iraq.

*R3: The Director General of the Tourism Groups Department confirmed Eng. Mahmoud Abdul-Jabbar Al-Zubaidi, that the Development and Training Department in the Ministry of Tourism continues to hold training courses for all tourist cadres, that tourists coming to Iraq are constantly increasing, which requires the availability of qualified and specialized tourist guides of both sexes to accompany the groups and groups Tourism during their stay in the country. He also said that the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities is always keen to learn about the investors' and tour guides' views before issuing new regulations. In this respect, it conducts special workshops and meetings to discuss possible modifications or give new rules. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities dealing with investors, tour guides, and tourists is based on the principle of partnership. For this purpose, several resolutions were issued by the state, according to what the Commission has submitted.*

However, we discovered that only one law, Law No. 37 of 1966, with 11 articles, has been enacted to regulate the work of the tourist guide profession. In 1992, five paragraphs were added to the work conditions of guides that did not adequately address the profession's specifics, nature, and needs (Iraqi Newspaper). Nonetheless, the law was reviewed and found to be vague and lacking in detail, with the most crucial aspects, such as the types of tour guides, their places of employment, and the skills they must possess, being ignored. Furthermore, neither the guide's authority nor consideration is given to his careful selection, and auditing (assuming he is competent) was covered. The Authority of Iraq and Tourism oversaw the law's implementation. It established the prerequisites for granting licenses and the standards that the tour guide must meet—choosing licensed guides from the private sector to escort foreign visitors. In addition, the law included regulating the fees the Authority charges for issuing licenses for tour guides who accompany tourists visiting places of destination in Iraq.

*R4: ... He reported saying the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has researched the most notable foreign examples of quality control and categorizing tour guides' activities, such as the provision of service, etc. Consequently, it establishes license control procedures and quality assurance standards to guarantee the proper provision of tourism services. Because of the intense competition in the international tourism market, it is time to set regulations and a measurement system to ensure the quality of tourism in Iraq. Regarding tour guides, we build growth strategies for them through the ministry's divisions and agencies. For this purpose, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has developed and implemented licensing regulations for tourism activities. In addition, it has included tourism quality criteria for Iraq to achieve a competitive advantage in service tour guides and set up requirements for consumer protection.*

Tourism in Babylon should be regulated, and a measurement system should be implemented in light of the fierce rivalry in the international tourism sector. For this reason, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has designed and implemented licensing requirements for tourism operations and tour guide services that include Babylonian quality standards. Furthermore, with the support of research centres, the Ministry of Tourism is designing future tourism programs offered to tour guides and enterprises to ensure their success in the market. The Ministry of Planning's tourism sector strategy enhances all tourism sectors" (Abdul-Jabbar, 2020). As for tour guide training programmers, but there are few." By conducting research and study to evaluate and based on the state of functionality, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities monitors research and study to evaluate its experience in tour guide education. That expresses remarkable development in policies or strategies for improving the quality of tour guides' services.

*R5: ... that to develop tourist guide skills, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has trained several tour guides in coordination with the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA). Moreover, several training courses were held to qualify tourist guides in several provinces across Iraq.*

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has organized the tour guide profession to promote the role of tourist guides to provide different services while accompanying tourists and providing them with correct information on tourism sites in a proper manner and pushing up the levels of provided tourism services in Babylon. Therefore, there are plans and strategies to advance the services of tour guides; for example, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities usually offers courses for tour guides." the General Commission of Tourism provides consultation to tour guides before and after the execution of tourist trips. Many service providers wish to achieve quality and exert great efforts to reach this goal, but most of these efforts are focused on inspection activities and damage control tourist trips (Koc, 2020).



**Figure 5.8: A Tour Guide Takes Photos Of Foreign Tourists In Babylon Archaeology.**

### **Code 2: Lack Of Funding**

With the rising unemployment rate, lack of funding, the rising number of college graduates, the struggling private sector, and the incapacity of the public sector to absorb all college grads, there is an immediate need to assist Iraqi tourism businesses (Jasim & Alyaseri, 2021). However, the expansion of Iraq's tourism industry faces several challenges, some of which may vary from province to province or industry to industry. Undeniably, the hospitality industry and tourism have their share of issues. The issues facing micro, small, and medium-sized businesses are all interrelated. These issues are typically caused by the company's internal operations or the owner's inexperience (Hassan et al., 2020).

Many decision-makers play many roles at once, compromising the separation of powers. Some MPs, for example, combine their personal and legislative responsibilities. Parliament has taken a more critical than controlling position toward the government. The consensus-based ("muhasasa") politics of post-2003 Iraq undercut the government's effectiveness through the politics of proportionality (Ibrahim, 2018). The Iraqi parliament is highly fragmented, which helps to thwart numerous policy efforts and limits the efficient use of resources by the government.

*R1: "... added that despite the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities' efforts and eagerness to develop the tourism sector, there are obstacles to overcome, such as a shortage of funding. Financing for tourism project plans in the most popular tourist attractions is an essential part of the modern approach to tourism. Corruption in the government and a lack of a defined plan has led to a lack of progress. And the lack of implementation of a clear strategy. Despite the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities' efforts and eagerness to develop the tourism sector.*

The tourism industry in Iraq is dealing with a variety of complicated issues. Due to a lack of funding, which is reflected by the projects taking longer than expected to complete, tourism projects are one of the most prevalent and severe issues in the tourism industry in Iraq (Abdulwahab et al., 2020). This goal cannot be achieved unless the project is financed most effectively. The reconstruction, maintenance, and operation of unfinished tourism

projects in Iraq require improved cooperation between these issues and the country's other affairs. Nonetheless, this is described by one of the decision-makers: One of them stated:

*R2: "...we are working on the Tourism Development Strategy that should achieve all its goals by 2028. One of our strategies in this strategy is to conduct big-scale tourism ardor and to create a new culture concerning the integration between the host and guest. The expansion of Babylon's tourism industry is proceeding favourably; however, efforts should be focused on including something innovative if one believes that Babylon will be a one-of-a-kind destination."*

The financial crisis has dramatically impacted Iraq's economy since falling oil prices have forced the nation to cut spending (Jasem Alnasrawi et al., 2020). Therefore, the government needs to pay more attention to mitigating and managing the factors that could lead to this problem because abandoning tourist projects in Iraq is a severe issue that has increased over several years. According to experts, project abandonment is one of the biggest challenges to Iraq's tourism. It symbolizes an incomplete project and hurts both tourists and other project partners. Nonetheless, this is described by one of the decision-makers: One of them stated:

*R3: He replied that according to the Ministry of Planning's annual report 2021, the Iraqi government experienced a severe funding shortage due to the financial crisis and the country's security situation, forcing it to abandon almost finished projects funded under government capital projects distributed throughout Iraq governorates. The most important factors affecting Iraq's tourist sector's functioning are the financial crisis, lack of decision-maker skills, poor planning, funding delays, insufficient technology, incompetent staff, and contradicting judgments.*

The government permitted government organizations to use private finance to complete projects shelved due to the financial crisis. The public and private sectors are present in every country, but the private sector excels at managing complex technology operations, encouraging creativity, and adapting quickly to changes. Such abilities from the private sector will significantly increase the efficiency and competitiveness of traditional governmental procurement. However, the lack of funding also caused Iraq to suffer from the poor choice of financing options through the public and private sectors, which had a detrimental impact on the performance of the tourism project environment (Faiq, 2021). Due to this area's lack of resources and weaknesses, choosing the best strategy for the public and private sectors is crucial for successful tourist initiatives. In general, this is especially relevant in light of the challenges Iraq's financial sector is currently experiencing.

### Discussion and Conclusions

This research aimed to learn how Babylon's decision-makers and tour guides view the city's recent progress in the tourist industry and also to determine the role and responsibility of the decision-makers regarding tour guides in Babylon, the processes of participation, and the implication of challenges for tourism. Only government-approved tour guides may be used for tours in Babylon, making them available for academic study. Using our method, we examined

the perspectives of tour guides and decision-makers in Babylon on tourism and their views on tour guides' place in the industry's present evolution. Mixed support for Cohen's (1985) tour guide communicative roles is provided by the tour guides' perceptions of their duties in the tourism sector. The guides predominantly saw themselves as information producers and cultural interpreters and highlighted that they did not manufacture information. The tour guides were cognizant that the advice and information they offered visitors may shape their impressions of Babylon. The cultural interpretation of tour guides was recognized as significantly impacting how visitors viewed Babylon. However, the Iraqi government has a significant role in selecting and training licensed tour guides is supported by some evidence from interviews and fieldwork, but there is no evidence that tour guides are utilized for propaganda. The reality that most guides refused to allow tape recordings to be made shows they were worried that their involvement in the study and reporting of unlicensed guides or unscripted stories would result in further government control and regulations. Therefore, Babylon's decision-makers and tour guides were well aware of the city's inadequate tourist infrastructure and the industry's struggles to keep up with rising visitor numbers. It will take years to complete the many building projects planned for Babylon.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

It is possible to improve the current study framework by conducting additional case studies to generalize. For instance, addressing what is occurring and how other multi-decision maker groups feel about the participation and the tourist plan policy may be accomplished using a combination of data collected from empirical research from multi-case studies and data gathered through surveys and interviews. Sustainable tourism development is one of the Sustainable Development Goals, so it is essential to do in-depth research into how to improve the processes of decision-maker participation and collaboration problems. There were drawbacks to the study. First, it relied on a cross-section of decision-makers and local tour guides who participated voluntarily in the poll. However, no complex data is available on the area's exact number of tour guides. While it was convenient to sample from a full-intercept survey and use the results to estimate, this approach is not without its drawbacks. We could not survey all potential decision-makers due to a lack of licensing. However, because there are no universally accepted standards for identifying tour guides, the Ministry of Tourism's decision-makers have given verbal estimations ranging from five hundred to nine hundred tour guides. Therefore, given that respondents were asked to base their opinions on a proposal for the guide certification system that did not yet exist and had not been formally presented, there was room for divergent understandings of what the system would entail. In light of the results of this research, it is more plausible than previously thought that tour guides in the region could benefit from a certification system for training and education. The general quality of Babylon tour guides can be improved with continual training and a sufficient support certification system, which the Ministry of Tourism should investigate with local governments.

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