UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

IDENTIFICATION OF CULTURAL PROPERTIES OF ARAB DISTRICT, ERBIL, IRAQ

OMAR KHASRO AKRAM

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IDENTIFICATION OF CULTURAL PROPERTIES OF ARAB DISTRICT, ERBIL, IRAQ

By

OMAR KHASRO AKRAM

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

May 2017

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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By

OMAR KHASRO AKRAM

May 2017

Chair: Sumarni binti Ismail, PhD
Faculty: Design and Architecture

This research aims to identify cultural properties of the Arab District, located in Erbil City, Iraq. Being one of the oldest constantly inhabited cities, Erbil City has great heritage and cultural values, including its Citadel, which is in UNESCO's World Heritage List since 2014. This district was the first inhabited area outside the citadel and, similarly to it, has highly influenced the urban fabric growth of the city and implemented the same kind of buildings, houses, construction materials and ancient techniques as the ones present inside the Citadel. However, there is no reliable information about the district neither available documents for visitors, researchers or planners to consult. In order to address this issue this thesis aims to identify the criteria based on UNESCO requirement operational guidelines 2015 and analyse the cultural properties present in Arab District, proposing a documentation framework that should be archived for the need of future conservation works.

Using Arab District as a case study, the research adopts a qualitative method in order to collect and analyse relevant information, including municipality documents, observations, photographs and interviews with authorities and specialists to confirm the authenticity of the data collected. In order to better understand the cultural properties of the area, factors like historical background, urban fabric, buildings and house typologies, are deeply analysed.

As main findings it is important to highlight the two types of house typologies, composed by one or two floors, the three different types of courtyards, where they are classified according to their rooms' location and the simplicity of the house facades built with bricks covered with shinny straw. It is also important to mention the uniqueness of the types of facades elements, where it is possible to find unique decorative elements, original voids, carpentry of doors and

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windows, exterior finishing and even internal facades. Focusing on urban, the main findings focus on the urban form of Arab District, which was kept until nowadays and represents almost a triangular shape. Narrow streets with high spatial enclosure, promotes a higher social interaction. The results must be stored in a database and turned available to the public, organized in accordance to their nature and type, in an easy way to retrieve, understand and consult.

Keywords: Urban Fabric, Cultural Properties, Arab District, Erbil City, Iraq, Identification, Documentation, Protection.

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Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

MENGENALPASTI WARISAN KEBUDAYAAN DI DAERAH ARAB, ERBIL, IRAQ

Oleh

OMAR KHASRO AKRAM

Mei 2017

Pengerusi: Sumarni binti Ismail, PhD
Fakulti: Rekabentuk dan Senibina

Kajian ini menyasarkan untuk mendokumentasi warisan kebudayaan di Daerah Arab yang terletak di Bandar Erbil, Iraq. Sebagais ebuah bandar yang sudah lama didiami orang, Bandar Erbil mempunyai pelbagai warisan dan budaya, termasuklah kubu yang mana tersenarai dalam Senarai Warisan Dunia UNESCO semenjak 2014. Daerah ini merupakan kawasan pertama yang didiami manusia diluar kota dan, telah mempengaruhi perkembangan susunatur di Bandar tersebut dan telah melaksanakan ciri-ciri yang sama dalam bangunan-bangunan, rumah-rumah, bahan-bahan binaan dan teknik-teknik purba seperti yang terdapat didalam kota. Bagaimanapun, maklumat sahih tidak dapat diperoleh mengenai daerah ini samada maklumat untuk pelawat, pengkaji atau perancang untuk dirujuk. Bagi menyuarakan pendapat mengenai masala hini, thesis ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti warisan kebudayaan yang terdapat di Daerah Arab dan menyimpan maklumat untuk keperluan kerja-kerja pemeliharaan pada masa hadapan. Dengan pemilihan Daerah Arab sebagaib ahankajian, para pengkaji menggunakan kaedah kualitatif bagi mengumpul dan menganalisis maklumat yang sewajarnya, termasukd okumen perbandaran, pemerhatian, imej dan temubual dengan pihak berkuasa serta pakar bagi memasti kanmaklumat yang telah dikumpula dalah tulen. Bagi memahami warisan budaya di kawasan tersebut dengan lebih mendalam, faktor-faktor seperti latarbelakang sejarah, susunatur, jenis-jenis bangunan dan rumah dianalisis dengan lebih teliti. Hasil daripada kajian mestilah disimpan dalam sebuah pengkalan data dan disebarkan kepada orang awam, dengan menyusunnya mengikut jenis, dalam bentuk yang mudah untuk diperloeh, difahami dan dirujuk.

Karakunci: Susunatur, Warisansejarah, Warisa Nkebudayaan, Daerah Arab, Bandar Erbil, Iraq, Pengenalan, Dokumentasi, Perlindungan

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

{قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الأَلْبَابِ}

صدق الله العظيم

[الزمر : 9]

In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful

{ Say: Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition.}

God Almighty has spoken the truth
[Az-Zumar: 9]

First and foremost I would like to thank God, who have given me the power to believe in myself and pursue my dreams, I could never have done this project without My God support.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 9 May 2017 to conduct the final examination of Omar Khasro Akram on his thesis entitled "Identification of Cultural Properties of Arab District, Erbil, Iraq" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

Norsidah binti Ujang, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Design and Architecture
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Nangkula Utaberta, PhD
Associate Professor Ir.
Faculty of Design and Architecture
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner)

Adi Irfan bin Che Ani, PhD
Associate Professor Sr.
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Malaysia
(External Examiner)

NOR AINI AB. SHUKOR, PhD
Professor and Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 6 July 2017

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

Sumarni binti Ismail, PhD
Lecturer
Faculty of Design and Architecture
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Nor Atiah binti Ismail, PhD
Associate Professor LAr.
Faculty of Design and Architecture
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

_____
ROBIAH BINTI YUNUS, PhD
Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Making heritage a bridge between past and present, launched toward the future and the development of the future, focusing on the important role of information and documentation, because the documentation and information, which are our heritage, should keep proving that our civilization, our identity and our memories are authentic. The most important inspiration factors is to create continuity and link between the architectural heritage and our urban contemporary (be through inspiration from architecture elements or a particular method or use solutions to climate problems, rather than replacing them with modern technology and in charge of energy that negatively affect the natural environment), with emphasis on materials traditional construction and upgraded to conform to the technical requirements of the age (Abdul Razaq, 2000 Akram et al., 2015 Akram, Franco, Ismail, 2016a Akram, Franco, Ismail, Muhammed, Graça, 2016c B. H. Ali, 1990 S. Ali, 1987 Ashour, 2002).

Focusing on Arab District, it is located near the Citadel of Erbil City, Iraq (Figure 1.1) and is considered one of the main important districts of Erbil. The district was the first inhabited area outside the citadel and, similarly to it, has highly influenced the urban fabric of the city and has the same kind of buildings, houses and traditional materials as the ones found inside the citadel (Akram, Ismail, Franco, 2016a).

Figure 1.1: Location of Arab District in the City of Erbil – Source: Google Earth

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There are important strength points of Arab District that must be highlighted, like the rich cultural heritage and architecture that exists in almost every building (Figures 1.2 and 1.3). The principles of ancient architecture can be kept and, therefore, there's no isolation among the history of the society and its past and current values. It is also possible to create a state of balance among the rational developments of the global architecture, the technological world and the environmental development process, fitting the local conditions in social and economic conditions. The successful experiences done by our ancestors are major benefits that can be taken from the district and show the way to balance the development with modern models. Some other good points of the area are the good location near to parks, panoramic views and shopping areas (Akram, Ameen, □ Khalaf, 2014□Akram, Ismail, □ Franco, 2016b).

Figure 1.2: Example of a Traditional House in Arab District – Source: author

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Figure 1.3: Example of Different Architectural Designs in Traditional Houses of Arab District – Source: author

However, there are also some important issues and threats related to the district and that are putting it at a serious risk of loss. The historical buildings and areas are being exposed to really long periods of negligence, where no attention is paid, resulting in the possible loss of important values and heritage characteristics. Some of the buildings present a high level of destruction and irreversible stages, causing, once more, the loss of important features that cannot be rebuilt. Due to its location, near the city central and main shopping zones, the area is constantly crowded, resulting in high levels of pollution that, due to the lack of cleaning activities, is putting the place at risk. Also the urban renewal activities, sometimes inconsistent, are not performed with attention to the historical architecture of the place, existing many modern important governmental buildings on the area. The dominance of high-rise buildings over the low buildings of the area, led to a lost of integrity in the urban fabric. All of these threats are mainly related to the low-income families that have no structure to preserve the area, leaving it obsolete and in a demolishing state (Figures 1.4 and 1.5), as well as the lack of awareness and educated community to preserve not just the buildings but the urban fabric itself (Akram et al., 2014).

Figure 1.4: Abandoned House in Arab District – Source: author

Figure 1.5: Example of the Bad Conditions of the Streets in Arab District – Source: author

1.2 Problem Statement

It is widely known that nowadays Iraq is living severe security issues. ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is constantly attacking new cities and gaining control over them. Heritage sites and buildings are also under the attack of ISIS and other terrorist groups. TV News and Newspapers are constantly showing new information of those sad events (BBC News, 2016 CNN, 2015 NBC

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News, 2016). Such attacks are putting at risk a large number of heritage values that cannot be replaced. Once they are lost, they are gone forever.

Selecting the city of Erbil that is located near the city of Mosul, a city presently controlled by ISIS, it has a large number of heritage that are at risk to be lost forever if an ISIS attack happens. Erbil Citadel was recognised as an UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2014 and is now under rehabilitation process (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2014). Focusing on Arab District, which was the first inhabited area outside the citadel, it is also possible to find a large number of historical buildings and historical urban fabric with important historical characteristics, such as traditional materials, narrow streets and house typologies. Apart from possible terrorist attacks, pictures and local visits to Arab District also show a large number of ruining buildings and damage areas as the result of the poor attention to the area and low economical power of the local population (United States Government Accountability Office, 2016).

UNESCO took a step, writing a letter to the area representatives, highlighting this issue and the urgent need of action. In that letter, UNESCO declares that itself cannot protect all the cultural heritage of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, focusing their mission on helping to strength the capabilities of the local authorities in order for them to properly act (Yigit Ciziri, n.d.).

There is no proper documentation of cultural properties of Arab District of Erbil city, Iraq. Therefore, there is a need to identify and document its cultural properties to help on their identification, protection and interpretation, as well as to have reliable documentation for future generations, in case an unexpected attack damages the district's cultural properties.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

This study focuses on the cultural properties of the Arab District, located in the city of Erbil, Iraq and assumes the following main research question (Main-RQ):

- What are the cultural properties of Arab District, Erbil City, Iraq to be identified?

Nowadays, the current high speed of development of the city is responsible for the big change occurring to the urban fabric and land use. Some of the central areas for the city of Erbil, such as the Arab District, are usually left abandoned due to people relocation to modern areas, resulting in deterioration and destruction of valuable cultural properties.

The goal of this research is to achieve an answer to the following objectives:

1. **<u>To Identify the Criteria Based on UNESCO – Requirement Operational Guidelines 2015</u>**
   Due to a huge lack of information regarding the Arab District located in the city of Erbil – Iraqi Kurdistan Region – there is a need to identify its cultural proprieties, where most of them are not known, or not identified and at risk to be demolished or damaged. To address this objective it is necessary to deeply study the UNESCO's Operational Guidelines 2015 and select the best criteria to be applied in Arab District.

2. **<u>To Analyse the Main Characteristics and Uniqueness of the Identified Cultural Properties of Arab District</u>**
   According to the identified criteria, from objective one, this second objective aims to analyse Arab District in order to identify its cultural properties and their main characteristics and uniqueness, such as urban fabric and traditional houses. To correctly address this objective, it is necessary to provide answers to the following research questions:

   a) **How are the characteristics of the urban fabric of Arab District? (Sub-RQ1)**
   b) **What are the built cultural properties of Arab District? (Sub-RQ2).**

3. **<u>To Propose Documentation Framework and Validate the Findings of Cultural Properties of Arab District</u>**
   This objective aims to produce and validate detailed documentation about the cultural properties of Arab District. It is also aimed to publish the validated documentation and turn it available to students and researchers, as well as to international and local organisations, inspiring them to care about the cultural properties of their neighbourhoods. In a way to achieve this objective, it is necessary to answer the following question:

   a) **Who will confirm the authenticity of the collected data? (Sub-RQ3)**

1.4 Research Methodology

This research uses Arab District as an exploratory case study, deeply explained in chapter three, adopting a qualitative method, in order to collect and analyse relevant information, including not just municipality documents (archival), such as historical background and local people demography, but also observations, photographs and interviews with authorities and specialists to confirm the authenticity of data collected. In order to better understand the cultural properties of Arab District, factors like urban fabric, buildings and house typologies are deeply analysed. Once collected and analysed all information, the validation process takes place, where structured interviews

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(questionnaires) are applied to authorities and specialists, in order to confirm the authenticity of the collected data and the need of its documentation. The results must be stored in an online database and turned available to the public in an easy way to access and understand (Figure 1.6).

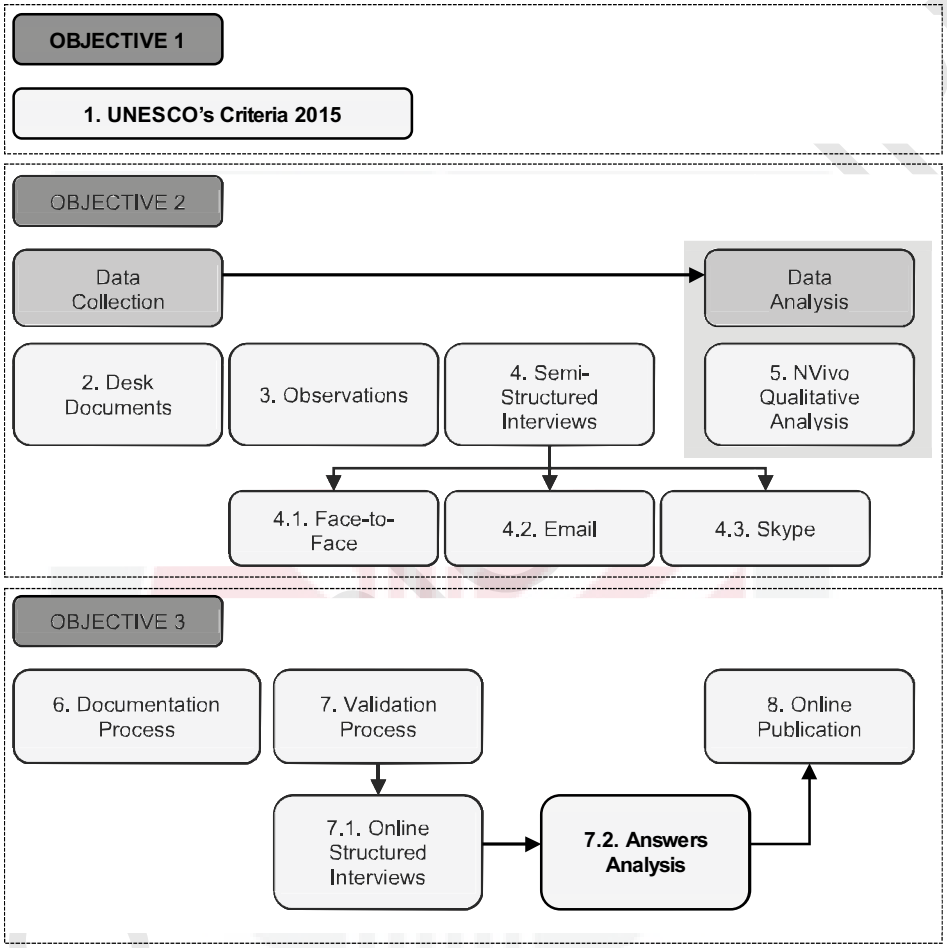

Figure 1.6: Diagram of Objectives

1.5 Scope and Limitation of Research

This research has some limitations and difficulties during the data collection procedures, mainly due to the lack of documentation about the district and the security issues that are occurring nowadays in the city of Erbil, that led people going to different areas. Apart for being the oldest constantly inhabited district in Erbil City, and the first human settlement outside the citadel, there were not enough reliable information about its cultural proprieties, being desk documents (archival), local visits and interviews the main data source of this research. The authorities and specialists also played an important role on validating the

documentation about the area. Due to this limitation, this research was divided in two main topics, the outside, or buffer zone, and, more deeply, the inside of the Arab District (Case Study). On the buffer zone topic, it is highlighted the main streets surrounding the district, while on the inside area it is focused the Arab District features, traditional and courtyard houses, including house typology, facades and traditional materials.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This study is organized into five chapters as follows (Figure 1.7):

The chapter one works as introduction, where are described some general concepts about the study, focusing the background study, the problem statement, objectives, research methodology and limitations of the study. It is also described some conclusions and ending with a brief description of the structure of this thesis and content of each chapter.

The chapter two focuses on the literature review and its divided in five main topics. Starting with a brief approach about the documenting process and cultural heritage, followed by the cultural properties, where it's featured urban and buildings. The chapter also focus on Arab District and its historical background, describes the research proposition and, at the end, a brief summary to close the chapter.

The chapter three focuses the adopted methodology for this research, describing its patterns as well as justification for their use. Used methods, such as qualitative and exploratory case study are described and adjusted to work on this thesis, in order to address the research problem and the identified research questions and objectives. It also highlights the research framework and its different phases, as well as the processes of data collection and data analysis. The chapter will end with a brief summary.

The chapter four focuses on the interviews, observation and documentation about Arab District and its divided in two main topics, the inside of Arab District, which is deeply approached, and the outside, or buffer zone. On the buffer zone topic, it is highlighted the main streets surrounding the district, while on the inside area it is focused the Arab district characteristics, traditional and courtyard houses, including house typology, facades and materials. At the end of this chapter is also presented a brief summary about the described topics.

The chapter five aims to present the discussion about all work and achieved results, as well as to present the answers to the initial research objectives and questions. In this chapter the questions are treated one by one, providing all relevant results that were achieved and how they influence on Arab District

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protection. Furthermore, it will be described the contributions of this thesis, as well as the future research work that may be done, based on it.

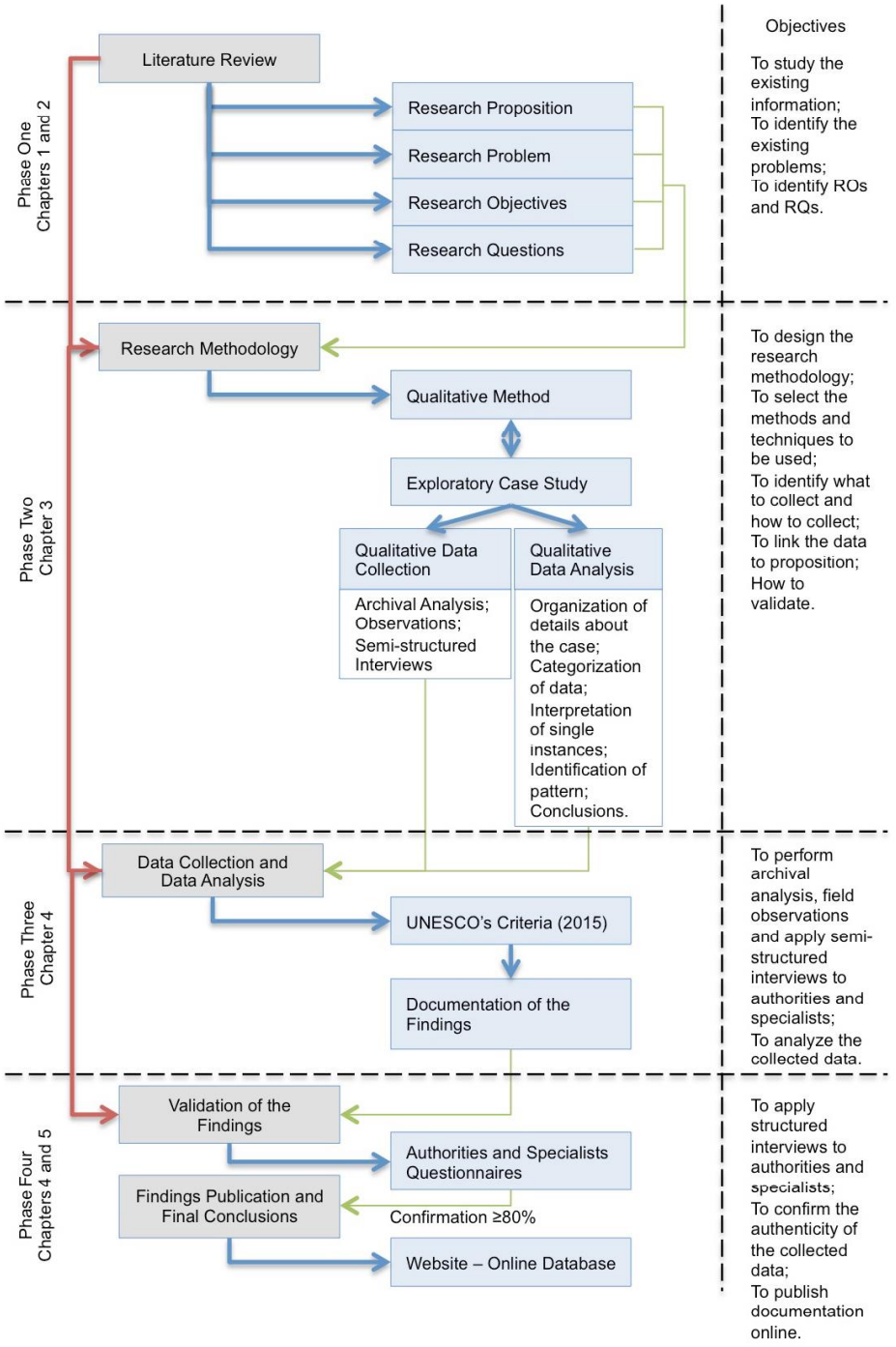

Figure 1.7: Research Process Diagram

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