



Culture and Walkability in Indian Urban Cores

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Abstract. Walking is closely associated with daily routines, rituals, and collective memory in many historic Indian urban cores. However, modern planning frameworks typically treat walkability primarily as an infrastructure and mobility issue, emphasizing pedestrian safety and traffic control. This paper therefore asks two questions: (1) how does walking function as a cultural and social practice in Indian urban cores, and (2) in what ways do current planning approaches overlook these cultural dimensions? This study proposes a more culturally informed view of walkability by reframing historic pedestrian networks as dynamic systems supporting identity, belonging, and participation. A systematic review of successful walkable pedestrian networks, public life, and preserve areas is performed alongside an interpretive analysis of case examples of walkable spaces throughout Varanasi, Old Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai's Fort area. The cases highlight ritualized pathways, marketplace streets, and corridors that facilitate social interaction among pedestrians. The findings establish how various pedestrian amenities such as: symbolic pathways; informal venues for gathering; or sensory experiences enhance social connection and intergenerational memories among pedestrians. However, increased commercialization of public space, vehicular traffic, public surveillance, and redevelopment limit opportunities for access to pedestrian systems and other walkable spaces for youth pedestrians who rely on streets as spaces of interaction and expression. The study makes the case for small-scale pedestrianization, context-sensitive streetscape interventions, community co-design, and the recording of walking narratives. Planning priorities can be shifted toward strategies that promote social inclusion, cultural significance, and long-term urban resilience by considering walkability as cultural infrastructure.

Keywords: Walkability; Youth Inclusion; Public Space; Cultural Identity; Social Resilience.

1 Introduction

Walking has historically played a central role in shaping the social and cultural life of cities. In many historic urban cores, walking is not merely a means of movement but a socially embedded practice intertwined with ritual, livelihood, memory, and everyday interaction. Temple routes, market streets, neighborhood lanes, and ceremonial pathways often function as cultural corridors where identity, belonging, and community life are continuously produced and negotiated. These pedestrian networks have evolved over centuries, reflecting patterns of settlement, trade, worship, and social exchange while simultaneously shaping the cultural character of urban environments (Riza, 2017; Somoza Medina et al., 2023).

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A. K. Singh et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Seminar on Designing the Future (ISDF 2026)*, Atlantis Advances in Applied Sciences 4,
https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6239-747-7_2

Within such contexts, walking also serves as a medium through which creative cultures are expressed and sustained. Festivals, religious processions, street performances, informal markets, and everyday social encounters transform pedestrian spaces into sites of cultural production and identity formation. Rather than serving solely as channels of movement, streets operate as living cultural landscapes where tangible heritage and intangible cultural practices intersect. Consequently, understanding walkability requires attention not only to mobility but also to the cultural meanings and social practices embedded within everyday urban life.

Despite this rich socio-cultural significance, contemporary urban planning in India continues to frame walkability primarily as a question of mobility infrastructure. Policies and design guidelines frequently emphasise pedestrian safety, sidewalk provision, accessibility standards, and traffic management. While these interventions remain essential for equitable mobility, they often reduce walking to a functional activity concerned with efficiency and movement (Bharucha, 2017; Mondschein, 2024) (see Figure 1). Such approaches rarely account for the experiential, symbolic, and cultural dimensions of walking through which people develop attachments to places, participate in public life, and reproduce collective memory (Chan et al., 2024).

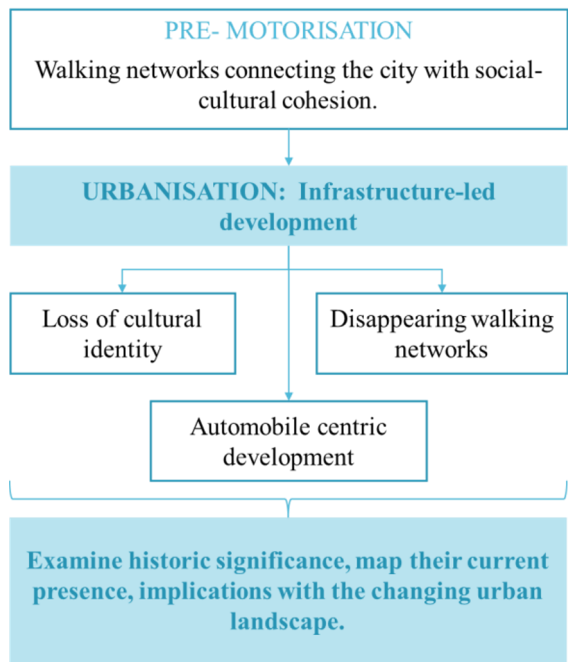


Figure 1. Infrastructure-led urbanization and its impacts on historic urban landscapes (Source: Author)

This narrowing of walkability has important implications for young people. Streets and public spaces within historic urban cores frequently act as informal arenas for interaction, learning, cultural participation, and self-expression. Unlike formal institutions, these environments provide accessible opportunities for engagement with community life and local culture. Previous studies demonstrate that pedestrian environments influence place attachment, social belonging, and civic

engagement (Chan et al., 2024). However, youth perspectives remain largely absent from both mobility planning and heritage management, where interventions often prioritise tourists, commuters, or economic objectives over the experiences of everyday users.

Recent scholarship across urban studies, cultural geography, and heritage research increasingly recognises walking as a socially and culturally meaningful practice. Research demonstrates how pedestrian routes contribute to place attachment, collective memory, and community identity (Somoza Medina et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2023). Cultural routes, pilgrimage networks, and heritage trails illustrate that movement through the city can reinforce cultural continuity and strengthen connections between people and place (Berti, 2013; Fistola & La Rocca, 2018). Nevertheless, these cultural dimensions remain insufficiently integrated into mainstream walkability frameworks, which continue to rely predominantly on quantitative measures of connectivity, accessibility, and physical infrastructure (Yuan et al., 2023).

This gap highlights the need for a broader conceptualisation of walkability that engages with culture, memory, identity, and everyday practice. The study argues that walkability should be understood not only as a physical condition but also as a form of cultural infrastructure that supports social interaction, collective memory, and urban belonging. Historic pedestrian networks can therefore be interpreted as living cultural landscapes that sustain both mobility and cultural continuity (Campolo et al., 2016).

Accordingly, this paper addresses two research questions: (1) How does walking function as a cultural and social practice within Indian urban cores? and (2) In what ways do conventional planning approaches overlook the cultural dimensions of walkability? To answer these questions, the study employs a systematic thematic review of literature alongside a comparative analysis of selected Indian historic urban cores, including Varanasi, Ahmedabad, Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi), and Mumbai's Fort precinct.

The paper contributes to emerging debates on culture, identity, and urban mobility by proposing a framework of Culture-Integrated Walkability. By integrating perspectives from heritage studies, public-space theory, everyday urbanism, and youth inclusion, the study demonstrates how culturally embedded walking practices can inform more inclusive, resilient, and creative urban futures. Reframing walkability as cultural infrastructure encourages planners and designers to recognize everyday practices as valuable knowledge systems and to incorporate community experiences into the shaping of urban environments. Such an approach offers a pathway towards urban transformation that respects cultural continuity while accommodating contemporary change.

2 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive research design to examine the relationship between culture and walkability within historic urban cores. Rather than evaluating walkability through conventional quantitative indicators, the research explores how cultural practices, collective memory, everyday social interactions, and place-based identities shape pedestrian environments. The methodological framework combines three complementary components: (i) systematic literature identification and screening, (ii) thematic coding and conceptual synthesis, and (iii) comparative analysis of selected Indian urban core case studies.

The PRISMA 2020 framework was employed solely as a transparent protocol for identifying, screening, and selecting relevant literature. The analytical component of the research was undertaken through thematic coding and cross-case interpretation to identify recurring cultural determinants of walkability and to develop a conceptual framework for Culture-Integrated Walkability.

2.1 Review Design and Eligibility Criteria

The review sought to synthesize literature from urban planning, cultural geography, heritage studies, public-space theory, and urban design, where discussions of walkability and cultural meaning often remain fragmented across disciplinary boundaries. The objective was not to quantify relationships but to identify conceptual patterns that explain how walking functions as a cultural and social practice within urban environments.

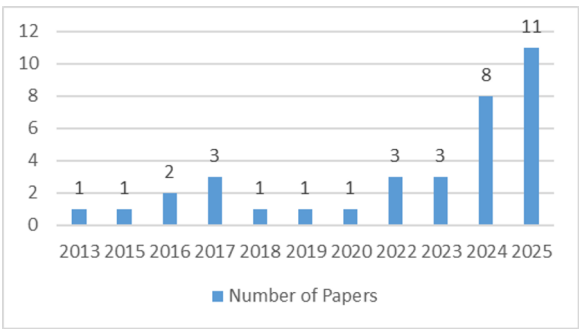


Figure 2. Year of Publications of the records (Source: Author)

Studies were included if they:

- Were published between 2013 and 2025 (see Figure 2)
- Were peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, book chapters, or policy-oriented research
- Examined pedestrian environments in relation to cultural practices, heritage, identity, place attachment, public life, or social interaction

- Addressed concepts such as cultural routes, pilgrimage networks, heritage trails, everyday urbanism, placemaking, or culturally embedded mobility
- Examined urban contexts relevant to historic settlements, heritage precincts, or culturally significant pedestrian environments

Studies were excluded if they:

- Focused exclusively on public health outcomes or physical activity without cultural dimensions
- Addressed purely technical transport engineering or traffic management issues
- Examined non-urban contexts unrelated to urban planning and design
- Lacked substantive discussion of pedestrian environments or socio-cultural processes

2.2 Search Strategy

Literature searches were conducted across Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar between June and December 2025. Search terms were developed to capture the multidimensional nature of culture-integrated walkability and were organised into four thematic clusters:

- Walkability and Mobility: walkability, pedestrian networks, cultural mobility, ritual routes, pedestrian accessibility
- Culture, Heritage and Identity: cultural infrastructure, heritage mobility, cultural landscapes, collective memory, cultural identity
- Urbanism and Settlements: historic urban cores, traditional settlements, vernacular networks, urban cultural landscapes
- Public Space and Social Inclusion: placemaking, everyday urbanism, youth in public space, participatory planning, social interaction

Boolean operators (AND/OR) were used to refine search combinations, including terms such as “walkability AND heritage,” “cultural routes AND urban planning,” and “everyday urbanism AND public space.” Additional studies were identified through citation tracking and snowball sampling from key references.

The review prioritized studies that explicitly connected pedestrian environments with cultural meaning, social interaction, heritage practices, or everyday urban life. This approach enabled the identification of recurring conceptual relationships rather than the production of an exhaustive inventory of walkability research.

2.3 Screening and Selection

The search process yielded an initial set of 130 records. Following duplicate removal, studies were subjected to a two-stage screening process consisting of title and abstract review followed by full-text assessment. The final dataset comprised 42 studies that satisfied the inclusion criteria and demonstrated direct relevance to the study objectives.

2.4 Thematic Coding and Analytical Framework

The selected studies were analysed using thematic coding to identify recurring relationships between culture and walkability. Codes were developed iteratively and subsequently grouped into broader analytical themes. Five major thematic categories emerged from the review:

- Ritual and Religious Practices
- Heritage, Identity and Collective Memory
- Informal Social Interaction and Everyday Urbanism
- Youth Participation and Public Life
- Experiential and Sensory Dimensions of Walking

These themes formed the basis for interpreting the literature and identifying the cultural determinants that contribute to walkable environments. The analytical framework enabled the study to move beyond conventional measures of connectivity and accessibility by examining how cultural practices influence pedestrian behaviour and place attachment.

2.5 Comparative Case Analysis

To contextualise the thematic findings, four Indian urban cores were selected for comparative analysis: Varanasi, Ahmedabad Heritage Walk, Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi), and Mumbai's Fort-Colaba precinct. These cases were chosen using cultural relevance as the primary selection criterion. All four represent historic urban environments where walking remains closely associated with heritage, ritual activity, informal commerce, and everyday social interaction.

The cases were examined through secondary literature, planning documents, heritage studies, and documented observations. Rather than serving as formal empirical case studies, they function as illustrative examples that demonstrate how cultural practices shape pedestrian environments in different urban contexts. Comparative interpretation across cases enabled the identification of common cultural attributes influencing walkability while acknowledging contextual differences.

2.6 Limitations and Analytical Positioning

Given the diversity of disciplinary perspectives and methodological approaches within the reviewed literature, a qualitative synthesis approach was adopted in place of meta-analysis. While this methodology supports conceptual integration and theory building, certain limitations remain. The literature exhibits a geographical bias towards internationally recognised heritage cities, and comparatively fewer studies examine Indian urban contexts in depth. In addition, the interpretive nature of thematic coding introduces an element of researcher judgement.

Despite these limitations, the methodology is appropriate for exploring complex socio-cultural dimensions of walkability that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative indicators alone. The approach provides a structured foundation for

developing a culture-integrated understanding of walkability and identifying pathways for future empirical investigation.

3. Literature Review

Walkability has traditionally been examined within the fields of transport planning, urban design, and public health through measurable indicators such as density, land-use mix, street connectivity, accessibility, and sidewalk provision. These frameworks have contributed significantly to standardising walkability assessment and enabling cross-city comparison. However, they largely conceptualise walking as a utilitarian mode of mobility, prioritising efficiency, accessibility, and safety while often overlooking the experiential, social, and cultural dimensions of pedestrian movement (Appolloni et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2023).

Recent scholarship has increasingly challenged this functional interpretation by recognising walking as an experiential and socially embedded practice. At a human scale, walking influences how people perceive, interpret, and interact with urban environments. Through repeated movement, individuals develop place attachment, construct memories, and establish social relationships that contribute to a sense of belonging. Such qualities remain difficult to capture through conventional quantitative indicators, prompting calls for broader interpretations of walkability that incorporate cultural meaning, lived experience, and social interaction (Somoza Medina et al., 2023; Chan et al., 2024).

This shift is particularly relevant within historic urban cores, where walking is closely intertwined with cultural identity and everyday public life. In these environments, pedestrian networks often function simultaneously as mobility systems, cultural landscapes, and social infrastructures. Understanding walkability therefore requires moving beyond physical accessibility to examine how cultural practices shape and sustain pedestrian environments.

3.1 Walking as a Cultural Practice

An emerging body of research positions walking as a culturally embedded practice shaped by social norms, traditions, rituals, and everyday routines. Riza (2017) conceptualises walkability not simply as a spatial condition but as a cultural practice influenced by collective behaviours and locally specific meanings. This perspective challenges universalised walkability models by recognising that pedestrian experiences are shaped by cultural contexts and social expectations.

Cultural routes and pilgrimage pathways provide important examples of how walking acquires symbolic significance. By connecting sacred sites, historic landmarks, and community gathering places, these routes reinforce collective identity and cultural continuity (Berti, 2013). Walking along such pathways becomes a performative act through which cultural values, memories, and social relationships are reproduced (see



Figure 3. Ritual and pilgrimage walking routes in Varanasi (Source: Toehold Photography).

Figure 3). The cultural significance of walking, however, extends beyond formal ritual routes. Everyday journeys to markets, places of worship, educational institutions, and neighbourhood gathering spaces gradually accumulate meaning through repetition and social experience.

Research on cultural mobility further demonstrates that pedestrian movement is influenced not only by spatial accessibility but also by social expectations, cultural values, and collective behaviours (Pradhani & Devi, 2025). Decisions regarding where, when, and how people walk are often embedded within broader systems of cultural practice. Despite these insights, mainstream walkability frameworks rarely account for symbolic meanings, cultural routines, or social rituals, revealing a significant gap between technical planning approaches and lived experiences of mobility.

3.2 Cultural Landscapes and Urban Heritage

The concept of cultural landscapes provides a valuable lens through which to understand culture-integrated walkability. Cultural landscapes are environments shaped through long-term interactions between people and place, reflecting layers of historical activity, social relationships, and symbolic meaning (Campolo et al., 2016).

Historic urban cores in India exemplify such layered landscapes. Streets often follow centuries-old alignments connecting temples, mosques, markets, residential clusters, and public squares. These pedestrian networks integrate tangible heritage, including architecture and monuments, with intangible heritage such as rituals, festivals, oral traditions, and everyday practices. Consequently, walking routes serve not only as connectors between destinations but also as carriers of cultural memory and identity (Pan et al., 2023).



Figure 4. Mumbai's Fort area showing historic architecture and pedestrian movement (Source: Author).

Heritage scholarship increasingly acknowledges mobility as an integral component of heritage systems. Cultural routes and heritage walks are frequently promoted as tools for conservation, tourism development, and public engagement (Berti, 2013; Zouridaki et al., 2024). However, critical perspectives caution that heritage-led mobility strategies may privilege visitors over residents. When pedestrian routes are curated primarily for tourism consumption, everyday cultural practices risk marginalisation and local meanings may be diluted (Gonzalez-Urango et al., 2020). This tension highlights the distinction between heritage as a lived cultural process and heritage as a managed visitor experience.

3.3 Public Space, Social Life, and Everyday Urbanism

Public-space scholarship emphasises that streets and pedestrian environments are not merely channels of movement but spaces where social life is continuously produced and negotiated. Everyday urbanism focuses on the ordinary practices through which people create and experience the city in their daily lives. Informal activities such as street vending, lingering, social interaction, religious observances, and spontaneous encounters contribute significantly to urban vitality and place identity.

Everyday Urbanism and Third Place Theory, while related, operate at different scales. Everyday Urbanism refers to the broader processes through which individuals and communities produce urban life through routine activities and informal practices. Streets, sidewalks, and public spaces are understood as lived environments where social and cultural meanings emerge through repeated use. (see Figure 5)

In contrast, Oldenburg's (1999) concept of the Third Place refers to specific social settings outside home and work that facilitate informal interaction. Examples include



Figure 5. Informal Street markets and pedestrian activity in Old Delhi illustrating the coexistence of mobility and social interaction. (Source: Delhi Tourism)

cafés, tea stalls, local markets, community gathering spaces, and neighbourhood businesses. These places function as social anchors that encourage conversation, familiarity, and community formation. While third places often exist within walkable environments, they represent destinations within the urban fabric, whereas everyday urbanism describes the wider social processes that animate public space.

The distinction is important because walkability is influenced not only by physical connectivity but also by the quality and diversity of social experiences available along pedestrian routes. Walkable environments support routine encounters, informal participation, and social cohesion, thereby contributing to collective identity and cultural continuity.

However, contemporary planning interventions frequently undervalue these informal dynamics. Regulatory controls, beautification initiatives, and commercial redevelopment can reduce opportunities for spontaneous interaction and low-threshold participation (Zhang et al., 2024). Although pedestrian-friendly design often prioritises safety and accessibility, its social implications receive comparatively less attention. Research indicates that walkable environments foster trust, familiarity, and social cohesion (Meuleman & Jæger, 2023), yet such outcomes are rarely incorporated into walkability assessments.

3.4 Youth, Identity, and Urban Belonging

Youth represent a significant yet underexplored dimension of walkability research. For many young people, streets function as spaces of exploration, socialisation, learning, and identity formation. Walkable environments support independent mobility while enabling repeated engagement with people, places, and cultural activities.

Studies on place attachment suggest that repeated interaction with routes, landmarks, and public spaces strengthens emotional connections to place and contributes to a sense of belonging (Chan et al., 2024). Festivals, street-based celebrations, and everyday pedestrian experiences often become part of personal and collective memory, particularly for younger generations.



Figure 6. Youth-led Ganesh Visarjan procession transforming streets into spaces of cultural interaction and belonging (Source: Mumbai Attractions).

Despite this significance, young people are rarely recognised as active stakeholders within mobility planning or heritage management. Public-space interventions frequently prioritise commuters, tourists, or commercial interests, limiting opportunities for youth participation in shaping urban environments. (see Figure 6)

This oversight reflects a broader tendency to view young people as passive users rather than active contributors to urban culture. Incorporating youth perspectives into walkability research can therefore provide important insights into how cultural meanings are sustained and transmitted across generations.

3.5 Cultural Determinants of Walkability

Across the reviewed literature, several recurring cultural factors emerge as significant contributors to walkability within historic urban environments.

First, ritual and religious practices generate recurring pedestrian movement patterns and strengthen cultural continuity. Second, informal social interactions occurring through markets, street vending, and community gathering spaces contribute to social cohesion and everyday urban vitality. Third, heritage environments and collective

memory reinforce place identity by embedding cultural meaning within pedestrian routes. Fourth, sensory and experiential qualities such as visual character, soundscapes, material textures, and climatic comfort influence how people perceive and engage with walking environments. Finally, youth participation and community engagement play an important role in sustaining cultural practices and intergenerational continuity.

These factors suggest that culturally vibrant pedestrian environments are shaped not solely by physical infrastructure but by complex interactions between social practices, cultural meanings, and spatial characteristics.

3.6 Toward Culture-Integrated Walkability

Taken together, the literature reveals that walkability research remains fragmented across mobility studies, heritage discourse, public-space theory, and studies of urban belonging. Although cultural dimensions are increasingly acknowledged, they are frequently treated as secondary outcomes rather than integral components of walkability.

Culture-Integrated Walkability offers a framework for bridging these disciplinary perspectives by recognising pedestrian networks as carriers of memory, identity, social interaction, and cultural expression. Such an approach moves beyond infrastructure provision to foreground lived experience and everyday practice. Emerging tools such as cultural mapping, participatory storytelling, and community-based documentation provide opportunities for capturing these dimensions within planning processes (Otsuka et al., 2025).

The review therefore highlights the need for a broader conceptual framework that understands walkability not only as physical accessibility but also as cultural infrastructure supporting identity, belonging, collective memory, and everyday social life. This understanding forms the foundation for the analytical framework proposed in the subsequent sections of the study.

4. Results and Findings

The review of 42 studies reveals a growing but fragmented body of research at the intersection of walkability, culture, heritage, and public life. While walkability is increasingly recognised as a multidimensional concept, most studies continue to prioritise physical accessibility and mobility performance over cultural and experiential dimensions. The findings are presented in two stages: (i) an overview of literature patterns and (ii) thematic findings identifying the principal cultural determinants of walkability in historic urban environments.

4.1 Overview of Literature Patterns

The reviewed studies were classified into four thematic domains according to their primary focus (Table 1). The distribution demonstrates that research on walkability and culture remains concentrated within mobility and heritage-oriented perspectives, while issues of social inclusion, youth participation, and every day public life receive comparatively limited attention.

Table 1. Distribution of Reviewed Studies Across Thematic Domains (Source: Author)

Thematic Domain	No. of Studies	Indicative Focus
Walkability & Mobility	15	Walkability metrics, cultural mobility, pilgrimage routes, accessibility
Culture, Heritage & Identity	13	Cultural identity, sacred landscapes, heritage–mobility integration
Urbanism & Settlements	9	Traditional settlements, cultural landscapes, urban morphology
Public Space, Design & Social Inclusion	5	Placemaking, participatory planning, youth in public space
Total	42	-

The concentration of studies within mobility and heritage domains suggests that walkability is most frequently examined through physical or conservation-oriented frameworks. Comparatively few studies explicitly investigate how social interaction, youth engagement, and everyday cultural practices contribute to walkable environments. This imbalance highlights a persistent gap between technical assessments of walkability and the lived experiences of urban users.

Methodologically, the reviewed literature demonstrates considerable interdisciplinarity (Table 2). Spatial and morphological analyses remain dominant; however, qualitative and participatory approaches have gained increasing prominence in recent years.

Table 2. Methodological Approaches in Reviewed Studies (Source: Author)

Methodological Approach	Description	No. of Studies
Spatial Mapping & Morphological Analysis	Mapping historic routes and street networks	10
Ethnographic & Qualitative Methods	Interviews, observations, participatory research	9
GIS-Based Network & Accessibility Analysis	Connectivity and accessibility assessment	8
Cultural Landscape & Heritage Assessment	Mobility linked with memory and sacred geography	7

Methodological Approach	Description	No. of Studies
Case Study & Comparative Analysis	Context-specific comparisons	5
Policy & Planning Review	Evaluation of planning frameworks	3
Total	-	42

Although methodological diversity is evident, quantitative and spatial approaches continue to dominate. Experiential, symbolic, and social dimensions of walking remain comparatively underrepresented, reinforcing the need for more culturally grounded frameworks of walkability.

4.2 Thematic Findings

The thematic coding process identified five recurring cultural determinants that shape walkability within historic urban cores: (i) ritual and religious practices, (ii) heritage and collective memory, (iii) informal social interaction, (iv) experiential and environmental qualities, and (v) youth participation and public life.

4.2.1 Ritual Practices and Cultural Mobility

The literature consistently demonstrates that ritual and religious practices generate sustained pedestrian activity within historic urban environments. Walking routes associated with temples, shrines, mosques, pilgrimage circuits, and ceremonial processions often function as culturally significant mobility corridors.

In Varanasi, pedestrian movement linking the ghats of the Ganga River with temples and bazaars supports daily religious practices while reinforcing cultural continuity. Similarly, processional routes associated with festivals and religious events transform streets into spaces of collective participation. These findings suggest that pedestrian movement within historic cities is frequently shaped by cultural obligations and social traditions rather than purely functional travel demands.

The review indicates that ritual practices contribute to walkability by creating predictable patterns of pedestrian use, strengthening place attachment, and reinforcing collective identity.

4.2.2 Heritage, Identity, and Collective Memory

A second recurring theme concerns the relationship between walking, heritage, and cultural identity. Historic pedestrian networks often connect culturally significant landmarks, neighbourhoods, and public spaces, enabling individuals to engage directly with layers of urban history.

The Ahmedabad Heritage Walk demonstrates how pedestrian movement can support heritage interpretation while strengthening local identity. Similarly, historic street

networks in Indian urban cores function as repositories of collective memory where cultural meanings accumulate through repeated use and social experience.

The findings suggest that heritage environments enhance walkability not simply through architectural quality but by embedding cultural narratives within everyday movement patterns. Walking therefore becomes a mechanism through which urban identity is experienced, remembered, and reproduced.

4.2.3 Informal Social Interaction and Everyday Urbanism

The strongest finding emerging from the review concerns the role of informal social interaction in sustaining walkable environments. Streets in historic urban cores frequently operate as spaces of exchange, observation, and everyday social engagement.

In Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi), pedestrian activity is closely intertwined with informal commerce, street vending, and routine social encounters. Likewise, Colaba Causeway in Mumbai illustrates how continuous pedestrian movement supports both economic vitality and social interaction within a mixed-use heritage environment.

The findings indicate that walkability is strengthened when pedestrian routes support opportunities for interaction rather than simply movement. Markets, street vendors, tea stalls, and public gathering spaces contribute to urban vitality by generating activity throughout the day. These informal practices transform pedestrian corridors into social infrastructure that fosters familiarity, trust, and community cohesion.

4.2.4 Experiential and Environmental Qualities

Beyond cultural practices, the literature highlights the importance of experiential and environmental qualities in shaping pedestrian behaviour. Walkable environments are often characterised by sensory richness, visual interest, climatic comfort, and human-scale design.

Historic urban cores frequently provide varied visual experiences through architectural diversity, active street frontages, and culturally significant landmarks. Shaded streets, narrow lanes, arcades, and mixed-use environments contribute to pedestrian comfort while enhancing experiential quality.

The review demonstrates that walking decisions are influenced not only by accessibility but also by how environments are perceived and experienced. Sensory and environmental conditions therefore play a critical role in supporting culturally meaningful pedestrian activity.

4.2.5 Youth Participation and Everyday Public Life

Youth participation emerged as a recurring but underexplored theme. Historic pedestrian environments often provide accessible settings for exploration, socialisation,

observation, and cultural engagement. Streets become important sites where young people encounter community life and participate in collective cultural practices.

Despite this significance, youth perspectives remain largely absent from conventional walkability assessments and planning frameworks. Existing interventions frequently prioritise tourism management, beautification, or vehicular circulation rather than the needs of everyday users.

The findings suggest that recognising youth as active participants in public life can strengthen both cultural continuity and social inclusion. Walkable environments that support informal participation contribute to intergenerational knowledge transfer and long-term community resilience.

4.3 Synthesis

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that walkability within historic urban cores is shaped by a complex interaction of cultural, social, experiential, and spatial factors. Ritual practices, heritage networks, informal social interaction, environmental quality, and youth participation collectively contribute to pedestrian vitality. These dimensions are rarely captured by conventional walkability indicators focused on connectivity, accessibility, and safety alone.

The review therefore supports the argument that walkability should be understood not solely as transport infrastructure but as a form of cultural infrastructure that sustains identity, memory, participation, and everyday urban life. Where pedestrian networks remain integrated with cultural practices and social interaction, they contribute to urban resilience by reinforcing collective memory, community cohesion, and adaptive continuity.

5.5 Comparative Insights

The comparative analysis reveals that culture shapes walkability through multiple and interconnected pathways. While each case demonstrates distinct socio-cultural characteristics, several common patterns emerge.

Ritual and cultural mobility are most evident in Varanasi, where pedestrian movement is closely linked to religious practices, pilgrimage routes, and ceremonial activities. Walking functions not only as a means of movement but also as a mechanism for cultural participation and continuity.

Heritage interpretation and collective identity are particularly visible in Ahmedabad, where the heritage walk integrates pedestrian movement with cultural education, community stewardship, and heritage conservation. The pedestrian experience becomes a medium through which local history and identity are communicated and preserved.

Informal social interaction and everyday urbanism are most prominent in Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi). Markets, street vendors, religious institutions, and public gathering spaces create a dense network of social relationships that sustain pedestrian activity throughout the day. Walkability is reinforced by opportunities for interaction rather than physical accessibility alone.

Contemporary cultural expression and mixed-use vitality characterise Mumbai's Fort–Colaba precinct. Heritage architecture, active street frontages, cultural institutions, and informal commerce collectively generate a vibrant pedestrian environment where mobility and cultural identity remain closely connected.

Across all four cases, walkability emerges as more than a transportation function. Pedestrian networks serve as cultural infrastructure that supports identity formation, collective memory, social interaction, and community participation. The findings suggest that culturally embedded walkability contributes to urban resilience by maintaining continuity between historic urban form and contemporary public life.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Indian Urban Core Case Studies (Source: Author)

Case Study	Dominant Cultural Attribute	Walkability Function	Key Insight
Varanasi	Ritual and sacred practices	Pilgrimage and everyday movement	Walking reinforces cultural continuity and collective memory
Ahmedabad Heritage Walk	Heritage interpretation and community stewardship	Educational engagement and heritage awareness	Heritage routes strengthen place identity and public participation
Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi)	Everyday urbanism and informal economy	Social interaction and cultural exchange	Informal practices sustain pedestrian vitality and community cohesion
Mumbai Fort–Colaba	Cultural identity and mixed-use heritage environment	Leisure, commerce and public life	Walkability supports contemporary cultural expression and urban vibrancy

Key Findings from the Comparative Analysis

The comparison identifies four factors that consistently contribute to culturally walkable environments:

- **Cultural continuity:** Pedestrian routes that support rituals, traditions, and recurring social practices generate sustained pedestrian activity.
- **Social interaction:** Informal gathering spaces, markets, and street-based activities create opportunities for community engagement and strengthen social cohesion.
- **Place identity:** Heritage assets, cultural landmarks, and collective memory enhance the experiential value of walking environments.

- **Everyday participation:** Walkable environments function as accessible public spaces that enable interaction across age groups and support intergenerational continuity.

Together, these findings reinforce the argument that culture-integrated walkability is both a spatial and social process. Rather than focusing solely on accessibility and connectivity, pedestrian planning in historic urban cores must also recognise the cultural practices and everyday interactions that give streets their social meaning and long-term resilience.

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that walkability within historic urban cores cannot be understood solely through conventional indicators of connectivity, accessibility, and pedestrian infrastructure. Rather, walking emerges as a culturally embedded practice shaped by ritual activities, collective memory, social interaction, heritage environments, and every day public life. This supports the study's central argument that culture is not merely a by-product of walkable environments but an active determinant of walking behaviour and pedestrian experience.

The reviewed literature and comparative case studies reveal that pedestrian networks frequently function as cultural infrastructure. In Varanasi, ritual pathways connecting temples, ghats, and markets sustain both religious practices and daily mobility. In Ahmedabad, heritage walks transform pedestrian movement into a medium for cultural interpretation and community engagement. Similarly, the everyday street life of Shahjahanabad and the mixed-use vibrancy of Mumbai's Fort–Colaba precinct illustrate how informal social interaction and cultural identity contribute to sustained pedestrian activity. These examples suggest that walking within historic urban cores is simultaneously a spatial, cultural, and social process.

The findings further highlight the importance of everyday urbanism in shaping walkable environments. While conventional planning approaches often focus on physical infrastructure, the review demonstrates that informal practices such as street vending, spontaneous social interaction, neighbourhood gatherings, and festival-related activities significantly contribute to pedestrian vitality. Walkability therefore depends not only on the quality of streets and sidewalks but also on the social and cultural activities that animate them. This perspective expands the understanding of walkability from a transport-oriented concept to one that encompasses public life, cultural expression, and urban belonging.

The study also identifies a significant disconnect between existing planning frameworks and the socio-cultural realities of historic urban environments. Contemporary pedestrian interventions frequently prioritise traffic management, streetscape beautification, tourism promotion, and accessibility improvements. While these measures remain important, they often overlook the informal practices that sustain everyday public life. As a result, pedestrian spaces risk becoming regulated corridors

designed primarily for circulation and consumption rather than inclusive public environments that support social interaction and cultural continuity.

A recurring theme across the reviewed literature concerns the role of heritage and collective memory in shaping pedestrian behaviour. Historic streets are not simply movement corridors; they are repositories of cultural narratives accumulated through repeated use and shared experience. The findings suggest that heritage contributes to walkability not only through physical preservation but also through its capacity to reinforce place identity and emotional attachment. This observation supports emerging arguments within heritage studies that mobility should be understood as an integral component of living cultural landscapes rather than as a separate functional system.

The review additionally highlights the underexplored role of youth within walkability discourse. Historic pedestrian environments frequently provide accessible spaces for cultural participation, observation, learning, and social interaction. However, young people remain largely absent from both mobility planning and heritage management. Recognising youth as active contributors to urban culture rather than passive users of public space can strengthen intergenerational continuity and promote more inclusive approaches to pedestrian planning.

From a policy perspective, the findings expose significant institutional challenges. Mobility planning, heritage conservation, urban design, and tourism management often operate within separate administrative frameworks, resulting in fragmented approaches to pedestrian environments. Transport agencies typically prioritise movement efficiency, heritage authorities focus on conservation, and tourism agencies emphasise visitor experience. Such fragmentation limits opportunities to recognise and support the cultural practices that sustain walkable environments.

These challenges are particularly relevant within the Indian context. Programmes such as the Smart Cities Mission and AMRUT have contributed significantly to pedestrianisation and streetscape improvement initiatives. However, many interventions continue to emphasise physical upgrading, beautification, and tourism branding while paying comparatively little attention to culturally embedded mobility practices. Informal vendors, ritual gatherings, and everyday social activities are frequently regulated or displaced during redevelopment processes, potentially weakening the very cultural dynamics that contribute to pedestrian vitality.

The findings therefore suggest the need for a more integrated approach to pedestrian planning. Culture-integrated walkability requires recognising ritual routes, informal economies, social interaction, and collective memory as essential components of urban infrastructure rather than peripheral cultural attributes. Tools such as participatory cultural mapping, storytelling initiatives, heritage-sensitive street design, and community-led planning processes offer potential mechanisms for incorporating these dimensions into planning practice.

Ultimately, the study argues that walkability should be understood as a multidimensional system operating at the intersection of mobility, culture, heritage, and

public life. Viewing pedestrian networks as cultural infrastructure expands the scope of walkability assessment beyond physical performance indicators and creates opportunities for more inclusive, resilient, and culturally grounded urban futures. Such an approach is particularly relevant for historic urban cores, where maintaining continuity between everyday cultural practices and contemporary urban development remains a critical planning challenge.

7. Conceptual Framework: Culture-Integrated Walkability

The findings of this study demonstrate that walkability within historic urban cores is shaped by a complex interaction of spatial, cultural, social, experiential, and institutional factors. The thematic synthesis identified five recurring cultural determinants of walkability: ritual practices, heritage and collective memory, informal social interaction, experiential quality, and youth participation which extend beyond the conventional parameters of connectivity and accessibility. These findings suggest that culturally embedded walkability cannot be adequately understood through spatial metrics alone.

To synthesise these insights, this study proposes a **Culture-Integrated Walkability (CIW) Framework**, which conceptualises walkability as a multidimensional system operating across five interrelated dimensions: **spatial-morphological, cultural-symbolic, sensory-experiential, social-relational, and governance-institutional**. Rather than functioning as independent variables, these dimensions interact continuously to shape pedestrian experiences and influence the long-term vitality of historic urban environments (Table 4).

The framework positions pedestrian networks as forms of cultural infrastructure through which mobility, identity, memory, and public life are simultaneously produced and experienced. It provides both a conceptual lens for understanding walkability and a practical structure for future research, planning, and policy evaluation.

7.1 Spatial-Morphological Dimension

The spatial-morphological dimension addresses the physical characteristics of pedestrian environments that enable movement and accessibility. Historic urban cores often contain fine-grained street networks, mixed land uses, active frontages, and dense concentrations of heritage assets that naturally encourage walking. However, the findings indicate that physical accessibility alone does not guarantee culturally vibrant pedestrian environments.

The cases of Varanasi, Shahjahanabad, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai demonstrate that street configuration becomes meaningful when connected to social and cultural activities. Analytical tools such as GIS-based network analysis, spatial mapping, and space syntax can therefore be used not only to assess connectivity but also to identify critical cultural corridors and areas vulnerable to fragmentation.

7.2 Cultural-Symbolic Dimension

The cultural-symbolic dimension recognises that walking routes often carry meanings that extend beyond their functional role. Ritual pathways, pilgrimage circuits, market streets, sacred geographies, and historically significant routes embed cultural narratives within everyday movement systems.

The thematic findings demonstrate that cultural identity and collective memory are frequently reinforced through repeated pedestrian practices. In historic urban environments, walking becomes a medium through which traditions are sustained and cultural belonging is reproduced. Participatory cultural mapping, archival documentation, oral histories, and ethnographic research provide useful methods for identifying and documenting these symbolic layers.

7.3 Sensory-Experiential Dimension

Walking is fundamentally an embodied experience. The sensory-experiential dimension therefore focuses on how pedestrians perceive and interact with their surroundings through visual, auditory, climatic, and tactile conditions.

The review identified environmental comfort, visual richness, street activity, architectural character, and microclimatic conditions as important contributors to pedestrian experience. Historic urban cores often offer layered sensory environments that strengthen emotional attachment and encourage prolonged engagement with public space. Methods such as sensory mapping, behavioural observation, photographic documentation, and walk-along studies can help evaluate experiential quality beyond conventional accessibility indicators.

7.4 Social-Relational Dimension

The social-relational dimension emphasises the role of everyday interaction in sustaining walkability. Streets function not only as movement corridors but also as public arenas where social relationships, cultural practices, and collective identities are continuously negotiated.

The findings highlight the significance of informal social interaction, street-based commerce, community gatherings, and youth participation in generating pedestrian vitality. Walkable environments support opportunities for observation, encounter, participation, and belonging. This dimension therefore focuses on user diversity, inclusivity, informal activities, and community engagement. Community workshops, perception surveys, focus groups, and participatory planning exercises provide important tools for assessing these social dynamics.

7.5 Governance-Institutional Dimension

The governance-institutional dimension addresses the policy and administrative structures that influence whether culturally embedded walkability can be sustained over time. The discussion highlighted how fragmentation between mobility planning, heritage conservation, tourism management, and urban development frequently undermines integrated pedestrian strategies.

Culture-integrated walkability requires institutional coordination that recognises pedestrian environments as both mobility infrastructure and cultural assets. Policy analysis, institutional mapping, regulatory review, and cross-sector planning mechanisms can help identify opportunities for collaboration and long-term management. Integrating cultural indicators within mobility planning frameworks can further support more holistic decision-making.

7.6 Operationalising Culture-Integrated Walkability

Taken together, these five dimensions move the discourse beyond conventional infrastructure provision toward a more holistic understanding of pedestrian environments as cultural systems. The framework demonstrates that successful walkability depends not only on physical accessibility but also on the ability of streets and public spaces to support cultural continuity, social interaction, identity formation, and everyday participation.

Importantly, the framework provides a foundation for future empirical operationalisation. Each dimension can be translated into measurable indicators that capture symbolic, experiential, social, and institutional qualities alongside traditional spatial measures. Such an approach would enable more comprehensive assessment of walkability in historic urban cores while supporting context-sensitive planning and design interventions.

Table 4. Proposed Dimensions of Culture-Integrated Walkability (Source: Author)

Dimension	Key Indicators	Suggested Methods	Expected Outcomes
Spatial-Morphological	Connectivity, pedestrian continuity, mixed land use, heritage proximity	GIS analysis, network analysis, space syntax	Identification of cultural pedestrian corridors
Cultural-Symbolic	Ritual routes, cultural landmarks, collective memory, heritage narratives	Participatory mapping, archival research, ethnography	Recognition of culturally significant pedestrian networks
Sensory-Experiential	Visual quality, thermal comfort, soundscape, street character	Sensory mapping, behavioural observation	Enhanced pedestrian experience and place attachment

Dimension	Key Indicators	Suggested Methods	Expected Outcomes
Social-Relational	User diversity, informal interaction, youth participation, inclusivity	Focus groups, surveys, community workshops	Increased social cohesion and cultural participation
Governance-Institutional	Policy integration, institutional coordination, cultural planning	Policy review, institutional mapping	Culture-sensitive pedestrian governance

The proposed CIW Framework establishes a conceptual bridge between mobility planning, heritage conservation, public-space design, and cultural studies. By positioning pedestrian networks as cultural infrastructure, it provides a structured basis for understanding and evaluating walkability within historic urban cores and contributes to the development of more inclusive, resilient, and culturally grounded urban futures.

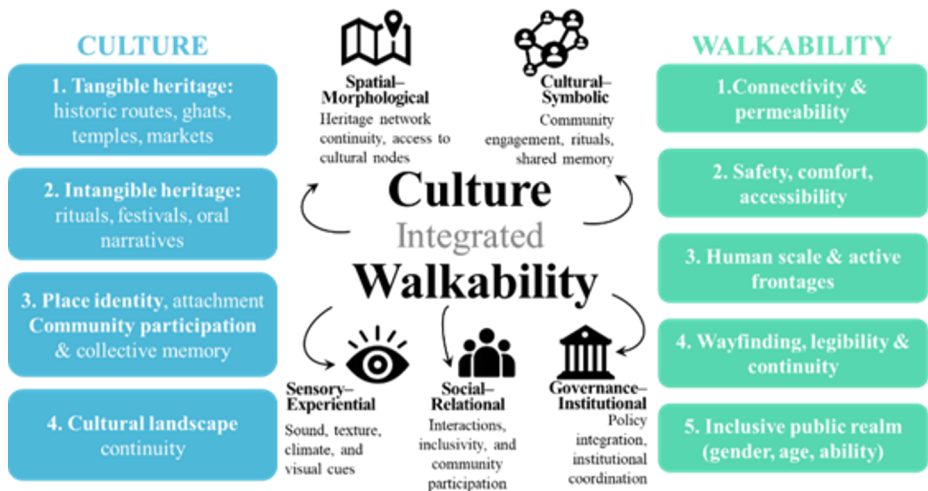


Figure 7. Conceptual framework for culture-integrated walkability (Source: Author)

The framework (Table 4) underscores that sustainable walkability in historic urban cores requires alignment across physical design, cultural continuity, experiential quality, social inclusion, and institutional capacity. Spatial accessibility without symbolic recognition risks producing technically walkable yet socially sterile environments. Conversely, strong cultural identity without pedestrian support may restrict inclusivity and adaptability. By articulating these interdependent dimensions,

the proposed model advances walkability discourse beyond conventional metrics and offers a structured basis for future empirical research, policy innovation, and context-sensitive urban design interventions.

8. Planning and Design Implications

The proposed Culture-Integrated Walkability (CIW) Framework has important implications for planning and design practice in historic urban cores. The findings suggest that pedestrian environments should be understood not only as mobility infrastructure but also as cultural systems that support identity, collective memory, social interaction, and every day public life. Consequently, planning interventions must move beyond mobility-centred approaches and address walkability across spatial, cultural, experiential, social, and institutional dimensions.

At the **spatial-morphological level**, pedestrian planning should prioritise continuity, permeability, and accessibility while safeguarding connections between heritage assets, markets, public spaces, and community facilities. Historic urban cores require context-sensitive interventions that respond to existing urban morphology rather than standardised streetscape solutions. Measures such as shaded pedestrian corridors, adaptive street furniture, protected vending zones, universal accessibility improvements, and climate-responsive materials can enhance pedestrian comfort while preserving historic character.

At the **cultural-symbolic level**, planning frameworks should recognise culturally significant pedestrian routes as heritage assets. Ritual pathways, festival routes, market streets, and neighbourhood walking networks often constitute important repositories of collective memory and local identity. Cultural mapping, oral-history documentation, participatory heritage inventories, and community-led storytelling initiatives can help identify and protect these cultural layers within urban development processes.

The **sensory-experiential dimension** highlights the importance of designing for pedestrian experience rather than movement efficiency alone. Visual continuity, street-level activity, thermal comfort, soundscapes, landscape elements, and architectural character influence how people perceive and engage with public space. Incorporating these qualities into design guidelines can strengthen place attachment and encourage sustained pedestrian activity.

The **social-relational dimension** emphasises inclusivity and community participation. Walkable environments should support diverse users, including women, children, elderly populations, informal workers, and young people. Youth inclusion is particularly important because pedestrian spaces frequently function as environments for learning, socialisation, and cultural participation. Participatory mapping exercises, community workshops, digital storytelling platforms, and co-design processes can provide mechanisms for incorporating local knowledge into planning decisions.

At the **governance-institutional level**, culture-integrated walkability requires stronger coordination between mobility planning, heritage conservation, tourism

management, and urban development agencies. Integrating pedestrian networks as cultural assets within Master Plans, Smart City initiatives, heritage management strategies, and mobility policies can reduce institutional fragmentation. Cross-sector coordination mechanisms, shared monitoring frameworks, and long-term management strategies are essential to ensure that pedestrianisation projects remain socially embedded rather than functioning solely as beautification or tourism initiatives.

Ultimately, protecting walkability in historic urban cores involves preserving the everyday practices that animate public life alongside conserving the built environment. Operationalising the CIW Framework can support planning approaches that are accessible, inclusive, culturally grounded, and resilient to contemporary urban transformation.

9. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between culture and walkability within historic urban cores and argued that walking should be understood as a culturally embedded practice rather than solely a mobility function. Through a systematic thematic review of 42 studies and a comparative analysis of Indian urban core case studies, the research identified how ritual practices, heritage environments, informal social interaction, experiential qualities, and youth participation collectively shape walkable urban environments.

The findings demonstrate that pedestrian networks in historic cities function as more than transportation infrastructure. They operate as forms of cultural infrastructure that sustain collective memory, social interaction, cultural identity, and everyday public life. Walking routes linking temples, markets, neighbourhood spaces, and heritage precincts contribute to the reproduction of cultural practices while reinforcing place attachment and community belonging.

A key contribution of the study is the development of the **Culture-Integrated Walkability (CIW) Framework**, which conceptualises walkability across five interrelated dimensions: spatial-morphological, cultural-symbolic, sensory-experiential, social-relational, and governance-institutional. By integrating perspectives from mobility studies, heritage research, public-space theory, and everyday urbanism, the framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural processes shape pedestrian environments.

The study further argues that culture should be recognised as an active determinant of walkability rather than a secondary outcome of pedestrian infrastructure. Conventional planning frameworks frequently prioritise accessibility, safety, and mobility efficiency while overlooking ritual practices, informal economies, collective memory, and everyday social interaction. As a result, many pedestrian interventions fail to engage with the cultural dynamics that sustain urban vitality and social resilience.

For rapidly urbanising cities, particularly within the Indian context, adopting a culture-integrated perspective offers opportunities to reconcile conservation and

transformation. Recognising pedestrian networks as cultural systems can support more inclusive planning approaches that integrate heritage conservation, community participation, and mobility planning. Such an approach encourages planners and policymakers to move beyond infrastructure provision and towards strategies that strengthen cultural continuity while accommodating contemporary urban change.

Future research should focus on developing measurable indicators for the operationalisation of the CIW Framework and testing its applicability across diverse urban contexts. Empirical investigations involving participatory mapping, behavioural observation, and community-based assessment methods could further refine understanding of how cultural dimensions contribute to walkability. By broadening the scope of walkability research beyond physical accessibility, the study contributes to emerging discussions on culturally grounded, people-centred, and resilient urban futures.

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