

The Rise of the Humanitarian Planning Committee

Can We Make It?

-Reflections on the Discussions at WUF10

Mapping Little Syria

Division Student Grant Report

Three Informal Transportation Nodes in the Beqaa Valley, Lebanon

Addressing a Water Scarcity Crisis in Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Reflections on Accra's Urban History with Lessons for Professional Planners

INTERPLAN

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Cover Photo: View from Jaigarh Fort - Jaipur, Rajasthan. February 2019. Photo by Kira Baltutis



Creating Great Communities for All

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Planning is, at its heart, a social profession. We collaborate on projects, we present to boards and councils, we network for knowledge, and we devise ever more elaborate schemes for public engagement. As much as we may complain about the never-ending meetings that seem to conspire against us sitting at our desks completing tasks, a lot of those meetings are where the work really gets done. Our interactions with our colleagues and with our communities are what energizes and inspires us and we are all suffering from our current isolation.

For those of us not remanded to never-ending childcare, our present confinement has provided opportunity to reflect on the role that we play in the world. The conception of resilience that we have been promoting to the world demands that we seek to bounce forward, using our current challenges as a mechanism to return better than we were before. Already, there has been no shortage of articles written about how the pandemic will affect our profession, the way we work, and the shape of the communities we build. Much of this revolves around values and policies that we already should be promoting: providing more accessibility to our public meetings, focusing efforts on those lacking housing or struggling to pay bills, building extra capacity to ensure that basic services function.

The International Division is also reflecting on what impact we want to make. Certainly, you will be seeing content revolving around the intersection between planning and public health coming out in the next few months. Our Vice-Chair for Special Projects, Tippe Morlan, and our new Webinar Coordinator, Carter Williams, are putting together our annual business meeting, a webinar series, and other events for you to take advantage of at home. Some of you (we hope very few) may face employment challenges in the new economy, and we hope that you will reach out to us for networking opportunities.

Most of all, the International Division is strengthening our relationship with APA National to make an impact on policy and advocacy. We want to ensure that a global focus is incorporated into future APA policy guides and advocacy efforts. We also want to ensure that issues that are of particular importance to international planning are placed on APA's agenda. Our Division Members have considerable expertise on a wide range of international planning issues; we want take every opportunity to utilize that expertise to synthesize new ideas, build a repository of knowledge, provide resources, and improve our global communities.

Our Division is fortunate to have in place a strong group of leaders to help develop and implement our policy and advocacy agenda. These efforts are being led by our two Policy and Advocacy Coordinators, Ras Tafari Cannady II for the US and Janett Tapia for Europe. Our workgroup on Planning for Humanitarian Assistance and Crises has a new leader, Nathaniel Echeverria. We also have Coordinators in place for two Division Council Initiatives, Kate Holmquist for Aging and Livable Communities and Mia Candy for Planning for Home. If you are interested in learning more about or supporting any of these initiatives, we strongly recommend that you reach out to the appropriate Coordinator.

I hope that you are all healthy and safe as we seek to get through our current crisis. Please take care of yourselves. ■



Michael Kolber, AICP, is a senior planner for the City of Trenton, NJ. He worked for the NJ Departments of Environmental Protection and Community Affairs and served overseas as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Burkina Faso and as a Monitoring Specialist for the International Rescue Committee in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Domestically, Mr. Kolber served as a volunteer in the United Way of Greater Union County and the Manhattan Borough President's Office. Michael has an M.S. in Urban Planning from Columbia University.

Convened by UN-Habitat, the 10th World Urban Forum occurred in Abu Dhabi. The Forum's focus was to address the challenges of sustainable urbanization. APA, along with our partners in the Global Planners Network (GPN), hosted a session highlighting climate change and culminated in the issuing and joint signing of [The Abu Dhabi Declaration](#). The declaration outlines the value and role of planners in regional and urban development. It will help guide discussions with stakeholders and the general public to elevate their understanding of the role of planning in community.

On 12 February, the Steering Committee of the World Urban Campaign (WUC) convened for its 22nd meeting (SCM22) in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The meeting was held in conjunction with the tenth session of the World Urban Forum. Three new Chairs of the WUC Steering Committee were elected: Bert Smolders (Arcadis NV), Sri Husnaini Sofjan (Huirou Commission), Sandeep Chachra (ActionAid India). The Steering Committee reconstituted its Working Groups into the following three committees:

- WUC Vision and Workplan
- WUC Terms of Reference
- Urban Thinkers Campuses

APA President Kurt Christiansen, FAICP, represented APA in the GPN events. Two other GPN members, Dy Currie, President of the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP) and Eleanor Mohammed, RPP, EP, President of the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP), both spoke at the Habitat Professionals Roundtable.

US Cities and Sustainable Development Goals

The SDGs Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were published by UN Habitat in 2015 comprising 17 goals to achieve prosperity as well as environmental wellbeing. They are worldwide goals which need local implementation. Urban planning plays an important role in making the strategies, especially for the Goal 11 (Urban Sustainability) and the Goal 13 (Climate Change). US cities are getting involved in the action. New York (2018) and Los Angeles (2019) are pioneers in producing Voluntary Local Reviews, demonstrating how they are adapting the goals into detailed local plans for implementation. Baltimore and San Jose completed their SDGs mapping worksheet and a specific "SDG recommendations report" on how to align city sustainability goals with the SDGs in 2016. San Francisco is having its "Bring the Goals of the UN Home to San Francisco", a project from the Voice of Humanity San Francisco. University of Virginia Graduate Planning Student Kui Cai prepared a report on the use of the SDGs as an APA Extern in January. ■

Abu Dhabi Declared Actions:

https://wuf.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/WUF10_final_declared_actions.pdf



Jeff Soule, FAICP, is the International Advisor for APA. Soule serves as a US delegate to the General Assembly for ICOMOS and advises governments regarding cultural conservation and is member of the US committee for Habitat III. Jeffrey represents APA at a variety of international forums including the United Nations Habitat, UNESCO and is the Focal Point for ICOMOS on the World Urban Campaign.

The Rise of the Humanitarian Planning Committee

In the midst of the novel coronavirus pandemic most of us are feeling the effects of “cabin fever.” We’re used to a broad range to roam and the confined spaces of our houses and apartments feel even more cramped when sheltering in place with family and close friends. We’ve had to transition our routines into cramped quarters asking the spaces in our homes to wear multiple hats; the dining room doubles as a make-shift office and perhaps the living room functions as a yoga studio while the kitchen becomes the “day care.” Yet, this type of double duty is part of everyday life for the residents of Towerville, a planned resettlement community with a population of over 7,000 residents located on the outskirts of Manila, Philippines. Each standard unit is 18 m2 (about 194 gsf) and home to an average of 6 family members.

In Towerville, every space – inside or out – wears multiple hats. Streets are for parking, playing, talking, grilling, and fighting. This is not an informal community or what many would call a “slum.” Towerville is a planned social housing resettlement community. It was developed in response to informal communities within Manila, to natural disasters such as Typhoon Ketsana, to climate change and sea level rise, to eminent domain, to the pressures of urban-rural migration. Towerville, and the hundreds of resettlement communities in the Philippines as well as the thousands of resettlement communities worldwide, are currently considered to be a reasonable solution. The reasoning, though, is generally economic in nature and discussed in terms of spatial efficiency.

I think many of you with cabin fever might closely empathize with the struggle between spatial efficiency and livability. But I also think that many of you could go beyond empathy. As planners we have specific skills to understand how space is constructed, how it is experienced, and how to leverage it for stakeholders. Right now, planners have an essential role to play as governments and societies grapple with global issues of limited resources, conflict, economic collapse, natural disasters, and political instability in largely urban contexts.

However, our profession is undervalued. The systems and processes by which these critical issues are formally addressed have been siloed outside of the design professions and planners have not had a seat at the table. That is why a collective of passionate and experienced planners from the International Division initiated the Humanitarian Planning Committee (HPC). We believe that our stakeholders can be defined broadly – humans. We believe that humanitarian refers to a focus on improving peoples’ lives in the face of a specific adversity. We believe that planners’ skills and experience are desperately needed to address global issues in areas



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that have not traditionally been considered. One of our first steps as HPC has been to partner with the Global Alliance for Urban Crisis - a multi-disciplinary, collaborative community of practices that works to prevent, prepare for and effectively respond to humanitarian crises in urban settings.

Change is happening. One prominent actor in the humanitarian community of practice that is starting to invest in planners is the non-profit Save the Children Australia (SCA). SCA established an “urban resilience” line of effort and began to reconfigure some of their humanitarian projects to add a research and design phase before the typical implementation phase. I had the opportunity to work with SCA as a planner through a fellowship with the Julie and Rocky Dixon Foundation for Innovation on project BURST (Building Urban Children’s Resilience to the Shocks and Threats of Resettlement). While the project addressed many topics, our team of planners focused on the objective of supportive spaces for children.

We developed a vision plan and area development plan for Towerville and three other resettlement communities that highlighted child-friendly spaces in line with the United Nation’s Sustainability Development Goal 11 (and the

Child Friendly Cities Initiative). We presented our plans in a public workshop to stakeholders from the federal, municipal, and local governments as well as community residents. Our work has been adopted into the on-going implementation strategy (FIG).

The case of Towerville and project BURST illustrate the opportunity and need for planners to professionally engage in humanitarian issues. The International Division’s HPC intends to advance the role of planners in humanitarian assistance. We are a newly established working group and need your voice to help shape our strategic direction. We would like to invite you to learn more by attending one of our bi-monthly meetings and/or joining our mailing list.

Our group now meets monthly. Please contact HPC Chair, Nate Echeverria (echeverria.nathaniel@gmail.com) for the meeting details or to join the mailing list. ■



FIG (L-R): Planner Lala Magayanes presents the goals of the urban design strategy. Ms. Magayanes and Area Coordinator, Myka Viernes listen to comments from stakeholders (photos by author, 2018).

APA International Division

The 2nd International Planning Excellence Award-Latin America

Category: **Community and Regional Planning**

Project Name: **Urban Renewal Partial Plan Triángulo de Fenicia**

Project Location: **Bogota, Colombia**

Recipient: **Alejandro Gaviria Uribe**

Institute/Firm: **Universidad de los Andes – Programa Progresia Fenicia**

Category: **Urban Design Award**

Project Name: **San Salvador Historic Center Corridor Placemaking Strategy**

Project Location: **San Salvador, El Salvador**

Recipients: **Alberto Harth, Carlos Ferrufino**

Institute/Firm: **CIVITAS = URBANISMO + ARQUITECTURA**

Category: **Transportation Planning**

Project Name: **Vargem Grande Paulista Free-Fare Transportation System**

Project Location: **Vargem Grande Paulista, Brazil**

Recipients: **Thiago Gomes, Rafael Siqueira, Bianca Oliveira, Bruna Lourenço, Edison Velasques, Paulo Silva, Rafael Siqueira, Roberto Gentileza, Tatiana Landi, Caio Ortega, Igor Gonçalves, Nayara Oliveira, Camila Bandeira**

Institute/Firm: **Polo Planejamento and Prefeitura de Vargem Grande Paulista**

Category: **Special Award for Excellence in Public Involvement**

Project Name: **Plan Especial de Intervención en el Corredor Metropolitano de Quito**

Project Location: **Quito, Ecuador**

Recipients: **Fernando Carrión, Gonzalo Estupiñán, Grace Yépez y equipo, Jaime Erazo, Estefany Mena, Paulina Cepeda, Nicanor Benítez**

Institute/Firm: **Municipio del Distrito Metropolitano de Quito**

Category: **Special Award for Excellence in Advancing Social Equity**

Project Name: **San Marcos Territorial Development Plan**

Project Location: **San Marcos, San Salvador**

Recipients: **Alberto Harth, Carlos Ferrufino**

Institute/Firm: **CIVITAS = URBANISMO + ARQUITECTURA**





Cities of Opportunities: connecting culture and innovation - a call for embracing culture and innovation as drivers for sustainable Urbanization

even began. Nevertheless, a broad spectrum of delegates spared no efforts to attend in order to strengthen hope and formulate breakthrough actions! Participants represented widely divergent stances: from professionals with evidence-based experience to academics equipped with deeply rooted theories; from international agencies to grassroots initiatives; and from distinguished, high-level politicians to marginalized working-class laypersons. A particular story has stuck with me: two women sat in front me in a session. One took the opportunity to interrupt the proceedings and introduce her neighbor to the audience. She described the tough life in the streets and slums in India in which her companion had grown up, but politely noted, “She may not understand what you’re saying because of the language barrier” but she was eager to show up at this event!

expectations, the UN has asserted the need to expedite progress, thus calling for a “decade of action” starting right then toward the target year of 2030. Urbanization is the transformational tool that is believed will bring a decent way of life; however, this is only achievable by harnessing this tool to reap positive benefits and avoid negative impacts. At the dawn of current millennium, humanity has come to realize that the rapid unplanned urbanization in the second half of the twentieth century has destroyed a considerable portion of our planet and now there is a growing need not only to prioritize the environmental dimension in development but also to add new drivers: culture and innovation. Culture takes into account urban heritage, traditional crafts and techniques, and the ever-changing and diverse nature of societies. Innovation, in contrast, refers to technological advances, creative industries, and smart city initiatives. As a platform for encounters and human interactions, cities bring incredible opportunities to shape our future. Both culture and innovation are strongly linked to the concept of sustainability, as well as indispensable in providing decent jobs, stimulating economic growth, maintaining dynamic identity, and promoting inclusive communities.

The forum raised the theme of “Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation”—a call to embrace both culture and innovation as drivers for sustainable urbanization. The forum’s aim was to declare voluntary actions and commitments for the coming two years to implement the New Urban Agenda (NUA), which in turn is viewed as an accelerator for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. Since global progress toward the SDGs still falls well below

The forum featured a range of diverse of events and activities, ranging in length from “urban library” events of

Can We Make It?

- Reflections on the Discussions leveled at WUF10

by Wail Bakhit



Wail I. Bakhit is an urban planner with an experience spanning over 17 years in government, real estate and academic sectors. His main areas of interest ranging from national development and comprehensive planning, to the role of urban policy and urban design in achieving a decent quality of life. During his career, Wail has participated in the guidance and supervision of numerous outstanding local and national projects in Saudi Arabia, developed by acclaimed international consultants and received global appreciation. Currently he works as a senior research associate at the Center for Local Governance, a think tank institution affiliated with Prince Sultan University located in Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia. Wail holds a B.Sc. in architecture and a Master of City and Regional Planning (MCRP).

Implementing the New Urban Agenda. The decade for action. Leaving no one and no place behind. These are the key catchphrases that summarize discussions at the tenth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF10) convened by UN-Habitat. From February 8 to 13, 2020, Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, had the privilege of organizing this international urban gathering, held for the first time in the Middle East. In a unique venue with varying capacity, and through an overwhelming program, around 13,000 participants from 168 countries enjoyed an intense week of hopes, deliberations, networking, and activism that culminated in the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions. In this article, I will share my overall observations on the

discussions, after first describing the world context, the meeting’s urban focus, the diverse attendance, as well as the content of discussions and activities, summarizing some of the debates generated.

The Forum was held at a critical time of environmental, political, and health challenges around the world. The devastating effects of climate change, exposed most recently by Australia’s bushfires; global disappointment on declining political commitment, as noted by the UN Secretary General at Madrid’s COP25 meeting; and the attack on populations by the Coronavirus outbreak—all of which have placed deep pressure on those attending this incredible gathering on the urban context before it



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less than one hour to "training" and "dialogue" gatherings that extended over three hours. Settings also ranged from formal organization in assembly rooms to informal presentations in the "SDGs in action" platform. Topics reflected numerous subjects with multifold perspectives. It was hard to choose among the sessions advocating the localization of sustainable goals and delineating a pathway for resilience and risk mitigation, or among those tracking urbanization and mainstreaming planning approaches in some global regions. Other options included sessions on leveraging the healthy use of green and public spaces, bridging the skills gap, and engaging youth in discussions. Nonetheless, despite the difficulty of drawing reflections on all of that was happening at the meeting, I can highlight the following overarching topics reflecting the deliberations of the attendees across the six-day event:

1. Urban conurbations are rapidly emerging and growing in ways that pose urgent questions on how a metropolis is planned, governed, and monitored. This supports the impression that the "metropolis" will be the dominant urban phenomenon in the twentieth century and beyond. Statistics clearly highlight that one megalopolis (a population of more than 10 million) emerges every two years and 20 metropolises (populations of more than 500,000) do so annually!
2. As metropolises become more and more political spaces, urban planners need to devote extra effort to strengthening their roles as key actors in the evidence-based decision-making process. This requires that urban planners become well trained and, then, play a role in "training" politicians and decision-makers!
3. Inequality is the key problem in our cities and manifested in almost every aspect of urban life. Within the planning field, strategic and urban planning expertise distributed

equally the most need communities are the ones who lack such know-how. Data are a prerequisite tool for planning and governing, although access to quality data is inconsistent.

4. In addition to the obstacles posed by data gathering and analysis, bridging the increasing gap between what data exist and what are needed, as well as incorporating data into evidence-based policy formation, still remain challenges in pursuing the SDGs. Another dimension of the problem is the absence of a global definition of what constitutes a "city" or how sustainable goals are measured through agreed-upon criteria and solid-base approaches.

5. Some global charity organizations and aid initiatives have initiated various kinds of outreach to marginalized communities and grassroots groups—not only to advise on particular planning issues but also to promote community-led plans. In such impoverished communities, enabling so-called "barefoot planners" can constitute a forceful remedy to respond to the know-how shortage in these deprived areas.

6. Collaboration is key for practical implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA). It is essential among cities and municipalities to better inform good governance and, among regional states, to improve institutional capacities and solidify their alliances. Moreover, a mechanism for collaboration is important between developed and developing countries to transfer cross-border knowledge and experience and to build a shared platform that helps implement and track progress of the NUA.

7. Public spaces, always synonymous with urban design, attracted more attention at the conference and evoked much discussion through multiple activities. One issue repeatedly mentioned was the need to consider citizens'

engagement from the outset in order to lay foundations for inclusive spaces and emphasize belonging through co-creation. Techniques to analyze the quality of public spaces or to advocate future transformation were shared by numerous experts and specialized research groups. The techniques included incorporating social data analytics, machine learning models, and mixed reality technologies. A shift in the governance of urban design from "hard power" (policies and regulations) to "soft power" (persuading, influencing and advising) for better quality in our cities was also advocated.

8. Mainstreaming urbanization in national development plans is becoming a resurgent phenomenon in developing countries. The hope is to enable good economics that supports prosperity and wellbeing. This is also coupled with the need to advocate strategic integrated urban planning that accounts for all dimensions of sustainable development.

While no single article can sum up the six-day World Urban Forum from February 2020, the eight points above are my best effort. What really amazed me were the high aspirations and promising hope that flashed from the eyes of all I saw, especially women and youth. Although the comprehensive agenda of the forum, along with meaningful deliberations, tackled most of the future urban challenges that are knocking at our door, As part of our continuous aim of achieving practical, tangible, and positive outputs, I feel it is worth sharing my personal comments:

- The core issue underlying the forum organization is the implementation of the NUA in order to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I feel some critical skepticism is warranted about the practicality of those two promising global targets. We may fall prey to the ideal of perfectionism; who can assure that ending poverty in all its form is achievable in the case of SDGs or guarantee that the bulk of urban commitments is attainable in case of the NUA? And when considering the precarious situation of our contradictory world, one may argue that the tangible roadmap of realizing these broad hopes is shrouded in mystery.
- Politics remains a huge burden in the pursuit toward achieving both of the above targets, despite the lofty intentions and declared agreements. Disappointment from the COP25 meeting in Madrid about the no-progress status of the climate change agenda will likely dampen the world's enthusiasm. Still, the world's big players

are manipulating in favor of their businesses, inflicting much pain on impoverished communities, and sending a provocative message to the supporters of a sustainable and prosperous urbanized world.

- "Leaving no one and no place behind" is, undoubtedly, a charming and desirable slogan. But, more important, there are no compulsory commitments or practical mechanism to convince us about the seriousness of this intention. The forum's declared actions refer to "voluntary commitments," whereas tangible measures of progress are still debatable!

- If politics is the first side in the implementation equation, funding is the other. Funding the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the New Urban Agenda (NUA) cannot go through the traditional rigid procedures imposed by international fund agencies. It is widely acknowledged that actions needed to implement both agendas, and other connected commitments such as Paris Agreement, rest at the local level of municipalities. However, many of these municipalities fall short of trustful institutional capacities, hold a long history of bad financial credibility, and exist in countries with corrupt regimes. Taken together, these facts often obstruct financial aid from getting through to those who are in much of need. Such an atmosphere surrounding these local "doers" hampers implementation unless this vicious circle broken down.

- Approaches, paradigms, ideas and techniques presented by many groups and individuals to build sustainable, inclusive, and resilient communities look brilliant and sound promising. Nevertheless, most of them appear as though we are dealing with new communities facing simple problems on vacant lands, forgetting or missing the point that we need to cope with "wicked" problems in "existing" overused territories. To be more realistic and practical, we need a roadmap for the "transformation" of our communities that stuck in problems and challenges.

In conclusion, we all look forward to joining hands in our pursuit toward securing a sustainable and prosperous future for coming generations. But, we have a long way to go and must devote much more time and effort. Ideally, the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum in Katowice, Poland 2022, will come at a more optimistic time, by which time, a considerable portion of our commitments will be met! ■

Mapping Little Syria

by Shaza Loutfi

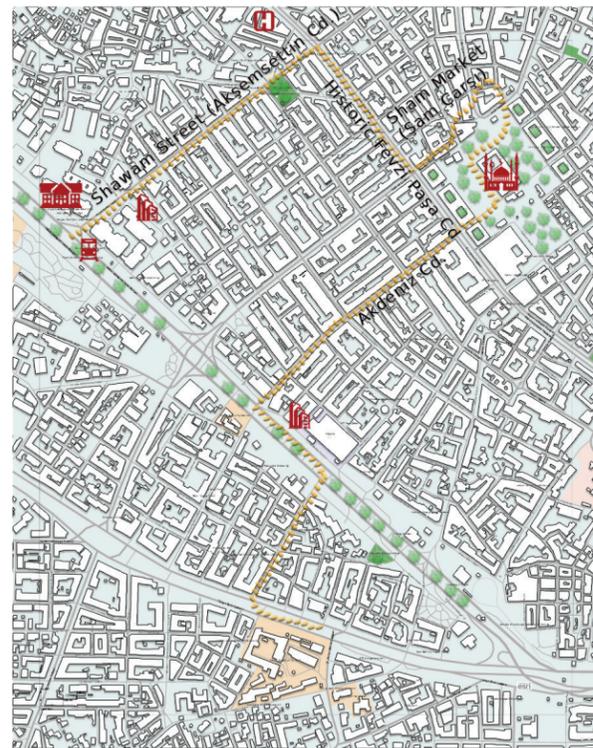


Shaza Loutfi is an independent Research and Development Consultant, specializing in migration. She holds a Master's degree in Urban Planning and Policy from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is a US NSEP Boren Fellowship awardee and consulted on numerous projects for the UNOCHA, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, and more.

In 2016, I moved to Turkey to learn about the planning response to urban Syrian refugees. I quickly learned of the “Little Syria” neighborhood in Istanbul’s Fatih district and was granted access as a bilingual Syrian-American. Unfortunately, during the next three years, I observed harmful narratives monopolizing the Syrian experience in Turkey. To challenge misconceptions, I created an Airbnb walking experience for foreign tourists. Although I sought to accurately reflect the Syrian reality and minimize personal skew in the walk’s design, the experience of guiding multiple, international groups through Little Syria challenged my original framing and revealed a more authentic representation of Syrian refugees.

We would start each walk at the immigration building to discuss the precarious legal status looming over every Syrian’s head. This, of course, included the resulting market of such uncertainty, represented by a Syrian immigration consulting firm just across the street. We would then progress to Shawam street and its restaurants. Though some Istanbul districts have banned Arabic signage, we ate our falafel under the same Arabic sign that adorns their restaurant’s branch in Damascus itself.

One time we spotted a closed restaurant, with a sign on its door indicating that it had not been properly registered with the authorities. It was brazenly open again the following week. On Fevzi Paşa street, I explained that an illegal Syrian health clinic that offered \$6 doctor visits for non-Turkish speaking and undocumented Syrians was just shut down, as Turkey does not allow Syrians to establish their own health centers. If and when it would return was unclear, and what vulnerable Syrians did in the meantime was similarly unknown.



"One way or another, people live, not according to fate, but to their own choices. The desire to create the life you want is not exclusive to the American dream, and refugees are not only familiar with it but are in fact the most affirming expression of it."



In a residential area, we learned that the direction a television satellite dish faces can suggest that Syrians are living in the building, since receiving Arabic rather than Turkish channels required different positioning. Desirable locations with high rents attract “boys’ apartments” (sakan shabābi) where large numbers of young men (up to 12) share a single apartment. Those same young men likely work in the tourist sector and Grand Bazaar, employing their language skills for a meager yet under-the-table wage and easily avoiding well-advertised police “raids.” In Şam Çarşısı, we saw, heard, smelled, and felt the result of a long trade history between two countries and the current economically viable markets that continue that trade today, like perfume, gold, electronics, and certain cheeses, breads, ghee, and mulukhiyah. And how is Syrian coffee different from Turkish coffee when they both look the same? Syrians add cardamom.

I strove to cover Little Syria holistically, and therefore included actual Syrian voices as well. At the end of the walk, our group would stop at a café for a question and answer session with Syrian locals. We chatted with business owners, students, restaurant workers, and more.

The most common type of question the groups would ask was “how?” How did you get here? How did you open this shop? How did you decide to live here? How are you adjusting?

It was revealing. The stories I told during the walk were important – but cultural enclaves fascinate because they are tangible proof of a people’s power to shape their city. One way or another, people live, not according to fate, but to their own choices. The desire to create the life you want is not exclusive to the American dream, and refugees are not only familiar with it but are in fact the most affirming expression of it. What could be more indicative of the human need to live freely than to completely uproot and seek a new home in a foreign land?

In preparing my walk I had inadvertently focused on

how Syrians flexibly fold themselves within existing structures and molds. The state decides their legal status. Market demand, existing trade pathways, and language skills dictate their livelihood opportunities. Rent prices, roommates, and neighbors control housing options. The health ministry regulates healthcare accessibility. Yet Syrians break the mold too. For example, in a span of less than 5 years, half a million Syrians fled to the small Turkish city of Gaziantep, roughly doubling its total population and permanently altering the city. Although the city’s response – building more housing, establishing job training programs, and increasing language classes – was needed, Syrians did not passively wait for these resources or be victimized by the obstacles. Syrian businesses opened, informal goods and service markets arose, and the Syrian-led humanitarian industry rapidly expanded.

Though Turkey is often criticized for its inadequate resource mobilization and distribution to urban Syrian refugees, gaps in regulation and enforcement are likely one reason Syrians there are able to effectively exhibit their agency. In contrast, many Syrians in Turkey feel they might face greater obstacles in countries such as Germany, where stringent regulations can restrict refugee communities’ ability to achieve self-reliance. Balancing the provision of basic needs with regulatory flexibility can promote agency and opportunity so that a wide array of refugees can achieve personal success.

At the end of my walk I always noted that “Little Syria” is a misnomer. The small piece of Istanbul’s Fatih district that we traversed is overwhelmingly Damascene. Küçük Halep (Little Aleppo) can be found in Istanbul’s Esenyurt, the city of Gaziantep, and the capital Ankara, and a Küçük Lazkiye (Little Latakia) is located in the city of Mersin. Across Turkey, other neighborhoods abound and a sizable Syrian population can be found in almost every city. Their impact is not uniform, however, and each enclave reflects the hard work, interests, and desires of the Syrians inhabiting them. ■

Sustainable Water Management Practices:
Addressing a Water Scarcity Crisis in Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

by Kira Baltutis



Kira is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Chicago's Master's of Urban Planning and Policy program and currently works in Chicago as an urban planner. She previously worked in international development where she was introduced to the profound need for decision-makers to work in partnership with local communities to achieve lasting change. Alongside communities, her passion is imbedded in work that address the adaptation and mitigation of climate change and encourages inclusive economic growth to achieve happier, more resilient cities. Kira can be reached at Kiramariebaltutis@gmail.com.

The summary below is part of a comprehensive report regarding water shortages in Jaipur. The field research conducted for this report was made possible in part by a grant from the APA's International Division

My field research took place in the city of Jaipur, situated in the arid state of Rajasthan, India. Jaipur is a city renowned for its rich culture, alluring history of royal families, prominent architecture and, like many urban environments, a growing population that has had to confront the reality of constrained resources. The continual expansion of urban and peri-urban communities, coupled with climate change impacts that are worsening, has led to the depletion (and often contamination) of existing water resources that pose critical challenges to the globe's inhabitants. My research focused on the crucial role of water supply to residents in Jaipur, which has an approximate population count of 3.1 million per India's 2011 census and an annual growth rate of 3 percent. At the time of my research, water scarcity had become an ongoing headline issue in Jaipur as household

access to government-supplied piped water was limited to approximately one hour a day between the hours of 6:00 and 7:00 a.m. This gave residents just enough time to fill up any water storage containers for all daily needs. For people living in freshwater-rich regions with unlimited access to clean water, this can be a nearly unfathomable way of life.

While the initial planning of the city's historic settlement incorporated a sophisticated rainwater harvesting system, Jaipur now faces consistent water shortages. Like many cities in India and around the world, Jaipur has had to grapple with climate change impacts, unpredictable monsoon rains, institutional complexities within its water management system, and a growing population that is expected to reach more than five and half million inhabitants by 2035. The complexity of Jaipur's water

“50 years ago, there was water flowing from the wells here. Now, most have dried up and we rely mostly on piped water and tankers for our water supply.”

- Purani Basti resident



Left: Meeno Ka Mohalla water filtration business. Right: Man drinking from borewell in Walled City. Photo by Author

scarcity crisis reached a peak emergency status in 2019 as the city's primary source, Bisalpur Dam, was predicted to run out of its average daily supply by August. Bisalpur Dam supplies approximately half of the city's drinking water, while tubewells and groundwater supply the other 50 percent. Water supply to residents has typically been distributed in time blocks, where residents are given a timeframe in which piped water is available to fill up household or business water storage containers. In recent years, water supply to residents has decreased steadily, with the most recent cutback implemented in August 2018, when the piped water supply was reduced from 90 minutes per day to 45-70 minutes.

In an incredible turn of events, excess rainfall in east Rajasthan between June and August 2019 refilled the dam, giving the districts of Jaipur, Tonk, and Amer the ability to fulfill irrigation and drinking water needs for the next two years. The excess rainfall came as a huge temporary relief to a city on the verge of a water shortage emergency crisis. While Bisalpur Dam has been momentarily filled, this stroke of good fortune was not a long-term solution to Jaipur's current water management system and the

likelihood of water shortages reoccurring in the future.

To explore the impacts of the city's current water management system and water shortages at the community level, I conducted a 10-day field analysis between January and February 2019. This included community member interviews and observational research in six key locations throughout the city of Jaipur and Amer, a nearby locality. Community members' perceptions and personal experiences play a crucial factor when examining the health and well-being of a city, as they reveal a day-to-day quality of life that quantitative data cannot always reasonably capture. These personal accounts demonstrated a complex relationship between the governing body and local communities. If community members believe their water isn't clean enough for drinking or even bathing, if they're paying more for their water than they can afford, and if their access to the water supply is severely limited, a trust deficit develops between the governing body and local communities who feel discounted by decision-makers. This trust deficit lessens a city's capability to effectively respond to crises such as these, and in turn, subsequently lessens a city's capability

to equitably thrive long-term. As one of the defining issues of this era, water accessibility has proven to be not only essential for human and natural life, but also shapes economic growth, health, safety, and the social constructs of our communities.

Though progress has been made at the national and state levels to address the complexity of water issues in India, Jaipur has yet to fully build the political, financial and physical infrastructure that can help overcome its existing challenges

Most evident during the interview process and various research, was the lack of cohesion, engagement and value alignment among relevant systems, policies and stakeholders. In order to more effectively streamline Jaipur's water management system, my six recommendations

range from systematic-level approaches that incorporate a Smart Cities' model of a Smart Water Network (SWN) and leveraging partnerships through a green bank to attract private capital, to community-level initiatives that focus on engagement, capacity building and rainwater harvesting initiatives.

I am deeply aware of the paradox that I am an outsider who seeks to provide recommendations for a city and culture that is not my own. While I pursued this research with personal and professional intentions of integrity and transparent documentation, this report is meant to serve as a preliminary document for additional research, more tailored recommendations, and policies and actions that best serve the residents of Jaipur. I have immense gratitude for those who provided me with their time, knowledge, honesty, and hospitality throughout my research. ■

“The high demand for clean water allowed us to create this business. There is actually competition between us, the other business here, and others that are opening up in localities nearby, as demand for water increases.”

-Meeno Ka Mohalla water filtration dispenser business owner

Left: A mother with her two children cleaning out the pollutants and debris of a street drain in Meeno Ka Mohalla. Middle: Street in Walled City. Right: bathrooms installed by the government for Amrudo Ka Bagh slum residents on community's perimeter. Photo by author.



School children in Meeno Ka Mohalla, They are very excited at the prospect of visitors! Photo by author.

Three [informal] Transportation Nodes in the Beqaa Valley, Lebanon

by Lynn Abdouni

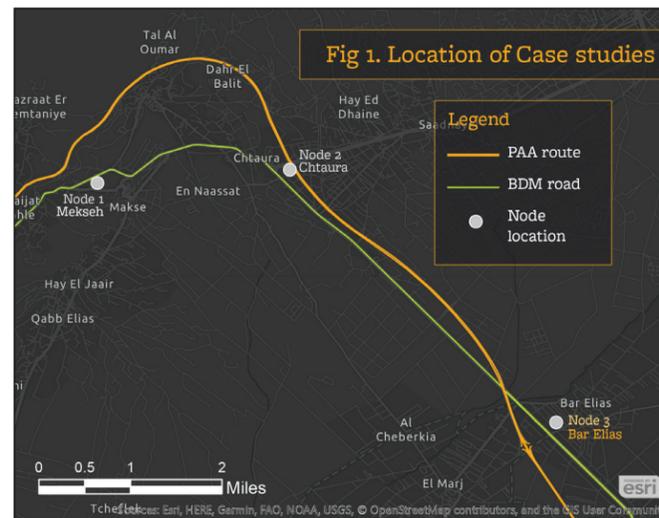


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This article is an excerpt of a report completed with the support of the APA International Grant. The research explored the impact of high-capacity transportation infrastructure on an existing urban settlement. The goal of this research was to use graphic representation to deconstruct and understand the urban form and activities in these nodes.

Note: The research uses the term “settlement” instead of “town, city, village” and uses the node-settlement framework to theorize the relationship between the transportation node and the urban fabric that surrounds it.

Lebanon is a vibrant case study of interactions. Lebanon’s multiple religious affiliations (18 recognized sects) and political parties (11 main parties represented in the parliament today) dwell in all of 4,036 sq. miles that include a 140-mile shore overseeing the Mediterranean Sea, two mountain ranges, and about 750 square miles of agricultural and industrial settlements. These factors, among others, determine the blueprint for Lebanon’s fragmented urban landscape. Urban spaces of any scale, from buildings to whole cities, are crafted by this diversity in geography, natural resources, customs and traditions, and economic means. Loosely enforced building and zoning codes have little impact on shaping these urban units into homogeneity. This is evident in the Beqaa Valley, which is the subject matter of this article’s three case studies. We identify these case studies as informal transportation nodes along the Beirut-Damascus Main Road (BDM), a historic road network that joins the Lebanese Capital, Beirut, and the Syrian Capital, Damascus. These nodes



Chtaura Node bustling with traffic including van transit. The hospital is in the tall building, backed by stretches of agricultural lands. The aluminum shelters serve as parking lots.

"The border between public and private, pedestrian and vehicular traffic becomes permeable and creates a space that is open to interpretation."

are also close to the Pan-Arab Autostrad (PAA), a limited access facility under construction that aims to increase traffic capacity for trips between the two capitals.

Site Description: Three Nodes

Mekseh Node: The Mekseh node has been recently constructed (2017-2019) by a member of the Lebanese parliament. Dubbed the “Zone Gate”, it acts as a gateway to Mekseh, a settlement situated south of the Autostrad. It sports restaurants and shops with ample parking space on the road façade, with a terraced secluded summer/winter resort. It has been developed to attract commuter traffic and local demand for entertainment and community space. It may be a precursor for transportation-oriented development.

Chtaura Node: The Chtaura node is at the meeting point of two main roads, the BDM and the Zahle main road. The node is known as an optimal location to exchange currency or hail a ‘van’ (privately owned public transportation that can hold up to 12 passengers) to travel to Damascus, Beirut, or Zahle. It houses restaurants, private offices, a

hospital, a police station, and residential apartments. Its fringes are adorned with plant nurseries (a specialty of Taalabaya, its neighbor).

Bar Elias Node: The PAA segment corresponding to Bar Elias is already functional, running parallel to the BDM, creating what could develop into a gateway into the settlement. Along the BDM is a continuous stretch of mixed use land, of buildings that sport a shop on the ground floor and apartment buildings on the 2nd through 5th floors. The three nodes, either by design or evolution, have mixed land uses.

Comparing land uses

All three nodes’ have a similar set of activities or land use classes. Commercial activities populate building façades, creating the first line of contact between commuter and urban fabric in all three. Both Bar Elias and Chtaura’s commercial buildings include governmental offices (notary public, municipality). All nodes contain a form of residence. In Mekseh’s case, the lodging is short-term, potentially for an entertainment summer or a winter season, whereas in

Bar Elias and Chtaura, apartments are a more permanent form of lodging. They differ in the following:



Chtaura's Shams building, the triangular center of the Chtaura Plaza Node. Ground floor: Sea Sweet (a sweets chain store), drugstore, clothing store, the Municipality of Chtaura, travel agency, Western Union. Top floors: insurance companies, magazine publishing houses, doctor's offices, real estate agency.

Flexible Traffic Space: The space between the edge of the road and the beginning of the building is used for more than car parking. In the Chtaura node, this space is used for pedestrian circulation, transit drop off/pickup, and hosts mobile produce and trinket merchants. The border between public and private, pedestrian and vehicular traffic becomes permeable and creates a space that is open to interpretation. In the Bar Elias node, the footprint of that flexible space is thinner and more continuous, and the configuration of that permeability in the public-private, vehicular/pedestrian borders is, in essence, similar. This is illustrated in the use of some parts of the sidewalk for displaying goods for sale, placing signage for advertisement. In both nodes, Chtaura and Bar Elias, this space is alive with various activities, acting almost as an urban edge ecosystem. Mekseh's front edge resembles both nodes, where the stairs and the parking lot allow for this open interpretation of the space but evident physical impact of user experience has yet to be manifested (pictures were taken before the Zone Gate was open to the Public). Mekseh's inner flexible space, which will be exclusive to resort clientele (pool and gym members, lodging renters), could be a stark contrast to the other two but ce it has not yet been open to the public long enough, absolute conclusions cannot be drawn.

Scale and Fragmentation: Noticeable is fragmentation in

action in two of the nodes (Chtaura and Bar Elias). On the footprint level, the Bar Elias buildings are relatively smaller than Chtaura's and are likely owned by a larger group of people. This visible fragmentation is also reflected in architectural styles and signage governed by trends or cost. Chtaura's fragmentation presents itself on a more vertical scale, with the central buildings designed to house shops and businesses, and nearby buildings sporting more floors for apartment housing.

Contribution

This report used these three case studies to distill a framework that theorizes the relationship between transportation and urban morphology in a loosely regulated urban milieu. This 'node-settlement' framework, developed by comparing different nodes of the same



Flexible space inside the Zone Gate node

hierarchy through field survey and representation, can be a useful method to understand and plan informal transportation nodes in the Beqaa region towards higher efficiency (designated lanes for van pickup/dropoff, clustered parking spots, ADA accessible pedestrian infrastructure, urban trees for shade). This framework can also promote preserving cultural and aesthetic aspects (signage, various architectural styles, mobile merchants). Should traffic increase in the Beqaa Valley, planning for efficiency and historic preservation becomes essential to support the Valley's competitiveness as a strategically located settlement to live and work. Research in Lebanon, particularly in urban studies, is usually obstructed by the lack of data on land uses. Methods employed in the research that culminated in this report (field observation, graphic representation, comparison) can help generate a platform and classification set for geospatial analysis towards achieving local and regional planning goals. ■

STUDENT GRANT REPORT

Collaborative Research on Communal Spaces in Nima:

Reflections on Accra's Urban History with Lessons for Professional Planners

by Victoria Okoye



Victoria Okoye, a PhD Candidate in Urban Studies & Planning at the University of Sheffield (UK), is a trained urban planner and researches citizen-led urban improvements. She has eight years of professional and community experience working on creative approaches to public space interventions, and she has worked with street and market vendors on inclusive planning and design interventions in Accra (Ghana), Lagos (Nigeria), and Durban (South Africa). Contact: victoria.okoye@gmail.com; @victoria_okoye (twitter)

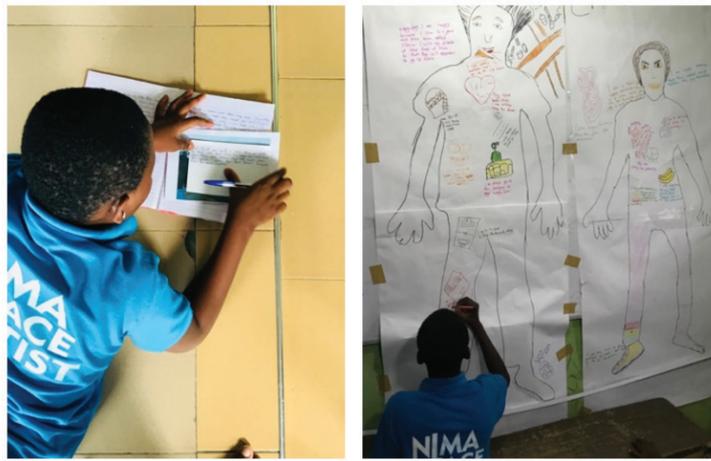
This article is an excerpt of a report completed with the support of the APA International Grant.

Accra, the capital of Ghana, is a rapidly urbanizing metropolitan area of more than two million residents, and a regional hub of financial and economic activity. The city is also home to deep urban inequalities: Urban growth and demands for space far outpace local authorities' ability to accommodate present urban development needs, and many of Accra's residents self-organize their own housing, employment, and social opportunity outside of government-recognized systems. Accra's government authorities aspire to transform the city into a world-class, "modern" city—an urban development goal that is deeply informed by histories of colonial and post-independent planning. Urban authorities implement planning and design approaches to encourage and guide residents toward this world-class ideal known as 'development'. However, this vision for development and related processes

ultimately marginalizes residents living in 'slums', 'informal settlements, and 'low-class' residential neighborhoods. In Nima, the site of my collaborative PhD research, residents live in densely situated urban environments, and available community spaces like streets, alleyways, sidewalk

"Residents claim and inhabit these sites for private life, public life, and livelihood, yet government authorities' maps, plans, and designs do not capture the magnitude and spectrum of these activities, which together form a valuable landscape of community spaces produced by residents."

pavements, and open spaces are utilized in everyday life as an essential, yet limited, resource. Residents claim and inhabit these sites for private and public life, yet government authorities' maps, plans and designs do not capture the magnitude and spectrum of the activities that together form an organic landscape of community spaces produced by residents. This tension is at the heart of my collaborative PhD research project. In 2019, I spent eight months working with Spread-Out Initiative (SOI), a local organization based in Nima. Our research explores young people's embodied experiences of community spaces through interviews, arts-based methods, and a site-specific intervention. A key theme that emerged was how everyday power dynamics constrain young people's access to these spaces. While it is



too early in our process to share further findings, I draw on our experience to consider some of our accomplishments and lessons produced through this process, as well as provide recommendations for professional planners and academic researchers on the ethics of doing work in contexts like Accra, Ghana.

Colonialism & Coloniality in Accra

I came to this research knowing that Nima has long been highly documented in built environment research as a site for urban design and planning studios, enabling researchers and students to study and gain knowledge on global south urban development contexts. I was also aware that too few researchers and practitioners include as part of their process a commitment to engaging communities in sharing and feedback processes that enable an accessible manner for community residents to listen, reflect, respond, ask questions, and challenge our work. I also came to this research aware of the history of colonialism and its influences on space, design, and planning for the city, not just as a time period in the past, but also continually informing contemporary approaches to urban management, planning, and design. Congolese scholar V.Y. Mudimbe described the European domination of African physical territories, local economies, and the “reformation of natives’ minds” as the three complementary components of Europe’s “colonizing structure” in the continent, a structure which serves to reproduce and extend colonial modalities (1988: 15). Achille Mbembe wrote that the colonization process was “a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical area—of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations” through the re-organization of border and territorial arrangements, property relations, resource extraction, and spatial imaginaries (2003: 25-26). The Republic of Ghana became independent in 1957, but the spatial ideologies that European colonizers

imposed through colonial architecture and planning are still alive and well in contemporary Accra and shape urban planning, design, and management visions for what makes a modern, world-class city. These ideologies, part of the city’s dominant urban imaginary, continue to inform city authorities’ desired vision for the city and continue to subjugate indigenous and local ways of life that are considered to be outside of this vision.

During the colonial period, the British selected Accra as the capital of the Gold Coast Colony. Accra became a mercantile and administrative core for the colony, and colonial planners and architects employed European zoning, building codes, designs, and construction material requirements to achieve a European sense of place, to successfully segregate European and African residential spaces, and to compel and control activities, residences, and movements in the city. Colonial planning ordinances empowered the colonial government as authorities over residents, imposed taxes on African residents, and enabled authorities to fine and detain African residents to compel them to clean and repair buildings deemed unsanitary. Substantial investment to upgrade residents’ living conditions was not provided. Early on in colonial cities, the native residential areas of African populations were frequently left largely to tend to their own needs. This was until key disasters occurred, such as the 1908 bubonic plague epidemic and 1900 and 1939 earthquakes, which devastated key parts of Accra. These disasters compelled colonial planners to act, and they did, using public health and sanitation as rationales for a series of “decongestion” practices. These decongestion exercises included razing African dwellings, instituting new infrastructure, furthering the segregation of residential populations, and establishing new “planned” residential areas to extend the city (Amarteifio 2015, Pierre 2013, Quayson 2014). This implantation of European design and urbanization processes through colonialism constrained the traditional

communal conception of space. Once open to diverse users under the stewardship of families and traditional authorities, design and regulation of private and public spaces shifted to the purview of government authorities for specified uses.

PhD research context: Nima Neighborhood

Nima emerged as a settlement in the early 1930s, when Mallam Futa, a Fulani cattle herder and Muslim religious leader, entered into a land agreement with the Odai Kwao family that enabled him and his community to settle on their traditional Ga family lands outside of the congested core of colonial Accra. Nima has long since been incorporated into the city and has grown into one of the most densely inhabited and diverse residential neighborhoods, with an estimated population of 80,843 people (GSS 2010). This same census data demonstrates that Nima’s demographic makeup has evolved dramatically since Mallam Futa and his followers first settled. In addition to the third and fourth-generation migrants, this includes people who trace their origins to southern and northern Ghana, the wider West African region, as well as throughout the continent. Spatially, Nima is a densely packed neighborhood with few open spaces, and residents make deliberate use of the area’s streets, sidewalk pavements, and other spaces for a wide variety of activities for both public and private life: markets and street-based vending, funerals and wedding celebrations, political meetings; as commercial and social spaces; as leisure and meeting spaces. These activities, invisible from city authorities’ plans for these sites and spaces, demonstrate how residents operate outside of formal urban plans and illuminate the ways in which urban

plans fail to acknowledge and support community life.

Research Project Description

Spread-Out Initiative is an NGO based in Nima that supports young people up to 25 years of age in creative writing, digital technology, art, and entrepreneurship. From January-August 2019, three NGO team members and I worked as facilitators with 17 of the NGO’s students (girls and boys between the ages of 10-16 years of age) using a series of arts-based participatory methods. Our work together investigated how, when, and where these young people create “place” for themselves, including the spaces they use in everyday life, such as for recreational and social activities. We also explored how these young people navigate the power dynamics of space, and how their activities, personal memories, and meanings connect them to these sites. As part of an arts-based research approach, we asked the youth participants to produce photographs, maps, and stories to document and describe their everyday spatial experiences. Our elicitation discussions enabled presentations and further reflections on their experiences. As part of our work together, the youth participants also imagined alternative stories and narratives for their community spaces, including alternative present and future possibilities. We also occupied a street space through a site-specific intervention, creating space for a community engagement event and as means to challenge existing power dynamics that typically exclude young people from these spaces. Through collaborative analysis workshops, we have begun initial reflections as part of a collaborative analysis process, which will continue over the 2019-2020 academic year.





"Urban planning, design, and architecture research and practice have long prioritized and centered European and US perspectives, expertise, and experiences. We should be aware and sensitive to the ways in which colonialism operated and influenced space, and the ways in which we might become complicit in continuing to privilege western knowledges, expertise, and practices over others, even in non-western locales."

PhD Research Project Accomplishments

One major accomplishment of this research so far has been our collaborative work process. This requires working together to select and define our arts-based methods (data collection) and flexibility in working through each method to enable changes, do-overs, and to reflect on our activities. We have also been working together to collaboratively analyze the information we gathered. This approach recognizes, values, and integrates SOI team members' explanations and understandings of residents' practices as local theorizing. This means treating the NGO team members as individuals whom I think and theorize with, not as just informants from whom I only draw information (data). By working with participation of community residents (young people), we attempt to operate differently from the many current urban planning and design research professionals who drop in and out of Accra, without taking the time to develop essential local understandings of urban dynamics. This allows us to develop a "critical spatial literacy", enabling our team to critically read codes, dynamics, and usage of the built environment. In our collaborative research, we do this by working in partnership with community members and community leaders to design, execute, and reflect on the work together.

An additional major accomplishment from this research has been our site-specific intervention. This event served as both a community event with 100 community residents to share our research project process and insights, and for the young people to present their work. It also provided an opportunity for youth to take over the street space and transform it into a recreation space. We planned this event with our youth research participants over several meetings, working from their ideas for activities to develop a program, and executing the event in a way similar to the typical street occupations organized by adults for outdoorings (naming ceremonies for newborns), weddings, funerals, and political meetings. We blocked off the street using rented chairs, tables and canopy tents, and we employed a DJ, speaker and microphone system for presentations and

music. We introduced our research project and the young people presented their photos, stories, and poems about the spatial experiences to community leaders, parents and friends, neighbors, shop owners and commercial vendors. These activities were followed by responses and reflections from a Nima community leader and audience members. We subsequently rearranged our occupation of the street, resituating the canopy tents, tables and chairs to create a kids-only recreational space in the street. This experience opened our work up to further critique and interaction in line with community feedback.

Recommendations

In my full report, I highlight how we can and (in my opinion) should operate critically and ethically when doing our research and practice. This includes building a sensitivity awareness to the histories of oppression, injustice, and marginalization that inform the contexts in which we work. Urban planning, design, and architecture research and practice have long prioritized European and US perspectives, expertise, and experiences. We should be aware and sensitive to the ways in which colonialism operated and influenced space, and the ways in which we might become complicit in continuing to privilege western knowledge, expertise, and practices over others, even in non-western contexts. This includes the western-centered coursework that comprises our trainings in built environment professions which we are expected to utilize in our work as international planners; the best practices from European, US and other western locales that we might seek to apply in non-western contexts. When we don't bring a full awareness of the histories of contentious social and political histories to the table, we reproduce damaging and stereotypical discourse in our work.

One example that we encountered in this research is the continued framing of Nima and neighborhoods with similar histories as "zongos" by academics, government institutions, and in popular culture. In Hausa, the term "zongo" refers to a community, a settlement, or a travelers' community and refers to the historical trade-related

travels of Hausa-speaking peoples throughout the West African region. As a Nima community elder relayed to us, the formal incorporation of Nima into Accra and the long history of settlement of its residents (in many cases dating back three to four generations) demonstrate that Nima is no longer a "zongo," but another diverse neighborhood in Accra with its own particular history.

Demographic statistics from Ghana's 2010 Census demonstrate that, like so many neighborhoods in Accra, Nima is diversely populated by residents from southern and northern Ghana, indigenous Ga as well as from the West African region. This framing "zongo" – which has also been consistently translated to mean "strangers' community" – constantly isolates the neighborhood by challenging its legitimacy as a welcome part of the globalizing city of Accra, as well as the status and identities of the residents who live there. This is particularly significant given that the city of Accra has emerged and expanded on indigenous Ga family and community lands. Instead of casting a neighborhood like Nima as a "strangers community," we should re-orient our understanding of Accra as a city that has been deeply influenced and enriched by its histories of

migration and its migrants who have hailed from different parts of southern and northern Ghana, as well as the West African region. For us, this critique underscores the political nature of both research and professional practice in the built environment.

These critiques and reflections will (hopefully) inspire us, as planners, designers, and researchers, to think critically and ethically about our practice in contexts such as Accra. This includes considering who we partner with to develop projects, who we engage with as we implement our projects, the understandings and assumptions that we bring to our work, and what we choose to represent in plans. These decisions define our ethics as planners and researchers, and either challenge or reproduce the existing power relations that marginalize residents' experiences, knowledge, and struggles in cities. As we operate in contexts like Ghana, it becomes extremely important to lead an ethical practice. Our designs, spatial plans and built projects will impact residents; it is our ethical obligation to critically and carefully try to determine how that can be done as positively as possible. ■

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by Wail Bakhit

Although I have had the opportunity to visit Abu Dhabi twice before as a causal traveler, the most recent trip was the only intentional visit, enabled by the 10th Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF10); the international biennial gathering convened by UN Habitat concerning urbanization and sustainable development. Unlike the preceding visits, staying for a whole week this time gave me the privilege to better understand the city, not least examining and mapping some urban concepts and applications through the city. Here are some of my thoughts concerning the host city, Abu Dhabi.

Starting from the overall impression, I would say that the city had amazed me more than in the previous visits. I'm not sure, honestly, whether this contrasting impression was due to ongoing improvements that the city undertook during the previous six years, or to the fact that I just took my time to discover some parts of the city, or even to the changing urban paradigms and interests that led me to focus through different lens and angles. Regardless of the underlying reasons, which may be a mix of all that, Abu Dhabi touched my heart through the organization of WUF10.

It is worth stating clearly from the outset that I am not aiming to draw a comparison between Abu Dhabi and other Emirates' cities, nor to set a ranking contest with other regional metropolitans. It's rather a self-evaluation viewpoint derived primarily by what I called it the "common sense" approach that started to shape my thinking and

understanding. Additionally, what I'm sharing now are my personal reflections drawn upon my observation, experience, and examination of the daily life activities.

What I really found worth admiring in Abu Dhabi is the pedestrian-friendly environment that is manifested by a significant walkable infrastructure throughout the city. Although similar to its counterparts gulf cities in terms of car dominance, Abu Dhabi succeeded in segregating cars from pedestrian movement yet facilitating the latter with special attention and respect, particularly at intersection points. The combination of elegant network of quality streets, on-ground and underpass crossings, well-positioned traffic signage, visible and non-erasable ground markings, strict traffic regulations, and drivers' respectful behavior was culminated in providing a good atmosphere and satisfactory experience for pedestrians of all types. To those who are used to this setting and may question my surprise, I need to say that such an infrastructure is not easy to find in the region! It is a humane experience to navigate through clear access as a pedestrian.

When crossing turning roadways, you don't need to stop or watch for coming cars; just cross and they'll wait for you respectfully no matter what. If you need to get to the other side across a busy street, the underpass tunnel that is clean, illuminated, and smoothly accessible by all will take you there efficiently and enjoyably. And at any minor street you will feel safe to cross, although you would be highly advised

to do so through the dedicated crosswalks. Street shoulders, or side walkways, are generously spaced and enable walking and gathering of people in a good manner. To this point, it is fair to say that the pedestrian-friendly environment is addressed at a microscopic level; within the neighborhood dimension, however, it needs a reconsideration at the macroscopic level. An overall accessibility strategy is needed to connect different parts across the city. It is fair to argue that Abu Dhabi's urban landscape is a remarkable ingredient that helped the city secure a promising global place, both in terms of quality of life (78th) or safety (73th) amongst the top 100 world cities, according to latest Mercer's 2019 list.

There is a public transport system composed mainly of buses in addition to ferry services. Nevertheless, the efficiency of the bus system is questionable as I faced difficulties in understanding how it functions, rarely observed those buses during my stay, and noticed some complaints regarding the lack of coverage in peripheral areas. It is stated that this system was introduced in 2008; nevertheless, the city authority took further steps to decrease traffic congestion and make a modal shift as it claimed. The toll gate system has been launched recently, resembling its neighbor Dubai, and will be in effect in March 2020. Parking, especially in the mainland of Abu Dhabi, is subject to strict charges with marginal exceptions for residents.

These policies of public transport obliged us to capture Abu Dhabi from a higher view and through a broader perspective. It is not hard to recognize that Abu Dhabi, again similar to its counterpart Gulf cities, fell prey to a rapid urban modernization process despite the escalating global complexity and the accompanying financial crisis. It consists of multiple islands with a total land area accounts for 87% of the total area of the UAE. The dominant urban landscape is portrayed by extravagant glazed skyscrapers grown over a remarkable base of infrastructure and public spaces with strong law enforcement, creating a cosmopolitan scene inhabitant by a diverse multicultural population.

All too often, cities are viewed through many lenses resonant with the fact that residents are widely immersed in many lives, and thus my observation through a visitor lens could be a very misleading viewpoint. This will directly pose a question of whether those communities living therein, beyond this fascinating scene, reflect tight-knit communities being thought-off as an integral part of this modernity, or just occupants of temporarily planned spaces who have acclimated to the role. It also raises a question of whether these law-abiding communities are a smooth consequence of a culture of urban integration, or a result of strict enforcement of a ruthless law. Policies underlying many urban interventions and decisions are debatable as most of them seem to miss the ultimate goal, as one may question the rationale behind imposing parking charges and introducing tolls on using highways prior to establishing and maintaining efficient, high-quality public transport.

To conclude my observation regarding the host city, it is useful to reaffirm that the intention was neither to end up with a final judgment on the quality of the city nor to go on a path of criticism. I narrated my experiences seamlessly, praising positive practices while highlighting negative policies. Abu Dhabi is an astonishing city in terms of the physical dimension, urban infrastructure, and public spaces, which positively contributed to the success of WUF10, yet non-physical aspects such as policies and decision-making process might leave one baffled, questioning the underlying concept and meaning of the development phenomenon as well as the modernization process. This is pivotal especially when it comes to viewing the city through the lens of its inhabitants, or as the WUF10 slogan says, "leaving no one no place behind". ■



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