

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

**URBANIZATION AND THE CHANGING
CHARACTER OF THE ARAB CITY**

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Preface

This publication sheds light on the role of development in shaping the character of the Arab city, with the aim of contributing to the discourse on urban development in the Arab region. It is divided into three parts, analysing the experience of three Arab cities, namely: Amman, Beirut and Dubai.

Diligent effort and extensive cooperation has gone into preparing this publication. Special thanks are extended to the following: Mr. George Arbid, for drafting the case study of Beirut and the overall conclusion; Mr. Mohammad Al-Assad, for drafting the case study of Amman; Messrs. Hashim Sarkis and Nasser Abulhasan, for drafting the case study of Dubai; Mr. Riadh Tappuni, Leader of the Urban Development and Housing Policies Team, who led the effort in setting the thematic framework of this publication and supervised its preparation; and Ms. Nadine Chalak, research assistant, who reviewed the publication and worked on its layout.

Executive summary

As a contribution to the discourse on urban development, this study is aimed at analysing the changes that the Arab cities have undergone and are still undergoing as a result of such major forces as rural-urban migration, population growth and socio-economic developments, taking into consideration the historical background of the city and its social capital.

With the aim of shedding light on the role of development in shaping the character of the Arab city, this study consists of a comparative analysis of three case cities, namely, Amman, Beirut and Dubai, which have drawn attention for the significant changes in their economic, social and physical dimensions, and whose development has been characterized by traits that are shared by other cities in the region.

While these three cities differ in terms of urban history, archaeological identity, bureaucracy, economic and tourism activities, they share some common characteristics, including comparable populations, a growing mall culture and the role played by foreign capital in their development. In addition, all three cities were greatly affected by the chronic conflict environment of the region. Beirut, which suffered directly from the devastation of armed conflict and occupation for more than 15 years, has witnessed a significant reconstruction in recent years; and Amman struggled to deal with population inflows that were partly a consequence of the conflict fallout. Given its geographic distance from the epicentre of the regional conflict, Dubai, on the other hand, has experienced a drastic urban development as a result of its rapid economic growth.

The resultant diversity and difference provided a cosmopolitan life of various intensities in the three cities. Among the three cities, Amman is the city that has undergone the most qualitative changes; Beirut is the oldest continuously inhabited; and Dubai is the most economically vibrant.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

| | |
|----------|--|
| BCD | Beirut Central District |
| CDR | Council for Development and Reconstruction |
| CIS | Commonwealth of Independent States |
| DIFC | Dubai International Financial Centre |
| DUBAL | Dubai Aluminium |
| ESCWA | Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia |
| GDP | gross domestic product |
| IAURIF | Institute for Urban Planning and Development of the Paris Ile-de-France Region |
| ICT | Information and communications technology |
| IMAX | Image Maximum |
| JTC | Jordan Telecommunication Company |
| MAWARDED | National Resources Investment and Development Corporation |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| SOLIDERE | Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District |
| TEU | twenty-foot equivalent unit |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

References to the dollar symbol (\$) indicate United States dollars.

Introduction

An apt departure for this study is to define an Arab city and to categorize which cities fall under such a definition. While conclusions can be drawn concerning the national identities of the three case cities under discussion, this debate does not constitute the main discourse for this publication. For the purposes of this study, an Arab city is one that exists in an Arab country and that is inhabited by an Arabic-speaking population.

The second question to ask is what defines the character of a city. Globalization and economic development are certainly major forces that greatly influence urban development, but the results are manifested in physical and social expressions that can eventually define the change in the character of the city. This delineates the intended context of this analytical endeavour. Consequently, an appropriate description of a city's character must take into consideration the urban ways of life that it accommodates, and the traditions and social habits of its community.

Amman, Beirut and Dubai are not necessarily representative Arab cities. However, their development has been characterized by traits that are shared by other cities in the region. Besides material development, a qualitative assessment of the development of cities could be achieved by evaluating their social, financial and cultural capitals. Urban social inclusion is a function of the physical forms of cities. This can be traced at the micro level through the access individuals are allowed to urban amenities, irrespective of their sex, social background, and economic or physical abilities. At the macro level, social urban stratification can be observed in all three examples: the poor southern suburbs in Beirut, the affluent western suburbs in Amman, and the residential stratification aimed at accommodating nationals and groups of expatriates in Dubai. Similar characteristics can be seen in other Arab cities, particularly those that have sizeable squatter settlements such as Cairo and Baghdad. The long history of a city like Beirut, coupled with its present cultural energy, contributes greatly to its cultural capital.

In positive terms, the development of cities is driven by various factors, including the following: (a) strengthening and sustaining institutions, in the case of Amman; (b) political will, which, in the case of Beirut, was promoted by the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District (SOLIDERE); and (c) economic growth as in Dubai. However, in general terms the visible development of cities is one of the most tangible manifestations of positive national development, whereby advancement in the quality of life can be observed and gauged.

This study is intended to contribute to the discourse on urban development in the Arab region. The team on Urban Development and Housing Policies at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) welcome comments from readers on this subject.

I. AMMAN: THE CHALLENGES OF CONTINUOUS GROWTH

A. INTRODUCTION

Amman has roots dating back to prehistoric times with the earliest recorded settlements extending to the seventh millennium B.C. While the city flourished during Roman, Byzantine and early Islamic periods, its good fortunes did not continue after the rule of the Umayyad dynasty came to an end in the middle of the eighth century. The city underwent a process of slow decline and became completely deserted by the end of the thirteenth century. It was not until the 1870s that Amman was inhabited again when the Ottoman authorities settled a number of Circassian families from the Caucasus in Amman and its environs. Other waves of Circassians moved into the city over the subsequent decades; and Arabs from surrounding areas also moved to the city at that time. By 1921, when Amman was chosen as the capital of the newly established Emirate of Transjordan (later renamed the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), the population of Amman had increased to some 5,000 people.¹

Since then, Amman has experienced exceptional growth, which can be partly attributed to natural population growth and to urban migrations by rural communities. However, the growth of Amman has been greatly determined by the waves of refugees and other population groups that have settled in Amman as a result of the political turmoil that continues to plague the region, particularly since the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict. At the eve of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the population of Amman was estimated at 60,000. Following the conflict and over the course of the subsequent two decades, some 240,000 Palestinian refugees who were expelled from their homes settled in Amman and surrounding areas. Similarly, an additional 180,000 refugees are estimated to have settled in Amman as a direct consequence of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. More recently, some 170,000 Jordanians, including Palestinians who had obtained Jordanian citizenship, relocated to Amman from Kuwait and other countries of the Gulf region as a result of the 1990-1991 Gulf War.²

Moreover, a considerable number of Iraqis moved to Amman in the 1990s to escape the harsh living conditions in Iraq following the 1990-1991 Gulf War. Other crises that have affected Amman include the Lebanese war, which caused a number of Lebanese to move to Amman at the outbreak of the war in 1975. While the vast majority moved on from Amman to other locations, their presence, albeit brief, had an impact on the socio-economic composition of the city. In the final result, Amman, which had been a deserted site for five centuries before the 1870s, is now a metropolis of approximately 2 million people.³

¹ For additional information on Amman, see M. Al-Asad, "Ruptures in the evolution of the Middle Eastern city: Amman" in *Population, Poverty and Politics in Middle Eastern Cities*, M.E. Bonine ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), pp. 56-57; *Amman: The City and its Society*, J. Hannoyer and S. Shami, eds. (CERMOC, Beirut, 1996); *Amman: Realities and Expectations* (in Arabic with English abstracts), H. Dabbas and H. Hourani, eds. (Al-Urdun al-Jadid Research Center, Amman, 1996); and A. Radwan et al., *Amman: History and Civilization* (in Arabic), (Municipality of Greater Amman, 2000).

² M. Al-Asad, M. "Ruptures in the evolution of the Middle Eastern city: Amman" in *Population, Poverty and Politics in Middle Eastern Cities*, M.E. Bonine ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), pp. 47-48.

³ Department of Statistics, *2001 Statistical Yearbook* (Department of Statistics, Amman, 2002), p. 7. Out of that total population, some 315,000 expatriates were residents of Jordan in 1994; and the authorities of Jordan issued more than 136,000 work permits for foreign workers in 2001. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

B. GENERAL OVERVIEW

1. Historical background

Figure 1. Map of Amman showing several western districts

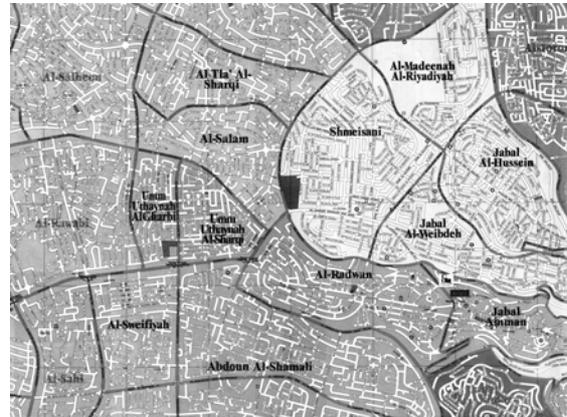


Photo courtesy of Luma Khalaf and the Municipality of Greater Amman

As is the case with all cosmopolitan centres, there is no single characteristic that best encapsulates Amman. The city involves various diverse elements and facets that can be summarized as follows:

(a) *Youth*: Given the high rate of population growth in Jordan, the percentage of the population aged under 15 is significant, and there is a high presence of youth in Amman;⁴

(b) *Gender*: While Jordan is socially less conservative than most countries of the Gulf region, it remains a relatively conservative country. One measure of the conservatism of a city is the degree to which women are present in its various public spaces;

(c) *Socio-economic status*: Amman is commonly divided between its western and eastern sections, whereby western districts of the city are largely more affluent and westernized, and eastern districts tend to be poorer and more populous and conservative;⁵

(d) *Religious affiliations*: While Christians in Jordan remain a minority, their presence is clear in Amman in the churches that dot the city's landscape and in the festive activities, including special sales and food, that accompany such Christian holidays as Christmas and Easter.⁶ Until the 1970s, some neighbourhoods were even primarily inhabited by Christians. However, since then and with rapid urbanization, neighbourhoods have shed their denominational characteristics;

(e) *Refugees*: While most refugees who moved to Amman have been integrated within the city, a significant number still reside in low-income refugee camps located within Amman, including Al Hussein and Al Wihdat. The physical compositions of these camps as well as the prevailing socio-economic conditions provide a distinct character in relation to other parts of the city;⁷

⁴ According to official statistics for 2001, approximately 40 per cent of the country's population was aged under 15 and some 50 per cent was aged under 25. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵ Roughly two-thirds of the total population of Amman resides in the poorer eastern section. For statistics regarding the population of the various administrative sections of the city, see A. Radwan et al., *Amman: History and Civilization* (in Arabic), (Municipality of Greater Amman, 2000), p. 57.

⁶ While it is generally mentioned that the Christians of Jordan amount to some 5 per cent of the population, the *Statistical Yearbook* does not provide any statistics concerning the religion of Jordanians except for those relating to marriages and divorces. Accordingly, in 2001, marriages involving Christians accounted for a modest 2.1 per cent of total marriages in the country. Department of Statistics, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁷ The number of those residing in refugee camps is difficult to estimate. Available statistics indicate that in 1992 the number of officially registered refugees in Al Hussein and Al Wihdat reached more than 29,000 and 39,000 inhabitants, respectively.

(f) *National affiliations*: Despite sharing a Jordanian citizenship, some of its residents consider themselves Palestinians. Even the Palestinian population can be categorized among those who moved to Amman as a result of the 1948, 1967, or 1990-1991 conflicts. Moreover, the city is inhabited by significant groups of expatriates, including Iraqi nationals; tens of thousands of Egyptian guest workers, almost exclusively young males;⁸ other guest workers from Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, primarily young women who are employed as domestic help in households; and a small, yet not insignificant, number of Westerners, comprising diplomats and employees of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and of an increasing number of multinational corporations;⁹

(g) *Ethnicity*: Other minorities in the city include the descendents of the original Circassians who inhabited Amman during the late nineteenth century; and Armenians who fled from Turkey during the conflicts of the 1920s.

While these different groups do not always exclusively inhabit specific areas of the city, they do affect the physical character since certain sections of the city become strongly associated with some of these groups and evolve to cater to their needs. Consequently, Amman, as with other metropolitan centres, cannot be viewed as a homogeneous city. It is increasingly emerging as a heterogeneous centre that houses groups reflecting different economic, social, ethnic and national backgrounds. Clearly, the more these different groups are able to co-exist peacefully and interact, the more they provide the city with an element of diversity that enriches the quality of life for its population. However, whenever the relationship between the different groups involves antagonism or marginalization, the city becomes a sphere for contention, tension and even violence. Generally, Amman has sought to accommodate the various groups inhabiting the city, even though the treatment of guest workers residing in the country is not always exemplary.

Furthermore, the population of Amman is estimated to increase by no less than 10 per cent during the summer months when Jordanian expatriates working in the Gulf region and tourists from a number of Gulf countries come to spend their summer holidays in the city.¹⁰ Equally, a significant number of citizens from the Gulf region and from other Arab countries are drawn to Amman for its medical facilities and to undergo medical treatments.

2. *Developments in the 1990s*

During the 1990s, the economic and political conditions were such that they enabled Amman to transform from a city with a comparatively provincial character into a metropolis that is becoming increasingly connected to and integrated with the global environment.

The transformations that have affected Amman since the 1990s are unique in relation to previous changes to the fortunes of Amman. While the wave of displaced populations that Amman received during this period was not the first in its modern history, this group was starkly different in that it largely comprised professionals who came from Kuwait and other countries of the Gulf region where they had enjoyed high standards of living. Consequently, most had considerable savings.¹¹ This is in contrast with the waves of

⁸ A good number of those Egyptian expatriates are active in such economic activities as construction, retail, sanitary work and gardening.

⁹ The exact numbers of expatriates in Amman and Jordan are difficult to assess. Official statistics indicate that during 2001 approximately 112,300 work permits were issued to workers from Egypt, more than 1,700 permits for workers from the Philippines, and some 6,500 permits for workers from Sri Lanka. The real numbers are generally higher given that a good number of foreign workers from these countries work in Jordan without official work permits. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40. With regard to Iraqi expatriates in Amman, the *Statistical Yearbook* only refers to the number of Iraqis who entered and left the country during 2001, which were estimated at 417,000 and 374,000, respectively. Department of Statistics, *op. cit.*, pp. 137 and 139.

¹⁰ Official statistics indicate that more than 800,000 citizens from the countries of the Gulf region, including a majority of Saudi nationals, entered Jordan during 2001. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹¹ As the political satirist P.J. O'Rourke sarcastically commented, these new residents of Amman left Kuwait "because their bank cards wouldn't work in Kuwaiti cash machines any more". P.J. O'Rourke, *Give War a Chance* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1992), p. 172.

refugees who came to Amman following the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli conflicts, which generally consisted of rural populations compelled to flee their homes with not much more than the shirts on their backs.

The newcomers in the 1990s injected a significant amount of their savings into the Jordanian economy. They bought properties, invested in existing corporations and started new businesses. In fact, their arrival resulted in an economic boom whose effects lasted several years. Moreover, they introduced new consumption patterns to Amman. Given their higher economic status, they were accustomed to high levels of consumption expressed in such activities as purchasing consumer goods and eating in restaurants. Amman quickly accommodated their consumption needs as existing commercial enterprises expanded the range of goods they sold and new establishments came into being. Similarly, the newcomers caused a real estate boom as they increased demand for residential and commercial properties, and investment opportunities.¹²

The other group that followed these expatriates from Kuwait consisted of the large number of Iraqi nationals who moved to Jordan to escape the harsh political and economic conditions that had become more extreme following the 1990-1991 Gulf War. These Iraqis came from different socio-economic backgrounds. Some were wealthy enough to be able to support an affluent level of living in Amman and invest considerably in the Jordanian economy. Others were more impoverished and tried to make ends meet in whichever way they could. While to a number of Iraqi expatriates Jordan served as a temporary stopover as they sought immigration in other countries, this transitional phase often extended for a number of years. These expatriates, who arrived in various waves throughout the 1990s, injected additional activity in the Jordanian economy. Moreover, these Iraqi expatriates included artists and various professionals, a number of whom are prominent in their respective fields, who made positive contributions to the cultural and economic activities in Jordan.¹³

The 1990s was not the first period during which Jordan received refugees with considerable financial means. This happened previously in the mid-1970s as a consequence of the outbreak of the Lebanese war. However, the number of Lebanese who moved to Jordan during that period was comparatively modest, and almost all of them left relatively shortly after their arrival. It has been commented that Jordan lost a golden opportunity and, with the exception of a few companies, failed to attract many of the regional businesses based in Beirut that considered resettling in Amman. The quality of services, incentives and the legislation relating to investment were not sufficiently developed to attract those businesses. Consequently, the impact of the movement of people from Lebanon as a result of that war was short-lived.

This influx of new population groups was not the only change to affect Amman since 1990. The decade equally witnessed important policies of economic and political liberalization and openness, as well as increasing integration within emerging global systems. In 1989, parliamentary life was restored in Jordan as part of a new policy of political openness. In 1994, a peace treaty was signed between Jordan and Israel, which brought to an end the state of war between the two countries and resolved various security-related issues. Moreover, the 1990s was the decade of increased openness to the outside world, during which both satellite television and the Internet became ubiquitous in the country, thereby facilitating uninterrupted and uncensored access to information.

Furthermore, the Government of Jordan instigated policies of economic liberalization, which resulted in its accession into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2000. These policies included an emphasis on privatization, as expressed in the sale of significant shares in the Jordan Telecommunication Company (JTC) and the Jordan Cement Factories Company to the multinationals France Telecom and Lafarge, respectively. These various policies have generally been maintained despite extremely difficult political conditions that have affected the region during the past decade, particularly the continuing conflicts in two of Jordan's neighbours, namely, Iraq and Palestine.

¹² O. Schlumberger, "Transition to development" in *Jordan in Transition: 1990-2000*, G. Joffe ed. (Hurst, London, 2002).

¹³ For example, it is generally commented that the arrival of Iraqi artists in Jordan positively affected the overall atmosphere in the country in the area of visual arts.

In a related context, the amendments made in 2000 to the law on residential and commercial leases has had a considerable impact on building activities in Jordan, particularly those related to investments in building projects. Until the promulgation of these amendments, a tenant of a residential or commercial property, as well as the tenant's inheritors, were able to continue to rent the property indefinitely, even where rental contracts specified durations. Moreover, it was not possible for the property owner to raise the amount of the rent except through specific governmental rulings, which occurred infrequently, that called for across-the-board rent adjustments. According to the amended law, the duration of all new rental contracts are bound by the period specified in the contract. As for rental contracts signed before the passing of the amended law, the amended law will apply to them beginning in 2011.

This amended law has encouraged investors to implement projects involving such rental properties as shopping malls. In addition, considerable funds have been channelled into the construction of housing projects, particularly apartment buildings.¹⁴ The amended law has resulted in the increased availability of housing units for both rent and sale; and has encouraged many tenants to own rather than rent their dwellings, and owners have become more willing to rent out their housing units.¹⁵

The changes initiated during the 1990s are still unfolding. The telecommunications revolution continues at a strong rate. In addition to the spread of the Internet, mobile telephones are becoming highly widespread. While the service began to be offered in 1995, prices remained prohibitively high for a number of years. However, since 2000, especially with the entry of a second mobile telephone provider, prices for mobile services have gone down considerably, and the number of users has consequently risen sharply with a penetration rate in Jordan currently approaching 25 per cent.¹⁶ This rise in the use of mobile phones in the country has had a liberating affect on the manner in which people carry out various social and business transactions.

Figure 2. View of one of Amman's latest shopping malls



Photo by Dalia Hussein

Moreover, Amman is now, for better or for worse, more integrated with global economic and consumer networks. This is evident in the various international hotel chains, shops and fast food restaurants

¹⁴ Over the past three decades, the single-family house in Amman has come to represent a diminishing percentage of housing units constructed in the city, and has become largely limited to higher-income groups. This can be attributed to building regulations that facilitate the construction of apartment buildings in most parts of the city.

¹⁵ For the full text of the amended law, see *The Official Gazette*, No. 4453, Statute No. 30, "A modified law of the Law of Owners and Tenants" (Directorate of the Official Gazette, Jordan, 31 August 2000), pp. 3415-3418.

¹⁶ Official statistics indicate that Jordan had some 629,000 landlines and approximately 1.2 mobile subscriptions by the end of 2002. See "Subscriptions to mobile phones rises 40 per cent," *Jordan Times* (20 November 2003). Some estimates expect the number of mobile subscriptions in Jordan to reach 1.5 million before the end of 2003. Department of Statistics, op. cit., p. 103; and A. Stensgaard, "Jordan's Mobile Phone Wars" (AME Info, 5 October 2002), which is available at: www.ameinfo.com/news/Detailed/16682.html.

that have become ubiquitous in the city. However, the position of Amman as an international city remains incomplete. For example, Amman's Queen Alia International Airport handles an average of some 70 daily flights, compared to the more than 400 daily flights of the region's busiest airport, Dubai International Airport.¹⁷

Until the 1990s, it was common for people in the region as well as visitors to Amman to refer to the city as "sleepy" or "provincial". This is no longer the case. During the past decade, Amman has served as a major gateway city for Palestinians and Iraqis, providing these groups with a link to the outside world and an escape from their considerable economic and political hardships. While various cities in the region, including Baghdad, Beirut, Cairo and Damascus, have lost some of their political, cultural or economic regional weight over the past three decades, other cities, particularly Dubai and others located in the affluent Gulf region, have been playing a more central role in the life of the region. Amman may not hold a position of political, cultural or economic predominance, but it has been able to hold its own and even gain a degree of added influence within the region since the 1990s.

C. THE PHYSICAL EVOLUTION OF AMMAN

As highlighted above, the groups that make up the population of Amman can be divided according to various criteria, including socio-economic and national. These groups sometimes occupy different physical spheres in the city, sometimes share the same spheres and sometimes intersect in their use of those physical spheres. Amman is neither that highly well organized in terms of urban planning and zoning practices, nor is it subjected to an excessive political and cultural authoritarian system that seeks to segregate the inhabitants. Moreover, Amman cannot be described as a fully integrated city that contains physical, cultural, social and economic spheres where the different inhabitants of the city come together. Instead, the city can be described as a mixture of economically and socially exclusive districts as well as mixed and "hazy" areas, wherein the residents do not form a predominant socio-economic, religious or national group.

While the physical evolution of Amman since the 1990s is connected to the various demographic, political and economic factors that have affected the city during that period, it has not been determined by such factors. The physical evolution of Amman, albeit highly accelerated in the 1990s, has its roots in previous decades.

Specifically and at least until the 1970s, the city's unique topography has greatly affected the manner in which it evolved. Growing from a fertile valley, which developed into the downtown area of Amman, the residential areas of Amman spread gradually from that centre to occupy the surrounding hills. The downtown area functioned as the central business district of the city and housed religious, governmental, commercial and residential areas. Moreover, it connected the western hills of the city with its eastern hills, bridging the socio-economic divide and providing a physical setting where affluent and poorer inhabitants could interact.

The downtown area today remains a busy and bustling part of Amman. However, it no longer plays the central role it previously occupied in the life of the city. Most of the governmental offices, corporate head offices and upscale commercial establishments that used to be located in the downtown area left to the outer sections of the city. Even the State mosque of Jordan moved from the King Hussein Mosque in downtown to the King Abdullah Mosque, completed during the late 1980s, in the Abdali district of Amman. This relocation of institutional and commercial activities took place primarily during the 1970s and was particularly influenced by the spectacular construction boom that Amman experienced following two regional conflicts, namely, the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 and the Lebanese war. The first conflict brought about a dramatic increase in oil prices, which trickled down to boost the national incomes of such non-oil producing countries as Jordan.¹⁸ Within the context of the second conflict, the move of a considerable number of people and businesses from Beirut to Amman, albeit temporary, did contribute to the construction boom in the city.

¹⁷ Department of Statistics, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

¹⁸ Additionally, during that period Jordan received assistance directly from a number of Gulf countries by virtue of its position as a frontline State in the conflict with Israel; and indirectly from the boosted incomes of expatriates working in the Gulf region.

While this shift of official and commercial buildings from downtown has followed and continues to follow the organic outward expansion of Amman, it is a process that hinders the sense of continuity in the life of the city. In a few isolated cases, certain economic sectors have settled in specific areas of Amman, including, most prominently, the banking sector, which is concentrated in the Shmeisani district of the western half of the city.

Figure 3. Aerial view showing parts of the Shmeisani district



Photo courtesy of the Municipality of Greater Amman

The present city limits, which were set with the establishment of the Greater Amman Municipality in 1987, now cover an area of 526 square kilometres. Until the late 1980s, more than 60 per cent of that area remained empty.¹⁹ While considerable construction has taken place in Amman since then, particularly in the surrounding hills overlooking central downtown, there remain many empty plots of land in all but the oldest parts of the city. This predominance of open plots can be attributed to inadequate zoning policies, excessive real estate speculation and inheritance laws that divide real estate among a significant number of inheritors, which impedes decisions and actions related to a shared plot of land.

Given the rapid urbanization of Greater Amman, such surrounding towns as Sweileh and Wadi Seir have now been physically incorporated into the city and, consequently, have lost their autonomous characters and distinctive features as separate towns. Within that context, both of these towns had considerable Circassian populations until they were overtaken by Amman during the 1980s. Moreover, the idea of surrounding such towns with green belts was unfortunately never implemented; and the urban sprawl was never put in check so that tracts of fertile agricultural land, a rare commodity in Jordan, have been lost under layers of asphalt and concrete. Even adjacent large cities, including Al-Zarqa and Al-Rusayfeh, which remain physically disconnected from Amman, are now economically closely integrated within the city and a growing number of their inhabitants commute to work in Amman.

While a number of plans were designed for Amman, they were never more than theoretical exercises that were never taken a stage further. The growth of Amman has often been addressed in the form of crisis management rather than preventive strategies addressing future growth. Generally, planning has concentrated on facilitating traffic through the various sections of the city. This has taken the form of constructing tunnels and overpasses at major intersections, thereby forcing some city streets to take on the mutually exclusive tasks of serving as motorways and as service roads. Consequently, these constructions have substantially hampered pedestrian movement, which already suffers from pavements that are either too narrow, too high, disconnected or otherwise unsuitable. Moreover, the comparatively chaotic driving and poor parking habits prevalent in the city is further compounded by an inadequate public transportation system, which tends to be used by those poorer groups who cannot afford personal cars or private taxis.

¹⁹ *Amman: the Capital of Jordan* (in Arabic), S. Musa, ed. (Municipality of Greater Amman, 1988), p. 310.

This has resulted in a significantly unfavourable situation whereby the car is the paramount mode of transport and the urban planning in turn surrenders to and serves the automobile. Despite the new motorways, overpasses and tunnels, the city suffers from serious traffic congestions and cannot keep up with an increasing number of cars on the roads, which has grown dramatically as a result of an increasing population, rising standards of living and lowered import tariffs on cars.²⁰ The only significant continuous pedestrian zone in the city can be found in the downtown area. However, it is an area that can barely accommodate the large numbers of people using it and, as stated above, the downtown area no longer represents the meeting place of the various inhabitants of Amman.

Equally, the city's skyline has changed considerably during the 1990s. One of the pleasant characteristics of Amman before the 1980s was its harmonized scale whereby most buildings were limited to a height of four storeys. A number of high-rise buildings were erected during the 1980s, particularly international hotel chains; and this trend has increased considerably since the mid-1990s. In addition to damaging the unified scale that had characterized the city, these high-rise buildings have increased the pressure on the infrastructure, particularly the roads, which already are subject to considerable traffic congestions. Within that context, the majority of these buildings have been erected in relatively more established parts of the city, rather than at the outskirts where such challenges would be more easily resolved.

International hotel chains represent a type of building that has proliferated in the city and that has impacted the skyline and the fabric of neighbourhoods in which these hotels are located. The other type of building that has surfaced in Amman in recent years is the shopping mall with its associated benefits and challenges. Within the context of the former, malls and large-scale supermarkets have boosted convenience and year-round shopping. However, these retail outlets are equally anti-urban structures in that they comprise large isolated blocks that are surrounded by expansive parking lots. Consequently, they are not easily accessible to pedestrians, further emphasizing their alienation in the city, and they break up any continuity of the urban fabric. Additionally, they move the weight of retail activity in the city from such public spaces as streets and plazas to semi-public, controlled and privately owned spaces. Perhaps ironically, once inside, the shopping malls represent one of the few places in Amman where pedestrians can move around freely and safely.

D. THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Before 1990, the most prominent large-scale public spaces and monuments included the following: the Monument of the Unknown Soldier, erected in 1977; the Hashemite Plaza, developed in 1986 in the downtown area adjacent to the Roman Theatre; and the King Abdullah Mosque, established in 1989.

Since the 1990s, the Municipality of Greater Amman, which benefited from an amalgamation and subsequent pooling of resources of several municipalities, has moved to commission a number of large-scale projects.²¹ This new financial power has brought with it an appetite for building and developing various public monuments, including the following: (a) the municipal complex in Ras Al 'Ain; (b) Al Hussein Public Parks; and (c) the Culture Avenue.²²

1. *Ras Al 'Ain*

The Ras Al 'Ain complex is currently the largest urban development project in Amman's history. With a surface area of 14 hectares and occupying a dilapidated district of historical Amman between the western and eastern halves of the city, this ambitious project is aimed at rejuvenating the neighbourhood by

²⁰ There are an estimated 419,000 cars in Jordan, of which more than 61 per cent were registered in Amman in 2001. Department of Statistics, op. cit., p. 81.

²¹ In 2004, the budget of the Municipality of Greater Amman was set at a substantial 95 million Jordanian dinars, approximately \$134 million. "GAM Announces 2004 Budget", *Jordan Times* (15 October 2003).

²² Information on these projects can be found in the news section of the website of the Center for the Study of the Built Environment, which is available at: www.csbe.org.

constructing a number of important public and cultural buildings, including the Amman City Hall, which is set to incorporate exhibition and lecture halls, and offices of the mayor and high-level municipal staff; the administrative municipality building connected to the City Hall by way of a bridge; Al Hussein Cultural Centre with lecture halls, a library and artist studios; a mosque; the Jordan National Museum; and an open, landscaped area to function as an urban public park.

Figure 4. View of the Ras Al Ain municipal complex



Photo by Dalia Hussein

2. Al Hussein Public Parks

Al Hussein Public Parks occupies a site of 70 hectares located at the western edge of Amman. It includes various landscaped areas, theme gardens, recreational facilities, museums and cultural buildings. The project, which has not yet been completed, is by far the largest urban park in Jordan.

Figure 5. View of Al Hussein Public Parks showing the “Culture Village” in the foreground



Photo by Jafar Tukan

3. The Culture Avenue

Compared to Ras Al ‘Ain and Al Hussein Public Parks, the Culture Avenue is a much smaller project. The project consisted of converting the median of a wide, 360-metre-long street in the busy Shmeisani banking district into a pedestrian walkway. The median includes landscaped areas, shops and exhibition areas.

Figure 6. View of the Culture Avenue



Photo by Tom Postma

While the design merits and shortcomings of these projects fall beyond the scope of this study, it is important to highlight some characteristics within the context of their connection to and interaction with the city. Specifically, the Culture Avenue provides a rare example in Amman of limiting automobile access in favour of pedestrians; while the other two larger projects further emphasize the domination of the automobile to the detriment of pedestrians. The Ras Al 'Ain complex in particular is an urban island that is completely surrounded by multilane expressways designed to accommodate large amounts of traffic. Given that it is therefore not easily accessible to pedestrians, the complex falls short of fulfilling its symbolic role of providing a link between the western and eastern halves of the city. Similarly, Al Hussein Public Parks is located in a relatively sparsely populated area at the edge of the city and along a busy thoroughfare that presents an obvious challenge for pedestrians.

Despite these shortcomings, these projects represent a new positive trend in Amman, which is aimed at creating spaces and buildings that serve the general public. Amman is a city where the public realm has more or less been restricted to the street, which in turn is dominated by the automobile, thereby marginalizing and alienating pedestrians. Otherwise, most of the activities of the city take place in private or semi-private realms. This emphasis on the creation of spaces that are open to all (though not necessarily easily accessible by all) is a welcome development that gives the public realm a stronger physical presence in the city.

E. NEW URBAN EXPERIMENTS

Amman is embarking on its most ambitious urban development project, which is situated in Al Abdali district. This project is located on some 33.4 hectares that, from the 1940s until recently, were occupied by various army, police and other security institutions. These institutions have been moved elsewhere in order to develop this part of Al Abdali into an upscale multipurpose complex that includes a university, residences, offices and shops. The project is set to be developed through a public-private partnership whereby the public

sector, represented by the National Resources Investment and Development Corporation (MAWARED), and Saudi-Oger will collaborate to establish the Land Development Company, which will subsequently play the role of property manager for the site.²³ This is the first instance of an urban development project being carried out in Amman at such a scale. MAWARED has emphasized that the area will be developed according to the highest architectural and urban standards, and will be sensitive in addressing issues related to pedestrian movement within the site. While the project remains in its early phases of implementation, the results are expected to impact the evolution of the city and provide an model for future urban growth.²⁴

Figure 7. Artist’s rendering of a pedestrian zone in the ‘Abdali regeneration project



Photo as presented in the project’s website, which is available at: www.alabdaliproject.jo

F. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Amman remains a city that changes regularly. While its growth has been both unremitting and exceptional since the 1920s, its development during the past decade provides a qualitative change in relation to the growth that characterized previous decades. Amman is emerging into a metropolis that is active and vigorous on the economic, financial and cultural levels. However, it has suffered on other fronts as an urban centre and faces the following challenges, namely: (a) an excessive urban sprawl; (b) increasing levels of air pollution, resulting primarily from vehicular exhausts; (c) overwhelming blots on the cityscape, resulting from the unregulated proliferation of billboards, satellite dishes and TV antennas; (d) the marginalization and alienation of pedestrians; and (e) the lack of a central business district. The directions that the authorities will take in addressing these various challenges will greatly determine the manner in which the city will grow. If the current course of development in Amman is left unchecked, the city will probably join, sooner than later, the ranks of those metropolitan centres in the developing world where daily life is becoming increasingly difficult and unpleasant for its inhabitants.

²³ The international developer, Saudi-Oger, developed the similar SOLIDERE project in Beirut Central District.

²⁴ Additional information on the regeneration project in Al ‘Abdali is available at: www.alabdaliproject.jo; and www.csbe.org.

II. BEIRUT: THE PHOENIX AND THE RECONSTRUCTION PREDICAMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

Beirut is said to have been destroyed seven times during its long history; and it recovered seven times. The legend of the phoenix rising from the ashes is still alive; yet many analysts question the cost for the latest recovery and, more importantly, whether it will benefit more than an elite. Relying largely on a policy of laissez-faire that has its roots in post-independence Lebanon of the 1940s, development has mostly been driven by the private sector with little monitoring by the State. Over the decades, the many success stories of individual Lebanese have not translated into concrete policies aimed at improving the public sphere. Typically, sustainable planning and development policies have depended on the will of individuals rather than of the State, and on their ability to act.

Figure 8. Aerial view of Beirut



For the purposes of this study, an Arab city is one that exists in an Arab country and that is inhabited by an Arabic-speaking population. Using such a definition, Beirut is an Arab city. However, the imprint of Arab and Islamic urban culture on Beirut is less evident than on Cairo, Aleppo or, for that matter, on such Lebanese cities as Tripoli or Sidon. Beirut has been continuously inhabited since the third millennium B.C.; and the city's heritage testifies to a variety of influences to which Beirut was subjected, including, among others, Phoenician, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Crusader, Mamluk, Ottoman and French under the mandate and leading to independence in 1943.

The reconstruction period that followed the 1975-1990 Lebanese war is perceived as a necessary condition for and sign of the renaissance of Lebanon. Consequently, the renaissance of Beirut has acquired something of a symbolic significance. While there is a general expectation that Lebanon will resurface as a major focal point of business, services and tourism in the region, it remains to be seen whether Beirut will live up to its mythical reputation and rise once more to assume the mantle of regional hub.

In 2003, more than 1 million tourists visited Lebanon, representing the highest number in 24 years, of which 43 per cent were Arab nationals.²⁵ While Beirut and Lebanon as a whole attract many visitors from the Gulf countries, the ongoing instability in the region continues to impede the flow of tourists from other countries and continents. This tourist clientele has some bearing on the character of the city, given that there is a clear incentive to cater to tourists both in terms of services and activities, and in such physical manifestations as architecture and decoration.

²⁵ In the period January-July 2004, more than 730,000 foreigners visited Lebanon, rising from the 527,000 visitors over the same period in 2003. These figures from the Ministry of Tourism do not include Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian nationals.

B. PRE-WAR BEIRUT

Like most cities on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, Beirut's history and development can be linked to trade, particularly since the second half of the nineteenth century. The city's population has variously been estimated at 22,000 in 1856, 70,000 in 1863, 120,000 in 1900, 300,000 in 1950, and 1,200,000 in 1970. The population of Greater Beirut is currently estimated at 1.3 million inhabitants, out of the total population of Lebanon of approximately 4 million.

In a modern context, the rise of Beirut can be traced to the 1920s when the city started to play a leading role in the region. Following independence in 1943, the Lebanese economy benefited from favourable conditions for commerce and trade, which deepened a dependence on unbridled capitalism. The services sector developed rapidly, making Beirut a major regional centre for trade, banking, air-sea-land transport and communication, tourism and professional services. Moreover, given its reputation as a safe haven at a time of political instability in some other Arab countries, Lebanon benefited from the expansion of oil production in the Gulf region. Growth was further enhanced by the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, which resulted in the relocation to Beirut of several major corporations in Egypt, including regional offices of banks, aviation and oil companies. The booming Lebanese economy resulted in an increase of land transactions and building activity. Local amenities and a favourable climate attracted both tourists and foreign investors, and resulted in the spread of hotels, office buildings, banks and upscale residential complexes. Equally during that period, financiers and property speculators flourished as new business districts and residential projects were developed to cater to a growing middle class.

However, the prosperous economy remained little more than a scintillating image for some inhabitants. Rural to urban migration brought to Beirut a population in search of education and job opportunities. While many migrants found such opportunities, a significant number of others did not and remained impoverished in a belt of misery that began to form around the capital. The absence of a social housing programme, compounded further by a general lack of official concern with regard to the welfare and living conditions of the newcomers, are believed to have exacerbated and even contributed to the tensions that led to the 1975-1990 Lebanese war.²⁶

C. WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

During the war, the conflict segregated the population along sectarian lines; and the city was divided into two halves, namely: East Beirut, which was predominantly Christian; and West Beirut, which was predominantly Muslim. The displacement and relocation of a large number of people created new poles. The population of the southern suburbs of Beirut increased significantly due to the displacement from South Lebanon. Moreover, the northern suburbs underwent frenetic construction that resulted in an uninterrupted urban sprawl reaching the town of Jounieh, some 15 kilometres north of the capital.

Following the cessation of hostilities in 1990, the country was left with significant human, material and economic losses. In terms of human losses, these have been estimated as follows: 170,000 persons died, 800,000 were displaced and 900,000 emigrated. The material losses were equally substantial. A total of 300,000 dwellings were damaged; hospitals, schools, roads, water, electricity, and telecommunication were severely affected; and total material damages were estimated at \$12 billion, while opportunity costs rose to a minimum of \$60 billion.²⁷

²⁶ In his introduction to the "IRFED" Mission study in 1961, which constituted the point of departure for examining the social and developmental situation in the country, Father L. Lebreton observed that if Lebanon could not manage to reduce the economic disparities, then it would "face extremely serious social problems, the events of 1958 being merely a symptomatic manifestation of what is yet to come." L. Lebreton, "*Besoins et possibilités de développement du Liban*", vol. I, in *Situation Economique et Sociale*, (Ministry of Planning, IRFED Mission, Beirut, 1961).

²⁷ F. Baz, "The macroeconomic basis of reconstruction" in *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*, P.G. Rowe and H. Sarkis eds. (Prestel-Verlag, Munich, 1998).

Figure 9. View showing the buildings overlooking Beirut



Photo by Naji Assi

In the absence of a Ministry of Planning, the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) was made responsible for leading and coordinating the reconstruction effort in the country. With a saturated Greater Beirut, the rebuilding of the city centre was not the only issue to tackle. The expansion of the city was left without control by the authorities. Outside the perimeter of the city centre, the reconstruction along the demarcation line was left to the will and meager capacity of individuals, and remains in largely a derelict condition. Certain districts, which were not as demolished as others, were nevertheless significantly affected. For example, the pre-war shopping district of Hamra has yet to recover fully from its economic demise.

Furthermore, the main planning tool of the Government before the war was largely centred on issues of road connections and transportation. This focus remains and is evident from the roads, highways and bypasses that have been constructed nationwide, particularly the northern and southern exit roads; and from improvements relating to the port and airport. Within the context of the latter, the comparatively new international terminals have been designed to accommodate 6 million passengers per year. Despite the importance of transportation for a national economy, there is a widely held belief that such limited focus by the Government has failed to address societal issues and has not sought to provide a better quality of life in the city.

D. BEIRUT CENTRAL DISTRICT

Given its location, economic and symbolic implications, and the extensive damage it suffered, the Beirut Central District (BCD) was considered as a separate item in the reconstruction programme. A consultancy firm, Dar Al Handasah, developed a project for the Government. However, owing to an exhausted national treasury, the project failed to be implemented. Subsequently, a single real estate company,

namely, SOLIDERE, was established to develop the city centre.²⁸ This company, capitalized partly by cash subscriptions from investors and partly by issuing shares, expropriated the central district perimeter.²⁹ In retrospect, it is clear that the reconstruction plan should have preserved the rights of the original property owners. Rebuilt as a collective effort, the city centre would then have attracted residents and involved individuals, not merely visitors. More importantly and despite the confessional composition of the board of SOLIDERE, which follows the consensual pattern of the Government, the development of BCD failed to provide the city and the country with the promised civic space of healing and recovery.

Figure 10. Aerial view of Beirut Central District



Photo courtesy of SOLIDERE

Environmentally, the project by SOLIDERE was certainly positive in resolving the significant problem that had been created by the dumping site on BCD's coastline, which extended over an area of 250,000 square metres and a height of 14 metres. The landfill was integrated into the project, treated and is set to be transformed into development land, comprising a promenade, two marinas and a public park covering 80,000 square metres.

Similarly, archaeological excavations during reconstruction provided a unique opportunity to study the history of Beirut, particularly its Phoenician past, and to document the successive strata.

At a societal level, a study on the urban fabric and collective memory revealed that sharp conceptual differences exist among various age groups.³⁰ While some squares, streets and landmarks had greater significance for the older generations, these were deemed largely inconsequential by the younger generations who grew up during or after the war. There is therefore a degree of cynicism that maintains that it no longer matters if the new city centre is significantly different from the one recalled by the older generations.

In fact, during the reconstruction of BCD, the wrecking-ball destroyed much of what the war had left standing. A thorough research on the city centre showed that the amount of buildings demolished after the war exceeded the amount destroyed during the war.³¹ Among the buildings and districts saved from the tabula rasa policy are religious buildings, Riad Al Solh Street (equally known as Banking Street) and the Foch-Allenby area. A look at three samples of projects in SOLIDERE provides an idea of the reconstruction predicament.

²⁸ The enactment of Law No. 117 of 1991 paved the way for a legal framework in the subsequent year that allowed the establishment of private real estate companies to carry out the redevelopment of damaged areas and in accordance with a master plan approved by the Government. Within that framework, SOLIDERE was empowered to redevelop approximately 1.8 million square metres, comprising the traditional BCD and the reclaimed land.

²⁹ Arguing that legal property entanglements between many tenants and owners were too complex to resolve, the properties were expropriated and the concerned people were given shares in exchange.

³⁰ R. Saliba, *Morphological Investigation of Downtown Beirut* (American University of Beirut, 1991).

³¹ H. Schmid, *Comparative Map for the Demolitions in the City Center* (Heidelberg University, 1997).

1. Foch-Allenby

What is commonly named the Foch-Allenby area is the district of BCD that was built during the French mandate in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The renovation of the charming ochre buildings aligned with intricate detailing and elegant iron handrails proved beneficial, at least as a setting for the most vibrant post-war activity, namely, sidewalk cafés, restaurants and bars. Somewhat ironically, and in the absence of an older medieval fabric, the current national identity and pride is associated with those historic buildings of the French mandate.³²

2. The United Nations House

The United Nations House, which is the headquarters of ESCWA, was completed in 1997 and designed as a paragon of Lebanon's recovery. On its eastern and western sides, the building presents conventional alternating strips of polished granite and glass; and the core of the building is a U-shaped glass box facing a public garden and, beyond that, the highway to the airport. While the glass walls provide the building with a high-tech futuristic look, the design proved inappropriate given the exposure to the heat and glare of the sun.

Figure 11. The United Nations House



Photo by Pierre El Houry

3. Saifi Village

Saifi Village is one of the few neighbourhoods that survived the war, offering a sound balance between commercial needs and activities, outdoor spaces and low-rise dwellings. During reconstruction, an extensive study recommended to maintain its scale and provide the district with urban and building regulations, thereby protecting its character while allowing for new construction. However, despite those recommendations, the project unfortunately surrendered to an easy pastiche of traditional architecture. Dissociated from the accompanying traditional dwelling layouts, the superficial treatment of arches, corbelled balconies and red-tiled roofs is nothing but quickly concocted historical reference. Furthermore, the streets and squares in Saifi Village that are presented as open to the public are guarded so heavily by security personnel that visitors feel unwelcome.

³² R. Saliba, *Beirut City Center Recovery: The Foch-Allenby and Etoile Conservation Area* (SOLIDERE, Beirut, 2004).

Figure 12. Saifi Village



Photo by George Arbid

Despite the effort to provide outdoor spaces, which are significantly lacking in the city, the objective is not fully attained because the spaces in Saifi Village are gentrified. In order for those spaces to be invested by the population, they have to lend themselves to public activities. Recently, the neighbourhood witnessed the opening of art galleries supported by temporary art exhibitions in an effort to attract more people.

Figure 13. Security personnel in Saifi Village



Photo by George Arbid

4. *The souks*

More than in the upscale residential neighbourhoods, it is hoped that the souks will be able to attract a wider cross-section of the population. Severely destroyed during the war, the souks were the object of an international competition launched in 1994.³³ After eight years of interruption for political and administrative reasons, and with the execution limited to the underground parking, the \$100 million project is again on track and, upon completion, is expected to comprise 200 shops, including a large-surface department store and a jewellery market; a leisure complex, including cinemas and an IMAX (Image Maximum) film projection system; restaurants and cafés; and several exhibition spaces.

While it is impossible to provide a full evaluation of the project, some observations can be gleaned even at this early stage of implementation. The design seeks to preserve Souk Tawileh and Souk Ayyass, the two major commercial streets in pre-war Beirut with high symbolic importance for Lebanese. However, according to the plan, these Souks are to be permanently covered, along the lines of markets found for example in Istanbul. Traditionally, the souks were open to the sky, except for some improvised and temporary structures. More importantly, there are fears that the gentrified and upper class shops will not cater to the local middle class that was the original clientele. Consequently, it remains to be seen whether the projected souks will be able to regain the spirit of their pre-war identities.

E. THE SUBURBS OF BEIRUT

Parts of the western area of the city's southern suburbs have been illegally inhabited since the war. The total area covers 560 hectares, five times the size of BCD, of which approximately 45 hectares is waterfront property with significant potential for tourism development. Relocating the illegal inhabitants of the sector in 7,500 low-income housing units, along with the shops and small industries that provide them with income is one aspect of a project being undertaken by Elyssar, a public agency in the field of planning and development. The project, which was expected to be completed at an estimated cost of \$1.8 billion, was originally funded with a \$400 million Government grant. However, the project has been plagued with delays, chiefly because of financial difficulties and thorny issues relating to land expropriation.

Some leading analysts have criticized that "only economic considerations are determining the choices adopted by the project and no debate is being initiated about its urban and social dimensions".³⁴ Furthermore, what was expected to be a participatory example of urban governance, bringing together the concerned population and the State, has become entangled in political negotiations and wrangling between local parties and the Government.³⁵

The northern coastal stretch of Beirut is equally undergoing development through a major project, entitled the Linord Project. While the main objective is to develop a modern urban setting, the Project has, to date, executed a landfill and constructed a grid of roads surrounding plots in preparation for real estate development.³⁶

³³ While this competition resulted in three project awards, none was executed. Subsequently, the Spanish architect of international repute, R. Moneo, was given the opportunity to design the souks.

³⁴ M. Harb, "Transforming the site of dereliction into the urban culture of modernity: Beirut's southern suburb and Elisar Project" in *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*, P.G. Rowe and H. Sarkis eds. (Prestel-Verlag, Munich, 1998), pp. 173-181.

³⁵ M. Harb, "Urban governance in post-war Beirut: resources, negotiations and contestations in the Elyssar Project" in *Capital Cities: Ethnographies of Urban Governance in the Middle East*, S. Shami ed. (Toronto University Press, 2001), pp. 111-133.

³⁶ J. Atallah, "The northern sector: projects and plans at sea" in *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*, P.G. Rowe and H. Sarkis eds. (Prestel-Verlag, Munich, 1998), pp. 202-216.

F. CITYSCAPE

1. *The pursuit of gigantism*

There has been a significant increase in the scale of projects in the past decade. This trend is reflected by the number of building permits that were submitted by the Order of Engineers and Architects of Beirut and that, in terms of surface area, reached 833 hectares in 2003, compared to 763 hectares in 2002.

The cityscape began to change in the 1970s following the building ordinance that eliminated the height limit. However, the first high-rise buildings, including the Murr Tower and the Rizk Tower, were generally exceptions in the city silhouette until the end of the war.

Since the 1990s, the number of high-rise buildings have increased significantly and continue to be erected in various neighbourhoods, including the waterfront of Ain El Mreisseh; the hills overlooking Beirut, such as the Cap sur Ville complex; and the waterfront of BCD, which, given its prime location, was able to attract investors from the Gulf region. Within that context, the Beirut Tower, with costs estimated at \$135 million, consists of 64 apartments on 27 floors; and the Marina Tower and the Platinum Tower each comprise more than 25 floors.

Moreover, a major project by SOLIDERE involves the construction of a 40-storey tower in Riad Al Solh Square in BCD, called the Landmark Beirut Trade Centre. Costing an estimated \$200 million, including \$60 million allotted for the purchase of the land, the high-rise building is set to become the largest structure in Lebanon, with 71,000 square metres of office space, conference, restaurant and banqueting facilities, in addition to an underground parking facilities for 600 cars.

Consequently, the balance that had been maintained between the two-storey traditional Lebanese houses and the six-storey buildings is currently under threat by giant towers, whose appearance have irreversibly changed the scale and character of neighbourhoods.

Similarly, major hotels that were renovated in the 1990s, including the Phoenicia and the Riviera, saw their pre-war elegance being replaced by ostentatious luxury, largely to cater to a clientele from the Gulf region. Additionally, massive hotels were built in and around Beirut, including the Metropolitan Palace Hotel in Sin El Fil, and Le Royal Hotel in Dbayeh.

This trend towards gigantism has been replicated by department stores and shopping malls. While these large-surface retail outlets used to be located on the outskirts of Greater Beirut, such as Monoprix/BHV in Jnah and ABC Mall in Dbayeh, there is currently a tendency to move them to the core of the capital.

Within that context, the ABC Mall in Ashrafieh, which cost some \$80 million and encompasses 40,000 square metres of retail space, opened its doors on 30 November 2003.³⁷ This mall imposes its overwhelming presence on its immediate vicinity and the neighbourhood, with solid stone facades that spread across an entire block. Its current commercial performance suggests that a smaller project could have balanced better its economic feasibility with its impact on the neighbourhood. Despite these shortcomings, the mall possesses generous outdoor space for pedestrians and an attractive architectural design that includes transitional open-air spaces covered with glass domes and tensile structures on steel tree-like columns. Other large-scale shopping malls currently under construction include the Beirut Mall with 175,000 square metres of retail space at the northern exit of Beirut in Dora; and the Metropolitan City Centre in Sin El Fil.

³⁷ The ABC Mall was inaugurated in the presence of the President of the Republic, religious dignitaries and politicians. In the current uneasy economic situation and in the absence or dearth of other forms of development, it is common to witness such official endorsements for consumption-oriented activities.

Figure 14. The ABC Mall in Ashrafieh and neighbouring tower



Photo by Amer Salem

Similarly, religious buildings are vying for space to impose their structures on the city. After some political and financial tribulations that delayed its construction, the colossal Mohammad Al Amine Mosque is nearing completion with its four high minarets on the western side of Martyrs' Square. Abutting the Maronite Cathedral of Saint George, it is hard not to consider the location of the Mosque as a sign of religious competition even in times of peace.³⁸

2. Public space

The city's promenade, namely, the Beirut Corniche is still a major attraction and is often described as the only real public space in the capital. Moreover, it is the urban space that is surreptitiously preferred by the authorities.³⁹ While another promenade was implemented in the 1990s on the northern exit of Beirut in Antelias/Dbayeh, it does not perform its basic task, given that a high parapet has been erected that obstructs the view of the sea.

Temporary social arenas are created in BCD, particularly to house cultural events. These play the role of public space, albeit provisional as well as staged and controlled. Additionally, a heritage trail is being implemented, which is aimed at providing the opportunity to discover historical and cultural landmarks on foot, and is set to complement the pedestrian zones in the city centre.⁴⁰

The reputation of "Green Lebanon" has greatly suffered both in the mountainous hinterland and in the capital where there is a dearth of public parks. Figures reveal that Beirut has 1 tree for every 33 inhabitants, compared to Berlin, with 4 trees per inhabitant, and Abu Dhabi, with 34 trees for every inhabitant. Additionally, a project aimed at reforesting the Pine Forest in the area of the Hippodrome was initiated in 1992. The park with its 32 hectares is now ready to be opened to the public. Similarly, a number of landscaping projects have been completed in the city centre, including the Gebran Khalil Gebran Garden, facing the United Nations House, the reflecting pool adjacent to the Municipality of Beirut, and the Roman Baths Garden.

³⁸ Some have argued that the construction of the gigantic Basilica of Harissa in the Kesrouan, initiated in 1969, was already a milestone in that competition.

³⁹ J. Atallah observes that in "a country where public gatherings are considered a security threat, the Corniche seems to be the ideal form of open space. It remains a place of passage." J. Atallah, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

⁴⁰ SOLIDERE, *Accessibility for the disabled: a design manual for a barrier free environment* (SOLIDERE, Beirut, 1998). For a detailed account of the operation and a post-occupancy evaluation, see R. Tappuni, "Access in rebuilding Beirut's city centre" in *Universal Design Handbook*, W.F.E. Preiser and E. Ostroff eds., (McGraw-Hill, New York, 2001).

Outside the perimeter of BCD, the scarcity of trees and greenery in the public domain is tempered only by private gardens and potted plants on the balconies and terraces of buildings.

Figure 15. Accessibility for the disabled



Photo courtesy of ESCWA

3. Architecture

In the 1950s and 1960s, Lebanon observed a period of integrated modernism in the area of architecture. Far from normalizing the cityscape, the response to local climatic conditions and orientation offered opportunities for a variety of creative designs. From the sun-protecting cloisters of the Pan Am Building to the west-oriented concrete veil of the Dar Assayad printing press and the north-oriented curtain wall of the Horseshoe Building, rational choices dressed the buildings with distinctive skins. Caring less about statements on the identity of the place did not hinder the production of a locally assimilated version of modernism with a Levantine soul.

Currently, the models that are the most visible and prevalent are either a pastiche of tradition or a pastiche of exacerbated modernism. Within the context of the former, tradition is represented by blunt historical reference, red-tiled roofs and canopies, and arches of various proportions and sources. On the other hand, modernism is reduced to high-tech structures associated with glass boxes that are totally inappropriate to the local climate.

If nostalgia to traditional features can be explained by a sentiment of loss of identity caused by the war, the overstated modernistic look replaces the social and cultural conditions of economic recovery with mere representations of wealth shaped in glass and dark granite.

Fortunately, other approaches have emerged to counter these superficial architectural statements. Displaying a decisive character that could be called situated modernism, these include such buildings as the Banque Audi headquarters in BCD, and the extension of the Abdel Kader School.

Figure 16. Banque Audi headquarters



Photo by George Arbid

4. Preservation

Real estate pressure has significantly affected some traditional neighbourhoods. Moreover, the lack of a decisive and concerted protection policy by the Government has been very harmful to the natural character of these neighbourhoods. When, in 1997, the news circulated that a committee of architects was commissioned to determine a list of buildings and neighbourhoods of major heritage importance, many owners demolished their properties overnight fearing that they would be classified. Ever since, the preservation of buildings has only happened haphazardly and often as a result of the action of individual activists. This is the case of the Barakat Building in Sodeco, which was built in the 1920s by Aftimus, a pioneer engineer-architect. Following a strenuous campaign in which activists pressured the authorities to act, the Municipality of Beirut finally agreed to acquire the property and transform it in the future into a museum of the city of Beirut.

In terms of neighbourhoods with traditional characters, Ain El Mreisseh was significantly affected by land speculation and real estate development, while Gemmayze was able to preserve its character due to the activism of a neighbourhood association and other NGOs. Preserving cultural landmarks has equally posed a significant challenge in times of consumption-oriented development. The best example of this trend is the current transformation of the Beirut Grand Theatre, a landmark in BCD, into a restaurant.

5. Projection for the near future: the Lebanese National Master Plan

In March 2002, CDR launched the study of the Lebanese National Master Plan is being undertaken by the Institute for Urban Planning and Development of the Paris Ile-de-France Region (IAURIF) with the collaboration of Dar Al Handasah and other local consultants and partners.

The first phase of the report, completed in December 2002, is justifiably alarming. It warns that comprehensive planning has become vital and may be the last chance for economic recovery. Noting that most of the reconstruction and development efforts have focused on Beirut, it concludes that there is a dire need to adopt sustainable, balanced and comprehensive development policies. Moreover, the experts insist that comprehensive, efficient and nationally oriented development need to replace the supposedly equitable system whereby regions and communities are provided with amenities that are often redundant or unneeded. Consequently, in addition to promoting coherent and balanced development, the report underscores its aim of seeking the unity of the country and, upon completion, is set to include two maps defining land-use and national infrastructure policy. Furthermore, the recommendations highlight the need to preserve the role of Beirut in terms of its aspirations and ability to compete with other major cities in the region.

Figure 17. Population map of Lebanon



Photo courtesy of CDR

G. CONCLUDING REMARKS

With regard to BCD, the jury is still out on the legitimacy and achievements of SOLIDERE. The critics rightly observe a general showcase atmosphere and the disappearance of improvised activities that contribute to the public life in public space. Culture is absent, with the exception of rare and highly advertised events staged by the real estate company. The zealous sanitation and deliberate gentrification of the city centre have marginalized a significant part of the population. In the meantime, the core of the city is being shaped and lived by its inhabitants and the visitors. Despite this legitimate critique, one is forced to admit that the central district is popular; only it has changed both its users and its activities. Rather than seeing in BCD a forum for reuniting the Lebanese people, an Elysium of sorts, it is the place where Lebanese invite their visitors in order to forget their troublesome recent past.

In order for the city to emerge from its trauma and recover from the war, more than a showcased centre is needed. While it is hoped that the atomization and the eventual success of BCD will favourably impact both the national economy and the adjoining neighbourhoods, it is crucial to address the whole city with concerted efforts. Through public participation and incentives, such neighbourhoods as Hamra, Clemenceau and Ashrafiyeh are being upgraded. Less fortunate districts, including Hay Al Sellom, Borj Hammoud and Al Nabaa, which count for a significant proportion of the population of Greater Beirut, are still waiting to be developed. It is in those less fortunate neighbourhoods that the real challenge of a liveable city resides.

III. DUBAI: THE CITY OF MANY CITIES

A. INTRODUCTION

The irresistible rise of Dubai underscores a deliberate development policy. Early critics initially dismissed the economic growth of the city as a happy convergence of circumstances, and believed that the national strategies were too ill equipped and short-sighted to foster true growth. However, such detractors have been proved wrong as economic sector targets, including the Internet, gold trading, air transit and health, began to fall together into a broader economic picture that hints at a calculated relay of short- and long-term plans. Such themed months of the year as the shopping festival and summer surprises, among others, have now become fixtures in a well-seasoned calendar.

In the past decade, the United Arab Emirates experienced almost uninterrupted economic growth based on oil production. The majority of the national oil reserves are in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Together they provide more than 80 per cent of the national income.

Dubai, however, is much less dependent on oil than the other Emirates. Currently, oil represents less than 10 per cent of Dubai's gross domestic product (GDP), estimated at \$18 billion in 2002. The Government of Dubai has actively sought to diversify its economy by supporting non-oil industries, particularly given that oil reserves in Dubai are expected to dry out by 2010.

This economic aspect of the Dubai story has attracted the attention of several analysts examining changing patterns in world markets. Qualifying as a "global city", it has been placed on an equal par with such regional trade platforms as Singapore and Frankfurt. Moreover, Dubai has been running a tight race with Las Vegas in the United States as one of the fastest growing cities in the world. However, despite these economic gains, critics still question the sustainability of Dubai and argue that the ongoing development is merely a reflection of excessive speculations; and that fragile castles in the sand are prone to total devastation by a regional conflict.

The strategic development plan of Dubai, which covers the period 2000-2030, aims to provide a long-term framework to plan effectively for the future. Within that framework, Dubai seeks to become a developed economy by 2010. Recognizing that new technologies, if properly harnessed, can bridge the development and income divides among and within countries, Dubai has been at the forefront in terms of nurturing industries and activities centred on services and high value-added manufacturing, particularly in the areas of finance, logistics, tourism, healthcare and transportation. This drive has, in turn, impacted on the urban and architectural character of Dubai.

Moreover, Dubai has attracted the attention of anthropologists and sociologists, given the city's multinational and multiethnic composition, and the complex relationships that emerge in such service-oriented, transient societies. However, despite the equally impressive urban transformation of the city, Dubai has attracted only modest interest by urban and architectural scholars. There is consequently a need to redress this situation and to outline the processes by which the city's economic growth has in part been driven by architectural opulence and by association with a particular urban and architectural agenda.

In Dubai, new business ventures are often assigned new urban sectors or "cities", including, among others, the free trade zone, the Internet city, the healthcare city. The architecture and planning of these cities plays an important role in the promotion and ultimate success of the economic ventures. They act as self-contained and branded entities that rely on their physical autonomy and architectural identity for their economic success. Dubai can therefore be described as a conglomeration of many cities. The sections below are aimed at the following: (a) reviewing the mechanisms of this conglomeration of cities; (b) highlighting future challenges in terms of coordination among different and disparate urban entities; and (c) outlining the physical attributes of the city by investigating growth and development since the nineteenth century up to the urban landscape of contemporary Dubai.

B. THE RISE OF DUBAI

The Emirate of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates extends over 3,900 square kilometres and currently comprises a population of approximately 1 million, of which 80 per cent are expatriates of other Arab nationals, Asians and Europeans. The Emirate includes Jebel Ali, some 20 kilometres from Dubai, which is the largest free-trade zone in the Gulf region.⁴¹ Moreover, its geographical location halfway between Europe and the Far East has turned Dubai into a major transit stop. Within that context, Dubai International Airport plays a leading role in the region, and transportation contributes to some 13.3 per cent of the city's GDP. Dubai is the third largest re-exporter in the world after Hong Kong and Singapore.

Additionally, Dubai enjoys a number of other comparative features that have placed it on the global map, including the following: the world's biggest shopping mall, the world's tallest building, the world's largest man-made island, the world's fastest growing city (equal pole position with Las Vegas in the United States), the gold centre of the world, the busiest airport and port in the Middle East, and the highest Internet access in the Middle East.

The history of Dubai reveals that its successive rulers have persistently and deliberately pursued the services path for Dubai. Recently uncovered archaeological evidence confirms that the city has been a fishing port along the Arabian Gulf since prehistoric times. However, modern Dubai can trace its roots to the 1830s when, following a truce between the ruling sheikhs of the region and a British suzerainty, a settlement was established around a trading post and pearl diving harbour near Khor Dubai, the ten-kilometre Dubai Creek that served as a natural harbour.⁴² Dubai became one of the main trading points for the region's pearls, with tradesmen from the Indian subcontinent and divers from Africa creating the original nucleus of an international community that still inhabits the city. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the city's population reached some 10,000. British influence tightened after the fall of the Ottoman Empire even though the military and bureaucratic presence of the British was not highly visible. With the decline of the pearl industry following the introduction of Japanese cultured pearls, Dubai sustained its economy primarily as a regional harbour, and its rulers offered strong incentives for foreign merchants to establish their businesses in the city. The ruling sheikhs of Dubai, namely, the Maktoums, proceeded with various projects aimed at expanding the harbour, implementing legal reforms to facilitate international trade, and building an airport even prior to the major oil discoveries in the late 1960s.

With independence, Dubai expanded the port facility of the city and invested in the service sector. This policy of providing business and trade services for the oil-rich Gulf States has been maintained and has been further enhanced given falling oil reserves in the Emirate. In the 1990s, Dubai enjoyed a GDP growth rate of 8.4 per cent. This growth rate has risen exponentially in recent years, driven in part by liberalizing reforms aimed at permitting property ownership by expatriates.⁴³ Moreover, this growth has been so significant that there are some concerns that the economic potential of the city is currently lagging behind.

While the urban planning history of Dubai has yet to be written in full, it is important to highlight some of the milestones in the city's evolution. Much of the early development in the post-independence era occurred in the vicinity of Dubai Creek. The original settlement of the Maktoum tribe in the nineteenth century was concentrated on the harbour and Al Fahedi Fort, which protected the Creek and housed the court of the ruling family. The surviving buildings from that period until the 1950s attest to the strong influence of Persian architecture with such features as courts and wind catchers, and which distinguished Dubai's architecture from the more ascetic and internally oriented architecture of the other Emirates.

⁴¹ The information presented in this section has been collected from a variety of sources, including official data from the United Arab Emirates; *Dubai: Global City* (in French) R. Marshall ed. (CNRS Editions, Paris, 2001); and S. and R. Nowell, *Dubai: Now and Then* (Zodiac Publishing, Dubai, 2000).

⁴² In reference to this truce, Dubai became part of the Trucial States until independence in 1971 when, along with five other Emirates, namely, Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Fujairah, Sharjah and Umm al-Qaiwain, they merged to form the United Arab Emirates. They were joined in 1972 by Ras al-Khaimah.

⁴³ The Crown Prince, Sheikh Mohammed, has promoted many of the current development ideas of Dubai.

Figure 18. View of Dubai Creek in 1937



Photo courtesy of Dubai Municipality

A master plan for Dubai was commissioned in the late 1950s with the aim of developing a rational grid layout of new blocks to guide expansion outside the old city. Under this plan, buildings were restricted to five storeys. While this restriction was not always strictly adhered to, it did instigate “the establishment of the municipality council to help implement public services and to control building development”.⁴⁴ The first bridge across Dubai Creek was constructed in the early 1960s following serious dredging undertakings that made the Creek accessible to larger ships. Most of the early urban development and business occurred on the northwestern side of the Creek around the district of Deira. However, since the construction of the Maktoum Bridge and following the creation of the United Arab Emirates and the increasing trade with Abu Dhabi, Dubai has expanded primarily towards the east.

Figure 19. View of Dubai Creek in 1945



Photo courtesy of Dubai Municipality

As a result of the recent project approach to economic development, much of the urban development has sprawled incoherently on the outer fringes of the city and primarily along the road to Abu Dhabi, thereby resulting in a relatively linear city. With the exception of the Sheikh Zayed Road, Jumeira and Dubai Creek, urban development has largely been piecemeal and isolated. There is consequently a need for a coherent connection that could link all these development projects to the rest of the city’s fabric. However, the Emirate has been able to provide ample infrastructure support for the sustenance of new development. The approach of projects preceding plans generates many challenges at the level of urban planning and management, some of which are reviewed below.

⁴⁴ D. Haider, “The growing pains of global cities: struggles in the urban environment of Dubai and Singapore” (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999), p. 24.

C. MECHANISMS OF PLANNING AND PROMOTION

The logic of development through isolated projects tends to overshadow any urban process of planning in Dubai. The city enjoys a strong partnership model between the Government and the private sector. This translates into a risk-sharing strategy whereby the Government usually takes the initiative of sponsoring and promoting large projects that the private sector would not otherwise undertake.⁴⁵ These pioneering large developments are linked to a broad spectrum of sectors and industries, including manufacturing, health, transportation, tourism and leisure. Importantly and in addition to gaining the full support from the Government, these projects are generally implemented in a timely manner such that they garner an initial financial success and increase the receptiveness of investors. This rapid implementation of projects, from conception to full execution, is among the fastest in the world and can be largely attributed to a minimal bureaucracy related to development.

Figure 20. View of Dubai Creek in 1995



Photo courtesy of Dubai Municipality

The majority of such projects begin with an initiative, which is cosponsored by the Government and the private sector. Brainstorming and incubation occur within the framework of ad hoc think tanks, which are established by Sheikh Mohammad. Subsequent to approval by an initial financial assessment, a given project is provided with the necessary company structure and a real estate presence in the city. Some initial architectural renderings are created to complement or otherwise convey the selling features of the project.

While this rapid implementation of projects is very impressive, it has some apparent drawbacks. First, Dubai's infrastructure constantly has to play a catch-up role with these individual "city" projects. Specifically, as these projects rush through implementation, Dubai is compelled to patch up on such infrastructural requirements as bridges and roads. Given this inability to plan effectively for future needs, it is often noticeable in Dubai that bridges, for instance, are built only to be torn down a few years later and expanded to meet a larger capacity. In many cases, the strategic location of certain projects on the outskirts of the city entails heavy investment in new infrastructure, thereby creating an urban patchwork with many empty areas in between districts. Secondly, the high speed of project-oriented development comes at the expense of design quality and control. By stark contrast to other cities, which rush to commission renowned architects for their monuments and landmarks, architecture in Dubai is generally assigned to large corporate firms. This tends to capitalize on the speed of delivery and execution rather than on the quality of design.

Additionally, the issue of water scarcity is often overlooked in the design of some projects. Given that water is such a scarce and precious commodity in the region, the many top-notch golf courses in the country represent a significant burden, particularly since desalination on a global scale is already facing many challenges.

⁴⁵ This is the case of the high-rise Burj Al Arab.

Figure 21. View of the Garhoud Interchange in the foreground and the Emirates Golf Club in the background



Photo courtesy of Dubai Municipality

Consequently, there is a need to establish or expand the capacities of an official entity aimed at overseeing the urban guidelines, including, chiefly, imposing rules on urban development from an aesthetic perspective, assessing the impacts of individual projects and formulating a regulatory policy to limit negative spill-over effects.

While these projects can often be self-regulating in an urbanistic sense, they do not generally adhere to urban rules and regulations imposed by the city. For example, commercial entities are often placed in industrial zones; and some shopping malls do not have the adequate supporting infrastructure requirements that can ensure their success. As evidenced by the infrastructural changes that result in costly re-appraisals and realignments of roads and bridges, there is a strong need for cohesive and integrated planning that reconciles the needs of the business community with urban regulations.

In the long term, this may have severe implications on efficiency. Given that these large-scale projects are developed outside the framework of a master urban plan, the price of such infrastructural requirements as roads, power grids and sewage systems is set to remain significantly high, and will cause the city to keep revising newly-developed systems. This, in turn, will increase Government expenditure, which will be reflected in higher service charges for the end-consumer. Long-term maintenance of the infrastructure is therefore expected to pose the most serious challenge to the success of these projects.

Additionally, Dubai is aggressively promoting itself as a success and “a package deal” aimed at attracting regional and international investors as well as tourists from the Middle East and Europe, particularly in the winter season. While these efforts have proven fruitful,⁴⁶ there is now a need to move beyond the hype and deliver on the promises of quality and safety. These issues must be continuously addressed if Dubai wishes to move from rapid development to management and coordination, and emerge as a developed economy by 2010.

⁴⁶ Advertisements and marketing materials have appeared in such media outlets as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Cable News Network (CNN).

D. MANY CITIES

The “cities” within Dubai are divided according to their specific functions and programmes, and incorporate scales that range from super blocks to land-use zones. These many cities include, inter alia, the Dubai Healthcare City, which aims to become the medical hub of the region by attracting several medical research institutions from across the world and by incorporating hospitals, clinics and special treatment centres; and the Academic City, which aims to attract higher educational institutions to the area. These cities underscore Dubai’s drive to attract high-skilled professionals from such diverse fields as healthcare, information technology and finance.

Figure 22. View of the old port in the foreground and the Bani Yas district in the background



Photo courtesy of Dubai Municipality

To accommodate these innovative professional communities, Dubai is now focusing on vast developments in the residential and office component of the real estate sector. Moreover, it is offering different themes or settings for these projects, including, for example, an oasis in the desert, man-made islands and residential projects surrounded by golf courses and horse ranches. These projects have become more attractive to foreign investors, given the liberalizing reforms by the Government aimed at permitting property ownership by expatriates,⁴⁷ and the growing number of financial institutions that help mortgage and finance real estate loans.

In the tourism and leisure sector, the most prominent large-scale project is Dubailand, covering a surface area of approximately 18,600 hectares and which, along with the gigantic Mall of Arabia, other shopping malls and hotels, comprises a total of 45 recreational themes and parks, including the following: Extreme Sports World, Kids World, Dinosaur World, Sports World, Light and Sound World, Animal World and Film City.

The projects that make up “the City of Many Cities” are treated thematically. The most often cited themed project is the Palm Islands, which constitutes two man-made islands, namely Palm Jumeira and Palm Jebel Ali, extending some six kilometres each and that have been designed to resemble two palm trees laid flat on the water off the coast of Dubai. Palm Jumeira, the first of the two palms, has more than 40 boutique hotels, 2,000 villas, and several spas and other leisure activities. The Palm Islands, which are being promoted as the largest man-made islands in the world, are advertised as the “eighth wonder of the world”. Other projects are reviewed below by economic sector.

⁴⁷ Previously, properties could only be leased to expatriates.

Figure 23. Rendition of an aerial view of future Dubai



Image courtesy of Nakheel

1. *Manufacturing*

The United Arab Emirates has more than 2,300 factories employing some 188,000 workers.⁴⁸ In Dubai, the most prominent manufacturing industry is Dubai Aluminium (DUBAL), which is ranked thirteenth among aluminium smelters in the world and is considered as one of the Government's most prized possessions. By focusing on producing high-value aluminium, DUBAL is an example where the Government has decided not to invest in low-value manufactured products in which countries of the Far East have a much stronger advantage. Instead, great attention was placed on a niche industry to garner significant competitive advantage and specialization.

2. *Information technology*

The Dubai Internet City, which was launched in October 2000, is a free zone targeting information and communications technology (ICT) companies and encouraging them to establish regional headquarters in Dubai to serve the wider Arab region, the Indian subcontinent, Africa and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Within the organizational set-up of this free zone, the Dubai Media City provides state-of-the art infrastructure and global outreach for media-related businesses. Other functions that are performed by the Media City include advertising, public relations and broadcasting.

3. *Banking and finance*

The Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) was launched to provide services in the areas of asset management, reinsurance and back office operations. The Centre comprises some 446,000 square metres and aims to become the hub for all trade in Islamic finance markets.⁴⁹ This project, divided into two phases, includes a plan to construct two high-rise buildings, namely: the Gate, a 15-storey complex to house the headquarters of DIFC and provide a free zone for regional and international financial institutions, professional service firms and corporations to operate out of Dubai; and the Leisure District, which will include offices and residential units as well as shopping, restaurant and other leisure activities. The investment in DIFC proves the commitment by the Government to move the economy into a high service, value-added economy.

⁴⁸ The main centres of non-oil manufacturing are Dubai and Sharjah.

⁴⁹ Upon completion, DIFC will be considerably bigger than the Canary Wharf development in London.

4. *Tourism*

Over the past decade, tourism and related industries have become an increasingly important sector of the national economy. Currently, some 5 million tourists visit the Emirate every year, and tourism accounts for an estimated 15 per cent of Dubai's GDP. The Government aims to increase those figures by 2010 to 15 million tourists and 20 per cent of GDP.

In order to reach those targets, Dubai is implementing a number of extravagant projects, including the following: (a) the World Project, which is located four kilometres off the coast between Burj Al Arab and Port Rashid and which, upon completion, is set to comprise a total of 250 islands positioned strategically to form the shape of the globe; (b) the Dubai Marina, which is currently under construction at an estimated cost of \$4.4 billion over 14 years, located in an artificial lagoon on approximately 280 hectares and which will eventually contain some 450 hectares of retail and residential space;⁵⁰ and (c) the Burj Dubai Development on 160 hectares on the Sheikh Zayed Road, which, in addition to six luxury residential towers, is set to feature two superlatives, namely, the world's tallest tower and the world's largest shopping mall.⁵¹

These projects are a testament to Dubai's focus on attracting regional and international attention. The success of these massive undertakings is very highly dependent on the continuous inflow of tourists, investors and Dubai residents. Consequently, the city is striving to market itself in the most sensational manner because, in a very real sense, its livelihood relies very heavily on hype and superlatives.

5. *Transportation*

In support of this drive for increasing tourism, the national airline, Emirates, is investing heavily in its expansion and seeking to maintain its position as one of the leading airlines in the world and an icon for the city. In the next ten years, Emirates is expected to increase the size of its fleet from 42 aircraft to more than 100, representing a rise of 138 per cent. This increase, which is set to move in tandem with an expanded network, comes at a time of sluggish growth in the global airline industry. Consequently, the strong investment in the State-owned national airline is encouraging and underscores a political will aimed at increasing the number of visitors to Dubai. Within that context, the Dubai International Airport is equally expanding its operations and infrastructure. Catering to 18 million passengers in 2003 and with a growth rate of 13 per cent, Dubai International Airport is aiming to accommodate 40 million passengers by 2010.⁵²

In the area of re-export trade, Dubai is ranked the third city in the world after Hong Kong and Singapore. Moreover, the Port of Dubai is the thirteenth largest container terminal and handled almost 5 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) in 2003, which represents a throughput growth of 23 per cent from 2002. The Port is undergoing massive development in order to expand its capacity and accommodate 20 million TEUs by 2020.

The Municipality of Dubai is in the process of considering a mass transport railway system, which is planned to be fully operational by 2010 and will comprise two lines, namely: the Red Line, which will run east to west from the border with Sharjah to Jebel Ali; and the Green Line, which will extend from Dubai International Airport to Al Ghubaiba. The main station will be in Al Ittihad Square in Bur Dubai. Given that traffic has become a growing challenge and is expected to worsen as the population increases, the project is expected to help alleviate the congested highways and roads.

⁵⁰ In addition to parks, schools, mosques, shopping centres and entertainment facilities, the Dubai Marina is planning to accommodate 80,000 to 100,000 residents in a maximum of 100 residential towers and several luxury hotels.

⁵¹ The Burj Dubai is expected to combine residential, commercial, hotel entertainment, shopping and leisure outlets with open green spaces, water fountains, pedestrian zones and underground parking for 16,000 cars.

⁵² The Dubai International Airport is currently undergoing expansion at a cost of \$4.1 billion and set to be completed by 2006.

E. THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE MANY CITIES

The evolution of the architecture in Dubai attests to the strong impact of the project approach on the city's skyline. The architecture of the early independence and oil boom years maintained a scale and distribution that allowed for a multi-centric city to emerge. The concentration of buildings around Deira and Dubai Creek still maintains a mid-rise scale with an architectural language that blends some of the international modernism of the 1970s with Arabesque iconographies, integrated within an overall modernist framework. The main projects were commissioned to foreign architects, primarily British firms, to provide a sense of continuity with the pre-independence era.

Figure 24. View of the Trade-centre Interchange in the foreground and Sheikh Zayed Road in the background



Photo courtesy of Dubai Municipality

With the project approach taking dominance in the 1990s, the city's architecture moved to a themed approach whereby a whole project or "city" became treated as a set stage. Architecture became more like scenography; buildings lost a sense of materiality and even scale, and acquired instead more of a branding presence in the skyline. While this weakened boundary between architecture and advertisement promises to lead to new innovations in design, much of the architecture remains superficially conceived and, in an urban sense, irresponsible. Some scholars in the universities of the region are beginning to raise these issues. However, their voices have largely been muted by the hype and sensationalism of the rapid development. More problematic and less obvious are the questions relating to the identity of Dubai. The city continues to cater to the changing demands of marketing and promotion, which in turn is a function of the interests and origins of a transient and tourist population. Asserting an urban and architectural character beyond the sensationalist and the glaring is necessary if Dubai hopes to develop a genuine citizenship for its residents.

F. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Dubai is a success story in its own right. In a very concrete sense, the city has successfully moved beyond comparisons to other cities, particularly Beirut in the 1960s and 1970s, and Hong Kong in the 1980s. More than merely creating its own unique mould, Dubai has now become the model for other cities in the

region, including Manama, Doha and, ironically, Beirut. However, there is a need to investigate whether such replication in other cities can be successful without ultimately harming the model. A recent review of Dubai presented the city as a place that is both unique and as a model that could be emulated.⁵³

Demographically, the urban life and the real estate market have been transformed radically by the reform that has facilitated property ownership by expatriates. This marks a significant shift in land uses and in the status of its international residents, who are now provided with the choice of remaining transient workers or of settling in the city. Consequently, the main challenge in the coming years is whether Dubai, designed to accommodate a tourist and transient clientele, will be able to maintain the same attractiveness to a more sedentary population. Equally, this demographic transformation could become a divisive issue in the long term. Dubai is distinguished among other cities in the region in its openness towards the cultural practices of its expatriate populations. However, as settled members of the community, the international populations could become actively involved in the decision-making process at social and political levels. This could either turn Dubai into a paragon of international citizenship or signal the beginning of conflicts between and among the resident communities.

In the area of environment, the desert represented an obstacle in the early stages of Dubai's development and growth. Given the ever-expanding city boundaries and the increasing environmental and financial burdens, Dubai is beginning to look for ways to engage its environmental context more effectively. Policies have largely ignored environmentally sound approaches to development in the desert in favour of thematic architectural projects, including ranches and oases. Despite recent research on saline plants and the potential from passive energy sources, the Emirate still depends on excessive water and energy resources. Moreover, Dubai is equally investing heavily in the tourism potentials off its coast and has failed to assess the negative impact that dredging, landfills and marinas have on the marine life. The compatibility between urban development and environmental protection remains a significant challenge that must and can be addressed.

Within the context of the urban fabric, the rapid development and growth of new projects have required continuous and costly revisions in the infrastructure. Despite the attractiveness of the project approach to development, the costs are beginning to affect the economic growth of Dubai and to highlight the need for planning at a level that anticipates if not precedes the speculation of development. The jury is still out as to whether Dubai can remain endlessly conglomerated or whether, instead, it needs to be consolidated into one coherent entity. Indeed, it is not even clear whether such consolidation will ever be accomplished or even necessary. This model of many cities could feasibly be open-ended as an innovative alternative to urban space that replaces the connective public spaces of conventional cities. Observers in the city's shopping malls and public spaces range from those who lament the commercialization of public life to those who see in the "many cities" a potential for a new kind of urban life that is yet to be articulated. Within that context, it is interesting to note that the city's old symbol, the clock tower, has been replaced by the opulent Burj al-Arab, a highly exclusive hotel.

Architecturally, the emphasis on themed projects and cities has pushed the role of architecture to scenography and special effects, to the production of dazzling images that could be understood as logos for the cities that they house. This "theme park" approach is not unique to Dubai; Las Vegas has led and mastered this branded approach to design. However, in Dubai, this model has extended to cover industrial, commercial and residential architecture, which has transformed the entire city into a continuous theme park. Paradoxically, this has resulted in a monotonous skyline whereby all the buildings strive to be unique. In an attempt to ground its development in a heritage approach, Dubai continues to restore some of its turn-of-the-century architecture. Here again, however, the heritage is treated thematically with the architectural motifs exaggerated at the expense of the urban coherence of the original urban fabric, and without careful study of how to integrate the uses to the needs of the residents.

At a geopolitical level, the Gulf region is undergoing major changes as a result of recent events and conflicts. Given their scope and outreach, it is important to ask whether Dubai's success story can

⁵³ K. Ringle, "Dazzling Dubai", *Smithsonian Magazine*, vol. 34, No. 7 (October 2003), p. 42.

accommodate or circumvent these changes. While it is difficult to predict the outcome of these changes, Dubai has faced previous wars in the Gulf region and has emerged relatively unharmed. If anything, the city has benefited from the flow of capital from more vulnerable areas in the region. The strategic scale of the second Gulf War requires a more serious assessment of the resilience of Dubai. However, within the context of the widening cultural divide between east and west, Dubai provides a relief from the stereotypes with regard to the Arab world.

Finally, there is a strong need to undertake more detailed and in-depth studies of Dubai's urbanism. Using the provisional observations presented in this case study as a starting point or guide, scholarly research is now needed to explore and assess the impact of rapid development on the urban fabric.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Amman, Beirut and Dubai are not the only representative Arab cities. However, they have drawn attention for the significant changes in their economic, social and physical dimensions. Among the three cities, Amman is the city that has undergone the most qualitative changes; Beirut is the oldest continuously inhabited; and Dubai is the most economically vibrant.

These three cities have comparable populations, in the range of 1.3 to 2 million inhabitants, and share the significant role played by foreign capital in their development either by virtue of their refugee or displaced populations or because they have been sought by entrepreneurs for investment opportunities. The resulting diversities and differences provided a cosmopolitan life of various intensities in the three cities. In the case of Amman, the demographic changes that shook the city could have been disastrous were it not for sound management.

While Amman and Beirut have a longer urban history than Dubai, the recent archaeological discoveries in Dubai confirming prehistoric roots have gone some way to provide a sense of historic legitimacy.

Architecturally, the three cities face similar challenges, poised as they are between the traditional architecture of the region and the desire for distinction with what is generally perceived as present-day architecture. Rather than being a synthesis, the result is more often than not an unresolved hybrid exposing an identity crisis in architectural forms.

The mall culture, which is another tendency shared by the three cities, has produced commercial spaces of an urban nature that widely differs from traditional souks. While the accompanying advertisements and sometimes architecture itself play on the charm of the souks model, the malls are often isolated from their neighbourhoods by large parking lots. They do not perform the same role of social condenser provided by the streets and squares. The competition between Beirut's and Dubai's shopping festivals is another example of the efforts aimed at attracting a foreign clientele. In Lebanon, economic competition can be an incentive for urban regeneration if it benefits a larger area of the country and a wider portion of the population. Currently, such regeneration is still largely concentrated in small pockets in Beirut.

If Dubai prides itself for minimal bureaucracy related to development, Amman and Beirut cannot afford such a privilege given their urban past. Amman and Beirut need to recognize that it would constitute an asset rather than a burden to incorporate in their development the protection of certain urban experiences with an eye on scale, type of activities and urban qualities. Rather than follow the Dubai model that they could not feasibly compete with, Amman and Beirut can nurture their respective specificities. This does not necessarily mean that the upscale multipurpose complex in 'Abdali in Amman or the SOLIDERE model adopted in Beirut's city centre is the proper mode. In Amman and Beirut, there is a strong need for more integrated thinking that moves beyond producing islands of development that are surrounded by major highways. Within that context, the two cities share the same emphasis on road networks and basic hostility to pedestrian movement. In the planning history of both cities and with the signal exception of roads, urban plans have largely been drafted as little more than academic exercises; they remain on shelves until they become too outdated to be implemented.

The three cities cannot be compared in terms of economic or tourism activities. For example, Amman's Queen Alia International Airport handles an average of some 70 daily flights, compared to the more than 400 daily flights of Dubai International Airport. Unrivalled by any other Arab city, the impact of Dubai's spectacular growth has yet to be adequately studied and analysed. Its expansion and successful model followed the opportunities offered by a fast-changing world. Competition with Dubai in attracting businesses can only be achieved if Amman and Beirut offer convenient administrative services and economical and technical facilities, including cheaper mobile telephone rates and broadband Internet connections.

However, despite this success that provides some relief from the stereotypes of the Arab world, Dubai has yet to prove that it can, through planned and sustainable development, avoid another stereotype, namely, the lavish display and shocking waste of accumulated opulence. Given that its economy is less reliant on oil, Dubai has every chance of divesting itself of such stereotypes and of moving towards durable economic success.