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## Urban Challenges in the Globalizing Middle-East

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### Foreword - Rethinking the 'Lived' within the 'Urban' of the Middle Eastern City

*Ashraf M. Salama*

With their varied socio-physical, socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-political presence, cities have always been highly differentiated spaces expressive of heterogeneity, diversity of activities, entertainment, excitement, and pleasure. They have been (and still are) melting pots for the formulation of and experimentation with new philosophies and religious and social practices. Cities produce, reproduce, represent, and convey much of what counts today as culture, knowledge, and politics. While the Middle Eastern city is not an exception, characterised by some of these key elements, but it continues to witness various forms of struggles. It endures to experience a multitude of influences where its architecture and urbanism have experienced dramatic transformations that instigated critical questions about urban growth, sustainable design and planning, regenerating and retrofitting heritage and historic building stock, the quality of urban life, healthy neighbourhoods, urban liveability and identity, and multiculturalism, among others. Architecture and urban spectacles are developed in tandem with environmental degradation, civic and regional conflicts and mass displacements of refugees, political and economic instability, among other bare realities. In essence, this conveys a severe dichotomy that is emerging as a new field of research, discourse, and critique.

The body of knowledge on what constitutes 'urban' has fluctuated between two clearly defined intellects. The first is concomitant with the spatial intensity of a population and buildings on the basis of certain boundaries, dimension and density. The second is associated with the dissemination of the value system including attitudes, norms, and behaviours where the 'urban' is viewed as a place of encounter and assembly, and simultaneity and social interaction. Evidently, the first is about 'urban' form and second is about 'urban' culture or 'urban' life. 'Urban' form has been, and continues to be, the key domain of architects, and urban designs and planners, and 'urban' life has been the domain of social scientists. This has been the case throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, over the past two decades 'urban' life has gained substantial attention among architects and urban designers. Likewise, contemporary urban discourse has portrayed the 'urban' life dimension within two poles. The first is a set of positive qualities including diversity, tolerance, sophistication, cosmopolitanism, integration, social interaction, negotiation of differences. The second is a number of characteristics that represent undesired conditions including detachment, withdrawal, loneliness, social control, segregation, individualism, isolation, fear, and seclusion.

Framing the preceding standpoints, one should refer to a cycle of three main symbiotic pillars on the 'urban': the imagined, the measured, and the experienced, which contribute to the development of insights that elucidate various parameters for interrogating urban challenges in the Middle Eastern City. These three pillars stem from the Lefebvrian conjecture on the production of space, which postulates a triadic relationship of three different but related types of 'urban': the conceived (Imagined), the perceived (measured) and the lived (experienced).

Largely, Lefebvre defined 'conceived space' as the space which is theorised by scientists and planners, known as 'representations of space', representations that are intangible and are entrenched in the principles, imperatives, beliefs and visions of experts, decision makers, and

those who are in a position to impose their personal notion of 'order' onto concrete reality. The second is 'perceived space', the space of 'spatial practice' defined as the space where movement and interaction takes place, where networks develop and materialise. Consequently, it includes both daily routines at an individual level and urban realities such as the networks that link places designated for work, leisure and 'private' life (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). The third is 'lived space', which is explained as the unconscious, non-verbal direct relation between people and space. This is the space that is occupied through associated images and symbols (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). The current body of knowledge on Lefebvre's work suggests that the 'conceived space' is abstract and tactical and where authority functions, the 'perceived space' is a pragmatic, physical space encompassing flows of investment, workforce, and information and that this where the conceived and lived spaces are construed. Salama and Wiedmann (2013) suggest that the 'lived space' is the most subjective space, involving the actual experience of individuals that is performed in the 'perceived space' and as a result of the 'conceived space'.

In most urban studies the influence of lived space on the production of the city and on understanding the associated urban challenges has been overlooked due to the difficulty of measuring its role scientifically. The lived space is assumed to be the subjective personal relationship between inhabitants and the urban environment. Such a relationship affects their active involvement in the urban environment. It is expressed in images, symbols and associations, the collective, and has a major impact on the coherence and continuity of a society and thus on urban development.

While in Middle Eastern cities with long urban histories lived space is often oversimplified as a major factor in the spatial development process due to the implicitness of its existence, in the case of emerging cities a lack of lived space is expressed in the form of a continuous struggle for identity and a relatively low degree of influence by inhabitants on development decisions. One consequence of this vacuum in cities that are built from scratch is branding with certain images in order to attract investment. The image of a city is influenced by conscious planning. Yet, it is also affected by spatial practice as well as the image of a city held by its inhabitants has an impact on planning. Questioning and analysing the lived space thus uncovers how society relates to the city and associates with its images and the accompanying circumstantial factors.

Notwithstanding the clear contextual particularities addressed in various interventions within this book, it is a conscious endeavour and an important contribution towards understanding some of the key urban challenges of Middle Eastern cities. It embeds and articulates the understanding that urban form and urban life should be fully interconnected and cannot be understood in isolation, that urban life stems from urban form and that urban form is influenced by urban life. Successfully, the book makes clear reference to both, urban form and urban life and in particular the real value of the interconnectivity of both and goes along the eloquent statement of Pallasmaa "*I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience. The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me*" (Pallasmaa, 2005, p.40). With a multigeneration team of editors and contributors who have in-depth knowledge and lived experiences of the context they are discussing, it is very refreshing and promising that the book generates new foci and insights on the 'lived' within the 'urban' of the Middle Eastern city as imperatives for understanding key urban dynamics.

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## Biography

Ashraf M Salama is professor of architecture and director of research at the department of architecture at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, United Kingdom. He also leads the cluster for research in architecture and urbanism in the global south since 2014. He has led three schools of architecture in Egypt, Qatar and the United Kingdom, two of which he founded. His work and research focus on architectural education, design studio teaching practices, transformative and critical pedagogy, performance of designed environments, and sustainable architectural and urban design. It maintains a strong emphasis on the impact of socio-cultural factors on shaping the built environment. Having authored and co-edited 14 books and published over 170 articles and chapters in the international refereed press, he is the chief editor of ArchNet-IJAR and co-chief editor of Open House International. Professor Salama is the recipient of the 2017 UIA Jean Tschumi Prize for Excellence in Architectural Education and Criticism.