

History of Urban Planning and Development in the Middle East as a Context of Syrian Post-war Re-construction

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1. Characteristics of the Middle East

Most large cities of the Middle East are located either along the region's great rivers or on the shores of the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Gulf. These are among cities having the world's longest histories of continuous habitation; first of ancient *Sumerian, Akkadian, Hellenistic, Roman, Parthian, Sassanian* civilizations, and then Christian and Arab-Islamic ones. Early establishment of irrigation canals allowed the development of agriculture, which led to the expansion of towns and cities. Jerusalem has been inhabited since 4000 BC; Mesopotamia areas were settled by *Amorites* since 2500 BC.

Urban morphology in the Middle East has been a result of a large variety of historical evolution and cultural transition. In the course of urban development, the governments are increasingly challenged to provide adequate housing, in addition to public and social facilities.¹⁾

In 1979, M. Hugh P. Roberts classified the history of planning in the Middle East to three categories: 1) Pre-Islamic (prior to c. 650 AD), 2) Islamic (c. 650 AD–c. 1800 AD), and 3) Urbanization of Economic Era (c. 1800 AD–c. 1950 AD).²⁾ Since the 1950s, many new factors have contributed to the development of the Middle East. Thus, a different type of development could be added and named as the Modern Urbanization.

1.1 Pre-Islamic Urbanization (Prior to c. 650 AD): Civilization of Mari

It is not clear how the urban character was in the Middle East before the Islamic era. However, monumental buildings such as temples and houses adopted the court yard principle. Elaborate sewage and water supply systems reflect an inheritance of the irrigation skills. The master plan of Mari city, now in the southeastern Syria near the borders with Jordan and Iraq, could be a good example to illustrate the concept of urban planning in the Middle East before the Islamic era.

Mari city was born on the west bank of Euphrates River in Syria. The essential urban characteristic of the city was consisting of a circular plan which was delimited by a dike of 1.9 km in diameter. It was intended to protect the city from floods of the river, while an inner rampart was to protect it from the human attacks.³⁾ The center and its peripheries were connected via large radiating arteries designed on the model of a cart wheel; these roads were connected by secondary streets with circular paths.

An artificial channel with 30 meters width connected to the Euphrates crosses the city to provide the city with water and to create a traffic access.⁴⁾ Around 2700 BC, Mari became denser with administrative and religious buildings established in the center. The city was equipped with a rainwater drainage system which allowed the water to flow down from the center to the peripheries where it was absorbed by the subsoil network filled with gravel, fragments of pottery and ash.⁵⁾

1.2 Islamic Urbanization (c. 650 AD–c. 1800 AD)

Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD, the Islam spread widely, and the longest period of urban growth was realized. The urban institutions of conquered cities underwent major changes. Mosques, which became colleges later, played an important part in developing the administrative system and the legal code as the principal institutions. The city' urban administrations consisted of: *Calipha*, *Walis* (governor), *Al-Shurta* (police), *Al-Qadi* (judge), *Al-Muhtasib* (supervisor of markets), and the heads of the city quarters.

Arab cities have been hierarchically organized around the great mosque, while markets were interconnected by streets. Although many areas were transformed from self-sufficient communities to economies oriented to import from industrializing Western countries, the major cities were still characterized by the historic concept of market place.

Arab cities experienced a long period of relative stagnation from the 18th century. However, the urban transformations of the cities started in the 20th century with the introduction of the European planning principles, which created a dichotomy between the historic and the modern morphology and institutions of the city.

1.3 Urbanization of Economic Colonial Era (c. 1800 AD–c. 1950 AD)

The economic colonialism introduced a new era of urban growth; new suburbs were added to the cities, and wide boulevards were introduced with new concept of spatial planning and building. Although water supply and sanitation had once been a pride of the Islamic settlements, with the economic growth, the health of the cities was improved vastly by the introduction of the modern water supply system. These were followed by electrification and telephones, which created problems in extending such services to the Islamic quarters. On the other hand, those European quarters were too expensive for the majority of residents including the poor.

1.4 Modern Urbanization and Informal Settlements Phenomenon (c. 1950 AD–)

The Middle East has experienced a high rate of population growth due to the introduction of modern medical services. The increased urban populations made the governments face the challenge of unemployment problems. More and more people flowed into big cities searching for job opportunities, contributing to expanding the city territories. In the 1950s, many cities prepared development plans, accommodating people migrating from rural to urban areas. Many of the migrants settled surrounding the cities, creating informal settlement phenomena in the 1960s.

The next chapter introduces four case studies and gives more details about the modern urbanization in the Middle East.

2. Case Studies

2.1 Saudi Arabia

Over the last 50 years, the Arabian Gulf countries have experienced a construction boom that has been fueled by increasing national revenues from exporting highly priced crude oil. This construction boom resulted in an unprecedented expansion in the size of cities. In response to this phenomenon, urban planning practice was geared towards physical aspects of fast urban growth and rapid changes in the built environment. Its emphasis was on land use, land subdivisions, building regulations and dealing with urban sprawl.

The urban planning in Saudi Arabia could be divided into two eras. The first era which extended from the 1930s to 1970s was in response to the urban planning problems, and to set measures for specific situations in certain urban centers which later became applicable throughout as circulars and decrees. The second era which started in 1970 and has continued through today; adapted a comprehensive regional planning approach. A series of plans were formulated such as five- year national plans and master development plans, in addition to establishing the regional planning institutions.⁶⁾

2.1.1. First Era: Town Planning with Physical Emphasis (1930s–1970s)

This period focused on controlling the urban development with providing various infrastructure and institutionalizing the provisions of the land use controls.

In 1937, the Statute of Makkah Municipality was issued to be the first formal step of the urban planning in Saudi Arabia. This order has added more duties to the municipalities including the supervision of the towns' organization, setting the urban systems, zoning regulations, and building code. In 1941, the Roads and Building Statute was issued to deal with planning procedures, buildings codes, and zoning planning.

Since the late of the 1930s until the late of the 1950s, the oil companies built camps near the oil fields, and these camps used the system of blocks and gridiron pattern to accommodate commercial, residential, industrial and social facilities. However, the growth in the old towns continued to be organic and followed the pattern of the cities with narrow and irregular streets.

Later in 1947, the Arabian American Oil Company (*ARAMCO*) produced two layout plans for both of *Dammam* and *Al-Khobar* relying on the gridiron streets pattern.⁷⁾

In 1953, the government moved its headquarters to *Riyadh*. For that, the Ministry of Finance initiated the *AL-MALAZ* project to provide housing for government employees.⁸⁾ This type of a gridiron plan depends on establishing a hierarchy of streets starting from a 60 meters boulevard, followed by 30 meters thoroughfares, 20 meters main street, 15 and 10 meters secondary and access streets. The boulevards divide the project into two parts: rectangular blocks with 100x50 meters, and typical lot size with 25x25 meters. Despite the very low density, the area did not have semi-private spaces.

Later, and due to the growth of the urban area, the government felt the need to control the urbanization especially in Riyadh, the Capital of Saudi Arabia. In 1968, Doxiadis Associates undertook the task of planning the capital as a milestone in the

urban planning at that time. The master plan introduced the super grid at the city level plan and used grid pattern in its proposals for action area studies. The plan institutionalized the grid as the desired pattern in other cities of the Gulf countries.

During this era, numbers of development plans had been achieved for cities and villages specifying urban structure with population projection, economy and social studies, and plans for five areas (Hael, Tabok, Mecca, Kasem and Baha), as well as the first strategy for the local development which identified the urban patterns and the hierarchy of the cities and villages in the Kingdom.

2.1.2. Second Era (1970s–present)

Several zoning plans had been made by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs for directing the urban growth for 100 cities over 20 years. These plans included two periods of developments:

- i. Until 1995: controlling or guiding the development in those cities; and
- ii. From 1995–2000: the government’s approvals for land owners to plan their lands, and the owners’ responsibilities to establish the infrastructure designed by the government.

The urban expansion caused more need for public facilities. Thus, it was necessary to think about encouraging the private sector to participate in the public utility development. During 2000’s, due to the urbanization, the immigration to the big cities accelerated further. Thus, the national urban strategy was necessary to set a national framework for the spatial development, including the three levels of development (national, regional and local), for supporting middle and small size cities by creating development axis.

Since 2003, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs started to study detailed regional plans for the prefectures and detailed and semi regional plans for the provinces. These plans aim to achieve integrated links between the economy and the services, in addition to supporting the rural development to improve the living conditions of the rural residents to suppress their immigration to the cities.

Figure 1 illustrates the urban development of Saudi Arabia since 1930 until now.

2.2 Egypt

2.2.1. Planning Strategies and Legal System

Due to the strategic location of Egypt in the old world, it has become the second most populous country in Africa. Due to its specific geographic condition, the urban development has taken place in the Nile valley and delta. Throughout the long history, urbanization has occurred, and numbers of cities and kingdoms have grown up along the river. Thus, population and economic activities have taken place only in this limited area.

Several strategies contributed to the urban development in Egypt such as the planning stage for the Greater Cairo Region in 1965–1973; the national perspective toward the urban process 1973–1982; the mechanism of urban planning in 1982–1990; the decentralization and the regional planning in 1990–1994; and internation-

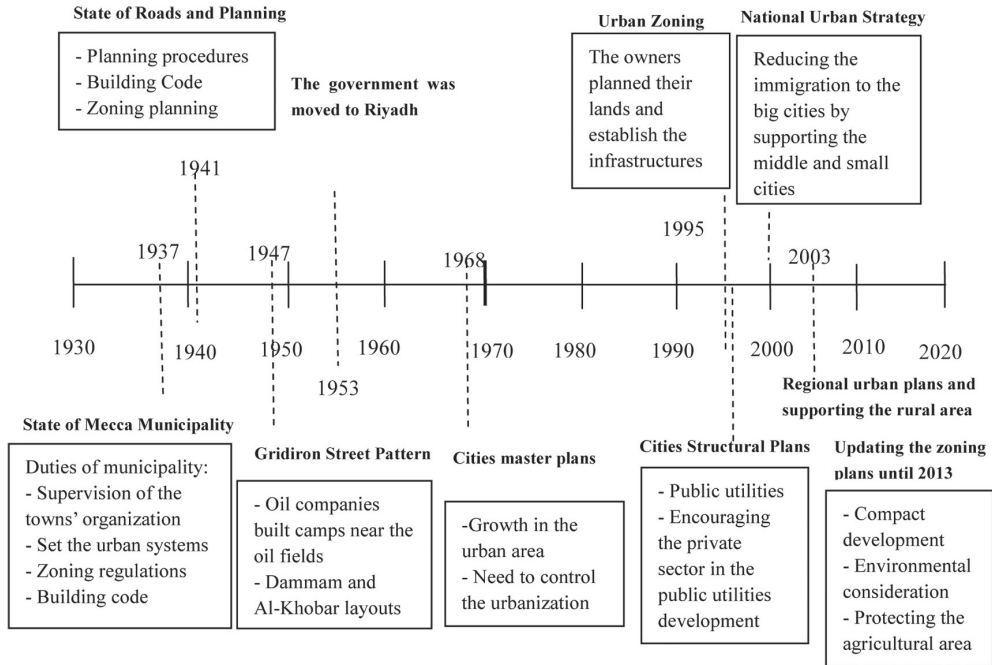


Figure 1: The urban development of Saudi Arabia

al level and participation as well as orientation for the modern technology since 1994 up to now.

For achieving the planning strategies, several laws and institutional entities have been set such as:

- i. Law no. 70 in 1973 to set the General National Plan which identified the regional planning rule within the comprehensive national plan;
- ii. Establishing the Ministry of Planning in 1974 and setting the Law of Local Governments in 1975; in addition to the decision no. 495 in 1977 to establish the eight regions;
- iii. Law no. 43 in 1979 which gave the governments more accountability related to urban planning;
- iv. The Urban Planning Law no. 3 in 1982, the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP) of Ministry of Housing and Utilities to be responsible for formulating the general policy for planning, setting up plans and programs for this purpose at the national and regional levels, revising urban plans at the local level;
- v. Law no. 145 in 1988 to modify the local government system to become local administration system.

These legal and institutional systems establishes essential conditions for urban planning and development common to most other Middle Eastern countries, including regional planning to set a framework for urban development, localization and

decentralization of urban administration, and accountability of local governments for planned urban development.

2.2.2. The Five- Year Development Plans FYDP

There existed no clear efforts for urban and regional planning during the first FYDP 1982–1986 plan. Due to the war in 1973, the government concentrated on the rehabilitation process for the existing projects and their economic effects. The plan was according to sectors in line with the centralized administration, and projects were distributed according to the geographical locations.

The Second FYDP 1987–1991 worked on agricultural, industrial, touristic and services societies. Also, it concentrated on establishing infrastructure projects.

The Third FYDP 1992–1996 established the program of the industrial cities, while the Fourth FYDP 1997–2001 aimed to achieve the participatory approach, in addition to the program of the urgent plan in 2001 which concentrated on the villages' development.

The Fifth FYDP 2002–2006 concentrated more on developing the villages, in addition to achieving the first stage of decentralization, and the Sixth FYDP 2007–2012 aimed to increase the role of the local governments in the planning process.⁹⁾

2.2.3. Overview of Urban Development and Master Plans for Greater Cairo Region “GCR”

The built-up area of Cairo has fluctuated throughout the history; the city passed through periods of recession in the following centuries. The districts adjacent to the old city witnessed high rates of growth; new districts appeared to the north-east and the west. The introduction of a tramway in 1896 boosted the expansion of the city. After the 1952 revolution, massive housing projects were developed on the desert land east of the existing area. Also, the city expanded on the agricultural land to the south and the west.

Since the 1970s until 2000s, the government tried to develop master plans of Cairo. Starting with the master plan 1973, this defined the ring road as the outward boundary for urbanization of the city agglomeration and proposed new urban communities outside of the urban area. The second master plan was in 1982, which tried to organize the urban growth by physical planning in addition to the ring roads. In 1991, the master plan updated the land use.¹⁰⁾

2.2.4. The Main Current Challenge Facing GCR

The main challenge facing the region is the lack of stability and security which contributed to the deterioration of socio-economic life of residents. However, several previous factors might have contributed to the current situations. The deterioration of the livability became a serious problem resulted from the lack of public spaces, air pollution, and inadequate housing policy. The lack of financial resources caused deterioration in the public facilities and services. Also, the government needs to reconsider the land use system and the urban management to be suitable for the low and middle income people. The informal settlements still face problems of lacking proper planning and public utilities, in addition to land tenure system.¹¹⁾

2.3 Turkey

Turkey's urban planning history goes back to 1960s when the first comprehensive planning study began. A hierarchical planning system was adopted in 1967 when the government started to study four regions. After 1983, a fifth national plan included a study of five regions. However, due to the limitations of planning structure, there were problems in realizing those strategies. The action plans have given priority in regional development, but due to the lack of finance and specialized staff, those projects were not completed.

Four legal stages are observed in the planning system in Turkey. The first stage is for the regional plans prepared by the State Planning Agency under the law no. 3194 in 1985. These regional plans identified the socio-economic development trends, development potential of settlements, distribution of activities and infrastructure. The second stage is for the environment order plans which are prepared as stipulated in law no. 3194. The third level is for the development master plans for city centers, and the fourth stage is for the implementation plans prepared by local authorities.¹²⁾

2.3.1. The Five-Year Development Plans FYDP

The urban process in Turkey follows the FYDPs. The first plan was in 1963 which concerned about the regional development. It set the 7 percent GNP growth rate, but it was much more a set of consistent economic relationships than a detailed investment program. Also, it did not set a specific target for construction. The very low growth rate implied in the strategy intended discouraging the residential construction so that the private sector goes toward more productive investment.¹³⁾

Second FYDP 1967–1971 concentrated more on the population problems, and the third plan decided that the industrialization is its prominent goal.¹⁴⁾ The government in the fourth and fifth plans tried to enhance the infrastructure, while the sixth and seventh improved the housing legal systems.

The newest plan determines the road map of the Turkey's development policies until 2018. It expects to have 5.5 percent increases in the GNP with more improvement in the education facilities and human rights.¹⁵⁾

Figure 2 shows the historical background of the urban development in Turkey.¹⁶⁾

2.4 Syria

Syria, the place of the first agricultural revelation which made the traveling persons settled residents and the land of the young people, has been inhabited since ancient times due to its strategic location along the ancient trade routs. It has some oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world with long urban history. After almost one thousand years as the center of Islamic empires (Umayyad), the Syrian cities have developed along main rivers.

Between 1250–1516, Syria became a part of the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt, and an important cultural exchange between Syria and Egypt took place during the Ayyubid period.¹⁷⁾

In 1864, the Ottoman Empire set a law which divided the area into two states: Damascus and Aleppo. In 1916, another division was made according to the *Sykes-Picot* agreement between Great Britain and France to give the country its current

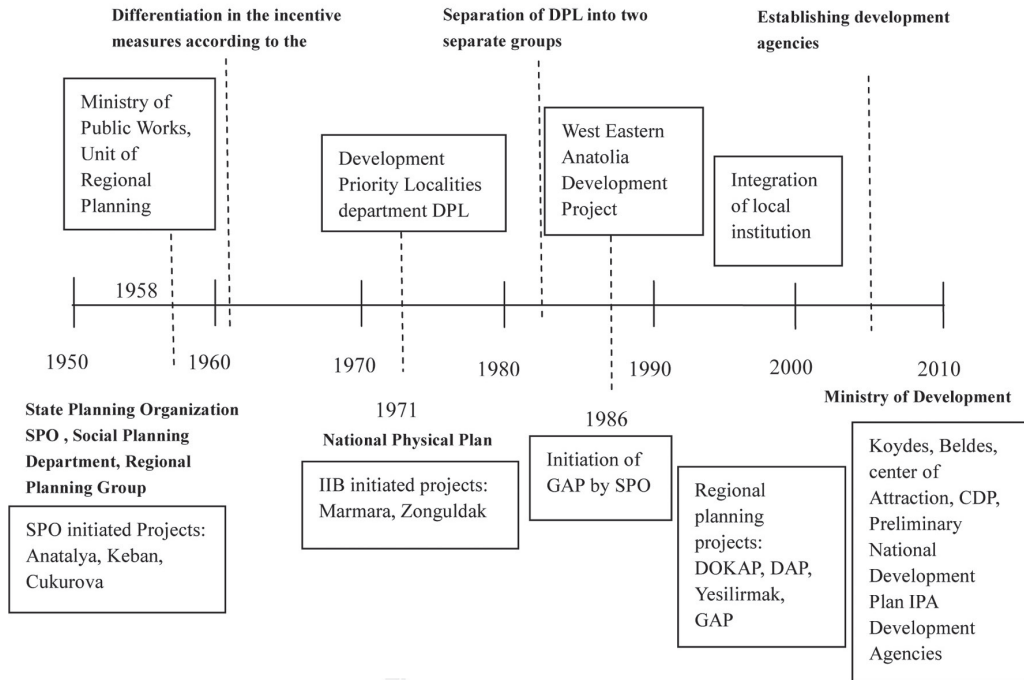


Figure 2: The urban development of Turkey

boundary.

To understand the long history and the urban development of Syria, it might be useful to study two cases for Damascus and Hama city.

2.4.1. Damascus

The urban form of Damascus, the capital city, began to be developed as early as 3000 BC. City walls were built around the settled area, with grid street patterns, public baths, temples, theaters and other public buildings in the center.¹⁸⁾ All these elements take its special characters besides the *Barada River*, descending from the slopes of *Mount Cassiounas* as the main water supply source to the urban and agricultural area or the *Ghoutet Demasheq*. It is interesting to know that *Ghutat Dimasheq* was originally described as the oasis formed by the *Barada River* around the site where Damascus was founded. Starting in ancient times, canals were dug by inhabitants to irrigate the lands, increasing the size of *Ghouta* to the south and the east of the city. This agricultural area provides its inhabitants with a variety of cereals, vegetables, and fruits.¹⁹⁾

During the long history of Damascus, agriculture has been a key economic activity, in addition to a strong socio-economic relation through trade between Damascus and its surrounding.²⁰⁾ The people who lived in the agricultural area entered Damascus for the economic activities. At the same time, *Ghouta* is a recreation place for the Damascene people.

Around 64 BC, Syria became a central province of the Roman Empire, which fol-

lowed the Greeks by expanding Greek temples according to the grid system and establishing the system of water pipes.

During the Islamic era, Damascus became the capital of the Umayyad civilization, and the exceptional potential of the city site was a reason to choose Damascus as the new capital of the Islamic Empire.

The grand Umayyad mosque was built, and the street layout, bathhouses, and the roofed souqs might be considered as major features of the city, which followed the organic pattern of growth.

Later, the Ayyubid period had a particular place in the history of Damascus. This era introduced new architectural forms for public institutions such as madrasas (schools) and bimaristans (hospitals). During the Ayyubid era, an important development occurred in term of strengthening all the city walls, which allowed successful urban development under protected environment. During this time, the satellite suburbs began to be established including Salahiye, and Maydan districts.²¹⁾

In the mid-16th century, the beginning of the Ottoman Empire, Damascus became very important meeting-point for caravans which took the Muslims to Mecca in Saudi Arabia for Hajj (pilgrimage). Thus, Ottoman Damascus grew along the route to Mecca following the pilgrimage route and developed straight street in suburbs in late 20th century.

An administrated reform and new urbanization with wide streets and new suburbs such as Al-Muhajrin district took place in the last 60 years of the Ottoman era. The French mandate continued the development with the western style which the Ottomans started earlier.

By 1968, after more than 20 years from the independence, French architect Michel Écochard was appointed to produce a master plan for the city. This new master plan was introduced as an instrument for controlling the growth of the city, and improving the interface between the old city and the other parts. This master plan was implemented only to a very small extent. However, it has created problems in the area adjacent to the Old City.

The study tied together elements of history, regional planning, hydrology, demography and traffic as well as the provision of amenities, and concentrated on protecting the water sources of Damascus.²²⁾ Syrian authorities were sympathetic to the plan's modernist agenda for the larger city and its attempt to adapt it to changing times, with the exception of the Old City, where they disagreed with the proposals. They generally followed Ecochard's plan with only minor modifications.²³⁾

The absence of regional planning in Syria before 2010, and the lack of comprehensive vision for developing the main cities contributed in increasing the imbalance between the supply and the demand in the real estate market. Also, the concentration of government agencies and large industries in Damascus created significant employment opportunities, and thus, led to increasing internal migration to the rural surroundings of the capital as a place to build cheap houses.

To solve the problems of the urbanization, and draw a good development strategy, a regional planning study was conducted from September 2006 under the technical cooperation of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in response to the request by the Syrian Government. The planning study was divided into three lev-

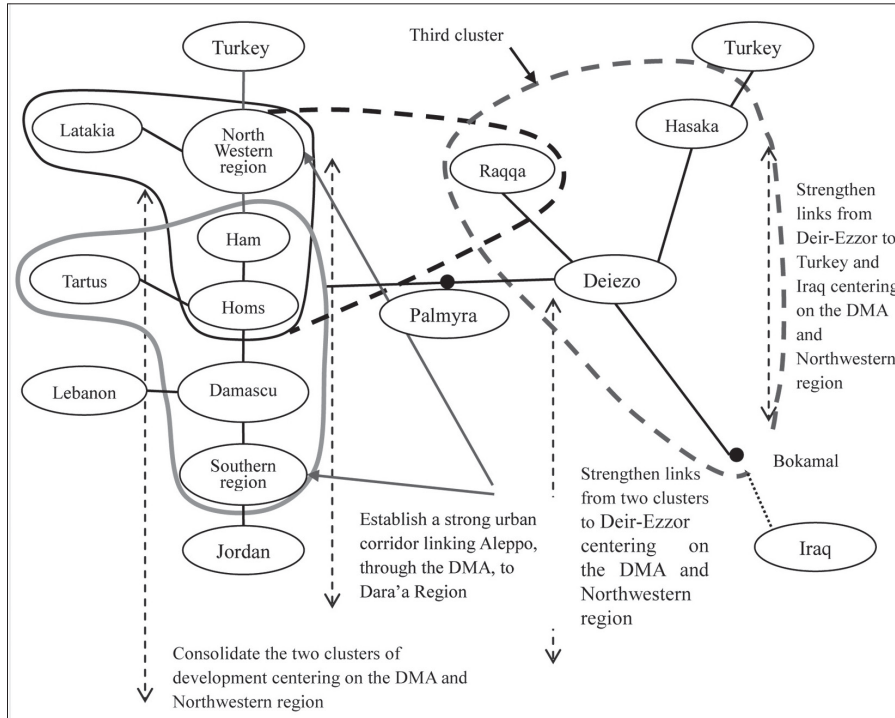


Figure 3: Strategy for Syria's Spatial Development by JICA2008

els of development: Macro (national), Meso (regional) and Micro (urban).

The macro (on Syrian country level) strategy is consisting of two frameworks. A socio-economic framework aims to achieve long-term development scenario on balance between regions linked also to neighboring countries in the globalizing economy. The other framework is spatial development strategy which suggests establishing four urban clusters and artery road network. Figure 3 shows the components of the spatial development that JICA suggested in 2008.²⁴⁾

Meso (Damascus Metropolitan Area level) strategy includes a master plan for urban development of DAM for infrastructure and related institutional measures to support the Syrian development scenario.²⁵⁾ The second phase of this project continued until 2012 but stopped due to the Syrian crisis.

2.4.2. Hama

Hama is one of the most charming cities in Syria, along with the *Orontes River*. It has a pleasant and picturesque environment with the old wooden water wheels, the traditional houses, noteworthy civil and religious buildings.²⁶⁾

The urbanization of the area was not mentioned before the first millennium BC, but the site prospered around 1500 BC. During the period between 3000 to 2400 BC, Hama built its first wall to enclose some irrigation, farming and industrial activities as well as living quarters. Between 332–62 BC, Alexander built the castle; while the Roman built the wall from the white rocks, within which some houses according

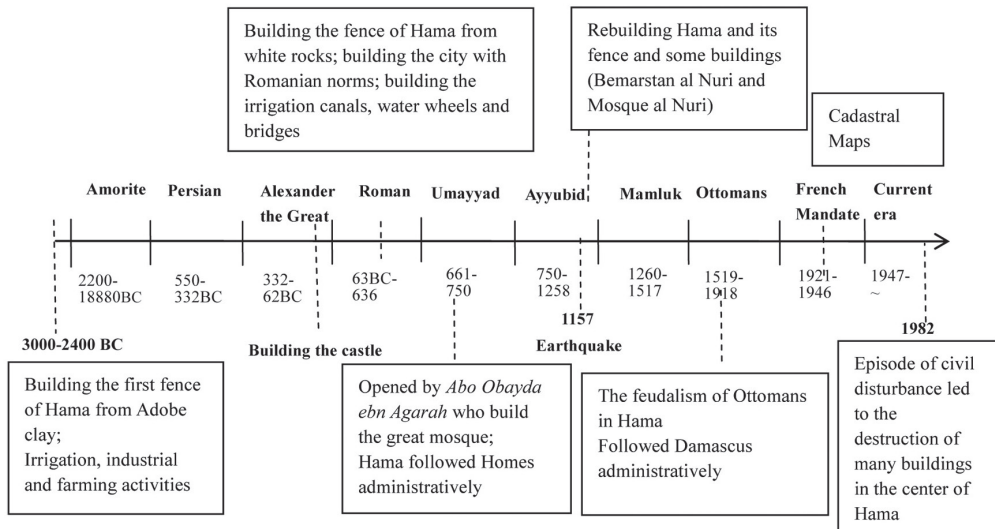


Figure 4: The urban development of Hama city in Syria

to the Romanian norms, irrigation canals, water wheels, and bridges were constructed.²⁷⁾ Hama was rebuilt again during the Ayyubid era after the 1,157 earthquake.

During the Ottomans period, Hama became an important city. Its built-up area expanded with the growth of regional trade, and it was benefited from its merchants' ties to Aleppo. During the 18th century, Hama served as a stopping point on the route to Hijaz for the pilgrimage, and thus it became linked to new centers of regional wealth and power in Damascus.²⁸⁾ However, part of the urban landscape changed after the military confrontations in 1982.

2.4.3. Al-kilaniyyeh District

Three upper-class families dominated Hama's society in the 18th century: Al-Azms, Al-Kaylanis and Alwanis. These notable families tended to live in the quarters where their mosques and lodges were built. Also, they tried to use its equity capitals in the architectural activities which became one of Hama city's characteristics.

Although Al-kilaniyyeh district was completely destroyed during the military confrontations in February 1982, including some of the most treasured buildings, the surrounding areas still have very valuable buildings. Figure 5 shows some of these architectural buildings which have become historical landmarks such as the castle, Mosque Al-Nuri, Great Mosque, Museum (Beit Al-Azem), Al-Naurah Al-Muhammadiyah, and several water wheels.

Some ruins still exist in the location beside the river. These ruins are parts from very rich buildings such as Al-Tayra palace, Hamam Al-Sheikh, Al-Sheikh Ebrahim Mosque and Al-Zawiay Al-kaylania (Sufi lodge). Figure 6 shows the district before and after 1982 depending on old photos taken by citizens and several field trips the author made during working in Hama for the project of the Rehabilitation of Al-kilaniyyeh District in Al-Tehlawi office 2006–2009.

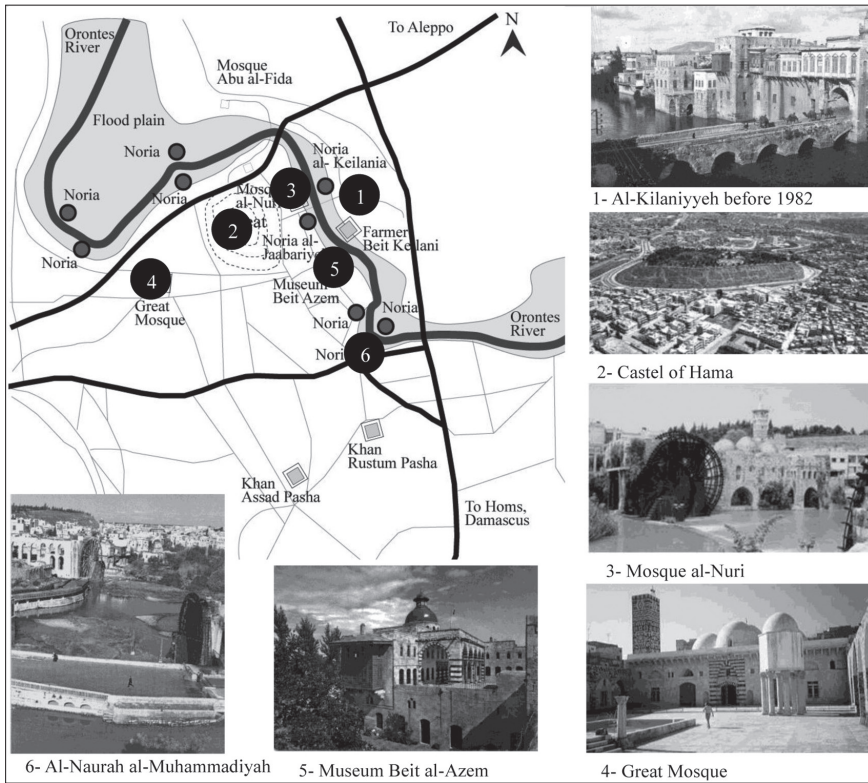


Figure 5: *Al-kilaniyyeh* district and the surrounding area
Hama map: Ross Burns (1999) "Monuments of Syria-An Historical Guide"
The photos from al-kaylani family / Al-Tahlawi office 2006 Syria

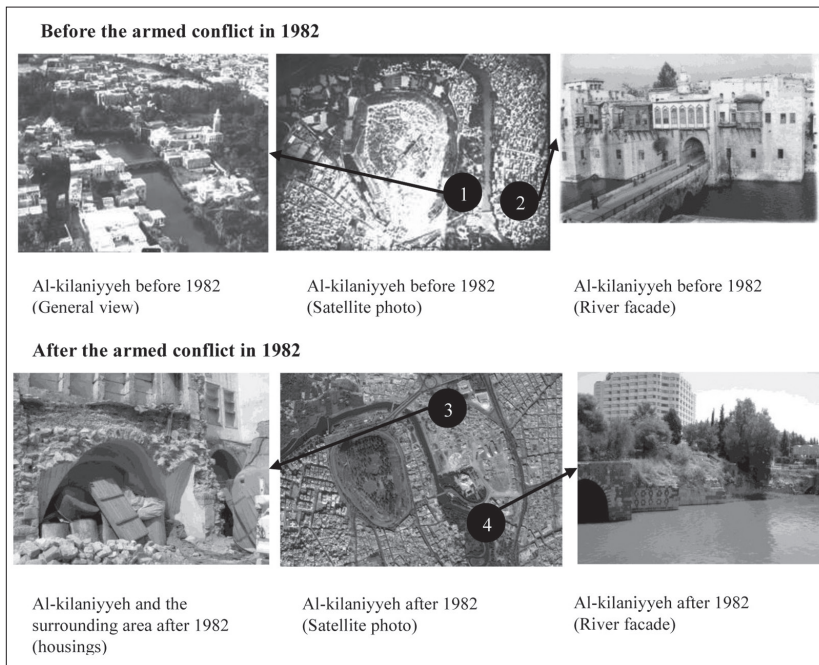


Figure 6: *Al-kilaniyyeh* district: before and after 1982

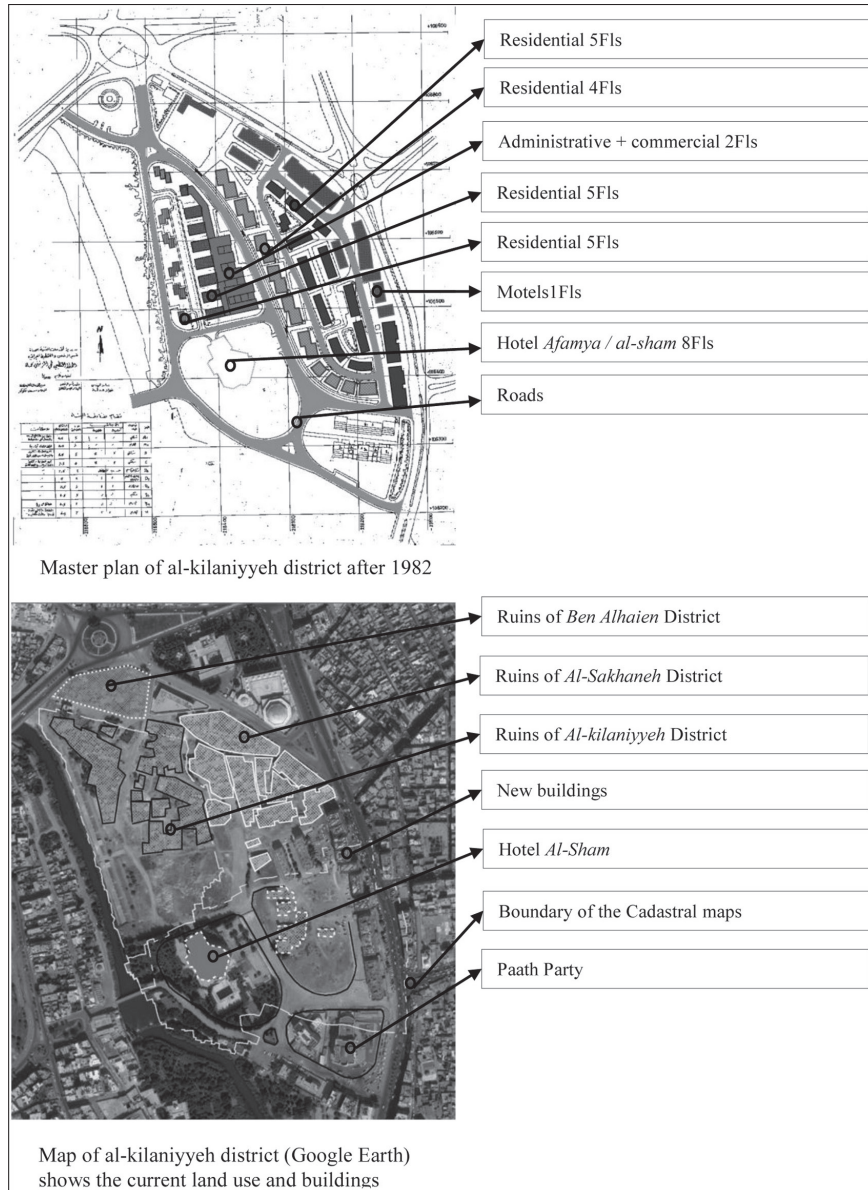


Figure 7: *Al-kilaniyyeh* district: master plan after 1982
 Master plan: Directorate of technical services in Hama, Syria

French cadastral maps were made in 1929 with the aim to collect the tax during the French mandate. These maps show the urban relation between the buildings, architectural design and buildings use.

The new master plan aims to remove the ruins of the historical buildings and establish new residential, commercial, entertainment and hotel buildings without considering the historical fabric. Figure 7 shows the program of the master plan, the existing ruins, and the new buildings.

Conclusion

Since 2011 until now, Syria has been under the pressure of the civil war. After more than six years of crisis, there have been devastating losses of human lives and livelihoods in Syria. The impact on the economy has been severe, and infrastructure has been destroyed. As a consequence, Syria has witnessed multiple displacements not only of people as refugees and internally displaced people exceeding 50% of the population, but also the socio-cultural heritage and fabric as well as urban institutions.²⁹⁾

Destruction of mosques, for instance, means a destruction of communities developed around them through the millennia history together with the livelihood of community members in relation to the neighboring regions and countries as trade partners. Destruction of cities means not just loss of many buildings but more fundamentally loss of urban institutions.

“Reconstruction of Syria” with its cities, therefore, should take serious concerns on issues at the level of institutions, communities and the regional and international relationships.

What reconstruction should look like, who will participate, and how the relation between the international donors and the domestic will be. Also, the relation between the state and the citizen is very important point need to be considered in post conflict environment.

The current reconstruction approaches, however, have several problems such as the following.

Adopting a structural approach to reconstruction of physical fabrics and related economic activities without the historical and socio-cultural concerns, there exist no guarantees that people’s rights and their access to resources including real estate are properly respected as the base for them to reconstruct their communities and re-establish the urban institutions. After six years of conflict, the landscape and demography have been changed. Thus, the new reconstruction plans will have to provide the institutions with development mechanisms and adapt resilient programs to ensure people’s rights and their access to resources; the new services and infrastructure will have to enhance the communities in addition to the economic and social recovery. Also, the cultural heritage must be recognized as a crucial element, not be considered a luxury to be attended later.

A comprehensive analysis of what worked during the history of the urban development in the Middle East and what did not worked is required in the post conflict period.

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Notes

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