

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

STATUS AND PROSPECTS OF THE ARAB CITY:

**THE REALITY OF THE CONTRADICTIONS AND DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN ARAB CITIES**

A critical vision against the backdrop of selected urban patterns

United Nations

Distr.
GENERAL
E/ESCWA/SDD/2009/8
15 December 2009
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

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- The present document is a summarized copy of an original Arabic.
 - The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of ESCWA.

09-0559

Preface

Arab cities undergo many transformations as a function of changing economic, social and structural conditions, all of which interact and even interfere and contradict with each other. Such contradictions, disparities and interests are reflected in different urban forms and patterns owing to internal or to external factors that stem from globalized economic relations. Those transformations arise from the various economic, social, cultural and political circumstances of countries with regard to their particular governance and administrative structures. This study highlights the case of three Arab cities, namely, Beirut, Cairo and Dubai; and sheds light on the contradictions and disparities within and between these cities against the backdrop of urban patterns.

In addition to providing an overview of the political, social and economic transformations of modern cities, this study analyses how these transformations have arisen by focusing on the analytical concept of urban fragmentation, by linking “local particularities” (social and cultural aspects) with “temporal particularities” (modernity crisis and economic globalization), “procedural systems” (governance and administration) and “urban sphere” (urban patterns).

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Introduction

The 21st century is the Century of the City. Half of the world's population already lives in urban areas and by the middle of this century most regions of the developing world will be predominantly urban.¹ In 1970, 38 percent of Arabs lived in urban areas, which increased to 55 per cent in 2005. Arab urban population is likely to surpass 60 per cent by 2020.²

Cities are not only growing in number but they are growing in influence as well.³ It is even increasingly argued that cities and city-regions are becoming the focal points of economic and political power at the expense of nation-states. The role of nation-states is being increasingly challenged and undermined from the top by international organizations dealing with various issues that are relevant at the global level – like pollution, international security, trade⁴ – and from the bottom by local authorities more suited to answer local issues – like cultural specificities, local development and citizen participation. Thus, cities are becoming the “test bed” for the adequacy of political institutions, for the performance of government agencies, and for the effectiveness of urban governance.

This situation is paving the way to important opportunities for urban development.⁵ Cities hold tremendous potential as engines of national growth and provide economic and social development, creating jobs and generating ideas through economies of scale and creative and innovative civic cultures. However, these opportunities are undermined by a number of imposing challenges; cities can also generate inequality, urban violence, and intensify social exclusion, denying the benefits of urban life to the poor, to women, to youth, and to religious or ethnic (social) minorities and other marginalized groups, and most of all the continuous fragmentation of the city fabric and the urbanization of poverty and social exclusion⁶ by global trends in urbanization and globalization.

According to the *Arab Human Development Report 2009*, in the Arab region, urban growth and the accelerating drift to cities and towns is straining an already-overstretched infrastructure and creating overcrowded, unhealthy and insecure living conditions in many Arab urban centres.⁷

The city is no longer merely a material space; rather, it constitutes an important social reality that is diversified and differentiated in its structure. More than forming a material space based on urban and architectural patterns, a city is a social space based on social life and ramified relations between individuals and groups. Some experts limit their studies to one of these spaces and link it to one of two fields, namely: (a) a tangible urban field which organizes the activities of people within physical, urban and artifacts in a specific space;⁸ and (b) an intangible social field which organizes the behaviors, practices and representations of citizens and groups in a specific time.⁹ However, cities represent interactions and

¹ UN-HABITAT - State of the world's cities 2008/2009 – Harmonious cities (WUF4).

² AHDR, 2009.

³ World Bank, 2000.

⁴ Egypt, for example, when trying to apply the Structural Adjustment Policies urged on it by the IMF and World Bank, experienced the dislocation of traditional economies, and continues to face worrisome rise in the numbers of unemployed and people living in poverty as a result.

⁵ World Bank, 2000.

⁶ UNESCO, Charte droit a la ville.

⁷ AHDR.

⁸ Grafmeyer, 1994, p. 25.

⁹ Bourdieu, 1994, p. 25.

interferences between those two fields in space and time, and encompass political and ideological national systems, with material, cultural and social production and reproduction mechanisms.¹⁰

This study presents a critical view of some urban patterns based on contradictions and differences between the above variables; and highlights their impact within and between Arab cities. The study covers three cities, namely, Beirut, Cairo and Dubai. These cities represent three different patterns of structural transformations in terms of economic, social and urban characteristics. Specifically, those patterns reflect different conditions owing to internal factors or external ones stemming from globalization. Those diversified conditions are governed by economic, social, cultural and political circumstances prevailing in every society which interacts with different governance and administrative systems. These three cities form different paradigms of development, thereby encompassing the evolution and transformations of many Arab cities. A comparison of those urban patterns and their contradictions provides a starting point. Subsequent in-depth researches will aim to investigate those patterns within the framework of the challenges of modernization, and assess their impacts on the evolution of Arab cities.

¹⁰ Le Goix, 2005, p. 7.

I. CHALLENGES OF ARAB CITIES

The last decade has seen a proliferation of theoretical approaches, which have sought to uncover the changing form and governance of cities: the central-local relations of government; the growing influence of 'urban regimes' and 'urban coalitions'; regional cooperation and metropolitan institutional organization.

In essence, the concept of government¹¹ based upon the existence of 'society' as a self-contained unity at the nation-state scale, by conceiving of populations as self-contained entities with their own laws and inherent properties governed at distance, are being increasingly challenged.¹² The two main challenges comprise (a) the rise of 'community' as a new territory for the administration of individual and collective existence; and (b) globalization and transnationalization of economic relations.

In other words, the political regulation of the 'state-centred' model of the arbitration is being increasingly challenged. This is due to a combination of various socio-political dynamics that differ in intensity from one institution and from one political culture to another. Among these, according to Jouve (2005) are: (a) the basic lack of confidence in the capacity of the political realm to address both the problems of modern societies and the emergence of a civil society that claims greater say in the organisation of power;¹³ (b) the fragmentation of policymaking systems subsequent to changes in the internal structure of the State caused by decentralizing reforms and federalist dynamics;¹⁴ (c) the emergence of new issues (the environment, exclusion, integration, etc.) that can no longer be addressed by sector-based policies but require integrated approaches;¹⁵ and (d) the consolidation of new areas of collective action, notably through urban social movements.¹⁶

Arab countries are not immune against these global trends. They are undergoing a similar political evolution in the management of their social groups, and trying to introduce, with limited success so far, democratic governance and institutions of representation that ensure inclusion, the equal distribution of wealth among various groups, and respect for cultural diversity. In countries such as the Sudan, Lebanon, and Iraq, social groups have been mobilized to press for inclusion or separation. This mobilization has been destructive and destabilizing in most cases. However, according to AHDR (2009), these struggles that appear on the surface to stem from identity in fact often originate in skewed access to power or wealth and in a lack of channels for representative political participation.

II. GENERAL FRAMEWORK: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Many experts reflect the deep transformations of cities and review the different phenomena as a pivot for these changes as follows: (a) new fields of economic globalization that have transformed cities into places that favour global economic exchanges;¹⁷ (b) new areas for cultural, ethnic and confessional distinctions;¹⁸ (c) areas of social divisions, with the development of gated communities for rich people

¹¹ Government within nation-states involves agencies and forces other than what is conventionally conceived as *the* government (Miller & Rose, 1990).

¹² Foucault, 1991.

¹³ Keane, J. (1998), *Civil society: old images, new visions*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

¹⁴ Loughlin, J. (ed.) (2001), *Subnational Democracy in the European Union. Challenges and Opportunities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

¹⁵ Duran, P. and Thoenig, J.-C. (1996), "L'Etat et la gestion publique territoriale", *Revue française de science politique*, 46, 4, pp. 580-623.

¹⁶ Hamel, P. *et al* (eds.) (2000), *Urban movements in a globalising world*, Routledge, London.

¹⁷ Harvey, 1993.

¹⁸ Davie, 1994.

distinguished from the rest of a city;¹⁹ (d) regions with “cultural identities”;²⁰ (d) new horizons for urban patterns following the dual city (the old city and the new city);²¹ and (e) an attempt to seek modernity and modernization through imitation and alienation.²²

All of the above mentioned studies state that cities, whether as a result of global economy and change in the social structure or the search for good governance, are spaces in transformation and reconfiguration in physical, economical and social terms.

III. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: FRAGMENTED CITIES

The past couple of decades has witnessed an abundant scientific literature on urban fragmentation and the associated phenomena and factors, including as follows:

(a) The development of new sectors in cities stemming from the global economy, with the support of local and international actors and their networks;²³

(b) Reaffirming the impacts of land development strategies, particularly in the field of housing and transportation, supported by liberal urban policies that lead to increasing urban expansion along with the development of such new neighbourhoods as cultural communities, gated cities and slums;²⁴

(c) Zoning planning approaches based on specific land use, such as industrial cities and others, or on the establishment of modern financial and economic spaces and assemblies;²⁵

(d) Cultural and social trends and their association with the identity crisis in developing countries, where administrative, political and economic systems are being modernized independently from the characteristics of prevailing traditional, social and cultural structures;²⁶

(e) The impact of geographic and natural features on the different urban configurations and, consequently, on urban fragmentation.²⁷

This literature has led to a more accurate definition of urban fragmentation and to the emergence of a set of theories covering issues related to this fragmentation. Urban fragmentation is reflected in weak social relations in the urban realm, resulting from weak interaction among communities, and it is also associated with a deficiency in the representative system.²⁸ Within that framework, urban fragmentation is completely

¹⁹ Dear and Flusty, 1998.

²⁰ Such as Beirut in the aftermath of the civil war where the gradual natural development of the city led to the following: (a) a different pattern based on the change of the features of the centre as a space for social blending; (b) urban divisions delimited by demarcation lines; (c) geography of fear; (d) service-based matrices based on self-sufficiency of different groups in their regions. See Davie, 1992 and 1994; and Khalaf, 2002.

²¹ Within that context, the city comprises suburbs and traditional villages and secondary cities as well; and the analysis is based on the plurality and diversity of daily practice in transport from one side, and the tendency of middle classes to live in suburbs adjacent to the centre. See Secchi, 2008.

²² Elsheshtawy, 2008.

²³ Sassen, 1996.

²⁴ Donzelot, 1998.

²⁵ Edwards, 1991.

²⁶ Navez-Bouchanine, 1993.

²⁷ Piroddi, 1991.

²⁸ Navez-Bouchanine, 2002.

different from other spatial social differentiation concepts in modern cities, such as marginalization, discrimination and exclusion.

The analytical framework of the concept of urban fragmentation, which is adopted in the discussions on urban patterns and their contradictions in the three cities under study, is based on a descriptive pattern that summarizes the approaches of many researchers that underscored the different economic, political, economic and spatial forms of urban fragmentation.²⁹

A. BEIRUT

1. *Urban fragmentation between regional disparities and political crisis*

Beirut has developed from a small coastal city on the Mediterranean, with a population of some 4,000 at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to the “façade of modernism” in the Ottoman era, to a bustling capital of business and culture, to a torn city during the civil war, and finally to a city characterized by large reconstruction projects, growing side by side with popular neighbourhoods and slums.

Few cities change so many times in less than a century. It is important to question whether this is the characteristic of a city that comprises 18 officially recognized confessions, or whether it is a general trait that occurs in every space that is marked by differences, disparities and a struggle to acquire political rights as well as the right to participation.

Beirut suffered significantly from the impact of war, which started in the suburbs but soon extended to the city centre, or downtown, which was comprehensively destroyed. The city was then divided into two parts by a demarcation line, whose tangible social effects remain despite its physical removal. Direct results of the war included the mandatory movement of Lebanese from one region to another in a trend that affected hundreds of thousands of internal migrants;³⁰ and the formation of illegal neighbourhoods or their expansion in different areas of the capital and its suburbs.³¹

The political transformation resulting from war was reflected in the absence of the State and emergence of the *fait-accomplis* powers that imposed their authority, each in its territory. Such authorities expanded to cover the collection of taxes and providing services and infrastructure;³² and remained active until the ratification of the Taif Agreement and the beginning of a new phase in Lebanon. During this phase, Lebanon witnessed a growing and discrepant decline of these practices paving the way for the reestablishment of the Lebanese State. Another result of the war was the fall of the downtown area as an economic centre and the emergence of such different economic centres as Ashrafieh, Kaslik and Verdun, and the enhancement of other centres, including Hamra, which have undergone modifications since the beginning of the 1990s.³³

Beirut witnessed a large construction trend during war aimed primarily at providing housing for internal migrants, particularly those seeking residence away from the front lines.³⁴ Subsequently, the post-war, “unified” Beirut expanded to include what was later on known as Greater Beirut.³⁵

²⁹ Navez-Bouchanine, 1993.

³⁰ Nasr, 1984.

³¹ Bourgey, 1982; and Clerc-Huybrechts, 2008.

³² Harb al-Kak, 1996.

³³ Boudisseau, 2001.

³⁴ Verdeil, 2002.

³⁵ Verdeil et al., 2005.

2. *Reconstruction*

Reconstruction projects, which began in 1992, were characterized by the wish to recover the pre-war image of Beirut as an economic centre and a cosmopolitan city. The two main challenges resided first in reviving the trade centre in an attempt to establish a central point in which the entire movement of the city would flow; and secondly, in opening areas with different confessions and political views by focusing on various road and infrastructure projects.³⁶

This phase is characterized by the emergence of the “Solidere” project, which aimed essentially at removing the scars of war. While the Solidere project eliminated such heritage features as ancient souks, it preserved the structure formed during the French colony period, with a change in entertaining and touristic uses. Main obstacles delaying this project include the persisting political crisis in Lebanon and the broader Arab region as well as the economic crisis that started in the mid-1990s.

3. *Spatial and social fragmentation*

As described above, the main features of the fragmentation of Beirut are reflected in the contradiction between the centre, which emerges as an independent space, and between the administrative Beirut and its southern suburbs, which inflates Beirut both in size and population.³⁷ The southern suburbs is differentiated from its surrounding areas along confessional lines, given that the majority of population is Shiite;³⁸ and is also characterized by the concentration of poverty in some of its quarters, especially in slums which occupy large spaces. Despite its stereotyped image, the southern suburbs comprises one homogeneous and harmonious category, but includes as well different political and social categories as proved by the 1998 municipal elections, when parties resorted to coalitions with families to form municipal councils.³⁹

By contrast, the northern suburbs cannot be considered as an independent unit comprising a Christian majority given that it also has ethnic differences in Borj Hamoud, which comprises a large Armenian community, in addition to neighbourhoods with Assyrian and Chaldean majorities, and other areas with a Shiite majority, such as Rweissat Metn. This region is characterized by political, economic and social differences.

4. *Urban governance and participation and their impact on the city*

There are many actors across Beirut and its suburbs in the field of public sphere, including municipalities, economic authorities, civil society organizations and representatives of confessions. Additionally, there are forces that participated in the civil war and that have succeeded in retaining their dominance over their private spaces. Such dominance is associated with such basic projects as schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, and cultural, sports and religious centres, with the support of different entities and through the establishment of housing projects targeted at specific confessions.

Moreover, economic actors play a main role in impacting the spatial realm in Beirut. Construction is considered to be one of the main economic sectors in Lebanon with regard to labour force and capital. While it faced a crisis at the end of the 1990s, it has resurged since 2001 to comprise different investment projects, including upmarket residences, skyscrapers, gated communities and malls. Other large projects were built on reclaimed coastal areas, such as Lenore, Marina Khoury and others. Moreover, huge malls that started to emerge on the borders or in the centre of the city have led to the establishment of new urban centres on their own.

³⁶ Verdeil, 2002.

³⁷ Harb al-Kak, 1996.

³⁸ Many of the residents of this area are migrants from South Lebanon and the Beqaa who relocated in the wake of Israeli aggressions and the civil war.

³⁹ Favier, 2001.

Despite their limited budgets, the role of municipal authorities in public affairs is increasing through restructuring the urban scenery of Beirut. They are building public gardens, providing infrastructure and entertainment and sports centres and organizing different activities. However, the relation of these municipalities with the representatives of confessions and parties is a crucial factor that can be identified in municipal unions, where the public interest is merely linked to the interest of the confession or the group.

Consequently, Beirut looks like a fragmented city, whose every fragment possesses its own characteristics. The public context is a reflection of these fragments, where every fragment is characterized by its own symbols and behavioural and cultural practices. For example, the Asaad Asaad crossroad in the Chiah neighbourhood in the southern suburbs was transformed from a military demarcation line during the civil war into a latent demarcation line between two spaces with different symbols and mottos, although the population belongs to the same economic classes and the same municipality.⁴⁰

In parallel, a relatively young middle class is growing in Beirut, transgressing fragments and barriers, that is separate from confessional leaderships and that is dynamic and linked to globalization.⁴¹

Some observers argue that Greater Beirut, which comprises some 1.5 million inhabitants, is a series of neighbourhoods and confessional and factional spaces that are so divergent economically and socially that the city becomes little more than a mosaic of contiguous groups. This leads to various questions, including whether public policies and urban governance of these different fragments form a factor of fragmentation; if the cultural and social practice or the interaction with the space give the fragment its character and, therefore, whether fragments become as diversified as the practices; whether globalization and the resulting differentiation between categories cause integration, whereas other categories remained marginalized; or whether, as mentioned above, it is a unique condition of a city seeking to gather too many confessions in one space.

The main issue remains, namely, if urban fragmentation is a reflection of the absence of ethnic, cultural and social homogeneity, how then to devise integrated spatial policies, without overlooking the social dimension and resorting to isolation and marginalization.

B. CAIRO

1. Challenges of globalization between spatial fragmentation and the issue of social justice

Cairo is expected to include around 43 per cent of Egypt's population by 2020. Its growth rate can be considered alarming. Specifically, an estimated 1,000 people move to Cairo every week looking for a job or residence;⁴² and surrounding cities are considered to be annexed to the capital due to a much centralized system. Unofficially, 8 million people out of the overall population of the city live in slums.

Current public policies include orientation towards privatization and facilitation of the conditions of investment in upmarket housing projects aimed at higher income groups. At the same time the number of poor lacking adequate housing keeps increasing. Consequently, urban dwellers are divided into a rich upper class, which has moved away from the centre of the city to affluent neighbourhoods; and a lower class living in poor areas and slums. The upper class frequents schools, clubs and places that differ from the ones frequented by the majority of people in such a way that accentuates the differences between social categories within the same city.

⁴⁰ Farah, 2006.

⁴¹ Davie, 2007.

⁴² Elsheshtawy, 2006.

2. *Problematic of spatial fragmentation: gated communities and slums*

These differences between economic and social levels in Cairo have led to the emergence of separate spaces for each of the poor and rich classes. According to the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), Cairo comprises three of the biggest thirty slums in the world.⁴³ The rich moved to cities built specially for them in east Cairo, which are almost totally governed by the private sector. This rich class has a network of relations that links those walled quarters together.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods have an important and mainly economic authority that enables them to manage and control economic affairs, without having to live in the city. The population in Cairo's slums is growing at a rate that is three times that of other regions, which has compelled people to take matters into their own hands with regard to providing shelter, services and necessary infrastructure.⁴⁵

Some governmental projects have sought to upgrade those slums, albeit with only partial success, whereas private efforts have achieved better results. Examples of this success include the project of reviving and developing traditional regions of Cairo by the Aga Khan organization, and the project of promoting Manshiyat Nasser with the support of a German institution for development. Within that framework, the State took effective measures by admitting the presence of slums and integrating the system for registering the ownership of lands and houses.⁴⁶

By contrast, most of the upper income housing projects in east Cairo appear as different spaces secluded from the rest of the city through doors and gates, as well as through their specific road networks, pavements and infrastructure. Some argue that those projects, which have been designed along the model of Dubai, are dispersed in the heart of Cairo, not adapted and integrated to the environment and the community, and in the midst of a degraded architectural setting and a poor social environment, all of which paves the way for risky social ills and upheavals.⁴⁷

Furthermore, these projects have an impact on prices of surrounding lands, which can increase beyond the reach of middle and poor classes. This phenomenon has a fundamental impact on the urban and social structure of the city, thereby raising the issue of sustainability. In fact, real estate companies, which could transform the architecture and the urban form of the city, could in turn lead to social problems and deepening the gap between social groups and categories of the same city.

3. *Urban administration and sustainability*

Given that slums or old souks are often impossible to relocate, governments must take into account a variety of complex social and economic issues. These slums form living spaces for their residents and include strong social networks that are part of the social capital, despite extreme poverty and the absence of services. Consequently, policies aimed at relocating citizens have failed, as witnessed by the fact that many of those given new residences have resorted to selling or leasing their units in order to return to their slums where they could be closer to their jobs.⁴⁸

In sum, spatial and social fragmentation in Cairo is reflected in the weak participation in public and sectoral policies and the profound contradictions between gated upmarket neighborhoods and slums and old settlements.

⁴³ IRIN, 2007.

⁴⁴ Mitchell, 2008.

⁴⁵ Singerman, 2007.

⁴⁶ Elsheshtawy, 2006.

⁴⁷ Elsheshtawy, 2006.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

C. DUBAI

1. *City of immigrants and social and ethnic fragmentation*

Every year, Dubai attracts more visitors, customers and workers from all over the world. In view of its modern infrastructure, strategic seaports and airport, and its major upmarket projects, it is set to receive more than 10 million visitors in 2010.⁴⁹

Dubai is considered unique in view of its demographic structure, with 71 per cent of the overall population being immigrants and workers in 2007. Most workers are from the Indian subcontinent in addition to other nationalities. Dubai is successfully seeking to become a globalized city through ambitious urban planning, and ensuring an attractive working environment with superior services aimed at impressing visitors and observers.

Some describe Dubai as the biggest construction site in the world, with approximately 600 skyscrapers, largest malls in the world and most upmarket hotels.⁵⁰ It is seeking to break all the records in the fields of, among others, largest mall, highest tower, largest airport, biggest artificial island and first underwater hotel. Additionally, Dubai encompasses several specialized spaces, such as Media City, in addition to other projects under construction.⁵¹

2. *Historical overview*

Some experts maintain that Dubai was established as a city of business and economic profit, and has been relying for decades on free trade and the policy of annulling or reducing taxes and providing modern infrastructure by making use of abundant financial resources and cheap labour force. In a comparatively short period of time, the city has been transformed from a modest settlement, whose population lived on raising cattle and harvesting palms, to a forest of skyscrapers.⁵² Some observers attribute this success to the political stability of Dubai.

3. *Spatial and social fragmentation*

A large gap exists between poor dispersed neighbourhoods and the skyscrapers and large upmarket projects. Middle-class people live in such regions as Deira, Bur Dubai, al-Jafiliyya and Satwa.

Poor regions border more affluent neighbourhoods in such a way that accentuates the disparity between humble houses and the towers of, for instance, Sheikh Zayed Street. Trees are planted to cover these poor areas.

The social structure is a mosaic of social classes. Far from being a blended society, it is pyramidal with the governing class on the top, followed by a minority of national citizens, and thousands of different nationalities at the base. The landslide which constitutes the base of the pyramid comprises different nationalities of workers, namely, Indians, Pakistanis, Filipinos and Sri Lankan female workers.⁵³ Some observers note that every category has its own sphere of workspace, schools, residences, cafes and restaurants, and even newspapers and television channels. Owing to high temperatures and the urban expanse, most of these categories, particularly poor ones, find it hard to move easily, and therefore remain confined in their neighbourhoods.

⁴⁹ Davis, 2007.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Elsheshtawy, 2006.

⁵² Lavergne, 2007.

⁵³ Ibid.

Disparities are evident between generations within the same category. For example, children are raised by foreigners, whether at home or at school, which leads to the fading of social values that become substituted by foreign values.⁵⁴ The public policies can also accentuate differences between the various categories of the city. Critics note that the city may be moving away from its Arab roots to turn into a picture with no cultural depth, with the aim of attracting a certain elite.⁵⁵ While new orientations are forcing their way through social policies and foreign acquisition policies, the city remains a combination of human groups governed by clear social distinctions where people interact solely in order to achieve gains.

4. *Dubai: The international city*

Dubai cannot become an international city along the lines of Shanghai or Hong Kong as long as it depends on the wishes of investors choosing it to be the centre of their projects and investments; and as long as it lacks the internal social, demographic and cultural core. Some analysts wonder about the nature of the structure or the institutional and legal basis that could secure the sustainability of the city and its projects in case factors which have led to its emergence and quick evolution fade or cease. A general worry stems from the establishment of global economy in Dubai without working on finding a solid basis to secure its sustainability.⁵⁶ Such concern surfaced during the recent financial crisis, and voices were heard calling for the need to find an electoral system, representative councils and wider participation in the management of public affairs.

In view of these points, the challenges of globalization in Dubai could lead to the fragmentation of the city as reflected at the level of the social structure, which would lead to the multiplicity of dissimilar fragments in terms of architecture, urban fabric and to the plurality of closed networks, thereby resulting in diminishing interaction between different social groups living in the same city.

IV. ANALYSIS OF URBAN FRAGMENTATION PATTERNS

The three cities represent different kinds of fragmentation stemming from private interactions and dynamics; and reflect contradictions, discrepancies and differences within and between them. The results of this comparison can be summed up in four points, namely:

(a) Elements having great impact on urban patterns and fragmentation:

(i) *Globalization and means adopted by countries and cities to deal with it*

Some fragments of the three cities under review have become more linked than ever to globalized economic and cultural dynamics; whereas large parts are still beyond the reach of globalization linked in their evolution to local dynamics, even if such dynamics are directly or indirectly impacted by globalization. Globalization has a clear, albeit variable, impact on the evolution of cities today. The urban evolution of Dubai, for instance, is largely based on economic globalization dynamics, including significant real estate projects, huge foreign investments, regional and international centres of multinational companies, and infrastructure at the service of globalization (international airport, large seaports and others). In the case of Cairo, the urban fabric clearly reveals this deep contraction imposed by the impacts of dissimilarities resulting from globalization. Differentiation is made between social categories getting richer, influenced by globalization, semi-secluded from the city and living in regions linked through their own networks and channels as well as their own space, and categories getting poorer secluded from economic relations and globalization and

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.; and Davis, 2007.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

undergoing exclusion and marginalization in slums forming the largest part of the city. In the case of Beirut, while globalization did not have this dramatic role that has characterized the urban development in Dubai and Cairo, it is particularly reflected in the development of consumer based economic structures;

(ii) *Changes in means of production, the labour market and labour force*

Economic transformations that have accompanied the decline of the intensive manufacturing phase in the West represent the main reason of urban fragmentation in such societies. The fall of the social contract that used to link production forces, or employers, to the State has led to an increase of unemployment, social exclusion and urban seclusion of large categories of the previous working community. Among the studied cases, Cairo is the closest to this situation. Egypt is the only case wherein an industry had a crucial role in the national economic structure. In Lebanon, while the country underwent an industrial phase in the 1970s, the market economy, particularly in Beirut, had the main role in planning the Lebanese economy. In the United Arab Emirates, particularly Dubai, despite little industrial heritage worth, the economic activity attracts large numbers of workers, which however has not led to the formation of a social contract such as exists in the West. Consequently, this dimension has a limited role in urban fragmentation, which emerges mainly in the form of exclusion and seclusion of large parts of society in Cairo;

(iii) *The relation between urban fragmentation and exclusion among cultural communities and social classes*

The cultural factor emerged as an essential factor in urban fragmentation. It is crucial for the integration or seclusion of social categories or individuals in the life of a certain community through participation in cultural symbols, tools and values. This factor has two main impacts, namely: emergence of barriers and cultural spaces (classes, ethnic and confessional); and appropriation of the public space. Beirut emerges as the eminent example to this kind of fragmentation, which does not exclude Cairo and Dubai. In Cairo, the factor of social classes plays the main role in the separation between gated rich neighbourhoods and slums, although they are sometimes geographically connected. In Dubai, while the separation factor is weaker, there is clearly an emerging phenomenon of ethnic and nationalistic neighbourhoods;

(iv) *Barriers and borders between neighbourhoods and regions*

The direct result of urban fragmentation is naturally the establishment of barriers. Such barriers can be material in the form of gates and fences, such as the gated rich neighbourhoods in Cairo; security-related, such as many large, private commercial or residential projects in Dubai, Cairo and Beirut; or symbolic, such as the war demarcation line in Beirut, which is still present in some minds despite its physical removal;

(b) Distinctiveness is a permanent characteristic of the city, particularly in such historical cities as Cairo. The new phenomenon is not the distinction per se, rather its transformation into a fragmentation factor. The difference between the two is that, while the distinction separates the neighbourhoods of a city on the backdrop of its social and economic reality, it does not sever communication and interaction between those neighbourhoods. In this case, the city remains a social unit with unified interest. As for fragmentation, it cuts communication lines and disassembles the interactive interests that unify citizens, thereby linking some neighbourhoods to others in other cities across instead of linking them with their own surrounding;

(c) The State plays a crucial role in establishing spatial distinctions, and preserving or removing them at all times, which makes its role crucial in terms of implementing what is produced by the labour force, or by limiting the effect of such production. In times of economic liberal policies, globalization and privatization, actors of the private sector and civil society have an effective role in the governance of the city.

In the West, openness on those issues has resulted in a balance between the role of the private sector and that of the civil society in formulating modern urban policies. In the Arab region, by contrast, the withdrawal of the State and the weak structure of the independent civil society have granted the interests of the private sector the main role in defining those policies. This sector generally works on securing its personal interests and isolates the interests of large categories in society, thereby leading to increasing privatization of service-related sectors in some countries. With this transformation, companies usually seek quick gain. According to Graham and Marvin, this yields a shift from a unifying infrastructure to an isolating one.⁵⁷ While this phenomenon is still in its first stages in the three cities under review, the resulting urban fragmentation has started to emerge sharply.⁵⁸

V. CONCLUSIONS

This primary reading of the urban patterns in the three Arab cities and the main questions raised have shown that urban fragmentation is a ramified phenomenon with several aspects, impacted by social and spatial practice and behaviours as well as by various political dimensions and radical changes in the global economy and technology.

Some pessimists see cities merely as arenas for power struggles, conflicts, contradictions, marginalization and differentiation, as well as mechanisms to produce spaces that coexist without sharing. However, a different point of view of the urban reality can be based on the principle of a city for all, where every person finds its own place because the city is a political, moral and esthetic claim; and where people can meet in the frame of “urban civilization” based on respect.⁵⁹ In this regard, it is important to see where Arab cities lie, and of investigating how to reconcile and connect fragmented cities with sustainable development principles based on equality, participation and justice.

There is therefore an urgent need for a critical research and studies aimed at identifying the urban challenges and at developing monitoring and analytical tools. Urban fragmentation is one of these theoretical tools that can assess sustainable development in urban and social policies, in addition to finding means of implementing sound urban governance based on the principles of citizenship and political and social rights for individuals and groups.

⁵⁷ Graham, Marvin, 2003.

⁵⁸ Verdeil, 2005.

⁵⁹ Paquot, 2009.

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