



Middle East – Topics & Arguments

Call for Papers #12 – Urban Development

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The peer-reviewed online journal “Middle East – Topics & Arguments” (META) is calling for submissions for its twelfth issue, which will be entitled **Urban Development**. This issue intends to critically investigate and question processes of urban change and transformation from a wide range of (trans-)disciplinary, conceptual and theoretical, as well as methodological, approaches.

Urban development in the Middle East has been complex and multifaceted in recent years. Following the postmodern and neoliberal Dubai model of urban development, fast-track urban growth in Arab Gulf countries has largely reshaped the socio-economic environment in cities such as Doha, Abu Dhabi, Muscat, Riyadh and Jeddah, despite severe temporary setbacks following the global financial and economic crises. Investments in cultural, sports, educational and business districts, hyperreal shopping and leisure facilities, huge waterfront developments, iconic mega projects and the redevelopment of religious heritage sites have not only aimed at broadening the economic basis for the post-oil era in these countries. Concurrently, they are intended as tools for city branding in a globalized competition of places and as signs to demonstrate progress and modernization to the members of the Gulf societies themselves. In consequence, these urban development projects function as a nucleus to (re-)develop a new urban and national identity. Moreover, they serve as a means to accumulate symbolic capital to legitimate the existing political system. Therefore, the *genius loci* of the cities in the region itself has increasingly become a contested space.

However, comparatively unrecognized urban development in North Africa and the Levant has been turbulent and dynamic, too, and has been partly influenced by the upheavals caused by the “Arab Spring”. For instance, Tunis is trying hard to democratize its urban development

governance structures, Tangier has profited from a huge redevelopment of its port facilities, and Erbil endeavours to become an appropriate capital under conditions of emerging statehood. In Cairo, the whole city structure is changing by bringing Cairo Vision 2020 increasingly to life, while Istanbul is trying hard to develop into a widely recognized global city.

What all these development paths seem to have in common is not only a postmodern, but also a neoliberal foundation: the privatization of urban planning and development, the erosion and fragmentation of public spaces, a strict orientation towards consumption- and business-orientated development concepts, and the securitization of urban spaces meet opaque and undemocratic planning processes.

Although the outcomes of these processes set a bright, clean and fascinating stage for urban development in the region, they simultaneously imply a dark and largely hidden side. Increasing socio-economic fragmentation, exploitation, the displacement of old established populations, rising socio-economic and cultural segregation, unequal access to urban infrastructure, growing crime rates, incidents of political unrest, protests and social counter-movements, and an increasing level of surveillance and political suppression by local governments are typical “side effects” of neoliberal urban development policies.

Whereas many states and cities engage in a rat race of such postmodern, neoliberal urban development, other places in the region face terrorism, war and devastation. Cities such as Aleppo, Kobane, Palmyra and Raqqa in Syria, Sinjar and Mosul in Iraq, Cizre and Sur in Turkey, Tripoli and Benghazi in Libya, and Ta'izz in Yemen have been bombed and destroyed by various conflicting parties. Thousands of people have lost their lives, and the urban heritage has been seriously damaged or is even lost forever. Even though this destruction may be interpreted as the ultimate outcome of a struggle about space and place, it implies an intrinsic logic in terms of rule, conflict, political economy and development opportunities, which is largely under-researched aside from the case of Beirut.

Against this background, the proposed themed issue intends to bring together various papers that critically tackle these complex current urban re-configurations and disparate development paths of contemporary urban dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa from cross-fertilising multidisciplinary perspectives. Besides widely present “global cities”, this also includes less-investigated “secondary cities” that nevertheless undergo much the same experiences. As it is done in most social and cultural disciplines today, we understand “urban development” as an open, non-linear and non-teleological process of recurrent transformation and change covering a broad range of aspects, and going far beyond urban planning and architecture alone. However, the term “development” is not neutral and should be attentively scrutinized in itself. In connection with the general tendencies outlined above, urban development also includes issues such as

- urban governance
- place branding
- migrating urban models
- the integration of cities into global and regional networks

- esthetical challenges
- heritage politics with respect to colonial architecture and former cosmopolitanism
- and the question of how individuals and groups enact, contribute to and deal with current urban transformations

For this, we call for conceptually well-informed, field research-based articles from a broad array of disciplines, including geography, economics, political science, sociology, history, architecture, anthropology and further fields of social and cultural studies.

Papers presenting new original research findings on the issue's topic will be published in the journal's FOCUS section. Articles in this section should be between 2,800 and 4,600 words.

In addition, we call for contributions for META's special sections:

The CLOSE UP section features a short portrait of a person who has a special relation to the issue's main topic, e.g. a researcher who has constitutively contributed to the field of urban studies on cities in the MENA region. It links that person's biography with a critical evaluation of his or her conceptual and empirical contribution to the field. Article length is 1,500 to 3,000 words.

The META section also relates to the issue's focus topic, with papers discussing the main topic from a theory-centred perspective. Regional scope is not limited to the Middle East and North Africa, but may also consider central theoretical approaches to contemporary urban development involving other world regions. Article length is limited to 2,800 to 4,600 words.

The ANTI/THESIS section juxtaposes two rivalling or complementary positions that highlight different overarching lines of argument, pros and cons, and/or competing narratives critically engaging with theories and concepts related to the current re-configurations experienced by cities in the region. These positions can be presented either together by one author or by two different authors in two separate articles. Contributions can discuss, for instance, neoliberal, postmodern and sustainable development of and in Middle Eastern and North African cities. Article length for each paper is 1,500-3,000 words.

All other paper proposals that fall within the general framework of the journal, but do not relate to the special topic "Urban Development", will be taken into consideration by the journal's editorial board for the OFF TOPIC section.

Prior to developing a complete manuscript, authors are asked to submit an abstract (300 words maximum), a short CV (not more than 150 words) and three to five key bibliographic sources. Please clearly indicate the research question, the method to be used and the empirical material your research will be based on. Papers will be accepted in English only.

The editors will make a preliminary decision regarding the topic's relevance to the journal's aims and scope and may provide suggestions for developing the manuscript, at the latest four weeks after the proposal submission deadline. However, all final papers will have to pass an external blind peer review process. Please consult our website <http://meta-journal.net> for further information about the journal's concept, sections and authors' guidelines.

The deadline for abstract submissions is March 30, 2018.

The deadline for article submissions is August 30, 2018.

Proposals and other editorial correspondence should be sent to submissions12@meta-journal.net