City Space
Architecture

EDITORIAL

Placemaking in Arab Cities.
Realities, Challenges, and Prospects

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Placemaking is an inclusive approach to the planning, design, and management of public places by which people create and/or recreate places. In the context of the Arab cities, placemaking projects are often envisaged to transform communities' spaces into lively and attractive places; to enhance quality of life and opportunity for existing residents. It also aims to (re)create a distinct sense of place or place branding at large. Exploring how contemporary Arab cities have framed placemaking processes within the contemporary urban conditions, and sometimes the threats to the quality of the city, are helping in creating healthier, equitable, and humane public places. Such challenges and opportunities of these processes is a core component of this special edition of The Journal of Public Space, which discusses various aspects of placemaking in Arab Cities, ranges from creating, enhancing, adapting and developing attractive and efficient public places in Arab Cities. In this context, academic papers and viewpoints have manifested a variety of perspectives, theories and practices of placemaking concepts, methods, recent challenges and possible solutions. They portrayed several tools on establishing and revitalizing public places starting from governmental toolkits, reaching unplanned activities fostering community engagement in placemaking.

Following a very selective reviewing process, this themed issue has been enriched by twelve distinguished papers discussing placemaking in terms of space, society, and system. It also exhibits five viewpoints that are demonstrating innovative approaches in placemaking practices. Consequently, the themed issue was divided into four main chapters to reflect the various focuses of the included papers and viewpoints.

Several papers (Amir and Kondolf; Marzbani, Awad, and Rezaei; Ramírez and El Habashi; Rashid and Obeidat) critically examined the *Space* as a theoretical concept and a dominant aspect of foundational domains of placemaking. Other papers (Alabdullah; Kulkul; Khemri, Melis and Caputo) focused on the *Society* as the main driven of placemaking in Arab Cities. While others (Keleg; El-Atrash; Hegazy) explored the *System* as an important factor of placemaking. Viewpoints demonstrate a variety of practical experiences in different contexts, to showcase of various innovative solutions of placemaking in a variety of Arab Cities.

Chapter one "Space" starts with a paper titled as "Bridges Over the Nile: Transportation Corridors Transformed into Public Spaces" by Amir Gohar and G. Mathias Kondolf. The paper debates the need for open space for people from lower income who cannot afford the expensive options along the Nile banks in Cairo, Egypt. It explores the spontaneous use of the sidewalks of the main bridges along the Nile banks as a new typology of public spaces. The paper recommends that making the riverbanks more accessible to average Cairenes could greatly improve their daily lives by providing badly needed open space. It also highlights some

recommendations on various levels, such as policy, planning, and design for innovative placemaking in Cairo.

Maryam Marzbani, Jihad Awad, and Mahmud Rezaei address the question "which of the "physical", "social" or "perceptual" aspects of a place has had a more significant impact on walkability? in their paper with the title of "The Sense of Place Components and Walkability". The paper analyses the case study of old and new developments in Dubai, UAE with a main goal of identifying, quantifying, and comparing the tangible (physical) and less tangible (perceptual, social) aspects of urban walkability in the new versus traditional developments in Dubai. The paper "Translation of civic pedagogical tactics to critically produce public spaces in Amman" by Amro Yaghi investigates the possibilities and the opportunities of producing alternative 'public' spaces through translating forms of civic pedagogical tactics in Amman. His contribution summarizes an innovative approach in exploring pedagogical forms of potential resistance that produces alternative spaces that deems public.

Natalia Ramírez and Alaa El Habashi critically address two main questions in their paper "reGREENeration of Historic Cairo: Hara al-Nabawiya and Bayt Madkour in al-Darb Al-Ahmar". They raise a question on "How to re-signify courtyards as part of an ecological system within historical contexts with rapid informal growth?". In addition, they explore the role that private and public open spaces can play for the development of communities living in historical areas. The paper concludes that "ReGREENerate" is to re-signify the link between the inside (courtyards) and outside (Haras) through a formula that creates appropriation of open spaces. It offers means to rethink the traditional role of privacy into a more communal oriented.

The Space chapter ends with the paper "Students' Static Activities in relation to Campus Quad Design and Layout: Exploring Gender-based Differences" by Mahbub Rashid and Bushra Obeidat. Their paper focuses on the relationships of various design and layout features of campus quads with students' static activities focusing on male and female differences. The study reaches solid results indicating that different design and layout features had different relationships with different static activities. Also, male students' and female students' static activities were affected differently by different design and layout features.

The second chapter of this themed issue focuses on "Society" in placemaking. It starts with a paper by Weaam Alabdullah about "Incorporating Practices of Publicness in Kuwaiti Parks: Chai Ithahha, Cricket, Diwaniya, and Malls". This paper focuses on practices of publicness in Kuwait that do not necessarily fall under accepted discourses of public space. These practices include culturally used spaces to respond to the needs of society with all its complexity, such as women's morning tea space, and predominantly men's gathering spaces. This paper also found that public parks which embrace such practices, becoming a terrain for fostering both community engagement and placemaking.

In her paper "Public Space and Social Polarization: A case study of the New Wave Turkish Migrants with a comparative analysis of Berlin, İstanbul & Ankara", Ceren Kulkul investigates the definition of public spaces. The paper traces the various uses of public spaces according to the local culture and the needs of the society. It specifically addresses the group of young Turkish migrants who moved from their cities to Germany. The paper examines various ways to cope with living with one another. In order to rethink the social production of urban space, Kulkul, analysed public spaces of Ankara and Istanbul in Turkey and the public spaces of Berlin in Germany.

The paper "Sustaining the liveliness of public spaces in El Houma through placemaking: The Case of Algiers" by Mohamed Yazid Khemri, Alessandro Melis, Silvio Caputo studies the social use of urban spaces in El Houma, in the Algerian capital. The paper presents an extensive study of the urban spaces as a form of placemaking, focusing on people-centred approach as an

improvement tool within a neighbourhood. It promotes for the design of socio-culturally appropriate urban spaces.

The third chapter of this edition of the Journal of Public Spaces focuses on the "*System*" that guides the placemaking and the development of public spaces in Arab Cities.
In this context, the paper "Prospects of placemaking progression in Arab cities" by Merham M. Keleg aims at investigating the different set ups in the Arab region in relation to placemaking philosophy. It critically discusses different bottom-up and top-down approaches in placemaking. The paper concludes that placemaking is being interrupted by the systems in the Arab region that are highly centralized and rigid. It requires further reconfiguration of the power structures and relations between the different stakeholders and also a more inclusive and democratic process.
Ahmad El-Atrash discusses public spaces policies in his paper "Placemaking Interventions in Palestine as Demonstration Effects on the Ground". The paper focuses on placemaking processes and ways of doing within the planning context of the West Bank. The paper identifies the role and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders in developing and identifying methods to challenge the existing situation of placemaking in the West Bank.
The paper "The (No-)Public Space: Reviewing the Transformation of Al-Qaed Ibrahim's Urban Image" by Iman Hegazy argues that public spaces are intangible expressions of democracy. The paper reviews the development of Al-Qaed Ibrahim square throughout the Egyptian socio-political changes, with a focus on the square's urban and emotional contextual transformations. It analyzes the impact of the socio-political events on the image of Al-Qaed Ibrahim square, and how those political events have transformed it into a revolutionary urban symbol and yet into a no-public space.
The last chapter of this themed issue is dedicated to five "Viewpoints" that showcase of real experiences in placemaking in a variety of Arab Cities with their processes, challenges and expected prospects.
In his contribution entitled as "How People Reclaimed Public Spaces in Beirut during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising", Wael Sinno discusses four main issues in placemaking within the context of the uprising places in the Middle East. With a special focus on public places in Beirut, Lebanon that was a theatre to many political events, the paper questions how public spaces in Central Beirut District have been reclaimed during the uprising; the benefits of this transformation; what is the potential future of these reconfigured places and; and what might be the role of local actors. Within the papers, the modern history of Beirut is being contextually presented.
Joana Dabaj and Riccardo Luca Conti showcase of the work developed through their design studio and charity "CatalyticAction". Their article entitled as "Placemaking in Lebanese cities hosting displaced communities" exhibits their work to empower communities through strategic and innovative community-led spatial interventions, where the built environment and wellbeing are being constantly negotiated. Often, their projects benefit the most vulnerable groups including children, elderly and persons with disabilities. With this process of thinking and doing architecture, refugee and host communities co-design together and shape their shared built environment at this specific time of displacement, but also work towards a sustainable longer-term use of the spaces.
In her viewpoint "The Double P! Public Spaces in Dubai: A paranoiac panopticon!", Therese Chidiac sees that the public spaces of Dubai are not reflecting an authentic identity, rather a collage of regulated western modernist spaces that have failed to create pockets of interaction and communication. The viewpoint questions: how to demystify the panopticon effect and make Dubai more liveable?
The article concludes that the presented design qualities of Dubai in the guidelines are worth to be put into action. It promotes the social responsibility of the architects in charge, and

recommends that they have the tools to integrate smooth design guidelines for public spaces and negotiate the regulations of the developers to end up with a win-win situation. "Pedestrianization as a strategy for placemaking: the case of the Wakalat Street in Amman" by Kamila Ashour and Wael Al-Shamali critically discusses the issue of borrowing western strategies for organizing public spaces in Arab countries that may have negative impacts. This viewpoint discusses the development of the Wakalat Street in Amman as a public space. The article concludes that the experiences at the Wakalat Street development prove that public seats and social mixing cannot be achieved at a location where services and products are designated for a specific class of high level income. It recommends that analysis of economic, social and physical characteristics of the local context and culture is essential to determine the right strategy for placemaking.

In their viewpoint "Placemaking for Coexistence: Child and community friendly space HOUCH YGAMAANA Project, New Damietta – Egypt", Insaf Ben Othmane Hamrouni and Omar Wanas narrate their project implemented in the Central Public Park of New Damietta, Egypt. The project aims to create age and gender inclusive child-friendly spaces that foster their imagination and enhance their physical, cognitive, emotional and social development.

The project is centred around a socially engaging mobile installation with the purpose of bringing the users of the park together and socially integrating them. The project is a manifestation of the socio-spatial dimension to placemaking where the produced public space is "both a product and producer of change".

And finally, this themed issue did not only focus on presenting successful processes and experiences of placemaking in the Arab cities. It didn't hesitate from exposing the problematics of public places in the Arab cities, aiming to find out new planning and design solutions for a better placemaking in the Arab World.

Although the papers and viewpoints included in this issue are themed, they are covering wide areas in the field on different levels, within aims that ensure the capability, viability and creativity of placemaking in Arab cities. They fill a gap in the literature on the "Arab Placemaking" by their focus on the progressive aspects of public places. This issue does not aim to be exhaustive, rather to spell out strategies and mechanisms that aim to revisit, re-recognize, and re-mobilize public places in Arab cities. It is hoped that this work will stimulate further discussions of this fundamental subject.