

THIRD ISSUE
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BY THE ARAB URBAN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

CITIES FOR PEOPLE

TOWARDS VIBRANT PUBLIC PLACES

THE INTERVIEW
His Excellency the Mayor of Ramallah, Issa Kassis, speaks from his experience in developing public places in the city of Ramallah

URBAN INSIGHTS
Experts' insights on place making and the development of public spaces in the Arab region
Toolkits on public space design and development

CITIES IN ACTION
Projects and Initiatives in Arab Cities to create active public places

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THIRD ISSUE

CITIES FOR PEOPLE
TOWARDS VIBRANT PUBLIC PLACES

Front Cover

Souk Waqif in Doha Qatar

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Mudununa Editorial Team

Dr. Anas Al Mughairy | General Supervisor
Dr. Jihad Farah | Editor in Chief
Mishel Ijaz | Project Coordinator
Maha AlBrikan | Graphic Designer

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EDITORIAL

THE NEED TO DEVELOP PUBLIC SPACES IN ARAB CITIES

By Dr. Jihad Farah - Editor in Chief

According to UN-HABITAT, public space represents only 2% of urban spaces in cities of the Middle East, much lower than the average of 12% in those of Europe. Even in high-income cities in the Gulf region, public space area per capita has been in decline over the last few decades. Massive urbanization in the region is putting considerable strain on the capacity of Arab cities to provide public spaces to its people. This is exacerbated by the fact that public spaces require considerable investments for their design, implementation, and maintenance. This issue of Mudununa is dedicated to the discussion on public space challenges in Arab cities and recommendations for the way forward.

The importance of public spaces and the role they play in city life today is undisputed, and public spaces are on the agenda of many cities in the Arab region.

Greater effort, however, is still needed. In fact, even large investment in the development of public spaces is not an adequate solution on its own. Studies indicate that a significant population of several Arab cities is dissuaded from going to public spaces due to accessibility challenges, including distance, absence of nearby public transport, and safety of pedestrians and for people with disabilities etc. Another concern is the inadequacy of the design of many public and green spaces that render them unsuitable to local climates. General security is also another major challenge to be considered. This is particularly the case for many women who avoid public spaces due to potential threats of harassment. More broadly, the de facto appropriation of a public space by one social group is likely to discourage others from visiting it. In the case of certain polarized cities, public spaces even act as sites of symbolic and sometimes physical confrontation between different cultural and political groups over the image of these spaces and their uses.

Producing public spaces hence means producing the very spirit, vibrance and resilience of a city. It is a strategic and tactical exercise. At the strategic level, it is about ensuring that the city is doted by public space "oases" easily accessible from nearby neighborhoods and integrated with a web of continuous green and blue infrastructure. Public spaces also need to be strategically located and designed to act as sinks during flooding, as well as mitigate heat islands and heat waves. At the tactical level, applying placemaking approaches through the creation of "pocket" public spaces on underutilized land and encouraging temporary appropriation of space is a way of ensuring cost effectiveness of public spaces in dense urban areas. Furthermore, working closely with the community is essential for the success of public spaces. Consulting different social groups (children, women, youth, elderly, etc.) and involving them in the design process ensures that their concerns are addressed. In some cases, select representatives of the neighboring community could act as stewards of certain public spaces, contributing to their operation and maintenance. Most importantly, city authorities need to strike a balance between empowering communities and ensuring inclusivity by making public spaces welcoming to a diverse range of users and populations beyond neighboring communities.

In this issue Mr. Issa Kassis, the Mayor of Ramallah, sheds light on the efforts taken by his city in securing public spaces for its residents, with minimal resources, and in a complex geopolitical context. Dr. Hassan ElMouelhi and Mr. Rony AlJalkh, in their articles, share their thoughts and experience regarding placemaking and public space development in Arab cities and how small interventions can bring about substantial change. In the Cities in Action section, the issue presents different projects from around the Arab world, where cities have adopted various approaches to address the multifaceted challenges of public spaces. The issue also reviews different toolkits produced by international organizations for the design and development of public spaces. In AUDI News, the issue covers the AUDI Strategy Launching event held in Riyadh in January, and presents two of AUDI's initiatives: the Arab Urban Development Portal and the Executive Program in Innovation and Urban Management.

INTERVIEWS

MAYOR OF RAMALLAH MUNICIPALITY

MR. ISSA KASSIS

In dialogue about the city of Ramallah's experience in creating public spaces

Mr. Issa Kassis, Mayor of Ramallah since 2022 and Founder of Awn Factors and Maalchat Digital Wallet.

Over a span of 26 years, Mr. Kassis holds vast experience in the domains of banking and finance in the Middle East. He has also served as General Manager of the Palestine Investment Bank, and as the Chief Executive Officer for The Palestine Mortgage and Housing Corp. Mr. Kassis has significant expertise in financial advisory and has previously held the position of an advisor at the Palestine Investment Fund, as well as of a board member and advisor at the Palestinian Monetary Authority.



Photo: Mayor of Ramallah, Mr. Issa Kassis

Ramallah Municipality stands out through its efforts to create vibrant and engaging public spaces for its people. In the face of great adversity, the city has developed innovative solutions to optimise its use of land and other natural resources. In doing so, it has been successful in the creation of multiple forms of public spaces with the participation of local communities. To gain greater insight into the city's experience with this process, the Mudununa team conducted an interview with its Mayor.

The section below provides highlights of the key points discussed.

To start off, could you provide us with a brief overview of the city of Ramallah and the challenges it faces in terms of urban development?

The city of Ramallah is located in the hilly region in the heart of the West Bank and historical Palestine, covering an area of 12 square kilometers. It is home to approximately 75,000 inhabitants, with a daily influx of around 140,000 visitors. In fact, the city is considered one of the most attractive places for living and working for the residents of the West Bank, thanks to its beautiful natural surroundings dominated by green olive orchards spread across the hills, its economic activities, and its culture of openness. One of the

"Our vision for the city of Ramallah is to be an attractive and thriving city"

distinguishing features of the city and its residents is the literacy rate, which is one of the highest in the world, with over 98% of adults holding university degrees or currently enrolled in higher education. As for the challenges, undoubtedly, Israeli occupation represents the biggest challenge for the city. I speak not only from a national standpoint but also from a development perspective; the occupation presents significant challenges to the daily lives of people and the municipality's ability to improve this reality. One of the main challenges facing the municipality is the restriction imposed by the occupation on construction,



Photo: Sports track, Ramallah, Palestine
©2024 Ramallah Municipality

allowing it only in central neighborhoods, which constitute no more than 30% of the city's area. This is a major problem given the noticeable population growth. This reality forces us to intensify vertical construction and make the most out of available spaces in these neighborhoods. This restriction also extends to the establishment of necessary infrastructure such as waste treatment centers and sewage treatment plants outside these central areas, posing a significant challenge for a municipality of our size, as it greatly increases the cost of investment and operation. Additionally, the occupation prevents us from accessing our water resources, which it directly controls.

Faced with these challenges, the municipality has worked diligently to devise solutions. As the Arabic saying goes, "need is the mother of all invention". The municipality's approach has been based on two fundamental ideas. Firstly, the municipality has focused on the judicious use of land in areas where it has been allowed to intervene and on maximizing the benefits of its actions. The municipality's primary concern has been to prevent the city from turning into a concrete jungle and it has worked to maintain the green character that is unique to Ramallah. To this end, the municipality has implemented effective mechanisms for the development of public and green spaces, resulting in the creation of many public parks and the preservation of a considerable portion of private land as green spaces. Secondly, the municipality has sought to adopt conservation and recycling practices to ensure preservation of necessary resources for the city; a notable example of this is the utilization of treated water from sewage treatment plants to secure irrigation water for the development of green spaces in the city.

In general, the municipality has embraced the principle of enhancing the city's resilience and its ability to effectively respond to challenges, noting that Ramallah is among the first in the world to obtain ISO22339 accreditation for its COVID recovery plan, which has been implemented successfully. It is essential to

acknowledge that achieving this work depends not only on good management and the proper use of technology but also on fostering a general culture within the community to be a partner in this effort and commitment. This culture has been reinforced through a civic education that focuses on the importance of preserving the land as a prerequisite for our survival, especially under occupation conditions. Hence, we see significant community support when the municipality works on creating public spaces, as well as a communal effort to keep the city clean and free from pollution factors.

In one of its publications, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia discusses an action plan by the Ramallah Municipality to create green spaces. Could you please take us through this action plan and the mechanisms for its implementation?

Firstly, it's important to note that in Ramallah today, despite its small area, there are 21 parks. These parks range from large ones, some exceeding four hectares, to medium and small-sized parks at the neighborhood level, with an average of two parks per neighborhood. To achieve this, the municipality has always sought to acquire land and convert it into parks, as well as utilize neglected and unused spaces in neighborhoods, greening them or developing them as public spaces. Generally, residents understand and welcome the municipality's efforts in this regard, recognizing the importance of public and green spaces in improving quality of life, especially in a densely populated city like Ramallah. On the other hand, the municipality has mandated that every construction project set aside 10% of the property area as green space, regardless of the property's size. The municipality has established nurseries to develop its green spaces and provide plants to residents.

Regarding roads, the municipality works to utilize every space within them. While the roads in Ramallah are generally narrow, it is important to always ensure sidewalks, vegetation cover, safety dividers in the middle of the roads, and suitable design specifications for people with special needs. Besides their traffic function, roads serve as places of daily communication and interaction in the city, making it crucial for them to be pedestrian-friendly regardless of their size.

In addition to parks and roads, there are other types of public spaces that the municipality has sought to develop, such as the sports track stretching over more than one and a half kilometers in the city, dedicated to jogging and walking. The municipality is also currently working on developing an outdoor amphitheater that can accommodate 5,000 people for events. Furthermore, the municipality has created temporary public spaces, with the Friday Market being the most prominent, where the municipality closes some roads and parking lots, installs stalls and amenities for recreational activities for children and adults, and provides internet access through Wi-Fi technology. The market consists of a hundred stalls rented out to individuals and businesses from within and outside the city, attracting thousands of visitors. The municipality also regularly organizes festivals, attended by tens of thousands of visitors. All of this plays a significant role in local development, especially for youth and women who have been particularly affected by the economic repercussions of the COVID pandemic.

It is worth noting that investing in public spaces is costly, and to deal with this, the municipality has developed some mechanisms that have proven effective. Collaboration with the private sector is one of the most prominent of these mechanisms. The municipality has specifically reached out to various financial institutions in the city and utilized their corporate social responsibility programs. Depending on the institution's spending capacity and willingness, the municipality proposes covering certain investment expenses for one of the parks or public spaces. As evident from the number of public spaces in the city, the municipality has succeeded significantly in this venture.

For the issue of irrigation, the establishment of a sewage treatment plant has been of significant benefit. With support from international donor agencies, particularly through decentralized cooperation with French municipalities, the municipality built the plant and connected all homes in the city to it. In addition to watering the parks, the plant also serves our firefighting units. Households contribute a fixed annual amount to cover the operating costs of the plant. We are currently working on expanding the plant and its capacity, which will increase our ability to develop more parks.



Photo: Garden of Nations, Ramallah, Palestine
©2024 Ramallah Municipality

What is the importance of involving the community in the design of public spaces? And what efforts does the municipality make to ensure active community participation in the planning and operation of these places?

It is important to note initially that community participation is at the core of the working mechanisms of the Ramallah municipality in general, and we strive to continuously expand it. Communicating with people allows for the emergence of creative ideas and ensures that the municipality's work is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people. More importantly, communication allows for building trust; the municipality cannot always respond to the opinion of every individual or party, and it is the right and responsibility of the elected mayor and municipal council to act as they see fit. However, dialogue enhances trust and cohesion in the community.

Community participation takes various forms. Firstly, there are regular open meetings held by the municipality, announced to and attended by residents to discuss projects and activities. Since COVID-19, we have developed additional online meetings to reach the widest possible audience. Moreover, we have established a municipal youth council and a children's council, aiming to engage this demographic s in thinking about the city's needs and projects, as well as instilling a sense of responsibility for public affairs in the younger generation. On the other hand, the municipality works to encourage the establishment of neighborhood committees; where it communicates with interested parties, supports them, and trains them when necessary to play important roles at the neighborhood level. Finally, there is communication through social media channels, and I can say that the municipality is very active in this regard, not only in terms of the number of its daily tweets and posts but also in terms of active interaction through comments. It is worth noting here that I and all members of the municipal council are always responsive to those who communicate with us on our personal social media channels, as it is important to have direct contact between the people and their representatives.

As for public spaces in particular, the municipality always focuses on understanding the needs of people and soliciting their opinions when designing these public spaces. Sometimes, associations and neighborhood committees are involved in their management. In other cases, when it is noticed that people are not utilizing a certain public space, we organize meetings to understand the problem and transform the place to better meet the residents' aspirations. We always strive to have gathering places in every park, where people can organize various social events. Another effort is the municipality's ongoing environmental activities, such as cleaning and tree planting campaigns, which focus on public spaces in the city. Some of these activities are organized and



prepared in advance, while others are spontaneous, where I personally go with the municipal council and start cleaning a littered public space, for example, and people start joining us. The fundamental idea we always want to convey is that these public spaces belong to all of us, and it is important to preserve them and their social role.

What are your aspirations for the future of Ramallah and what is the role of public spaces in it?

One of the main challenges that has begun to burden the city is paradoxically due to its success story. As I mentioned earlier, Ramallah is an attractive city for visitors as well as for people who want to live and work in it, which has created a significant demand for housing and services and has translated into rising prices. Clearly, the cost per square meter of land or built-up area in Ramallah exceeds that of neighboring towns and cities in the West Bank, and we see the same thing in the cost of basic consumer goods such as the price of a cup of coffee, for example. This is a significant problem, as not all people in Ramallah are affluent, and we do not want the city to become unaffordable for those with lower incomes.

Therefore, we are working to encourage real estate developers to build smaller-sized apartments. On the one hand, with our limited ability to expand horizontally due to occupation restrictions, we must accommodate as many people as possible in the areas where we can build. On the other hand, we can reduce the cost of housing for people in this way. However, this path places greater responsibility on the municipality; with the reduction in the size of housing units, people will need compensation in the form of spaces to meet outside their homes, and public spaces play a very fundamental role in providing that. Unlike restaurants and clubs, they are accessible to everyone. Therefore, the municipality must ensure that public spaces are always clean, attractive, and meet the needs and aspirations of the people, in all neighborhoods of the city.

As a result, our vision for the city of Ramallah is to be an attractive and thriving city. To achieve this in the harsh reality of occupation, the city must also be green, clean, vibrant and resilient; and we focus on public spaces to be able to deliver this vision.

"The fundamental idea we always want to convey is that these public spaces belong to all of us, and it is important to preserve them and their social role."

URBAN INSIGHTS

External Article

PLACEMAKING: AN INNOVATIVE METHODOLOGY OF PARTICIPATORY PLANNING



Rony Al Jalkh

Rony Jalkh is an Urban Development professional with more than twenty years of experience as a consultant and project manager within international and local development organizations in the Arab region, Europe, and the United States. He holds a Bachelor in Agricultural Engineering, a Bachelor in Political and Administrative Sciences and a Master in Urban Planning. He is passionate about the subject of placemaking, which he both teaches and practices. He is a Senior Fellow at the Project for Public Spaces and founder of Placemaking-MENA.

The crisis of public spaces in many Arab cities reflects a broader global trend, impacting the social fabric and contributing to the dehumanization of living spaces. Rapid urbanization, often driven by population growth and economic development, has led to the neglect and inadequate planning of public spaces. Traditional communal gathering spots, such as souks or squares, are often overshadowed by towering structures and commercial complexes.

The scarcity of well-designed public spaces hampers social interaction and cultural exchange, hindering the formation of strong community ties. In some cases, rapid urban development has led to the displacement of historic neighborhoods, eroding the unique cultural identity of these cities. The resulting urban landscape often lacks the human scale and character that fosters a sense of belonging. As a consequence, residents may find themselves navigating dehumanized environments, characterized by a lack of shared communal spaces that promote social cohesion and a vibrant urban life. Addressing this crisis in Arab cities calls for a thoughtful approach to urban planning that prioritizes the creation and preservation of public spaces, blending modern development with the preservation of cultural heritage to create more humane and inclusive living environments.

The concept of placemaking offers a promising solution to the crisis of public spaces in Arab cities, aiming to reinvigorate urban environments and counter the dehumanization of living spaces. Placemaking involves a collaborative, community-driven approach to urban planning, emphasizing the creation of vibrant, inclusive, and people-centric spaces. By involving residents, local businesses, and other stakeholders in the design and activation of public areas, placemaking seeks to restore a sense of identity and community.

Founded in 1975, Project for Public Spaces (PPS) gradually developed a comprehensive approach to placemaking. In addition to fostering community-based practices, the organization contributed to the dissemination of knowledge by publishing guidelines on the design of large public spaces and providing recommendations on how to improve life in cities.

PPS defines Placemaking as both a philosophy and a practical approach that helps strengthen the bond between people and the environment they share. This theory refers to a collaborative process by which a space can be shaped to maximize its shared value. Placemaking encourages people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community.

According to PPS, "when people are asked what placemaking means to them, we find that it is a crucial and deeply valued process for those who feel intimately connected to the places in their lives". This connection between people and their environment is of great importance to the Placemaking philosophy. PPS offers 11 principles of placemaking as guidelines to help communities (1) integrate diverse opinions into a coherent vision, (2) translate that vision into a plan and program of uses, and (3) ensure the plan's sustainable implementation. The 11 principles are:

1. The community is the expert:
An important starting point in developing a concept for any public space is to identify the talents and assets within the community.

2. Create a place, not a design:
Turning an underperforming space into a vital 'place' involves introducing elements that make people feel welcome and comfortable.

3. You can't do it alone:
Partners are essential to the future success and image of a public space project. They can be local institutions, local players, museums, groups of people or clubs, schools and others.

4. You can see a lot just by observing:
By looking at how people use (or don't use) public spaces and finding out what they like and don't like about them, it's possible to assess what makes them work or not work.

5. Have a vision:
The vision must emanate from each community. However, it's essential to have an idea of the types of activities that could take place there.

6. Start with petunias:
The best spaces experiment with short-term improvements that can be tested and refined over many years!

7. Triangulate:
"Triangulation is the process by which an external stimulus establishes a connection between people and prompts strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other" (Holly Whyte).

8. They always say, "It can't be done":
Starting with small-scale improvements that foster community can demonstrate the importance of 'places' and help overcome obstacles.

9. Form supports function:
Input from the community and potential partners, understanding how other spaces work, experimenting and overcoming obstacles and naysayers make up the concept of the space.

10. Money is not the problem:
When the community and other partners are involved in programming and other activities, this can reduce costs.

11. You're never finished:
It's very important to be open to the need for change and have the management flexibility to implement that change to meet the needs of the community.

In Arab cities, implementing placemaking initiatives involves transforming underutilized or neglected spaces into inviting, culturally rich environments. This could include the revitalization of historic markets, the creation of pedestrian-friendly zones, and the incorporation of green spaces within the urban fabric. Integrating elements that celebrate local heritage and traditions helps to reconnect residents with their cultural roots, fostering a greater sense of pride and belonging.

Furthermore, placemaking encourages the development of spaces that facilitate social interaction and community engagement. Public squares, art installations, and communal gathering spots become integral components of the urban landscape, encouraging residents to come together, share experiences, and strengthen social bonds. This approach not only addresses the crisis of public spaces but also promotes a more holistic and human-centric urban development. By embracing the principles of placemaking, Arab cities can transform their urban landscapes into dynamic, people-oriented environments that enhance the quality of life for residents, counteracting the dehumanization associated with the neglect of public spaces.

External Article

METHODOLOGIES FOR DEVELOPING PUBLIC SPACES IN ARAB CITIES



Hassan Elmouelhi

An Architect and Urban Planner by training with a PhD from Berlin Technical University. Since 2014 Hassan has been working as a senior researcher, post-doc, and project leader at the department of Urban Development, Campus El Gouna, and the department of International Urbanism and Design-Habitat unit at the Berlin Technical University, Germany. His academic interests within the field of international urbanism include culture and urban informality in relation to aspects of urban development and governance in the global South.

Public space can be considered as a core element of cities, that represents the roles and relations between the state, the citizens, and other stakeholders. Over the years, the urbanism paradigm in Arab countries has gone through various stages. Some countries still suffer from conflict and civil wars, or post-conflict political reforms. On the other hand, Gulf countries are booming with multiple mega urban projects, creating a new identity supported by diversification of their economic resources. In between, other Arab countries are relatively politically stable, with a struggling middle-income and unclear economic future. Dealing with public space can be differently framed in cities of the three different subcategories of Arab countries as discussed in this article.

In cities of post war-conflict Arab countries, public space has transformed over years into a battlefield and carries feelings of fear in the residents' perception. Changing these negative perceptions needs a lot of effort and might take years. By taking small steps and working at the grassroots level, we can ensure that these spaces also play a crucial role in healing and reconciliation.

In Syria, for example, UN Habitat has worked to restore the functionality of three public spaces in Deir Ez-Zor City and Aleppo, by providing safer access for

students in catchment areas of the targeted public spaces. Another good example is that of using Art for public particiation projects. In 2022, the Syrian ministry of culture organized a series of art installations in Al Hatab Square, titled "Once upon a time". It showcases around 30 artworks in participation with a group of young artists who attempt to envision the square as more lively place, and embellish the plaza in an effort to express the ten years of war in Syria, which has left behind mass destruction.

In Lebanon, tension between rival political groups continues to dominate the political scene. The economy has faced a drastic deterioration in recent years. Since October 2019 the Lebanese Pound has lost 80 % of its value according to Human Rights Watch 2020; this led to reduced accessibility to basic goods for the population. COVID-19 and the explosion in Beirut worsened the crises. The recovery of Beirut necessitates the collaboration of municipal government, civil society, and international cooperation. The renovation of public spaces symbolizes Lebanon's resilience and offers a chance for inclusive and connected urban development. One example is that of the "Mar Mikhael" square, currently being rebuilt as part of a UN-Habitat project. Examples of small-scale interventions by the artist Ramzi Dalieh, include the installation (adapted to the respective spatial conditions) of seating or elements such as ladders that facilitate access to inaccessible places and thus qualify them as public spaces in the city of Beirut.

In the semi-stable middle-income Arab countries category (e.g., Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia), public space development remains on low priority due to economic struggles. Small local gardens are usually neglected by the city management due to lack of resources, or are removed to make way for transportation infrastructure such as in the case of the Heliopolis in Cairo.

Bigger parks act as a green lung for the city and as recreational space for residents, holding potential for income generation. This can be observed in the public parks of Jordan and Egypt (e.g., King Hussein Gardens in Amman Jordan, and Azhar park and lately the Al-Fustat park in Cairo Egypt). GIZ in Jordan has been working in partnership with the Ministry of the Environment and the Greater Amman Municipality to construct public spaces through the project titled "Improving Living Conditions of Disadvantaged Areas in Amman" that contributes to resolving issues regarding gender inclusion and refugee crises.

Another trend is that of modifying small to middle sized spaces for commercial activities (e.g., fast-food restaurants under the bridges in Cairo). However, privatization of public space affects the social spatial justice for low-income groups and, due to the removal of trees and green spaces, increases their vulnerability to climate change impacts.

Over the last decades, cities in Gulf countries have experienced an economic boom that has enabled them to invest in numerous urban development projects. For these cities, the quality of public spaces represent a high standard of urbanization and quality of life. Some examples of these include the King Salman park in Riyadh, and the Art Promenade in Jeddah, with its pedestrian infrastructure and 30km long coastal walkway along the Red Sea. The art promenade aims to contribute to the ' humanization' of the city, and in doing so, has transformed the Jeddah corniche through artworks for pedestrians and cyclists to appreciate.

Another example is that of Doha which, through the organizing and hosting of the World cup in 2022, has developed large scale infrastructure and facilities, including public spaces that benefit not only tourists, but also the citizens and residents of Qatar. Some examples of these public spaces include the Doha Fire Station and the Msheireb market in Doha. The process of developing these spaces, albeit conducted in top-down manner with limited participatory mechanisms, does adopt the 'public hearing' or 'majless' system that is common to multiple Arab cities. In this, a Sheikh or Emir holds regular meetings with citizens and invites public opinions and complaints regarding various city matters.

To conclude, it can be argued that each type of Arab country, and by extension city, has its own characteristics regarding urban governance of public space, and cities in each sub-category of Arab countries have their own challenges, shared within cities of the same subgroup. Countries and cities can learn from each other regarding participation in the design processes, stakeholders' management, and financing mechanisms and resources management to provide sustainable public space for a better urban life in Arab cities.

TOOLKITS FOR ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC SPACES IN CITIES

Since the advent of civilization, public spaces have served as effective manifestations of a city's culture, identity, aspirations, and ambition. While city planning paradigms have undergone significant transformations, the unique role played by public spaces is acknowledged across all schools of thought. It is therefore essential that cities are equipped with the right tools and resources to not only understand the nature of public spaces, but also enable the creation of spaces well suited to their specific contexts.

In the following, Mudununa introduces a number of toolkits produced by international organizations that can help municipalities better understand the processes required for the development of successful public spaces. While some toolkits focus directly on the principles of good public spaces, others stress on the need to re-envision other city activities, such as markets, to transform them into vibrant public spaces. Overall, the following toolkits provide a snapshot of the types of resources available to municipalities across the world in their journey to improving the quality of public spaces in their respective cities.

1

Toolkit 1:
City-wide Public Space Assessment Toolkit: A guide to community-led digital inventory and assessment of public spaces

2

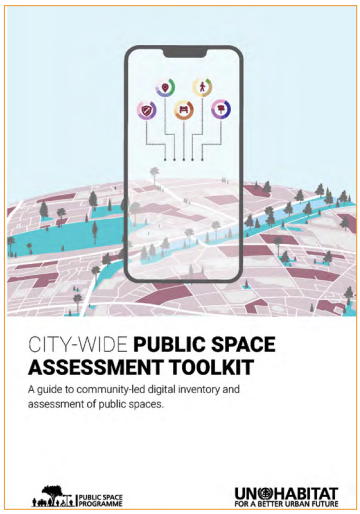
Toolkit 2:
Placemaking: What if We Built Our Cities Around Places?

3

Toolkit 3:
Making Your Market a Dynamic Community Place

4

Toolkit 4:
Streets as Places: Using Streets to Rebuild Communities



UN Habitat, ©2020

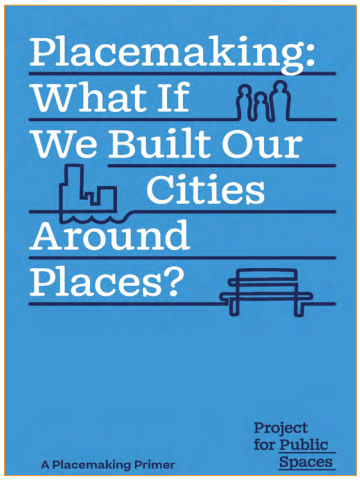
https://unhabitat.org/city-wide-public-space-assessment-toolkit-a-guide-to-community-led-digital-inventory-and-assessment

Toolkit 1:

[City-wide Public Space Assessment Toolkit: A guide to community-led digital inventory and assessment of public spaces]

Acknowledging the potential of quality public spaces, and the significant role played by municipalities in their creation, the City-Wide Public Space Assessment Toolkit aims to provide a flexible framework to assist entities that are working on public spaces. Developed by the UN Habitat, it facilitates cities in the assessment of their public spaces. It provides a structured framework for evaluation, real-world case studies, policy recommendations, and a platform for global collaboration among cities. It is not just a tool, rather it's a catalyst for positive change, empowering cities to assess, enhance, and celebrate their public spaces as symbols of inclusivity and sustainable urban development.

In this way, the toolkit functions as a guide for cities, leading to a greater understanding of public spaces within a city, and in doing so, facilitating community engagement. The digital application enables the community to participate in both the mapping and the re-envisioning process of their public spaces. Some of the cities where this toolkit has been successfully practiced include Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, and Bethlehem in Palestine.



Project for Public Spaces, ©2022

https://www.pps.org/product/placemaking-what-if-we-built-our-cities-around-places

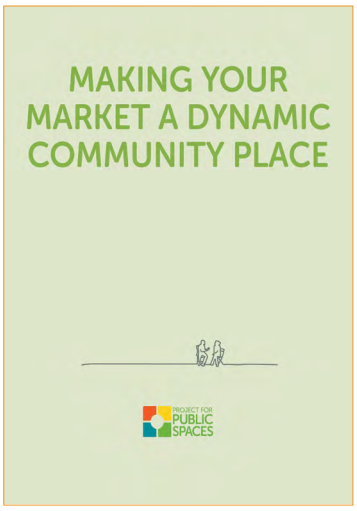
Toolkit 2:

[Placemaking: What if We Built Our Cities Around Places?]

The Placemaking toolkit provides insight into the multidimensional benefits of vibrant public spaces, as well as the significant influence exerted by them on citizens' experience of the city. Developed by the 'Project for Public Spaces', it describes placemaking as a way to unlock the full potential of the public spaces, where physical, cultural, and social identities come together.

It pays particular attention to the ways in which public spaces have a transformative effect on cities, and gives a comprehensive overview on the design and programming principles that enable the creation of successful and engaging public spaces. The key principle to support this creation, as narrated in the toolkit, is that of the 'Power of 10+'. It emphasizes on the need for cities of all sizes to have at least 10 destinations, each consisting of at least 10 different types of places such as cafes, playgrounds, spaces for interaction and so on. Moreover, to create impactful public spaces, the toolkit identifies 11 principles that guide the transformation of said spaces. These include community engagement, the significance of local partners, the need for a vision for the space, room for experimentation, and the importance of acknowledging the constantly evolving nature of public spaces. In providing the user with a comprehensive guide on both the benefits and principles of successful public spaces, the toolkit also outlines the steps required for a place led, community-based process of placemaking.

The toolkit effectively serves as a reminder that cities are not just concrete jungles but rather living, breathing entities shaped by the people who call them home. It is important to build cities around places that capture the essence of communities and help them flourish.



Project for Public Spaces, ©2016

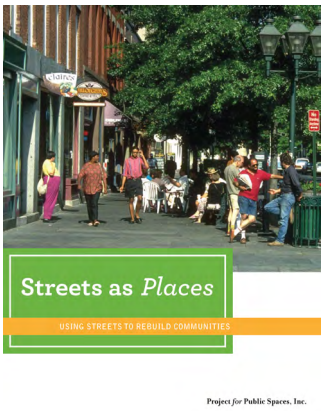
https://www.pps.org/product/making-your-market-a-dynamic-community-place

Toolkit 3:
Making Your Market a Dynamic Community Place

In recent years, farmers' markets and various other markets such as flea markets, night markets, and food markets have experienced remarkable growth. The spaces occupied by these markets, beyond serving as points of commercial activity, have become vibrant community centers.

Developed by the 'Project for Public Spaces', this toolkit reimagines the scope of these markets and promotes their role in creating dynamic and engaging community spaces. It deems a market successful when it becomes a place where people want to spend time together, and where they are given opportunities to interact and engage in community activities. It also focuses on the principle of the 'Power of 10', and further elaborates on the need for each place to have at least 10 types of activities for people to engage in. In this way, instead of being isolated in specific locations, markets can activate streets, plazas, squares, and unused storefronts, contributing to increased local economic activity.

The toolkit also provides a set of placemaking strategies that can be adopted by cities and other relevant entities. These highlight the ability of markets to thrive if they are accessible, well connected with other places in the city, and provide comfort and entertainment. In doing so, they offer a chance for people to engage, socialize, and be part of a larger community.



Project for Public Spaces, ©2008

https://www.pps.org/product/streets-as-places-using-streets-to-rebuild-communities#:~:text=The%20first%20in%20the%20series,stops%2C%20and%20countless%20case%20studies.

Toolkit 4:
Streets as Places: Using Streets to Rebuild Communities

The idea of streets serving as public spaces was born out of a common problem faced by people in cities worldwide: the gradual loss of genuine community spaces due to the overwhelming presence of cars. In 2008, to support the Mobility Agenda, the 'Streets as Places' toolkit was developed with the aim of educating and engaging communities to advocate for better streets and more walkable neighborhoods.

This toolkit discusses the characteristics of what makes a space a 'place'. These range from presence of diverse activities at the street level, to design scale, and intangible aspects such as sense of security and safety. To facilitate cities through the extensive research and studies conducted by the PPS, the document discusses success stories of cities that have transformed their streets into lasting livable spaces. These include cities and towns such as West Chester in Pennsylvania and Metuchen in New Jersey.

However, the common principles that have led to successful interventions in these cities include the presence of multiple small streets targeted at pedestrians rather than vehicles, the development of town squares supported by mixed use commercial activities, bicycle friendly infrastructure, sidewalk cafes, street trees, and easily accessible transit stops. Furthermore, the toolkit provides extensive guidance on how to develop these characteristics in existing cities.

CITIES IN ACTION

Project 1



Photo: Madina, Saudi Arabia
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Madina Humanization Program

Improving the experience of residents and visitors by rehabilitating streets, neighborhoods, and public places

The government of Saudi Arabia has always paid significant attention to the city of Medina due to its religious importance across the Islamic world. However, in the past decade, the government has encouraged the Region's Municipality and Development Authority to work cohesively and comprehensively together to develop and rehabilitate neighborhoods in the city. This is to be done according to a clear plan and priorities aimed at enhancing the urban landscape, improving the quality of life, and enriching the visitors' experience. To achieve this goal, the "Medina Humanization" program was launched. The program aims to enhance the quality of urban space for the residents and visitors of Medina through various interventions, ranging from balanced high-level urban planning to localized creative interventions. Its slogan, "Improving Places to Serve People," effectively encapsulates the program's concept and goals.

According to His Excellency, the Mayor of Medina, Engineer Fahd Al-Blehihshi, the program aims to transform the city so it can live up to its iconic status,



Photo: Madina, Saudi Arabia
©2024 Madina Municipality

through a unique process that focuses on human scale and produces a distinctive visual identity for the city, inspired by Medina's built and natural environment as well as its cultural characteristics. It also aims to position Medina at the forefront on the international stage, recognized for the high quality of life enjoyed by its residents, and the appeal it holds for visitors and businesses.

The Medina Humanization program focuses on the improvement of multiple informal and substandard areas and neighborhoods in Medina, particularly in the Teibah area. This is to be achieved by enhancing the quality of spaces through design interventions that are human-centric and environmentally responsive. It seeks to create public spaces that serve as gathering spaces for residents and visitors and contribute to local economic development in neighborhoods.

The humanization projects in Medina began in early 2017, starting with the development and rehabilitation of the pilot neighborhood of Hamra Al-Asad (south of the city), and then expanding to the Sayyid Al-Shuhada neighborhood and the Hill of Hubeib next to Mount Uhud (a religious landmark associated with the Prophet's biography), then to Quba Street, linking the Prophet's Mosque and Quba Mosque. By 2020, the program had targeted a number of neighborhoods for development and rehabilitation, including Al-Mughaisilah, Al-Masani, Al-Sayh, Bi'r Othman, Al-Quswah, Al-Aziziyah, and Al-Hijrah, as well as some main streets in the city. The focus in these areas is on transforming spaces to be more inclusive and adapted to the diverse needs of local communities. Other priorities were also introduced to the program's objectives, such as increasing per capita share of green spaces, provision of services in neighborhoods, and enhancing commercial establishments' compliance to spatial norms and ordinances. In lieu of this, a standard of 4.5 square meters of green space per person was set as a target for the end of 2024. In the first quarter of 2024, compliance rate for establishments reached 85%.

Moreover, the Humanization program upgrades and develops infrastructure within targeted neighborhoods including that of water, electricity, sewage, and public lighting. It also focuses on enhancing the streetscape by intervening on the facades of selected residential buildings. Public spaces play a central role in this program; it seeks to develop a network of public spaces across all neighborhoods in the city to host social events for residents and visitors. The program also intervenes at the street level to ensure safe pedestrian and bicycle paths. Additionally, the program supports the introduction of visual art works in public spaces, primarily those that are inspired by the historical identity and natural environment of Medina. Program officials believe that visual arts play a role in instilling optimism and tranquility among residents and in giving places greater legibility, harmony and connection to the local environment and the urban fabric of the city. They also consider that humanization efforts offer sensitive attention to the religious significance and cultural values of historical sites on the one hand, and their touristic potential on the other

hand. For example, the humanization program has contributed to the revival of the religious tradition of walking between Quba Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque through Quba Street, as well as playing a pivotal role in enhancing the commercial activity and boosting the economy of this area.

In parallel and in conjunction with the Humanization program, a number of projects have been launched to complement the program's objectives. The most prominent of these projects relate to mobility, including the improvement of public transportation services through city buses, and the development of a BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) system, scheduled to be launched in the third quarter of the 2024. Attention is also given to soft mobility, through the development of the "Careem Bike" service that aims to make bicycles an efficient mode of transportation in the city, rather than just serving a recreational function. Other projects to support the program have also been implemented, mainly in the domains of smart city development and digital transition.

Medina's efforts have been honored with a range of local, regional, and international awards. Quba Street won the Tourism Excellence Award for Best Tourist Attraction Site in 2018, as well as the Tourism Excellence Award for the Best Cultural Festival in 2018. It also received the Best Municipal Initiative Award in the field of city humanization from the Gulf Cooperation Council in its 2018 edition in Kuwait. Additionally, both Quba Street and Hamra Al-Asad received the gold and silver awards for vibrant communities from the United Nations Environment Program in 2018. The Excellence Award in humanizing the Al-Mughaisilah neighborhood was awarded by the Project Management Institute (PMI) in 2021, along with the platinum classification for ISO37120 certification from the World Council on City Data (WCCD) for the year 2021. The commendation award was received in 2023 at the Seoul Smart City Awards, and the Innovative Digital Governance Award at the Shanghai Expo for Smart Cities in 2023. Madina is also the first Saudi and Arab city, and third city globally to receive the Gold Certificate for SDG-Cities program from the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat).



Photo: Before - Al-Azhari neighborhood
©2024 Madina Municipality



Photo: After - Al-Azhari neighborhood
©2024 Madina Municipality



Photo: Before - Quba Avenue
©2024 Madina Municipality



Photo: After - Quba Avenue
©2024 Madina Municipality

Project 2



Photo: St. Nicolas stairs, Beirut
©2024 Salter Spiral Stair

Participatory design for the rehabilitation of public spaces in Beirut and Amman

Following the catastrophic Beirut Port explosion in 2020, the neighborhoods of Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh in Beirut, Lebanon, experienced not only physical devastation but also a disruption in the social fabric. However, in the middle of this crisis, a project emerged to bring back these communities by rehabilitating three historic urban stairs: Saint Nicolas, Vendome, and Laziza.

Built during the French mandate, these stairs served as functional pathways for pedestrian mobility while evolving into vital public spaces where residents gathered, rested, and engaged in various activities. Recognising their significance, local activists and residents worked together to preserve these stairs as integral elements of Beirut's public realm. The project's objective was clear; to restore these stairs, making them safe, inclusive, and accessible to diverse groups while enhancing the overall quality of these public spaces. It embraced an inclusive approach, involving local residents in the design, implementation, and activation of these public stairs. Through participatory methods such as exploratory walks, Minecraft workshops, interviews, and online meetings, over 30

local residents contributed to the development with their ideas. The resulting design proposed integrated elements such as green spaces, benches, accessibility ramps, and play areas, all the while respecting the unique characteristics of each site. These interventions prioritized safety and inclusivity, incorporating handrails, shading structures, wooden furniture, and other interactive elements. The project aligned with global and national frameworks, including the UN's Sustainable development goals and Lebanon's Crisis Response Plan, emphasizing its commitment to creating safe, inclusive, and resilient urban spaces.

Moreover, the project promoted gender equity by involving women in the design process and adopted a human rights-based approach, ensuring access for vulnerable groups such as children, youth and the elderly. In a city marked by adversity, this project serves well as an outstanding example of community resilience and the transformative power of participatory design in rebuilding lives through intervening in public spaces.

Another city where public stairs are serving as a medium for innovative public space design interventions is Amman, the capital of Jordan. The city is on a journey to modernize its urban landscape, making it more pedestrian-friendly. Amman's older neighborhoods, often situated on steep hills, lack adequate infrastructure, parks, and public spaces. This disparity is further exacerbated by limited public transit options. To address these issues, the city is working to improve pedestrian amenities, accessibility, and safety. One effective example of this urban revitalization effort is the 7th Stair project located near Ras Al-Ain in the Badr District.

The 7th Stair was once a neglected, fragmented public space plagued by informal settlements and land disputes. It had no railing, poor lighting, uneven steps and was often plagued by flooding due to poor drainage infrastructure. Through planning and community engagement, it underwent a remarkable transformation. The primary goal was to enhance accessibility and create an inviting, inclusive environment. Design elements, including planters, green walls, benches, drainage channels, lighting, service ramps, communal spaces and a herbs garden, were proposed in collaboration with the community. The final staircase design harmoniously balanced these elements while respecting the existing context, such as home entrances and infrastructure.

Both these projects shed light on the great potential of Arab cities in fostering vibrant and inclusive public spaces. While cities across the world invest significant capital into the development of new public spaces, the cases of Beirut and Amman shed light on the innovative ways in which each city's unique urban context can be adapted, in collaboration with the community, to serve as a public space that celebrates the city's history and identity.



Photo: Amman, Jordan
©2024 Praxis Architects and Urban Designers | Archinet



Photo: Abdeen Square, Cairo
©2022 Mohamed Hossam El-Din | Google maps

Transforming public spaces in Cairo's historical neighborhoods

In the last decade, Cairo has witnessed a diverse range of urban projects seeking to address its rapid urbanization and complex urban realities. The latter includes sprawling slums and gated residential complexes on the outskirts, with dilapidated neighborhoods in its historic center. Given the symbolic and economic importance of the center, these neighborhoods have been the subject of several public space projects, three of which are discussed in this article.

Abdeen Square

Located in the heart of Khedival Cairo area, which dates back to the nineteenth century, Abdeen square is characterized by wide streets lined with large buildings, squares, and gardens. Its prominence stems from the adjacent Abdeen Palace, which was the seat of government of that era and is still sometimes used for the reception of heads of States. Spanning an area of 36,600 square meters, the square is also one of the largest public spaces in the city.

However, as the number of cars increased in Khedival Cairo, many squares became parking lots. This situation continued for decades, until 2016 with the start of the rehabilitation project for Khedivial Cairo neighborhoods. The project aimed to showcase urban heritage as well as reduce traffic congestion in the area. The first phase of the project included the transformation of Abdeen Square.

The project introduced green spaces, seating areas, a large water fountain and some facilities to the square that have become an attraction for families and street vendors. In 2021, the square underwent further transformation, as the governorate fenced the park and allocated spaces in it for restaurants and cafes, with guards and cleaning workers to facilitate security and maintenance. This was seen as a way to keep the park open to the public while controlling littering, and providing security in the vicinity of high profile administrative buildings.

"Kodak" and "Philipps" Passageways

Not far from Abdeen Square, between the buildings of the Khedive period, there are many narrow passageways. These are home to shops, cafes, and libraries that are part of the modern cultural history of Egypt. However, today these businesses suffer from dilapidation, and neglect of the public space surrounding them.

This led a local association, CLUSTER Studio, to study these challenges, and propose two designs to transform two of these passageways ("Kodak" and "Philips", named after some of their stores) by intervening on their public space. It should be noted that the passageways are the property of firms that were involved in the original allotment of the land, and were never expropriated by the State. The association convinced one of these firms to implement the proposals in 2015.

The designs focus on the principle of "in-betweenness," that is, the need to articulate the diverse needs and perceptions of stakeholders: shop owners, residents, cultural activists, passers-by, public institutions, etc. Therefore participatory design methodology was adopted, and allowed interventions to capture the characteristics of each passageway and mediate between different uses. Despite consisting of simple elements, such as plants, benches, drawings, and lighting, the interventions succeeded in transforming the passageways into attractive oases. In order to ensure the sustainability of the project, two associations were established to ensure maintenance and to animate these spaces. Their members are the owners of institutions in each passageway and are funded through monthly subscriptions.



Photo: Kodak Passageway, Cairo
©2024 CLUSTER Studios

Ahl Masr Promenade on the Nile

Not far from the two previous sites, one finds the "Ahl Masr Promenade" on the Nile shores. This walkway project is part of a larger national project bearing the same name and extending along the Nile River, from Aswan to Cairo. This project was launched by President Abdel Fattah El-Sissi in 2019 with the aim of removing encroachments on the banks of the river by unlicensed restaurants, cafes and other establishments and turning them into tourist and service sites open to all.

In Cairo, the project extends over a length of 4.5 kilometers on the eastern bank of the river, and consists of two upper and lower walkways connected by stairs. The project includes open spaces for strolling, as well as kiosks, restaurants, cafes, shops, services, etc.. The first part of the project, which extends over 1.8 kilometers, was opened in December 2022, and a company was commissioned to operate it. However, after a few months, and as a result of acts of vandalism that affected some of its facilities, gates were placed and an entry fee was imposed for anyone who wanted to access the lower walkway, directly adjacent to the river and where most of the restaurants are concentrated. The upper walkway, on the other hand, was left open for all.

These three projects represent different answers to the challenges of producing and managing public space in large cities today, and in particular the challenge of reconciling between keeping public space open to all and ensuring the requirements for its sustainability, such as cleanliness, maintenance, and safety. These projects were accompanied by much controversy. Regardless, these projects undoubtedly deserve the attention of Arab municipalities seeking to develop public spaces in old neighborhoods, to learn from their experiences.



Photo: Ahl Masr Promenade, Cairo
© 2020 Momen Nabil / IWMI

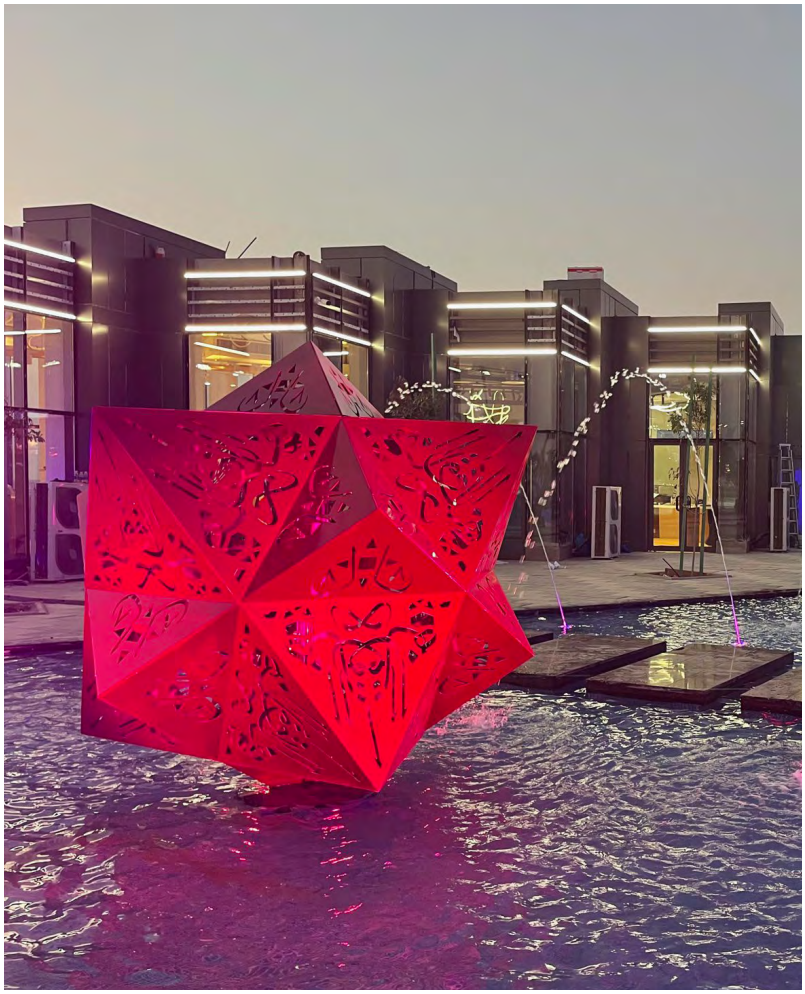

Photo: Jeddah Art Promenade,Jeddah
© 2024 Saudi Tourism Authority

Jeddah and Doha's Public Art Program:

Urban Public Spaces as Canvases for Narrating Cities' Aspirations

Public art plays an influential role in shaping a city's identity. It manifests through various mediums, including architecture, theater, and literature. Cities across the world have utilized art mediums to both express their aspirations, and engage with people to create vibrant public spaces.

In the city of Jeddah, for instance, a large public art program was launched by the municipality in 1972. It invited renowned artists from around the world to design sculptures and monuments for the city's public spaces, with many of them serving as a permanent feature across numerous roundabouts in the city. On an even larger scale, in 2021, the city of Jeddah launched Saudi Arabia's first globally curated public-art space along the city's waterfront overlooking the Red Sea. Known as the Jeddah Art Promenade, it hosts not only an array of various artworks but also eateries, museums, cultural events, workshops and other public engagement amenities. It also fosters local economic development by engaging emerging small and medium enterprises to participate in its weekly market, 'Souq al Sabt'. This adds to the vibrant program

of the promenade, with stalls exhibiting a variety of items including food, accessories, artwork, and other decorative items.

Now an annual art festival, the Jeddah Art Promenade sees visitors from across the globe. Every year it features some of the world's most exciting installations, such as the HADO tent in 2022, which is an interactive Japanese virtual reality combat game. In addition to this, the promenade also has some permanent features such as the Exploration Tower, an 80 meter high structure providing panoramic views of the city. The promenade also consists of a walking and jogging track, spanning 4 kilometers along the Jeddah waterfront.

Following the same concept of bringing the arts into public life, in 2011, the Qatar Museum in Doha commissioned sculptor Richard Serra to create a piece specifically for the Museum of Islamic Art's park. The interest this created encouraged the establishment of a large national Public Art program. Led by the Qatar Museum, the primary focus of the program is to feature works that go beyond mere beautification of spaces, and focus on creating landmarks with a monumental presence. In light of this, all the artwork curated for the program reflects on the country's culture, history, and future aspirations.

In addition to celebrating the nation's identity through art, the program also aims to instill inspiration among local artists, and foster a greater connection between art and local communities. With more than 100 art installations, the program is expanding every year, featuring both local and international artists. One of the more prominent works include a piece by Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson titled 'Shadows Travelling on the Sea of the Day'. Located north of the Zubarah archaeological site, the installation features a series of circular shelters and rings, the arrangement of which is dictated by the principles of a sophisticated symmetrical pattern. Embellished on the underside with mirrors, the roof of the structure reflects the ground, in an attempt to disorient the visitor, and question the visual perception of reality.

The program also features local talent such as the artist Shouq Al Mana, whose installation 'Eqal' was commissioned to celebrate the 2022 World Cup. The sculpture is inspired by the traditional head cover of Qatari men, and its presence is a symbol of respect for the nation's history and heritage. Another fitting artwork for the program is 'Milestones', an installation by local artist Shua'a Ali, that narrates the economic transformation her country has experienced over the past five decades.

Both the Qatar public art program, that extends across the nation, and the Jeddah art promenade that draws people to the vibrant waterfront, demonstrate how art has the potential to bring life to public spaces in a city. Both, in their own accord, utilize the power of engaging public spaces and interactive artwork to boost tourism, and subsequently, drive greater economic development for their respective countries.



Photo: Shadows Travelling on the Sea of the Day by Olafur Eliasson, Doha
©2024 Iwan Baan / Studio Olafur Eliasson

Project 6

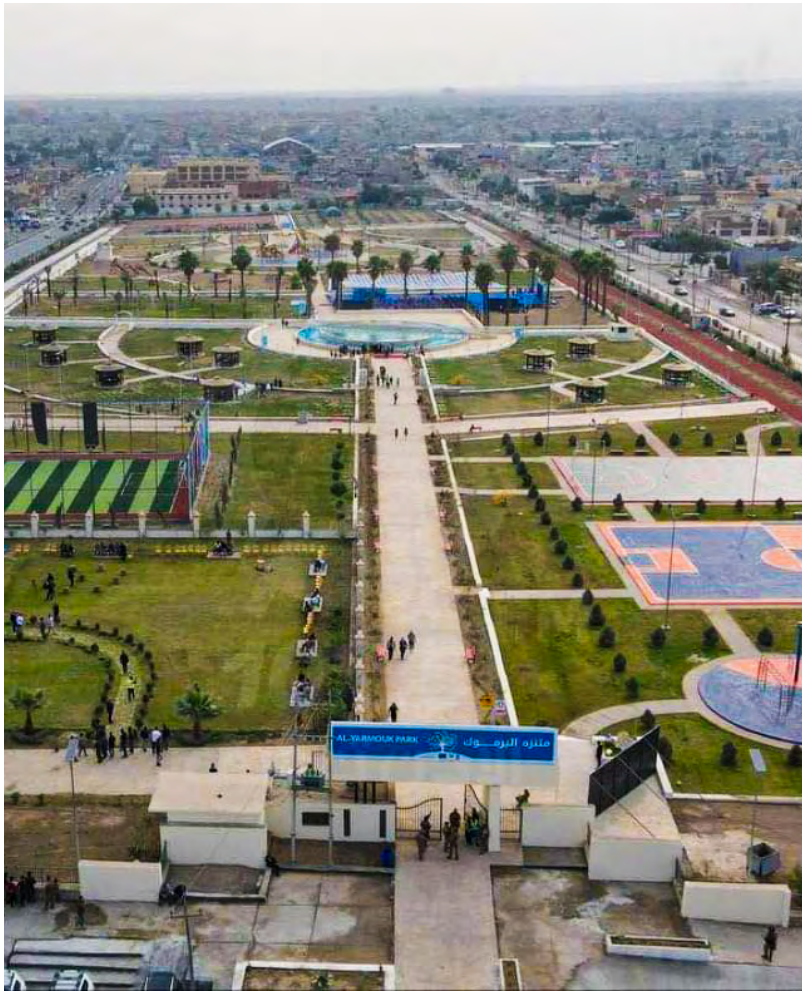

Photo: Al Yarmouk Park, Mosul
© 2022 IQ FM, Iraq

Public Spaces for Recovery and Inclusivity

Mosul's Al Yarmouk Park

Al Yarmouk Park is located in the heart of Mosul, Iraq, spanning an area of 67,000 square meters. It was rehabilitated between 2019 and 2021 with the aim of restoring essential services in the public space that were disrupted as a result of war and conflict. The rehabilitated park lends itself as a much needed green public space to a city that has historically been deprived of such amenities. For years, the average area of green space available to each person has been a mere 15% of what is recommended by the World Health Organization.

The process of rehabilitation narrates the story of revival and reconnection with nature as the park was once a place well-known for its tall palms, colorful flora, and expansive grounds. Beyond that, it also serves as a symbol of cohesion between the multiple communities and social groups in the city. The park was designed to be 'Accessible for All' ensuring that it is suitable for the use of all age groups, as well as for the comfort and safety of people with disabilities. . The design of the park encourages the concept of "building back better" in adopting clean technologies, recycling, and the use of local materials.

The rehabilitation project transformed Al Yarmouk park to serve as the hub for a wide range of public activities, including environmental campaigns,

cultural events, as well as recreation and sports activities. A series of components were implemented to ensure this transformation, including plantation and irrigation, solar energy projects, skills and training program, and development of a children's playground. The plantation activity introduced 300 new trees to the site, including fruit and palm trees and plants were specifically chosen based on their ability to absorb excess rainwater. 800 square meters of grass cover was also installed, along with 2 wells and a solar powered irrigation system to sustain the plantation. Other facilities that were implemented include 3 multi-purpose sports courts, an open-air gym, guard rooms, and a cycling route.

The project not only breathes life into this green space but also provides employment opportunities for local residents, including women. To support local livelihood generation, a female-only horticultural training program was held with 30 candidates, which helped create jobs for women with no fixed income.

The introduction of youth sports served as a unifying force, with the launch of the "Al Yarmouk Youth Athletics for Peace Initiative", where 200 children from the neighborhood participated in a football league championship, basketball and many more other forms of sport. These activities served as tools to strengthen social networks, fostering community bonds, and breaking down barriers between the youth who have grown up amid conflict. Engagement from the community was also encouraged through campaigns such as the 'Al Yarmouk Cleaning Day'.

Al Yarmouk Park stands as a symbol of inclusivity, welcoming individuals of all ages and abilities. This project is not only about recreation, it is a symbol of recovery, hope, and inclusivity for a city on its path to healing.



Photo: Mosul, Iraq
© 2019 UN-Habitat Iraq

Project 6



Photo: Femmedina intervention site: Green Escape, Tunis
© 2021 Cities Alliance

The experience of the city of Tunis with enhancing women's participation in the development of public spaces

The planning process of cities often overlooks the diverse needs and experiences of certain social groups, in particular women, including their use of public spaces. Tunisian cities, like many others, have struggled to incorporate women's specific needs and preferences into urban planning initiatives.

To address these challenges, in 2020 the Femmedina Inclusive City Programme was launched in Tunis as a collaborative effort. Based on a three component participatory approach, the program aimed to create safer and more inclusive public spaces in the city, particularly in the districts of Medina Centrale, Bab Souika, Bab Bhar, and Sidi Bechir, with the goal of enhancing women's participation in public life.

Implemented over a period of 20 months from December 2020 to June 2022, the project consisted of three main phases. The first phase included an assessment of women's participation in the Medina. This assessment was conducted through surveys, stakeholder interviews, and analysis workshops. The

findings informed recommendations for policy, programming, and spatial improvements, including the creation of gender-based community maps. The second phase aimed to create inclusive public space projects in collaboration with the community. Residents of the Medina participated in co-design workshops to identify and prioritize inclusive public space projects. This phase also included space selection, procurement, and implementation of improvements aimed at meeting women's identified needs. Additionally, municipal stakeholders received training on gender-sensitive budgeting and participatory planning to ensure the sustainability of interventions. Lastly, a city-to-city exchange program was developed, which facilitated the sharing of best practices and lessons learned with stakeholders from different cities, aiming to promote gender-responsive urban planning.

The primary outcome of this assessment were interventions in public spaces, targeted at enhancing the social, cultural, economic, and political participation of women. The main interventions included the Green Escape intervention in Parc du Passage, which consisted of an open library, seating areas, and a playground to provide a welcoming public space for women to spend time with friends and children. Another installation, known as the Women's Safe Haven intervention in Bab Souika, involved the creation of wooden kiosks for artisan and entrepreneur women to sell their products, as well as playground facilities to improve mothers' access to the space. In Torbet el Bey, a Hidden Park intervention consisting of a recreational garden was developed, while in Sidi Bechir, the Learning Hub served as a capacity-building center to help women produce artisanal products and sell nail treatment services. The Hive intervention in Sidi Mfarrej consisted of a shaded seating area with children's playgrounds for the neighborhood's women to engage in recreational and social activities. In addition to this, two training centers were established in the municipal buildings of Bab Souika and Bab Bhar, intended for women and local associations to use for capacity-building activities, workshops, and seminars.

These interventions aimed to enhance women's cultural, social, economic, and political participation in urban life within the Medina of Tunis, reflecting the Femmedina project's commitment to creating safer and more inclusive public spaces for women. Approximately 1500 women benefited from the project, most of whom are Medina residents.

These outcomes demonstrate the tangible impact of the Femmedina project in creating safer and more inclusive public spaces for women in the city of Tunis, as well as the knowledge sharing and capacity-building efforts that have contributed to enhancing women's participation in urban life.planning beyond Tunis. By addressing the specific needs and preferences of women in the Medina, the initiative has not only led to physical interventions but also institutional and societal changes, paving the way for enhanced gender mainstreaming and urban planning practices in Tunisia.



Photo: Femmedina Inclusive City Programme, Tunis
© 2021 David Fernandez / Cities Alliance

OUR NEWS

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE ARAB URBAN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE 2025 STRATEGY



Photo: Dr. Anas Almughairy (left) with HH Prince Dr. Faisal bin Ayaf (right) for the official launch of the AUDI Strategy 2025
© 2024 Arab Urban Development Institute

On 22nd January 2024, in the presence of several dignitaries, ambassadors, and representatives from Arab cities, the Arab Urban Development Institute launched its 2025 Strategy. HH Prince Dr. Faisal bin Ayaf, the Mayor of Riyadh and President of the Arab Urban Development Institute, welcomed guests from across Arab cities, emphasizing the role of our cities in preserving and producing culture and civilization. He announced a new phase for the Arab Urban Development Institute, that aims to lead the development and modernization of Arab cities to reclaim their urban and developmental significance. AUDI's Director General, Dr. Anas Al-Mughairy, presented the highlights of the institute's 2025 strategy, noting that it had been in development since the fourth quarter of 2022 under the guidance of HH, the institute's president.

The strategy itself focuses on transforming AUDI's role and activities to be more responsive and supportive to member cities, all the while keeping in mind the



Photo: Exhibition of selectively curated photographs of cities across the Arab region under the theme 'City Life'.
© 2024 Arab Urban Development Institute

institute's limited resources, as well as the needs and aspirations of Arab cities. It was developed through in-depth studies of various challenges and opportunities within Arab cities and municipalities, as well as their need to align with modern trends in urban development. The process of strategy development also underwent comprehensive analyses of the current situation of the region, with the participation of municipalities, experts, and organizations via a structured survey conducted by the institute. The new strategy includes 13 initiatives structured in three programs: urban policy research, capacity building and training, and networking.

During the event, AUDI called upon partners from member cities and municipalities, international organizations, universities, and stakeholders interested in urban development to engage and participate in the institute's programs and activities, which are designed to benefit and foster a positive impact in the domain of urban development.

While the program of the event focused on sharing AUDI's strategy and initiatives, an integral component of the launch was the institute's official premises. In 2023, after the new leadership keenly observed that the existing interior workspaces did not fit today's business needs, it underwent extensive renovation. In pursuit of optimal efficiency and seamless collaboration among team members, AUDI embraced



Photo: Esteemed guests of the official AUDI Strategy 2025 launch
© 2024 Arab Urban Development Institute



Photo: Dr. Muwaffaq Saqqar and Dr. Anas Almughairy (right) for the signing of an agreement regarding the project "Participatory Greening of Neighborhoods in Arab Cities"
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a modern design ethos characterized by simplicity and the open plan concept. This has helped reduce the bureaucratic trappings of traditional institutional setups, expediting information transfer and interdepartmental communication, and fostering a participatory and efficient decision making process.

For the launch event itself, the building served as an excellent host, offering both indoor and outdoor spaces for multiple programs including the official ceremony, formal dining, live music, and an exhibition of selectively curated photographs of cities across the Arab region under the theme ‘City Life’.

The ceremony also witnessed the signing of an agreement regarding the project "Participatory Greening of Neighborhoods in Arab Cities" between the institute and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, to support the institute's activities in several Arab cities. The event also featured visual presentations outlining the institute's aspirations to achieve leadership in the regional urban development domain and its efforts to connect with people through a presentation titled "Why Do You Love Your City?." Additionally, it showcased programs and projects of the institute's 2025 strategy, including an overview of the bi-monhtly newsletter "Mudununa," the "Mudun +" initiative, the Innovation and Urban management program, the Arab Cities Urban Living Lab and the Arab Urban Development Portal.

The launch event ended on a positive note, leaving the institute’s guests and its team in high spirits, eager to play their respective roles in the success of both AUDI and its member cities.

AUDI'S PARTICIPATION AT THE ARAB TOWN ORGANIZATION'S BOARD MEETING 2024 IN BAGHDAD

The Arab Towns Organization's Board Meeting is an annual event organized by the ATO in partnership with a host city. It brings together 38 mayors forming the board of the ATO as well as delegations from the six technical institutions affiliated to the ATO, including AUDI.

The 2024 Board Meeting was held in Baghdad on January 24th-25th 2024, at Babel Hotel.

The event convenes the ATO board and its affiliated institutes through meetings to discuss the board's annual report and proposed recommendations on which it votes. It also consists of a session where each of the 6 affiliated institutes present their respective annual reports. For this particular meeting the agenda included one-on-one meetings between Baghdad municipality and other delegations, as well a meeting between the Prime Minister of Iraq and invited mayors. The host city facilitates the event by organizing dinner, tours, and musical events in the honor of the guests.

AUDI presented its annual report to the meeting of ATO affiliated institutions. Furthermore, AUDI met with the Deputy Mayor of Baghdad to present several of its activities and identify areas of cooperation. It also met informally with present mayors and delegations to discuss their cities' needs and how the Institute could support their efforts.



Photo: His Excellency the Mayor of Baghdad, Engineer Ammar Musa Kazem, with the Secretary-General and directors of the Arab Cities organizations.
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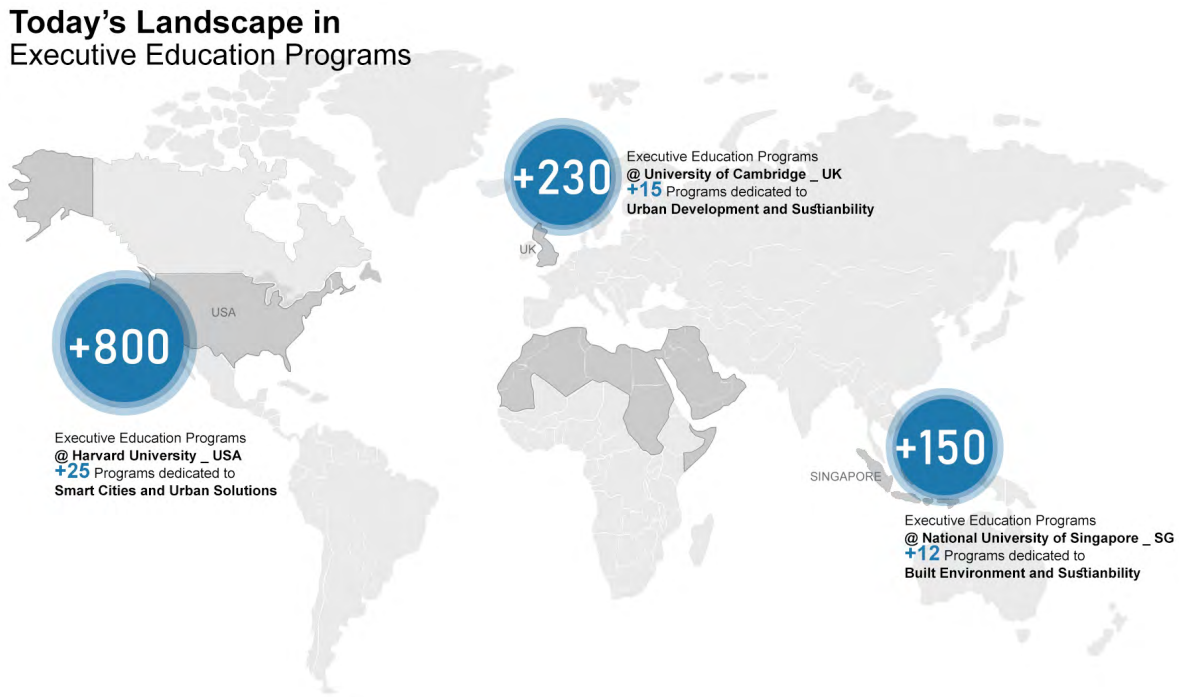
EXECUTIVE PROGRAM IN INNOVATION AND URBAN MANAGEMENT

The Arab Urban Development Institute Executive Program in Innovation and Urban Management (EPIUM) is an initiative aimed at empowering municipal professionals with cutting-edge knowledge and skills to navigate the evolving landscape of Urban Development and preparing cities for the technological future. EPIUM emphasizes digital transformation, data driven decision making, and the integration of AI to address the needs of urban planners, through a series of training programs and surveys in global cities to provide participants with best practices and the opportunity to participate in specialized training courses.

The program works to close the gap in professional education for practitioners in Arab cities, where Arab institutes and institutions lack programs dedicated to urban innovations and new urban trends. While global institutes offer hundreds of executive programs, AUDI seeks to provide knowledge and skills to Arab urban institutions practitioners.



The program is a unique blend of Three local and global stages in which Participants embark on a journey across three countries, exploring global best practices and engaging in specialized training modules. These modules are designed to deliver distinct learning experiences by providing skills that can be transferred to the Arab city.

module **01**

The Triple L

Local Leadership Learning

Partner:

Duration: 2 weeks
Content:
Modern Trends in Urban Planning
Municipal Investment and Assets Management
Human-Friendly Sustainable City
Digital Urban Transformation

Certificate:

Certificate of Excellence in Local Learning Leadership

module **02**

The Avante-Garde

Global Urban Innovation

Partner (in process):

Duration: 2 weeks
Content:
Urban Planning 2030
Mobility Xcel
Post- City Twinning
Urban Ideation360

Certificate:

Certificate of Excellence in Urban Innovation

module **03**

The Mastery

Abroad Municipal Coaching

Partner (in process):

Duration: 2 weeks
Content: International delegation to explore best municipal practices and
work at a leading global municipality

Certificate:

Certificate of Practical Excellence in Innovation and Urban Management

Program Snapshot

01 Overview:
Innovative Collaboration for Preparing the NextGen of Arab City Professionals

02 Program Duration:
6 weeks, with 3 non-consecutive phases, spanning over 5 months with + 150 training hours

03 Accreditation:
Certificate of Excellence from Academic institutions

04 Targeted Group:
Municipal Staff with less than 10 years of experience in: Urban Planning and Design; Road and Infrastructure Planning; Environmental Sustainability; Municipal Investment; Digital Transformations and E-Governance; and Local Community Development

05 Projected number of beneficiaries:
+500 innovative Municipal Pro in 5 years

06 Expected Outcomes:
Enrich Human Capital
Curate Lifelong Education
Create Tomorrows City
Drive Innovative Research

ARAB URBAN DEVELOPMENT PORTAL

"A Portal for Sharing Knowledge on Urban Development"

The Arab Urban Development Portal is an open digital platform that provides information about cities, municipalities, urban projects and development organizations and their publications in the Arab region.

- It aims to produce 400+ reports on projects and cities in the Arab region.
- Information and reports are provided in Arabic and English languages.

Visitors of the platform can access information about urban development PROJECTS in the region by hovering over them on the PROJECTS page's interactive map. By clicking on a project title, the visitor obtains a report that includes a description of the project's components, objectives, phases, and the stakeholders behind it.



Video of the Arab Urban Development Portal

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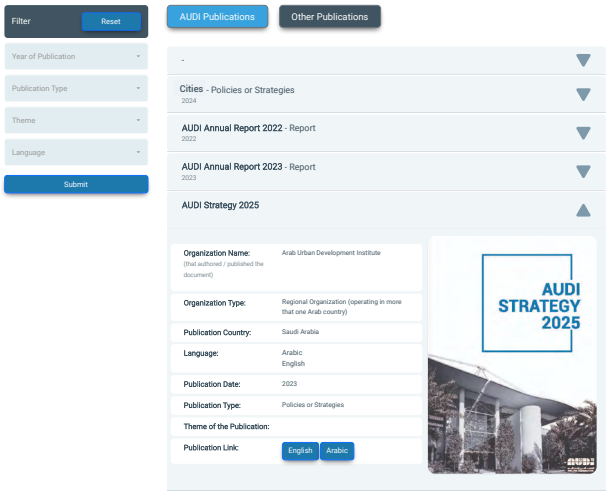
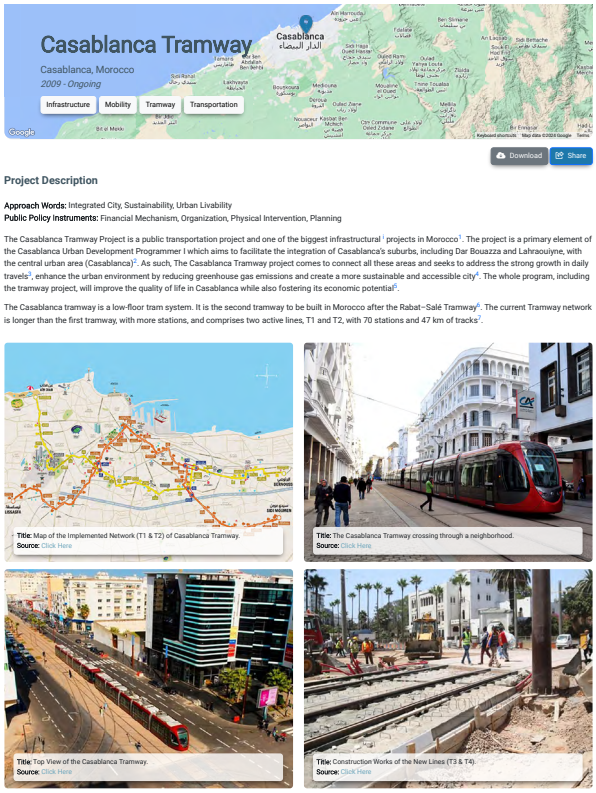
On the CITIES page, the visitor can select a city and access information about it provided by its municipality or local authority. This information includes data about its geographic, demographic, economic context as well as insights about its housing and transportation situation.

On the ORGANIZATIONS page, one can find an address book of municipalities, public institutions, research and scientific centers, consulting institutions, local and international associations, and donor agencies working in the field of urban development in the Arab region. On the PUBLICATIONS page, the platform displays a list of recent studies and reports issued by municipalities, development agencies, and international organizations operating in the Arab region.

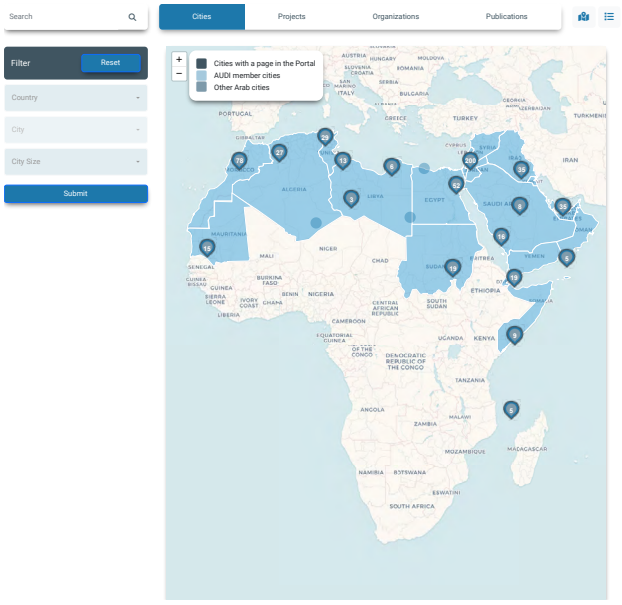
It is worth noting that the portal acts as a participatory platform, where the pages of cities and municipalities are the product of the municipalities themselves. Interested development organizations can also provide information about themselves and their publications.



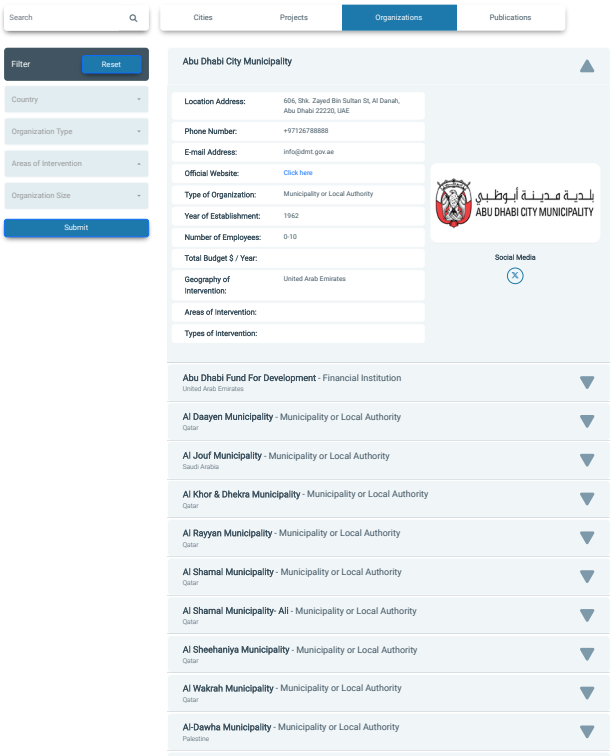
Screenshot of the Arab Urban Development Portal page for 'Publications'



Screenshot of the Arab Urban Development Portal project information page for 'Casablance Tramway'



Screenshot of the Arab Urban Development Portal page for 'Cities'



Screenshot of the Arab Urban Development Portal page for 'Publications'

MUDUNUNA

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the Arab Urban Development Institute by
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Catch up on all Mudununa issues by
scanning the QR code below

Riyadh 11452
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

P.O Box 6892,
Diplomatic Quarter

T. +966114802698
mudununa@araburban.org

araburban.org

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