Urban Planning in the Middle East

Urban Planning in the Middle East: Case Studies

By

John Yarwood

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by John Yarwood

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FOREWORD

BY ASAD SHAHEED

In the early 1980s, I was the Architect / Town Planner for a project in East Wahdat, a small squatter area in Amman that was rehabilitated as part of the World Bank-sponsored Jordan Urban Project. As East Wahdat had grown spontaneously outside government planning regulations, it was tailored to the real needs of its residents: free of roads (no one had private cars), with narrow shaded footpaths which cleverly negotiated the hilly terrain and provided access to houses. Shops were located within walking distance and even small common areas which served as meeting and play-spaces. The houses, although built of corrugated iron, had rooms compactly laid around central courtyards. This was an exemplar of a highly workable community built by its settlers without the constraints of planning byelaws. The upgrading effort was minimal, and consisted of improving water and sanitation services, paving pathways, allowing access for emergency vehicles, and leaving buildings to be improved incrementally by residents through soft bank loans. Significantly, no material change was made to the plan of the original settlement, which worked perfectly well.

It was an unusual project to receive the 1992 Aga Khan Award for Architecture, a prestigious award that up till then had recognized beauty and the continued promotion of Islamic art and architecture, but here was rightly recognizing the need to also look beyond individual buildings to the urban settlements of which these are part, to the people that inhabit and work within them, and to celebrate their improvement.

For me this signals that there is a chance—and a need—for practitioners and governors of urbanism to stop and consider more appropriate solutions towards addressing cultural identity, environment and historical legacy before simply applying rules and standards of “modern practice” borrowed largely from the west. Dr John Yarwood’s present book echoes and reinforces this need for appropriateness in urbanism, increasingly crucial in a globalized world. John has written many books, one of which,

"Planning for the International City", we co-authored a few years ago, and I feel most honoured to have been asked to write the foreword for this, his latest work.

Any meaningful discussion on urbanism inevitably intertwines its technical strands (namely, of urban planning, urban design, architecture and construction) with socio-cultural and historic influences. This, combined with the starker realities of governance and funding ultimately converge to fashion cities. A consequential comparative discussion on the subject further requires a profound understanding of how each element of the city and urban environment is related.

Dr Yarwood's book on *Urban Planning in the Middle East* deftly ticks all these boxes, knowledgeably drawing together the strands that influence the creation of the urban forms we witness today in nine unique cities.

What do the urban settlements of Mersin in Turkey, Muharraq in Bahrain, Dubai and Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait City, Aden in Yemen, Kabul in Afghanistan, Tirana in Albania and Damascus in Syria share in common? It is true that all have predominantly Muslim inhabitants and are located in countries with emerging, as distinct from mature, economies. They have either endured a colonial past where occupying nations have left their particular cultural impression, or they have voluntarily adopted modern, foreign and largely Western influences in architecture, city building and municipal governance. True, they all possess a rich history of city building that is regrettably nearly forgotten and which this book urges us to rediscover. But a significant underlying thread conjoining these cities as presented here, is John Yarwood himself, who has lived and worked in each of these places.

And he has studied them with his usual passion. Over the years, he and I worked together on a number of projects across the Arabian Peninsula. The most ambitious of these was "*La Ville Contemporaine*" for the Dubai Government (2004-2005), a project that aimed to provide the city with a new central business district. In contrast to Dubai's 1970's municipal grid this project set out to create a sequence of discrete business clusters focused around the waters of an extended Dubai Creek. Despite their separation by major new highways, these neighbourhoods sought, at least internally, to bring about a greater sense of pedestrian scale and reference. The four clusters, now all partly implemented, were later named "Business Bay", "Al Jadaf", "Knowledge Village" and "The Lagoons". A picture I

will always fondly recall is seeing John, long after work, sitting at a small table in a bistro we sometimes dined at in one of Bur Dubai's modest hotels with a glass of red wine, cigarette and drawing pen. In his own particular way he strove to resolve the challenges of this complex project, working late into the night, wholly engrossed in sketching plans with great panache on the restaurant's paper place-mats.

So, at many levels this book is a personal, almost autobiographical journey of John's work across these nine cities, and a platform from which to eloquently share his philosophy on urbanism and express his passion for the subject. This book is not merely a technical publication: the inclusion of his personal anecdotes and insights makes this book all the more enjoyable.

Asad Shaheed, London, 29 August 2011

PREFACE

This book describes projects in a number of countries in the region which can be loosely called 'the Middle East", namely Turkey, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Albania, Syria and Yemen. Clearly Afghanistan is best categorised as Central Asia whilst Albania was traditionally described as part of the Near East or 'Turkey in Europe'. The titular geographic term of 'Middle East' is thus not quite precise. The obvious thing in common between all these countries is that they are all predominantly Muslim, but that term would be misleading for another reason, namely that the Islamic World stretches from West Africa to Indonesia, and they are not represented in this book. The other thing in common is simply that I personally have worked on all these projects, and thus the book is a partial professional autobiography.

Each chapter tackles not only a different country but also a different aspect of urban planning and development, as follows.

- Upgrading or improving recent illegal or informal slums, *(gecekondu* in Turkish*)*, including detailed local planning and strategic planning;
- Urban conservation of Al Muharraq, a historic Gulf city;
- Traditional building construction as reference point for modern design;
- Urban design of new city centre areas in three prosperous Gulf states;
- The recreation - post-war - of an urban planning system in Kabul;
- A historical account of urban planning in the Zog-Mussolini period in Albania, which is contrasted with the currently collapsed system;
- An account of urban economic regeneration in Syria;
- Local planning aiming at economic revival in Aden.

The book, in short, is quite general in scope, and aims to cover (more or less) the full range of urban planning. These essays articulate eight *themes*, which are listed here:

- Tradition versus Modernism
- Regionalism and Identity
- The property market in the urban economy
- Privacy, the family/tribe etc
- Arts and crafts. Industrialised construction
- Impact of the motor car, and urban infrastructure
- The courtyard house
- Public administration, local politics and corruption

Of course, not all these points are equally relevant to all the countries mentioned here, and I point out below the chapters (i.e. the towns) in which each theme is mainly mentioned.

I had a motive behind my original interest in the Middle East, twenty five years ago, which was this: I was fascinated (although puzzled) by the ostensibly chaotic or at least organic form of the traditional Islamic city, so unlike the geometric and abstract, Euclidean or Cartesian structure of the classical western city. I went to work in Bahrain with the hope of pursuing this interest. It led me to produce a PhD[1] on the history of the old town of Al Muharraq and, as part of this, I considered the difference between the organic form of the traditional Islamic city and the Cartesian form of the Western city[2]. I went on in future years to work on several cities which are described in this book: my work on these cities concerned wholly contemporary urban issues, however. For the most part, traditional Middle Eastern or Islamic urbanism seemed to hold no clues to them, and the chapters dealing with contemporary themes are based largely on modern (i.e. western) planning ideas.

For example, plans for Kuwait, Dubai and Sharjah (chapter 5) involve modern infrastructure and roads, and the functioning of a modern urban land economy (in which plots are bought and sold), neither of which characterise the local tradition. In the study of Zogist Tirana (Albania) one sees how a modern urban development system was created amazingly quickly. In chapter 8, I discuss how a modern capitalist system was promoted in the context of the old quasi-Soviet urbanism of Syria. And so on. In other words, there is a contrast between the tradition on one hand and current realities on the other. This contrast is the central theme of the book.

[1] Yarwood. J.R. (1988). See bibliography for chapter 3.
[2] Yarwood. J.R. (1998), (2000) and (2006). See bibliography for chapter 3.

Next I will describe the sources of drawings and photographs. All the drawings and photographs were prepared or taken by me, except those listed below. The aerial photograph of Al Muharraq (fig.3.1) was obtained by me from the RAF archive at Taunton. Next I refer to those drawings in the chapter on Tirana, as follows: fig. 7.1 by Hauptman von Milius, 7.2 and 7.6 by Di Fausto, 7.3 by Brasini, 7.4, 7.9, 7.11, 7.16 to 7.19 by Bosio, 7.8 by Koehler. The other drawings and the photographs in this chapter are from unknown sources. They were all obtained by me from the Central Technical Archive in Tirana, which I used to visit towards the end of my time there. And there are also 6 photographs and postcards of Aden in chapter 9 taken from www.adenairways.com website, namely figs 9.2, 9.6, 9.12, 9.16, 9.17, and 9.17.

Finally, I will recall several people who have contributed most significantly to the projects described in this book. This is worth covering because the planning described here was not my own work in its entirety, but was shared by quite a number of capable and creative individuals

The World Bank adviser to the Cukurova project in Turkey (described in chapter 2) was a civil engineer called David Cook. At the time he was the Chief Engineering Adviser to the bank—a ‘man with a mission’, with great charm of manner and coherence of mind, whom I was to meet again in several different places over the years. His particular interest concerned the delivery of affordable, serviced building land to match demand. In other words, the population should be wealthy enough to pay rents to the client (the Government of Turkey) sufficient to enable *them* to repay the loan to the Bank. In this regard he developed serious reservations about the work of my employer, the consultants Dar al Handasah, and, as a remedial measure, he arranged for two other consultants, John Kirk and David Gilmore of GHK (a London-based consultancy) to come out to Turkey for a few weeks and advise our team.

Their arrival generated a good deal of tension and even resentment on the project, as it seemed to imply some sort of perceived failure on our part. Consequently, John and David were placed in a somewhat ticklish position. However, they behaved with great charm and humour, avoided the obvious scope for antagonism and made a valuable contribution. I came to have a great fondness for them—particularly the witty and sociable John. They had created a computer program which aimed to test the *affordability* of sketch plans. The Bank was, of course, very concerned with the ability of the government to collect an income from the

beneficiaries—the tenants—and so repay the Bank loan (i.e. the ability of future occupiers to afford the repayments of investment in their house in the form of a rent). David was worried that we, the consultants, had not adequately grappled with that. This computer program was based on an algorithm defining the relationship between development density (dwellings per hectare), road costs (or road type in terms of width and sewer type), plot size and width (and hence plots per kilometre of road frontage), etc. They 'tested' our various layouts by feeding the cost figures and the private wealth estimates into the computer, which revealed that many of our layouts could not have been repaid as affordable rents by the impoverished population.

I recall in particular two other people in Turkey: John Bowers, an English architect-planner about my own age, leading the team on Adana (whilst I was leading the team on Mersin and Tarsus), and Deniz Artamli, a young Turkish lady planner who was my main assistant. This was my first job as a consultant—I had only worked as a local government employee until then. I was very lucky to have John as a colleague, an experienced consultant able to teach me a lot of lessons about how consultancy—and in particular World Bank consultancy—works. My experience hitherto working for government had been a totally different kettle of fish. I was also very fortunate to have Deniz as a colleague. She impressed me as a *generalist*, a near-universal person*:* she could discharge almost any type of task, covering everything from social statistics to urban design with equal facility. I am afraid that planning education in Britain had recently become rather narrowly specialised and young people could do X or Y or Z, but rarely all of them. Not so in Turkey, at that time.

Moving on to Bahrain: I remember in particular two individuals. I was working in the Ministry of Housing when Ron Lewcock walked in to my office to find out how architectural conservation in Muharraq was progressing. He was at that time the Aga Khan Professor at MIT, and had done a study for UNESCO a few months before, advocating a certain approach to the conservation of Muharraq. I found him a most *simpatico* individual. I told him how frustrating I found the ministry, and how little interest they had in conservation. He tried to cheer me up, and suggested I undertake my own research by surveying the old buildings of Muharraq 'off my own bat'. They were very significant but had never been recorded. I followed this advice, and I felt eventually that I had not wasted my time in Bahrain. A few years later, I met him in the United States and in Cambridge. I visited Yemen, for which I conceived a huge admiration.

Ron's book *Sana; an Arabian Islamic City* was a source of real inspiration. At that time, Fernando Varanda worked in the ministry in the next room to mine, and he had a collection of 18000 slides of Yemen, which we viewed over several evenings in his apartment. His wonderful book, *The Art of Building in Yemen* was equally a source of inspiration. Both books helped me stick to my own efforts to record Muharraq.

I tried to get my study of Muharraq published, and by great good luck I found Jalal Uddin Ahmed, editor and guiding light behind the journal *Arts and the Islamic World*, who was most enthusiastic about publishing it. Together with his wife Azra, we worked on the publication. Jalal was a retired senior civil servant from Pakistan—a most energetic, amusing and visionary person; they lived in London at that time. Decades later I found myself again in Bahrain, at the invitation of Sheikha Mai al Khalifa. She was the Undersecretary at the Ministry of Information and Culture, and subsequently became the Minister. She hustled me into publishing the research on Muharraq as a larger book, which was done in a most splendid manner. I rather think that Sheikha Mai has failed to reverse the non-commitment of Bahrain to urban conservation, but—having said that—she has done as much as any human being could have done, and deserves the gratitude of all of us.

Steve Crawhurst was a freelance planner with whom I worked in Aden and Dubai. We had worked together for a year in Dublin, and I had formed a great admiration for his professional skill and his sparkling humour well able to hold its own with Irish vivacity. He had spent several months leading the Halcrow team preparing the strategic plan for Aden. I was not there at that stage. He then had to go back to Britain owing to a family tragedy. Halcrow then asked me to suddenly go to Aden to execute the local planning components of the same project, and Steve came back after a few months. I was impressed by his great steadiness and stability after a time of dreadful sadness.

Finally, I should mention Asad Shaheed (who wrote the foreword to this book), and Tim Catchpole of Halcrow, with whom I worked in Dubai and Sharjah on several occasions over the years. Asad is a Pakistani architect-artist with superb diplomatic and political skills, as well as awesome ability as a water-colourist. They are an interesting, complementary pair. Tim, an English planner, is an endlessly patient, steady and good-natured administrator. Asad, by contrast, is bursting with charisma and design-vision, although prone to outbursts of brusqueness when dealing with his

juniors. They make me feel that ‘it takes all types to make a world’, and that none of us is perfect.

The purpose of reviewing these people in the context of this book is to remind us that one individual—myself in this case—cannot claim the credit for the items mentioned. Everything dealt with here is a team product, and the person who can participate creatively in the team will contribute most to the whole.

John Yarwood
Egremont House,
Edgmond,
Shropshire.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Summary

This book covers plans in eight countries—Turkey, Bahrain, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates (Sharjah and Dubai), Afghanistan, Albania, Syria and Yemen (Aden)—and eight topics, all in terms of my own working experience or research. The eight topics are listed in summary here:

- Upgrading or improving recent illegal or informal slums, (*gecekondu* in Turkish), including detailed local planning and strategic planning (chapter 2);
- Urban conservation of Al Muharraq, a historic Gulf city (chapter 3);
- Traditional building construction as reference point for modern design (chapter 4);
- Urban design of new city centre areas in three prosperous Gulf states (chapter 5);
- The recreation of an urban planning system in Kabul (chapter 6);
- A historical account of urban planning in the Zog-Mussolini period (1920-40) in Albania, which is contrasted with the currently collapsed system (chapter 7)
- An account of urban economic regeneration in Syria (chapter 8);
- Urban planning aiming at economic revival in Aden (chapter 9);

Each topic is dealt with in a separate chapter, and these chapters are first summarised within this chapter.

Clearly, Afghanistan is best categorised as Central Asia, whilst Albania was traditionally described as part of the Near East or 'Turkey in Europe'. The titular geographic term of 'Middle East' is thus not quite correct. The obvious thing in common between these countries is that they are all predominantly Muslim, but that term would be misleading for another reason, namely, that the Islamic World stretches from West Africa to Indonesia, and they are not represented in this book. The other thing in

common is simply that I, personally, have worked on all these projects, and thus the book is a partial professional autobiography.

As well as the eight topics summarised above, the book is based around eight particular issues, woven together like warp and weft.

Descriptive attempts at categorisation might be doomed to inadequacy. Nonetheless, one is entitled to wonder whether these studies of diverse places reveal things in common. Do they, for instance, all reveal the stamp of western influence—and if so, in what way? Or in what way do they reveal distinctly non-western or regionally unique influences—in what sense are they *sui generis?* This introductory chapter tries to sum up the distinctions to be drawn between modern western urban planning and development management on the one hand, and the recent characteristics of the countries mentioned here on the other – either collectively or individually.

Specific Issues

There are eight interlinked points to be made, as follows.

- Tradition versus Modernism;
- Regionalism and Identity;
- The property market in the urban economy;
- Privacy, the family/tribe etc;
- Arts and crafts. Industrialised construction;
- Impact of the motor car, and urban infrastructure;
- The courtyard house;
- Public administration, local politics and corruption.

Of course, not all these points are equally relevant to all the countries mentioned here. However, all the points are discussed below, and I point out the chapters (i.e. the towns) in which each is mainly mentioned.

Tradition versus Modernity

In this section, I try to describe the question of ‘modernism’ in these cities, and specifically whether there are any remaining traces of ‘regionalism’ which are capable of being built on. By ‘modernism’, I mean a copy of the western city which reflects the urbanism of capitalism. The conclusion is that, in general, there is little regionalism in their identity, but with partial

exceptions. In the Gulf—Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE—there are depleted remains of regionalism in their identity which could form the kernel of a historically aware future. In the case of Bahrain, my earlier books provide some suggestions for this[1]. A few remains exist in Aden from the early days of the British colony in the nineteenth century. As regards Kuwait, Dubai and Sharjah (chapter 5), the modern plans illustrate the contemporary need in a prosperous capitalist economy—that is, plot boundary definition, development regulations, rights of way including roads and infrastructure, etc. Of course, in Tirana, one had a minor traditional Ottoman town until the First World War. Thereafter, King Zog[2] rapidly created a modern planning system with the help of Austrian and Italian experts under the influence of western methods.

Ibn Khaldun wrote in *Al Muqaddimah* about the mentality of people in the Arab empire, as follows: "The vanquished always want to imitate the victor in his distinctive marks, his dress, his occupation, and all his other conditions and customs….The soul…. assimilates itself to him"[3]. Von Grunebaum expresses a somewhat contrary view, identifying also the repulsion of the eastener: "The individual and his society are divided against themselves, suffering from attraction and repulsion at the same time, when confronted by the nonchalant aggression of the western mentality".[4] The attraction was what Mikhail Nuaima called 'internal colonialism'.

This state of simultaneous acceptance and rejection of westernisation seems to be a version of the 'Stockholm syndrome'.[5] Many ostensibly westernised Arabs are, nonetheless, what Norman Dennis called 'cultural resisters'. They sense the spiritual incoherence of western cultures, the disappearance of absolute truths, the decline of the family—nuclear and extended—and so on. Many are willing, of course, to be debauched by it in a material sense. But the incongruity between the material benefits and the cultural matrix which yielded those benefits is disquieting for them. There is some sense of insecurity, which arises from embracing a culture which is not fully absorbed. This stimulates a counter-revolution which (so to say) can be a pendulum swing too far to be comfortably sustained in the

[1] See Yarwood, J. 2000 and 2006.
[2] King Zog was named Ahmed Zogu before he assumed a royal title.
[3] Ibn Khaldun (1978).
[4] Gustav von Grunebaum 1962.
[5] The Stockholm syndrome describes the behaviour of hostages coming to empathize, over time, with their captors.

real world. One can see this painful process going on now: balanced cultural self-assertion is thus necessary for health; intellectuals will seek self-understanding or pursue self-construction by assessing their own civilisation against others, and that can only be done by some degree of recovery of the past. The recovery of history means the recovery of *identity*, and only that can give a meaning to independence.

In this sense, we may consider the relevance of historic models in the planning of new cities and the renewal of old ones (including the conservation of historic areas and their management). Change is like a river, which may flow fast on the surface and yet be almost still at the bottom. Thus one sees on the one hand that many valuable innovations have occurred, such as air conditioning, the motorcar, the computer, democracy and the emancipation of women. Such things have revolutionary implications for the city. On the other hand, the constant renewal of the well-springs of Islamic culture is vital for the health of these countries, and respect for the past—and particularly of the city—is the central component of that.

The two chapters (nos Three and Four) on Al Muharraq concern a traditional Gulf town, which arose in a pre-capitalist age, and in a civilisation radically different from the western classical tradition. The key questions concern its urban conservation, in the light of the massive changes that have occurred in the last 200 years. Recently, these included piped water, sewerage and power, reinforced concrete and glass, modern capitalism and property ownership and investment, the nuclear family and female emancipation, as well as the internet and computing, modern government practices, and so on. Such things have wrought tremendous change to buildings and the city. From the nineteenth century on (in places like Aden and Damascus which were subject to British and French influences), to the Gulf states in the last seventy years, new urban forms have arisen.

Regionalism and Identity

Current scepticism about the ubiquity of internationalism and the mounting problems of modern cities may require new approaches to architecture and planning. This has not yet, in general, arisen, however. In the Gulf one can see some cases of a valid regionalism, but most modern parts of these cities appear as western in character at both superficial and profound levels. The Gulf cities include air-conditioned skyscrapers,

multi-level highways, huge cities of villas and shopping malls, etc. The old districts, of Damascus, for example, are clearly quite different, but are now in decay. In Tirana, one saw the European *modernismo* of eighty years ago suddenly rejecting the old Ottoman city. Then came Stalinist classicism, and now Californian glamour floating in post-capitalist, third world decay. That chaos is also found in the informal slums of Mersin (Turkey), of course.

Regionalism, however, would seek to create a (to some degree) unique architecture and urbanism specific to the local culture and conditions in each part of the world. Regionalist design tends to—but should not—degenerate into post-modern cliché-mongering—*maquillage* coating the underlying reality of western architecture. Modernism is seen as universal, 'western', sophisticated, progressive and *modern*. Regionalism is often seen as the opposite—parochial, insular, kitsch, narrow-minded and backward. Thus, one sees a type of sad, self-imposed cultural colonialism.

It should be stressed that regionalism does not imply rejection of the benefits of advanced technology. It incorporates the points of 'appropriate technology' in building science and construction. This applies in principal as much in the Middle East as in Europe. Britain, for example, suffered from the use of an apparently sophisticated, but inappropriate, prefabrication high-rise technology to tackle its housing problems.

'Identity' does not entail blind copying of decorative details from the past, but rather requires a grasp of principles, reference points, values, images, criteria, etc., in defining and satisfying functional, cultural and spiritual requirements. Identity cannot be fossilised as a set of styles, but rather as a dynamic process, continuously refreshed and regenerated. Contemporary designers could look at—and absorb—history in this light because rejection of the past—a past in the case of Arabia stretching back beyond Ur —will entrench an eventual cultural disaster. The approach to such a direction could only be through an intense historical awareness in new design—not the awareness of the antiquary for whom history (interesting though it is) has passed, but that of an avant-garde for whom the past contains the clues to the future.

Aldo Rossi observed that all great eras of architecture "have proposed the architecture of antiquity anew, as if it were a paradigm established forever;

but each time it has been reproposed differently"[6]. As things stand, most of these cities mimic the western city, and none more than those planned in the modern Gulf.

The Property Market in the Urban Economy

We will begin by considering the matter of property rights and the consequences of the property market. The beginnings of the modern property register occurred after the First World War – in the 1920s in most of these countries. In Bahrain, it tended to occur after 1927, when the municipalities were founded at the behest of Charles Belgrave[7]. Each hereditament was granted a property deed with (rather inaccurate) plans describing the plot layout and defining the boundary. In all cases, inheritance followed the provisions of Sharia law, by means of which children divided ownership. This led either to physical subdivision or shared (i.e. joint) ownership.

In the case of Bahrain, the joint owners often lived at a distance—for example, in Qatar, Kuwait, the Pirate Coast, Oman—so that it was often very difficult to collaborate and reach consent to any action, such as sale or repair. The only practical action was often to neglect, and then abandon, the property. I remember making a presentation to the Minister and advocating compulsory purchase measures or similar ways to consolidate ownership and assist in urban renewal action, but I got the impression he could not face the challenge of urban renewal—unless it was proposed to widen a street, in which case he saw the point. But without this, we could not even contact the owners (and where were they?), let alone persuade them to act. He also said that it was easier in Britain for a politician to resist selfishly interested requests because of democracy, but, in a dictatorship like Bahrain, a minister like him found it hard to turn down personal appeals.

At the time, there was no real property market, and indeed there is no market in most of old Muharraq even now, I think. Valuation in Muharraq (for compensation) is still essentially a form of bribery. The government offers such a high price that no sensible person could turn it down—but this is extremely costly and cannot be afforded on any great scale. The result of this has been the freezing or blockage of urban renewal, the

[6] See Rossi, A. 1982.
[7] Sir Charles Belgrave was appointed Adviser to the Sheikh in the 1920s.

promotion of Bahraini emigration from the old town to modern districts away from Muharraq, and the gradual decay of the old town as impoverished 'guest-workers' take over abandoned property.

These cities were more-or-less pre-capitalist, in that property was not fully abstract and exchangeable. A dwelling was part of one's family or identity. To sell it would be like cutting off a limb. This was the 'unchanging land' to which the proto-Marxist mediaevalist Troeltsch referred:

> [Capitalism] tends to a restless and changing social differentiation which is not based on the unchanging land, but upon accidental accumulations of money, which can change anything into anything else. The personal relations which depend on nature and social groups are dissolved. The individual (in the West) gains an abstract freedom and independence… He makes up for the loss of concrete individuality ….by abstract individualism.[8]

Gellner[9] and other writers have argued that the *ummah*, the traditional Islamic collectivity, prevented the emergence of civil society and 'modular man' in the Middle East. Rodinson[10] stressed the Prophet's encouragement of trade and his condemnation of practices disturbing the free play of supply and demand, and the importance attached by the Qur'an to rationality. Nonetheless, he also points out that the bourgeoisie failed to attain political power as a class. The merchant class was unable to dislodge the dominant military-bureaucratic class, and was thus unable to inaugurate a capitalist revolution. In the past, Sharia law militated against the public recognition of group interests other than kinship groups, and found no concept of 'legal personality' such as that in Roman Law. According to Schacht,[11] Islamic Law did not recognise cities as such, nor did it admit corporate bodies. Thus the city remained a collection of villages organised as family domains.

One should consider relatively modern cities like Aden, Tirana and Dubai as well as *gecekondu* slums in Mersin. The layouts of the first three all comprise (i) separate development plots, and (ii) the public realm, mainly streets. In Tirana, however, there are now very large areas of informal slums—almost all the growth since 1990—in which people grabbed land and built housing with no layout planning, no physical or social

[8] See Troeltsch, E. 1931.
[9] Ernest Gellner, E. 1968.
[10] See Rodinson, M. 1978.
[11] Schacht, J. 1959.

infrastructure, and no ownership or tenure, etc[12]. In the Zog-Mussolini period, to which I referred earlier, an urban management system of considerable sophistication was established, and the results of that are visible (see chapter 7). Of course, the slums of Mersin (and, indeed, most Turkish cities) are very similar. The interesting topic here (see also chapter 2) is how these areas could be upgraded. It involves defining plot boundaries and conveying the land to the putative owners, (owner-occupiers, landlords or housing societies, perhaps); and creating access roads and 'public rights of way', with drains, sewers, water mains, power lines, and so on, within them. There are several important points to be made about the underlying economic development needs, such as the creation of housing banks and the emergence of a property market. In other words, property development comes to play a role via property asset value enhancement in the economic development process.

There are four cases here of cities operated at some stage by communist authority, namely Tirana, Damascus[13], Aden and Kabul. The points above about the role of land and property in economic development did not apply to these communist regimes, of course.

In the case of new areas in Gulf cities, such as Dubai and Sharjah (chapter 5) these points also apply, excepting that an administrative/legal grip tends to be maintained from the start, whereas in the other informal cases, chaos reigns from the start. In Dubai, Sharjah and other Gulf cities, plots are defined and sold off to finance the construction of roads and infrastructure. This is possible because local government authority functions—even if imperfectly. In Sharjah, which is a separate authority from a planning point of view, there is a focus on (i) maximising value of land disposals (requiring high permitted plot ratios[14] and low developer costs), and (ii) minimising public investment in the area. The Dubai approach is more sophisticated and far more ambitious, but also far more vulnerable to economic instability: rents have been much higher, and costs to the investor and the state are also much higher. When I started working in Dubai, there was a rather cautious approach. Surveyors said: Look, there will not be enough demand to sell or lease this much space in the reasonably near future, so we can only finance a low-rise building. In the last five years this caution went out of the window, and property

[12] See Yarwood 2010
[13] The Syrian authorities were proto-Communist during the Ba'ath period.
[14] PR means the ratio between floor space and plot area (measured in the same units).

investment became a speculative bubble independent of foreseeable demand. Now, of course, it has burst. One can see immensely high buildings, often incomplete or vacant.

Privacy, the Family/Tribe etc

Next, I want to mention privacy, which is of huge significance in Islamic culture. In England, we had the phrase "privacy by distance", meaning that new houses were separated by 35 yards/metres so that there was no serious "overlooking". This led to buildings being 'spaced out', or in other words, set quite far apart. They were usually set back from roads on parallel "set back lines". This made the typical modern layout very boring and formless in a spatial sense, and was the main single cause of anger for Ian Nairn in his polemical book "Outrage"[15]. Cullen, Browne and others preferred instead the old, historic towns, with many buildings *fronting* the streets. This meant that some windows of ground-floor rooms were next to the street, in a way culturally unacceptable in a traditional Islamic town. The point in such a town is that day-lighting directly from the street is minimal and there is no set-back. Either there is courtyard (see below) or a high boundary wall. Some day-lighting from the street may be utilised, but then side-screens and grilles would be employed as devices to afford privacy.

In the Essex Design Guide[16], Mel Dunbar pointed out that "privacy by distance" (in other words, "set-back" from the road) was not a wholly satisfactory thing. Privacy depended, he argued, on the visual angle subtended by the window, which covered more area the further you got from the window. This means that the further you are from the window, the more internal area you can see from the outside. He therefore argued for tall, narrow windows near the road. In much of the modern Middle East, one finds villas with wide windows set back from the street, and then you need high walls and gauze curtains to provide privacy. The resulting rather ugly street scene is not as attractive as some of the old streets, not least because the set-back phenomenon creates a certain formlessness in the street. The modern villa form in historic towns like Al Muharraq creates a lack of spatial containment and consequently formlessness of the public realm.. The solution to this problem might be the resuscitation of the courtyard house (see below). Light would be mainly gained from the

[15] Nairn, Ian 1955.
[16] Essex County Council 1973.

court, and the street frontage would not entail 'privacy by distance', thus requiring no setback at all.

The original land disposal process is the key to the social pattern, which is vastly more significant in these cities than the physical structure. Janet Abu Lughod makes an important point about the Islamic city.

> Planning and ownership began with the ceding of urban space to supra-individual entities… These supra-individual groups may have been related by kinship, descent, common origin or function, but in any event, they were assigned space within the evolving urban pattern on which to set out their 'communal settlement': the details of the arrangement were left to them.[17]

Until recently, the structure of the environment could be best understood as a social pattern, whereas the structure of a western city could be best understood as an aesthetic or physical pattern. The 'public realm' in the classical western city was formally composed (or consciously interpreted thus) rather like a piece of sculpture or a painting, with devices such as symmetry, poche, axiality etc. In the Middle East situation—at least, in the traditional case—one wonders if the 'public realm' as a thing to be appraised (and understood reflexively) existed at all.

There is potentially a contradiction between this social group-basis of housing, on the one hand, and the property market basis, on the other. The property market allocates space to nuclear families or small (one or two person) households in terms of wealth, whilst the old city was organised on the basis of extended family and tribal kinship or trade/profession. The former process tends to produce alienation from urban space, as well as loneliness, but modern city life is so mobile and fragmented that the old way of living cannot work any longer. I argued[18] for the idea that a typical neighbourhood should be based on housing *associations*, which people or nuclear families would join and stay with for (often) long periods. Membership of such a group of neighbours would help root the individual and generate a pattern of mutual obligations and forms of mutual reliance, as well as reducing the sense of isolation or loneliness. Rather than buying a house on a basis of the property market (covering a huge territory in unrelated, individual structure-objects), one would buy into a social group.

[17] Abu Lughod, J. 1983.
[18] See Yarwood, J 2006.

Courtyard Buildings

The discussion above considered the courtyard form as a solution to the need to establish private territories isolated from the street or other forms of 'public realm'. It should be distinguished from the 'villa form' in which the rooms face outwards towards the street (or other houses), requiring a high boundary wall to retain the privacy which Islamic culture entails. Also, of course, this form gives rise to slivers of peripheral space between the villa and the wall which cannot be readily used because they tend to be dysfunctional, non-private and non-social. Typically, they are unbearably hot because exposed to the sun. The value of the villa may be that it is easier to provide central air-conditioning, whilst a courtyard house will tend to involve longer ducts. On the other hand, the villa will tend to have higher solar gain.

De Montequin[19] argued that the archetypal Islamic city is a private religious city, in contrast to the western secular city - *polis* and *civitas*. There is a symbolic aspect here as Titus Burckhardt[20] argued. The street and the outward aspect of houses reflect modesty, anonymity even, whilst the inner, private spaces – the courtyards – express more gorgeously the individual personality of the owner. This outward modesty also leads to the camouflage of the separate dwelling in the collective form. One can rarely see what the separate, individual house or building is: it is generally impossible to identify the boundaries of the single dwelling, whether from the street or from an aerial photograph. The courtyard, however, is the secret heart of the family, offered privately to God, and open to Heaven.

The Impact of the Motor Car

The motorcar is another particular problem in the localised neighbourhoods of these cities. Until the 1920s, there were almost no cars, and most roads in urban areas were alleyways trafficked by pedestrians and donkeys.

The motor car is a matter of huge importance, particularly for the Gulf Arabs. They want a garage on plot with direct access from a free-flowing street, and if they cannot have that, then they will (with very few exceptions) depart to another supposedly modern place, leaving behind them a quasi-ruinous slum. At the time I was first working in Bahrain, the

[19] De Montequin 1983.
[20] See Burckhardt, T. 1976.

notion of narrow, twisty roads in housing areas was becoming a preferred idea in Britain. Most 'design guides' proposed that houses should project forward so as to make street spaces more narrow, cut off sight-lines, reduce forward visibility, curtail acceleration, slow traffic down and improve safety. This was a striking change from the old thinking, which envisaged wide straight streets, with major sightlines at corners and junctions (affording high forward visibility), demolition of buildings which would otherwise block views from vehicles around corners, high design speeds combined with long braking distances. This old idea was, of course, the thinking of the highway engineer, not the architect or the urban designer, and it is no accident that most town planners at the time were engineers trained to design roads and sewers. Now one was saying that the highway should not be exalted—at least in traditional towns—above the saving of their historic beauty.

Thus also in these Middle East towns, one found that the old town plans were mainly road-widening proposals, but, naturally, they could often not be implemented. At the same time, urban conservation was nowhere on the agenda either, and one can well see why. In Britain, the Design Guides issued by local authority planning departments were clearly based on the ideas ("Townscape") of Gordon Cullen[21], Ian Nairn and others. One could see that Mel Dunbar's plans and sketches of new areas (depicted in the Essex Design Guide), were copying the historic townscape of Essex, with narrow streets on twisting alignments, no set-backs and buildings fronting streets, buildings blocking views, and reducing the sense of urban scale, etc.

It seems to me that this philosophy—architectural space-focused rather than vehicle-focused—would permit many cities in the Middle East to be developed in a more elegant and civilised way. There would then be no universal need for dual-carriageway roads, and often no need for pavements (sidewalks) on small, local access roads. Those roads could be one-way, and as narrow as two metres in places, with quite sharp corners; facades could line the backs of streets, and so on. In other words, there would be much less need to demolish buildings under urban renewal in order to create space for cars. I also thought about the idea of a car-less town, or at least a car-less neighbourhood. One would have multi-storey car parks at intervals, and drive an electric cart, like a golf-cart, to one's house. The collection of dustbins, as well as access by ambulances and fire

[21] Cullen, G. 1961.