

# Sustainability in the City and Beyond

Concordia University

March 19-21, 2019

## Refugee camps and Home-Making practices as Urban Assemblages Comparative Study of the Palestinian and Syrian Refugee Camps in Jordan

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The everlasting conflicts in the Middle East have resulted in displacing massive numbers of refugees to the neighboring countries. Jordan as a safe zone in the middle of a war area, has become the focus of attention for refugees wishing to start a new life. One physical consequence of these conflicts is a refugee camp. In effect, Jordan prolonged history of refugee camps from various nations has provided opportunities for a rich comparison between two different examples: the Palestinian and the Syrian camps. Examining the physical settings of the two cases reveals a striking observation, which is that there are a lot of cultural similarities across Palestinian and Syrian camps in terms of material culture and home-making practices. However, what we are seeing on the ground is while the Palestinian camps were totally embedded in the local urban fabric, the Syrian ones stand out completely isolated. Therefore, this study seeks to better understand the evolution of camps in this one context, and how it was situated differently in relation to the geo-politics and the economic settings. It also sheds light on the fact that refugee camps were initially meant to serve as temporary shelters, whereas the lifespan of a refugee camp is 17 years in average. This questions the sustainable processes and practices that transform such a short-term shelter into a permanent settlement that survives for a long time. Such practices, which differ from a camp to another, highlight a resilient way of rethinking refugee camps. Based on that, the study argues that a camp does not reflect a static state or idea, it plays different roles in different times, locations and settings. In urban studies, the Urban Assemblage theory summarizes this unstatic state of a refugee camp and its inhabitants' regenerative way of living.



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Thus, through exploring the built environment (BE) of refugee camps in Jordan, this study aims to map the physical manifestation of Urban Assemblage concept over time. Focusing on the residential built environment theme or the “Home-making” practices, symbolically and materially, is the main study approach towards exploring different features of urban sustainability. The research question is: Through the lenses of Urban Assemblage theory, what are the home-making practices of refugees in host settings (Jordan) with a comparison of two, the Palestinian and the Syrian refugee camps-materially and symbolically, and how do they play out with the broader socio-economic and political context? Also, how do these practices achieve urban sustainability? Through a methodology that combines two levels of comparative analysis, the research can explore how symbolic and material practices of refugees overtime have shaped the residential built environment and the livelihood practices in a refugee camp. Also, the research explores the role of the physical settings and meaning making practices as effective tools of urban resistance, rights claiming and identity surviving as important aspects of urban sustainability. Consequently, when considering Home-making we must broaden our thinking beyond the design itself and think more critically about the networks that collectively have created and sustained that space.



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