

Cities, Communities and Homes: Is the Urban Future Livable?

- **Paper / Proposal Title:**

Sustainable camps: self-organising design in community centres

- **Format:**

verbal presentation (with visuals)

- **Author(s) Name:**

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- **University or Company Affiliation:**

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- **Abstract (300 words):**

Palestinian refugee camps were formed in Lebanon after 1948, and are today home to approximately half a million inhabitants. Estimates are highly uncertain, since many refugees live in Lebanon informally, due to stringent Lebanese residency regulations and the massive crisis in neighbouring Syria. Besides the Palestinians newly arriving from Syria, camp populations have been swollen by the general crisis, pushing migrant workers and poor Lebanese to seek the cheapest possible accommodation.

Camp conditions were difficult already before the recent war, but have dramatically worsened. The pressure on infrastructure and housing has multiplied, due to the sudden increase in population. Conditions are further affected by the pressures on power and water supplies outside the camps. At the same time, restricted livelihoods and skyrocketing prices of materials leave little resources to proceed with necessary upgrades and maintenance of facilities and the built environment. Desperate homeless families are prepared to live in buildings that are compromised and unsafe, since they have no other options. At the same time, poor infrastructure leads to a vicious circle, since local

workshops that could provide livelihoods also depend on access to transport, power supplies, water, and effective management of wastewater, waste and fumes to minimise environmental impacts.

Sustainable camps is a project initiated by the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University in collaboration with community centres at Beddawi and Bourj-el-Barajneh, aiming to address the dual need for education and improved living conditions in the camps in Lebanon. Existing community centres will be used as hubs for learning, training and innovation. Young people living in the camps will collaborate with students in Lebanon and abroad to develop low-cost and environmentally friendly solutions to the local infrastructure challenges, in the context of carrying out necessary repairs and upgrades. Interconnecting centres in different camps allows sharing knowledge and know-how.

• **Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Mahmoud Halimeh originates from one of the camps in Beirut, and has extensive knowledge concerning the history and conditions of these camps. Mahmoud has been active with community work as well as working for several humanitarian organisations and NGOs. His specialisations include media and digitally mediated learning.

Helen Avery is from South Side Chicago, and the conditions of her own neighbourhoods have inspired an early interest in issues of segregation, community and urban planning. Helen is committed to community service and socially engaged research projects. Her current focus is on how higher education can contribute to build capacity both in response to the immediate refugee crisis, and to support equitable and sustainable post-conflict recovery and reconstruction strategies in the Middle East.

Nihal Halimeh is an architect graduated from the Lebanese American University, Byblos with Dean's honour list in Architecture, and has experience working for Raed Abillama Architects. She is currently a member of the non-governmental organization, ACTED/REACH that conducts assessments to inform humanitarian and development planning, in a project with the collaboration of FAO, to understand implications of the Syrian crisis on food and livelihood security of vulnerable host families. She has also developed a number of designs for infrastructure in the camps in relation to livelihoods, equity and social cohesion.