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**Title:** Refugee Camps in Jordan: From Temporary Shelter to Permanent Dwelling

**Abstract**

This research tackles the topics of spatial organization in refugee camps considering their transition from temporary emergency response to permanent dwellings, and studies the use of artificial intelligence to guide the transition away from “slummification” towards creating adequate low-income housing for refugees in Jordan. The transition from temporary to permanent urban form, its duration, driving factors, reasons and preferred outcomes regarding spatial organization and quality of the physical built environment, summarize the aims of this research.

**Introduction**

Refugee camps are defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as “temporary facilities built to provide immediate protection and assistance to people who have been forced to flee their homes due to war, persecution or violence” (UNHCR, 2021). They are deployed as a temporary solution for an urgent problem, and the duration for which they are usually inhabited ranges from a few years to multiple decades, according to UNHCR the average lifespan of a refugee camp is seventeen years (Moore, 2017), after which they organically evolve into permanent towns. Jordan, as the country housing the majority of refugees since 1947 (UNHCR, 2018), is an example of this phenomenon. However, since refugee camps are not considered formal settlements, their current conditions are reported to be inappropriate for living and do not address the needs of specific groups of people (Harrouk, 2021).

As time goes on, refugees’ needs change and become more complex; from basic shelter, food, and safety to more personal needs, careers, education and fulfilment (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2022) as they stay in their allotted camps for decades instead of a few months or years. One can argue that such structures remain obsolete in their “permanent impermanence” (Aburamadan, et al., 2020) and do not consider the human needs of the inhabitants over a prolonged period of time.

This transition from temporary to permanent urban form, its duration, driving factors, reasons and preferred outcomes regarding spatial organization and quality of the physical built environment, summarize the aims of this research.

**Emergency urbanism: Deploying instant cities and the ideal refugee camp**

Addressing the failure of refugee camps to provide the growing needs of inhabitants sparks questions about their shortcomings and how can they be remedied. It also brings up the conversation regarding what constitutes a successful or unsuccessful refugee camp. Such settlements are not treated as what they are (mass housing projects) due to the “temporary” label, and their inhabitants are under constant surveillance by authorities, prevented from traveling freely outside the camp borders (Dalal, et al., 2018).

In their work on refugee camps between Jordan and Germany, Dalal et al. discuss the “innovations” that promise better, more effective, and more humane emergency shelters using the examples of “Tempohomes” in Berlin as well as the Jordanian refugee camps of Zaatari and Azraq in search for an “ideal” refugee camp design (Dalal, et al., 2018). The article concludes that while refugees should be recognized as active urban actors to be included in the co-production of space and shelter, new planning approaches by authorities result in a shrinking of spaces of self-determination and self-provisioning of refugees.

Technocratic top-down planning of refugee camps is employed by authorities and humanitarian agencies to control and monitor large numbers of incoming refugees in a specified area. Through such arrangements (generic emergency manuals, guidelines, policies and agendas of host governments and other external pressures) humanitarian organisations seek the best possible pragmatic response to a specific crisis at a certain time (Dalal, et al., 2018).

Giorgio Agamben (1998, p. 78) described the refugee camp as the “the absolute, pure, impassable biopolitical space”, where control over life and death can be practised (Agamben, 1998). The excessive control and disciplinary power illustrated in a refugee camp are derived from the political otherness of refugees entering the body of the nation-state as unwanted, undesirable others (Agier, 2011). The perception of the camp as “other space” is strongly intertwined with the political notions of nationalism, and thus the camp becomes a spatial container for those who have “no right to have rights” (Arendt, 1951).

Studying the urbanisation of refugee camps showed how refugees’ agency dramatically reshaped the spatiality and physicality, as well as the socio-economy, of camps (Dalal, 2014) (Maqusi, 2021). Maqusi describes the socio-economic growth in Palestinian refugee camps as a reaction to overcome modes of “management and control” by host governments and the United Nations, often ensuring their own needs are met outside of the scope of authorities.

Sanyal (2014) explained how, despite the policing practices of the Lebanese government and the attempt to maintain the temporal nature of the camp, Palestinian refugees managed to urbanise it through the incremental practice of building under the tents and bribing policemen (Sanyal, 2014).

In the literature on camps, control is either perceived as a result of the sovereign nature of the humanitarian regime (Agier, 2002) or considered as an intrinsic part of the camp’s spatiality. In his lectures at the College du France, Foucault described how camps are planned on a disciplinary basis in the form of smaller towns (Foucault, 2007) by saying: “In the case of towns constructed in the form of the camp, we can say that the town is not thought of on the basis of the larger territory, but on the basis of a smaller, geometrical figure, which is a kind of architectural module, namely the square or rectangle, which is in turn subdivided into other squares or rectangles.” (Foucault, 2007, p. 31).

Furthermore, studies and investigations of planning in refugee camps mostly tend to question the architectural modules in an attempt to offer improved solutions (Kennedy, 2004) (Kennedy, 2008), or criticise the standardised humanitarian planning (Herz, 2007), whereas the ways in which power, control, and agency are present through refugee camp planning remain insufficiently explored. This can in turn be attributed to the label of “impermanence” and the clashing interests of governmental and humanitarian actors involved.

**Patterns in the built environment: modern social housing**

Social housing emerged from Modernity’s ideals of social equity and standardized totalitarian values. The concept of flowing public space and organized, designated quarters for living, working and leisure characterized iconic Modern housing projects in the 20th century from Le Corbusier’s Masterplan of “Ville Radieuse” to the infamous “Pruitt-Igoe” (Fiederer, 2017). Emerging from the ideals of an urban utopia, these projects rejected and challenged the traditional city and aimed to address pre-existing problems in housing and settlements, to accommodate the mass-industrialization movement as well as political and social reform of inhabitants (Bristol, 1991) (Wendl, 2013).

The totalitarian nature of Modern systems in the built environment was the overarching reason why such housing projects failed to achieve the aims they were designed for; the sense of ownership was lacking (as in the case of Pruitt-Igoe) as inhabitants were not in direct control, they were considered as merely end-users not as active participants in the decision-making process. This, along with other factors to be further analysed and studied in this research, is among the shortcomings which led to the failure of such projects (Coleman, 1985) (Jacobs, 1961) (Spicker, 1987).

In current times, dealing with the built environment as a solid product of design aimed to serve a certain function is considered only two-dimensional; as the built environment is a multi-faceted living growing entity that cannot be viewed in binary terms, but as a whole that influences, and is influenced by, multiple variables and often unmeasurable factors. The aim is not designing an ideal replicable utopian prototype to reform the status quo and ensure quality living for the inhabitants, but to adopt a bottom-up, human approach where the people are active participants and decision-makers (Aburamadan, et al., 2020).

Control and ownership of the built environment are defining factors of its sustainability; Habraken’s notion of the “open building” identifies that the lives of people are not rigid and so they must have control over the spaces they inhabit to adapt and personalize them according to their needs (Habraken, et al., 2014), a stark contrast to the standardized Modern housing developments.

**Research questions:**

1. What processes govern the transformation of a temporary refugee camp to a permanent low-income housing development?
2. What constitutes the levels of transformation or adaptation of the housing typologies (on the scale of the region, city, neighbourhood, building, and unit) and how do they respond to people’s needs?
3. What is the extent of the participatory approach or bottom-up planning involvement of relevant stakeholders in such emergency housing responses, and at what stage should this be integrated into the process?
4. How can we use past examples of transformation to optimize and shape an ideal future for low-income housing before it settles into a permanent informality?

**Research methods:**

1. Literature review of existing secondary sources concerning the establishment and development of refugee camps in Jordan and the region, as well as drawing comparisons to Modernist low-income social housing projects.
2. Case study analysis of refugee camps in Jordan specifically and the region generally using qualitative and quantitative methods (mapping, surveys, observations, interviews, open source statistical and spatial data, etc).

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