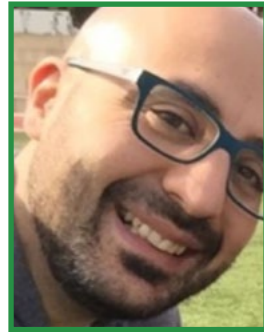


Urbanization in the Arab World: Between “Dubaiification” & “Campification”



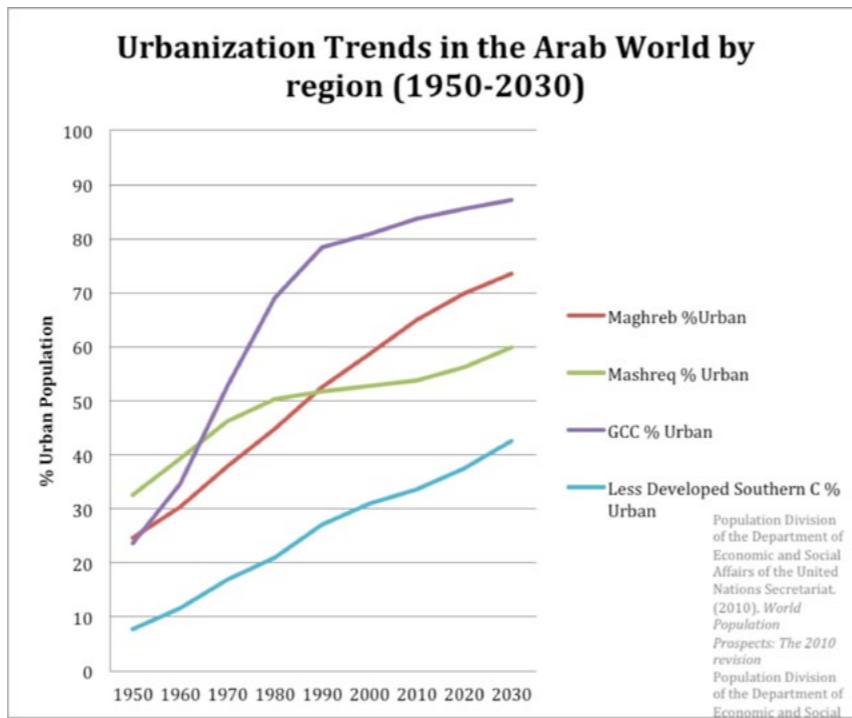
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people, global capitals and services, has become the trend in most GCC countries and beyond. In the Mashreq and Maghreb, urbanization has been a result of internal migration of people seeking better opportunities. Better education and health services and availability of jobs have pulled rural populations into the main cities of these countries as early as the postcolonial eras. The Mashreq, in particular, has witnessed waves of war refugees who throughout time have become based in and around major cities. Urbanization in the less developed southern nations is following similar dynamics of that in Maghreb and Mashreq but at a higher rate.

Except for the GCC city-states, Arab cities have fragile urban regimes. Basic urban services are often crumbling with the needs of growing populations. The urban infrastructure is deteriorating. Slums and informal settlements (the *ushwayyat*) have proliferated in almost all cities except for GCC city-states. **With the on-going**

Lebanon and the Arab World are urbanizing, and at a rapid rate. It is estimated that 56% of the population in the Arab World is currently in cities. In Lebanon, the rate is 87%. Urbanization differs between the various sub-regions of the Arab World. The *Mashreq*, which comprises Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, is mostly urban with proportion of urban population ranging from 43% in Egypt to 87% in Lebanon. The *Maghreb*, comprising Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania is urban except for the latter. With the exception of Djibouti, the *less developed southern countries* including Comoros, Sudan and Yemen are least urbanized with a range of 30-40% urban. *The Gulf Cooperation Council* (GCC) countries are a special case of mostly city-states where 80% of the population lives in urban areas. Understandably, the least urbanized countries are currently experiencing the highest urban growth rates.

The variation in urbanization levels among the four sub-regions in the Arab World means different dynamics in each of these sub-regions. The urbanization of the GCC city-states is predominantly the result of immigration and the product of the oil economy and the state-run over-development policies and projects. Dubaiification, meaning the uber gentrification of cities to become major nodes in the flow of



crises in some parts of the Arab world such as Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen, the informal settlements have become sites for refugees. Some Arab cities are becoming increasingly ‘campified’, resembling refugee camps. Manshiet Nasser in Cairo has around one million inhabitants living in poverty and precarious environmental conditions. Large parts of the suburbs of Beirut have become informal settlements housing refugees and the poor Lebanese.

Life in such places resembling camps has significant impact on the health of the inhabitants. Research at the American University of Beirut has shown that people living in informal settlements in Beirut had experienced poor health associated with inadequate housing quality. Moreover, inhabitants who were originally displaced and

living in informal settlements as refugees or IDPs were more likely to experience poor health than those who were not displaced. This showing the double impact of displacement and living in informal settlements.

Governments are trying to address the challenges of urban growth through urban upgrading and infrastructure projects. Channeling investments to secondary cities has been a policy direction in a number of Arab states aiming to divert growth from larger cities. So is the case in investing in urban corridor, which has been seen as way forward in urban policies.

Time will tell if the trend continues towards the ‘Dubaiification’ or ‘campification’ of the Arab city or perhaps a “mélange” of both.

