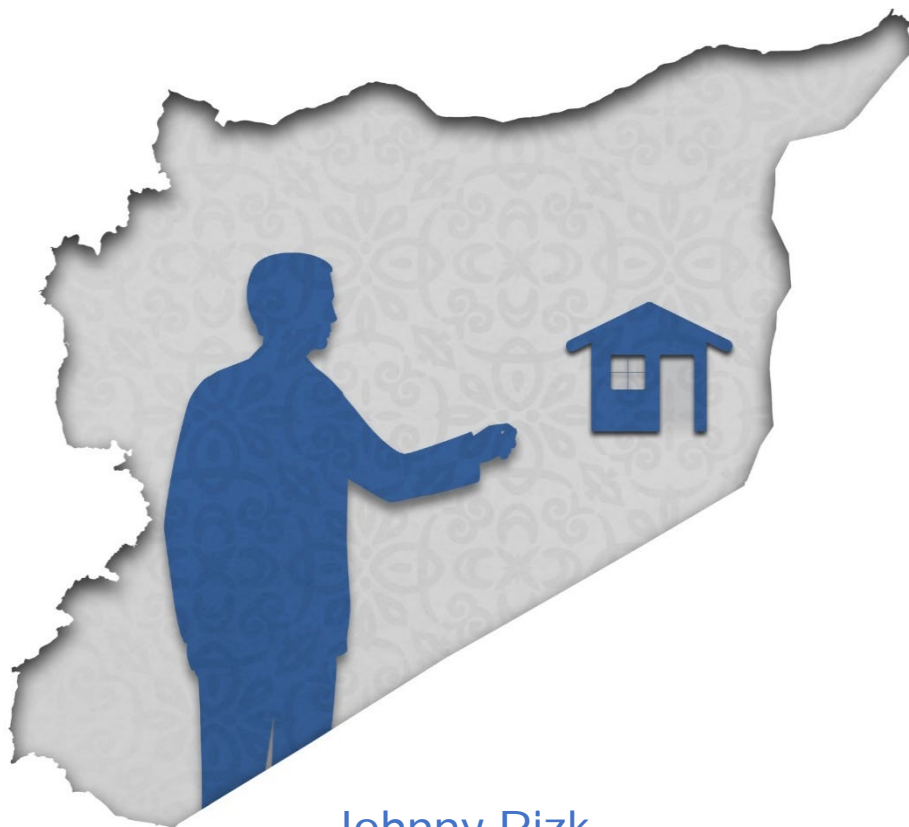




POLITECNICO
MILANO 1863

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN SYRIA POLICY AND REGULATION (?)

DAMASCUS AS A CASE STUDY



Johnny Rizk

POLITECNICO DI MILANO

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR MASTER'S DEGREE OF
URBAN PLANNING AND POLICY DESIGN

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“ *By wisdom, a house is built, and through understanding,
it is established; through knowledge, its rooms are filled
with rare and beautiful treasures.* **”**

The Old Testament, Proverbs 24:3-4

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, this research is dedicated to my country Syria that suffered from different types of devastation, hoping that this work would push the post-war reconstruction forward and would help to build a better future. Second, thanks to all of those who were supportive to have this work done whether family, friends, or colleagues, from Italy, Syria, and everywhere else. I wish to show my gratitude to professors Stefania Sabatinelli and Massimo Bricocoli who were instrumental in defining the path of my research with all passion and appreciation, for this, I am extremely grateful. Finally, special regards to Politecnico di Milano for such a great opportunity.

ABSTRACT

The thesis investigates the state of the art of housing in Syria, and specifically the access to affordable housing over the past five decades. It illustrates the overall housing system presenting the main issues related to the housing question and the orientations in housing policies. A main focus of the research is on the role of informal settlements in addressing the growing demand for affordable housing in Syria before and during the recent war and especially in larger urban areas. Moreover, the research illustrates various housing projects that were developed during the studied period, shedding light on the characteristics of these projects and their impact on the cities.

The city of Damascus has been selected as a case study with a specific focus on the housing crisis and informality. Moreover, some more recent phenomena related to housing development, illegal settlements and consistent new investments have been investigated as relevant for an understanding of the housing question in Syria in present times.

Keywords: Syria, Damascus, Housing, Affordable housing, housing policies, housing regulations, Housing Crisis, Informal Settlements, Syrian war, Public and Private sectors.

Nel presente lavoro di tesi viene investigato lo stato dell'arte dell'abitare in Siria, e nello specifico la disponibilità di alloggi a costi accessibili negli ultimi cinquant'anni. In particolare, viene illustrato il sistema abitativo generale, presentando le principali problematiche relative alla domanda abitativa e agli orientamenti nelle politiche abitative. Un'attenzione particolare è rivolta al ruolo degli insediamenti informali nell'affrontare la crescente domanda di alloggi a costi accessibili in Siria prima e durante la recente guerra, soprattutto nelle aree urbane più grandi. Inoltre, questa ricerca illustra vari progetti abitativi che sono stati sviluppati durante il periodo preso in considerazione, facendo luce sulle caratteristiche di questi progetti e sul loro impatto sulle città.

La città di Damasco è stata selezionata come caso di studio, con particolare attenzione alla crisi abitativa e all'informalità. Inoltre sono stati analizzati alcuni fenomeni più recenti, legati allo sviluppo abitativo, agli insediamenti illegali e a nuovi consistenti investimenti, che possono essere rilevanti per la comprensione della domanda abitativa in Siria ai giorni nostri.

Parole chiave: Siria, Damasco, Casa, Casa a costi accessibili, politiche abitative, regolamenti abitativi, crisi abitativa, insediamenti informali, guerra siriana, settore pubblico e privato.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Housing is a very relevant dimension in the domain of urban planning and policy design. Housing policies and projects have a direct relation to human's life, as housing affects the physical, cultural, and even psychological dimensions in people's life. The modern explanation of the term housing expresses a direct connection to the individual access to security, safety, and self-identity. At the same time, it is relevant as public economy indicator, because it has an important relationship and a significant role in the development process.

The thesis investigates the affordable housing situation in Syria, concerning the housing framework and typology, distinguishing the various housing aspects in the cities and highlighting their features and role in people's lives, following the developments of housing in Syria in the past five decades, ending up with a massive affordable housing shortage on the national level. The research aims to investigate the reasons behind this shortage, by presenting the main actors involved, the housing suppliers, decision-makers, and analyzing the mechanisms that contributed to this shortage. The research as well illustrates different social housing projects that were implemented by different actors among the Syrian provinces and present their advantages and disadvantages.

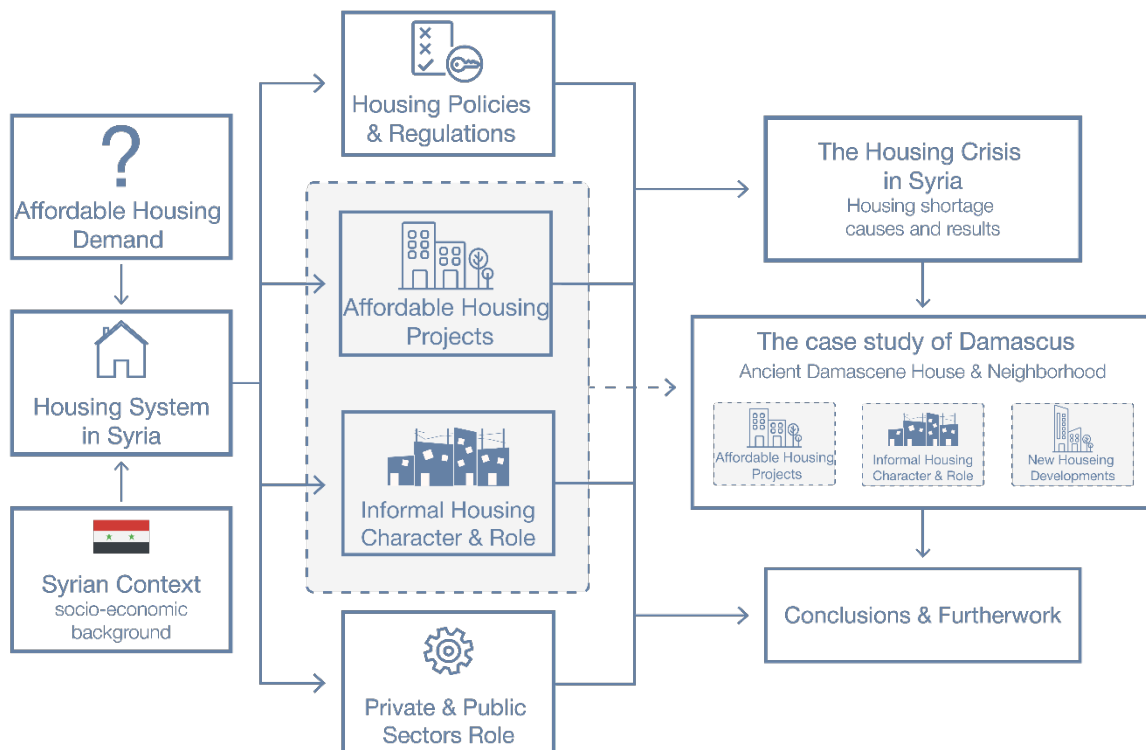
Moreover, the research focuses on the role of informal settlements in the provision of housing and, specifically, of affordable housing. Research work has been conducted in order to identify the reasons and drivers of such a phenomenon, to outline the profile of the inhabitants who live in informal housing, figuring their socio-economic conditions. The research compares informal settlements and the regular planned areas presenting various data and pieces of information related to the size, the inhabitants' features, typology, and other socio-economic aspects. Shedding the light on the reasons that make these areas to be considered as an adequate destination and lead people to self-housing approach is relevant in order to identify the triggering factors of such a tendency. Understanding the importance of the dynamics in urban informality, and how its mechanisms operate, in order to know the kind of housing these phenomena provide has also been a key interest in the research. It appears in fact to be relevant that the governmental agencies learn from some key factors of the informal sector and self-built housing in order to improve the provision of housing and combining housing quantity with affordability. This could help to reach an integrated design and to combine the quality of formal housing with the quantities produced by the informal sector.

Housing policies and regulations have played a significant role, as housing factors determinants take them as the basis to lay on in every action. The thesis debates the role that they have played for the past five decades. It as well debates various housing rules and laws that have been enacted and presents the goals they intended to achieve and their actual outcomes, on both the national and the local level.

The research focuses as well on Damascus, the Syrian capital, illustrating housing development in its different neighborhoods. It gives a brief introduction on the history of the city and its extraordinary role in hosting internal and external migrants before and after the Syrian war. On the other hand, Damascus experienced tremendous growth during the second half of the 20th century, with its population estimated to have increased more than tenfold, as the city's growth rate is higher than that of the country as a whole. The research takes an overview of the new housing projects and the future housing projects and their relationship with the city from both the historical and socio-economic points of view.

Structure and methodology

This thesis will be organized as follows: chapter 2 presents general information about population, economy, and the hierarchy of the Syrian provinces and the local administrative units. Chapter 3 explains the policies and the regulation related to the property rights and land cadastral system in Syria. Chapter 4 illustrates the housing typologies and system, presenting the housing actors and suppliers, with a special focus on the affordable housing system and the role of the informal settlements. Chapter 5 illustrates figures that show the impact of the population growth and internal migration on the housing sector, the housing market structure in Syria and the role of the realtors and real-estate offices in the housing crisis, as well as the various laws and rules that had an effect on the housing sector; lastly, the chapter deepens the impact of the war on the housing sector. Chapter 6 presents a historical overview on the city of Damascus along with the urban development of the city's districts; it presents the affordable housing projects that were developed as well as the informal settlements' characteristics and size as well as the new projects developed in the city. Finally, chapter 7 draws some conclusions, reflects on the limitations of the research and suggests further research of investigation.



2. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SYRIAN CONTEXT

Syria is considered to be one of the 15 nations that comprise the so-called cradle of civilization, plus it is the home to two of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, Damascus and Aleppo. It is as well a land of contrasts, since the cool breezes come in from the west of the Mediterranean Sea, while hot, dry winds blow across the desert that composes two-thirds of the country. Across the country, from the north to south there are the mountain ranges that create a natural division between the coastal plain and the steppe of the interior.

The western band of Syria, where its population live, is less than 100 km wide and has the Mediterranean climate. To the east is a range of limestone mountain called the Mountain of Nusayriya, that is cool in summer, and snow-covered in winter. Farther to the east from Nusayriya mountains, there is another range of dry mountains, while between those two ranges there is a drier but still fertile valley called "Sahel al-Ghab" the Ghab Depression, which was filled with marshes until modern times. The narrow strip of land along the eastern slopes of the coastal mountain is where the largest cities are, and the climate varies quite a bit from the north to the south. For instance, the average of rainfall in Aleppo in the north is about 47 cm per year, but in Damascus, farther to the south is only 22.8 cm. The reason for the drier climate around Damascus is the Anti-Lebanon Mountains. The triangle of land northeast of the Euphrates and Khabur Rivers is known by "Al-Jazirah" and it is not as dry as the central desert. Although most of the central and southern desert is 0.8 km or more above the sea level, Al-Jazirah's altitude is around 360 m. this area was part of ancient Mesopotamia.

Along the coast and the coastal mountains, grapevines and pine, olive, and fruit trees are abundant. The cities east of the coastal range have green belts around them where most of their fruit and vegetables have traditionally been grown. This is changing, though, with a fluctuating population. Larger cities now import most of their produce from rural areas farther away. Around Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo, there are olive, locust, maple, fig, and palm, and also many grapevines.

Syria borders Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east and southeast, Jordan to the south, and by Lebanon and Palestine to the southwest. The country somewhat is shaped like a triangle with irregular sides, covering about 185,000 square kilometers. It has a strategic location that increases its historical value to both Middle Eastern and Western civilizations despite of the proportion of its size, and its short coastline, which stretches for about 180 km along the Mediterranean Sea between the countries of Turkey and Lebanon. Sandy bays dent the shore, alternating with rocky headlands and low cliffs (Figure 2-1).

FIGURE 2-1 SYRIA ARAB REPUBLIC AND ITS POLITICAL BOUNDARIES (EDITED BY THE AUTHOR)



The country also comprises the Mediterranean island Arwad, (Figure 2-2). It belongs to the province of Tartus and it is located just a few kilometers off the coast. This was an independent kingdom called Aradus in the days of Phoenicians and contains many historic structures as well as a marina. Its inhabitants depend on fishing for their livelihoods.

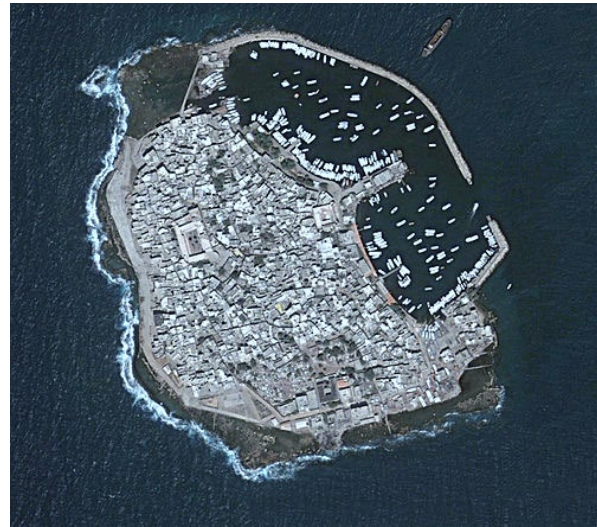


FIGURE 2-2 ARWAD ISLAND IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA
(PHOTO BY COURTESY NASA/JPL-CALTECH)

The Syrian capital is Damascus (Dimashq), on the Barada River, known as the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, located in an oasis at the foot of the Mount Qasiyun, its most famous landmarks is the Omayyad Mosque, it constructed in 705 bc. Aleppo is also an ancient city, with the earliest settlements dating from about seven thousand years ago, however modern Aleppo is a commercial and industrial center. Homs, a heavy industry center, and Latakia, the country's main port on the Mediterranean Sea.

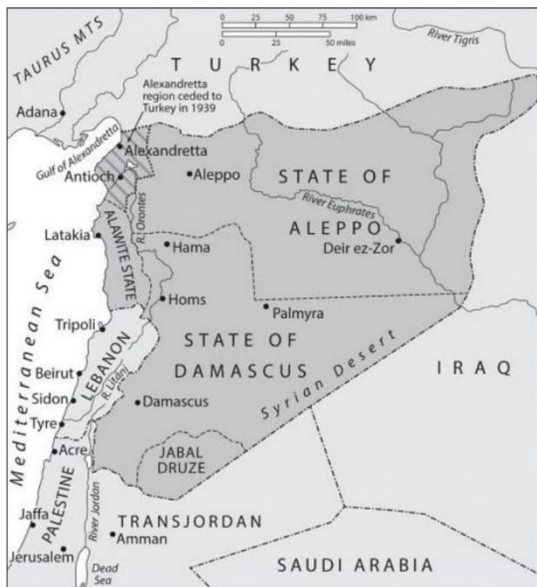


FIGURE 2-3 FRENCH MANDATE SYRIA
(REILLY 2018)

In 1920, France and Britain determined the boundaries for what was Syria and what was not. In the year that followed France repeatedly adjusted the new country's political frontier, sometimes shrinking them and sometimes expanding them according to political and colonial expediency (Figure 2-3). After Syria gained its independence from the French mandate in 1946, political life in the country was unstable, owing in large measure to intense friction between the country's social, religious, and political groups (Reilly 2018).

However, the present area does not coincide with ancient Syria, which was the strip of fertile land lying between the eastern Mediterranean coast and the desert of northern Arabia. Historically, the great Syria or as in Arabic known by *Bilad Al-Shaam*, “the land of Shaam” or it might be “the town of Shaam”. *Shaam* stretches along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea (Figure 2-4). Today’s *Bilad Al-Shaam* or what is known as greater Syria, is divided between Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. The lines on the recent map which give these modern countries their political frontiers were drawn in the twentieth century.

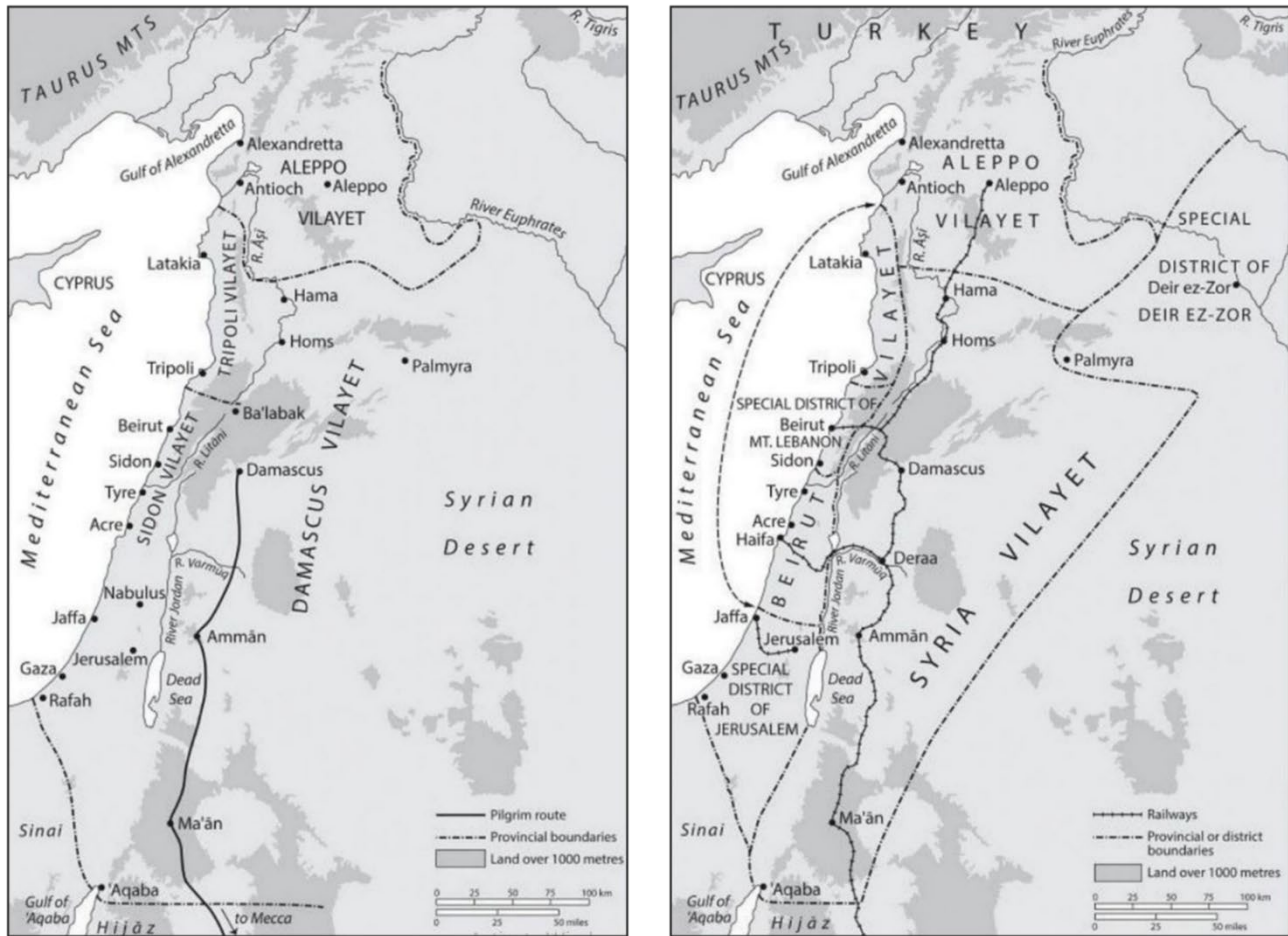


FIGURE 2-4 GREAT SYRIA WITH ADMINISTRATION DIVISION BETWEEN (1800-1914).
 (REILLY 2018)

Glance on the recent ongoing war

The ongoing Syrian war has started in 2011; it is hard to define its nature, but the consequences are evidently devastating. A decade of war over land's control has expanded people's needs. People whose physical security, basic rights, dignity, living conditions or livelihoods are threatened or have been disrupted, and whose current level of access to basic services, goods and protection are inadequate to re-establish normal living conditions within their accustomed means. Moreover, the demand for houses has risen, because the war has destroyed entire neighborhoods including thousands of houses displacing their residents who left either to a safer city in Syria or they just totally left the country (Figure 2-5). The war as well has torn down landmarks, historical sites, and damaged ancient cities such as the Old City of Damascus and Aleppo, as well as the cities that vanished like Palmyra.

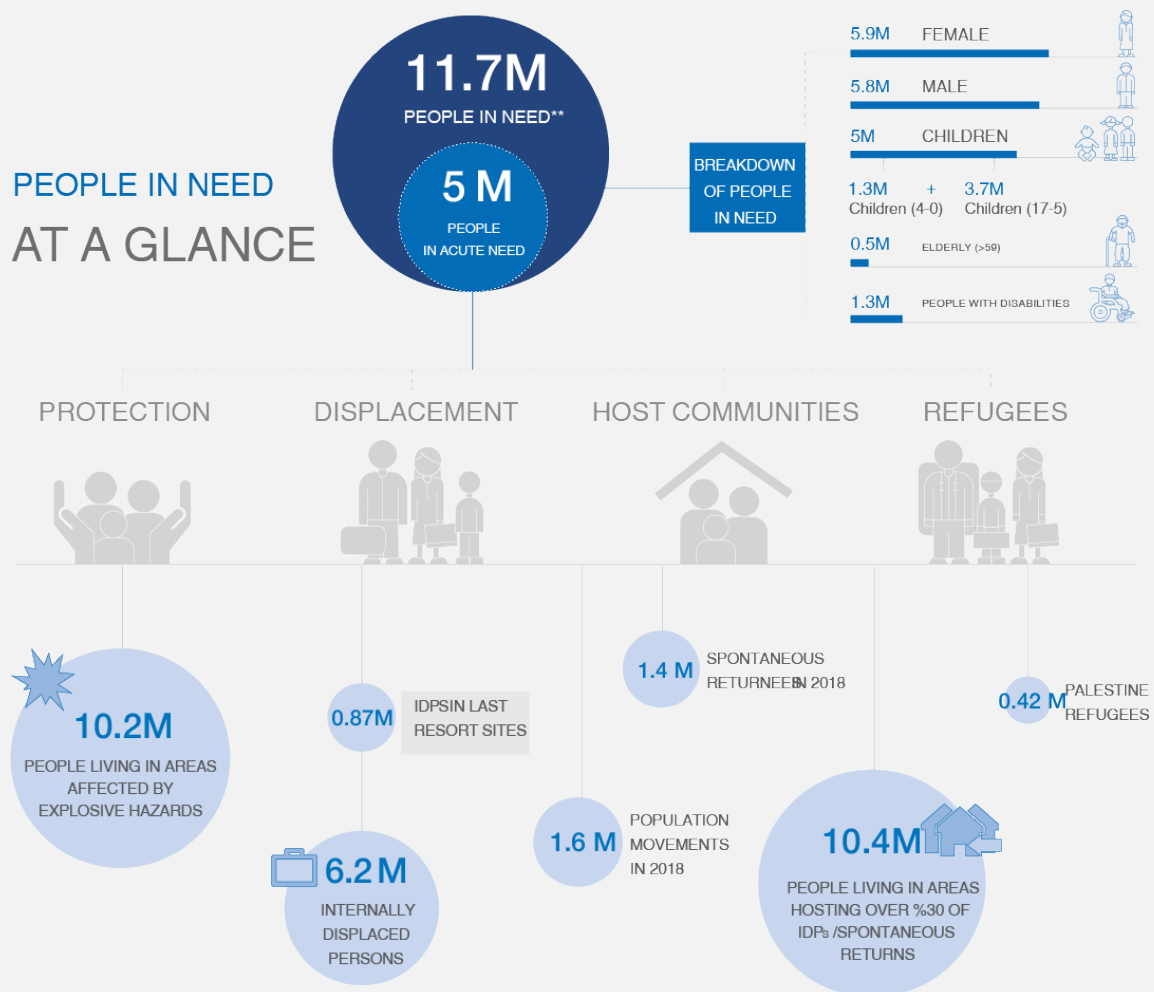


FIGURE 2-5 PEOPLE IN NEED (HNO SYRIA 2019)

The last decade Syria has become one of the most talked-about places on the earth. For ten years, the country has been locked in an enormous brutal war, that claimed the lives of over 300,000 Syrians and forced millions more to run out of the country looking for peace, and a safe-shelter, thus creating the largest global humanitarian crisis since the end of the Second World War. Also, enormous damages in the cities and infrastructures were caused. The war has left the country in a fragmented state with a constantly shifting network of battles and alliances, destroying neighborhoods and forcing people to flee their houses, making the Syrians pay the cost of such political power-games over their land. Syria is not a rich country, most of its inhabitant tend to be in the low or middle class, due to the war, most of the middle class has undergone impoverishment, raising the gap between the rich who become way richer and the poor who fell well below the poverty line.

FIGURE 2-6 THE DESTROYED NEIGHBORHOOD OF KHALIDIYA IN THE OLD CITY OF HOMS, SYRIA (UNHCR/ANDREW MCCONNELL)



PROVINCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM IN SYRIA

Since the 1960s the political development in Syria has set a strict centralized planning and administration system. The government institutional structure remains dependent and strongly related to a small-group of political decision-makers in the central government in terms of management and plan-making of the cities. No matter how small the provincial project was, to put it in the executive phase, the city council should get authorization from the central government in the capital Damascus. Thus, one of the main problems was the hierarchical organization of the governmental institutions, as regardless to the size of the city whether, in term of population, geographical or strategical importance city's council has no power to implement any development plan or any other kind of city's projects without an agreement with the upper level in the administration pyramid (Sarrouh 2003).

Local Governance System: Syria (POGAR n.d.)

The Syrian government includes four levels of sub-government authority below the national level.

Provinces:

- There are 14 provinces, including the autonomous city of Damascus, that are headed by governors appointed by the Ministry of Interior.
- These governors report directly to the president.
- The governors control provincial government offices as well as the local offices of ministries and state-owned enterprises.

Below the provinces, there are, in descending order of authority, **districts**, **counties**, and **villages**.

- Locally elected administrative councils administer these governments, though in practice they remain highly dependent on central leadership.
- All government expenditures are included in one national budget produced by the Ministry of Finance.
- Local governments receive all operating funds from the central government and any excess revenues collected are returned to the national treasury.
- They report intermittently to the governor and are administered by the governorate's technical services administration.

Local Government Act of 2011

Legislative Decree 107

The Article 2 in the local government law aims firstly; to apply decentralization approach, as well as to increase the authority of the local administrator units in order to improve the economic, social, culture, and urban situation in the unit. Secondly, to find administrator units with ability to plan, implement, and make development plans for the local society, and execute its special projects... Therefore, make it the direct responsible of the services, economic, and other matters that important for the inhabitants as the central government rule is focused on planning, legislation, organization, and the implementation of the big projects that the local authorities are unable to implement (law 107 2011). The Article 7 explained the hierarchy of the administrator units that mainly are Province, City, Town, and Municipality (Figure 2-7).

yet, the law illustrates a sufficient way to direct the administrator matters in the Syrian town and cities, but the lack of experience on one hand and the corrupted people in charge make it hard to achieve the balance that the law 107 aims to in the first place. However, it does not hold the matter of housing specifically, but it helps to understand the methodology that has been taken to develop and improve the lifestyle between the different towns and cities in Syria.

FIGURE 2-7 LOCAL ADMINISTRATION LEVELS ACCORDING THE LEGESTLATION DECREE 107 (SCHEME BY THE AUTHOR)

LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR HIERARCHY

Article 13

Council members' number determined by:

Province council: 50-100 members

1 member / 10000 people.

City council: 25-50 members

1 member / 4000 people

Town council: 10-25 members

1 member / 2000 people

Municipality council:

10 members

01

PROVINCE

- * Ask the central and the local government to create the long term vision of the province
- * Cooperate with other local units and the central government to ensure the implementation of the national plan

02

CITY

- * could not divide or organize lands without the approval of the executive office of the local authority
- * any authority should not implement or make changes without approval

03

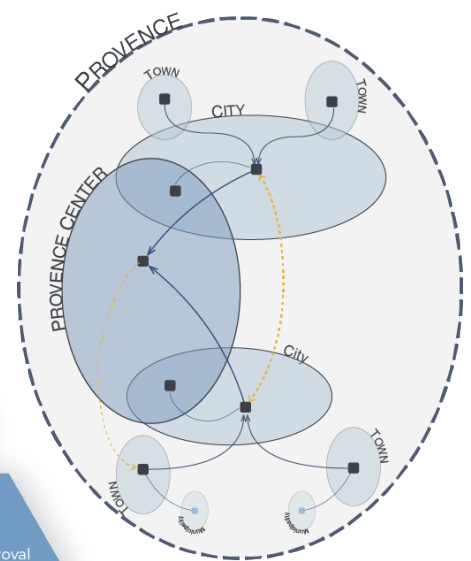
TOWN

- * create the essential and the special procedures to give the construction recognition for buildings

04

MUNICIPALITY

- the smallest unit and it divided into neighbourhoods



The Relationship within the province

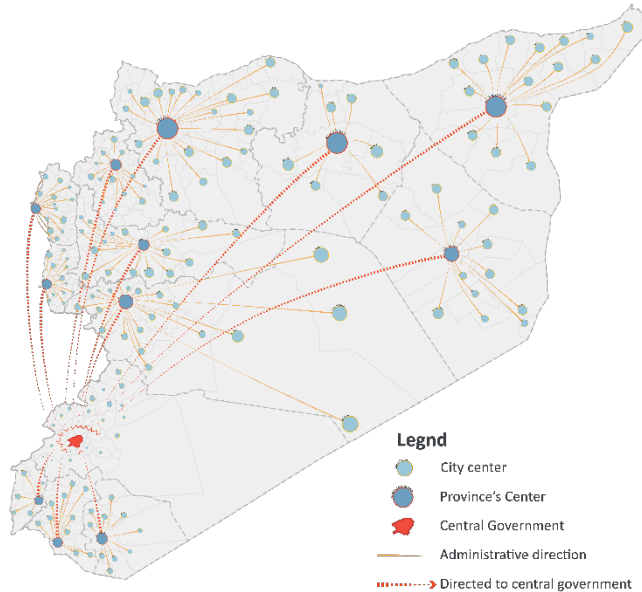


FIGURE 2-8 MAP OF THE ADMINISTRATION PROVINCES IN SYRIAN
(SCHEME BY THE AUTHOR)

Elections occur for governorate councils of 14 provinces, 95 city-councils, 231 town-councils, and 181 village-councils. Though, public service contributes to the centralization of government decision-making. Low experience in administration, leading and most importantly planning and policymaking is major in most of those councils usually lead to low efficiency especially on the local and low-level. Thus, most governmental operations tend to be very top-down in their approach.

Geographically, Syria's four traditional regions are the coastal strip, the mountains, the cultivated steppe, and the desert steppe. On the coast, the fertile alluvial plains are intensively cultivated in both summer and winter. The region is the site of Syria's two principal ports of Latakia and Tartous. Syrian population lives in cities, that have many modern elements side-by-side older neighborhoods with the old narrow streets that been built in respect of the human scale. Many buildings have not changed in hundreds of years the old cities of Damascus, Aleppo, Palmyra and Homs.

Urban settlements, ten centuries of Greek and Roman rule left an urban mark still visible in the towns of Latakia, Palmyra, and Bosra Al-Sham (ancient Bosra). Following a period of rapid urbanization in the 1950s and '1960s, rural-to-urban migration _that will discuss furthermore_ abated somewhat. Nevertheless, disparities between rural and urban areas, albeit reduced on several fronts, persisted into the 21st century and contributed to Syrians' continued movement from rural to urban areas.

The national capital of Syria is Damascus, situated in the southeast on the banks of the Barada River. The city not only the national headquarters of government and the diplomatic community but also the main center of education, culture, and industry. In addition, all decisions and plans for all other Syrian's Cities take a place at it, since it has all ministries, governmental institutions, and the parliament. Damascus was a major city in the past largely because of its location in the crossroads of Africa, Europe, and Asia.

Over the years it has been controlled by several empires including the Roman, Byzantine, Hellenistic, and Islamic empires. What is left today symbolizes the different cultures and how they impacted the city through the years. The old city and some of the new city still reflect Roman city planning, in that its streets are only either North-South or East-West. Much of what the Islamic empire constructed hasn't lasted, while Ottoman influences are still noticeably seen. The most notable structure left standing is the Umayyad Mosque in the Old City (Figure 2-9).



FIGURE 2-9 THE ANCIENT CITY OF DAMASCUS (SOURCE: © DAMPRESS.NET)

The second most important city is Aleppo, it is located between the Orontes and Euphrates rivers, it is the largest city, in term of trade and light-industry center. The city is served by roads and unused railroads and it is surrounded by an area that specializes in the production of sheep for market in Damascus and other countries. On the Mediterranean Sea located the main port of Syria in Latakia. The city characterized by its rich agricultural region and contains some other industry as well. Because of its seaside location, the city is a domestic-tourist center.

POPULATION STRUCTURE

Syrian population has faced a rapid increase during the 1960s, due to the high birth rate and the low mortality rate (Winckler 1998). Thus, the Syrian society age structure could be easily explained because of the rapid growth due to natural increase, especially the continuing high proportion of young people. The median age was 22.3 in the year 2012 (Table 2-1). However, the capacity of the government to provide houses for the increasing number household was not sufficient (Glefand 2013).

Age structure	1960	1980	2000	2004
Age group: under 15 years	46.3%	49.3%	40.5%	38.6%
Age group: 65 years and over	4.8%	4.4%	3.1%	3.2%

TABLE 2-1 AGE STRUCTURE IN SYRIA BETWEEN 1960 AND 2004
(GLEFAND 2013)

However, the population policies between 1950 and 1970 were in favor of increasing the population growth, according to a legislation decree announced in the year 1952 there was a reward for families with more than 12 children, in addition to other regulations and norms that encouraged childbearing (Al Zayed, Seam and Yusuf 2014).

Years	Birth average	Mortality average	Annual Growth average
1960 – 1970	48000	15300	32800
1970 – 1981	39000	8100	33500
1981 – 1994	33000	6000	23000
1995 – 2000	33000	3200	27000
2000 – 2010	34900	3800	24500

TABLE 2-2 ANNUAL GROWTH RATE IN SYRIA BETWEEN 1970 – 2010
(AL ZAYED, SEAM AND YUSUF 2014)

After the population census of 1970, the recognition of the overpopulation issues started to appear and negatively affected the socio-economic development, so the government activated policies and regulations to control the population growth, as well as they have launched many programs in order to increase the awareness of the families on the consequences of this issue (Al Zayed, Seam and Yusuf 2014).

Figure 2-10 illustrates the annual population growth in the Syrian provinces between the years 1981 and 2010. The eventual reduction in the population growth was due to the first five-year plan of 1981 – 1985, that involved the indicator of population growth and its relationship with education, healthcare and services.

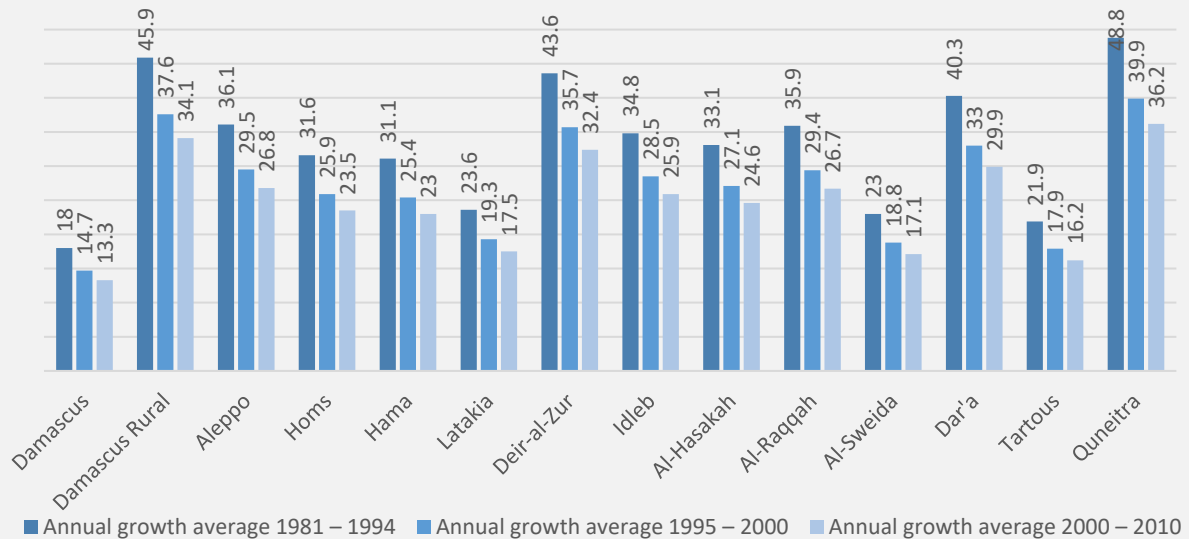


FIGURE 2-10 ANNUAL GROWTH AVERAGE OF THE SYRIAN PROVINCES BETWEEN 1981 – 2010
 (AL ZAYED, SEAM AND YUSUF 2014)

Moreover, the costs of housing must have some effect on the population growth in large section of population. If housing costs absorb an undue proportion of the income, the family is compelled to economize its expenditure in other direction. However, the relationship between population and housing has many sides. On one hand, the size of population and in particular the number of households, determines the demand of houses. On the other hand, it influences young people’s opportunities to leave the parental home, marry or cohabit, and have children. To sum up, due to the high expenditure and especially the expenses of houses prices and the lack of affordable houses has a big proportion in the equation of population decline, even more than the policies implemented by the government to control the population growth.

THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Brief history

Socialism has been the official economic policy in the country since 1963. Since then the trend has been toward socialist transformation and industrialization. Small private businesses and cooperatives are still in operation, and the retail trade is still part of the private sector, despite competition from consumer cooperatives in the large cities. The government controls the most vital sectors of the country's economy and regulates private business.

The government encourages private savings by paying higher rates of interest on deposits and by guaranteeing investment by citizens of other Arab countries. There are severe restrictions on all luxury imports. At the same time, strenuous efforts are made to mobilize economic potential, combat underemployment, and discourage emigration. Despite modest steps toward privatization since 1990, the Syrian government has been largely hesitant to pursue economic liberalization, wary of its potential to endanger political stability

Syria's economy is dominated by three main sectors: agriculture with 25%, industry with 31%, and services with 44%. These sectors represent 70% of the country GDP (Table 2-3). As many other developing countries, Syria was highly affected by the debt crisis of the 1980s, the Syrian government was unable to sustain the flow of benefit to the country and the main economic sectors have been affected accordingly. Overall, that led to highly continuous reduction of GDP.

Sector	Percentage
Agriculture	25 per cent
Industry	31 per cent
Services (wholesale and general trade, transport, building and construction, etc)	44 per cent

TABLE 2-3 THE MAIN SECTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SYRIA'S GDP IN 2004 (AL-KHALAF 2014)

Syrian economy is generally characterized as highly centralized and the public sector controls it totally. 'Economic independence' was the case prior to 1980 when Syria tried to achieve it through an extensive import-substitution industrialization (ISI) program.

Public sector took exclusive control of the foreign trade, the foreign investments were almost totally restricted in the exception for a small number of public enterprises, and most of the local production was geared towards satisfying local demand. However, Syria failed to take ISI to the level of an export-oriented program. A segment of the Syrian industry managed to break out and successfully penetrate East European and former USSR markets, thanks to the special relations Syria had with those countries, during the 1980s and to their highly protected markets. Many of the exports were manufactured goods with significant growth potential. However, the dismantling of the former USSR broke this peculiar economic relation. (El Laithy and Abu-Ismaïl 2005).

Despite the socialism style of government, urban and region development in Syria did not follow a general plan. For many years, the major cities were left without any clear urbanization plan or a land use framework that could adapt economic changes or growth. For a long period after the 1970s government started to allocate lands for urban projects to develop new areas, people started to subscribe for one or two decades to finance their development through various associations, ultimately acquiring an apartment. Those projects were mainly executed by public authority or military enterprise and they faced many delays and quality problems.

In the 1990s some improvements were observed, urban and regional development plans have emerged. However, the situation went down in the 2000s. A major wave of rural-urban migration occurred over the country especially in the years 2003 – 2004. The second wave was when 1.5 million Iraqis fled to Syria and it expanded the development of the informal settlements.

A major report, published in 2007 by the UNDP, was called the first national prospective report for the Syrian 2025 program. The report indicated the main challenges facing urban and regional development It suggested as well to divide Syria into six regions, each with its own comprehensive socio-economic development characteristics. The report as well assessed the urban socio-economic problems of the main cities. Overall the lack of lands due to the development of the informal settlements and as a consequence of the competition over land for urban development were identified as major governmental and political economy problems (Aita, ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT OF URBAN ISSUES FOR RECONSTRUCTION IN SYRIA 2007).

Income and consumer prices

Saving money through working years is usually important to get a house at a certain age and after a certain period of working time. Low wages and low incomes in Syria are the two important issues to clog the possibilities of money-saving in view of getting a house or a small flat in Syria. Though the main elements to build it, like steel, wood, and other goods have been sold locally, they still follow the global prices, more often the local currency exchange rate for U.S-Dollar, with no respect to the fact that the Syrian employees' salary that is paid in Syrian Pound remain the same with no raise.

For instance, the average GDP per capita in the 50 years before the war was at the maximum rate of SYP 72,000 which is equal to \$1300, and for the minimum rate of SYP 28,000 which equal to \$500. At the same time, the rents were in the minimum rate of \$100, and it kept increasing until it reached the highest rents cost between the years 2008 – 2011 that was \$250. However, the rise in the wages and GDP per capita did not help housing ownership, nor the money-saving due to the loss exchange value to other currency. That is what made the idea of homeownership even harder in both urban and informal settlements. Eventually, the process of houses' price valuation usually deals with respect of the exchange rate of the U.S-Dollar, although, the rest of the deal's elements is looked after locally.

Table 2-4 shows the main economic indicators in the five years before the war started in 2011; the consumer prices went higher than the growth of the GDP, especially in the year 2008 due to the global economic crisis. According to the Economic Intelligence Unit, Syria's real GDP growth was expected to rise to 3.9 % in 2010 and then 4.2 % in 2011; after experiencing a dip in 2009 (Haddad 2011).

Main Economic Indicators	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Nominal GDP (\$/month)	28.210	32.780	40.376	49.193	49.442	56.180	63.072
Real GDP growth (%)	6.2	5.0	5.7	4.3	3.0	3.9	4.2
Consumer price inflation (avg. %)	7.2	10	3.9	15.7	2.6	7.1	6.2
Unemployment (avg. %)	8.0	8.3	8.4	8.6	9.2	9.7	9.4

TABLE 2-4 SOME OF THE MAIN ECONOMIC INDICATORS (HADDAD 2011)
DATA SOURCE ECONOMIC INTELLIGENCE UNIT

Generally, the disproportion between high prices of houses and average wages is not just due to the prices of construction, but also because of the unreasonable prices of lands, making the market prices of the houses triple than their construction cost. Moreover, the economic recession and the scarcity of investments had a noticeable effect on the housing market as it became a safe way of saving and speculating; as a consequence, the housing market experienced price inflation (Hadad 2018).

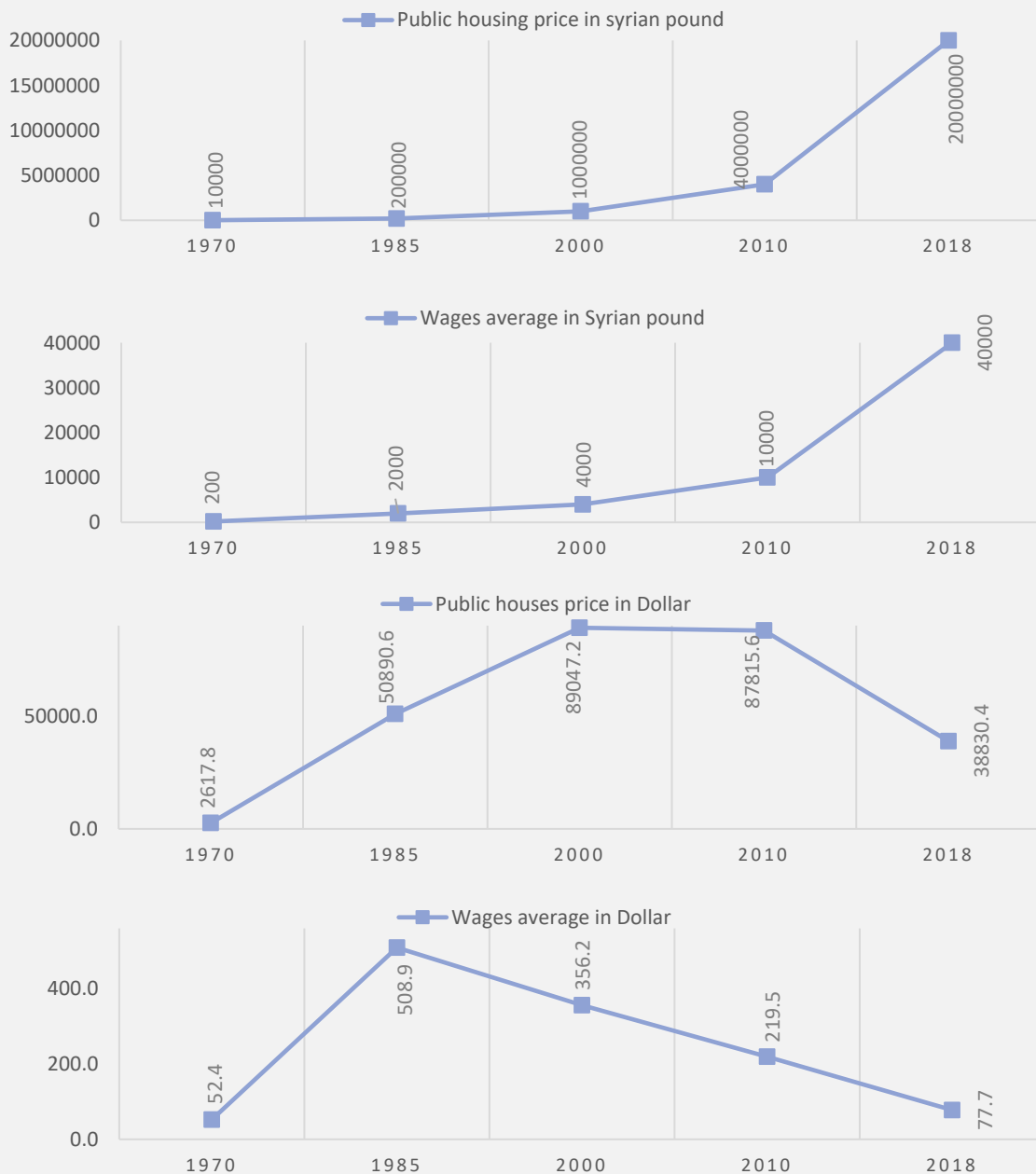


FIGURE 2-11 THE AVERAGE PRICES OF HOUSES AND WAGES IN SYRIAN POUND AND DOLLAR BETWEEN THE YEARS (1970 - 2018)

P.S: THE FIGURES RESPECT THE CHANGES OF TWO CURRENCIES OVERTIME, [HTTPS://FXTOP.COM/](https://fxtop.com/)

The effect of the war on the Syrian economy

During the French mandate (1923 – 1946), a new system for land recognition and registration was established in all provinces. However, those only covered the transactions that occurred within the statutory system, it did not cover the informal transactions of land or properties. Moreover, the process of digitalization that started in 2010 was only for new records, so it did not include transactions that happened before 2010. Examples include the use of “*tapu*” a documents to represent ownership rights over land; the use of witness testimony where documents were lost; and the role of “*Shari’a Courts*” to effect the transfer of property rights.

Mainly, Syrian land is divided into two categories, state lands 62% and private lands 38%. The simple division of land reflects the ownership of the asset, but not the different types of access and use rights, based on the historical tenure patterns and various legal system (Forni 2001). Even before the crisis, over half of Syrian population lived in urban areas, and approximately one-third of the population lived in informal settlements. For instance, 40-50 per cent of Homs or Damascus inhabitants lived in informal settlements (Unruh 2016). The informal settlements in Syria usually, have some services like electricity, sewer system, and some public transportation, but they have limited official recognition and registration. The main issue related to these settlements is the lack of security of tenures (cunial 2016).

During the war, the economy has suffered due to the enormous destruction throughout the country. GDP faced a major decrease between the years 2010 and 2016 from 60.2 billion dollars to 12.4 billion dollars respectfully. In addition, the main structure of the Syrian economy has changed as a result of the war (Central Bureau Of Statistics 2019).

The main resources, including the foreign currency reserves and fiscal revenue, were highly reduced through the wartime. The conflict was as well responsible for increasing the poverty rate over all the provinces, though it varied by region based on the damage and the conflict size. For instance, the one that witnessed intense conflict and had higher historical rates of poverty suffered the most. Thus, people in Raqqa were the poorest, with almost 91.6% of its inhabitant living below the poverty line, while in Deir al-Zur, and Rif-Damascus also suffered from overall poverty (Daher 2018).

At the same time, new way of economic investment appeared during the war in many cities, due to the extreme destruction in cities such as Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Rif-Damascus, that causes kind of unbalanced economic situation because of the transfer of companies and industries to safer areas, where public and private investment also grew significantly. The province of Sweida, for instance, benefited from a great share of investments throughout the years of the war because of its relative safe position and proximity to the capital Damascus (Daher 2018).

The general economic recession and the limited investment prospects have turned the real estate market and the housing sector into a haven for resaving and a playground for commercial speculations. The surplus of money looted by corruption was one of the motives of speculations to legitimate it by owning different properties and reselling multiple times for middlemen and traders in non-housing operations, which boosted the movement of virtual demand, pushing prices higher. The numbers show that the construction sector's share of GDP was 7% in 1980, rose to 8% in 1985, the highest percentage ever reached in Syria, then dropped to 3% in 1990, which was the lowest and never grew back till 2005 when it reached 4% (AL-Khalaf 2014).

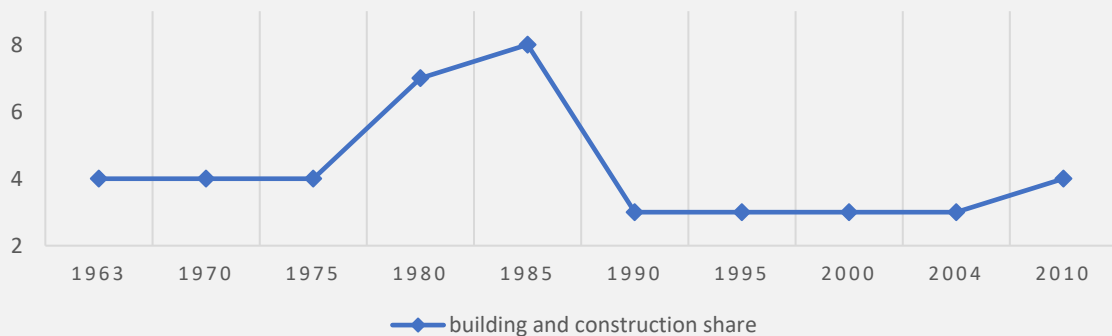


FIGURE 2-12 BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTIONS GPD SHARE BETWEEN (1963 - 2010) (HADAD 2018)

Figure 2-12 shows that in the 1980s the share in the building and construction field experienced a noticed rise. Although it attempted to meet the high needs for residential stocks, it did not solve the housing crisis anyway. Mainly, it did not solve the housing shortage because that rise was exploited as a way of fast profits making and legalize corrupted money for the real estate traders. A strong partnership will remain between “The real estate traders” and “The people of power”, as one of the hidden but obvious factors in keeping the crisis, and that to collect more benefits through maintaining real estate values high (Hadad 2018).

HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

Poverty in Syria had decreased between the years 1996-1997 and 2003-2004, but on the regional scale, the patterns were different. The level of poverty declined rapidly in the Middle and Southern regions, especially in rural areas. The decline was moderate in urban areas of the North-Eastern and Coastal regions, and poverty rose in the rural parts of these regions. At the national level, between the years 1997-2004, inequality in Syria rose. In 2003-2004, the bottom 20% of the population, consumed only 7% of all expenditure in Syria, and the richest 20%, consumed 45%. However, regional variations were significant (El Laithy and Abu-Ismaïl 2005).

Generally, the main source of income of Syrian society in both rural and urban areas is labour; accordingly, wages are the most important source of income (Table 2-5), accounting for 49.27% of total income of the households. The next important source of income is from self-employment and properties with a share of 39.8% of the total income (El Laithy and Abu-Ismaïl 2005).

	Wages	Income from self-employment or properties	Bank's interest	Pensions	Domestic Transfers	Remittances	Total
Urban							
Poor	68.97	27.34	0.04	1.71	1.42	0.52	100
Non-poor	49.10	39.99	0.04	6.61	1.88	2.38	100
Total	49.73	39.58	0.04	6.46	1.87	2.33	100
Rural							
Poor	50.77	45.25	0.03	1.52	1.05	1.38	100
Non-poor	46.75	39.77	0.10	2.11	1.81	9.47	100
Total	47.17	40.34	0.09	2.05	1.73	8.63	100
All Syria							
Poor	60.27	35.90	0.03	1.62	1.24	0.93	100
Non-poor	48.61	39.94	0.05	5.68	1.87	3.86	100
Total	49.17	39.75	0.05	5.48	1.84	3.72	100

TABLE 2-5 INCOME SHARES BY POVERTY STATUS, 2003-2004 (PERCENTAGE) (EL LAITHY AND ABU-ISMAIL 2005)

The major difference of income levels of poor and non-poor is not only based on the human capital assets, like education or other skills, which is obvious from the Table 2-5. Focusing on the source of income of the poor it appears that, although poor individuals represent 11.4% of individuals in the sample, they receive only 4.8% of total income. Since wages are the main source of the poor, accounting for 60.3% of their total income, on the other hand for non-poor is 48.6%.

A closer look at the income from transfers, reveals large differences between the poor and non-poor in general and in every region. The most important component of state transfers is pensions. These are extremely unequally distributed, with the non-poor, representing 88.6% of the population, receiving almost 98% of the pensions. Out of total pensions, the poor receive only 1.4%. This is not surprising, as most of the poor do not work in the regulated sector and hence are not covered by any type of insurance. Other types of transfers are similarly very unequally distributed.

Statistically, over 70% of the Syrian earn salaries that are below \$100 per month. Though, the inflation rate is 0.9% and unemployment rate between 25-30%. Thus, it is estimated that a share between 15% and 25% of the Syrian people live below the poverty line (UNDP 2005a).

Also, the economic performance failure in jobs creation in respect of population growth was noticeable, according to the United Nation Development Program report “only a 6.4% increase in real GDP per capita between 1980 and 2004” was observed (Jabbour 2013). Despite, all the attempts by the government to decrease the economic decline, and make reasonable increase in per capita income and public services, income distribution remains unequal, as seen in Table 2-6 (Cordesman 2006).

Briefly, before the war, the main reason of poverty was due to the decrease in monthly household incomes value; as the increase in the unemployment rate reveals the problems inherent in uncontrolled the population growth, and more importantly in the housing affordability problems.

Moreover, during the war years many workplaces have shut down, what led to massive job losses on the scale of the country. That has had a direct effect on the households who have been left vulnerable. Plus, the economy has lost 2.1 million actual and potential jobs between 2010 and 2015. Thus, unemployment increased from 69 % to 78 % between 2013 and 2015 (Daher 2018).

Household expenditure

According to the results of the Syrian National household survey of 1996-1997, the average total per capita of expenditure for the whole country was around SYP 25.140 (\$503) per month. Other studies on the average show that households in urban areas spent 20 times more than the ones who live in the rural areas. The monthly consumption expenditure was SYP 9250 (\$185) in the urban areas, and SYP 495 (\$10) in the rural areas (Fiorillo and Vercueil 2003). That shows the high inequality between the rural and urban areas in terms of expenditure (Table 2-6).

Population Deciles (poorest to richest)	Cumulative Percentage of Total Expenditure	Percentage of Total Expenditure
1	3.02	3.02
2	7.24	4.22
3	12.36	5.12
4	18.36	6.00
5	25.30	6.94
6	33.40	8.10
7	42.98	9.28
8	54.75	11.77
9	70.10	15.35
10	100	29.9
Expenditure Classes	Cumulative Percentage of Total Expenditure	Percentage of total Expenditure
Bottom 50%	25.30	25.30
Middle 30%	54.75	29.45
Top 20%	100	45.25

TABLE 2-6 DISTRIBUTION OF EXPENDITURES IN SYRIA FROM 2003 TO 2004, ADAPTED FROM (UNDP 2005A)

So, the gap between the expenditure and the income in the Syrian society is not a recent phenomenon, it is due to the huge difference between the average of the salaries and cost of basic living requirements. To fill that gap usually, the Syrian family needs to have more than two people working or more than one job for one person, (the average size of a Syrian family is between five and seven members) (Epestein 2008). That rose the corruption cases in the country, making people who have a good governmental position to exploit it as a source of illegal income (Hadad 2019).

Thus, the highly rise in goods' and services' prices led to a noticeable reduction in the market demand or/and quality. The period between 1987-2001 faced a rise by almost 300% of the living costs, while only 145% was the rise of income in the same period (Al-Khatib 2019).

The period between 2000-2011 had faced constant salaries rising that reached 75% however, it did not cover the general inflation, also because of the income and the expenditure variation between Syria and the neighbor countries, in term not only of actual income levels, but especially of purchasing power (Al-Khatib 2019).

So, the salary rise means expenditure increase. As we shall see in the next paragraph, Syria has a socialist system, that provides sort of free services such as healthcare, and education, so, families do not need to spend large amounts of money for those two. Syria is one of the lowest individual income levels and GDP per capita. The official numbers show that the middle-class comprehends almost 60% of the population, but the truth is that many of those who have been considered as belonging to the middle-class, were living on the edge. That helps to understand the high and fast reduction of the middle-class to become between 9-14% according to economic studies (Hadad 2019).

Generally, due to the ongoing war in Syria and its economic effect, the family expenditure has gone very low, and the currency exchange breakdown turned to be the main indicator responsible for decreasing the value of the income in term of purchasing value. As well as, the economic blockade that has affects many life aspects like education, healthcare and food therefore the Syrian family doubled its expenditure.

WELFARE AND EDUCATION

Syrian government provides a healthcare system over almost all Syrian cities, towns, and villages, totally for free and well qualified. Most endemic diseases in Syria have been eliminated. Health facilities include state and private hospitals and sanatoriums, as well as hospitals and outpatient clinics of the armed forces. There are also a number of public and private outpatient clinics, as well as maternal and child-care, anti-tuberculosis, malaria eradication, and rural health centers. Child mortality is caused mostly by measles and diseases of the digestive and respiratory systems. Tuberculosis and trachoma are widespread, particularly among the Bedouin, peasants, and residents of poorer urban areas.

Health conditions and sanitation in the cities, towns, and larger villages are generally satisfactory. Running water is supplied to almost all houses, buildings, and public places. Each municipality maintains its streets and collects refuse regularly. Although the government has offered incentives for doctors to serve rural areas, medical services are unevenly distributed, with most doctors concentrated in the large cities.

The Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor is empowered to find work for, and distribute cash allowances to, the unemployed. The ministry also encourages such youth activities as athletics, scouting, literacy campaigns, and the organization of cooperatives. The government gives substantial grants to private welfare society.

About four-fifths of the Syrian population is literate. Schooling, which begins at age six, is divided into six years of compulsory primary, three years of lower secondary, and three years of upper secondary education. Lower and upper secondary schools provide general (which prepares for university entrance) or vocational curricula. Secondary schools are open to all elementary students who wish to continue their education. Within this framework, increased attention is being given to technical education. The University of Damascus, founded in 1923, is the country's oldest university. Other universities include the University of Aleppo 1960s, Tishreen University 1971 in Latakia, and Al-Baath University 1979 in Homs. All levels of education have been expanded substantially since 1963.

During the wartime, the health care sector was indirectly but highly damaged. Health facilities were enormously attacked, the lack of health staff was a major issue as well, access was limited, and humanitarian needs were high. The education sector was damaged during the war as well, according to UNICEF’s report since 2014 the UN verified 385 attacks on education facilities. Over 2 million children are out of the school, and one in eight children per classroom requires specialized psychosocial support (UNICEF 2019).

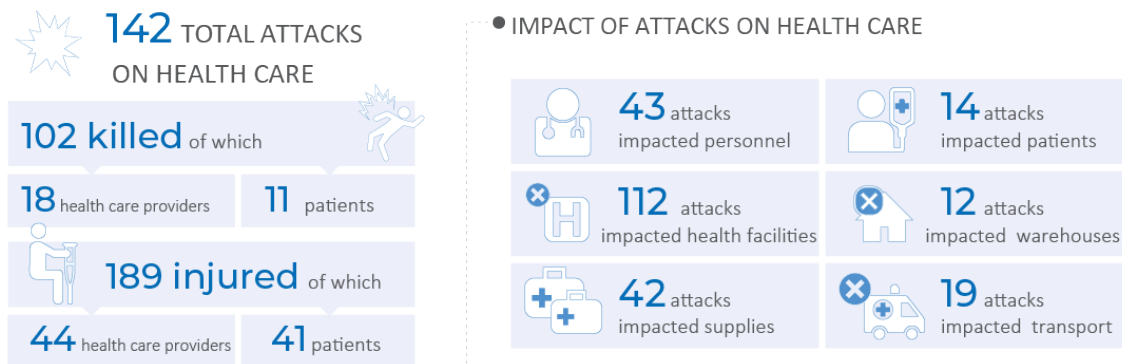


FIGURE 2-13 IMPACT OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH CARE IN 2018
 (HNO SYRIA 2019)

Afterall

This chapter discussed an overall view about Syria. It illustrated different aspects like heritage and cultural background and the hierarchy system among the administrative units like provinces, main cities, and the local units. The population growth and the household structure were presented as well as the socio-economic features in the Syrian society. Finally, the chapter gave a brief about the Syrian economy and about the household average income and expenditure.

3. HOUSING AND LAND REGULATION

The traditional land tenure systems in Syria are complex and overlapping, evolving from hundreds of years in the legal as well as the socio-economic conditions. Although, almost every development in the legal code was built on the previous codes, while introducing new definitions created kind of new set of contradictions. Thus, the blockage of these contradictions statutes hindered the emergence of an effective land management system. So, the role of the regulations of the state was easy to snap, due to the contradictions in the system that allowed corruptions and clientelism.

The evolution was based on different aspects that influenced Syria over time, such as the Islamic doctrine, Ottoman and French mandate. In each phase of history, the social contracts that regulate private and public rights were changed and redefined. For instance, Islamic jurisprudence has norms and regulation to meet almost the oldest development that affected the relationship between men and land. The Ottoman reforms of the late 19th century involved a reform of property right; the Ottomans progressively organized the myriad types of property rights into specifics categories. During the French mandate, Syria experienced a major transformation of the land administration system. They instituted new regulatory frameworks, they as well launched a series of legal ordinances to regulate and issue lands and properties. The system involved a complex set of interrelated mapping and documentation tools that were not included before. In addition, new regulations have required property owners to seek clearance from law enforcement authorities before proceeding to sell any of their real estate assets (Aita 2007).

However, the housing policies have been modified during the wartime. For instance, in Syria informal settlements are illegal, although most of them were provided by electricity and water, residence is not deemed legal and owners still have to use electrical bills to prove that their property exists; that is because such a right is generally recognized, despite not being formally registered. But, due to the major displacement of the population and as a way to save those kinds of rights the government issued Law 10 for property rights during the wartime.

Regulations 186-188-189 of 1926 (Aita 2007)

- Urban maps: often used as key maps to define the different circumscriptions of the city.
- Circumscription maps were produced to a scale of 1/500 in cities in rural areas the scales varied. These maps were completed using different techniques.
- The Real Estate Record (al-qaid al-Eqari): this is a ledger recording the property's physical and legal description as well as the names of the current owners. Anyone can be issued with a declaration of the record (bayan qaid 'aqari). The declaration will include all liens and legal junctures on the land. Prospective buyers or investors have access to these types of information.

The legislation Decree 5 in 1982 (Syrian law)

The Decree organizes the mechanism, essence and procedure of urban planning in Syria for:

- The existing houses complex (cities, towns, villages, etc.)
- The under-planning houses complex (Residential peripheries, New residential projects, etc.).

The law 26 in 2000 (Syrian Law)

This law handles two main issues:

- The procedures of renovation of the informal settlements
- The urban planning of the areas around the provinces' centers (expanding zones)

Documentation of Syrian property ownership:

In Syria, there are many types of documentation of property title, however, the following ones are the most common:

- Certificate of title "*Green Tapu*": Cadaster records usually called "*Green Tapu*". In 2011, around 30% of Syrian property fell into this category, according to a real estate banker. The Green Tapu is a title in the property official registry that details all relevant information. Any action related to the property is part of the record, like sale, relevant court decisions, division, inheritance, expropriation etc. This information is publicly available; anyone can obtain a copy of it, and it is the most secure form of property documentation in Syria (Baumann 2019).

- Court order “*Hikem Mahkama*”: This type of document is used when a parcel of land is zoned for a particular use by the master plan and the owner builds a property on the land without obtaining official permission, which is required even if the project conforms to the master plan’s land use.

For instance, if a landowner sells apartments built without a formal permit, the cadaster only acknowledges the land, not the property (the building). A court order is a process that documents the sale and secures the right of ownership of the property. The owner and the buyer, represented by lawyers, have to go to court to confirm the transaction. The court visits the apartment and makes a full description of it, then issues an order confirming the sale and adds a label in the cadaster. Later, this label can be used to formally register the sales, if the landowner pays a fine (for having built without a permit). It is less secure than the Green Tapu because it only documents the transaction of a sale or purchase in the form of the label in the cadaster. *Hikem Mahkama* is problematic when multiple properties were built on the same parcel and sold to different buyers. Each of these properties requires a label registered in the cadaster in the order they were sold. This can result in late buyers having to wait a long time to obtain a formal certificate of title “Green Tapu” since labels are required to be transformed into formal titles following the same chronological order. Court orders can be rescinded if the buyer does not occupy the property for more than 15 years (Baumann 2019).

- Non-cancellable notarized mandate “*Wkalet Kateb Adel*”: This type of documentation resembles a court order because it, too, allows a new owner to secure ownership rights with a label in the cadaster. This type of documentation is used for a property built on land not zoned for residential use in the master plan (agrarian land). To document ownership, the landowner has to sign an official consent to the buyer and register it in the cadaster. For each subsequent transaction, the mandate must be reissued to show the new buyer’s name. If a landowner resells the same property to different individuals without providing a new mandate each time, a sale could be considered fraudulent, and the buyer won’t secure ownership rights. Ownership rights go to the first person who marked a label in the cadaster (Baumann 2019).

- Co-ownership: Documentation of formally and informally owned properties in which different individuals own shares in a property. To have security in informal settlements, besides possessing the property, it is essential to buy over 75% of the shares.

- **Conclusive sales contract:** This is the most common type of documentation in informal settlements built on state land. Owners cannot register or document ownership in the cadaster or any other official registry but can use official institutions to obtain papers that may help them access compensation, as in the case of property demolition. A conclusive sales contract is drawn up between the current and future owner without any court documentation. After finalizing the sale, the new owner must immediately take possession of the property. Then an owner should obtain more evidence from state institutions to strengthen their claim to ownership: get a property reconciliation from the Ministry of Finance to be able to register the property and pay taxes; pay bills in order to change the names on the electricity and water meters, or create a fictitious loan from someone using the property as security, and go to court to sue the debtor for non-payment – which serves as an official admission that the property exists. Over time such practices became accepted community practices rather than just individual actions. These collective practices provide the basis for the potential recognition of rights for the entire community (Baumann 2019).

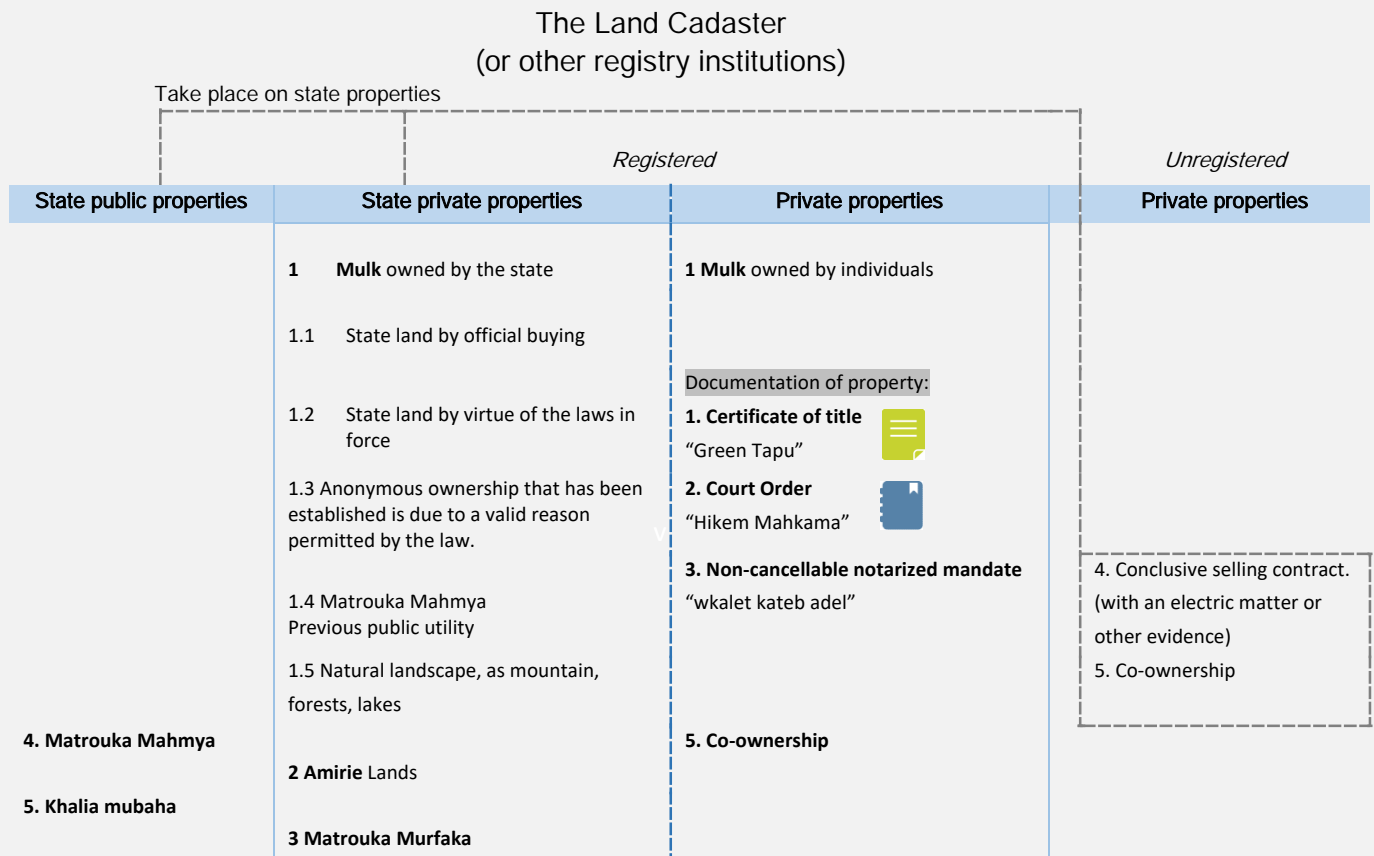


FIGURE 3-1 SYRIAN OWNERSHIP TYPES AND THE LAND CADASTER (BAUMANN 2019)

LAWS AND POLICIES OF LAND PRODUCING FOR HOUSING

There are series of laws and decrees that supported the planning policy in Syria, thus the land provisions and allocation are controlled by zoning plans that are announced usually by the Municipalities or the Province's center; however land allocated for residential use is regulated by five laws which were issued in order to increase the number of land for residential use (Alshibly 2009). The following discussion will show the weakness and inefficiency of these five laws to providing adequate amounts of land for housing development.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations about the institutional regulations for land access and use of the owner weather individuals, family groups, communities or the state According to FAO's report in 1999, out of total 18.5 million hectares, 11.5 million comes under the general term of state lands, the other 7 million hectares are privately owned and operated (Forni 2001).

Land acquisition Laws used to provide land for residential use are:

- Law number 9 issued in 1974.
- Law number 60 issued in 1979.
- The legislation number 5 issued 1982.
- Law number 20 issued in 1983.
- Law number 26 issued in 2000.

Those were the laws expected to provide adequate houses in the market. Starting by Law 9/74, that was responsible for the satisfaction of growing housing demand over the decades. It has the vision to identify the planning tools and land zoning and allocation process in the urban areas. However, the lack of professionalism during the writing and activating the law had negative consequences that led to decrease in the area of land set aside for residential use (Aljaberi 2005).

The Law 60/79 announced after 5 years aiming to tackle the problems due to Law 9. But again, the misinterpretation and the insufficient mechanism to provide both public and private land for urban development led to a considerable bottleneck in the land's market, thus escalating lands and houses prices (Aljaberi 2005). Also, this law was the one responsible of putting the land acquisition for residential use into the hands of the municipality. So, the main provider of the land in the urban areas within the master plan limits is the municipality (Aljaberi 2005).

Accordingly, some private developers or entrepreneurs that have good connections with people who are in responsible positions exploit the friendship or the mutual benefit to take advantages and use the legal system and obtain land plots from the municipality. It is obvious the ability of private developers who can pay higher costs to buy massive land plots because they have greater financial resources. Similarly, landowners prefer to sell their lands to private developers, so they get more money out of it, and after all this is placing the poor out of the land market.

Later then, legislation No. 5/82 aimed to enhance the role of municipalities, by allowing them to set out of the master plan in urban and rural areas in respect of the planning policy and standards prepared by the Ministry of Housing and Construction. This legislation was followed by law No. 20/83 that gives the municipality the power to compulsory purchase land available in project areas for expansion. While the Law No. 26/2000, on the other hand, has extended the municipality power to involve the projected areas for expansion and those existing in the master plan limits in the main cities (AL-Khalaf 2014).

Despite all the legal changes that have been taken in order to manage and increase land access process, the shortage was happening not necessarily because of natural limitation. It was mainly the outcome of the policy choices and the role of the municipality since it is the main land provider for residential use in the market.

Most importantly, the fact that the municipalities have their own statutory planning environment, planning plays a smaller role in the provision of affordable housing for low-income households. Being the main supplier of new land and the landlord of all existing lands, planning tools are less significant than land supply policy in regulating housing prices in the private market, where the real request of low and middle income households is housing services (AL-Khalaf 2014).

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However, the land of the project is one of the main aspects affecting the housing prices. So, lands to be used by municipalities for residential use requires purchase power through using land acquisition laws that help the municipality to buy lands from landowners. Such as Law No 20/83 and Law No 26/2000 that allow the government purchasing the lands within the limits of the Master Plan in the main cities for the interest of the public sector from their owners.

Overall, land supply for affordable housing is a problematic issue in Syria (Sabbagh 2007). Fernandes (2008, p.8) reported that “although it seems logical to refer to the ‘lack of land’ as being a problem, the fact is that land itself is widely available, what is not fully and easily available is serviced land released into the market through legal processes”. However, the decision-makers in related in the sense of affordable housing prefer to look for lands for such a project out of the city master plan’s limits, and that is what makes the purchase process of lands easier and cheaper , no matter of that move the area far from the city center, especially, in cities like Damascus, Aleppo, or Homs (Figure 3-2).

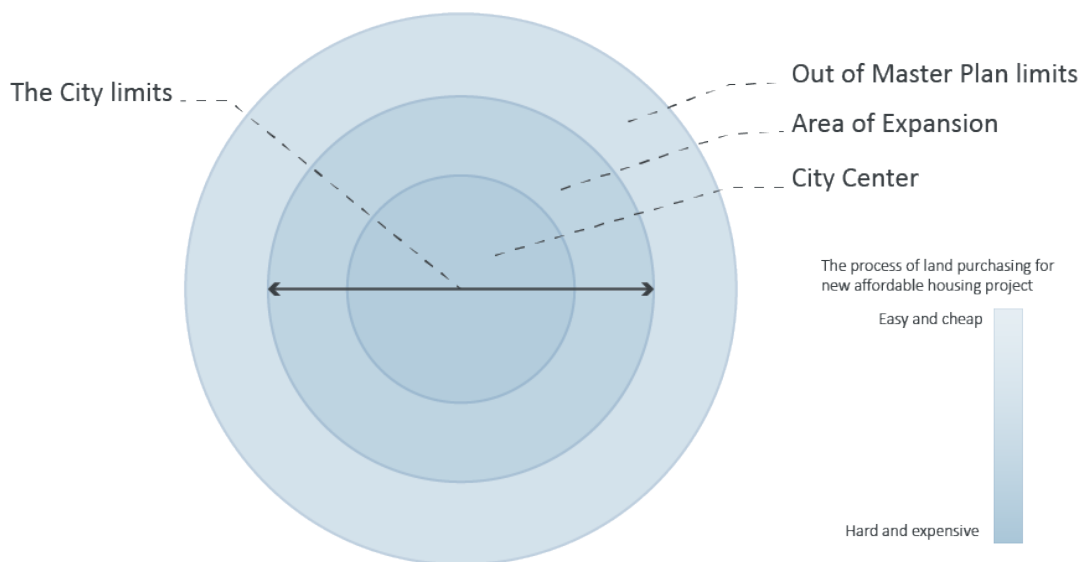


FIGURE 3-2 SCHEME FOR THE AREA PREFERRED FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECTS (BY THE AUTHOR)

4. THE HOUSING FRAMEWORK IN SYRIA

This chapter reviews the housing stock in Syria, and the legal framework that control it. It also will present the major influence of the realtors and private houses traders on the houses market. The housing supplement process will be discussed as well. Although, the public housing supplement in Syria is a typical process, almost there are no proper or specialized agencies that provide houses in Syria.

The Ministry of Construction and Housing has launched many residential projects over the last decades, but anyways the gap remains high between the produced houses and the actual market demands. Some other associations and societies participate in the houses supplement process such as the professions and crafts syndicates or the Military Houses Establishment. Although, they usually target very specific groups mostly their subscribers, lack of land, law sufficiency and professionalism, delaying of the houses submission dates, lead them at the end to sell their stocks in the black market making a small profit.

affordable housing supply was and still needed in the Syrian market in order to accommodate the vulnerable, low-income, youth and other groups who cannot afford to own or rent a house in the current situation. The recent huge destruction in the housing sector as a result of the unrest situation in the country. That is leaving a large part of the population around the Syrian cities without the ability to afford houses.

The house type and its price effect many other matters in the Syrian family, like wealth, education, and many others. Policies and intervention that the government adopted in the last decades and especially those related to the houses' price, were not sufficient to keep the prices calm, especially in the main cities. Thus, a major number of households could not afford to own a house and they tend more to rent one even if other life's matters like health or safety were not adequate.

The informal settlements will be discussed as well in this chapter. Various aspects like the historical evolving, the size of the informal settlements, the characteristic of buildings and neighborhoods in the informal areas and compare them with the planned urban fabric. Moreover, comparing education and unemployment rates of the informal settlement inhabitants, taking into consideration social life and the inhabitants' backgrounds.

A GLANCE OF HOUSING TYPOLOGIES AND PRICES

In Syria, housing units are divided mainly into three groups, houses, flats/apartments, and others (e.g. traditional/old houses with courtyards, cottages, etc.) in addition to the informal settlements. The definition of houses types mainly based on the staircase access system, and dwellings with this system are organized either in three to five stories block. Each group could be further divided into detached, semi-detached and terraced houses/block (AL-Khalaf 2014).

Figure 4-1 illustrates the main buildings' types, it also shows the minimum and maximum share of square meters per person according to the urban and land use principles that have been followed generally in Syria. Those principles were determined on the basis of the construction costs and the social aspects, related to different urban fabrics. The authorized built area out of the land area was also determined according to the target group and what actually fits it.

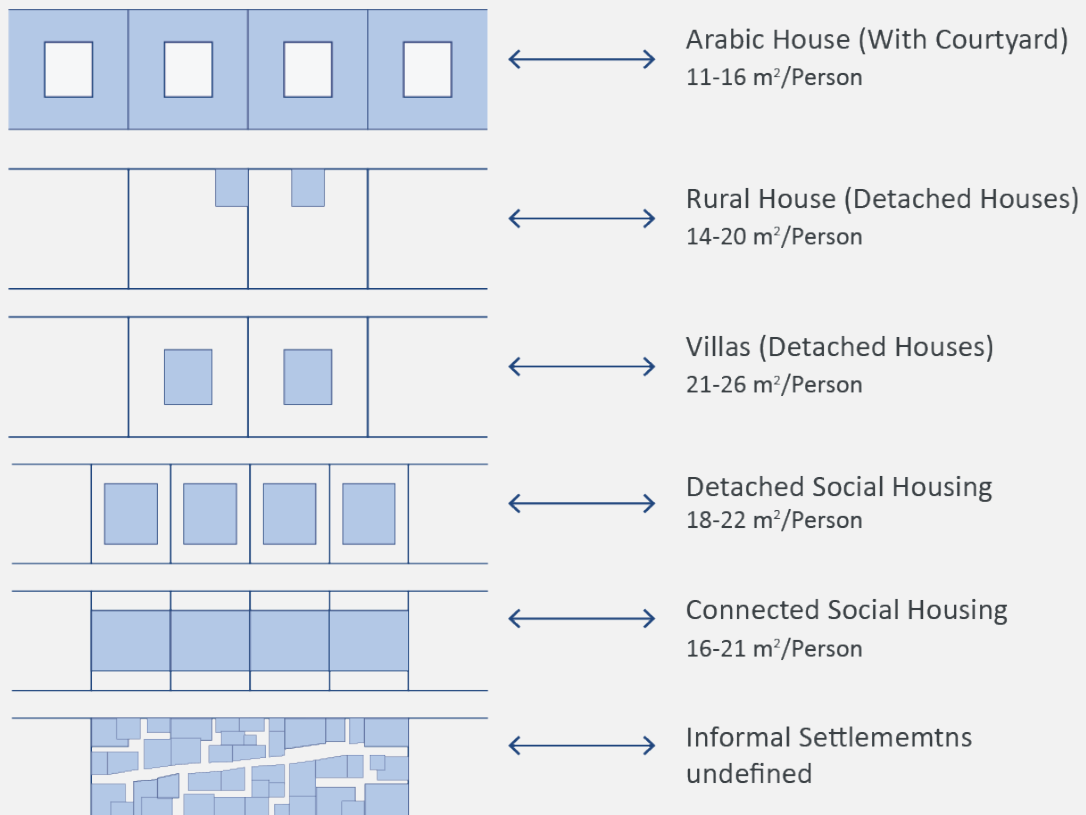


FIGURE 4-1 HOUSES BUILDINGS TYPES IN SYRIA WITH THE MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM SHARE PER PERSON
GRAPHIC ELABORATION OF THE AUTHOR FROM (AL-MALLA 2008)

Typical residential urban type (Figure 4-2) considered as the main building type in the urban areas in Syria. Generally, its height varied between 3 to 5 floors, it became common after the Syrian independence from the French, later on, some additional floors were allowed in order to have more houses. Yet, the heights of the buildings still limited and have not reached the heights to be called skyscrapers. As the skyscraper is sort of unwanted type in Syria due to an unstable set of services like elevators, electricity, water, etc. also the construction difficulties because of the limitation of the available tools to build a skyscraper (Hadad 2018).

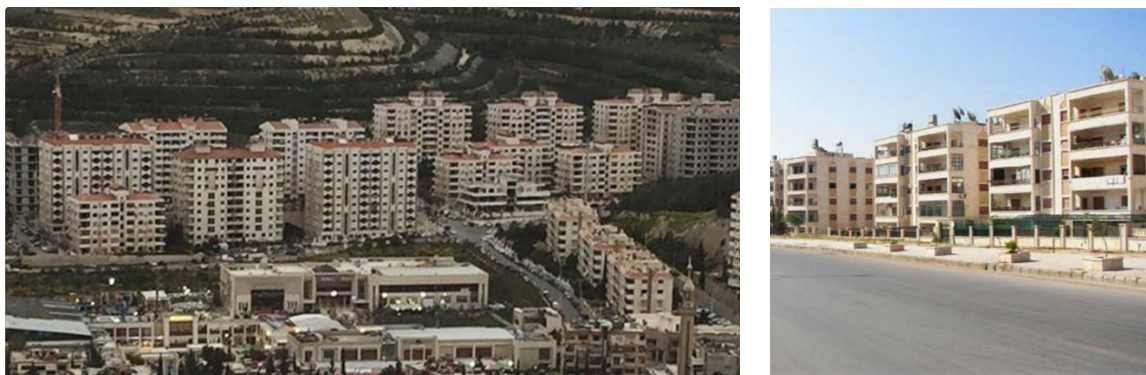


FIGURE 4-2 TYPICAL RESIDENTIAL URBAN TYPE (UNKNOWN)

While the rural type has a specific condition, as there are two different kinds of what should be considered as rural. So, we shall distinguish between the actual rural area and rural area that adjoined the cities as became kind of a part of it due to city expansion and even in term of social aspects is not anymore considered as a rural. Firstly, the adjacent rural areas that overlapped within the city’s administrative border, the architecture and urban identity of this kind has changed and became a mix between the typical urban type and the informal type, as some urban projects have been developed in it, and has become kind of well-organized urban areas like Dummar project in Damascus (Table 4-1), while the rest of it has turned into small plots of lands and got build individually to end up making informal settlements (Hadad 2018).

Type of multi-story dwellings	Num. stories	Num. Units	Total num. units in the project	Percentage
Multi-story dwelling with staircase access system	4	2300	5300	43.4
High-rise block	12	2000	5300	37.37
Terrace housing	2	1000	5300	18.9

TABLE 4-1 MULTI-STORY DWELLING APPLICATION AT THE DUMMAR PROJECT IN DAMASCUS (AL-KHALAF 2014)

On the other hand, the actual rural areas located far from the big cities and their urban expansion (Figure 4-3), where there are cement houses with one or two floors, which is the common rural type. Although the rural house recently tends to have similar characteristics as the urban house in the city, as it used to contain agricultural tools and barn animal, and that due to the recession in the agricultural activities and switching career of the farmer to a new one more related to the city than the rural (Hadad 2018).



*FIGURE 4-3 TEL TAL VILLAGE, AL-HASAKAH
(IVOR PRICKETT, THE NEW YORK TIMES)*

Another type of rural house is the one that separated from the agricultural land, in this type the land had transferred into a gathering of adjacent buildings. Landlords tend to build so close building to another in order to have some kind of public service, in addition to the fact that is the plot of land is already small. On the contrary, the rural type when the house located in the middle of the agricultural land, this type is rare in Syrian and people do not prefer it because of the limitation in public services and the poor connection with public transportation (Hadad 2018).

In Syria, the ratio between houses price and income is high because a family with a medium/low-income does not earn a sufficient income (70% of Syrian earn salaries are below \$100 per month). Generally, houses prices depend on both the location and the house type. However houses prices in Syria have escalated, because of the big wave of international immigration like Palestinians, Lebanese, and Iraqis, that made pressure on the real estate market along with the issue of the housing shortage (Sabbagh 2007).

The Syrian Economic Center (2007) reported that the houses prices in Syria increased by 300 % in 2003 because of the lack of intervention by the government to provide solutions in order to address this problem.

Moreover, the rising prices of land and the increasing costs of raw materials due to general inflation put some pressure on the housing sector and thus lead to an increasing of the houses prices. According to the Oxford Business Group (2009), a ton of Syrian cement cost was SYP 2500 (\$50) in 2005, and it jumped to SYP 6000 (\$120) by the middle of 2006. They also reported that, between the beginning of 2007 and early 2008, houses prices in different areas in Damascus rose by 20% in Malki, 33% in Mazzeh and Abu Rumaneh, and 50% in Kafr Soussa.

Although in the second half of the year 2008 the house's prices have fallen by almost 20 %, there was still increasing demand for affordable housing. The average salaries were between \$100 - \$200, that left much of the housing stocks out of the resident reach especially of the low-income group (Oxford Business Group 2006).

Year	Public housing price in Syrian pound	Wages average in Syrian pound	Houses price in working month	Houses price in GDP per capita
1970	SYP 10000	SYP 200	50 months	12 shares
1985	SYP 200,000	SYP 2000	100 months	18 shares
2000	SYP 1000,000	SYP 4000	250 months	24 shares
2010	SYP 4000,000	SYP 10,000	400 months	29 shares
2018	SYP 20,000,000	SYP 40,000	500 months	80 shares

TABLE 4-2 THE HOUSES PRICES IN SYRIA 1970 – 2018 (CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2019)

Table 4-2 is based on approximate figures and shows the trend in housing market prices over time, together with the average wages in comparison of the GDP per capita during the mentioned years. The average price of a house in the year 1970 was equal to the salary of 50 months, while it became equal to 500 months in 2018 (Central Bureau Of Statistics 2019).

HOUSING SECTORS AND SUPPLIERS

Most of the formal systems failed to cope with the increased demand for housing and the magnitude of the rural to urban migration, which created massive zones of informality that will be discussed later in this chapter, particularly in peri-urban sections of major metropolitan areas and in secondary cities. Supply-side state subsidies and the promise of freehold homeownership for all was a dream on which the State could not deliver. Contradictions unresolved in the transformation from traditional land tenures to modern land registries accumulated and added to the inability of the State to manage urban growth properly (Clerc and Hurault 2010).

Housing development and supplement processes in Syria involve many sectors, including the public authority, the governmental establishments, the cooperative sector and the private sector. The role and responsibilities of these actors in the process housing supplement, with special emphasis given to affordable housing, are outlined below.

The public sector

Since the 1950s Syria started considering the housing matters, as the law 94/1953 allows the municipalities of the big cities to implement and sell houses for workers and employees, over 7 years in a nonprofit program. While the ninth Five-year plan 2000 – 2005 somehow was a success and achieved the expected goals in the housing matters, the tenth Five-year plan did not accomplish its goals by providing 433500 houses by the end of 2010, and the houses shortage remains.

While the public contractor is represented by a public institution, which is responsible for the building process and the constructions of affordable housing provided by the government.

The General Establishment of housing was created by the legislation decree 683/1961 and its main role includes saving for housing and provision for social housing, such as housing the state employees, the professors, the youth, and more importantly housing those who have been warned of demolishing their houses for legal matters. The youth house program, for instance, has started since 2002 in six provinces Damascus, Rif-Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hamah, and Latakia then it covered the rest of the provinces.

The number of subscribers reached 63000, they have been categorized into four times waiting stages 5, 7, 10, and 12 years, and the houses were categorized as the following 60, 70, and 80 m², corresponded mainly with subscriber's choice. The subscriber should pay 10% of the approximate price of the house at beginning of the process, and the rest would be covered over 25 years as a monthly instalment with only an addition of 5% on the house price as profit, and the state would fund 30% of the project cost out of the public debt with no profit (T. G. Housing 2019).

However, the important matters that should be considered and preciously studied are the household's income and the structure of the family, as the priority should go to those who are below the poverty line. It should as well consider the income of the subscriber on the basis of determining the monthly payment not the price of the house. Overall, the long implementation period along with major economic changes in the region, lead to delaying the houses submission.

The cooperative sector

it has been active since 1959, and it reached over 2000 societies and associations. Its role has declined due to many factors, such as speculations and private interest on one hand, and the high construction cost with low support on the other hand. However, it is still the only opportunity for worker and craftsmen to get a house properly, due to collaboration between different guilds, worker champers, unions, and other associations and cooperatives. Some of those gathered and operate different projects like housing projects as the beneficiaries of their subscribers. Those cooperatives have implemented many housing projects, the outcomes, however, tend to be modest in terms of quality, services or connection with the city. They manage the cost on the bases of the income of their subscribers.

The houses projects of the cooperative sector have many problems, the project might last up to 30 years to get delivered. Usually, they tend to implement at the cheapest cost, so they tend to purchase the project's land in the peripheries where public transportation is limited, and services are feeble. After all, some of those who already registered, prefer to sell their stocks to realtors or to the real estate offices in the black market with some benefits. Thus, the prices of the cooperatives' houses become more expensive since it enters the black market and becomes a place for speculations.

The private sector

the dominating sector, generally it is not affordable for low nor for medium income-level families. yet, it is the most active sector in term of selling and buying the stocks since it makes the most profit. Even in term of project implementation, the private sector scores better than the other sectors in terms of quality, implementation time, and preciousness. It controls almost the whole Syrian houses market since it owns the highest size of the stocks.

Generally, the private sector has different branches such as, real-estate companies and entrepreneurs. It also could be represented by engineering and architectural companies, although, those are more professionals, they are too few.

Entrepreneurs considered as private developers, their work based on investments as well, sometimes, they collaborate with the Public Establishment of Housing or the cooperative sector to have their projects done through tendering in order to deliver a complete project during a determined period of time. Though they must get an allowance and complete a variety of administrative requirement. By the law they could heir a subcontractor who has the work done and they share the revenue out of the project (AL-Khalaf 2014).

Foreign investors

Mostly, the housing projects are published by the government, such as the 10th plan that was adopted by the Syrian government in 2006 – 2010. In this case the governmental authorities had introduced a new model of development, they called it: “The social market economy”. The plan was to create a favorable environment for private national and foreign investments, to ensure a financial source for the projects. Law 10 of 1991, about foreign investors, has published and improved the conditions for the investments in the country and removed some restrictions on imports. Moreover, a rise in the prices of the lands was obvious especially in the provinces of Damascus and Rif-Dimashq, as they became the main destination of the foreign investors.

The conditions of investment have also evolved since the year 2000, the housing legislation and town planning system that was set up during the 1960s and the 1980s have been totally revised since 2000. Between 2000 – 2007, production of formal cooperative and private housing has increased by seven times over the whole country, but in the Rif-Damascus province the production has increased by almost fifteen times. However, the process of those types of investment is more complicated in several aspects, such as land purchase, the approval of the master plan, the paperwork, and so on, so that the process could last up to 3 years (Clerc and Hurault 2010).

Those are the main sectors responsible for houses supplement in Syria, however, there are some other associations and organizations (private and public), but their role is feeble. Due to many aspects, most importantly that they have fewer resources and financial support. Almost most of the houses that the private and foreign sectors provide are not suitable for low/medium income because they more often go toward more profits. On the other hand, cooperative and public sectors' houses are designed for low-income groups, however, the gap is getting greater between the demand and supply of the houses' market (Figure 4-4).

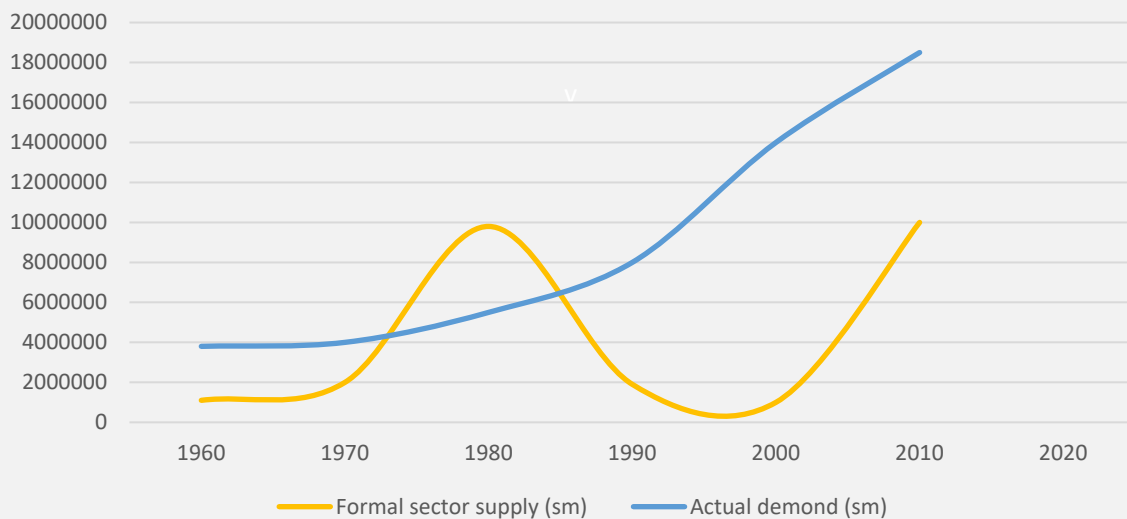


FIGURE 4-4 SUPPLY OF LAND READY FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENT VS. DEMAND (AITA 2007)

The government in Syria has planned to increase housing supply through the development plan in order to reduce the issue of housing backlog. Since the homeownership in Syria has a very high rate equal to 80% (Beidas-Strom, Lian and Maseeh 2009). Though, still, the shortage in housing stock, and especially the affordable housing for the low-income group is still high.

Housing supplement process in Syria is still slow and the large cluster of the informal settlements is still exist and growing, that still exist and growing rapidly (Alsafadi 2009). Although the policy-makers in the Syrian government attempted to control the constant increase prices and supplement of the house's market, the lack of new affordable houses projects kept preventing them to do so (Oxford Business Group 2008).

Housing development process in Syria involves many actors, such as the government represented by the Ministry of Housing and Construction, General Organization for Housing, the Military Establishment of Housing, and others, entrepreneurs that are almost the main contractors of the projects provided by the government, the developer and professionals, and the financiers. (AL-Khalaf 2014).

The development process of houses supply is based on the relationship between the mentioned actors, the contemporary housing production process in Syria mainly provided by the government, since 1960 they established the first five-year development plan, with special focus on affordable housing development. The following will discuss the main keys that affect the market demand and supply of affordable housing.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FRAMEWORK

The term affordability, in brief, refers to the relationship between an individual's income and product's prices. The adjective affordable can either mean "cheap," or can imply that, even if sometimes is expensive, people in need of it have enough money to easily get it. Mainly, it is about how much the individuals could afford to buy different goods by their income, so, if something is generally understood as largely affordable, it means that its price is reasonable, rather inexpensive, and that most people can afford it. An affordable good or service is one that is within individual budget. Consequently, "affordable city", implies that rents are not too high for most of its residents.

The term 'affordable housing is a specific term. For example, it points at homes whose rents are lower than those on the market. The rents are lower because the government subsidizes them, or for whatever other reasons. So, affordable rented housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices.

However, Affordable housing is an important part of the recent world's housing vision especially for the developing countries, access to adequate affordable housing is a fundamental component related to the quality of life. Without affordable and decent shelter, people cannot meet their basic needs and participate properly in society. Recently many countries around the globe are suffering from the unaffordability issue. Due to, the accelerated increases of houses' and lands' prices, the absence of the affordable housing investment, the domination of the private sector, etc.

Many questions related to affordable housing have been argued like, what are the roles to play to ensure that everyone is adequately housed? How does the housing privatization phenomenon influence the housing sectors? What are the conditions to take to reach a social mixite between various groups? What is the future provision of social housing? How the government subsidies can affect the houses supplement process through the regulation and policies?

To address that, firstly by clarifying some of the special attributes of housing that drive the need for intervention. then by looking back at the different models of public and social housing that have been implemented across the globe, explaining some examples and sort of comparison among different countries around the world.

Considering the number of dwellings, the percentage of the stock, the private sector...etc. In many countries, housing policy objectives are reportedly tenure-neutral but there are a number of countries that have tenure-specific objectives. Poland, Switzerland and Turkey mention promoting homeownership; Germany, Norway, Portugal, Spain and the United States aim to promote the private rental market while the Czech Republic, Germany, Norway, New Zealand, and Turkey aim to promote social rental housing (Pero et al. 2016).

Generally, the production of affordable housing has three stages which include policymaking, design, and post-occupancy evaluation. During this processes, three major groups of professionals including policymakers, designers and researchers are involved. For instance, policymakers emphasize on financing options, zoning and providing access to public facilities.

Therefore, it can be said that planning policies as a determinant of residential satisfaction includes all these factors. The features of the dwelling and the neighborhood are related to architects and urban designers; thus, redesign principles play a determinant role. Regarding the social dimension, the root of all the determinants of previous empirical studies, such as participation, social cohesion, and social ties are in the interaction with neighbors.

The main affordable housing supplier:

The demand to build new public housing could not be met by the limited resources of the Country. Thus, the government, aiming at increasing the supply of urban housing, issued Decree Number 96 of the year 1974 authorizing the establishment of cooperative housing. The shares of social housing remained minuscule however, the majority of lands provided by the state for this purpose was distributed at highly reduced values with full public infrastructure and subsidized building materials (Aita 2007).

In 1979, also for the purpose of expediting the supply of urban lands for public and cooperative housing, the State issued Law Number 60 mandating the State as the sole entity able to acquire greenfield peri-urban zones. While cooperatives aimed at meeting the demand for affordable housing, their initial beneficiaries could not maintain their monthly payments on limited State salaries. Members of cooperatives would often sell their right to a housing unit in a cooperative to private speculators (Aita 2007).

They preferred to take these limited profits and move to informal settlements or distant suburbs. The new beneficiaries of the subsidized housing cooperatives ultimately became a new class of urban elites who joined the State's complex patronage network even if indirectly (Aita 2007).

Overall, affordable housing in Syria is provided mainly by the public sector, the main two suppliers are The General Establishment of Housing and The Military Housing Establishment. Although the government subsidizes these two establishments from the budgetary fund, they kind of institute their own finance scheme to raise capital for their projects. They sell apartments to the subscribers before the construction starts. And when there have enough cash flow from the installments, they start to pay for building. People who subscribed receive their apartments after a specified period and continue to pay for number of years.

Affordable housing projects that the two establishments provide usually, is implemented in respect with regulations and planning standards. That makes their projects have the same characteristics in all aspects. After getting the project designed and purchasing the land and defining other criteria, they could start the execution process of the project themselves or they might assign a private contractor that is willing to construct the project under their supervision.

In Syria, the actors responsible for the project's definitive and constructive plans mainly are:

The government: The houses development process in Syria has a significant relation with the government, as the last roles the various stages of it. There are different governmental departments work under the Ministry of Housing and Construction (Wizarat Al-Esakan wa Al-Ta'meer), as it is responsible for the approval of outcomes related to the project like road design, housing types, drainage and sanitation, building plans. While municipalities (Al-Baladyeh) are governmental institutions responsible for opening and paving roads, implementation of sewer network organizing public parks and gardens, and most importantly providing administrative authorization for building plans, including housing and land plots for residential use including private sectors (AL-Khalaf 2014).

The professional: Those are represented by the planners, architects, engineers and surveyors, who work in the Department of Studies and Planning in the Ministry of Housing and Construction. Architects usually are responsible of preparing the architectural plans, and to keep in touch with the public authorities, the entrepreneurs, or the technicians, they are authorized to certify the completion of the project's construction and finishing process. The planners, they work usually in public sectors such as municipalities or planning departments, and their responsibilities are checking the projects proposed by the constructors or the developer making sure that the project accomplishes the conditions and the requirements requested, and respects all the standards and the guidelines of the Municipalities that holding the project, meanwhile the engineers responsible for the technical and the engineering and structural studies (AL-Khalaf 2014).

The contractors: they might be from both sectors, public and private. The private contractors are appointed through tendering process in order to execute projects that provided by government or cooperative sector. While on the other hand, the public contractor is represented in public institution and it called Branch 3 "Al-fere' 3", which is responsible for executing affordable housing that provided by the government as well. Before a contractor is legally eligible to work, some administrative requirements should be done (AL-Khalaf 2014).

The main character of affordable housing projects

As mentioned before, affordable housing is formally provided by the public sector. Usually, their programs work with subscribing before the construction process, they announce all the needed information through "the subscriber toolkit," along with the allowance conditions and guidelines, meanwhile, those who are willing to execute the project start to apply for the tender that was announced by the government along as well with some guidelines and conditions, on one hand. On the other hand, people who are willing to apply for a house in the project, usually, if they fulfil the necessary conditions of the project and they are allowed to participate by paying first instalment (15 – 25 % of the total amount of the house), then they continue the payment process through a determined bank; the process takes between 4 – 10 years according to the type of the project (The Military Housing Establishment 2010).

The major affordable housing suppliers are The Establishment of Military Housing, and The General Establishment of Housing, however, there are other governmental or cooperative establishments that also contribute in the housing market. There is work based on constructing housing for low-income, youth, and vulnerable groups. As we mentioned, affordable housing in Syria has almost the same character in all of the projects, in term of architecture, planning and also the instructions altogether follow the same implementation process (T. G. Housing 2019).

It is organized usually in four-story blocks, surrounded by semi-public gardens that are called “Wajyba Omranyah”. There are many types of affordable housing based on the target group, such as Youth Housing “*Sakan Al-Shbab*”, Saving Housing “*Sakan Al-Eddikhar*”, Labour Housing “*Sakan Ommali*”, Social Housing “*Sakan Shabi*” (T. G. Housing 2019).

An example of an under construction project is in Deir-Azur province (Figure 4-5), the project has many houses categories according to the official website of The General Establishment of Housing, such as houses for teaching members, organization, youth housing, and saving housing. As well, it includes other commercial, services, educational, and healthcare facilities. The land area is 60 hectares, and the final number of apartments that supposed to be built is 4098, divided into 2806 for youth, 860 as saving housing, and the other 432 apartments are for the teaching members. The approximate final cost of the project is SYP 4 billion (T. G. Housing 2019).



FIGURE 4-5 3D VIEW OF AL-ASAAD SUBURB IN DEIR-AZUR
(T. G. HOUSING 2019)

Another example in the province of Aleppo is Al-Me'sraneeh suburb (Figure 4-6), it is located in the eastern part of Aleppo, the land of the project is owned and provided by the public authorities, the studies of the master plan and the functional program of the project, as well as the construction works, had been done by The General Establishment of Housing, the project involved 132 blocks that have 3960 apartment, (75 blocks are under construction, includes 2250 apartment) it includes markets, education facilities, kindergartens and administration facilities. As well as three types of apartments 90m², 75m², and 65m². The actors who studied the master plan as well as the constructions studies and shop drawings are:



FIGURE 4-6 AL-ME'SRANEESH SUBURB ALEPPO (T. G. HOUSING 2019)

- The General Establishment for Housing,
- The council city of Aleppo,
- The general company of electric,
- The general establishment for drinking water,
- The general company of telecom,
- The Syrian for networks,
- The Military Housing Establishment.

The approximate total cost of the project is SYP 2,6 Billion. The apartments types available are three A, B, and C. their area varied around 65 – 90m². The project has been outsourced by both public and private sectors (T. G. Housing 2019).



FIGURE 4-8 MAP OF AL-ME'SRANEESH NEIGHBORHOOD
(GOOGLE MAPS 2020)



FIGURE 4-7 AL-ME'SRANEESH NEIGHBORHOOD ALEPPO
(T. G. HOUSING 2019)

Another important example is the youth residential project in Tartous, the project started in 2005 with 3774 qualified subscribers, with a monthly instalment estimated by SYP 2500 (\$50) by then. The program of the houses handover has two phases, five years for the first phase and seven years for the second one, accordingly the subscribers were categorized to have their houses received in 5 or 7 years (Ibrahem 2020).



FIGURE 4-9 AL-BASEL SUBURB – FIRST PART OF THE YOUTH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT IN TARTOUS (SOURCE: © ALWATANONLINE.COM)

According to the General Establishment of Housing, the finances of the project and the money flow would be divided among three parties: the first party is the State and it would pay 30 % as a loan with no-interest from the annual budget, another 30 % would be from the subscriber, divided into first installment and monthly installments during the period before the housing assignment process, and the third party is certain banks that would be responsible for the last 40 % as a loan with 5 % interest; the reason of the bank loan is because the Establishment was not able to finance the whole project by itself, so it had to process through the banks (Naiof 2019).

After ten years of delaying on the original deadline, 22 residential buildings were built and around 95% of the first-phase subscribers who have in fact received their houses. The second and the third groups were supposed to have their houses by 2012, but they have not received it yet (Naiof 2019).

The main problem according to the General Establishment of Housing was the process of lands purchasing for the second phase however, after they got through it in 2017, other difficulties caused the delaying in the second stage.

- Land availability: as many legal issues related to the lands that the Establishment has already bought.
- The general inflation of prices and especially of the construction material, labor, and fuel.
- Companies both private and public, abstaining from applying for the auctions due to the general instability around the country and especially during the first four years of the conflict from 2011 – 2014.
- The global economic sanctions forced on Syria after 2011 and their influences on the housing and construction sectors
- The fact that only 50% of the subscribers have carried out their commitment and have been paying their monthly installments.

On the other hand, most of the subscribers have blamed the Establishment to be the main responsible for the delaying in the second phase. One of the subscribers said to Tishreen Newspaper that (Naiof 2019).

“the General Establishment has delayed in delivering the houses, as it was supposed to be in 2012, and we are in 2017, with more unacceptable excuses; the Establishment anyway did not handle the promise neither the contract, if it had implemented the project according to its original deadline, it would not have undergone this failure. The prices almost remained the same during the first two years of the war, while now we have to pay between 7 to 13 million for a house, it is just not worth it. The Establishment as well asked the subscribers to pay 30% of the new estimated price of the house which is impossible, and we have no other choice: we cannot even afford the bank loan because it passes our monthly income”

Many other projects have been studied and implemented by The Military Establishment of Housing and The General Establishment of Housing like Abe-Alfedaa' Suburb in Hama province, Worker Suburb in A'adra, Rif-Dimashq province, Al-Ashrafeeh in Aleppo, housh baeer in Al-Hasakah province and so on. Almost all of these projects share the same characteristics in term of design, stages of implementation, and eventually the same problems.

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS AS AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In Syria, the concept of building illegally started in the 1960s, due the neglecting of the ongoing housing crisis, and many other issues that have not been cracked in the long term to solve it correctly. The solutions most of the times were shot term, and they were not actually trying to solve the roots of the problems. The challenge of the housing policies and regulations to a new housing approach have started in the sixtieth as well, while during the 1970s the informal settlements have expanded largely as a result of the enormous national and international migration waves. In the 1980s, the sprawl of the illegal constructions has developed and grown even greater. (AL-Baridi 2005)

Generally speaking, living conditions in the informal settlements are definitely worse than in the formal urbanized areas. As the informal areas come with sub-standard provision of services like drinking water, electricity, sanitation, telephone connections, transportation, refuse collection, and health and education facilities. Although, these services exist in these areas, they are usually of a lower quality than what exists in the formal and more urbanized areas. For instance, roads might be built in the informal areas but poorly maintained, or there might be an electrical connection, but the supply will be intermittent. Jeramana is one of the informal settlements located on the outskirts of Damascus, and home to a large informal housing area. it has today the same infrastructure that it had in the 1970s. The main difference is that those roads were built for the 13,000 people who were living there in the 1970s, while now it contain more than 500,000 people and yet they are using the same roads (Goulden 2011).

in the 1990s many companies had come from abroad and especially from the gulf countries trying to invest in those settlements. They suggested to remove and replace them in a new modern urban fabric. However, many political and financial reasons line, along with the strict governmental regulations toward the whole procedure caused its failure at the end.

By the year 2004, the informal settlements reached almost 500,000 dwellings over the country, and that as a property, value about SYP 300 – 400 million. However, the average density in these areas was 450 Person/hectare, and an approximate total population of 2.5 million people. Altogether they occupied more than 5500 hectares of lands (Al- Dayrei 2007).

In the year 2014, according to the ministry of Housing and Urban Growth, there were around 157 informal settlements over Syria, that contained approximately 40-50% of the Syrian population. The phenomenon started and reached more than 50% of the existing informal settlements between 1970 - 1990 (Al- Dayrei 2007). According to the Central Bureau of Statics, 40% of the informal settlements were built after the 1990s. Despite all the strict regulations and policies that have been launched in order to prohibit illegal buildings, still, between the years 1990 and 2004, the average number of buildings that were built in the informal settlements increased by 170%.

Even though the informal settlements have been recognized as a downside part of the Syrian cities' planning and Syrian property and housing policies, still, from a low-income group's point of view, they are considered as the only recourse, no matter of other features like adequate services, or healthcare or whatever else. Those settlements and especially in the recent decade, have been the only affordable shelter for the majority of inhabitants of the main cities.

*FIGURE 4-10 A PHOTO FOR ONE OF DAMASCUS'S INFORMAL SETTLEMENT AL-REZZ MOUNTAIN
(PHOTO BY HASAN BELAL)*



The size of the informal settlements

Syrian people, generally, intended the main cities in Syria, like Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs as their first destination, due to jobs opportunities or universities (internal migration will be discussed deeply later on: The impact of internal migration on the housing crisis). Informal settlements were also the aim of vulnerable and low-income groups

The size of the informal settlements varies among the Syrian Cities, for instance, in Damascus, due to the limited census, in the year 2004, the census was counted based on the number of the buildings without a permission in the informal settlements. The counting process was based on the number of dwellings without a property title “Green-Tapu”, because this title could only be guaranteed with a building permit. After all, the figures show that, approximately 40% of the inhabitants of Damascus are living in informal residential dwellings. By the year 2011, the number of inhabitants who live in the informal settlements was around 1.6 million out of 4 million total population of Damascus (Clerc 2011).

Usually, the building phases depend on the owner saving. Most of them start with a one-story building with a staircase, later on when more money has been saved, they install another floor and sometimes two or three more floors. The city faced a major growth of the informal settlements during the 1990s. Due to the housing shortage and the dereliction of planning strategies, most of those who arrived at the city after 1968 considered the informal settlements as their main destination. The population has therefore grown in both the informal and the formal settlements.

The informal settlements became the main destination for those who were looking for affordability, and they have been playing a significant role in housing provision for low- and medium-income levels and especially in the capital Damascus, as during the years 1981 – 1994, the increase that the city experienced in the formal sectors was about 35,000 housing units, while in the informal sector it was almost triple, with 102,000 housing units. Therefore, around 67% of the total housing units supplied were in the informal sector (Khadour and Kafa 2009).

Aleppo, on the other hand, aside of the highly population growth after the 1970s and the decline in the agricultural activities in the 2000s, the movements numbers from the country toward the city has increased. The demand on houses remained higher than the land available on the market, causing a distorted market. High numbers of people could not afford to buy nor rent houses. Therefore, low-income groups were left with no other choice than build or rent a place in the informal areas (Figure 4-11 and Figure 4-12).

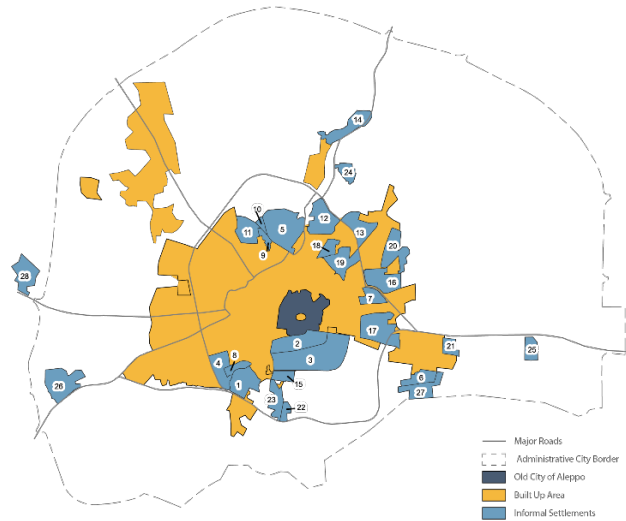


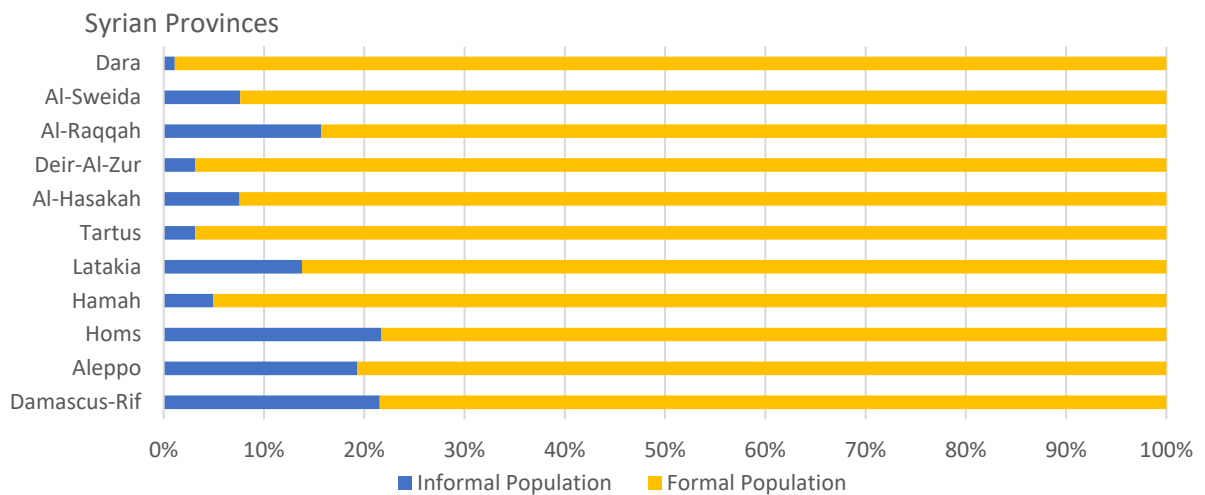
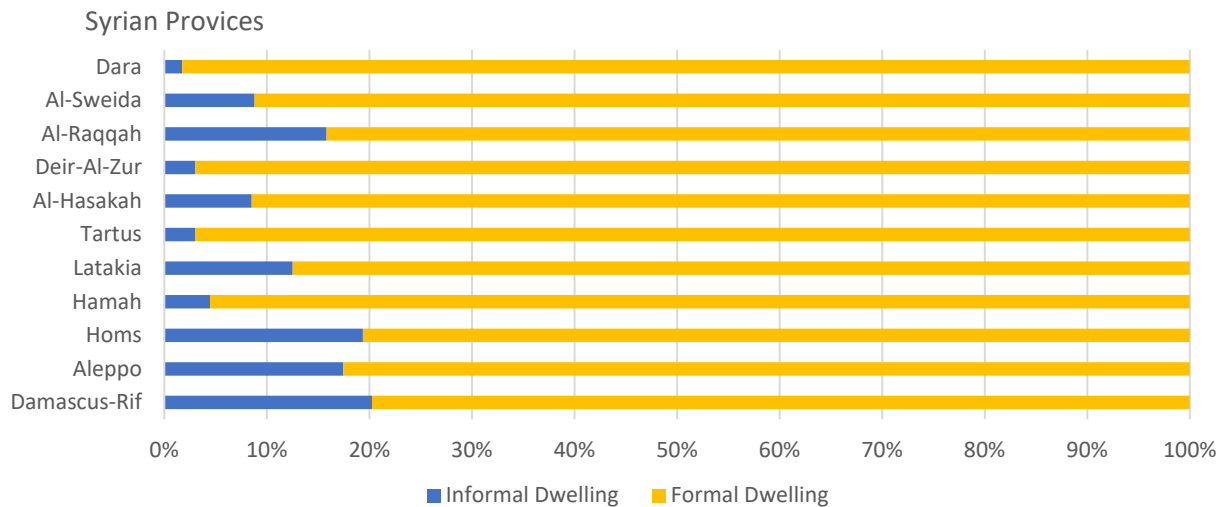
FIGURE 4-11 THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN ALEPPO
(SAAD AND STELLMACH 2010)

Thus, by the 2000s, the city experienced the emerging of 22 new informal settlements, situated in the southern, eastern, and northern parts of Aleppo; recently the Eastern part of the informal settlements in Aleppo has come to be called as “the crescent of poor”. To sum up, by 2010 40% of Aleppo’s population was living in the informal settlements (NEMETH 2017).



FIGURE 4-12 PHOT FOR THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN ALEPPO
(SYRIAN - GERMAN TECHNICAL COOPERATION 2009)

Statistically, and according to the Central Bureau of Statics, the population and housing census in the year 2004, shows figures for the main Syrian provinces that have informal settlements growing within their administration boarders. Overall, the numbers show that the informal settlements shared around 15 – 20 % of the population and dwellings on the national level. The province of Damascus and its suburb shared the highest number in all of the aspects. The last two provinces in the bottom of the list are Dara and Al-Sweida with the lowest share of the informal settlements. The huge gap between the first province and the last one is mainly due to economic and social reasons (Figures 4-13).

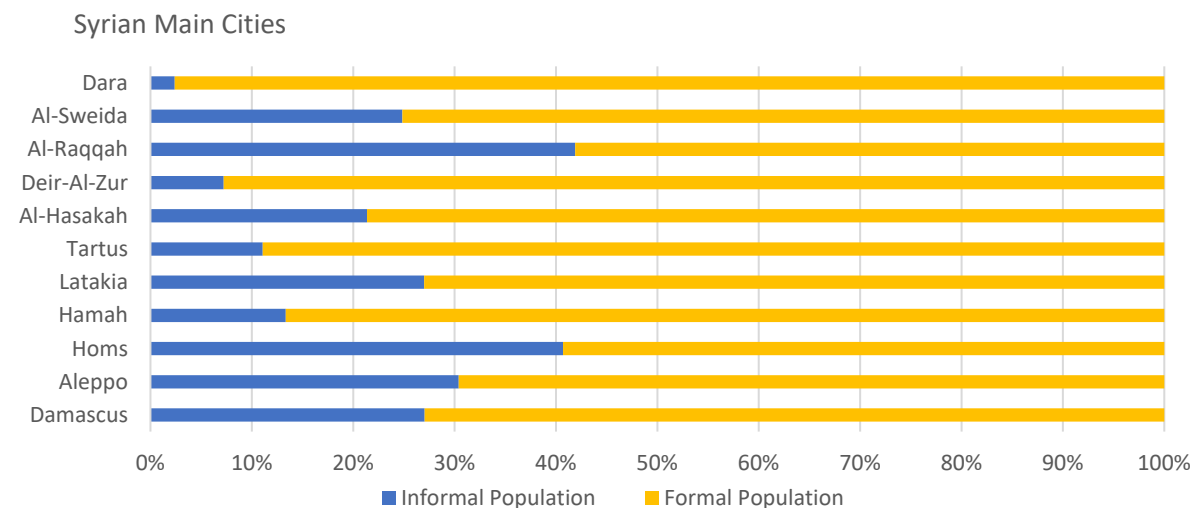
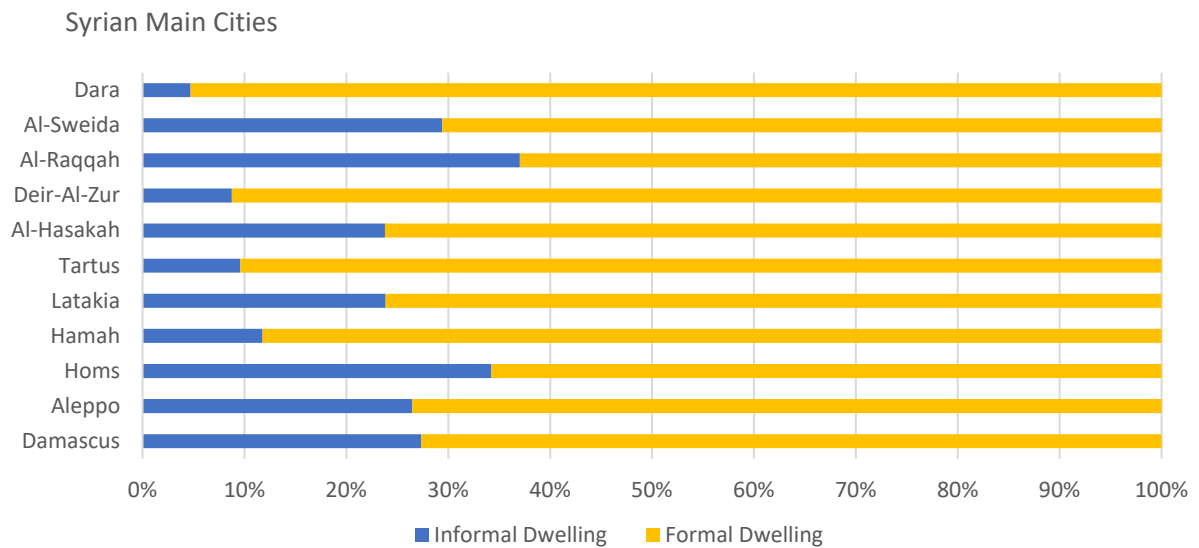


FIGURES 4-13 THE PERCENTAGE OF DWELLING AND POPULATION IN THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL AREAS IN THE SYRIAN PROVINCES

DATA SOURCE: POPULATION CENSUS CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2004

AL-QUNEITRA PROVINCE WAS NOT INCLUDED IN THE CENSUS

On the other hand, Figures 4-14 illustrates the rate of the informal settlements in the main cities in Syria. According to the Central Bureau of Statics, the informal settlements share around 26% out of the cities' population and dwellings. However, Damascus, Aleppo, And Homs have the highest shares of informality, as in the year 2004, almost half of the population in Homs were living in the informal settlements, at the same time in Damascus and Aleppo, almost one every three dwellings was informal (Central Bureau Of Statics 2004).



FIGURES 4-14 THE PERCENTAGE OF DWELLING AND POPULATION IN THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL AREAS IN THE SYRIAN MAIN CITIES
 DATA SOURCE: POPULATION CENSUS CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2004
 AL-QUNEITRA PROVINCE WAS NOT INCLUDED IN THE CENSUS

Table 4-3 and Table 4-4, show the actual number of the census of the year 2004.

	Ratio%	Dwelling		Ratio%	Households		Ratio%	Population	
		Informal	Total		Informal	Total		Informal	Total
Damascus and Rif-Dimashq	20.3	185119	914000	23.0	174653	758451	21.5	813847	3778980
Aleppo	17.4	139194	798000	19.0	134387	706498	19.3	779701	4045166
Homs	19.4	61957	320000	18.0	48957	271500	21.7	332083	1529402
Hamah	4.5	12496	280000	5.2	12240	233563	4.9	68543	1384953
Latakia	12.5	31520	252000	13.8	25638	185135	13.8	121276	879551
Tartus	3.0	6165	206000	3.2	4549	143051	3.1	22040	701395
Al-Hasakah	8.5	16004	188000	7.7	14026	181195	7.6	96365	1275118
Deir-Al-Zur	3.0	4738	157000	3.4	4485	132874	3.1	31404	1004747
Al-Raqqah	15.8	19939	126000	15.8	18966	120163	15.7	124611	793514
Al-Sweida	8.8	6683	76000	8.5	5423	64135	7.6	23912	313231
Dara	1.8	2476	141000	1.2	1634	132843	1.1	9274	843478
Total	14.1	486291	3458000	15.2	444958	2929408	14.6	2423056	16549535

TABLE 4-3 INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS SIZE IN THE SYRIAN PROVINCES (AL- DAYREI 2007)
DATA SOURCE: POPULATION CENSUS CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2004

	Ratio%	Dwelling		Ratio%	Population	
		Informal	Total		Informal	Total
Damascus	27.4	182035	665543	27.0	803504	2971074
Aleppo	26.5	139194	525712	30.4	779701	2564557
Homs	34.2	61957	181004	40.7	332083	816138
Hamah	11.8	12496	106137	13.3	68543	513489
Latakia	23.8	31520	132166	27.0	121276	449153
Tartus	9.6	6165	64252	11.1	22040	199150
Al-Hasakah	23.8	16004	67265	21.4	96365	451145
Deir-Al-Zur	8.8	4738	54081	7.2	31404	434746
Al-Raqqah	37.0	19939	53855	41.9	124611	297445
Al-Sweida	29.4	6683	22707	24.8	23912	96228
Dara	4.7	2476	52503	2.4	9274	387331

TABLE 4-4 INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS SIZE IN THE MAIN SYRIAN CITIES (AL- DAYREI 2007)
DATA SOURCE: POPULATION CENSUS CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2004

Informal settlements profile

Generally, the informal settlements in Syria almost have the same character as the formal settlements, physically, socially, and functionally. Though, the informal settlements have low-quality services and high absence of greenery or public spaces. In most of the cases in Syria, the informal settlements contain varied social groups in terms of religion, and origin; that is because their tenants came from different cities in Syrian or sometimes from other countries such as Palestine and Iraq, which, therefore, create kind of social mix areas.



*FIGURE 4-15 PHOTOS SHOW THE CLOTHING AND THE STRUCTURAL MATERIALS OF THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS' UNITS
(PHOTOS BY ABDULLA JAMAL)*

The construction materials mainly are bricks, cement, and usually with a framework of reinforced concrete, which is considered to be kind of costly material in Syria. The top roof usually, reflects the position of its owners based on its material. Building's clothing differs. Externally, most of the buildings in the informal settlements remain on the structure body without any covering. While, on the interior level, the house usually is well clothed and furnished almost in all aspects such as the sanitary and the electrical systems, floor covering, wall painting, and an adequate kitchen and bathroom Figure 4-15.



As mentioned, the informal settlements in Syria were built by individuals either on private lands sometimes or on squatted public lands, as they considered to be independent neighborhoods and give each one of them a unique character.

The juxtaposition between the formal urban zones and the informal settlements had created sort of a socio-economic segregation among the inhabitants, in terms of living situation, considering the differentiation of the economic level of expenditure of the families based on their living areas, as it is quite high in the formal urban zones compare to the one in the informal settlements. Other important differentiations that can be observed are the healthcare, the education and the sociological aspects: all come along with poorer living standards in the informal settlement. As well as, a lack of social services, green spaces and public transportations (Figure 4-16).



FIGURE 4-16 INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS MEZZEH 86, DAMASCUS
(PHOTO BY HASAN BELAL)

Although informal settlements' character in Syria is classified as unwanted and considered to damage the architectural identity of the Syrian cities, yet, these areas are considered as the only shelter that fits low- and medium-income groups. Especially in the wartime as these neighborhoods were the only available and affordable destination that could contain vulnerable groups who had been displaced due to the brutal war across Syria.

So, in order to characterize and define the informal settlements areas in Syria, various aspects should be distinguished like the residential unit, the social and physical look of the informal district, the household and the social cohesion, and the educational and employment levels in there.

Informal settlements units

structural safety indicators were never considered not even on the minimum level due to the absence of the engineering supervision and construction studies, as the unit did not respect the architectural nor the cultural identity of the city. As well as, it did not build according to the Syrian buildings code. Although in terms of quantity, the housing indicators (the minimal individual area, the average size of the house, and the crowding indicator) almost correspond to the Syrian code, however, they are in low levels.



*FIGURE 4-17 INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS UNIT, MEZZEH, DAMASCUS
(PHOTOS BY ABDULLA JAMAL)*

However, each building in the informal settlements is kind of unique. Every single one was built differently, with a variation in term of heights, facades, opening and so on. Each floor of these units is built based on the household's situation. Technically, it started with the ground floor for a small family then the unit evolves over the years, as the family grows bigger they install another floor for instance, so that a child will be able to rise his/her family at it in the future, or for a brother who lives in another city and wants to move in for education or employment. In the recent decades, some households started to install additional floors as a kind of investment. They release the place down to the market for renting and get an additional income, even higher than a regular job (Figure 4-17).

Informal settlements district

firstly, these settlements were built randomly on agricultural or public lands, so the absence of the planning principles and criteria is obvious, the roads were determined spontaneously respecting in the most cases the human scale. Very low healthcare conditions, and due to the lack of the geological studies of the area the safety indicator is soft.

The basic services and infrastructures like electricity, drinking water, and the sanitary system were provided urgently to serve the existing situation, although, these services were overused because of the pressure of the high density. Public facilities, schools and others if found, they are fragmented (Figure 4-18).



*FIGURE 4-18 AL-TABALLEH NEIGHBORHOOD, DAMASCUS INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS
(PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR)*

Moreover, more than 60% of the informal buildings do not have a property title “Tapu”. As well as, overlapping in the legal and estate situation of the properties. The informal areas are usually overcrowded, which causes a high construction activity, even higher than in the provinces, in the urban areas, or the national level, reflecting the demand and supply of the housing market.



FIGURE 4-19 AL-TABALLEH NEIGHBORHOOD, DAMASCUS INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS
(PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR)

PHOTO SHOWS THE MAIN STREET OF WITH THE COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Informal settlement household

The informal settlements took a shape of population gathering into closed neighborhoods that have the identity of their inhabitants. Despite the social mix, the informal districts are still kind of socially isolated on the scale of the city.

So, households in the informal settlements are not classified as particularly poor or vulnerable. However, they are not capable of owning a proper place in the urban area due to the high prices of houses. Moreover, the family structure in terms of sex, age, and size in the informal settlements is the same as the one in the urban areas on the national level, especially when comparing the first generation of these families, while in the second or the third generation the ratio become worsen or equal to the national level.

The unemployment indicator

In the informal settlements the unemployment ratio is significantly low, and that is logic because the main reason of emerging the settlements in the first place is to house the migrants who came to the big cities mainly for job opportunities. However, the unemployment ratio of the youth is quite high compared with the national level, that shows that the problem of high unemployment started to appear in the second generation (Central Bureau of Statistics 2004).

Figure 4-20 shows the unemployment ratio in the informal settlements is 10,2%, significantly lower than that on the national level (14,5%). However, for the second generation, or specifically for the youth, the ratio is different, at the level of the settlement 68,8% as opposed to the national average 59,8% (Al- Dayrei 2007).

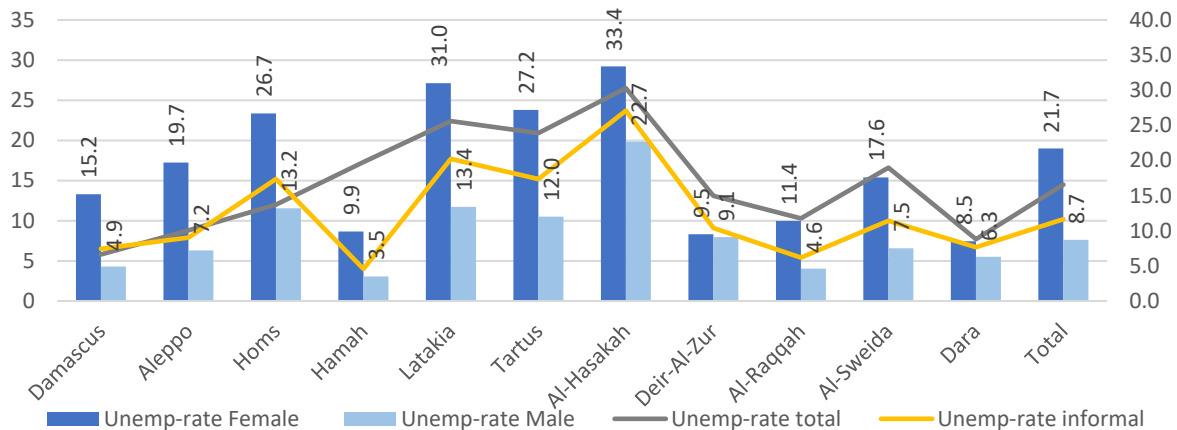


FIGURE 4-20 UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FOR MALE AND FEMALE IN THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE SYRIAN PROVINCES
 DATA SOURCE: POPULATION CENSUS CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2004
 AL-QUNEITRA PROVINCE WAS NOT INCLUDED IN THE CENSUS

The education indicator

Similarly, a high share of the informal settlements’ inhabitants is well educated compared with the national level. That is because the majority of people in the settlements are public employees who have varied certifications and skills. On the other hand, there is a high share of students who came to the cities to go to university. Statistically, the ratio is close when comparing people who went to school, as in the informal settlements the ratio is 91,1% similar to the national level, that is 91,5% (Al-Dayrei 2007).

The previous indicators show a significant transition process of the informal settlements from a temporary or urgent residential destination for families or individuals who migrated from different areas and do not belong originally to the place where they currently live, into permanent stable settlements for people that have started their families there, and who totally belong there Figure 4-21 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2004).

Therefore, the informal settlements in Syria, recently, have their own social and cultural identity, an identity that came with the cultural and social background of the migrants. Very often this causes a kind of distortion for the cultural and social heritage of the communities where the migrants came from.

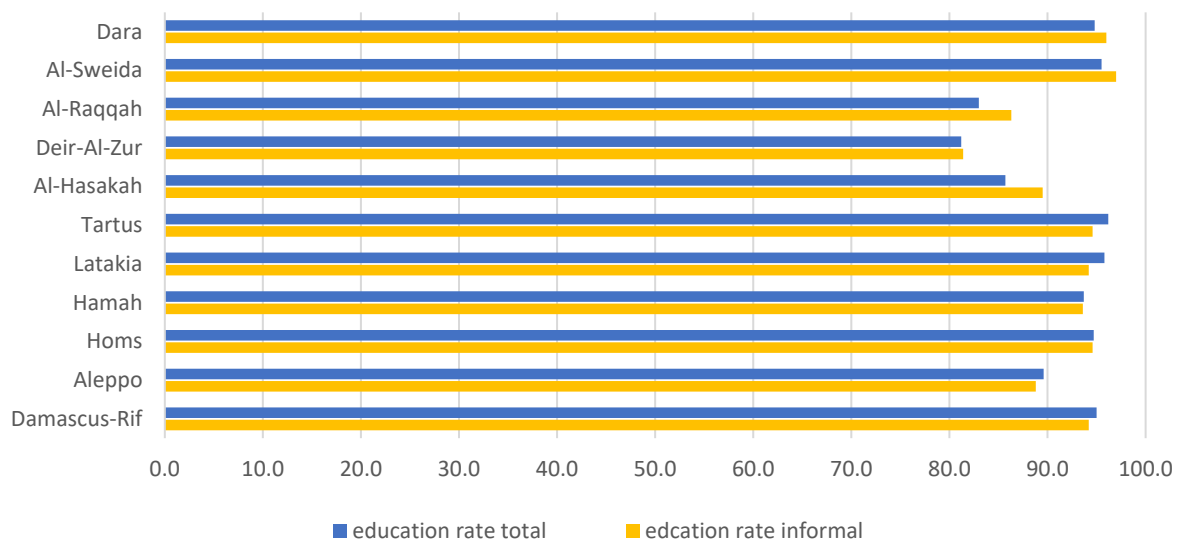


FIGURE 4-21 EDUCATION RATE IN THE SYRIAN PROVINCES
 DATA SOURCE: POPULATION CENSUS CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2004
 AL-QUNEITRA PROVINCE WAS NOT INCLUDED IN THE CENSUS

Social life and society

Social cohesion varies among the informal areas over Syria, for instance, according to the Syria-German Technical Cooperation program for Sustainable Urban Development in Aleppo, some of the informal settlements have sort of community conflicts and non-cooperation among different ethnic groups, as well as, insecurity such as incidences of robbery and moving-safely in the neighborhoods could be problematic. Anyways, in most of the settlements a sense of community solidarity is found with people willing to work together for the sake of the collectivity, for instance street paving (Syrian - German Technical Cooperation 2009).



FIGURE 4-22 COMMERCIAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES IN THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS
(PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR)

Figure 4-22 shows two photos of Al-Taballeh informal settlements in the southern area of Damascus. The photo on the left shows some banners for doctors and dietitians, while the one on the right shows a grocery market; the photos show how people who live in the Syrian informal settlements are actually well educated and practice highly specialized jobs.

Law recognition and policy dealing with informality

The definition of the informal settlements as mentioned previously has evolved over time. From 1960 to 2003, the illegal buildings were the buildings built outside the city's master plan limits. Since 2003, the law was updated to include the buildings built in unsuitable areas, or expropriated, and the buildings that did not comply with the Syrian building codes and urban planning. In 2008, the law eliminated the verdict of the ugliness, that was applied in previous years. In 2011, the law of infraction evolved to include the infraction in the city in the formal as well as the informal area; considering buildings that have been built without a permit as shape of informality.

So, according to the Syrian government, the term "informal settlement areas" refers to houses built in contrary to urban planning or Syrian building regulations. This means that in the informal settlements "the ownership of the land is in dispute and/or is not legally registered; and/or the settlement is in contravention of the master-plan zoning regulations; and/or planning standards are not met; and/or dwellings are constructed in contravention of building standards and regulations" (Wakely 2008).

The public authorities have paid no attention to the emergence of these settlements around the main Syrian cities. Basically, that was because of the conviction that the informal supply could meet the housing needs and especially for low-income groups where there is a large supply gap in the formal housing sector. According to the Oxford Business Group (OBG 2011), the Municipal Administration Modernization Program (MAM), that is funded by Syria and the EU, has been involved in a number of planning exercises carried out in informal settlements in Syria.

Mainly, there are two types of land tenure; the first type is the informal settlements that had developed on public lands, those land were squatted by the initial occupant, for instance, the case of the settlements on the slopes of the mountain Qasiun in Damascus. The second type is settlements built on private lands which are legally held by their owners, although it was not allowed to have any construction activities there. For instance, the agricultural lands like The Ghouta harvest in Damascus, the agricultural region surrounding Damascus to the south and the east, although it was outside the urban development plan of the city, it was anyways almost totally constructed. The construction of the settlements did not follow any rules and was randomly built with no respect for any codes or criteria, so they were recognized as "A'shwayat".

After all, the government has to deal with this quick growth in the informal settlements, so, they requested the support of the International Agency Urban Management Program in order to improve the living conditions in the informal settlements and try to control their fast development (AL-Khalaf 2014). However, thanks to the policy of integration, equipment and upgrading applied in the 1980s and the 1990s, informal settlements areas were served to a large extent by public infrastructure and some other services (AL-Baridi 2005).

During the 2000s, the government kept making interventions in the informal settlements and putting in different services like schools, healthcare, centers and others. By 2004, 97% of the informal settlements in Damascus had running water and rubbish was collected frequently. Although running water availability is not stable, as it runs for a few hours a week; also schools are overcrowded and public spaces inexistent (Clerc 2015).



FIGURE 4-23 SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTRE IN THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS (PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR)

Urban policies toward the informal settlements have changed over time, law admission and confession of the informal settlements has evolved. Since the beginning of the new century, the informal settlements became a central issue for the government and policy-maker, two main approaches were followed: either, renewal through total demolition of the informal settlements and modern planned reconstruction, or upgrading, through interventions in order to improve the existing zones.

At the meantime, the town planning services were drawing up detailed master plans with an overview of the final vision for some of these zones; while in contrast, the municipalities continue installing infrastructure and services for other zones (Clerc 2015).

The new policies started at the beginning of the 2000s. A new law in 2003 called for the destruction of all infringed buildings, buildings with no permit of building, or that did not comply with the building codes. In 2008, the law introduced a prison sentences for people involved in the building operations; on the other hand, this law enabled the legalization of the buildings built before this date, under condition that the existing buildings were compatible with the city's master plan (Clerc 2015).

The new master plans of the cities were massively revised containing the intervention toward the informal settlements. Therefore, the policies were, as mentioned previously, either renewal – demolition and reconstruction – following a master plan that ignores the reality, or on the other hand, upgrading of the informal settlements – improvement of the existing situation – together with the legalization of its land occupancy, for which could be called the reality. However, the feasibility of the first option – the renewal – according to its promoters was presumed to be ensured by the arrival of investors attracted by the opening-up of the economy.

The Ministry of Local Administration and environment, in charge of urban planning since 2004, took part in many programs that aimed at the upgrading of the informal neighborhoods. A set of laws had created the necessary administrative tools (46/2004, 33/2008). Together with the Regional planning Commission, that set up in 2010, The Ministry drew up what is called *Informal Settlements Upgrading and Rehabilitation National Program* (Government of Syria 2010).

The first phase, with Municipal Administration Modernization (MAM 2005), carried out with the assistance of the European Union {MEDA Program}. As well as, the recommendation of the Sustainable Urban Development Program carried out by the provinces of Aleppo and Damascus with the support of the German cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft Fur International Zusammenarbeit – GIZ). Moreover, the upgrading of Rif-Dimashq Program drawn by the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment and by the province of Rif-Dimashq with the aid of the World Bank and Cities Alliance. (Clerc 2015).

Informal settlements during the wartime

At the beginning of 2011, when the conflict has started in Syria, the implementation of the new master plan for the informal areas was in the very early stage. The so-called “*Informal Settlements Upgrading and Rehabilitation National Program*” was still in the process of adoption, and the implementation of the section related to the informal settlements in Law 15 of the year 2008 was also at the beginning (Clerc 2015).

From the very outset of the conflict, illegal construction started to boom, in the informal zones the constructions were soared, the formal zones took a place in the infringements too (e.g. addition of a floor on the roof, digging additional rooms under the ground floor, etc.). No actual report has been done to monitor this boom, but informal observations, opinions by the constructors themselves operating in zones concerned, and also by satellite images (Figure 4-24) seem to confirm this.



FIGURE 4-24 ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTION BOOMS, AREA LOCATED IN DOUMA, RIF-DIMASHQ PROVINCE.
(GOOGLE EARTH: 29/06/2009 – 26/06/2011 – 26/4/2012)

On the other hand, the increase record in cement sales, which was in April 2011 480,000 tones had gone up by 115% in March of the same year, according to the records of General Organization of Cement and Building Materials, is also a sign of such a boom. In the time of the conflict, when the currency seems risky, households in the informal settlements tend to seek security by investing more in the real estate (Clerc 2015).

Apparently, taking advantages of the current situation of war and the fact that the public authority wants to avoid open a new conflict within population, as soon as the crisis started, households started new construction of new buildings and raising the height of existing ones. So, in order to limit this phenomenon, the government asked The General Organization of Cement and Building Materials to demand a construction permit before selling cement to a client. However, the construction in a way or another continued (Syria Report 2011).

SUMMING UP

The housing situation in Syria is kind of unique because the main pillars that support the housing sector exist and active. For instance, the private sector, although, the one is more commercial than affordable, the sector is the most active one among all others, and the outcomes more often have good quality. On the contrary, the cooperative sector has the principle of affordability, but yet, the sector does not have the finances or the power to respond to the housing market demand.

Moreover, the policies and laws have implemented in the housing field; apparently, they have left negative consequences on the housing sector such as inflated prices, freeze large parts of lands, and finally, they have not helped individuals to meet their needs whether landlords nor tenants. In addition, laws and policies that were supposed to facilitate foreign investments and get them to implement the housing projects were not fully effective as well.

On the other hand, the informal settlements were the only remain destination, as almost half of the population are living in informal areas. However, these areas were not officially recognized by the law, but they were provided with important services. Although, they were considered as a downside part of the city despite the fact of people who live there are well educated and employed. Another important fact is that informal settlements have met the housing market demand with affordable prices.

After all, the growing land and housing demand with the limited supply, the lack of sufficient and affordable official market options of access to urban land and housing, and the lack of a social rental policy where it is estimated that there are 500,000 empty houses in Syria due to the previous rent law, which led to a non-balanced relationship between owner and tenant, and caused complete disappearance of the leasing approach from the housing market in Syria” (Fernandes 2008).

5. THE HOUSING CRISIS IN SYRIA

Introduction

The housing crisis remains one of the most intractable crises in Syria, it has escalated highly since the 1970s and came along with the expansion of the state structure, and as a result of the rural migration toward the cities and of the fact that the policies and the actions that had been taken at that time were not effective to tackle such a situation.

On the contrary they had the unintentionally effect of making it even worse; as The supplemented housing by the public sector did not exceed 10% of the actually built houses and 12% of the cooperative sector, overall the average of the contribution of both the public and the cooperative sectors were around 13-23%, while the rest was left to the private sector, that was responsible for more than 80% of the implementation, However, the aggregate number of the implemented dwelling by the three sectors was lower than the required housing needs and unable to escort the current population growth (G. O. Housing 2019).

This lack of affordable, decent housing is increasingly seen as a major socio-economic crisis, while at the same time vast amounts of money are being invested in luxury properties for a newly visible, ultra-wealthy elite. This chapter examines these aspects of the housing sector in Syria and finds the related policies roots in the country's transition from a centrally planned, state economy, to one with increasingly neoliberal characteristics. The recent wave of unrest in the country may be symptomatic of these changes (Goulden 2011, 187-202).

The sharp differentiation between the steady increase of the real estate prices, and the trend of wages and salaries, during a long stable period of exchange price of Syrian Pound, however, the relationship between those two are not in a direct proportion, as the prices of the real estate experienced a great spikes through different stages that are not related to the exchange price, but it was due to some policies and as reaction of the market situation among demand and supply and monopolization.

At the same time the high prices of rental, accomplished a new motivation for houses ownership, as it tends to be a new struggle in the way of tenants, because they have to pay most of their income for rent, giving them no chance of saving for home owning.

Housing is considered the chief concern of the citizens of Syria these days and represents a serious crisis which has been ongoing for several decades. The housing situation in Syria is invariably described in local media as a 'crisis'. Decades of rural-urban migration, along with a high population growth rate, have left towns and cities with a demand for new housing which far outstrips the supply, with a shortfall of around 1.5 million formal homes. Faced with this lack of housing, many people have had no choice but to turn to the informal sector, by squatting on land that they do not own (such land is usually owned by the state) or buying a plot on private land (in which the lack of planning permission and legal contracts means the arrangement is informal) (Goulden 2011).

The estimates of what proportion of the population lives in informal housing vary, usually fluctuating between 30 – 40%, though a recent report by the Central Bureau of Statistics estimates that it may now be as high as 50%. For Damascus and Aleppo, the same difficulty in accurately estimating the proportion of informal housing is found, though recent figures suggest the figure is between 40 – 50%. Whatever the exact numbers, they have undoubtedly grown dramatically in recent decades and have been the main destination for those seeking new housing. Between the years 1981 – 1994 the informal sector met 65% of the new housing demand in Damascus and 50% for the country as a whole (Goulden 2011).

So, as mentioned before access to adequate affordable housing is dependent upon many factors: an adequate and affordable supply of lands, basic infrastructure, construction materials, construction and technical labors, and housing finance. In addition to a proper urban and regional planning, and public spaces or cultural amenities. However, numbers of studies and reports about the housing situation in Syria, show a noticeable failure of housing delivery, particularly at affordable levels for low-income households. This chapter will present the main indicators that have a direct responsibility for this failure.

POPULATION DENSITY AND ITS EFFECT ON THE HOUSING CRISIS

Nowadays, the Syrian cities occupy by 55% of the population, while the 45% in the suburbs and the countryside in the year 2018 compared with the year 1960, the countryside areas were holding almost 63% of the population, and it means the internal migration passed 21% toward cities, not included the seasonal migration (World Bank Group 2020).

However, the population increases more in the urban areas than in peripheries or rural areas, that is due to the presence of more services, water supplement, education and other indicators. The following map (Figure 5-1) shows the concentration of the population, it is obvious that the people highly concentrate in the main cities like Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hamah. This brings more pressure on these cities in many aspects, especially in the housing sector, since the market could not meet the increasing demand for houses.

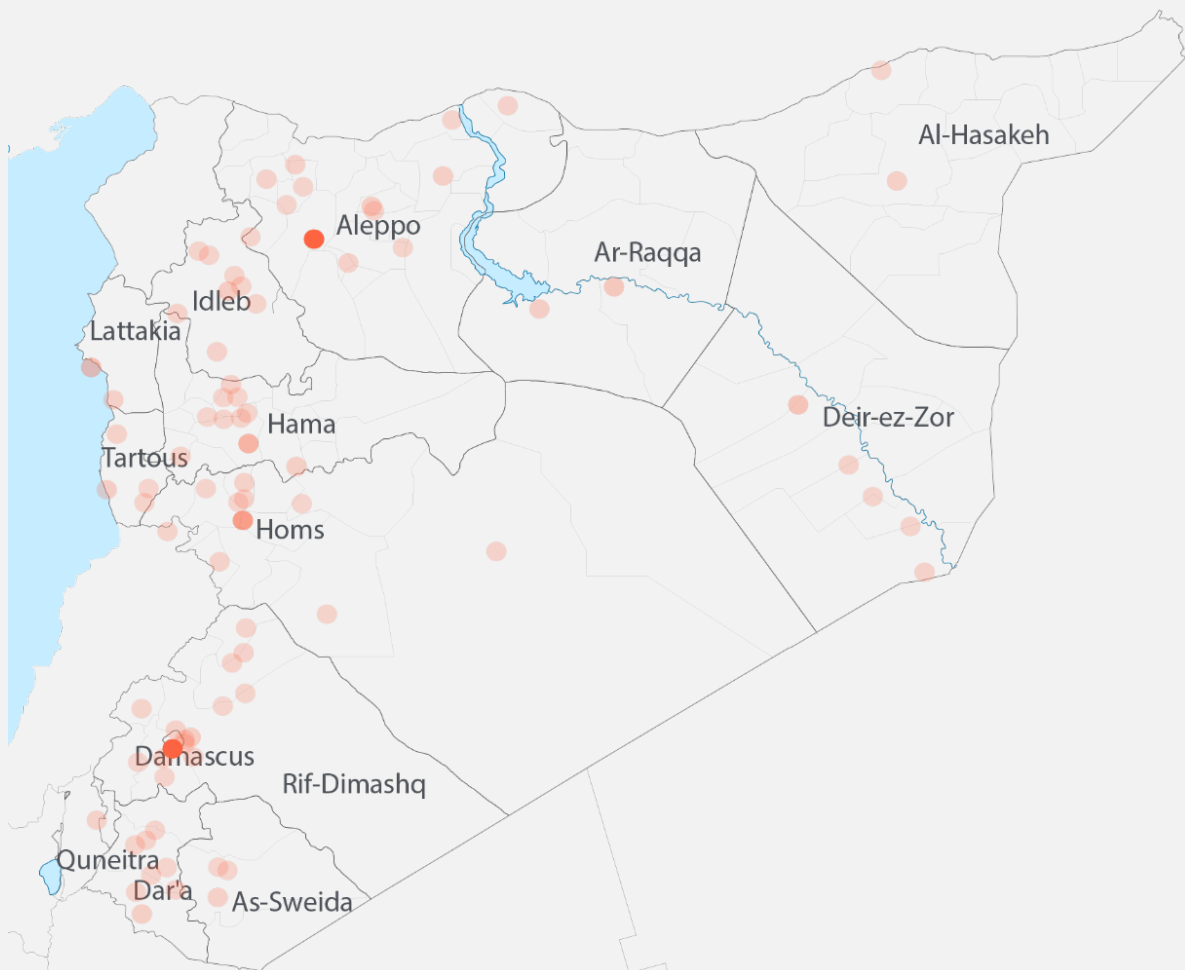


FIGURE 5-1 PEOPLE CONCENTRATION IN SYRIA
(WORLD BANK GROUP 2020)

Figure 5-2 shows the biggest Syrian cities by population size. Aleppo considered as the biggest city in Syria with more than 1,6 million people, is followed by Damascus, the capital with 1,56 million people although, the population in Damascus only counted within the administrative border of the city. Homs comes after with less than 1 million people. Hamah, Latakia, and Deir Azur follow, with less than 0,5 million people. Those are the cities that highly suffered from the housing crisis the most.

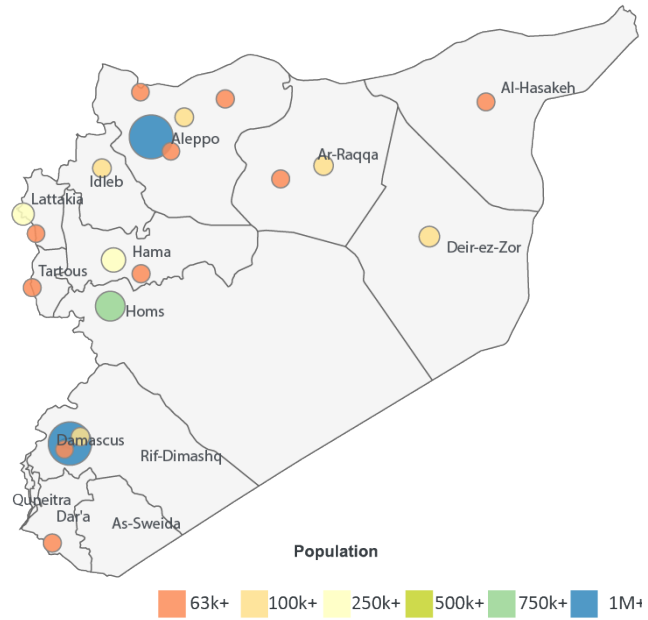


FIGURE 5-2 SYRIA'S TOP 20 CITIES BY POPULATION
 (WORLD BANK GROUP 2020)

The Syrian population had been steadily increasing until 2010. In the past decade, in the annual population variation has become negative due to the ongoing war, but still Syria takes the 55th country in comparison with the world in total fertility rate with 2,9 children/woman in the year 2020 – (it was 1,47 in Italy in the same year - (World Factbook 2020).

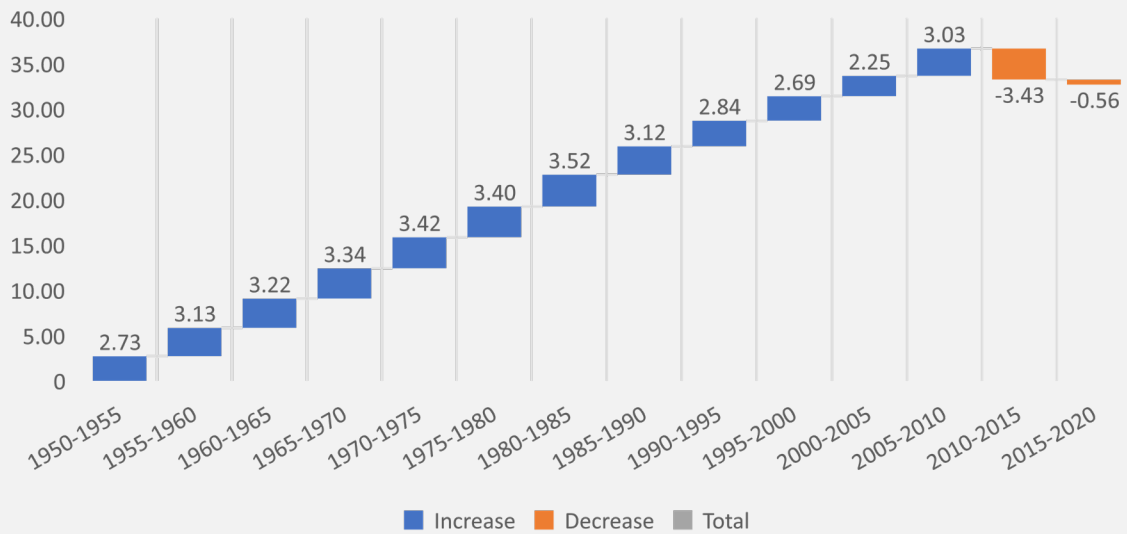


FIGURE 5-3 AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF POPULATION CHANGE IN SYRIA (PERCENTAGE)
 (UNITED NATIONS 2020)

Syria has an intermediate average of population density, around 128 people/km². by looking at the history of the Syrian population density over the area, since the year 1950, (Figure 5-4) the density has tripled in the country since the 1970s, and expected to grow even more in the following decades according to the population dynamics department in the United Nations website (United Nations 2020)

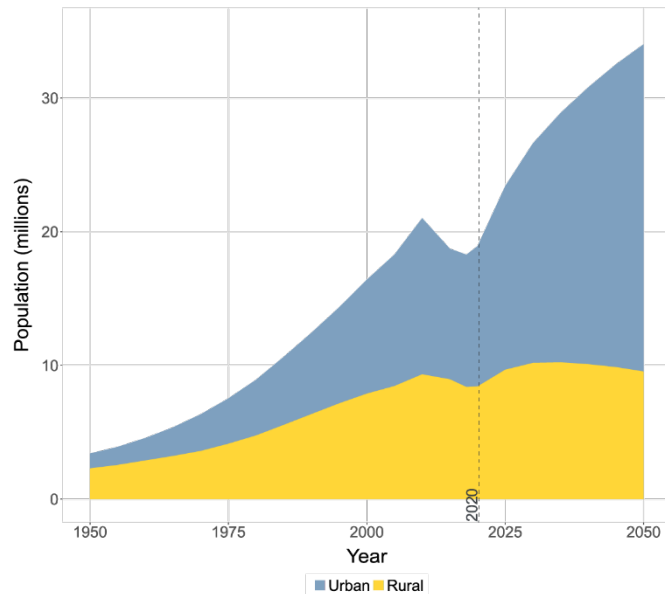


FIGURE 5-4 URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION GROWTH IN SYRIA (UNITED NATIONS 2020)

Overall, the population indicator has a direct relationship with housing. All the census data show that Syria has been facing an enormous increase in the population, especially in the main cities, despite the drop of the last decades. This increase, together with the slight production of adequate houses, make more pressure on the housing system.

Consistent population growth and particularly the growth in the number of households leads to a consistent growth in housing demand. At the same time, the supply of affordable housing influences the opportunity for the population to form new households.

However, to accommodate a smooth housing entry of people, it is important that housing stocks are diverse, it should be not only high-quality and certainly not the only owner-occupied housing, but also affordable rental dwellings. Local governments have limited power implementing policies to enlarge their housing stock in order to fit their inhabitants.

THE IMPACT OF INTERNAL MIGRATION ON THE HOUSING CRISIS

One of the significant factors that have a direct relation with the housing crisis in Syria is that the internal migration, especially from the rural to the urban zones. Many studies have been done in this field; most of them pointed out that the internal migration process in Syria is not so different than it is in other countries around the globe, mainly it takes the same shape of people moving from the rural and countryside areas toward more urbanized and more organized zones. It is also known as the industrialization movement that happened because of the limitation of the agricultural lands. Generally, the benefits of the agricultural activities have decreased and became sort of limited source for the Syrian households. It is as well a result of the technological development that opens a new opportunity were not available before. Besides the new generations thrive for a good education that almost exists only in the big cities.

Moreover, the lack of efficient policies and governmental interventions to manage the process of the internal migration make it more difficult to regulate it, and due to nonexistence of the administration and mobility regulation that whether to encourage it or to restrict it. Therefore, the size and direction of the internal migration became part of the common economic, social and political development and growth and has a direct relation with it.

Syria experienced during the first half of the last century limited migration movement among the provinces, and from the countryside to the urban. The migration rate noticeably increased during the sixtieth and seventieth, however, some development plans had been done to improve the quality of life in the countryside like improving the public services, developing the road network, and enhancing the infrastructure; seeking to balance the development in both geographical and administration aspects, distributing different project among the provinces downsized the migration rate (Central Bureau Of Statistics 2019).

In the following, the discussion will be on the major pressure that the migrants put on the housing system, it will go also through the preferred destination cities by migrants. As well as the most unlikely cities for living. As it will explain the relationship between these indicators and their influence on housing supplementary process in Syria. by Focusing on the census of the years 1994 and 2004.

Migration size

Comparing the years 1994 and 2004, the observed data compares the size and the movement process of the migrations, and the different streams of the past and recent accommodation place. In the following and according to the bureau statistical center, the discussion will represent the size and the direction of internal migrants on the level of the provinces themselves and as well as the migration from the rural to the urban zones within the province.

The following tables show, the total migration on the level of the country is 345,000 migrants during the 10 years before 1994, and they represent 2,6% out of the total population. On the other hand, the 10 years before 2004, the total number of migrants was 331,000, and they represent 1,8% out of the total population in the same year (Central Bureau Of Statistics 2019).

	Arrivals according to the previous accommodation (1994)	Departures according to recent accommodation (1994)	Net migration (1994)
Province center	73000	145000	-72000
Other urban zones	109000	34000	75000
Countryside	72000	75000	-3000
Total	254000	254000	
Percentage (population)	1.80 %		

TABLE 5-1 SIZE OF MIGRATION ON THE PROVINCES LEVEL, IN THE YEAR (1994)
(CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2019)

	Arrivals according to the previous accommodation (2004)	Departures according to recent accommodation (2004)	Net migration (2004)
Province center	71000	132000	-61000
Other urban zones	139000	31000	108000
Countryside	38000	85000	-47000
Total	248000	248000	
Percentage (population)	1.40 %		

TABLE 5-2 SIZE OF MIGRATION ON THE PROVINCES LEVEL, IN THE YEAR (2004)
(CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2019)

Migration dynamics and flows by province

provinces attracting migrants were there according to the 1994 to the census data, Rif-Dimashq, Al-Hasakah, and Al-Raqqah. While according to the year 2004 the three attraction provinces became Rif-Dimashq, Latakia, and Al-Raqqah.

Rif-Dimashq province was the most attraction province among the other Syrian provinces continually before the year 1994 or even after, as it has an average increase by 1.4% yearly between the years 1994 – 2004. The reason of this highly increase of migration toward it, because it is near the capital Damascus, where almost all the ministries and central administration offices are located, and where the main economic, political, and social activities are held on one hand, and due to the high prices in Damascus on both rental and ownership sides (The Central Bureau of Statistics 2009).

Al-Hasakah, Al-Raqqah, and Latakia become at the second, third and fourth most attraction provinces respectfully, and with a great difference from the first (Rif-Dimashq). Al-Hasakah province, where people used to do agricultural work for living, as it is known by its fertile big lands also the fuel industry, all that made of the province an important point of attraction of migrants, especially from the near ones such as Al-Raqqah and Deir-Al-Zur before 1994. It passed from being a point of attraction to be a point of departure between the years 1994 – 2004 because of the climate change, lack of water, and land drought, that pushed people to start leaving, looking for new opportunities.

Al-Raqqah province, it remains an attractive place during the period 1994 - 2004, and the main reason is the major economic and social development, especially in the agricultural field, due to the Euphrates dam and the development of the irrigation network by the government that led to job creation in the area, a major factor of migration.

Latakia province is one of the promising provinces at the country level because it has the biggest port in the country, as well as it is a recommended place for internal tourists, also it has many developing projects on different fields, such as the creation of Tishreen university, the third biggest university in the country, it also experienced increases of industrial activities from 5.9% in 1994, to 6.4% in 2004. Therefore, it achieved a noticeable movement in terms of people attraction for either work or study reasons, and it became the second attraction point of internal migration after 2004.

The rest of the Syrian provinces are almost all are considered as a non-attractive ones, such as _ordered from the least attractive province and upward_ (Damascus, Idleb, Hama, Deir-al-Zur, Tartous, Al-Sweida, Aleppo, Homs, and Quneitra), during the ten years before 1994 population counting. While according to the counting of 2004 the order became like the following (Damascus, Idleb, Hama, Al-Hasakah, Aleppo, Deir-Al-Zur, Homs, Tartous, Al-Quneitra, Al-Sweida, and Dar'a). As the ranking between the two years shows the repulsion provinces remain the same but in a different order, and with the ratio of close differences between them (Central Bureau Of Statistics 2019).

The province of Damascus, due to its small administrative size, the high increase of its population density (Damascus province only represented 10,1% and 8,7% out of the total population according to the population census of the years 1994 and 2004 respectfully), and mainly because of the high increase of the housing prices in rental ownership, passed from being a strongly repulsive province for the migrants, especially low- and medium-income groups, into a province that attracts rich and high class households.

The provinces Deir-Zur, Tartous, Al-Sweida, and Dar'a, had the same rank consistently between years 1994–2004, and they tend to have a stable population. Most refer to Tartous as a province with limited lands and high population (1% out of the total area with 4,3% and 3,9% of the total population in the years 1994 and 2004 respectfully). On the opposite side Dar'a known by its wide lands range, high fertile plains that are highly recommended for agricultural activities, that cause high density as well.

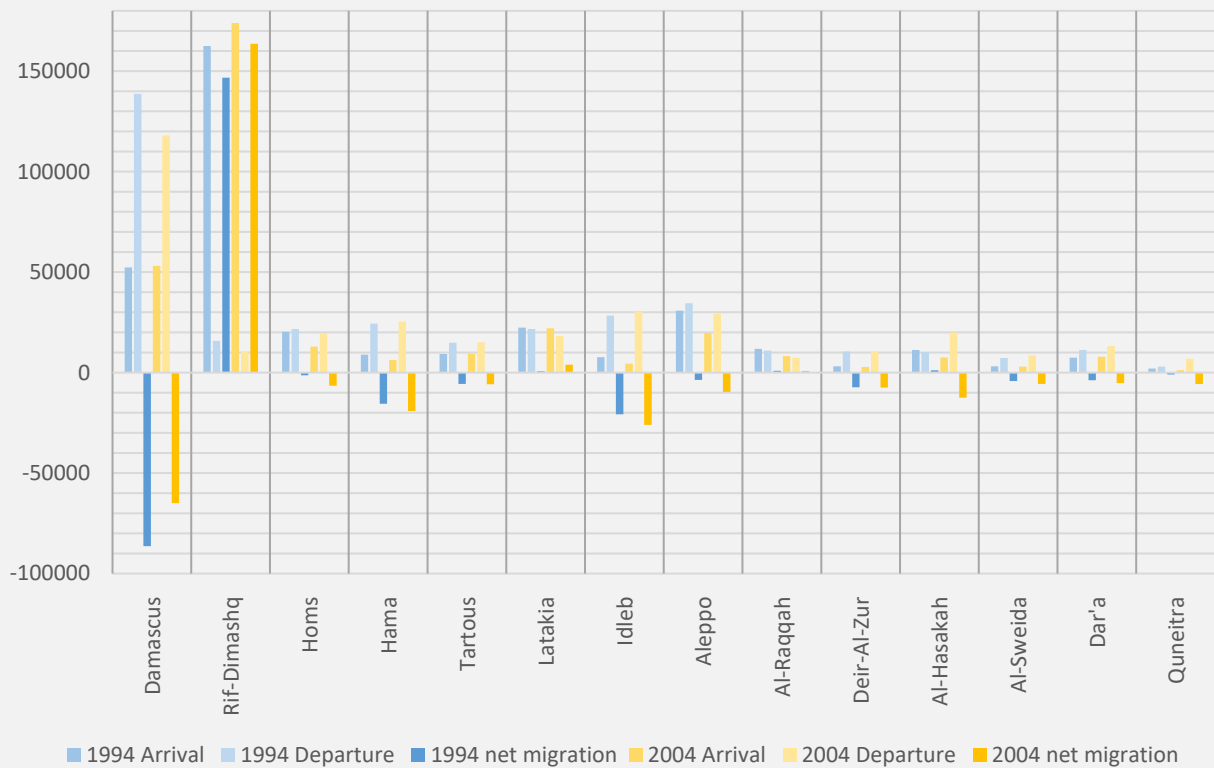
Reasons and motives of the internal migration

According to the survey done by the bureau static office (Central Bureau Of Statistics 2019) and Fafo institution for labor and social researches in Norway in the year 2000 (Khawaja 2002), there were many reasons for migration between the different provinces. Basically, it was based on economic and social motives with great differences between different profiles of migrants and their priorities ranging from lack of job appropriate, to inadequate houses or unwanted location, low-income that does not cover the living costs, nonexistence or inappropriateness of public services and infrastructure, non-possession of agricultural land or its small size or low productivity.

The issue of unacceptable house or neighborhood is also considered as an important one, especially for the women. As the migration rate for this reason was 31.1 % between 1995 and 2000; and it was divided into 38.2 % migrated women, and 27.8 % migrated men (Khawaja 2002). However, the migrated families during the same period aimed to improve their lives and their places but they could not due to the high prices of houses, so they were distributed among 29.3 % in urban flats, 65.6 % in traditional houses area, and 5.1 % in farms and grove areas around the big cities (Hadad 2018).

The following Figure 5-5, compares the number of internal migrations in the years 1994 and 2004 among the Syrian provinces. The highest number of migrants were settled in Rif-Dimashq province –the direct suburb and peripheries of Damascus– while the highest number of people left the capital Damascus during the same period and with a huge gap between the two and the rest of the provinces in term of the migration size.

FIGURE 5-5 THE MIGRATION SIZE BY THE SYRIAN PROVINCE OF THE YEARS 1994 – 2004
 (CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2019)



Overall, between 1994 and 2004, in almost all of the provinces there is a noticeable slowing down in the population mobility, with the exception of Rif-Dimashq and Damascus, as the population in Damascus reduced from 10,1% to 8,7% out of the total population in Syria, while in Rif-Dimashq it increased from 11,9% to 12,7% in the same period, and that shows the continuity of migration from Damascus to Rif-Dimashq.

Moreover, and according to the internal population census of the year 2000, most of the migration flows were between the close provinces, while the other migration movements were generally concerned to Damascus and Rif-Dimashq provinces. (Central Bureau Of Statistics 2019). It is also noted that the main movements were occurring mainly between the capital Damascus and its direct Suburb Rif-Dimashq which is recognized as a province itself.

The high density and high living cost, made of the provinces' centers a good destiny for rich migrants, while the mid and low-income were fully or partly used to match in the new conditions, and this made them leave toward the farms and the agricultural areas around the cities, settling illegally, building their unsafe homes in unserved poor environments. The Bureau Statistics Office calls this phenomenon "realization".

Housing, however, may attract migrants or make them depart, and lack of housing may prevent migrants from entering or lead to outgoing migration. But urgent migrations are not very likely to choose their destination according to the housing accessibility. Also, the inadequacy of housing may postpone migration mobility. But in the case of Syria, no matter of the housing opportunities, people tend to migrate due to other important factors such as work, education, and healthcare.

Internal migration due to the war

According to Humanitarian Needs Overview' report, people tend to leave their cities for various reasons; the rate in 2018 remained almost as high as 2017 (HNO Syria 2019), with 1.6 million population moving. Thus, the map below (Figure 5-6) shows the approximate number of people migration by province, high migration is mainly observed toward Rif-Dimashq, Aleppo, Idleb, and Damascus. That, however, leads to increase of demand on the houses in those cities. Therefore, when the demand is higher than the supply, the prices rise and in such a chaos situation they grew even higher.

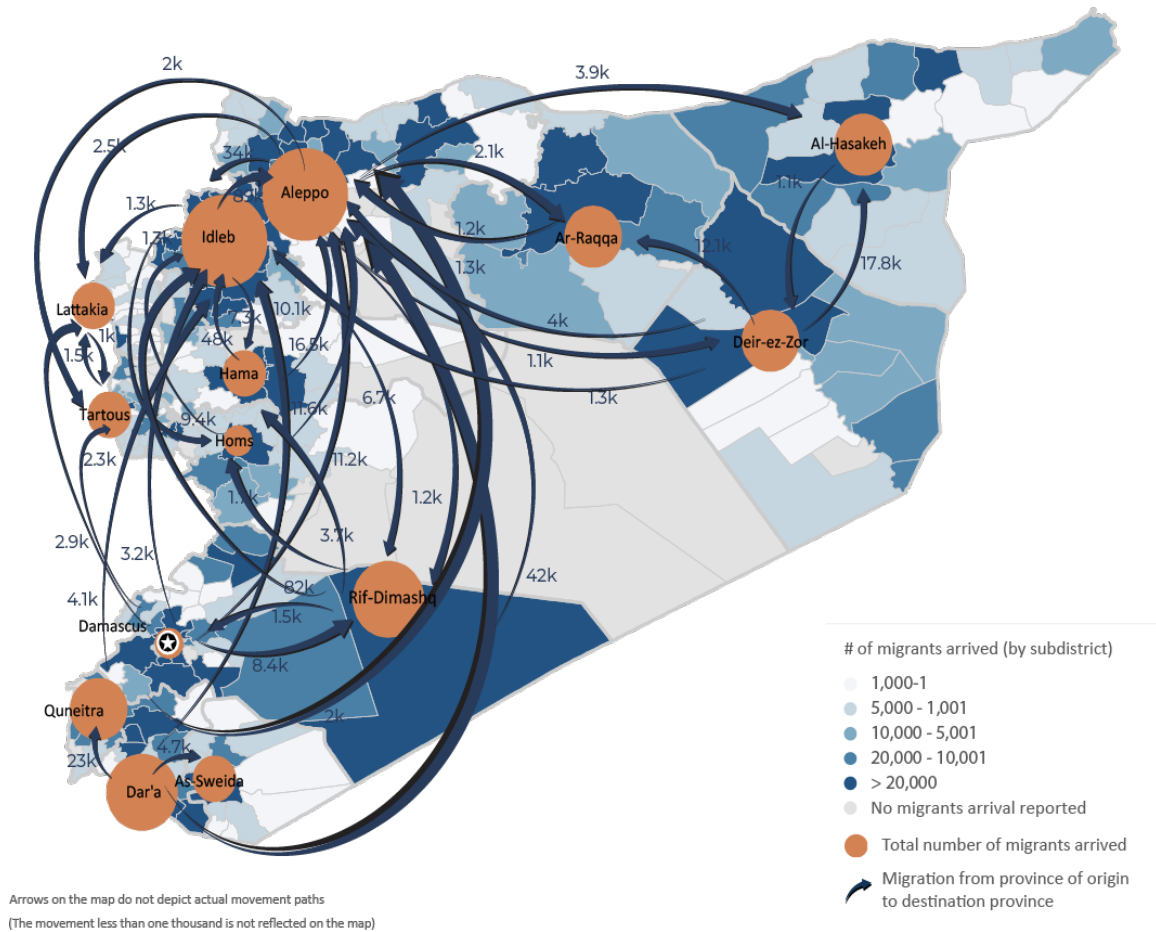


FIGURE 5-6 PEOPLE MIGRATION DUE TO THE WAR IN THE YEAR 2018
 (HNO SYRIA 2019)

HOUSING MARKET AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE HOUSING CRISIS

The housing market in Syria generally, and in the big cities like Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs especially, is monopolized by the private actors who are known as Real-Estate offices. These are independent offices, companies or sometimes simply rich people that have enough money to buy and sell stocks as a type of trade. That kind of deals happens between the buyer and the seller almost without any governmental control.

The way to get a house in Syria beside inheriting one, and this is through cooperative sector, which is called sometimes collaborative charities “Jemia’t Ta’awneeh”, that works with subscriptions that might last for 10 to 15 years before getting a house.

Still some of their some projects have many disadvantages, such as little connection with the city, and low quality of public services. Another issue that the co-operative sector faces is the implementation of the project, passing from the policies that determine the outline of the project and its users, to the construction process, as mentioned previously (AL-Khalaf 2014).

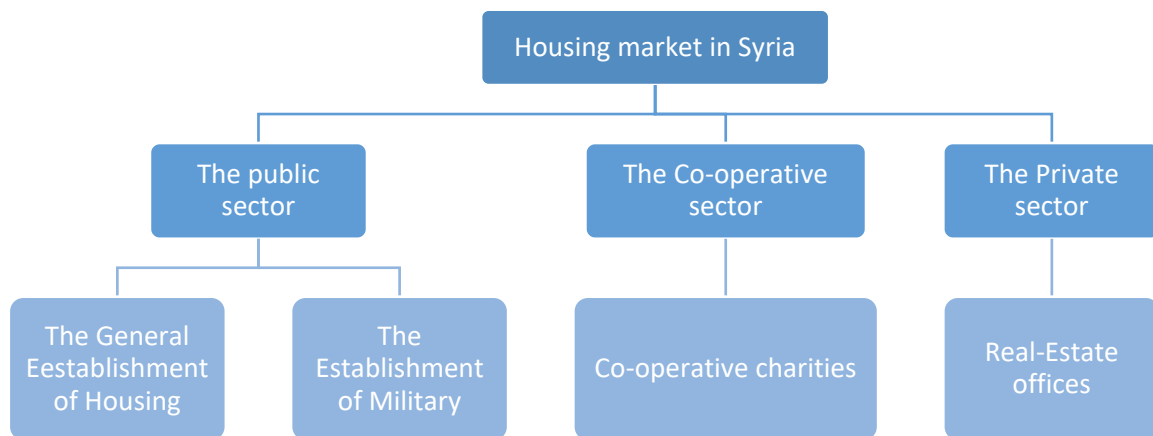


FIGURE 5-7 HOUSING MARKET STRUCTURE IN SYRIA (AL-KHALAF 2014)

The regional effects of the Syrian housing market

However, the recent boom in the housing prices was not only in Syria but also in many other neighboring countries. Table 5-3 shows the market split into three main categories: homeownership, rental and social housing. The homeownership ratio scores the lowest in Egypt with 38%, and the highest in Syria with 85%.

On the contrary, for rental and social housing sectors Syria scores the lowest with less than 1%. In spite of the high homeownership ratio in Syria, still there is a shortage in housing stock, particularly affordable housing. Housing supply depends partly on land supply which appears to be a gap that exists in many of the EMCD¹ countries (Beidas-Strom, Lian and Maseeh 2009).

Since 2002, the market was dominated by a housing supply dedicated to the middle to high-income, in term of value. It tailored to high-income expatriates, seasonal tourists, and wealthy households. High-income expatriate workers are typically those who work in the oil and financial industry, and those who work in rich Western areas of the world, Australia, Europe, and North America. So, expatriate workers, together with the seasonal tourists, generate the majority of demand in the luxury and high-end segments of the rental market, contributing to push the rental prices to even higher levels (Beidas-Strom, Lian and Maseeh 2009).

However, the “regular” Syrian workers are strongly influenced by such a process, most importantly because the high exchange price from different currencies to Syrian Pound makes the gap between the income of the “regular” Syrian workers and the expatriate worker very large.

	Home ownership	Rental & Leasehold	Informal and Social (Subsidized) Housing	Land Mkt Problems	House Price / Income Ratio	Supply Gaps
Algeria	0.45	0.30	0.25	Yes	12	Yes
Bahrain	0.68	0.20	0.12	Yes	12	No
Egypt	0.38	0.33	0.29	Yes	7	Yes
Jordan	0.71	0.17	0.12	No	3	No
Kuwait	0.68	0.27	0.05	Yes	...	Moderate
Morocco	0.65	0.22	0.15	Yes	9	Future
Qatar	0.72	0.28	Moderate
Saudi Arabia	0.56	0.44*	...	No	...	Future
Syria	0.85	0.07	0.08	yes	...	Moderate
Tunisia	0.77	0.08	0.15	...	5	No
UAE	0.55	0.45	0.05	...	>12	No

TABLE 5-3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HOUSING MARKET IN THE EMCD COUNTRIES (BEIDAS-STROM, LIAN AND MASEEH 2009)

¹ The EMCD region comprises the following 16 economies: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates. However, data are not available for all 16.

Supply rigidities are strongly attributed to land supply constraints, which appear to exist in all mentioned countries with supply gaps. While some positive changes occurred after 2000, affordable housing is still a challenge for many EMCD economies. Besides, as Table 5-3 indicates, in countries with supply gaps, the house-price-to-income ratio is generally larger than in those without. In spite of the high homeownership ratio in EMCD, there is a shortage in housing stock, particularly affordable low- and middle-income housing.

Real estate and Realtors market

The general economic recession, along with lack of investments availability have an enormous negative effect on the housing market, making it a place of a commercial speculations, and playground for venture capitalists at the same time, through buying and selling the stocks many times in such a commercial progress that is not related to housing needs in any way, raising the prices of the stock, making those in need accept higher prices, being afraid of the fact that prices getting even higher.

Expatriate worker and especially those in the Gulf Countries have influenced the market, through the fact that they could afford owning a house, increasing the housing demand. Although in the 1980s the construction sector represented 7% of the GDP, and it recorded the highest rate after five years reaching 8% in 1985, it got greatly down in 1990, to 3% as the lowest rate, that had never been reached again till 2005 (Hadad 2018).

Due to the lack, or non-existence, of housing companies and associations in Syria, obviously, the governmental housing establishments that could provide or help households during renting or purchasing process of a house take a long time. Therefore, the fastest, or even the only, process of accessing housing is through realtors.

Real-estate offices and realtors are the main actor that controls and monopolizes the houses' prices. For instance, the process of selling or buying a house is based on the needs of one of the two parties involved in the deal. The more the seller needs to sell his property, the lower the price he could get, and vice versa. Since the realtors are the only connection between the property owner and the one who wants to buy it, the realtors have more chances to control the property's price, until they get the deal accepted by both parties, trying to achieve the highest benefit for themselves out of both.

The actual portion of buildings and construction process in the eighties was not because of the actual act of housing market as type of a solution for the initial housing crisis. It was more as a cover for corrupted money of particular side, aiming to a quick increase of the profits; it was more toward buying and selling the existing stocks than constructing a new one.

Although the private sector manipulates the housing market, as it represents 85 % of the housing market stocks in the country (Hadad 2018). Housing provision that has been done by the private sector has the commercial character that is separated from principles or the tools of engineering or city planning. They only presume each deal separately almost without any general criteria, or regulations.

Syrian Provinces	Families Number	Occupied Units	Unoccupied Units	Ratio of unoccupied
Damascus	340864	309317	35780	10.3%
Aleppo	706498	675647	65523	8.8%
Rif-Dimashq	426228	405008	45879	10.1%
Homs	271500	258679	37411	12.5%
Hama	233563	221266	30663	12.1%
Latakia	185135	182557	41375	18.4%
Idleb	201685	195756	22689	10.3%
Al-Hasakah	181195	179486	26508	12.8%
Deir-Al-Zur	132874	130163	10887	7.7%
Tartous	143051	141703	26175	15.5%
Al-Raqqah	120163	114378	8629	7%
Dar'a	132843	120752	10714	8.1%
Sweida	64135	61899	8012	11.4%
Quneatra	10624	10274	1758	14.6%
Total Number and Average Percentage	3150358	3006885	372003	11.4%

TABLE 5-4 THE NUMBER OF UNOCCUPIED UNITS IN THE SYRIAN PROVINCE
 (THE CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2009)

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICIES EFFECTS ON THE HOUSING CRISIS

The insufficient regulations and policies that were implemented as a way to solve the housing crisis in Syria and the rescission in adequate housing provision, have turned to be causes of the housing crisis because of the inflexibility of these policies and the fact that it did not respect or follow the housing demand in the market. In the following the most important of these regulations and laws are detailed.

Law 3/1976; Land Trading Banning

This law has banned the process of buying and selling the lands that have been included into the residential master plan, unless the land has a building already at it. The public authorities were allowed to buy the lands as they were exempted from the banning. However, when the law was executed, it turned to have unintentional consequences like diminishing the land prices, while all the other prices went higher. A lot of land plots were therefore kept on hold due to this law, and landlords attempted to evade the provisions of this law as well (Hadad 2018).

Law 60/1979; Urban Expanding Law

Its role was in the city centers and the urbanization plan within it. the rushing of execution this law has led to enormous confiscation of lands, therefore the public authorities went into deep lending problems that they could not handle, and it has also contributed to land prices inflated (Hadad 2018).

Law 26/2000; Urban Expanding Law adjustments

According to this law the provinces' center cities were requested to prepare a five-years plan to expropriate the lands that were subjected to the provisions of the Law 60/1979; therefore, cities' authorities expropriated hundreds of hectares of lands. Pointing the fact that these enormous expropriations of lands have created financial problems on the cities, since they should recompense the landlords and the fact that the cities do not need all those lands. The cities have kept these expropriated lands on hold because they were not able to develop them nor to protect them of squatting. Therefore, those lands were left abandoned and later on were squatted and illegally built to became part of the informal settlements (Hadad 2018).

Renting and the Old-Rent regulations

The renting policies and regulations also have a part in the Syrian housing crisis. The renting process was subjected to the provisions of the Law 111/1952 and its later adjustments. The law had lasted for a half decade because it gives the rights to the tenant for extending the rental period, which causes many problems for the landlords and their rights. For instance, the landlords could not get their property back and the tenant could stay at the property despite the willing of the landlord, as well as they could not ask for a rental price higher than their properties actual value in the current market; therefore the tenant almost shares the ownership of the property with the owner. That is what has been known as an “*Ejar-Kadem*” or old-rent (Hadad 2018).

Due to the apprehension about tenants who might take advantage of the Law 111/1952 and remain stuck in their property for ever, many landlords turned back to what is known as Seasonal and Touristic Rental Law of the year 1987 that emphasizes the eviction of the tenant every six months otherwise the contract would be considered as an Old-Renting contract (Hadad 2018).

Law 6/2001; Contract Deals with Contractors’ Desire

Up till the year 2001, the law gives the rights to landlords to have the tenants evacuated, and the Old-Renting rights would go to the landlords’ desires. Specifically, and according to this law, if the landlords want their properties back, they should recompense the tenant with a sum equal to 40 % of the property current price value (Hadad 2018).

Once again, the public authorities were exempted from the recompensing article of this law. The 2006 adjustments on this law that gave the public authorities the rights to resign new contracts with the tenants who are considered of being Old-Rental tenants. In addition, when the public authorities have rented a property and it is subjected to the provision of the Law 111/1952 (Old-Rent), the landlords have no rights to ask for evacuation (Hadad 2018).

Despite all the positive aspects due to the Law 6/2001, it did not reduce the mortgage prices nor the rental prices, nor did not solve the problems of Old-Renting related with public authorities. The Law 6/2001 remains in the circle of solving a small portion of an old problem.

Other legislative initiatives and land expropriation

The Legislative Decree 20/1983 gave any public establishments the rights to expropriate the properties to public benefits. Later on, the idea of public benefits became a common action, until it reached a point that any project that has any relation with the public sector became under the consideration of public benefiting. Even, some touristic or investment projects are being considered under public benefiting. Later on, and according to the constitution implemented in the year 2012, this decree has been cancelled and considered as infringement of citizens' rights (Hadad 2018).

The expropriation laws and regulations to public benefits have had important impact in the housing crisis in Syria, as they forbid the owners of expropriated lands to build on their lands; moreover, they created sort of a frozen situation over those lands, because the private sector would never invest over them because it would be kind of risky investments; the public sector as well has failed or sometimes did not even start any kind of projects over them (Hadad 2018).

On the other hand, the compensations given to the previous owners were low in comparison with the actual value of the expropriated lands, or they arrived late, therefore the owner could not afford to buy another land; so, the expropriation became a struggle for those who are willing to build or invest (Hadad 2018).

In some cases, the expropriated lands to public benefits reasons were assigned to implement affordable houses projects over them. However, in reality many of these lands were sold to entrepreneurs or traders with the goal of profit making or implement commercial and touristic complexes and sell it to the private sector (Hadad 2018).

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR ON THE HOUSING SECTOR

Altogether, the recent war has had a destructive impact on the housing sector, it causes great reduction in the number of houses, due to destruction and damage. The approximate share of the destroyed houses is one-third to the total housing number in Syria. On the other hand, the war has caused a break of the housing construction process, especially in the area that experienced direct aggressive conflict, due to the lack of resources and general instability. The crisis was further aggravated by the increased migration between cities.

One of the most significant regulations that implemented during the war was that the Law n. 10 that announced in March 2018, which protects the owners' right in the demolished areas. The law n. 10 caused a huge confusion internally and externally, as some looked at it as kind of a legal cover of illegal occupation of the properties of the displaced people, and a way to change the demographic map of the area.

What aggravates the crisis even more is that some project that had designed and declared during the war and unstable housing situation such as the project of Marotta City in Damascus. As the project area was one of the informal settlements in the city that accommodated around 5000 people with affordable rental prices. The main aim of the project is to replace the settlement with a luxury one that only rich households will be able to afford it.

Overall, the housing issue has high priority for the Syrian people; it becomes a challenge to get an adequate house with an affordable price, especially under the lack of the public housing provided by Municipalities and the public authorities.

Currency and prices stability during the war

Another enormous effect of the ongoing war in Syria is the ratio among the salaries, prices and cost of living. The inflation rates and shortage have driven up prices to such a degree that the average salary cannot even cover the basic needs for living. For instance, the salary of a teacher amounted to SYP 20,000 and that was equal to \$383 before the war. The value of that salary plummeted to around \$30 due to the war. Generally, households live on previously saved resources or have become dependent on finding alternative methods to bolster income.

The subsidies programs to support and reduce pressure on households is less capable recently of easing the suffering of the population. In 2016 the government allocated SYP9733 billion for social subsidies, by that time it was equal to \$2.78 billion. The allocated budget is intended to subsidies on fuel, electricity, and certain food products. However, due to the increase of sanctions and the exhausted financial resources from oil and gas, the government rolled back the energy subsidies. On the other hand, they increase the salaries of the public sector by SYP 7500 (\$15) in order to support household incomes (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018).

Despite the increase of salaries and subsidies, the Syrian Pound continues devaluating. Its value had remained relatively stable during 2011-2012; the deterioration of its value accelerated since 2013, and almost all the payments, although they were done using Syrian Pound, they were highly related to the USD's exchange price.

Food prices were rising and especially in 2016, which can be attributed to the future difficulties of the agricultural sector. Also, the prices of energy sources increased dramatically during 2016. So, the Syrian economy is widely fragmented and destroyed, without expectation of reconstruction or recovery in the near future.

The Syrian government budget has also suffered. While the government managed to increase the budget in SYP value each year of the crisis, the real value of the budget witnessed a heavy decline. From 2011 to 2017, the budget increased by 319%. At the same time, the value of the Syrian Pound decreased from an exchange rate of SYP 45/\$ in 2011 to SYP 517/\$ in 2017 (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018).

Overall, a new economic war has emerged in parallel with the conflict. besides the deterioration of the value of the Syrian Pound, a noticeable increase in the prices. Was observed, especially in the housing sector that is also suffering from the issue of the currency. The rental or sales of houses followed the ongoing inflation trends. The landlords tended to save the real value of their property, therefore they related it with USD, although, the government imposed the only use of the Syrian Pound during any selling or renting process, and they strictly banned the use of other currencies

6. THE CASE OF DAMASCUS

Overview

The city of Damascus was founded in the 3rd millennium B.C, it was mentioned around 67 times in the Bible. The ancient city of Damascus is one of the oldest cities in the Middle East. In the middle ages, it was the center of the flourishing craft industry, specializing in swords and lace. The city contains around 125 monuments from different periods through its history – one of the most spectacular is the Great Mosque of the Umayyads from the 8th-century (Figure 6-1), built on the site of an Assyrian sanctuary (UN WHC 2020). The Mosque, still one of the grandest monuments in Syria, was a temple of Jupiter for the Romans and church for the Byzantines.

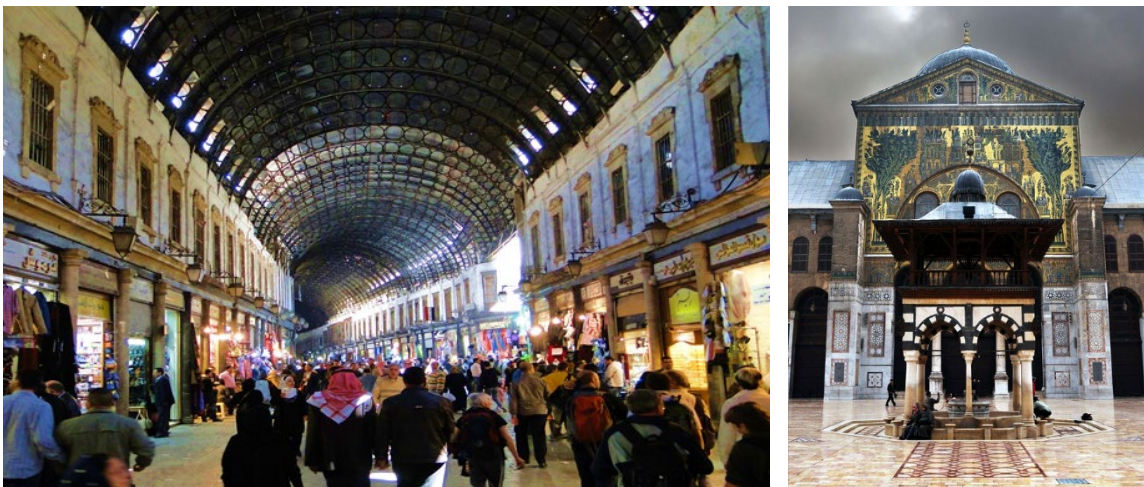


FIGURE 6-1 PHOTO ON THE LEFT FOR THE OLD MARKET “AL-HAMEDYIAH SOUQ” (SOURCE: © ALWATANONLINE.COM)
PHOTO ON THE RIGHT FOR THE GREAT MOSQUE OF UMAYYADS (SOURCE: © ISLAMIC-ART-AND-QUOTES.TUMBLR.COM)

The ancient city of Damascus, known by the Syrian “*Dimashq Al-Kademah*” which latterly means the ancient Damascus, lies to the south-east of the Mount Qasiun. Different parts of the ancient city have been torn down making place to the concrete buildings, and to the modern boulevards. Still, most of it is still standing, including the Muslim, the Christian, and the Jewish neighborhoods within the ancient wall of the city, aside with the markets and light-crafts industry workshops (Salamandra 2004). Further down is “Al-Hamedyiah Suq” the marketplace set on the western part of the ancient city (Figure 6-1), finally with the Roman arches, the main entrance of the Umayyad Mosque.

A telling account of the city with its river and lifestyle was published in the New York Times in the year 1970.

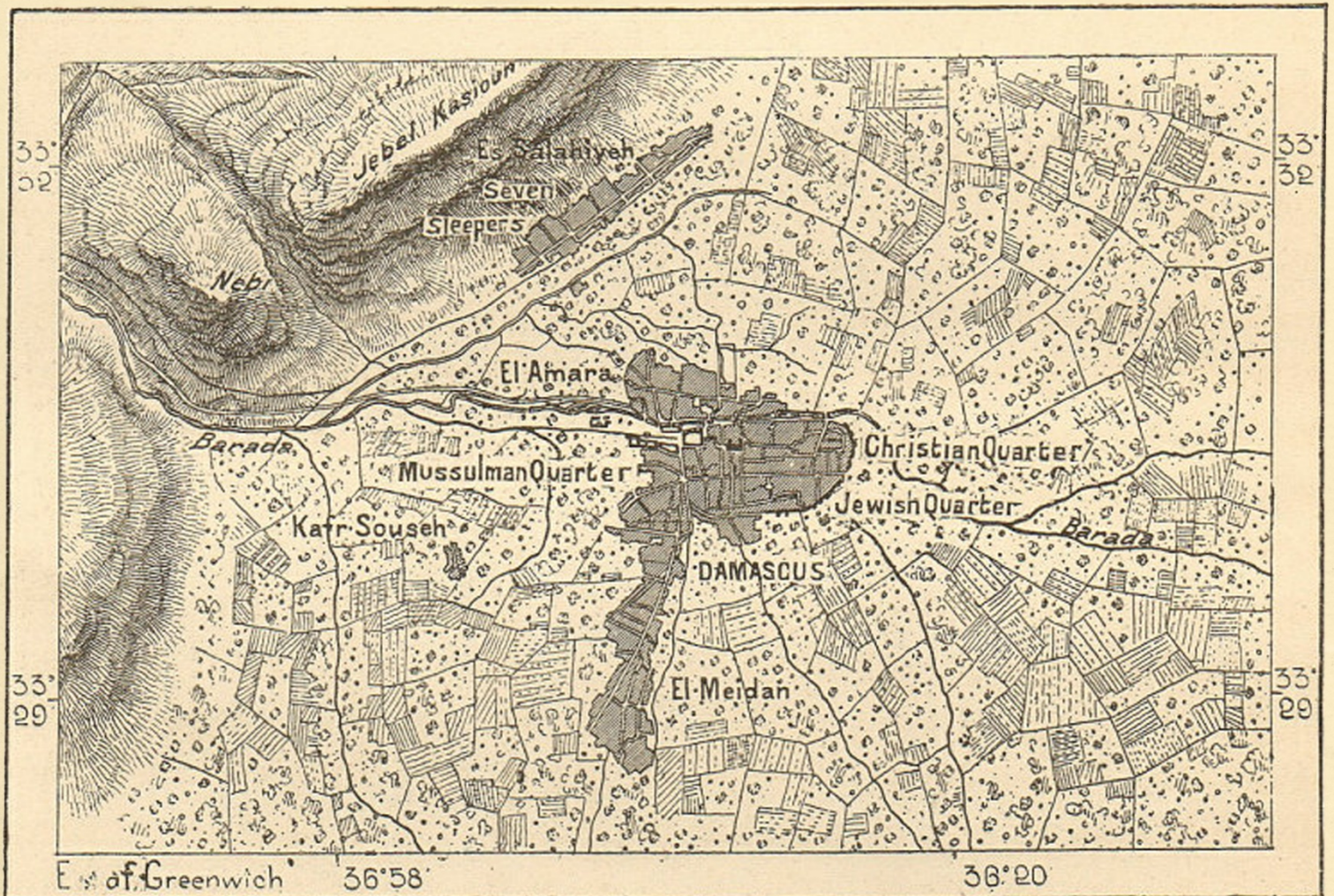
"The Barada River has made Damascus an island of green in the Syrian desert. At night, the more well to do gather in large clean restaurants on the edge of the city to eat, smoke their water pipes or play tawala, a sort of Arabic checker. For a Westerner, the poverty of Damascus appears frightful, although food is cheap and there is little real hunger. Hordes of children run ragged, but they do not seem poorly fed. Damascus also is one of the Middle East's best shopping cities. Damascus silk is famous and inexpensive. A trade fair near the center of the city exhibits goods from Italy as well as from the Communist countries" (The New York Times 1970).

Fig. 183.—DAMASCUS.

FIGURE 6-2 DAMASCUS MAP 1885

(SOURCE: © ANTIQUEMAPSANDPRINTS.COM)

Scale 1 : 120,000.



2 1/2 Miles.

The Mount Qasiun “the Holy Mountain” is another natural magnificent landmark of Damascus. With the 1,200m altitude over the sea, the mountain has a spectacular view of the city and its other monuments such as the castle, the ancient city and the Omayyad Grand Mosque with its minarets. However, the mountain has another characteristic, as the Damascene believes that when Cain sacrificed his brother Abel he threw him over the Mount Qasiun; the Bible does not mention where this exactly happened, but it indirectly refers to Syria-Canaan – in the Old Testament-Genesis:

Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field”. And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Genesis 4:1-8 (HCSB)

And that is where the city’s name “Dimashq” come from, as it is a combination between two Arabic words “Dam and Shaq”, which means literally a blood that tore as the painting on the right shows by the Italian Renaissance painter Titan (Figure 6-3). As the map on the right shows the Ancient city of Damascus with its wall and the old castle; on the upper part of the picture, the great Umayyad mosque appears with its three minarets; the Mount Qasiun down the photo with Barada river going through the city’s neighborhoods (Figure 6-3).



FIGURE 6-3 PHOTO ON THE LEFT IS ICON THAT REPRESENTS THE KILLING OF ABEL IN 1543 (NATGEO 2019)
ON THE RIGHT SHOWS AND IMAGINARY MAP TO DAMASCUS E 1470. (SOURCE: © GALICA.BNF.FR)

While others say it came from the Arabic verb “*Damashaq*” that means “done it, quickly”, or it derived from the Aramaic “*edeim-mask*” “red land”. The city is also referred to as Al-Sham “the north”, this name is a less formal and somewhat emotive term used only by Syrians (Salamandra 2004).

Damascus as most of the other cities has been built on the bank of the Barada river, that starts from Barada lake in the western area of Damascus and descends through a steep “Rabwe” till it arrives to Damascus; it used to irrigate the groves and the agricultural area in the oasis of Ghouta around the city (Figure 6-10).

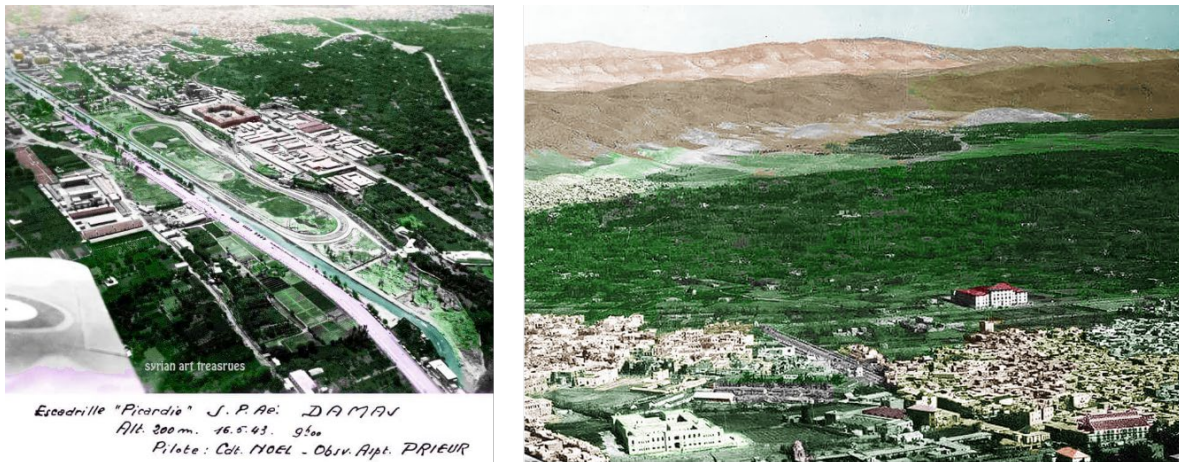


FIGURE 6-4 PHOTO ON THE RIGHT SHOWS THE RIVER BARADA CROSSING THE CITY
ON THE RIGHT AL-GHOUTA OASIS DOWN THE MOUNT QASIUN
(RECOLORED PHOTO BY SYRIAN ART TREASURES)

The city used to be surrounded by a great cluster of agricultural and orchard lands that are known by the name “Al-Ghouta” (Figure 6-4); basically it is a green belt located at the edge of the great desert which slopes thence to Euphrates river. With an average height of 670 meters above the sea. These extensive woods, harvest, and gardens contain number of villages like Douma, Harasta, Jeramana, and many others (Masterman 1898).

HISTORICAL HOUSING AND DISTRICTS OF DAMASCUS

Generally speaking, Damascus could be divided according to its urban fabric under three categories, with three corresponding main house types: Mainly, “the Ancient City”, “Damascus”, and “the Great-Damascus”, as the last one means the extensions around the city. The discussion will go through the city’s neighborhoods focusing on the house types and their inhabitants, although the meaning of those terms has changed over time.

Evocation and reminiscences of old Damascus involve references to old city’s houses and neighborhoods. Until the very beginning of the twentieth century, almost every architectural piece in the city and especially its houses were built in the Damascene style. As almost all of the houses within the ancient wall have the same characteristics. The streets are narrow with a few exceptions, as they were built with respect to the human scale.

The Damascene neighborhoods, beside the Ancient city within the wall, were built in different time periods, starting from Al-Salihiey district, Al-Mydan, Al-Shaghour and Sarouja that were built between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Right until the 1920s when the French mandated Syria, the city started to take different approaches in terms of expansion and growth, as the wide streets were opened like Baghdad street in 1925, the Seven Fountains square, Al-Abed street, Parliament street, and others. The architecture style of the buildings during that period was influenced by the French architectural style as well, which appears in many districts like Al-Shaalan, Al-Malkee, AL-Rawda, Abu-Romannah, and Al-Qassaa.

However, after the independence from the French the city has definitely went through a shifting phase. For instance, in the terms of houses, the housing sector has totally changed, as it started to have more European housing style than the traditional one it used to have. In the following the palimpsest that created Damascus will be discussed as well as, the Damascene house and the socio-economic differences between it and the recent housing system in the city.



Ancient Damascene house and districts

The house, as seen from the street, as a rule, consists of a few white mud walls, low doors, and mean latticed windows only for the first floor, none for the ground floor for privacy proposes. The roofs are flat and made of wood covered by mud; when it rains, they discharge what they collect over the interior greenery garden by a series of pipes (Masterman 1898).



*FIGURE 6-5 PHOTOS OF THE STREETS IN THE ANCIENT CITY OF DAMASCUS
(BY THE AUTHOR)*

Within the ancient wall, social differences were somehow hidden, as the exteriors of the Damascene house do not reflect its interior. The exterior walls deceived the passers, as almost all of them have the same look in sense of the materials, the opening, and even the doors, so the passer would never distinguish the households' social levels, also in order to prevent poor inhabitants when they walk down the streets from feeling that differences Figure 6-5.

On the other hand, the interior part of the Damascene house has a long corridor after the entrance that landed at an open courtyard with the fountain in the middle, surrounded by the rooms that only have windows at the yard, due to privacy. sometimes it might contain more than one yard and that depends on the social level of the household. On the southern, most shady side, there is an open room to the court that is usually raised seat with two-steps higher level than the court's, called "*Lewan*" as photo on the left in Figure 6-6 shows. While photo on the right in the Figure 6-6 shows the guests room, it comes usually beside the *Lewan*, and is well connected to the entrance, called "*Dewan*". The upper rooms are generally flimsy structures, built of wood and mud bricks.



FIGURE 6-6 INTERIOR PHOTOS FOR THE DAMASCENE HOUSE (UNKNOWN)

Moreover, even poor families' houses have some wells, and most importantly in these houses is the green touch, like trees, bushes, or some of the greenery colored that shaded this central open space. These houses have been built by thick walls not only to respect their inhabitant's privacy, but it also contains natural cooling and heating techniques that do not run by any fuel or electric sources; they were built using domestic materials, that overall make them sustainable adequate houses for both the environment and their inhabitant. However, it is difficult to trace a precise character of the ancient city's current inhabitants. They vary, as some Damascene families have remained in their houses, while the most have left, and rural migrants from varied backgrounds have replaced them.

The elite quarters

Back in the late 19th century, a new settlement developed in the western part of the Mount Qasiun; it was planned by the government between the years 1895 and 1911 in order to house the refugees coming to the city. On the other hand, the high-class started to build their villas in the newly developed area of the mountain. Al-Muhajirin quarter got built several years after for housing the refugees; in the year 1890, the eastern part was already occupied with loam houses that have been constructed for refugees (Schwiete and Wunder 2009).

The planning of this suburb was based on the structure used in the capital, for the first time in the city's history a plan was set for a neighborhood, although it was based on European design methods, it clearly arranged block structure and followed some laws and regulations (Figure 6-7).



FIGURE 6-7 RICH VILLAS IN AL-MUHAJIRIN QUARTER
PHOTOS BY (SCHWIETE AND WUNDER 2009)

In the early part of the 20th century, a new urban style starts to show up, leaving the Damascene style for newly built modern flats of the “garden districts” toward the slopes of Mount Qasiun to Al-Salihiey quarter.

During the first year of the 20th century Al-Salihiey quarter (Figure 6-8) started to extend along with the enhancements of its infrastructure like Al-Salihiey-Street, that was built in 1904; by the year 1905 the street-grid of Al-Muhajirin was finished and after a couple of years it was connected to the water system, and by the year 1907 the quarter was perfectly connected to the city by a tram-line (Schwiete and Wunder 2009).

Although Al-Salihiye intended to be the host for refugees, it also attracted wealthier people. As wealthy rich families of the same period welcomed and encouraged urban modernization. Siham Tergeman an Old city activist, described in her book this phenomenon:

“it started with a few families, who built factories, - the first private [industrial] production in Syria. They became very rich and wanted to live in villas [apartments in detached houses]. So, they went to the orchard areas and built villas, one after another, and this is how the neighborhood of Abu Rummaneh appeared. All the Damascene families moved there. The families still living in the Old City started to imitate them, so AlRawda and Al-Jisr Al-Abyad neighborhoods were built. In their era the French Built a few neighborhoods, like that of the Franciscan [parish], built in French style, with iron balconies. These houses were what the Damascene began to want, and they became fashionable for the upper classes, “the high society”. They wanted to move to apartments, because Arab-style houses were tiring, needed a lot of work, with their trees shedding leaves, and stairs the women had to climb up and down” (Teregman 1998).

FIGURE 6-8 THE MOUNT QASIUN WITH AL-SALIHIE QUARTER
(PHOTO BY MARY EVANS 1910)



During the French mandate

The French occupation in 1923 had a major effect on Damascus, especially on the ancient part, the first impact was destroying some parts due to bombings to take back control over the city. They as well considered the ancient city's lifestyle as backward and low-classed, therefore they started to settle down on the of slopes Mount Qasiun leading to Al-Salihiye quarter.

As mentioned previously, Damascus has experienced a steady and significant population increase throughout the twentieth century. Between the years 1945 and 1980, the city's population doubled to reach almost 300,000 people. And during the post-World War II, and post-Independence period the population multiplied fourfold, to become 1,350,000 people. Census shows from the mid of the 1990s the number has become around 3.5 million people, and some other unofficial estimate shows the number as high as 5 million.

Thus, the newcomers, as the damascene used to call them, needed houses, and that explains the rapid and enormous expansion of the city's suburbs, as it has been considered as a cheap dormitory. Therefore, they replaced two-story buildings with high-rise apartment blocks. (Salamandra 2004).

Recently, most of the inhabitants of the Ancient city belong to a low and middle-class level and they are artisans and skilled laborers; many prefer to leave the difficult crowded condition of the Damascene-style houses if given the chance and move to more comfort and convenience of modern apartments, just as high-classed people had done decades earlier. The shape of the city is increasingly determined by emerging social distinctions that are a fact of modern urban life almost everywhere, but perhaps particularly acute in Damascus. The social differences appear in the socio-spatial distinction as the Indian researcher Chrita Salamandra refers to it in her book about Damascus.

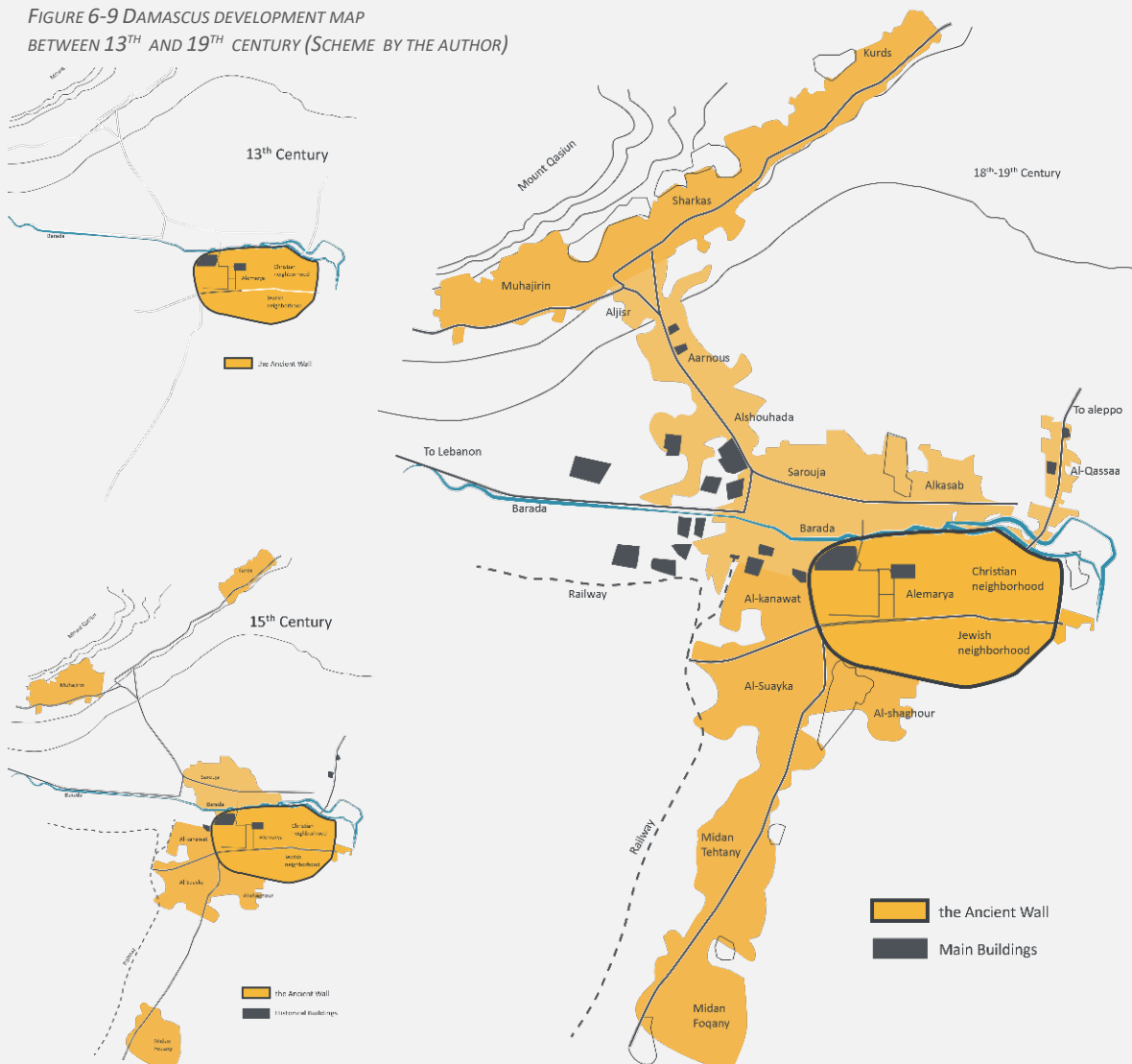
"His family had a house in Malki, so we thought he was all right"

The fact is Al-Malki neighborhood is one of the most expensive ones in Damascus, and for Damascene people mentioning that someone leaves in this neighborhood means that he/she belongs to a rich family, which in somehow shows the social distinction among the city's neighborhoods.

However, in Damascus, post-independence national elite adopted a colonial logic, leaving the traditional quarters for European -style housing left by colonists. So the traditional houses were left for poor rural migrants, dividing houses into smaller, densely populated units (Abu-Lughod 1980). In the meantime, the new residents who occupied the ancient city often lacked sufficient resources to maintain and repair their deteriorating houses (Salamandra 2004).

So, the divide between the old and the new parts of the city during the French post-independence period was significant. In sort of urban apartheid of “rich and poor” and “urban and rural”, this new urban identity was associated to socio-economic differences (Celik 1997).

FIGURE 6-9 DAMASCUS DEVELOPMENT MAP BETWEEN 13TH AND 19TH CENTURY (SCHEME BY THE AUTHOR)



URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING STRATEGIES

The first master plan was implemented in the year 1936 by the French architects Michel Ecochard and Cabinet Danger. The last comprehensive master plan has been designed by Michel Ecochard with the Japanese architect-planner, Gyoji Banshoya in the year 1968, right after the end of the French mandate, when the city was almost a fifth of its current size (Figure 6-10).

They were appointed to produce a new master plan to the city, in the basis and principles of the functional town planning from the Athens Charter y Le Corbusier. Ecochard however, brought a great experience to the project because of his involvement in the development of the 1936 plan for the city (Abdulac 1982).

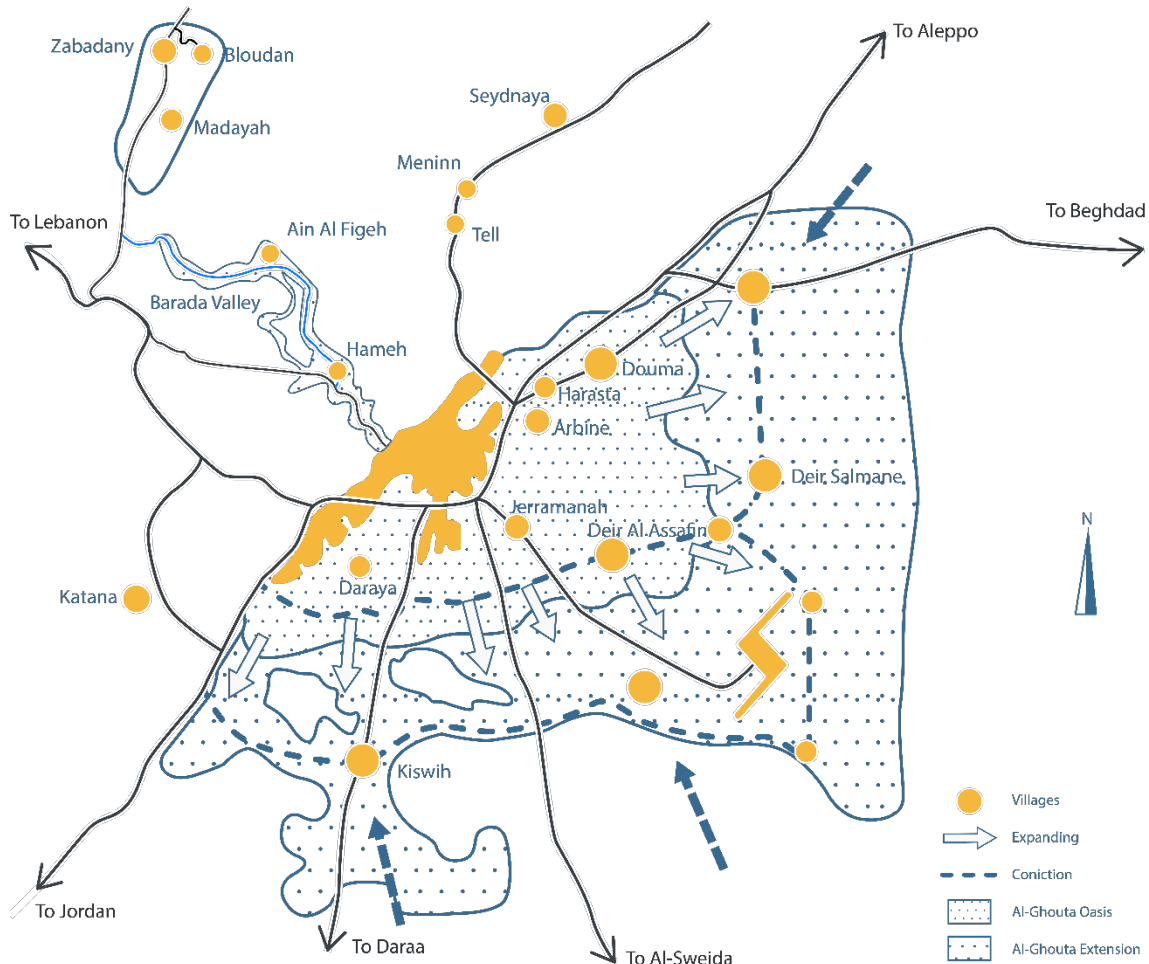


FIGURE 6-10 MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES OF THE REGION OF DAMASCUS BY M. ECOCHARD 1968
(MAP ELABORATION OF THE AUTHOR FROM M. ECOCHARD 1968)

The master plan tied together important aspects and elements of history, regional planning, demography, and others; one of the most important aspects that the master plan tried to achieve was protecting the water source of the city “Al-Ghouta”. The master plan as well suggested the extensions of the city to the south-west, and it was responsible for the ring road to allow circulation to regional heavy traffic and to avoid the narrow Barada valley (Abdulac 1982).

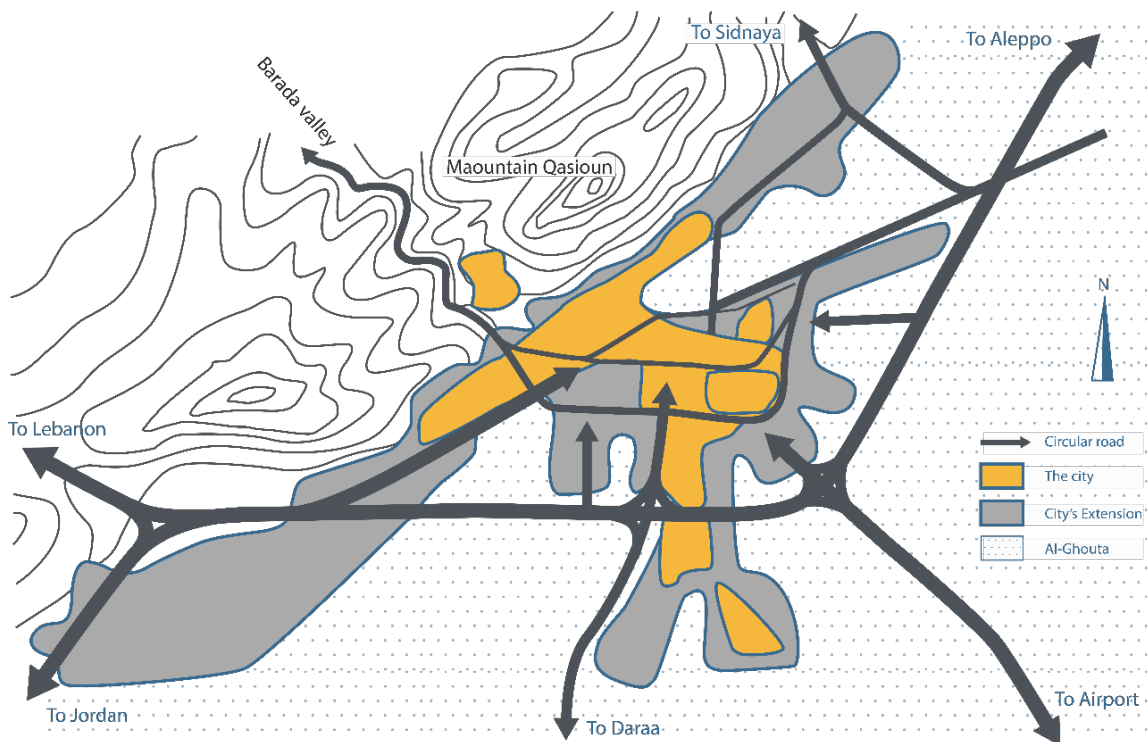


FIGURE 6-11 DAMASCUS'S HIGHWAY AND CONNECTION PLAN (MAP ELABORATION OF THE AUTHOR FROM M. ECOCHARD 1968)

The city was divided into fourteen sections including the Old city within the wall, the green belt, some parks, residential neighborhoods, governmental areas, rural and industrial areas, and the Barada river valley. He as well created a special idea of “buffer zones”, as he called them, a kind of strategy for the city’s expansion to contain up to a million people inside the city and another million in the city’s periphery.

The strategy was based on the concept of a hand, the city grows as a hand shape, where Al-Salihiye quarter is the thenar and to preserve the graves between the fingers. Although Ecochard’s master plan did not consider the identity of the city, it valued the agricultural lands and their importance to the city; an important issue the decision-makers almost do not take it into consideration.

Housing strategy in Ecochard's master plan

By presenting the strategy that was studied with the master plan of the city by Ecochard and Banshoya and the very recent one. The Report of General Master Plan for Damascus done by Ecochard and Banshoya in the year 1963 included the housing studies for the city. Generally, the study covered many aspects, like the people who in were need to be housed, housing types and demography, public services needed, public spaces, and the extension areas of the city with its services (Ecochard and Banshoya 1963).

The 1960, 1961, and 1962 population census used by them were based on estimated numbers (despite the fact that these numbers were taken from the Administration Unit of Census and the Ministry of Planning), not very precise due to the different ways of the calculation. By the year of the study, population census were 660,000 people; and according to the Ministry of Planning the number expected to become 1,500,000 by the year 1984 (Ecochard and Banshoya 1963).

However, the study categorized the inhabitant based on their monthly income under three categories, SYP 200/m, SYP 300/m, and SYP 350/m or more; therefore, the planers categorized the housing types respectfully:

- 40% of public housing, with a house size between 70 – 90 m²
- 50% of medium housing, with a house size between 80 – 120 m²
- 10% of wealthy housing, with a house size between 150 – 200 m²

The size were calculated with respect to population density and they varied among the ancient city, existing districts, the districts under construction, the public district, and the extension areas of the city. The study as well aimed to reduce the population of some districts with determined density as the following:

- The ancient city to reduce density by 200 people/hectares,
- Current districts Kurds, Sarouja, and Midan to reduce density by 100 people/hectares,
- Other districts for both the city like Al-Zahira, Barzeh, or for its extension like, Jobar, Dummar, Mezzeh, etc. with a population density around 350 people/hectares.

The city's new residential districts were supposed to grow in a parallel with Mount Qasiun.

DAMASCUS MASTER PLAN 1968
NEW HOUSING DISTRICTS

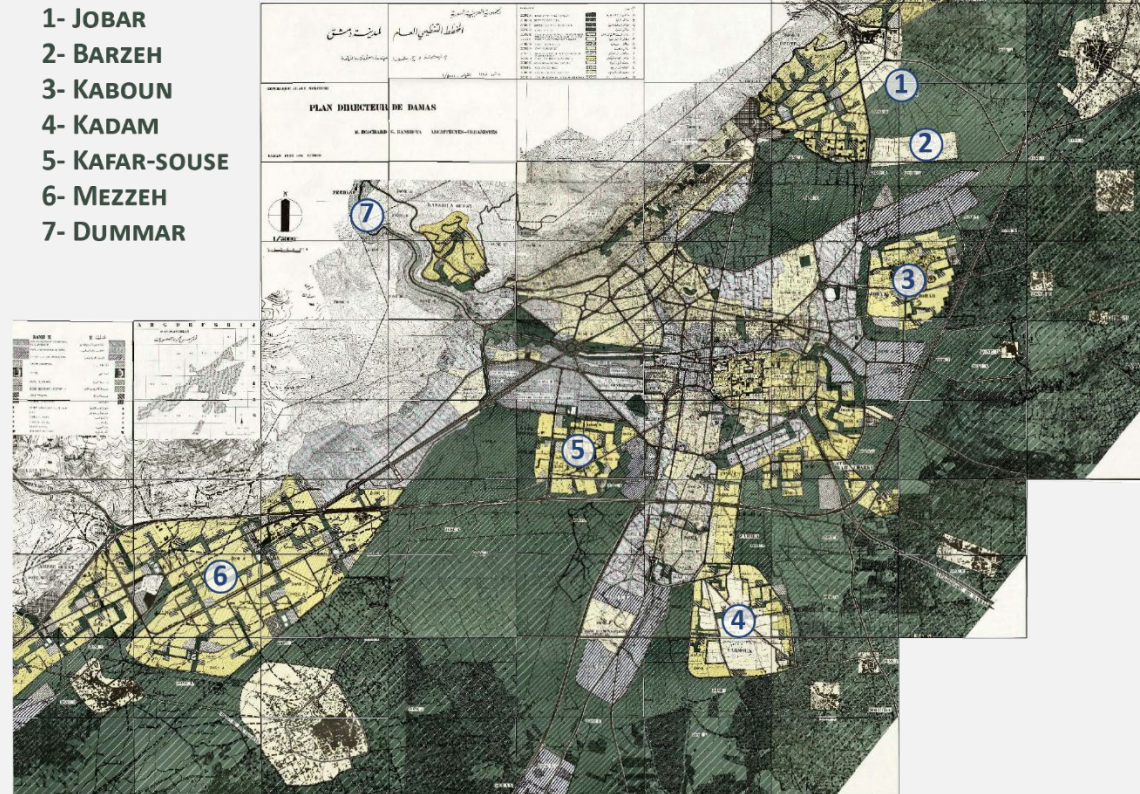


FIGURE 6-12 DAMASCUS MASTER PLAN 1968
 NEW RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS (DAMASCUS PROVINCE)

Anyways, the report mentioned that the housing forecasts were done on the basis of hypothetical numbers, to have kind of a general perspective of the future capacity of the city; however, this numbers should be reviewed frequently every five years taking under consideration the new set of data in economic, social, and population aspects (Ecochard and Banshoya 1963).

In the 1970s, some new laws were issued, implementing the Land Building Law n.14/1974, and the approach of the building obligations was announced with the decree n.350/1978. Later on, during the 1980s, urban growth was attacking the city, and the local authority's response was to solve only the immediate issues with a fast solution rather than planning the way for the future master plan or developing strategy for the city's growth. That is actually what causes most of the today's problems.

Housing strategies and new investment

At the beginning of the 1990s, the General Establishment for Studies and Consultancy was appointed to produce a new master plan for the city. Due to administrative issues and many other reasons, there was a delay in the due date, despite the valuable results in the final product, the final master plan did not get the authorities to approve because according to the authority the master plan was based on an old set of data.

The Law 15/2008, that includes special articles related to property investment. As it created what is called the Real Estate Investment and Development Commission (REDIC), which comes below the Ministry of Housing, in the aims of controlling, supervision, and management of the real estate sector. It as well authorized the creation of land and housing companies. This law also issues the investment licenses for the investors, that was the work of the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MLAE) or by the Province Center of Damascus, if the project within the administrative borders of the province (Clerc and Hurault 2010).

Most importantly, the REDIC was in a position to develop and create social and public housing through the private sector; as well as recognizing and developing plans for the informal settlements. However, many obstacles have driven the investor not to carry on the process. The most important one was the land purchasing, especially when it is private property, that is because it undergoes a long and complicated process that could last up for 3 years. So, the investors prefer to build on public land, because the public sector owns large and important parcels of lands including downtown areas, in a way that simplifies and limits the legalization process in some cases.

The lack of urban planning within the city's decision-makers led to legitimate projects based on the availability of public land and initiatives of investors rather than on the needs of the city and of its inhabitants. After all, the realization of the huge impact, the difficulties of urban control the high fragmentation happening outside the master plan, and the city limited capacity, together have reached at the end to suspend the issuing of the licenses, until the authorization becomes able to refine and control these new modes of urban production.

In the year 2010, Damascus was considered the eighth most expensive city in the world according to a study by (Cushman and Wakefield 2009). Land supply for housing projects does not meet the housing market demand. The city at the beginning of the twenty-first century started to recognize the housing crisis. However, the production of the houses in Damascus was the lowest since the 1970s.

Despite, the high demand on housing in Damascus, one fifth of the housing units was unoccupied (vacant, under-constructions, partially built); moreover, the rental sector was not active nor well developed and it shares only 12% of the housing stocks and controlled by the private sector (Clerc and Hurault 2010).

Between the years 2000 and 2007, the production of formal private and cooperative housing increased almost seven times over Syria and fifteen times over the province of Rif-Dimashq. Moreover, the provinces of Damascus and Rif-Dimashq have announced several planning studies including the regional master plan for the direct suburb of Damascus, aiming to preserve the Ghouta orchards, and provide housing for low-income households (the Province Center of Damascus 2008).

Despite the failure in the investment plans, there were some achievements in the field of housing. The cooperative sector with the help of the public authorities has already built 12,500 housing units in Dummar Project that will be discussed below, and they are planning for another 16,000 housing units. Moreover, in other projects like Dahieh Qudsaya Al-Sakanieh the public authorities have built 11,000 housing units for youth; in Qura Al-Assad was planned to build 28,000 additional units. (Clerc and Hurault 2010).

Finally, in the year 2004, a very small part of all these housing projects around the city were totally implemented, for instance, only 60% of the housing projects like Dahieh Qudsaya Al-Sakanieh and Qura Al-Assad were built and 25-30% of the housing project of Yaafour and the rest of the projects were built (The Central Bureau of Statistics 2004). These results did not meet the market need, nor they were adequate for low-income groups, as most of them rather aimed to tackle specifically middle-income groups.

HOUSING PROJECTS IN DAMASCUS

Many of modern residential projects were developed by the government like Barzeh prefabricated homes, Al-Zahira prefabricated homes, Dummar project, and Qudsaya Suburb. These projects have created a sufficient socio-economic situation (Abdin 2017). Although homeownership approach dominated in most of them, and their implementation period had taken a long time, they contained various social groups, because they target the low- and middle-income groups.

Altogether, the social diversity manifested in Dummar project served as a model for the design of future middle-income housing projects in the city and will be discussed furthermore in the following (Abdin 2017).

Dummar project:

At first the projects considered to be part of the new Damascus, looked as a new city, aimed to house varied social groups. Therefore, when the collaborative society was announced in August 1975, various unions, syndicates, and worker chambers, such as Engineers Syndicate, Artist and Painters, Journalists, Doctors and Pharmacists Syndicate, Bankers and Workers were involved (Mohammad 1996).

The Society has started with more than 5500 members, and they accomplished 193 buildings with almost 2400 apartments, 42 towers with almost 2200 apartments, and 104 terraces with 750 apartments (Figure 6-16). It also included services, like two hospitals, a health clinic, a police station, 16 schools, 21 kindergartens, a mall, a cinema and others. Almost an entire city was built, and the extension of the project was initiated that was supposed to host 5000 apartments and their services Table 6-1.

However, the project was held totally by the society, the government did not have any role, except helping with the struggles that appeared later, by creating a committee that help to gets the project through the difficulties according to the Legislation Decree 37/1981 (Mohammad 1996).

“Mashrou Dummar”, as known by Damascenes, was settled west of Damascus in an area called “the New Damascus” Figure 6-13. In the past, the area was a valley surrounded by limestone mountains, with the exception of one military facility. The project was started in the year 1976, and the work on the project lasted over ten years, then it stopped until the Establishment of Military Housing resumed it and finished it in the year 1982.

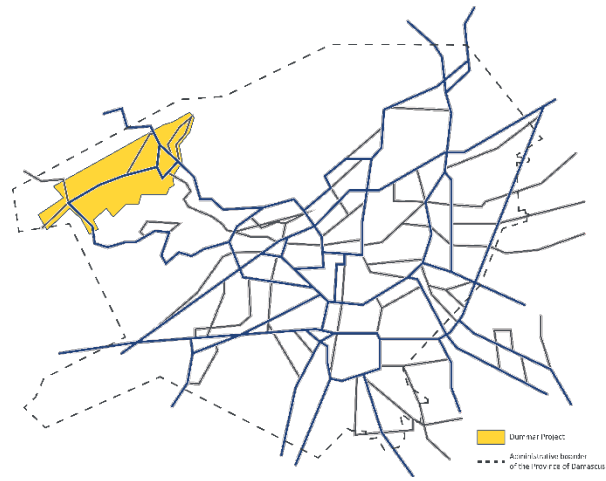


FIGURE 6-13 THE LOCATION OF DUMMAR PROJECT
SCHEME BY THE AUTHOR

The district is set in a limestone mountain 12 km from the City Centre, it did not affect any agricultural lands, it was totally built on barren land in order to save the greenery belt around the city. The urban concept of the project was to create a group of closed residential units that gathered together as they called each one of them “an island”, and each on one of these islands has a capacity of 400 residential units with a total area of 80-100 thousand square meters Figure 6-14.

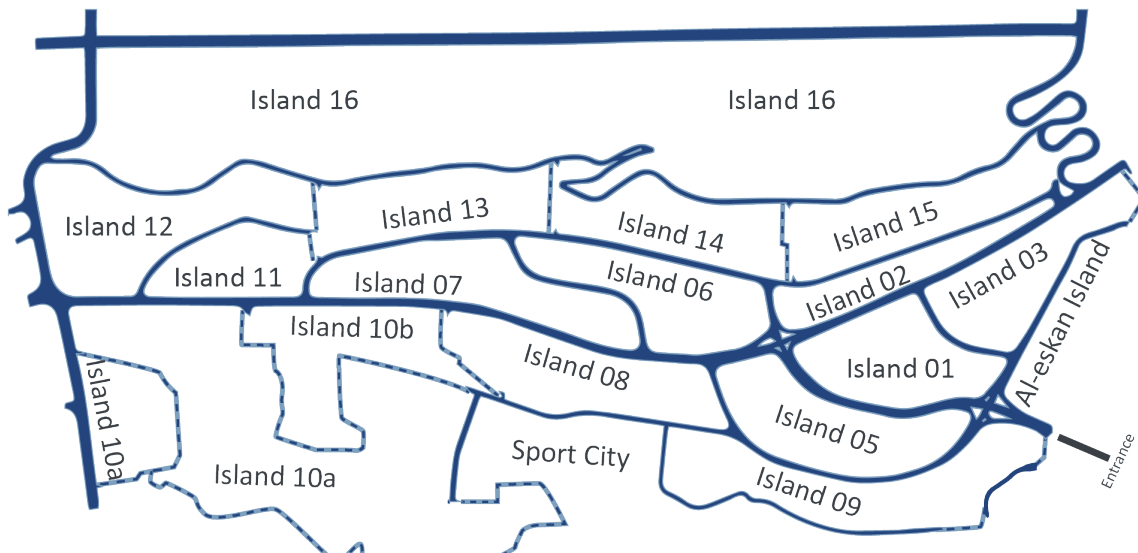


FIGURE 6-14 MASHROU DUMMARS' ISLANDS
GRAPHIC ELABORATION OF THE AUTHOR FROM (MOHAMMAD 1996)

The project has 15 buildings types, different in terms of the design of the houses, the number of stories and their size, and the view, as they distribute among the projects' islands (Mohammad 1996).

- Varied stories buildings: mainly this type contain 4 stories without the ground floor; it is divided into further subcategories based on the floor area's size of the building and the number of entrances.
- The Towers: this type contained 11 stories, each story contained 4 apartments with the exception of the last floor that contained only two apartments; and it has different types as well.
- The Terraces: this type is located on the mountain and it has a special architectural style as the buildings lay on the slopes of the mountain; it contains different sub-categories as well.

Table 6-1 is based on figures that show number and types of the residential buildings in each island, with the total area.

	Residential buildings	Residential towers	Residential units	Island area
1 st Island	-	-	-	66,000
2 nd Island	13	-	-	38,500
3 rd Island	18	4	-	62,500
5 th Island	23	2	400	71,600
6 th Island	18	4	488	66,000
7 th Island	14	6	162	69,200
8 th Island	23	-	280	75,500
9 th Island	18	8	576	12,9000
10 th Island A	22	5	424	223,000
10 th Island B	20	4	454	67,500
10 th Island C	2	17	-	23,500
11 th Island	11	9	642	68,500
12 th Island	18	11	246	75,000
13 th Island	40	-	234	86,000
14 th Island	45	-	224	86,000
15 th Island	28	-	226	85,000
16 th Island	130	-	-	650,000
Total	483			1790700

TABLE 6-1 DUMMAR ISLANDS PROPERTIES
 (MOHAMMAD 1996)

The term “island” is used as synonym of neighborhood, and it has a number of residential buildings, towers, and services; the buildings stand on pillars, leaving the ground floor empty as semi-public greenery making kind of connection between the residential islands. A central island, “1st Island”, does not have any residential buildings, but only services; it is considered as a civic center for the rest of the islands. The study also included the extension area of Dummar.

The Seventh Island

Located on the right side of the main road number 1, it has direct tunnels with the eleventh and the eighth islands. Total area of the seventh island is 69200 m². It contains fourteen residential buildings, with apartments areas around 115-160 m² and six residential towers.

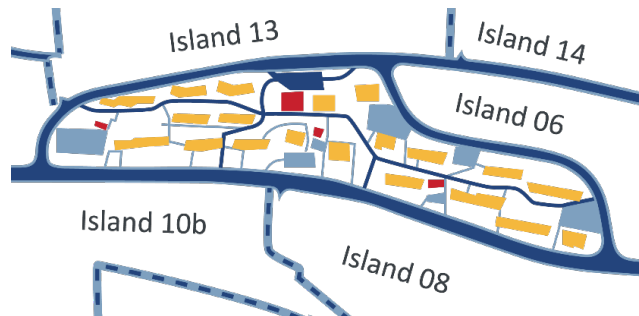


FIGURE 6-15 THE SEVENTH ISLAND IN DUMMAR'S PROJECT
GRAPHIC ELABORATION OF THE AUTHOR FROM (MOHAMMAD 1996)

The Seventh island contains as well a kindergarten, commercial shops, an office building, restaurants, eight car parking lots, children parks and open spaces (Figure 6-15).



FIGURE 6-16 THE HOUSING UNITS FROM DUMMAR
(BY THE AUTHOR)



Basically, the implementation stages were based on a subscription approach: the candidates who qualified to have a house in the project should follow certain instructions. First, they need to register for a flat in one of the islands, then they pay the first installments and after that they have to pay out monthly installments through a certain bank. Usually, the monthly payment is determined on the basis of the salary level and should; not exceed 20 % of the candidate's salary.



FIGURE 6-17 DUMMAR PROJECT VIEW FROM THE 23RD ISLAND (BY THE AUTHOR)

The project considered as a magnificent success; the buildings type and the remarkable topographic of the area together give the project its own visual and physical identity, although the subscribers received their apartments after a long time yet, they were not clothed so the owner still need the money for painting the walls, the furniture and others.

Dummar's inhabitants have some difficulties such as the issue of public transportation, considering the majority of the inhabitants work in the city; as the available choices to reach the project are limited, private cars are the only way in some cases, otherwise, it needs a high price cab, and especially after the Sixth island. although very few public buses reach the project and only on the main highway, even the public transportation that runs by the private sector does not reach all the islands and that is due to the hard steep of the area.

Lastly, as mentioned before the final outcomes were owned dwelling that did not include any kind of rental stocks that due to the participating syndicates and unions who were willing to provide only their members with a private dwelling, leaving no place for any kind of rental activities or investments whether by the public authorities or by any other society or cooperative association.

INFORMALITY IN DAMASCUS

Recently, the random growth has changed the city beyond recognition, not only its great identity had been destroyed due to the neglect of its overcrowded poor inhabitants and the huge informal concrete installation that has been settled on the steep of the Mount Qasiun, blurring the beauty of this natural masterpiece and vanishing its green oasis.

The informal settlements in Damascus do not vary from other cities' informal settlements in Syria, that has been discussed previously, in terms of socio-economic aspects, general character, or legal recognition, with the exception of some other aspects that will be discussed in the following.

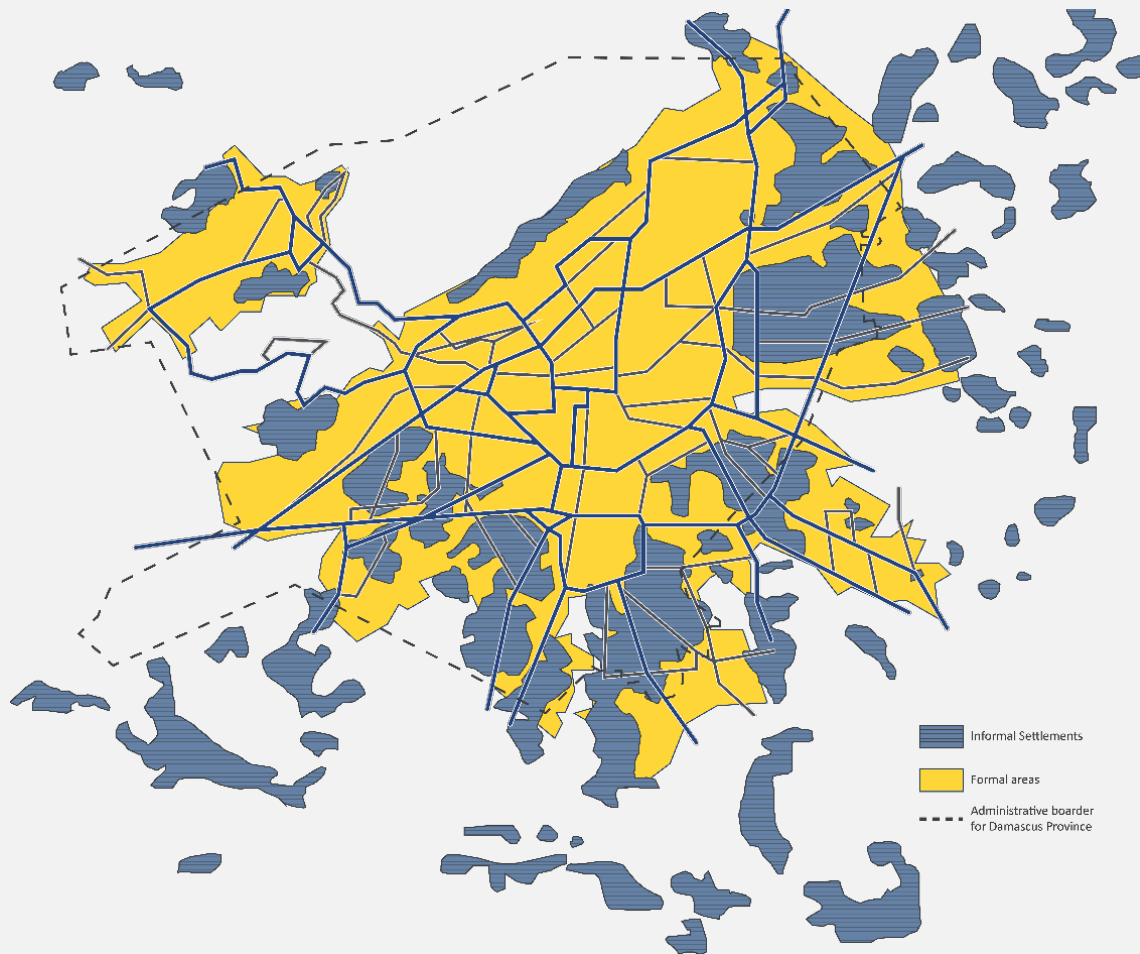


FIGURE 6-18 MAP OF THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN DAMASCUS
(SCHEME BY THE AUTHOR)

For instance, in Damascus, the informal urban fabric comes as a patchwork that responds to the inadequate planning strategy that leads the city, completely done out of architecture or urban guidelines.

It raises in a parallel with the housing crisis, when the landlords of the orchards and agricultural lands in Al-Ghouta started to build on some parts of their plots and divide the rest into a smaller pieces of lands and selling them, leaving a small room for a public route to access them. Gradually, by selling them at reasonable prices all the greenery belt around the city has become sort of random fabric with almost zero green area or any other public services Figure 6-18. Despite the master plan that has been designed and right between the extension urban fingers that were supposed to be the green lungs for the city, almost all of them were intensely built and overpopulated.

Moreover, the randomness and irregularity of informal buildings did not grow only on a private land, but it has claimed even the Mount Qasiun creating a great cluster of blocks that covered up the beauty of a natural element Figure 6-19.

*FIGURE 6-19 INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS COVERING UP THE MOUNT QASIUN
(PHOTO BY V. CLERC)*



Despite all the regulations and the laws that have been declared after 1968, which forbid people from building in non-residential plots, the spontaneous and random settlements took a big partition. Even though the public authority tended to create sort of different housing projects in the close suburb as mentioned before, yet people prefer to go those settlements for reasons like, transportation difficulties, impossibility to get a flat in those projects, low-prices, and proximity to the city center.

Informal district name	area (hectare)	Population	
		1994	2020
Kaboon	48	14,700	35,000
Shawraa	38.1	10,868	11,750
Mastabah	13.9	4,951	6,810
Al-Mezzeh	82.5	37,500	45,000
Mezzeh khalf Ar-raz	41	4,738	4,100
Kaser al lebad	21.75	5,500	5,268
Barzeh	170.6	55,407	72,136
Hai teshreen	55	9,087	23,000
Aysh al warwar	60	9,914	10,126
Kadam informal	142	49,617	37,635
Hai Blal informal	89.25	20,545	21,690
Taballeh + Dwelaa	90	26,103	80,000
Jobar informal	46.7	9,340	9,340
Kafar-suse	35	4,965	6,015
Lu-wan	33	14,421	21,621
Dha deel	93	40,641	30,000
Rizz and Qudsaya	115	15,826	17,320

TABLE 6-2 MAJOR INFORMAL DISTRICTS WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION AREA OF DAMASCUS
 (KHADOUR AND KAFA 2009)

Since the 1990s, Damascus urban informal market has faced big growth and developments; many contractors and middlemen have taken control of this market and in some cases, the local municipalities in the city were a part of this game (Khadour and Kafa 2009). Table 6-2 shows figures about the informal districts in Damascus and their area and population in the year 1994, with an expected number of the population in these districts for the year 2020; due to the ongoing Syrian war that started in the year 2011 the expected numbers are probably greater in some and lower in others depending on the safety factor.

The different types of self-built housing that was being produced under the term of urban informality are considered mainly as a problem while, on the contrary, others identify them as a housing solution to shortage (3rd report of Damascus's Master Plan Structure 1997, MOH). Therefore, the obstacles between the poor urban strategy and the high housing demand continue on one hand, and the understanding of the fact that many of these settlements need to be improved and upgraded, under the public authority observation on the other hand. As in Damascus, 70% of these houses are in good physical conditions, 20% need upgrading, and 10% need to be rebuilt (Khadour and Kafa 2009).

Factors that exacerbate the informality in Damascus

Mainly, there were two groups of factors that exacerbated the informal activities in Damascus: external and internal factors. External factors are related to the national policies, as Damascus attracted Palestinian refugees in 1948, and again the Syrian refugees occupied the Golan Heights in 1967.

Internal factors are related basically to the following: Damascus is a center of the economic, financial, educational, management facilities and activities, the transportation factor as in the year 1990s when the growth of microbus eased and encouraged people to move far from the city to the suburbs, last and most important factor was the housing shortage and that was due to the following (Khadour and Kafa 2009):

- Lack of new policies for the housing and construction sector, as well as the high prices of the estate and the property in the formally planned areas.
- Inappropriate urban planning system and land use policy, and lack of public and private investments in the housing market and housing handover system as mentioned in the housing crisis (ch.05)
- Some complex problems related to the local administration and municipality, including inertia, and prevalence of short-term solutions.

Mainly, the illegal building mechanism observed during the 1990s was a kind of a new corporation that has been started between the landlord on one side and a contractor who offers the money and the relationship with the municipality on the other hand, therefore the outcome would be five or six multistory buildings. Thus, Figure 6-20,21 and 22 show the increasing numbers of both the formal and informal sectors between the years 1968 – 2004 in Damascus (Khadour and Kafa 2009).

The housing crisis for the local people in the city started to appear in the early 2000s, when governmental decisions and policy started to mislead the current situation by making short-term decisions and ignoring the real problems. Starting from the Iraqi and the Palestinian refugees that arrived in the city, and lived in the fringes, making their own camps, that turned into dense neighborhoods, gathered around the UN schools and social centers.

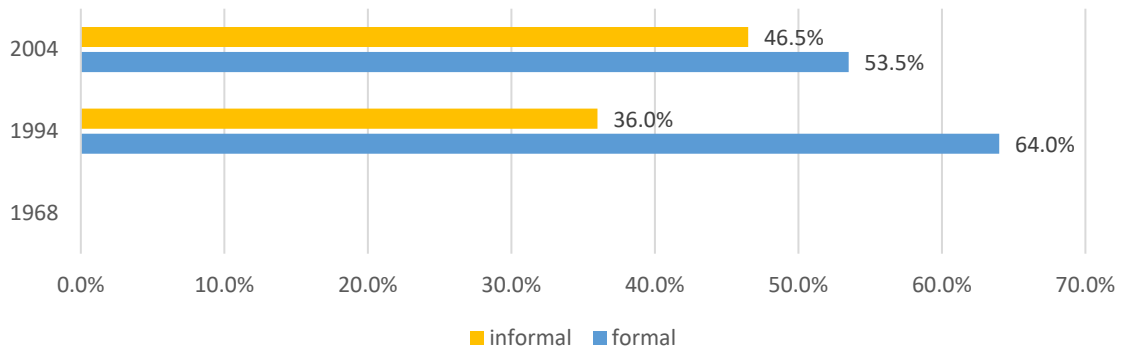


FIGURE 6-20 INFORMAL AND FORMAL POPULATION GROWTH PERCENTAGE AVERAGE (KHADOUR AND KAFA 2009)

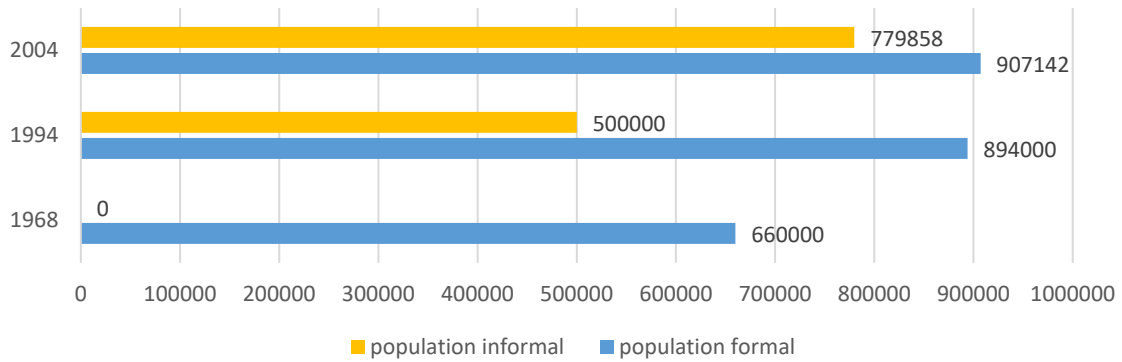


FIGURE 6-21 INFORMAL AND FORMAL POPULATION GROWTH (KHADOUR AND KAFA 2009)

QUESTIONABLE RECONSTRUCTION POLICIES AND PROJECTS

Before going ahead, an important set of facts should be discussed especially the ones that appeared after the starting of the Syrian war in 2011. The housing sector has suffered the most due to the widespread destruction since 2011; the war has been disastrous also for the economy, and the repairing costs are daunting.

In early 2019, estimated numbers for the post-war reconstruction costs were between \$250 billion and \$400 billion (Daher 2019), while the entire 2018 government budget was SYP 3.9 trillion, (or around \$8.9 billion) and contained \$115 million allocated for reconstruction (Al-Frieh 2018). Therefore, the government cannot afford such a massive amount of costs.

Thus, the Syrian economy is in dire shape; almost half of the Syrian population is in need for several types of assistance in one form or another due to aggressive war, global sanctions, and other living difficulties. Syrian gross domestic product (GDP) declined markedly from \$61.1 billion in 2010 to \$17.1 billion in 2017 (Daher 2019); at the same time the poverty rate flared higher than 90%.

The Syrian Pound purchasing power has been declining steadily since the beginning of the war; in 2018, the average monthly expenditure of 4-5 member households was around SYP 325,000 (or \$650) (Tishreen 2019), while the average monthly salaries of the public and private sectors ranged from SYP 40,000 to 70,000, which equals \$80 to 140 (Central Bureau Of Statistics 2019).

Law 5/2016 private and public participatory

Aside from the limitation of the budget, starting from the Law 5/2016 that allowed the private sector to participate and invest in implementing, developing or managing the public facilities and infrastructure with the exception of the fuel industries (Prime Ministry 2016).

This Law aims to fund and boost the development of the public projects, as well as to create kind of equal and competitive opportunities that ends up with public benefit. This ignores the fact that the private sectors' aims usually are profitable and commercial ones. Although, many studies went deeply throughout different aspects of the reconstruction and the socio-economic situation in Syria during the war, this is beyond the scope of this dissertation, that is aimed to debate the housing policies and their effects.

Decree 66/2012

Decree 66 which entered into implementation in September 2012, basically announced the creation of two urban areas within the province of Damascus, with the aim to develop processes of informal settlements and infraction areas for what is known as “Post-war Reconstruction”; it also appoints the province center to prepare the master plan of these new urban areas.

- The first area is the South-Eastern Mezzeh in the municipalities of Mezzeh – Kafarsusi
- The second area is the Southern part of the Southern Highway in the municipalities Mezzeh – Kafarsusi – Kanawat – Darya – Kadam

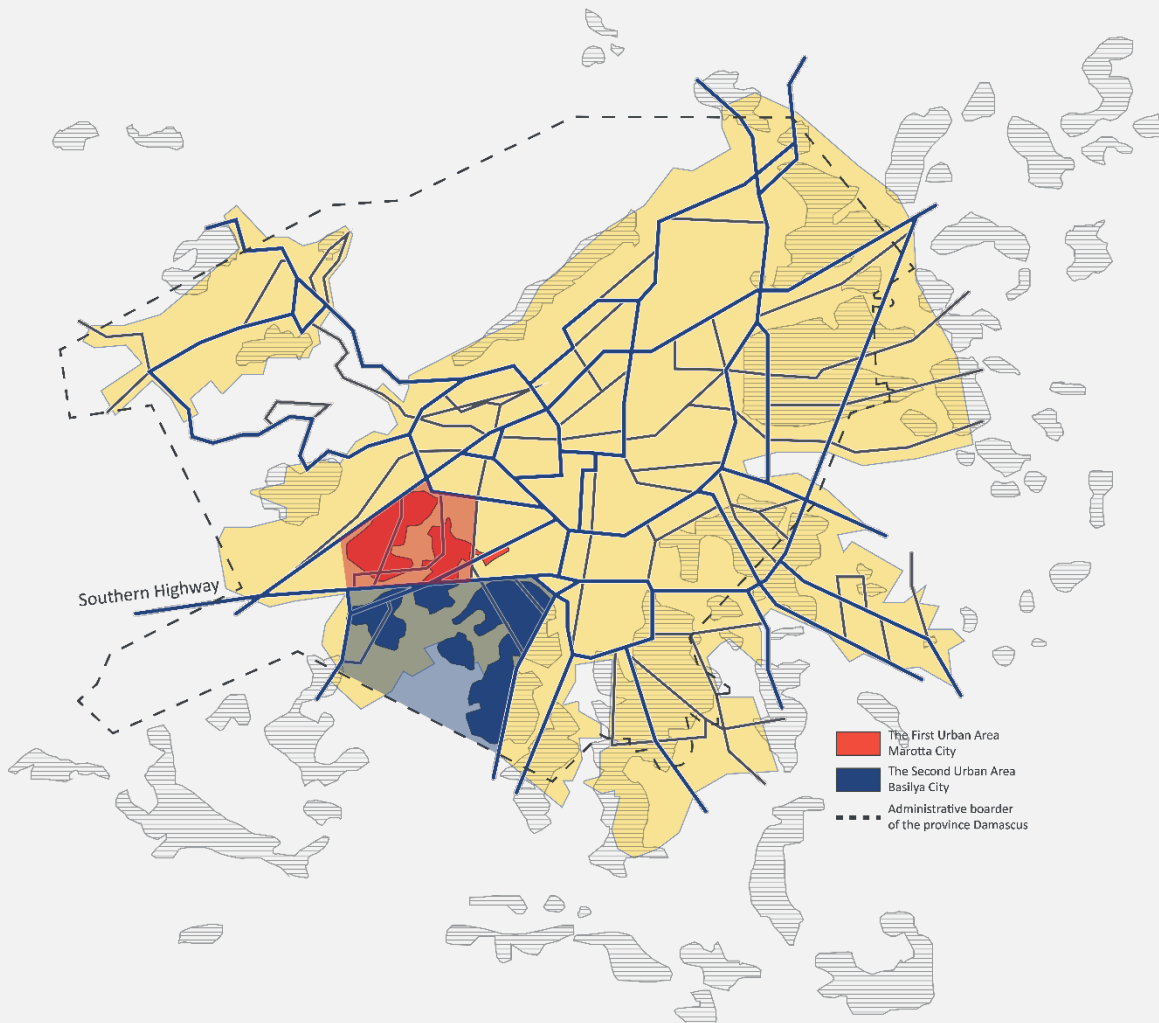


FIGURE 6-22 MAP OF THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS APPOINTED IN THE DECREE 66
THE SCHEME PRESENTS THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN AND AROUND THE PROVINCE OF DAMASCUS (BY THE AUTHOR)

However, the second chapter of the decree includes an entire paragraph regarding the informal owners; they are treated differently depending on the type of land, public or private, and the real value of the informal building in the real estate market. The Decree also appointed a committee to estimate the value of the property. The documentation processes were divided into four groups as the following (Harastani and Hanna 2019).

- People who are occupying public or private land without proof of ownership, their compensation would be cash that equals the amount of two years of rent.
- People who do not own the land but have rented it before 2000, will have compensation either 30% of the building value when the property is a residential one or 40% when the property is a commercial one.
- People who built their informal buildings on their land will have 100% compensations, and an annual rent compensation.
- People who own agricultural land without building it, they will get financial compensation.

The compensation will be in the form of shares, based on the property value and the land area, to be used later in the rehousing phase in order to purchase a new house in the alternative housing section of the project, while the missing amount of the new house would be paid through monthly installments (Harastani and Hanna 2019).

On the other hand, the smallest apartment in the alternative residential projects, according to the government's estimation, would cost around 700,000 shares, while the governor in the province of Damascus declared that 25% of the previous residence in the first area have less than 100,000 shares (Harastani and Hanna 2019).

So, 25% of those who were evicted had two choices: either to sell their shares or to buy other 600,000 shares, if they could afford it, in order to have an apartment in the project.

The first urban area was named “Marotta City”, which means sovereignty or homeland in the old Syriac language, while the second urban area “Basilya City” which means Eden.



*FIGURE 6-23 MAP FOR THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS OF THE FIRST AREA (GOOGLE MAPS)
AND PHOTOS OF THE AREA (UNKNOWN)*

Marotta City has a total area of around 215 hectares. According to Damascus Ecochard’s master plan the area was recognized as an agricultural zone. Due to the housing crisis the area was informally built. Right before the announcing of the new project, 55% of the area was built and contained almost 6800 informal houses and some shops, in addition to the infrastructure and services that were provided previously, while 45% of the area was agricultural land (Figure 6-23).

The master plan based on Damascus Master plan was provided by the Province of Damascus in the year 2012. It includes residential units, commercial, tourist, and entertainment centers, as well as a part of the master plan was allocated for alternative houses for those who were evicted.



FIGURE 6-24 THE MASTER PLAN OF THE NEW PROJECT MAROTTA CITY (DAMASCUS PROVINCE)

Since the province of Damascus does not have the funding, and since the private sector recently is leading most of the reconstruction developments, in 2015, the government authorized the city council and local administrative units to create private sector holding companies to manage public assets and services. In 2016, the Cham Holding Company was set up with a budget of around SYP 60 billion (\$120 million). The company was supposed to be managed by Damascus Province center; it acts independently. In 2018 the province of Homs announced another holding company, as did the Rif-Dimashq and Aleppo in 2019 (Daher 2019).

However, the private sector business is usually based on luxury developments, and according to the real estate experts “all the residential projects being launched today target the wealthy, while those with an average income or even higher income cannot afford these homes”. As, according to Midad institution census in 2016, the middle-income group’s rate in Syria has declined into less than 14% of the population.

Decree 66 extension

In the year 2018, the Syrian government, based on The Ministry of Local Administration and Environment's suggestion, has modified the Decree 66/2012 that dealt only with developing two areas related to the master plan of Damascus; as well as announced the Law 10/2018 that allows the creation of an urban area or more within the local administrative units.

Thus, the Law 10 considered as an extension to the Decree 66, as it requests from the local units around the nation to create a local committee as well as to determine and create urban areas within their local territory; as well as to prepare the documentation listing of the landlords as did in Marotta City. So, the purposes of Law 10 is to do what was done in the previous two zones of Decree 66, but at a nationwide scale.

The executive map of the new urban areas according to Law 10 was determined, as well as the zoning plans of these areas were drafted. Although they have not been officially announced, the scheme illustrates those areas Figure 6-25.

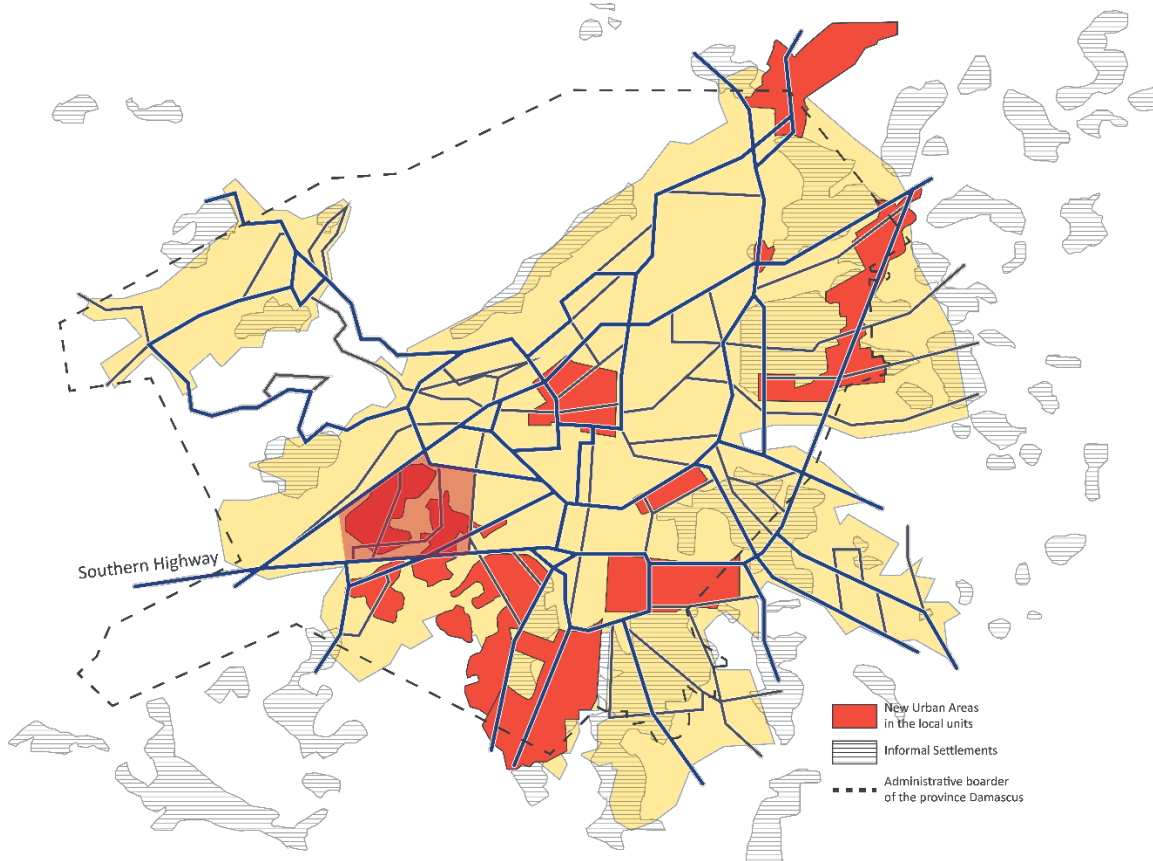


FIGURE 6-25 NEW URBAN ZONES IN DAMASCUS, (THE PROVINCE OF DAMASCUS) SCHEME BY THE AUTHOR

However, many of these areas were not areas that were devastated by the ongoing war, especially the areas mentioned in Decree 66, as they were almost not influenced by the war. While most of the Syrian cities, like Aleppo, Al-Raqqah, or Homs were largely destroyed, Damascus has been facing a different type of destruction, due to the misleading policies by 'post-conflict reconstruction' which have started in 2012, covered by the private sector, that caused exclusion and eviction to many residents.

Despite the fact that in the Article 20 of the Decree 66/2012 aimed at creating a financial fund by the province of Damascus to cover the costs of the social housing and rehousing sections in the project, the privatization approach in such a situation, as well as the general poor financial conditions in the country, lead at the end to convert the project almost totally to a private profitable project, although with the power and blessing of the government.

Most importantly, launching such kind of project shows neglect of the housing crisis that has been aggravating for decades. According to some Syrian real-estate experts "the government, if it continues in this framework, will be unable to resolve the housing crisis for the next hundred years, especially when more than 3 million houses have been destroyed, and given the actual need for 1.5 million houses annually in Syria" (Alyousif 2018).

7. CONCLUSIONS

The research debated “the access to affordable housing matters in Syria, as well as the housing policies and regulations role in the past five decades. The research illustrates various housing projects that were developed by the housing suppliers in Syria (public sector, cooperative unions, private sector) shedding light on the projects’ advantages and disadvantages. These issues have been discussed taking Damascus as a case study, as the city – and its inhabitants – has faced the housing crisis at its extreme, wide development of housing informality, along with the impact of rushing decisions and erratic policies development.

The absence of planning experts in the decision-making process together with the lack of urban planning tools have had tremendous implications in Syrian cities, and people are facing significant problems in accessing adequate and affordable housing, without much chances of an improvement in the near future. Moreover, a lack of strategies that are supposed to be defined in order to shape and control city growth and to provide the housing demand is recorded. Thus, the planning system relies on national criteria together with local subdivision plans, but in the absence of any general strategy.

Moreover, the housing crisis in Syria is not a recent one, it has been deteriorating for the last five decades, as debated previously in the housing crisis chapter (ch.05). Generally, there is a growing gap between the average income and housing prices; this gap has been increasing due to the insufficiency of affordable housing projects. Despite the fact that an approach to the development of affordable housing policies has been promoted by the governmental establishments and the unions' cooperatives, the delay of housing handover due to the financial issues have created a distrusting environment.

The role of the private sector in Syria has been growing in the housing market, as the realtors and real estate offices in the main cities have been controlling the housing stocks, by taking advantage of inefficient housing regulations and policies that are supposed to balance the housing market. Furthermore, after the Syrian war has started in 2011, the private sector’s role has been gaining an even greater role, especially in the perspective of a post-war reconstruction period. This happens disregarding the fact that the private sector has only commercial profitability goals and that the projects that the private sector carries out do not usually target the low-income groups but the high-income ones.

On the other hand, the illegal building activities on private and public land started to develop especially in the main Syrian cities due to various reasons. With time, these buildings created sort of clusters that have been later recognized by the law as “A’shwayat” which means informal settlements. Thus, public authorities have provided these informal areas with some services such as roads, sanitary systems, electricity, schools etc. Although these areas are considered as a downside part of the cities, they do not differ from the regular ones on the socio-economic level. The informal settlements have evolved to play a significant role in the housing market in Syria; they became the only adequate destination for low- and medium-income groups. It is estimated that almost one third of the Syrian population lives in the informal areas, and the percentage is even higher in some cities like Damascus and Aleppo where it reaches 40%. Moreover, these settlements became a sort of a new income source for the household, sometimes higher than their original income, and this is due to the housing-rental activities. As the regular housing market was not able to meet the housing demand with adequate dwellings, the tenants have partially met their demands in the informal settlements.

Housing policies and regulations that have been announced over the last five decades have played an inefficient role as they mainly targeted existing problems with a short-term approach instead of focusing on long-term objectives. They were not thoughtfully implemented; therefore, their unintentional outcomes have tended to impact negatively the housing sector. In addition, the implementation of new erratic housing policies and regulations has never stopped, even during the wartime, causing more damage to the housing sector.

Selecting Damascus as a case study allowed to address all the mentioned points together, as the city has suffered the most from the housing crisis and the informality phenomenon. Besides, the city was considered as an experimental city, as mainly the housing policies and regulation were implemented here first, as mentioned in the chapter dedicated to the case study (ch.07). The Decree 66/2012 was first implemented for Damascus and then it was extended to be applied over the other cities. Moreover, the developments of the new project are not only evicting people out of their houses, but they are also creating a sort of social segregation and ignoring the vital social approach that was displayed when the Old City was built.

As a way of conclusion, some headlines should be taken into consideration in order to help the housing sector to pass the crisis and the low- or medium-income groups to access proper dwellings. First, the housing policies should be developed recognizing the need of some more control over and negotiation with the private sector, especially in the perspective of the major role that private developers will play in the post-war period in the domain of housing development: it ought not to be monopolized. In addition, foreign investors' policies should be more flexible in order to attract more investors who could participate in housing projects. Second, the priority in the post-war reconstruction period should be given to the implementation of new housing projects that target vulnerable groups. Third, since the housing market in Syria lacks a proper rental strategy, and since the available rental units are controlled by the private sector, a company or an establishment supported by the local authorities should manage and provide the market with adequate rental units.

Despite the fact that the research presented in this thesis has faced some limitations particularly, data shortage that represented a challenge due to the planning-tools deficiency and the lack of published official figures; as a consequence, it was necessary to use data and statistics that dated back to different periods.

It would be important that further studies could carry on, assessing the socio-economic damage occurring to the city and the society. The newly released master plans within the Syrian provinces, in fact, tend to have the same character as the Marotta City project in Damascus. Furthermore, the research could also go more through the new housing regulations and policies with the aim of finding the reasons behind the unintentional outcomes. Finally, the old Syrian proverb that says, "*Identifying a Disease Is Half the Cure*", appointing to issues or obstacles, could be considered as a start for future decision-making process.

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