

FLORIAN WIEDMANN AND ASHRAF M. SALAMA,
*Building Migrant Cities in the Gulf: Urban Transformation in
the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019). Pp. 264. £85.00
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Investigating the spatial form of hyper-capitalism, this urban planning book, well illustrated with original maps and plans, sheds a technical light on entrepreneurial urbanism and its impact on urban transformation in Gulf cities. Built on ten years of urban planning practice in the Gulf (2004–2014), it methodically demonstrates the incoherencies of the current urban governance in Gulf cities through the lens of housing. The book unfolds the paradox of increasing land prices and the resulting lack of affordable housing, hyper-vacancy rates, and overcrowding in the Gulf cities. In search of prestige and rent redistribution, rulers and developers have neglected the fact that housing should be the core driver of integrated urbanism, attracting long-term investment by individuals, and a crucial factor to the construction of shared urban identities. Current urbanism in the region, focused on leisure and mega projects, creates spatial forms that exclude medium-income and low-income migrants who are precisely the pillar of the Gulf economic model.

According to the authors, Gulf cities are exemplary of top-down urbanism that captured land value profits and built prestige at the expense of their Asian migrants. Migrant communities are not provided with a more stable perspective to settle and invest long-term. 82% of the population in the Gulf is comprised of migrants: 10% are high-income expatriates from the Western countries, the Middle East, and Asia, followed by medium-income migrants from the the Indian subcontinent, and the Philippines. The majority of the population, around 70%, are workers from the Indian subcontinent. Most of them are single, as only the United Arab Emirates and Qatar allow family

migration by medium-income groups with a minimum monthly wage of \$2,700. The nonmigrant, national population form only between 10–20% of the population in each country.

The Gulf's geographic position between Asia and Europe has become opportune, particularly as a leisure destination from a Middle East in war. However, the authors show that capital-driven globalization is pushing Gulf cities into a shortsighted competition to attract investment, in detriment of its own small cities and residential neighborhoods. Not only housing, but also urbanized land has become an exchangeable commodity within international markets. The urban form of globalization is preventing the integration of many migrant communities. Each Gulf country has conceived a development vision to prepare for the post oil phase by diversifying the economy and by training its national workforce to progressively replace the migrant Western and Arab high-skilled workers.

Entitled "Enabling housing supply through new forms of governance," chapter three presents the new forms of entrepreneurial governance and the emergence of semi-public holdings. The emerging real estate markets have been deregulated to establish property-led developments to attract advance producer services such as finance. Accompanying this trend are city branding strategies designed to attract tourists. Ministries have developed land use plans and master plans, while housing is in the hand of specific housing ministries, most of which are working alongside local municipalities to develop new residential towns in the outskirts of the capital cities (Hamad Town and Issa Town in Bahrain). The new property laws have allowed local citizens to buy undeveloped land and speculate on the plots to expand residential neighborhoods. Municipalities, meanwhile, have become key actors in urban entrepreneurialism as they are in charge of zoning ordinances (physical planning, area structure plans, and integrated urban areas), but have lost control by selling strategic locations to real estate holding companies.

Wiedmann and Salama show how Dubai urban governance has been transformed from a centralized administrative type to a corporate-driven model. Specifically, Dubai enabled foreign capital to take shares in real estate holdings as soon as 1999, in particular in Dubai Holding and Dubai World. However, the other Gulf countries facilitated a freehold property market only after 2002, in a post 9/11 context. At that time, Arab capital started to be diverted from the United States to the Gulf countries. However, those policies drove the increase in land prices and the unaffordability of housing for the

majority of the migrant population. The authors thus demonstrate that the top-down decision-making process has led to the privatization of urban governance. A few competing dominant stakeholders have emerged outside any administrative supervision, with a large impact on spatial development. Gulf real estate markets do not provide affordable and suitable housing for all income groups. The government needs to intervene to support a housing supply for the local citizens and medium-income migrants in the coming years in order to maintain its economic model of deregulation.

Chapter four discusses the economic transformation ignited by property-led development incentives, with examples taken from Dubai and Bahrain. Gulf cities are characterized by new urbanism policies based on the liberalization of markets to attract foreign investment, the extension of public land via reclamation, and the founding of semi-public holdings as developers. Residential high-rise and island projects are the exemplary urban morphologies of this urbanism, but, in contrast, large parts of the historical cores are neglected, and the cities are segregated.

Chapter five deciphers urban fragmentation tendencies around new urban development patterns. The authors investigate the spatial distribution of different housing typologies in Bahrain's capital, Manama, and Qatar's capital, Doha. The concept of garden cities was imported by Western urban planners in Gulf cities, with the correlated social isolation and shrinking spatial diversity stigma. Social isolation is even worse due to the lack of public transportation and the emergence of highway grids as barriers between areas. Only the Dubai metro, inaugurated in 2009, counterbalances these negative trends. In most cities, migrants have to adapt to the housing market, instead of housing being based on their needs and preferences.

Entitled "Lifestyle trends and multicultural perceptions," chapter six investigates the relationship between different social groups in highly socially segregated Gulf cities. Lifestyles characterized by demographic and consumption patterns are grounded in specific areas. 80% of the majority of the migrant population is from South Asia, mainly from India and Pakistan, half are male workers. They spend their leisure time playing sports in the public spaces (cricket), but are not allowed to gather within shopping malls. Medium-income migrant families are mainly settled in central areas. Their leisure time is focused on family-oriented activities within their community. High-income migrants keep strong links to their countries. They follow an individualistic approach regarding leisure

choices as well as family settings. National populations live in homogeneous spaces, spending their time in spacious villas where the different generations meet and interact. Men regularly gather at local neighborhood mosques. National use the restored historic market areas, malls, and waterfronts. The gentrification of historic city cores via large-scale mega projects is depriving large communities of essential spatial needs and relocating the problems of social segregation, whereas direct economic interaction in small businesses help to consolidate the social fabric and the urban experience.

Following Henri Lefebvre's *"Right to the City"* and David Harvey's *Social Justice and the City* theories, the authors are calling for public participation from migrant groups in urban planning.¹ This call is entirely new for Gulf cities and could be challenging for both national and western developers, but will be a condition for the sustainability of the economic model. It could have been of great interest to include elements on land value capture tools used in the rest of the world to counterbalance these trends and reintroduce spatial justice. Similarly, the question of sustainable urbanism and green compact growth could have been mentioned as a way to foster forms of urban housing densification. Nevertheless, this book is a must-read on Gulf cities for architects and planners.

NOTES

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), (first published in French in 1968); David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Athens: Edward Arnold, 1973).