

**Yasser Elsheshtawy (ed.)**, *Planning Middle Eastern Cities. An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalising World*. London: Routledge, 2004. 210pp. £24.99 pbk.  
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This edited volume, part of a trilogy which seeks to provide a new reading to Middle Eastern urbanism, concentrates on the urban development of six Arab cities since the late nineteenth century focusing on the impact of colonialism and globalization on their built environments. The aim of this book is to highlight the diversity of experiences of urbanization across the region in order to consider challenges and strategies for the future. The editor and the contributors are architects born in the Middle East, employed in Arab universities and 'citizens of the city' they study, either by birth or residence. In this respect, one of the most welcome contributions of this volume is that it offers an indication of the academic trends, professional involvement and civic engagement which underpin the practice of architecture and urban planning in the Arab world. What clearly emerges from *Planning Middle Eastern Cities* is the real and perceived close connection between the past, present and future of cityscapes on the one hand, and the cultural and historical identity of Arab societies on the other.

This connection has a long pedigree in the historiography of the Middle East as epitomized by the vast literature on the Islamic city. Very appropriately the volume opens with a poignant critique of this ideal-type approach to the study of urbanization which Elsheshtawy sets against the notion of a contemporary Middle Eastern 'urban kaleidoscope', to rehearse the book's title. It is quite ironic – and candidly acknowledged by the editor (p. 19) – that his critique of socio-religious approaches to urban development is implicitly refuted by Akbar in the essay following the introduction (pp. 22–8). This is a short prologue which discusses the unequal urban processes generated by globalization and capitalism in contrast with the rights and entitlements of urban dwellers according to mediaeval Islamic jurisprudence. Elsheshtawy's dislike for the Islamic city paradigm forms the core of the revisionist argument which he puts forward in an eloquent and stimulating introduction. He correctly sees processes such as globalization, colonialism and capitalism as indispensable analytical tools to understand Arab cityscapes more organically and in a broader intellectual, geographical and historical context than that provided by Islam alone. In fact, one of the most interesting propositions of the book (particularly for historians) is to consider the effects of colonialism, capitalism and globalization from a comparative perspective. As lucidly explained by Elsheshtawy, this approach is intended to provide a corrective to 'the narrative of loss' which emerges from some of the academic literature produced in the region and outside (pp. 3–6). This narrative explains the 'underdevelopment' of contemporary Arab cities (and societies) and their inability to become global players as a result of processes of colonial domination and of the decline of a once powerful Islamic civilization. The case-studies are grouped into two sections. The first includes contributions on Algiers, Baghdad and Sana'a, cities which have been relatively untouched by the forces of globalization but have suffered the full brunt of colonialism, war and sustained political conflict since the nineteenth century. Hadjiri and Osmani's essay on Algiers (pp. 29–58) is largely a factual but informative account of urban development after the French occupation of the city in 1830. The chapter by Nooraddin on Baghdad (pp. 59–84) focuses on changing

architectural practice and styles against the backdrop of Iraq's troubled colonial and post-colonial histories. The contribution on Sana'a by Al-Sallal (pp. 85–113) revisits urban space by contrasting the architectural style and social ideals of the old city's housing clusters with the unregulated urban growth of the post-1960s era.

The second part of the volume deals with urban centres which are aspiring to join the exclusive club of world cities. As in the previous section, all essays take a broad historical perspective linking together colonial and post-colonial urban expansion. Yet the focus is specifically on large-scale urban projects with a view to illustrating the socially and economically divisive impact of globalization. Kenzari's fascinating chapter on Tunis (pp. 114–33) concentrates on the Lake Tunis Project, a new urban zone with residential, business and leisure facilities catering for hi-tech industries and international clients. Equally absorbing is Adham's account of the influence of international capitalism and real estate speculation in the creation of spaces of leisure and consumption in twentieth-century Cairo (pp. 134–68). Elsheshtawy's concluding chapter on Dubai (pp. 169–99) offers a multi-faceted account of the negative implications of the globalization discourse surrounding the Burj al-Arab Hotel complex and the Jumeirah Palm Island resort, the two megaprojects which have become world-wide symbols of global Dubai.

Inevitably, some of the contributions are more successful than others in addressing Elsheshtawy's substantive agenda. Yet, overall this is a laudable collective effort with an excellent choice of case-studies which make a compelling argument in favour of the 'urban kaleidoscope'. This certainly provides food for thought for architects, planners, urban specialists and historians working *on* and *in* the Middle East. For the non-regional specialist this book offers a useful insight into ongoing academic debates on Middle Eastern urbanism from an insider's perspective.

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**David Gordon (ed.)**, *Planning Twentieth Century Capital Cities*. London: Routledge, 2009 edn. 320pp. £24.99 pbk.  
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This is a collection of short essays summarizing in parallel format selected world capital city histories, as its title declares. Its 15 city narratives are remarkably consistent, keeping to a narrow definition of administrative history – although one might criticize a few more impressionistic contributions (among which I would disappointedly number London) and also a few swamped by the complexity of their subject (among which would come Brussels). Editing is irregular (some incorrect English and computer glitches – Brussels again), but length and focus achieve admirable uniformity. Here lies, for me, much of the value of the book: it presents a consistent body of comparative material and I would use it as an introductory text for a city design course, around which to arrange more critical and problematic readings to explore the considerable tensions showing through Gordon's tight grid.

Introductory essays by editor Gordon and Peter Hall – both planning historians – plus a concluding essay by Hall make it clear that their interest is typology: what