

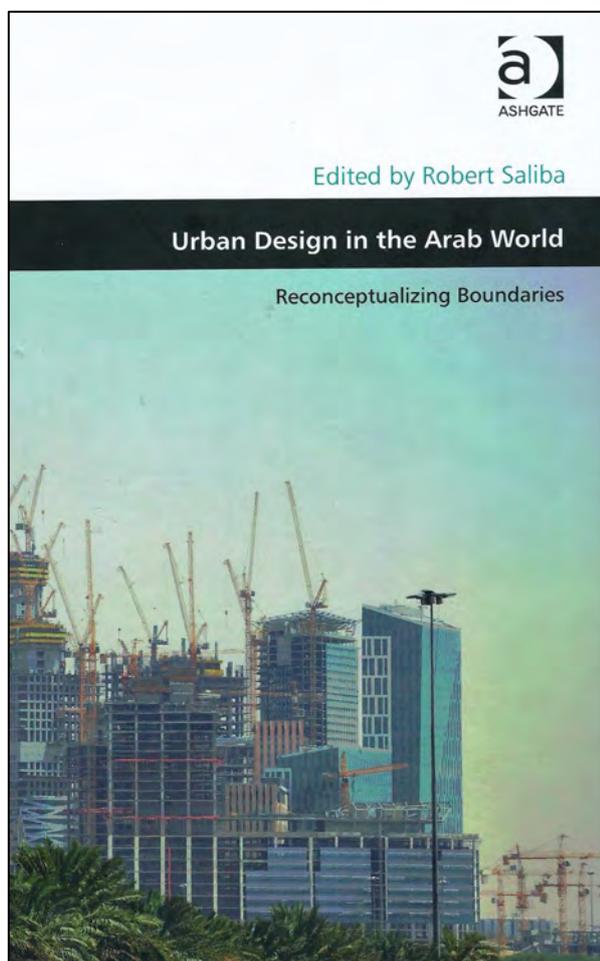
BOOK REVIEW:**URBAN DESIGN IN THE ARAB WORLD: RECONCEPTUALIZING BOUNDARIES**

Robert Saliba (Ed), Ashgate 2015, ISBN 9781472409768 (New Edition, Routledge, 2016)

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Urban Design in the Arab World: Reconceptualizing Boundaries, by Robert Saliba, he successfully publishes an edited book that discusses the theory and application of Urban Design in the Arabian context and the locational aspects of new urban interventions.

The work of various scholars narrates the diverse urban experiences in respect to the global, regional and local trends. By having a closer look into this unique volume, I personally see it among the few publications that focus on contemporary urban design interventions in detail rather than overviewing the comprehensive urban setting of cities and nations of this part of the world. The main focus is Urban Design both via theory and practice. Moreover, Robert puts it under four main parameters or tracks of discussion; such as, *'the Discursive, the Hybrid, the Operational and the Visionary.'* The book examines the methods of synthesising urbanism of Arab cities, determining the philosophical context and the evolutionary advancements. The book highlights the urban transformation and contestation of Arab urbanism along the various architectural shifts between the past century and now.

The book extensively tackles the various discourses of urban design in the Arab World, whichever these urban interventions are new, redevelopment, or reconstruction. This significant publication covers various examples of urban design projects at different cities throughout the Arab World. The book starts by stating the Urban Design theories which would have impact on urbanism in this geographical region. It consists of five sections that reflect the four different tracks and finally ends with a prospective section.

The first section discusses the 'Discursive Design Approach' and consists of four chapters. This section is well composed to investigate the various design trends in Urban Design revealing the degree of complexity and questioning the unitary philosophy of the Arab city. For instance, Omar Hallaj presents a chapter that discusses how the Aga Khan Award for

Architecture is highlighting the diversification of Urban Design practice in this region. He provides an argument based on the various urban interventions presented at the award to examine the impacts on stylistic and discursive practices of the urban environment. Another chapter by Howayda Al-Harithy discusses the strategies for community participation in the post-war reconstruction approaches by professional activism. Al-Harithy presents a participative discourse in various districts of Lebanon of different scales of intervention, offering pragmatic lessons learned from the professional activism group while supporting in the reconstruction of destructed districts. As for chapters five and six, they discuss the 'Corporate' and 'Greening' discourses respectively; Angus Gavin in chapter five focuses on the inner-city regeneration of Beirut's post-war central area. Angus highlights the Public Private Partnership framework on various levels of management, governance, and operations. In chapter six, Jala Makhzoumi focuses on the Ecological landscape design in the Easter Arab States, the argument presented challenge the global urban design interventions driven by neoliberal forces in these cities and creating loss of national identities.

In the second section, Robert Saliba presents 'the Hybrid Discourse' to highlight the emerging trends of urban design, that stresses on ecology over morphology and network surface over urban form. The section consists of two chapters; in chapter seven, again taking Beirut as a case study, Lee Frederix focuses on the Beirut River as a site of cultural infrastructure based on a process-based intervention that acts as a systemic catalyst by community members and leaders. In chapter eight, Sam Jacoby examines what kind of urban interventions emerging from the methodologies of typological reasoning within the Arab world, surprisingly being proposed by young and innovative student minds of the Architectural Association.

Afterwards, section three of the book presents the third discourse called, 'the Operational', here the editor managed to build this part out of three chapters. This part demonstrates the various governance and planning systems, while investigating participatory models in managing spaces of the Arab cities. In chapter nine, Saad and Stellmach present Aleppo with a new innovative operational approach imported from previous European experiences which empower local communities to engage in the strategic planning mechanism. In chapter ten, Rabih Shilbi presents new operational methods of cooperation between the academic and local community to cover up for the absence of government. Rabih and the students of the American University of Beirut present urban design solutions following community-based design methodologies. In continuation to the participatory approach, chapter eleven by Sandra Frem rethinks of Beirut River as a platform of a socio-economic and ecological incubator. Interestingly, all three chapter of this section highlights the necessity of research during the planning phase and community engagement. Notably, this section discovers the designers' degree of effectiveness toward acknowledging the community empowerment in urban scale interventions. The final discourse is 'the Visionary,' presented at the fourth section and including four different chapters mostly questioning the diverse urban landscapes and the capabilities of adapting toward modernity and globalisation. This part introduces other cases studies, such as Cairo, Baghdad, and Makkah. In addition, establish theoretical and visionary connections among these case studies according to their ultimate goals and perception of public urban spaces. Thus, in chapter thirteen, Robert Saliba presents how design philosophies and practices envision the urban developments of the Holy Shrine cities considering the holy services and infrastructural needs while addressing the socio-cultural diversification and identities of these cities. While within chapter fourteen, Hussam Salama and Nathan Cherry reveal the secrets of Tahrir Square in Cairo and its political role in shaping the future of Egyptians.

Finally, the book ends with a futuristic agenda of how to practice and interpret urban design in the Arab World. Specifically, the notion of sustainability and urban design is brought up through policies reformulation and methods of implementation within Abu Dhabi. In addition, John Madden introduces the 'Pearl Rating System' initiated by the United Arab Emirates to monitor

and measure sustainability with the continuous emerging built environment. The final chapter by Anne Vernes contribute not just to the built environment development, but goes further and reconnects Urban Design and transportation methods with the people's public health. This is a great experience to attempt at such an investigation.

Ultimately, 'Urban Design in the Arab World: Reconceptualising Boundaries' provides a new and well developed ideas of how to envision Urban Design within defined contexts of various circumstances and challenges, either socio-cultural, environmental, political or economic. The book cross the conventional boundaries of limiting Urban Design and introduces innovative trends of design practices while embedding research as a design tool. The major goal achieved in this publication is to examine and synthesise Urban Design of Arab cities with actual reference to global trends of practice with less reliance on historical interpretation or subjective criticism of aesthetics of urban settings. Personally, I recommend this book to all scholars teaching Urban Design theories or urban design studios, especially in the Middle East and the North African region.

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