REFUGEE CAMPS IN OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Need for Integration with the Cities

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The Palestinian refugee camps were established 55 years ago to shelter the refugees who left their homes in Palestine as a result of the 1948 war. These disordered habitats were located on the skirts of the major cities of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip) and the neighbouring Arab countries. Initially, the construction of these camps was thought to be temporary for refugees who were waiting to return to their homes. Today, the refugee camps represent alienated neighbourhoods within or around cities where they were originally located.

The Palestinian refugees suffered a lot and are still suffering as a result of the Arab- Israeli conflict. And it is believed that the refugee problem is one of the main issues that should be dealt with in order to reach a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. Several issues need to be considered when addressing the Palestinian refugees. Research work, which was or is being carried out investigate the problem from political, social and economic points of view, however little was done to study the aspects related to planning and urban design of the camps.

This study proposes to investigate issues related to the urban structure and planning of Palestinian refugee camps. The purpose is to construct guidelines for urban regeneration and urban integration of these neighbourhoods with the adjacent cities.

The research proposes to study the refugee camps as urban settlements of low urban qualities compared to the adjacent of surrounding cities. The main objective is to establish means to redesigning and structuring refugee camps to fit into urban structure of cities. In particular, the study aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. Analysis of the historic and physical development of Refugee Camps
2. Evaluation of the Refugee Camps in terms of socio-economic, physical, environmental and architectural aspects
3. Determination of possibilities and means of integration of Refugee Camps with the urban environment of adjacent cities. (Social, Urban, Cultural ... etc.)

Palestinian refugees are Palestinians who were displaced from their homes since 1947, leading up to the catastrophic ethnic cleansing of 1948, and systematically thereafter numerous times. In 1948, with the establishment of the state of Israel, an estimated 700,000 - 800,000 Palestinians (some 80% of the Palestinian population) were expelled from their homes. In 1967, after Israel occupied the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, approximately 350,000 Palestinians were made refugees, many for the second time (Parvathaneni, 2003).

Today, there are more than 5 million Palestinian refugees - more than 3.8 million are registered with and receive services from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Due to the magnitude of the Palestinian refugee crisis, UNRWA was set up as a special agency of the UN in 1950 to provide relief services for the refugees scattered in camps throughout the region. Palestinians are the largest refugee population in the world. Palestinian refugees are scattered around the globe and live in varying conditions. More than one and a quarter million of these refugees live in the 59 refugee camps located in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan (UNRWA, 2003). There are a smaller number of unofficial refugee camps. The large number of Palestinians remaining in camps after more than five decades of exile can be explained by several factors: family and village support structure in the camp; lack of resources to rent or buy alternative accommodation outside the camp; lack of living space outside the camp due to overcrowding; legal, political, and social obstacles which compel refugees to remain in the camp; physical safety; and, the refugee camp as a symbol of the temporary nature of exile and the demand to exercise the right of return (UNRWA, 2003).

Over 40% of the more than 1.4 million refugees in the West Bank and Gaza inhabit the 27 refugee camps in the area. The Gaza Strip has the highest concentration. 70% of the population of Gaza is refugees. All Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are required to carry Israeli-issued identity cards at all times (UNRWA, 2003).

The Formation of Refugee Camps

A camp, according to UNRWA's working definition, is a plot of land placed at the disposal of UNRWA by the host government for accommodating Palestine refugees and for setting up facilities to cater to their needs. Areas not designated as such are not considered camps. The plots of land on which camps were set up are either state land or, in most cases, land leased by the host government from local landowners. This means that the refugees in camps do not "own" the land on which their shelters were built, but have the right to "use" the land for a residence (Parvathaneni, 2003).

Campi profughi nei territori palestinesi occupati: necessità di riqualificazione e integrazione con le città

L'articolo riguarda un'interessante ricerca svolta dalla An-Najah National University, riguardante la riqualificazione e l'integrazione con le città dei Campi Profughi insediati nei territori palestinesi occupati da Israele.

La ricerca si propone di analizzare gli aspetti relativi alla struttura urbana ed alla pianificazione dei Campi profughi, con lo scopo di costruire linee guida per la rigenerazione e l'integrazione, con le città adiacenti, dei Campi Profughi considerati insediamenti a bassa qualità urbana.

Obiettivo dello studio è di individuare i mezzi e i modi di riprogettare e strutturare i campi Profughi per rigenerarli e integrarli con le città esistenti. L'obiettivo generale si articola in obiettivi specifici, quali:

- l'analisi dello sviluppo storico e fisico dei Campi Profughi;
- la valutazione degli aspetti socioeconomici, fisici e ambientali ;
- la determinazione delle possibilità e dei mezzi atti a realizzare l'obiettivo generale, cioè l'integrazione dei Campi Profughi con l'ambiente urbano delle città adiacenti.

Ad un inquadramento storico dello sviluppo e delle dimensioni del fenomeno insediativo, fa seguito l'analisi degli aspetti giuridico-amministrativi e dei compiti dell'organismo delle Nazioni Unite UN Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) consistenti nella fornitura di servizi e nella gestione delle installazioni, sia nella West Bank che nella Striscia di Gaza.

L'articolo affronta l'argomento dell'evoluzione e delle caratteristiche dei 'Campi' individuando nel desiderio di "urbanità" più che di cittadinanza, l'ansia dei profughi dopo cinquant'anni di esistenza nei 'Campi' divenuti via via sempre più come piccole città in termini di pratiche spaziali, di forme costruttive e di servizi, divenuti quindi parte dell'armatura territoriale della Palestina.

L'articolo passa a descrivere, per periodi, la trasformazione delle costruzioni e delle infrastrutture urbane realizzate per addizioni successive determinate dall'aumento di popola-

UNRWA's responsibility in the camps is limited to providing services and administering its installations. The Agency does not own, administer or police the camps as this is the responsibility of the host authorities. UNRWA has a camp services office in each camp, which the residents visit to update their records or to raise issues relating to Agency services with the Camp Services Officer (CSO). The CSO, in turn, refers refugee concerns and petitions to the UNRWA administration in the area in which the camp is located (Parvathaneni, 2003).

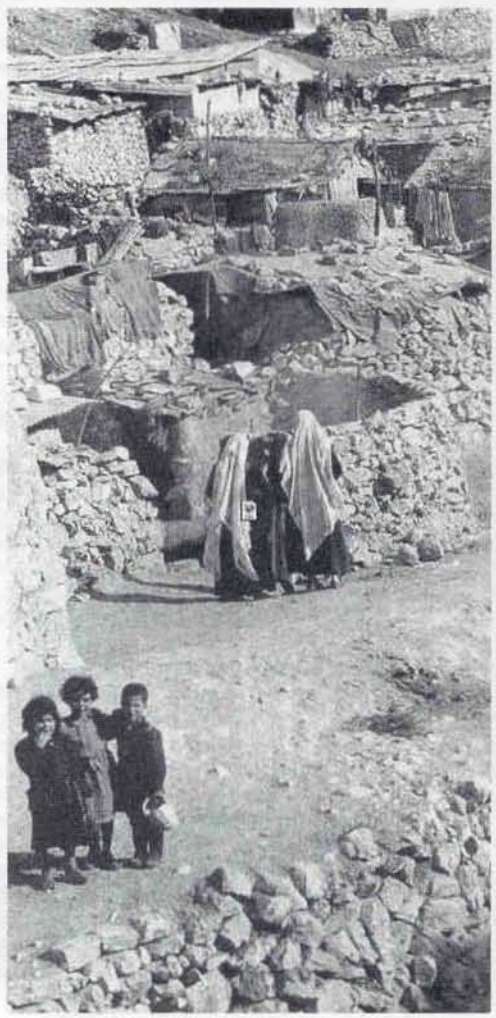
In the Occupied Palestinian Territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip), there exist 26 refugee camps. The West Bank covers 5,500 square kilometers with an estimated population of 1.8 million. Approximately, one quarter of the refugees live in 19 recognized refugee camps and the majority live in West Bank towns and villages. Some camps are located next to major towns and others are situated in rural areas. While the West Bank has the largest number of camps according to UNRWA's figures, the largest camp, Balata (located near Nablus city), has a similar size population to the smallest camp in Gaza (UNRWA, 2003b).

Comparatively, the Gaza Strip is unique amongst UNRWA's information as the majority of its population is refugees and over half of the refugees live in 7 camps. Over three-quarters of the current estimated population of some 1.1 million are registered refugees, representing 22 per cent of all UNRWA registered Palestine refugees, living in this narrow strip of land; an area of only 360 square kilometers (UNRWA, 2003a).

The Evolution and Characteristics of Refugee Camps

The exile of 1948 is the trauma foundation of the camps, and its memory stay alive in the present identities of the refugees. Their "desire" of urbanity, rather than of citizenship, is the result of more than fifty years of daily life inside the camps. After fifty years of existence, camps are looking more and more like towns in terms of spatial practices, building forms and evolutions and urban equipments. Camps are also in relation for working, leisure and commercial exchanges with neighbour cities. But these relations are between urban dependence and independence. Camps are to day a part of the territorial armature of Palestine. But this part of the Palestinian territorial armature is due for a great part to marginal and informal practices of refugees living in the camps and actors in charge of them. Refugees of the camps have built the town of refuge to show their creativity in terms of development and integration, but also to prove that they are still waiting for the right of return. Between memory and future, the residents of refugee's camps are making use of many strategies developed by a lot of actors to leave the "anti world", to integrate the real world and to finally show their specificities. Camps sum up a lot of Palestinian paradoxes. They are a part of the landscape in Palestine. In these very same places, their identity and their nearest environment have incorporated a succession of temporalities, an exile, a refuge, a lot of conflicts, many years of resistance, a kind of local development, and a so particular social's functioning. Finally camps are built on the dream and on the claim of return, but also on the dignity and on the necessity of life (Seren, 2004).

More than half a century, refugee camps, although built on the collective trauma and the transitory, have slowly taken urban forms. These forms have urban appearances to the point that somebody unaware of the status of the camp as a refugee camp would have difficulty differentiating the camp from a city or a village.



Palestinian refugees in Wadi es-Scir, Jordan, 1948

zione negli anni dal 1948 ai decenni successivi.

Fra i fatti più rilevanti si segnala per durezza il piano per la riorganizzazione dei 'Campi' imposto e attuato dall'amministrazione Sharon a partire dal 1972, volto ad allargare le strade per facilitare le azioni militari all'interno dei 'Campi'.

Due tematiche fondamentali vengono quindi evidenziate dall'articolo:

- il rapporto tra la sovrappopolazione e l'ambiente
- i tentativi di approccio alla problematica dei Campi profughi.

La prima considera che la sovrappopolazione produce il cattivo funzionamento ambientale e che questo alimenta la sovrappopolazione.

Fenomeno questo che può avere esiti positivi o negativi per la vita umana, riguardanti le migrazioni, l'evoluzione delle abitazioni, il funzionamento sociale e economico, la guerra o le epidemie.

L'analisi conclude osservando che se la sovrappopolazione non trova un suo sbocco positivo, gli abitanti sono condannati irrimediabilmente alla povertà.

La seconda tematica riguarda i due approcci con cui il problema dei profughi è stato affrontato dal ministero della Pianificazione: il primo prevede l'assorbimento degli immigrati Palestinesi nel nuovo stato di Palestina, il secondo la rigenerazione urbana dei Campi profughi.

L'articolo conclude con l'osservazione che tutti i tentativi di integrazione dei Campi con la città dovrebbero essere pensati come soluzione politica del problema dei profughi, quindi spettante ai politici, mentre ai pianificatori, ai tecnici, ingegneri e architetti spetta il compito di formulare soluzioni a valenza tecnico-culturale

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Urban forms in the camp are the result of two processes of urbanization: the evolution of the built itself and the evolution of infrastructures (Seren, 2004).

Building process in the camps

The West Bank and the Gaza Strip camps have experienced similar temporal evolution (Seren, 2004):

- 1948 to 1960 was the period of distribution of parcels of around 80 sqm by the UNRWA to heads of families and construction of barracks of concrete blocks.
- 1960 to the end of the 1980's was a period of architectural diversity where each one makes personal modifications to their lodging: adding an extra outside room, built on the public space of roads, a special water reservoir, transforming roofs into terraces, opening windows and supplementary doors.
- 1990 sets in a period of drastic transformations and for the Gaza Strip it signifies a process of homogenization. The houses of concrete blocks give way to houses made of cement or made as bases for taller buildings.

Urban infrastructures

If UNRWA has not succeeded in managing the evolution of buildings, it is nonetheless the UNRWA that has constructed all urban infrastructures: road network, electric and water distribution and the sewage network. Three periods of construction follow each other allowing for the participation of diverse actors (Seren, 2004):

1 - From 1948 to 1970: From the outset, camps were provided with a main access road tied up to the closest main route. Inside the camps communication roads were not paved. At first, parcel distribution represented a spatial square grid. Quickly, this grid took more complicated forms due to the construction that occupied road space. At the same time the system of electric distribution was at its minimum level and had just began, often in an informal way. Water was only accessible through pumping, one pomp by block. Very quickly a service of distribution of water was set up needing some preparation. Used water of barracks was thrown into roads or inside houses. Communal latrines were distributed by blocks provided with septic tanks.

2 - From 1970 to 1996: Since 1972, a military plan for the reorganization of the camps imposed by Sharon, was implemented. It was a plan to broaden roads inside camps in order to facilitate military actions in them. By military order, Israeli government "offered" a new house into a mashru' (re-housing projects) to refugees who were living in barracks on the road extensions, and purposed to relocate them outside the camps. These two mashru' are non-official camps. Roads enlarged through this plan were at times asfalted or paved.

Baqa'a refugee camps, Jordan, 1967

Parallel to the realization of those extensions, the army systematically closed access roads by walls of tin tanks sealed with cement, provided sometimes with small access space. Electricity and water distribution systems were set up by the Israeli military administration. By the end of this period latrines had disappeared and domestic used water was evacuated from the houses through a system of sewage at open air that caused all kinds of diseases. The problem in the Gaza Strip is the flatness of the land that does not allow for a quick evacuation of used water.

3 - Since 1996: Developments accelerate in those domains. The road network inside the camps is asphalted but with a very thin layer, subject to rapid deterioration, or paved. These works are carried by the UNRWA. But in the central Gaza Strip camps that have a municipality, these municipalities cooperate with diverse construction works. Electrical services have become more complicated and deteriorated. Land use raises serious problems due to the superposition of providers and administrators.

In relation to the evolution of the sewage system in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the situations are very different:

- In the Gaza Strip since 1998 emphasis is in the efforts to cover all open air sewage as well as individual septic tanks. Although camp sewages are now underground, they are not tied up to any terminal of water depuration treatment and they are thrown into the beds of wadi (valleys) or into the sea.
- In the West Bank, sewage is tied to the municipal sewage system. The problem remains in the refugee camps far away from municipal services.

Refugee Camps and Urban Extension

The growth of population in the refugee camps has lead to situations of overpopulation for fifty years that you can find it in the scale of every house, every block and every camp. The growth of population is being done in places that are closed by borders and that have other land use and housing rules. Overpopulation is in the same time a consequence and a fundamental element of the environmental issues. Overpopulation breeds environmental bad functioning, and environmental bad functioning breed overpopu-

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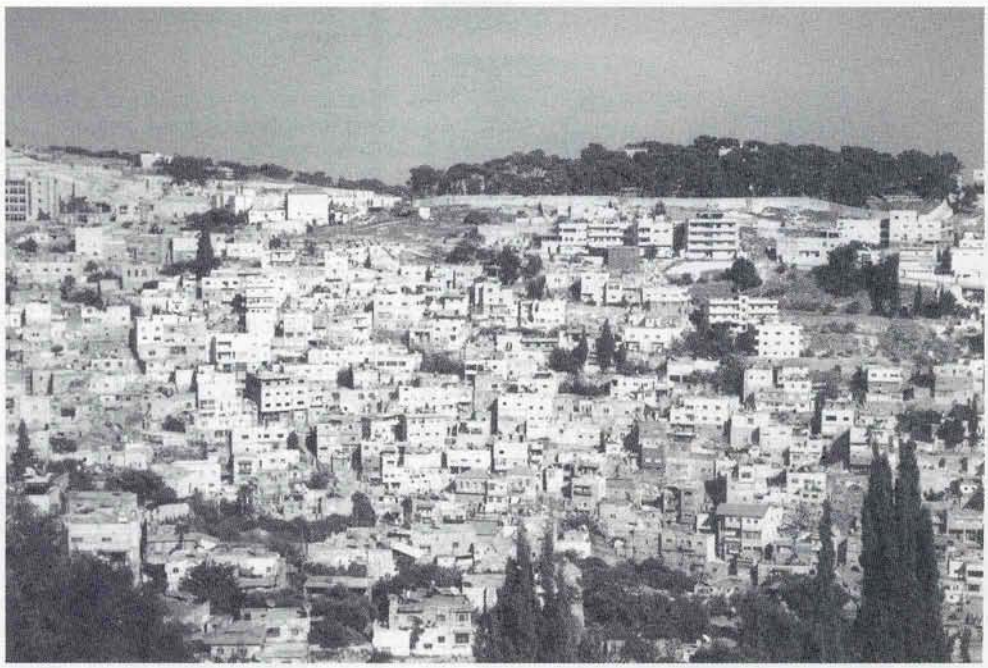

East Jerusalem, the evolution of a refugee camp, 2003

lation. But overpopulation has successive outlets that are positive or negative for the human life. It can be all kind of migration, evolutions of housing, social and economic functioning. It can be war or epidemic illness (Farah, 2000).

If overpopulation doesn't find any outlets, people go slowly and surely to an irremediable poverty. If they can, actors and populations of camps are trying to get new peripheries for an extension of housing. When camps are included inside cities, it is not possible to find vertical building extensions - like it happens in Jabalya and Khan Yunis camps in Gaza Strip possible - or to find more migratory outlet (Farah, 2000).

When camps are a little isolated in a rural zone or a not crowded urban zone, it is possible to extend the camps with peripheries. The camp is increasing inside itself and on its borders and peripheries. The houses built on peripheries are more spacious and usually have a small garden. They are linked to the neighbour camp by identities of the builder and daily migratory (school, health and commercial). Sometimes peripheries have a number of block, but are not really under the rules of UNRWA. The first difference is that people living on camps peripheries are owners of their land parcels. On peripheries, land use rules are depending on municipality if the land is belonging to a municipality, or there are not really land use rules if it's considered like private lands.

The land property will be a great problem, where all actors will be involved and interested. The land property is certainly the problem where every plan of development, every plan on environmental issues will be stopped. The land belongs to an actor, the land use rule belongs to the UNRWA, the population are living on refugee camps deals in unofficial ways with the laws, you can find a lot of political representation, sometimes you have a municipality, anyway there are relations between actors in camps and National Palestinian Authority.

Finally people are a little individualistic in their communitarian way of life and a little collectivistic in their own way of life. To cover all the system, you have the Israeli army and government that are doing the weather in the daily life of Gaza Strip and West Bank populations. But the very good point in Palestinian Society is that people are interested by the environmental issues. They do care with the land. And particularly inside camps where they are supporting now a lot of environmental dis-functioning's consequences due to many years of conflicts.

Attempts of Dealing with Refugee Camps

The refugees issue has been and shall continue to be in the coming period one of the major challenges facing Palestinian politicians and planners alike. During the previous years, there were certain attempts to deal with the refugee camps issue. For example, the Ministry of Planning (MOP) has been engaged in two activities directly related to the refugees' issue, first, the absorption of Palestinian immigrants in the new Palestinian state, and second, the urban regeneration of refugee camps. The planning for the absorption of Palestinian immigrants in West Bank and Gaza Governorates aims at developing national policies, strategies and programs for absorbing potential Palestinian immigrants in a way that considers the well being of the individual immigrant and the benefit for the Palesti-

nian society based on the fact that, in order to avoid problems and to make the absorption and integration as positive as possible, there is a need for comprehensive planning (Nijem, 2003).

Similarly, the studies concerning urban regeneration of the existing refugee camps aim at investigating options for upgrading and integrating the existing refugee camps into the urban and rural structure of West Bank and Gaza in consequence to an agreement reached between Palestinians and Israel. The ongoing work includes performing in-depth analyses of existing refugee camps, especially typology of camps, type of land, quality of housing, variation in socio-economic status, etc. as well as, analyzing different scenarios for the upgrading and integrating of the camps in order to develop policies and programs for the rehabilitation and integration of the refugee camps (Nijem, 2003).

Conclusion

The refugee camps constitute a distinct phenomenon in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in terms of its formation since half a century, its physical evolution from temporary or very primitive houses (tents) to permanent house made of cement or bricks, and its social, economic and political features. In planning terminology such camps are considered as informal houses due to its physical characteristics and living conditions of the people there. However, they are different from informal houses in terms of the reasons behind their formation, which is not any more economic or social but it is political related with the Arab-Israeli conflict, which forced thousands of Palestinians to leave their homelands and migrate to other places.

A "grown" refugee camp in East Jerusalem

This political background is still affecting the way of dealing with such camps in terms of rehabilitation or upgrading. The governmental Palestinian agencies think that any attempt or intention to interfere with these camps means offering a solution to these areas and a kind on canceling the right of return of the people living in the camps to their initial homelands.

To conclude up, we can say that the attempts to deal with the refugee camps in terms of providing services, improving and upgrading the living conditions as well as rehabilitating the built up environment and integrating the camps with the adjacent urban areas should be though as a political solution to the refugees' issue and elimination of the right of return. Therefore, we as planners and architects are responsible for providing physical solutions not providing political ones, and our role is related with the development and improvement of the whole urban environment, i.e., the city with its physical, social, and economic structures.

Jerusalem, a growing Camp on the road toward Ramallah