



Universiteit
Leiden



THE RIGHTS TO AMMAN

An exploration of the relationship between a city and its
inhabitants

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Date of submission: 04.01.2021

Word count: 29.936

Acknowledgements

Before I start, I would like to thank several people for helping me in the process of this thesis. First of all, I would like to thank all of my interviewees who donated their time to me and tremendously helped me guide this piece of work towards the end result it became to be. Each person individually contributed in sharing their thoughts and personal stories with me, for which I am incredibly grateful. I also owe a big thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Christian Henderson, who has helped me throughout the whole process, helped me to structure my thoughts and guided me to finish a piece of work I can be proud of.

Last, but certainly not least, I owe the biggest thank you to the family that I stayed with in Amman. You have taken me into your home from the beginning on and even, or perhaps especially during times of uncertainty and crisis you made it unmistakably clear that I am welcome and am with you to stay.

Abstract

The *Rights to the City* discourse has been discussed by various academics and its concept been adopted by international institutions and organisations. It speaks about the complex relationship and the different actors involved in the building and shaping of the city. Space and how it is exercised upon, influenced by its users and in turn itself influences them stand is the omnipresent circumstance. The Marxist criticism of cities being “produced” by an elite for their own self-interest as a further suppression of the middle- and lower classes have led me to try to understand non-elite productions of space. This study analyses and evaluates how space is being created by the very citizens who inhabit it in the midst of the ever-growing importance and presence of capitalism and its most recent ally - neoliberalism. Throughout this thesis I investigate how different parts of society in Amman have made use of their rights to their city. Using existing structures of Amman and amending them for a purpose of art or creativity have shown to revive spaces and change the interaction of citizen and city. Surely such changes have been met with many institutional and legal challenges. Regardless, there are many forces at work in Amman that seek to make the city a better place for its citizens. Analysing this has come to show that capitalist energies, that often have little regard for the complex nature and the many intrinsic relationships space entails, have been met with resistance. They have been met with the tireless efforts of people making major contributions to the city, recreating and reclaiming *their* rights to *their* city, depicted in this thesis.

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1. Introduction

*The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic value we desire. The rights to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. (...) the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.*¹

In quest of finding a topic for my master thesis I jumped from topic to topic, from environmental politics and water scarcity to garbage management to urban politics until I finally arrived at wanting to investigate the structures of the city of Amman. Ploughing through theory on urbanism I quickly came across the theory called *The Rights to the City*, coined by Henri Lefebvre² in the 1960s, which has been picked up by many theorists as well as organisations, like the UN, since then.³ This theoretical approach focussed on the people whose city had been built by an elite. It depicts *the city* as a product of capitalist interests rather than fulfilling the initial purpose of accommodating the needs those who live in it⁴. Calling upon the people to make use of their *Rights to the City* (RtC), Lefebvre highlighted a narrative in which the people had an intrinsic right to use their city, to shape- and mould it to their interest and passion. Since there are uncountable examples and circumstances which could be described as making use of such rights, I decided to narrow it down further, at which point I came across a geographer and theoretical thinker, called David Harvey.⁵

Harvey's writings emphasise working against the capitalist system with all means necessary and therewith trying to overcome the endless commodification of space and things.⁶ He discusses how artistic and creative realms are particularly important in that aspect, since they often have been utilised for purposes of the latter, rather than for those of beauty and art. Harvey argues how investigating those aspects of a city show the true extent and form in which the citizens use and mould their own city.⁷ Wondering how this has been realised in Amman, particularly since neoliberalism has become more prominent since the 2000s, I decided to try to find the answer to following research question:

How have the citizens of Amman made use of their *Rights to the City* following and combating neoliberal reform?

¹ Harvey cited in: Kuymulu, Mehmet BariŞ. "The Vortex of Rights: 'Right to the City' at a Crossroads." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 3 (2013): 923-40., p. 936

² Lefebvre, Henri. "Dissolving city, planetary metamorphosis." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no. 2 (2014): 203-205.

³ Kuymulu, Mehmet BariŞ. *The Vortex of Rights*, p. 924

⁴ Zieleniec, Andrzej. "Lefebvre's politics of space: Planning the urban as oeuvre." *Urban Planning* 3, no. 3 (2018): 5-15,

⁵ Harvey, David. *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. Verso books, 2012.

⁶ Ibid, p.70

⁷ Ibid, p. 153, 162

As previously mentioned, I used Harvey's perspective specifically on more creative and artistic changes of the city, that are not immediately connected to making more money. The first part of this thesis will explore the literature and theory on urbanism and serves as foundational structure of this work. In the three consecutive empirical chapters I will discuss, how the idea of the *RtC* has been realised in Amman on three different levels. First, I will look at urban management on a bigger and structural level, particularly with respect to the actions of Amman's city administration, the *Greater Amman Municipality*. The second empirical chapter will be dedicated to discussing and analysing two projects that have for many years worked on achieving Amman's citizens to be shaping their own city structures for *their* interest. This will be followed by the third chapter, which focusses on street art and graffiti in Amman. Although street art has at times been organised and bundled in form of festivals, it also represents diverse, individual and unique attempts of reshaping and recreating the city. All three empirical chapters seek to highlight different yet similar aspects of the *RtC* and its exercise by different actors. The purpose of this thesis is to shine light on and explore the structures of the Jordanian capital and how such structures are affected and in turn affect its citizens.

Methodology

In order to prepare for my fieldwork, I had gotten familiar with the literature on spatial theory and Amman before I travelled. That made a big difference, as it sharpened my eye to pay attention to certain circumstances. I left Holland to travel to Amman at the end of January and returned mid-May. I was supposed to stay until July/August, however, saw myself forced to leave due to the global uncertainty caused by the spread of Covid-19. Surely my fieldwork was affected by the global pandemic, although this change of circumstances mostly redirected my methodology rather than pulling it apart. At this point I would like to state, that my "experience" with Corona was and is as peripheral as possible in this situation and that by no means I intend to undermine the severity that this pandemic has had on many people's lives. Remarks over its impacts on my fieldwork are merely stating *my* circumstances and are not a reflection of the overall effects of this global event.

Description of fieldwork

Due to family connections, I spent my whole stay with a Palestinian-Jordanian family in the east of Amman, a district called *Marka*. This made all the difference. They cared for me, explained different things to me, and since most of the family was able to speak only Arabic with me, I was forced to make quick process with my language skills. I would like to take this opportunity again to thank them for everything. Before my arrival I had decided to take Arabic classes every day to improve on the little Arabic I already knew and in order to get a routine into my days. Since my fieldwork was self-organised, I had to find some structure, some way to find my place in this new city. Unfortunately, I only had one and a half months to get acquainted with the city and its people, after that Covid-19 hit a global stage.

Those first 1.5 months were of course the most memorable moments during my fieldwork. I took this time to explore the city with my new friends, to get to know my new family, be around them

and find my place with them. Since I did not know what was coming for us (I was sadly aware of the virus outbreak in Wuhan, but in no way considered the consequences this would have on the world and my personal life), I took my time to enjoy the city and my life there. In the beginning of March people in Amman started getting nervous, as the virus started spreading in Europe, in countries that were the homes of many of the people I went to school with, including myself. Mid-March, Jordan shut its borders and went into a nation-wide lock down. In a matter of two days almost all the people at school left to catch the last flights allowed to leave the country back home. After consultation with my family in Germany, and considering my situation for myself, I decided to stay in Jordan, despite not knowing when the borders may reopen. I did not want to leave in panic, as well as I now had a family in Amman who I felt comfortable with. Up to that point, there were very few infected people in Jordan.

The 17th of March, the closing of the borders and imposition of a lockdown, represented a radical shift of my fieldwork experience in Amman. For the rest of time, until mid-May, I only managed to go back to the city centre twice, and that was towards the end of my stay. At the start, a four-day *complete* lockdown was imposed, no one was allowed outside their house or flat. The military and police patrolled the city to enforce compliance. In order to provide food, the city had sent busses with bread across Amman. After those four days, the government imposed a curfew so that people were allowed outside between 10 am and 6pm. Since it was Ramadan that meant that breaking the fast together, which happened after 6pm, would have to happen in isolation. Cars were not allowed to be driven and while people were allowed to go outside, they were not allowed to leave their districts (or at least that was the case at the district that I stayed at). Every Friday the city would go into complete lockdown. In the beginning people complied with the rules, but after some time they went more relaxed about their business. For myself this meant that I would have to restructure my research, rethink my position, having to try to figure out, how to conduct a meaningful research under such new circumstances. Firstly, those circumstances meant, that I would not be able to meet any of my interviewees in person. Furthermore, I could not visit any more places for taking pictures or even a closer look, than those I had already visited. Then in May, since there were no signs of things getting better, I decided to try to get back home and was able to catch one of the repatriation flights organised by the Jordanian government. I finished conducting the interviews completing my “fieldwork” from Germany. I would argue that the fact that I could only speak to people virtually did not necessarily restrict my research, it just shaped it in a different way than expected. Of course, sometimes connection issues or other technical issues were interrupting the flow of the interview, overall, however, it went very well.

Research method

In order to investigate the *Rights to the City*, I understood I could “only” do expert interviews with regards to the new situation. Conducting a large scale, quantitative research would now not be possible anymore. After having identified the fields that I wanted to look into, for example street art, I started contacting people who I wanted to speak with. I had already been in touch with one hip hop artist in Amman personally, so I began the entire process by conducting an interview with him. After that I

had a much better sense of the street art scene. I contacted more artists, most via Facebook, some via email. Simultaneously I contacted other people, academics, architects and city builders who I thought would help me in finding structures, angles from which to perceive the city. Of course, a lot of people were difficult to reach via email. However, there were also many who were willing to speak to me. So, I conducted seventeen interviews with people that are actively involved with shaping the city. All of those interviews, with the exception of one, were conducted via zoom or Facebook messenger calls or also phone calls. Those interviews were the heart, the core of my research. They directed my attention to certain problems or also certain people. They made me aware of structures, both physical and in discourse, that I had not previously been aware of.

Regarding the interviews themselves my conduct changed along the way, as I became more comfortable and started knowing the field. I began with a structured interview, during which I mostly stuck to the questions I had noted down beforehand. Quickly after that, however, I realised that having a loser conversation and directly responding to a person's answers, would open up the possibility of getting to know subjects and topics outside of the scope of the structured questions.

In order to maintain an ethical standard, I clarified the purpose of my thesis and my work as well as I asked for consent for recording the audio of the conversation before the start of each interview. Those recordings and their subsequent transcription were of essence, since I previously mentioned that the core research of this thesis relies on the content discussed in those interviews. I used content analysis to analyse what was said and feed it back into the bigger narrative of the *Rights of the City* in Amman. In addition to interviews, I also used sources that interviewees provided me with, consisting of pictures, secondary interviews or online material. I also conducted online research myself, researching organisations, institutional structures and legal structures. As I have mentioned previously, my Arabic skills are rather limited. While I made a lot of process during my time in Amman, I could use those skills to very little extend during my research. This means that all the interviews were conducted in English, with people that were capable of speaking English. Furthermore, it implies that the online research I conducted was restricted to English sources, or sources that I could translate into English.

Positionality

On my path of finding a topic I wanted to write about, dealing with positionality was perhaps the topic I struggled with most, making me question my whole field of study. I took and take issue with anthropological studies and research, although one could argue this thesis counts as one to some extent. This issue was perhaps the main reason why I chose to write about structures, about space, rather than about people and culture. Of course, I found out rather quickly that one does not exist without the other. You cannot and perhaps should not completely ignore the field of anthropology, as this would be a denial of the very people that make the space, which in the end is exactly what I am looking at. Nevertheless, throughout this research you will see that I tried to stay away from cultural assumptions or descriptions as much as possible. The city, as any other, is so varied and diverse that I would, without

even knowing it, gravely misrepresent the people I spoke with and lived with and those who I never met.

Another important remark to mention is that since I did not know Amman, its structures and workings, I was only able to take into consideration what I saw, what I understood and felt to be important and meaningful. I am aware that there are many things that are outside my vision and thus not included in this thesis, neither in the end product, nor in the process of research and writing. But since I *do* hold value of the work I did in this piece, I believe that my gathering and analysis of data, can shed light on Amman from a new perspective.

2. Literature Review & Theory

Urban politics has surged as theoretical field over the past century, with numerous academics covering its many different aspects. In order to find a good entrance into the topic itself, I believe it is most useful to start with a review of the literature on spatial thinking. Therein I will revise how spatial thinking has developed, how it has affected and been affected by different scholars. Throughout this literature review I have decided to focus my attention on a few authors and scholars that have made essential contributions to the field.

To make things less repetitive I have decided to merge the theory section and the literature section on theory, so that this is a combination of reviewing what has been written on urban politics and what will serve as a crucial influence on this thesis. After having clarified different approaches to spatial thinking, I will outline what has been said by thinkers subscribing both to Marxism and to (post-) structuralism. Henri Lefebvre⁸ and David Harvey⁹ will be paid most attention to when talking about Marxist theories on urbanism and urban politics. This is because their theoretical thoughts and the idea of “The Rights to the City” serve as the title, and consequentially as the structural and theoretical backbone of this thesis. In pursuit of understanding the whole of spatial thinking and its multidimensionality, I will then continue to James Scott’s¹⁰ work on structuralism. Despite the fact, that urban politics was not the center of the works I discuss by Timothy Mitchell¹¹ and Michel Foucault¹², their deconstructivist styles of analyses and writing will also be alluded towards when talking about structural approaches to urbanism. Although they may not be mentioned directly during the empirical and theoretical explorations of my fieldwork, their works and thoughts have been an inspiration with regards to academic thinking (deconstruction) throughout my academic career and this research.

After having reviewed the theoretical literature and discussed relevant authors and pieces of work, I will proceed to illustrate the literature, with respect to urban politics, that has been written on Amman. Therein I will give an overview of who has written what on the city. It is important to mention at this point, that all the works discussed in this review have been written in English or German. The review on Amman will quite shortly give an overview of the literature that has been written on the city. Since this chapter will be followed by a chapter that

⁸ Lefebvre, *Dissolving City*

⁹ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*

¹⁰ Scott, James C. *Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2008.

¹¹ Mitchell, Timothy. *Rule of Experts*. 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

¹² Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality*. University of Chicago Press, 1991

provides a larger context and contextualisation of Amman, the specific workings of the city and urbanism, will not be greatly mentioned during the literature review.

Spatial thinking

Talking about the city and urban politics, it is important to firstly make sense of the concept of *Space*. Traditionally space had been assigned to the field of Geopolitics. Academics such as Agnew¹³, Kristof¹⁴, O'Tuathail and Dalby¹⁵ and Deleuze, Guattari¹⁶ and many more provide an oversight of space in geopolitical thinking and the journey that geopolitical discourses have taken in the past century. Space was thought of as physical area, which could be viewed from different perspectives. Hence, the naturalist would see trees, fields and animals where the political strategists would take into consideration, for example, borders and territories.¹⁷ However, in the 20th century, space started to be thought of in a more critical manner. Theorists began to think of space as a multidimensional unit in itself, which is neither fixed nor static. It is not only the physical space in terms of a certain location it is also *mental* space. Furthermore, the reciprocal relationship between time and space started to receive more attention and be explored. Whilst previously space had been taken for granted and not been analysed directly, thinkers began to understand and investigate space as a unit, as having direct effects on its surroundings and being affected thereby vice versa.

In the field of Geopolitics this has resulted in the addition of the prefix *critical*. Rather than the deterministic idea that nature is fixed and understood as a space that can be conquered and possessed by states, critical Geopolitics takes into account the contested nature of statehood, as well as the fact that there are reciprocal flows of influence between nature, people and social and physical constructions.¹⁸¹⁹ One of Edward Said's statements perhaps best represents this break, illustrating how physical places have been covered with human, social constructions of it that from then on define that space:

¹³ J. Agnew, *Space and Place*. In: Agnew, John A., and David N. Livingstone. *The Sage handbook of geographical knowledge*. Sage Publications, 2011.

¹⁴ Kristof, Ladis KD. "The origins and evolution of geopolitics." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 4, no. 1 (1960): 15-51.

¹⁵ O'Tuathail, Gearóid, and Simon Dalby. "Introduction: Rethinking geopolitics: Towards critical geopolitics." *Rethinking geopolitics* (1998): 1-15.

¹⁶ Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *What is philosophy?* Columbia University Press, 1994.

¹⁷ Kristof, *Evolution of Geopolitics* (1960)

¹⁸ O'Tuathail, et al. *Rethinking geopolitics* (1998), p. 3-5

¹⁹ Sharp, Joanne P. "Geopolitics at the margins? Reconsidering genealogies of critical geopolitics." *Political Geography* 37 (2013): 20-29.

*The line separating Occident from Orient (...) is less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production, which I have called imaginative geography.*²⁰

This idea of “imaginative geography” highlights the extent of conceptualisations of physical space into mental and social space in our society. Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities”²¹ are a compelling continuation thereof, wherein space plays an important role in the cohesion of society. He argued that different forms of identity are constantly projected upon physical space creating a feeling of interconnectedness and togetherness. There is thus a direct, almost visible link between the social and the physical, both ends constantly informing and forming each other. This is interesting with regards to this thesis, as it is motivated from a place of criticism of a *disassociation* and weakening of exactly that link between people and their space.

In the 1990s, Edward Luttwak started using the term *Geoeconomics*, which signified the growing presence and importance of the capitalist world economy.²²²³ An increasingly intrinsic and complex web of theories and professions evolved, dealing with the construction, organisation, theorisation and building of space. This economic perspective had been developing over years. In the 1960s, French thinker Henri Lefebvre, who was coined by the political extremes of Fascism and Communism during the first half of the 20th century, created important works that led to him now being considered one of the fathers of spatial and urban politics.²⁴ In order to make sense of space and the relations therein, Lefebvre identified three elements that are required to “produce” space.²⁵ The first one is *Spatial practices*, by which he means space perceived and practiced upon on an every-day basis by its inhabitants. The second element, *Representations of space* is the space that is conceived. It is planned, organised and built by various interacting fields of profession, such as scientists, urbanists and members of the government. The last element is the *Space of representation* which corresponds to the mental sphere and codifies and motivates spatial practices.²⁶ By identifying these three

²⁰ Edward Said cited in: West-Pavlov, Russell. *Space in Theory: Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze*. Vol. 7. Rodopi, 2009., p. 148

²¹ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso books, 2006.

²² Baru, Sanjaya. "Geo-economics and strategy." *Survival* 54, no. 3 (2012): 47-58.

²³ Cowen, Deborah, and Neil Smith. "After geopolitics? From the geopolitical social to geoeconomics." *Antipode* 41, no. 1 (2009) p. 38

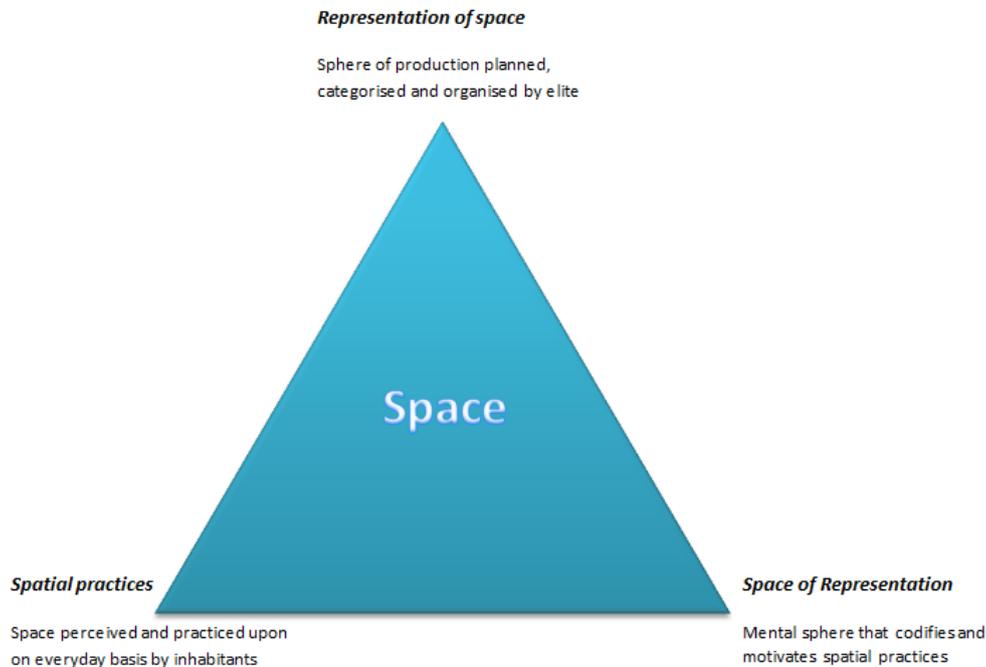
²⁴ Kipfer, Stefan. "Urbanization, everyday life and the survival of capitalism: Lefebvre, Gramsci and the problematic of hegemony." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 13, no. 2 (2002): 117-149.

²⁵ Zieleniec, *Lefebvre's politics of space* p.5

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 6

elements, Lefebvre aspired to create a “unitary theory” that combines the physical sphere, the mental and the social sphere.²⁷

Image 1: Lefebvre’s triangle²⁸



Foucault was another thinker, famous for his impact on spatial thinking. His theorising on the *Panopticon* drew out the extent of the power of space and infrastructure in itself and the influence space and structure can have on its surroundings.²⁹ A continuation of this were theories on the “madhouse”.³⁰ Therein he revealed not only the relationship between structure and social relations, but also the effects this has on *discourse*. Discourse in that respect refers to the depiction and social construction of the image of the inmate or patient. His work shows, how structure and space can be organised, categorised and built so that it exerts authority in itself upon “subjects”.³¹ It also shows how structures of discourse can shape the identity and image of things, revealing that structure is not only built with physical materials but also with words.

²⁷ Lefebvre, Nicholson-Smith, and Nicholson-Smith, Donald. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, OX, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991, p. 11

²⁸ Zieleniec, *Lefebvre’s politics of space*, p. 6

²⁹ Grbin, Miloje. "Foucault and Space." *Sociološki Preglad* 49, no. 3 (2015): 305-12.

³⁰ West, *Space in Theory*, p. 152

³¹ Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality*. University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 93

Thus, infrastructure has gained more and more attention from scholars and professionals, particularly in the discourse on urbanism. Its central role in facilitating and enabling human life, transactions and actions has meant that there is a perpetually growing strive to improving infrastructure. Various scholars have highlighted the extent to which the inventions of tools and technology have affected societies and the world as a whole.³² The ever-evolving process of infrastructure therein is seen as key to human development and progress. However, it also has also become a field of higher scrutiny, exactly *because* of the substantial networks it has created and because of an increasing reliance on them. Therein those who build, plan or organise infrastructure, not only physical but also virtual, are holders of immense power. This narrative feeds in again with urban politics and the politics of space. Crucial questions that must be answered when investigating urban space thus ought to inquire: Who organises and plans the use of space? Who uses it and for what purpose? Which purpose was it built for? Who is affected by such creations and how? Perhaps this last question is most central to this thesis, although one always ought to bear in mind the bigger picture. Those questions have been discussed from various theoretical perspectives. Here I will respond to two schools of thought that have tried to make sense of space and urban politics.

Spatial theories

Marxism

A major strand of thought in the literature on urban and spatial politics is the Marxist perspective. Two of the most prominent thinkers and scholars that have marked the field are Henri Lefebvre³³ and David Harvey.³⁴ The point of departure, but also the omnipresent circumstance here is the global system of capitalism that has by now penetrated most aspects of human life. The city, according to Marxist thinkers, is the materialisation of endless capital accumulation in this system. Urbanisation therein has become merely a tool of the bourgeoisie to reinvent and perpetuate the process of production.³⁵

Lefebvre's work directs to our attention to the process of urbanisation as active means of capital accumulation. The effects of growing urbanisation on the citizenry therein were considerable, though they did not reach as far as triggering revolutionary sentiments; the ruling elite being the facilitator of this process.³⁶ He depicts a correlation between the process of city building and urbanisation, i.e. expansion of the city, and its social relations. For this reason, the

³² Larkin, Brian. "The politics and poetics of infrastructure." *Annual review of anthropology* 42 (2013): 327-343.

³³ Lefebvre, *Dissolving City*

³⁴ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ Lefebvre, *Dissolving City*

“modern city”, according to his writings, was born at the beginning of the 20th century. Lapses in technology helped facilitate this social restructuring, in which the working class has increasingly been marginalised and exploited. The urban and the city pose the mediating unit between time, space and the people that do and did inhabit this space.³⁷ Those relations are intrinsically political, manipulated and controlled by the economic elite. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Lefebvre represented three elements involved in the production of space. He amplifies the second element, namely the *Representation of space*, as the most crucial. This is because it captures the sphere of production, in which the elite plans, categorises and organises space in order to control and remain in power.³⁸ The focus here does not lie merely on space as a product but on the *process* of the production of space, as the exercise of power. He continues to illustrate, how the working class and the people who use the city have been physically marginalised from the city center into the periphery of urban space³⁹. The center instead has become the space of the privileged, designed not for the working class, but for consumption, materialism and hence the continuation of capitalism. It is interesting to visit Paris today as you can see where he was coming from— most of the city center is designed to look beautiful, displaying luxury brands of fashion and food luring its wanderers from one store to the next. At its periphery on the other hand, there are almost ghetto-like districts, physically close yet mentally far removed from the centre of lavish and literally “beautiful” life. This strand of thought set the start of my theoretical framework for my thesis. However, I decided not to particularly focus on the *production* of space, a process of elite politics, relations and economics. Instead of decided to focus on what is happening in the city itself, what are the relationships between the citizens and their city.

David Harvey’s works are truly relevant to my thesis in that respect. His book *Rebel Cities*⁴⁰ illuminates aspects of *social* relations and the *Right to the City*. In this work he expands on previous Marxist thoughts on the bourgeoisie controlling the city and using urbanism as means of capital accumulation. He shows how the physical and mental space and consequentially also social relations have been created by the ruling elite, with the goal to “mop up capital surplus”.⁴¹ He puts focus on the efficiency of infrastructure with regards to economic gain. Neoliberalism on a global level does not only represent but enable this very process. The relationship between neoliberalism and urban development has also been reviewed by Altshuler

³⁷ Kipfer, *Urbanization*, p. 138

³⁸ West, *Space in Theory*

³⁹ Lefebvre, *Dissolving City*

⁴⁰ Harvey, *Rebel cities*

⁴¹ Harvey, *Rebel cities*, p. 13

and Luberoff⁴², Weber⁴³ and Purcell.⁴⁴ The relevance of this analysis is exacerbated by an increasing privatisation of public spaces, places and services, and a rising gap between rich and poor.^{45,46} Spaces in the city that are used by many of its inhabitants, have been created by those ruling elite for their own purpose, rather than for the purpose and interest of those who use it. Harvey deduces from that, that the city ought to be “taken back” (even by rebellion) by the many who use it, as they have the right to the city in which they live. The concept of the “Right to the City” has been picked up from him and been used by academics such as Kipfer⁴⁷, Zieleniec⁴⁸, Purcell⁴⁹, Parnell and Pieterse⁵⁰ and Mayer⁵¹ to just name a few. The work puts core points of the discourse on display in “simple words”. It comes to show that those who use the city ought to be allowed to design and create it. Art, creativity and social interaction ought to revive the streets, according to Harvey, and are crucial in this ideology⁵². Instead of the endless capital accumulation and control from above, it ought to be aesthetics and creativity, unattached to commercial value in the city that is sought, without the necessary element of “efficiency” or “purpose”.⁵³ Cities are full of “symbols” that codify power, for example, in the structure of buildings.⁵⁴ Those symbols hint towards the omnipresence of economic power rather than the city being a space of life of its inhabitants. An increased presence of art and creativity stemming from the citizenry would challenge that, according to Harvey. As mentioned, he does not mean art in art galleries, necessarily, as again, this represents a large economic market, criticised for its elitism and not accessible to all. Instead, he speaks to art and creativity in the streets, on the buildings, with the buildings. The creative usage of the city would come to show that space is

⁴² Altshuler, A. A.; Luberoff, D.; Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. *Mega-Projects : The Changing Politics of Urban Public Investment*; Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C., 2003.

⁴³ Weber, R. (2002). Extracting value from the city: neoliberalism and urban redevelopment. *Antipode*, 34(3), 519-540

⁴⁴ Purcell, M. (2008). *Recapturing democracy: Neoliberalization and the struggle for alternative urban futures*. Routledge.

⁴⁵ Heywood, Andrew. *Global Politics*. 2nd ed. Palgrave Foundations Series. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

⁴⁶ Mitchell, Don. "The end of public space? People's Park, definitions of the public, and democracy." *Annals of the association of american geographers* 85, no. 1 (1995): 108-133.

⁴⁷ Kipfer, *Urbanization*

⁴⁸ Zieleniec, *Lefebvre's politics of space*

⁴⁹ Purcell, M. (2002). Excavating Lefebvre: The right to the city and its urban politics of the inhabitant. *GeoJournal*, 58(2-3), 99-108.

⁵⁰ Parnell, S., & Pieterse, E. (2010). The ‘right to the city’: institutional imperatives of a developmental state. *International journal of urban and regional research*, 34(1), 146-162.

⁵¹ Mayer, M. (2012). The “right to the city” in urban social movements. *Cities for people, not for profit: Critical urban theory and the right to the city*, 63-85.

⁵² Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p. 162

⁵³ Rodgers, Scott, Clive Barnett, and Allan Cochrane. "Where is urban politics?" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 5 (2014): 1551-1560.

⁵⁴ Gottdiener, Mark., and Ray. Hutchison. *The New Urban Sociology*. 3rd [rev.] ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006.

produced multilaterally. Here, as it is supposed to be, space and the city would be produced by those who are “produced (or influenced) by it”.

Exactly this was the way I approached Amman. When trying to grasp the RtC (Rights to the City) in Amman I did not try to delve into politics, the greater machines and workings of economics or also anthropological analyses of social relations in the city (although of course all are ever present in all aspects). I chose to try to understand the relationship between citizens and city and see how this relationship had led to physical amendments of the city structures and walls. Focusing on the creative, on beauty and aesthetics, allowed me to zoom in on a part of Amman that could touch every citizen.

Theorists following the Marxist strand of thought of course can be criticised for not taking into account the structural features and dimension that might exist. The idea here is that power is controlled and held centrally. Despite the fact, that urbanism may be tentatively controlled and manipulated by the economic and political elite, structuralists and post-structuralists allude towards the fact, that today’s cities have been, and are being, created by not just people but by a complex web of interacting and co-dependent factors beyond that.

Structuralism and post-structuralism

Structuralism and post structuralism are another major field in the literature on urban and spatial politics. Bearing in mind, that they are distinct schools of thought, both depart from Marxist assumptions that humans are the sole agent in the compositions of the city. Two very prominent writers of the structuralist school of thought are James Scott⁵⁵ and Timothy Mitchell.⁵⁶⁵⁷ Both stand out in their critique of human expertise and highlight how apparent pretentiousness has affected infrastructure, structure and urban spaces.

To begin with, Scott⁵⁸ argues that for a long period of time humans have attempted to take control of their surroundings and reinvent it for their own benefit. He does so by describing the development of forestry law, technology and science and subsequent activity that started in Germany, used in an attempt to modify the forest to fit the interest of the ruling elite.⁵⁹ Doing so, however, failed in many ways, not least due to the fact that only the perspective of *that elite* was taken into consideration when making those modifications. A naturalist vision of the forest, which could have understood the forest’s functioning in various dimensions, was not taken into

⁵⁵ Scott, *Seeing like a state*

⁵⁶ Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonising Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

⁵⁷ Mitchell, Timothy. *Rule of Experts*. 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

⁵⁸ Scott, *Seeing like a state*

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p. 18

account. Its existence as an ecosystem in a larger context and in active interaction and integration with other eco systems was completely ignored, since that was deemed to be irrelevant. With the help of this example, Scott illustrates how throughout history humans have tried to alter and “scientifically” control the natural world around them.⁶⁰ In the end, cities are the ultimate concentration of that. They are the material realisation of humans trying to make their permanent home most convenient and comfortable (though bearing in mind – most convenient for *whom?*). Scott talks about those attempts and projects of building and expanding as efforts to improve the human condition.

This quasi obsession with efficiency and comfort with disregard to most if not all things in the surrounding have resulted in the vision of “high modernism”⁶¹. It is the attempt to spread the most modern inventions and (quite literal) products globally, assuming this is somehow desirable. Disregarding local existing structures, discourses and social relations, high modernist projects are planned and implemented into a city, randomly.⁶² This is where it fails. Quite unsurprisingly ideas and construction plans of such projects are often copied, simplified and not adapted to the local circumstance. Neoliberalism and politics in the hands of the few has played a significant role in this, as the quest for money and capitalism leaves little room for “sensitive” adaptations to local contexts. This leap towards high modernism has been deemed responsible for an increasing wealth gap in cities and the marginalisation of the urban, whilst the elite govern the centre.⁶³

The repeated use of the word *elite* begs the question what (or rather who) is meant by that. It clearly goes beyond the boundaries of the state apparatus, although it can and does overlap logically. Hence it is important to try to understand the role of the state, but also the role of those who wield economic power with an interest of (city) building (and/or finding a niche of money making). The arrival and spread of neoliberalism pretended that the state has been removed in an increasingly privatised market. Institutions, both national and international, have arguably taken over control over the market and administer its stability and smooth running. However, this is not necessarily the case.⁶⁴ Apart from the pseudo-scientific nature of those institutional mechanisms that govern markets, many have pointed out, that states and

⁶⁰ Biggs, Michael. "Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 4 (2002): 852-854.

⁶¹ Scott, *Seeing like a state*, p. 4

⁶² Scott, *Seeing like a state*, p. 4

⁶³ Purcell, *Recapturing democracy*

⁶⁴ Abu-Hamdi, Eliana. "Neoliberalism as a Site-specific Process: The Aesthetics and Politics of Architecture in Amman, Jordan." *Cities* 60 (2017): 102-12. p. 102

political authorities may not be as far removed from the market as presented.⁶⁵ An intrinsic analysis of all units involved on all possible dimensions is thus necessary, albeit difficult.

Timothy Mitchell has a similar, though more complex approach to structure. In his works he deconstructs social relations, buildings and hierarchies down to the smallest element. He attacks the idea of “untouchable science”, in that he argues that science is often used to present something as a fact, although it rarely ever is a fact as such.⁶⁶ Looking at the building of dams in Egypt for example, or analysing the organisation and representation of economic markets, he reveals how it was *people* behind the failures of dams, epidemics and market collapses. Often such failures have been depicted as having autonomously spurred up due to the “nature” of the market, or simply because of nature itself. Mitchell, however, by picking apart those incidents and trying to consider the factors involved, illuminates how it was ultimately humans behind those failures. Whilst in his critique of “expertise” he hints towards the veil called “science” that has been put over the faces of people involved to cover up their involvement and responsibility, his older work shows how structures, particularly building structures, and categorisations have been created by elites in order to maintain their power. His focus lies on colonialism and linguistic and material tools of the colons utilised to maintain control over the oppressed.⁶⁷ Foucault⁶⁸, in his lecture on *Governmentality* adds to that the dimension of discourse and its effective use as a tool in governing. As an example, he shows how the discourse surrounding the family has evolved from representing a model into that discourse being used as an instrument of control.

All of that counted together signifies the importance of deconstruction on all possible levels. Humans have come to create an intrinsic network of categories, means of organisations and the technologies to improve their conditions. Naturally, an analysis of urban politics ought to take into consideration the means and purposes for which things have been created, and consequentially of course also by whom. The literature and theories mentioned in this review are most crucial in this process. They provide a theoretical backbone and drive attention towards important dimensions that one ought to analyse. While they all have informed me and guided me through the process of research and thesis writing, Lefebvre’s idea of the citizen’s *Rights to the City* are the headline over this piece of work. Each chapter will discuss respective topics

⁶⁵ Ward, Kevin, David Imbroscio, Deborah Martin, Clarence Stone, Robert Whelan, Faranak Miraftab, and Allan Cochrane. "Urban politics: an interdisciplinary dialogue." *International journal of urban and regional research* 35, no. 4 (2011): 853-871., p 861

⁶⁶ Mitchell, Timothy. *Rule of Experts*.

⁶⁷ Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonising Egypt*.

⁶⁸ Foucault, *The Foucault effect*, p. 100

and reintegrate them into this theoretical framework. The word *framework* perhaps best highlights the reason for that - the discourses held on and around the *Rights to the City* (RtC) clarify the parameters in which I conducted my research and how it directed my thought process. Even though theory is important, particularly with respects to guidance and structuring a thought process, it is also important to know what has been written already on the city of Amman.

Reviewing the literature on Amman

The literature on Amman is varied and wide reaching. To begin with, Northedge and Bowsheer⁶⁹, Fandi and Alyazjeen⁷⁰ and Khadim⁷¹ look at the origins of modern-day Amman. Drawing out evidence by archaeological findings as well as references to biblical sources they lead readers from the first findings of an existing citadel in Amman around 1200 BC until the late fifteen-hundreds, which is when the citadel, back then called *Rabbat Ammon*, was occupied by most different rulers. Khadim⁷² in particular displays gains and losses of power of the people that lived in the citadel, underlined with statistical facts. Northedge and Bowsheer⁷³ on the other hand draw out the presence of water and its relevance in *Rabbath Ammon* for being an attractive place of settlement for all sorts of people. This is interesting also from a modern perspective, since today the region is associated with scarcity of water. Kadhim, in collaboration with Rajjal also connected both ancient and modern-day Amman in his book *Cities*.⁷⁴ While Hamed-Troyansky⁷⁵ describes the beginnings of the back-then settlement of Amman, Hanania⁷⁶ pick off there and begins illustrating the development of the modern structures of the capital Amman. Therein he particularly focusses on the establishment of the Greater Amman Municipality and the administrative and political structures of the city.

⁶⁹ Northedge, Alastair Earnshaw, and Julian Bowsheer. 1993. *Studies on Roman and Islamic Amman: the excavations of Mrs C-M Bennett and other investigations. Vol. 1 Vol. 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (for the British Institute in Amman for Archaeology and History).

⁷⁰ Fandi, Mohammad, and Alyazjeen, Tawfiq. "Variation of Ground-motion Amplification and Structural Dynamic Characteristics of Amman Citadel." *Arabian Journal of Geosciences* 4, no. 7 (2011): 1351-361.

⁷¹ Kadhim, M. B. "Amman and Urban Conservation: An Overview." *Third World Planning Review* 11, no. 3 (1989): 289, p. 290

⁷² *ibid*

⁷³ Northedge and Bowsheer. *Studies on Roman and Islamic Amman*

⁷⁴ Kadhim, M.B, and Rajjal, Y. "Amman." *Cities* 5, no. 4 (1988): 318-25.

⁷⁵ Hamed-Troyansky, Vladimir. "CIRCISSIAN REFUGEES AND THE MAKING OF AMMAN, 1878–1914." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 4 (2017): 605-23.

⁷⁶ Hanania, Marwan D. "From Colony to Capital: Reconsidering the Socio-Economic and Political History of Amman, 1878-1928." *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 1 (2019): 1-21

Works contributed to the analysis of 20th century Amman try to unravel the vast changes that have happened in the city, the country and the whole region. Potter et al.⁷⁷, Jamson and Billington⁷⁸, Meaton and Alnsour⁷⁹ as well as Alnsour and Ahmad⁸⁰ all talk about the huge impacts that regional instabilities and consequential refugee inflows have had on the city. It has not only grown on a massive scale, it has also resulted in a mostly hasty urban planning and building, in order to accommodate the vast amount of people. Different kinds of problems and dimensions are picked up by respective authors. Alnsour and Ahmad⁸¹ for instance focus on the economic impacts of the refugee waves, while Jameson and Billington⁸² and Satloff and Schenker⁸³ highlight the political circumstances that were created by varying regional political climates. They, as well as Sarah Irving in the book *Leila Khaled: Icon of Palestinian Liberation*⁸⁴ speak about the leading up to and the events during the Black September Movements in Amman and whole Jordan.

Mango⁸⁵, Al-Hamarneh⁸⁶, Razem and Kaftangui⁸⁷, Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina⁸⁸ on the other hand speak about how neoliberalism has infiltrated the city of Amman and the Jordanian economy at the turn of the century. Abu-Hamdi⁸⁹, Razem and Kaftangui⁹⁰ for instance discuss real estate developments, such as the Jordan Gate towers, Abdali or Abdoun, which have had significant “aesthetic”, but also economic impacts on the city. Abu-Ghazalah⁹¹ and ElSamen et al.⁹² on the other hand speak about the boom of shopping malls in

⁷⁷ Potter, Robert B, Darmame, Khadija, Barham, Nasim, and Nortcliff, Stephen. ““Ever-growing Amman”, Jordan: Urban Expansion, Social Polarisation and Contemporary Urban Planning Issues.” *Habitat International* 33, no. 1 (2009): 81-92.

⁷⁸ Jameson W. Doig, and David P. Billington. "Ammann's First Bridge: A Study in Engineering, Politics, and Entrepreneurial Behavior." *Technology and Culture* 35, no. 3 (1994): 537-70.

⁷⁹ Meaton, Julia and Jamal Alnsour. "Spatial and Environmental Planning Challenges in Amman, Jordan." *Planning Practice & Research* 27, no. 3 (2012): 367-86.

⁸⁰ Alnsour, Jamal Ahmad. "Managing Urban Growth in the City of Amman, Jordan." *Cities* 50 (2016): 93-99, p. 94

⁸¹ *ibid*

⁸² Jameeson and Billington, *Ammann's First Bridge*

⁸³ Satloff, Robert, and David Schenker. *Political instability in Jordan*. Council on Foreign Relations., 2013.

⁸⁴ Irving, Sarah. 2012. *Leila Khaled: icon of Palestinian liberation*. London: Pluto Press. P. 43.

⁸⁵ Mango, Tamam "The New Centre and the City Citizen." In *Order and Disorder: Urban Governance and the Making of Middle Eastern Cities*, 157. Montreal; Kingston; London; Chicago, 2017

⁸⁶ Al-Hamarneh, Ala, Margraff, Jonas, and Scharfenort, Nadine. *Neoliberale Urbanisierung*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2019.

⁸⁷ Razem, Maiss. "Place Attachment and Sustainable Communities." *Architecture_media_politics_society* 17, no. 1 (2020):

⁸⁸ Beauregard, Robert A, and Andrea Marpillero-Colomina. "More than a Master Plan: Amman 2025." *Cities* 28, no. 1 (2011): 62-69.

⁸⁹ Abu-Hamdi, *Neoliberalism as a Site-specific Process*.

⁹⁰ Razem, and El Kaftangui, *Place Attachment and Sustainable Communities*.

⁹¹ Abu-Ghazalah, Samer, Ali Abu-Ghanimeh, B. Arch, and B. Arch. "The impact of shopping malls upon the future of urban planning in Greater Amman." ICSC, 2004.

⁹² ELSamen, Amjad Ahmad Abu, and Rund Ibrahim Hiyasat. "Beyond the random location of shopping malls: A GIS perspective in Amman, Jordan." *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 34 (2017): 30-37.

Amman that came along with the introduction of neoliberalist policies. Due to the fact, that the city administration has made numerous efforts to improve on Amman's infrastructure and city management, there have been different comprehensive master plans that sought to help solve existing structural problems. Such plans and the failures and successes of achieving their aims or failing to take into consideration the interest of the public are discussed in papers published by the UN, OECD as well as by academics such as Beauregard, and Marpillero-Colomina in their work called *More than a Master Plan: Amman 2025*.⁹³

So overall I would suggest that the literature on Amman is wide reaching and yet so scattered that it takes quite some time to understand the city structures and workings. For that very reason the next chapter will be devoted to creating an overview over Amman, its development and current situation.

Conclusion

All in all, the literature that will set the framework of my thesis is wide ranging and divers. Regarding the literature on theory, this richness, I believe, can be used qualitatively. This means, that the different theories and thoughts on space, urbanism and infrastructure helped me to pay attention to different dimensions, actors and agencies that play a role and contribute to the changing city scape in Amman. Despite the fact, that all the writing on space and urbanism helped me understand structure and the city of Amman, narratives promoting the *Rights to the City* are those that I found most illuminating when trying to create a comprehensive analysis of citizen-structure-power relations. Regarding the literature more specifically on Amman, I believe that existing work helped me to gain oversight over the historic and contemporary developments that have shaped the city. Although there are many pieces which contributed to the analysis of Amman, economically, politically and socially, I suggest, that due to the number of changes that have happened in the past 100 years and their fast pace, there is still a lot to work on. This has given me the opportunity of "finding the gap" I want to fill with my master thesis - the equilibrium of theory and place – the *Rights to the City* in Amman, particularly when looking at it through David Harvey's⁹⁴ theoretical eyes.

⁹³ Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina, *More than a Master Plan*

⁹⁴ Harvey, *Rebel cities*

3. Contextualisation: The History and Presence of Amman

Awareness about the history and the context from which today's city structures emerged is a necessary prerequisite in introducing this thesis. This chapter will thus be dedicated to creating an oversight over some aspects of Amman. To begin with I will just shortly introduce the origins and development of the ancient city that Amman used to be. Regional and also local tensions, conflicts and wars have had significant impacts on it. I will then delve into its contemporary history, in which particularly regional wars, refugee flows show to have had a significant impact on the physical shaping of the city. Both Amman's infrastructure changed, due to big waves of refugees from war torn regions coming into the city, as well as its citizenry's identity. Lastly, I will reflect on the economic policies that have contributed to a rising gap between rich and poor. This last part sets the departure to the rest of my thesis, as it is this exact circumstance that has led me to investigating the disillusionment between a population and their city.

Ancient origins

Looking at the history of Amman, earliest evidence of the presence of civilisation and the development of a society can be traced back to approximately 3200 Before the Common Era (BCE), during the first Bronze Age.⁹⁵ Back then, the society of the Ammonites settled on and around a hill, which is in fact still a central part of Amman today.⁹⁶ That hill, *Jabal Al Qal'a*, became home of a fortified settlement, which has frequently been referred to as *Rabbat Ammon* by biblical sources among others.⁹⁷ Kings and leaders of whole empires expanding their territory frequently sought to capture the citadel. From the period of 1000 BC up until approximately the 3rd century CE (Common Era) the city saw significant changes of mostly prosperity and growth happening in and around it.

Whilst I will not go into greater detail of those occupations, two occupation periods in particular had an impact on the cityscape that ought to be amplified. Firstly, the Greeks ruled by Ptolomy II occupied Rabbat Ammon in 331 BCE. They did not only rename the city to *Philadelphia*, but they also significantly expanded on the existing structures. Dividing it into "lower" and "upper" town, a division which partially still exists today, a concept of urban planning was introduced to the city that it had not previously witnessed.⁹⁸ Secondly, after other

⁹⁵ Northedge and Bowsher. *Studies on Roman and Islamic Amman*, p. 23

⁹⁶ Kadhim, *Amman and Urban Conservation*, p. 290

⁹⁷ Northedge and Bowsher. *Studies on Roman and Islamic Amman*, P. 24

⁹⁸ Kadhim, *Amman and Urban Conservation*, p. 290

periods of occupation, in 30 BCE the Romans gained control over the city. Some buildings that were erected in that ruling period, lasting for several centuries, still (partially) exist today, such as the well-known Roman Amphitheater, which is a defining element of today's city scape.⁹⁹

Image 2: Roman Amphitheater in Amman¹⁰⁰



One of the main attractions of the city was its close proximity to water, and consequential access to water and minerals. It has also been called “city of the Waters”.¹⁰¹

Between the 3rd and 15th century CE, the city began to crumble, buildings started to turn into ruins and were abandoned and Rabbat Ammon seized to be a cultural and social focal point. In this period of time the city was occupied by different powers such as the Byzantines as well as the Arab Moslems.¹⁰² Despite the decay of the city at this time, its rich history and important role in different political apparatuses can still be seen nowadays when looking at the old ruins and remains of the prehistoric city. That historical legacy has shifted more into focus in recent years. Due to the vast and fast urban expansion that happened in the past 100 years, Amman's heritage had not been taken care of in the “right manner” and fears mounted of the traces of Rabbat Ammon being lost therein. However, the 1984 Comprehensive Action plan for Greater

⁹⁹ *ibid*, p. 292

¹⁰⁰ Gagnon, Berard, „Roman Amphitheater in Amman”, Atlas Obscura, 2020, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/roman-amphitheater>, (Accessed 13th October 2020)

¹⁰¹ Northedge and Bowsher. *Studies on Roman and Islamic Amman*, p. 24

¹⁰² Kadhim, *Amman and Urban Conservation*, p. 292

Amman¹⁰³ and subsequent action plans and ideas that followed, have sought to protect its historic and cultural heritage. Thus, whilst Amman has witnessed an immense growth of neoliberal building projects, something I will discuss in a later paragraph, King Abdullah II has articulated his interest in maintaining this “old” image and historic site of the city.¹⁰⁴ This comes to show, that it is important to be aware of the prehistoric and historic context of Amman, as it still plays an important part economically, politically as well as socially (via symbols that signify the city, such as the Amphitheater).

Contemporary history

Whilst this previous activity in and around the city that we now call Amman, is important to look at, many have argued that the origins of *modern* Amman history are rooted in the 19th century.¹⁰⁵ At the end of that century there were three waves of Circassian immigrants settling around the hill, where previously *Rabbat Amman* had thrived. The first immigrants, according to evidence found by historians, arrived in 1878; the other two groups of immigrants arrived between then and 1902.¹⁰⁶ In that time most of the region was under Ottoman rule and towards the end of the 19th century the *Tanzimat reforms* were introduced, an attempt of modernisation in response to growing European pressure.¹⁰⁷ As a result, the Ottomans increasingly built railway tracks to improve transportation and effective communication, thereby consolidating control. The Hijaz railway was one of such expansions. In 1903 a railway line connecting the city of Medina via Amman to Damascus was opened and people, such as railway workers and military men moved in and around the villages of the region.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, a growing community started to be formed.¹⁰⁹ Whilst first loosely bound to each other without clear social structures, the growing number of people living in the area required more structural levels of organisation. Albeit discontinuous, Amman grew in the first quarter of the century, and perhaps even more importantly – it became a junction for important infrastructure projects, such as building of administrative buildings or the railway, which led to it being an important military asset. This was perhaps first and foremost due to its advantageous geographical position, combined with the access to water that was provided in the city. It was because of this development, that in 1921 Amman was declared capital of the newly formed state of Transjordan, rather than al-Salt, which had originally been envisioned as

¹⁰³ Potter et al. *Ever-growing Amman*, p. 91

¹⁰⁴ Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina, *More than a Master Plan*, p. 64

¹⁰⁵ Hanania, *From Colony to Capital*, p. 2

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, p. 3

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p. 2

¹⁰⁸ Potter et al. *Ever-growing Amman*, p. 84

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 4

the capital.¹¹⁰ Hanania¹¹¹ points out, that despite the fact that a lot of scholars tend to analyse modern Amman from either 1916 or 1921 onwards, which is when the Hashemites took over from Ottoman control, political, social and economic introductions by Ottoman rulers played a significant role in its further development. Institutions, administrative processes and bodies that had been in power under the Ottomans were largely adopted by the Hashemite rulers. It is interesting to see, that Amman in its beginning years as a capital, up until 1948 was a rather small city. Its important role was defined by its capital status and consequential location for political and partially also economic transactions. However, its size meant that the inhabitants of Amman only made up around 3 % of Transjordan's total population.¹¹² In less than a century its size has increased more than 100-fold. Amman's population today accounts for more than a quarter of Jordan's total population; looking at Greater Amman, rather than just Amman proper (the inner-city population) it is home to over 4 million people.¹¹³

Amman, Refugees and Identity, from 1948 until today

This vast expansion can be mostly accounted to regional wars and regional instabilities in the past century, which resulted in large influxes of refugees into the country and into the city. Jordan's position of relative stability contributed to people seeking shelter and safety in the Middle Eastern country. A large wave of refugees arrived between 1948 and 1950, when after the declaration of the independent state of Israel thousands of Palestinians were displaced and forced to flee the country. Amman's population numbers climbed up from around 50.000 before the war to 230.000 thereafter.¹¹⁴ Also, the six day-war in 1967 resulted in huge numbers of refugees pouring into Jordan and settling down in and around Amman, resulting in its population more than doubling, and its count exceeding 500.000 inhabitants.¹¹⁵

This led to Amman's suburbs expanding massively during the 1960s and 70s and the city scape changing accordingly. On top of this having an obvious effect on the infrastructure and size of Amman, identity also increasingly became a politically important topic. The strong presence of Palestinians, not only in Amman but in whole Jordan, had to be taken into political

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Hanania, *From Colony to Capital*, p. 1

¹¹² United Nations, "The World's Cities in 2018", *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs*, (2018),

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=7&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj7jfjDhqvmAhXRskQKHbEIB_cQFjAGegQIBxAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.un.org%2Fen%2Fevents%2Fcitiesday%2Fassets%2Fpdf%2Fthe_worlds_cities_in_2018_data_booklet.pdf&usq=AOvVaw0rK-sDIVHWLn1vkSplNXry, (Accessed 5th February 2020)

¹¹³ UNdata, "City Population By Sex, City And City Type". *United Nations*, (2019).

<http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=city+population&d=POP&f=tableCode%3a240>. (Accessed 5th February 2020)

¹¹⁴ Kadhim, *Amman and Urban Conservation*, p. 294

¹¹⁵ Potter et al. *Ever-growing Amman*, p. 84

consideration, particularly regarding the country's relations with neighbouring Israel.¹¹⁶ The presence of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in Amman and its increasing political leverage in Jordan contributed to tensions rising in the 1960s. Whilst the Jordanian government tried to be sympathetic to pro-Palestine voices to begin with, a higher number of cross-border attacks and consequentially growing threats from Israel pushed it to suppress pro-Palestine actions. In turn the PLO and groups in association with it started to oppose the Jordanian government. Tensions escalated during the *Black September Movement* in 1970.¹¹⁷ This movement started when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) hijacked four international airplanes in Jordan, gaining high international attention. Thereafter the Jordanian government tried to expel both the organisation and its associates from the country. In order to do so King Hussein appointed a military government and declared military rule in Jordan.¹¹⁸ Especially Amman was affected by this, since it is not only where the government is located at, but also where a lot of protests and anti-government efforts stemming from pro-Palestine groups were planned and conducted.¹¹⁹ One of the last acts of former Egyptian President General Abdel Nasser before his death, was to broker a peace treaty between the two parties in 1970. Nevertheless, some argue that tensions and outbreaks of violence extended the Black September into the year 1971.¹²⁰

Not only the 1948 war and the 1967 war set off the two largest waves of refugees into the city. Also, the Lebanese civil war 1975-90, the Gulf war 1990-1, the US invasion of Iraq 2003 and the ongoing war in neighbouring Syria since 2011 has meant that a diversity of people have persistently entered the city and found shelter there.¹²¹ Often depicted as a country of stability surrounded by conflicts, Jordan posed a viable option for a new home for thousands of displaced people. This diversity of background marks the country as a whole, but particularly Amman in various ways. The constant pressure to provide things such as housing, goods and services has meant that Amman expanded on an exceptionally large scale quickly. The divide amongst ethnic groups and nationalities is therewith also reflected in its infrastructure.

Social circumstances

Refugee camps outside and inside the city were built up to accommodate those who came. Despite the fact, that those who came found shelter in one way other the other and society

¹¹⁶ Robins, P. *A history of Jordan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 110-115

¹¹⁷ Robins, 2019, p. 111-113

¹¹⁸ Robins, 2019, p. 138-141

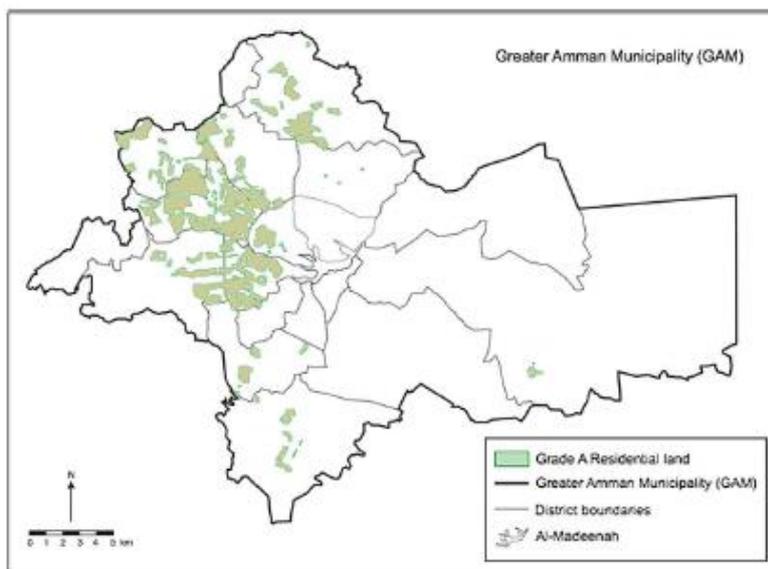
¹¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 135

¹²⁰ *ibid*, p. 111-113, 139

¹²¹ Potter et al. *Ever-growing Amman*, p. 84

became increasingly diverse, it also became more and more stratified and polarised.¹²² Sources show, how this is geographically visible when looking at a map of Amman. Notably, the western part of the city inhabits the more affluent districts, those with bars, malls and sports centers. The eastern half of Amman on the other hand has been depicted to be more economically impoverished. Interestingly it is here, where the refugee camps were first based and then integrated into the city.¹²³ These areas are characterised with low economic investment and poor infrastructure. This is visible in maps that display housing or real estate planning. Potter et al.¹²⁴ for instance analyse housing plans and allowances of different tires and thereby reveal the geographical divide between (not only but particularly) the eastern and the western part of Amman. Thus, whilst larger, buildings that are less expensive to live in and are in the lowest tire are mostly located towards the eastern side of the city, more expensive houses are almost *exclusively* located in the West, as seen in the images below.

Image 3: Category A Residential land, (most expensive housing category) Amman¹²⁵



¹²² Meaton, and Alnsour. *Challenges in Amman*.

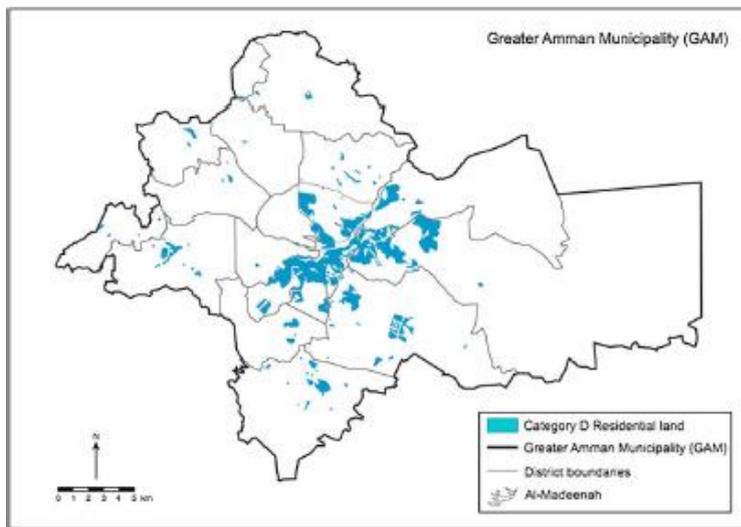
¹²³ *ibid*

¹²⁴ Potter et al. *Ever-growing Amman*, p. 86

¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Potter et al. *Ever-growing Amman*, p. 86

Image 4: Category D Residential land, (least expensive housing category) Amman¹²⁶



This distribution of land and housing visualises the geographical dimension of inequalities that exist in the city. Apart from housing, however, there has also been increasing criticism that has been directed towards the lack of social services and poor infrastructure in the eastern part of the city. Particularly the low provision and availability of social services hits the poor harder than those who are rich, widening the gap even further.¹²⁷ At this point I would like to mention my exchange with UN Habitat Coordinator for Amman Deema Abu-Thiab, during which she sent me her thesis that dealt exactly with that topic – the east/west divide in Amman.¹²⁸ Therein she criticises the emphasis on such a divide as exaggerated and overstated. It is an important reminder not to take such a divide and its surrounding narratives as a fixed fact.

Regarding infrastructure, particularly water has been seen as a problem.¹²⁹ Although Jordan is located along the river of Jordan, it has to share those resources with Palestine and Israel, which has led to water scarcity, as well as regional tensions. Despite the fact, that almost all household are *connected* to the central water supply system, the decreasing availability of water, coupled with the increasing demand for water, has resulted in water being rationed by the central government since 1987.¹³⁰ This again amplified social divides, as the inhabitants that were well off had few problems with storing water that was provided only at certain times or days of the week; the poorer population on the other hand often could not store water and

¹²⁶ Potter et al. *Ever-growing Amman*, p. 88

¹²⁷ Alnsour, *Managing Urban Growth*, p. 94

¹²⁸ Abu Thiab, Deema Mohammad, “Mind the Gap: Mapping the Urban Divide in Amman”, *School of Architecture and Built Environment*, M. Sc. In Spatial Planning, German Jordanian University, 2012

¹²⁹ Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina, *More than a Master Plan*

¹³⁰ Potter et al. *Ever-growing Amman*, p. 90

had an even greater lack thereafter. The issue of water has been recognised and plans such as the “National Water Master Plan”, released in 2004, have tried to tackle especially the socioeconomic aspect of water supply.¹³¹ This plan was created in context of various other attempts and efforts by the government, to improve the infrastructure of Jordan, and Amman in particular. Assorted development and improvement plans, such as the Greater Amman Master Plan or the 2025 Vision Plan¹³² have been devised to not only improve the city, but also to attract national and international investment.¹³³ More recently sustainability and green growth have moved into the picture, exemplified by the publication of the National Green Growth Plan.¹³⁴ This plan is supposed to tackle various issues, but more concretely it seeks to place Amman in a good international and national position to deal with environmental problems. Other than water, transportation is a big issue, as Amman’s streets are infamously congested and its public transport system underdeveloped.¹³⁵ The publication of those various reports and plans has helped Amman’s authorities to gain a better presentation on an international level, which has resulted in it being placed on lists for investment by international organisations. While after the 2008 financial global crash, international investment and support went down for a few years, around the year 2011 it was picked up again.¹³⁶ Simultaneously, however, there is another economic development on the way, tall skyscrapers under construction and neoliberal giants are at work.

Neoliberalism and economy since the early 2000s

Even though neoliberal policies already paved their way into Jordanian economy and politics in the second half of the 20th century¹³⁷, here I will focus on the developments in the city just before and after the year 2000. Due to heavy investment from oil rich states, as well as many of Amman’s citizens sending remittances from abroad, the capital has economically grown on a large scale.¹³⁸ In addition to that, around 2002 the city saw a boom in the real estate sector, with many new infrastructure plans proposed and houses built.¹³⁹ There has been academic scrutiny of the relationships between neoliberalism and neoliberal policies and the

¹³¹ *ibid*, p. 89

¹³² Maas, Norbert. “GGGI Jordan – National Green Growth Plan.” *Green Growth Knowledge Platform*, 2019, <https://www.greengrowthknowledge.org/project/gggi-jordan-national-green-growth-plan> (accessed January 10th 2020)

¹³³ Musa, Majd. *Amman: Gulf capital, identity, and contemporary megaprojects*. Taylor and Francis, 2017.

¹³⁴ Ministry of Environment, “A National Green Growth Plan for Jordan, Amman” *Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* (2017)

¹³⁵ Potter et al. *Ever-growing Amman*, p. 89

¹³⁶ Abu-Hamdi, *Neoliberalism as a Site-specific Process*

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p 103

¹³⁸ Musa, *Amman*

¹³⁹ Mango, *The New Centre and the City Citizen*, p. 164

state and its citizens. In that context, theories on urban politics are the most revealing and interesting to bear in mind. In Amman, it has been argued, neoliberalism has been used to veil the interest of the elite, both in and outside the state apparatus.¹⁴⁰ Consequentially it has been argued that the interest of the state is tightly knit into the interest of the economic elite and vice versa. Scholars looking at various sectors have tried to make sense of the many relationships and exertions of power. Often the interest of the majority of Amman's citizens seems to be left out. There have been analyses regarding proposed and built mega projects of the city. The Jordan Gate towers or new Abdali city center are examples thereof. Both are mega projects that radically transformed the landscape of the city. To begin with, the Jordan Gate towers have been envisioned to alter the city scape in such way, that they are seen as the defining features of the capital's skyline.¹⁴¹ Despite the fact that the construction of the towers had already started in 2005, they are still not completed to this day. Besides construction issues, such as a fire in 2006, there seem to have been disagreements among the parties involved in the building and planning.¹⁴² The Abdali city center at the same time is another example of such envisioned transformations, as it seems to relocate the current "old" city center to the western part of the city.¹⁴³ It does not only include high towers and skyscrapers but also plans of modern flats that, due to the high pricing, would only be available to the elite.¹⁴⁴ Surveys that have been conducted, that ask the city population about their opinion of those projects have revealed a largely negative response in attitudes towards such projects.¹⁴⁵ This is not only because of the higher availability to the rich, but also because it disregards the cities old landscape and imposes a new imagery that seems unauthentic.

Due to the fact, that changes occur quickly and involve many actors, it is important to further investigate developments, plans and actions. In all that, it is important to bear in mind, that Amman has a historical cultural heritage. Concerns have been raised over the maintenance of that heritage and the old cityscape particularly with regards to the building of the new megaprojects.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the quick development and expansion of Amman's urban area has attracted substantial attention and that rightfully so. Developments in all aspects affecting the city life have been tried to make sense of, not only economic and political developments but also how the social life of Amman's inhabitants has affected that and been affected by it.

¹⁴⁰ Abu-Hamdi, *Neoliberalism as a Site-specific Process*

¹⁴¹ Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina, *More than a Master Plan*

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ Mango, *The New Centre and the City Citizen*, p. 163

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Mango, *The New Centre and the City Citizen*

¹⁴⁶ Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina, *More than a Master Plan*

Various institutions, national, local and international, have been involved in the process and attempt of improving the city, or on the other hand gaining benefit by changing how the city looks like (megaprojects). Hence, at this point it is interesting to remind ourselves of James Scott's¹⁴⁷ thoughts on urbanism. The strive towards "high modernism" in today's upper classes and the consequences for the lower classes (a dissociation with their respective surrounding) is exemplified in this neoliberal leap in Amman. The elites seek to "upgrade" their cities by introducing, planning and building megaprojects, modelled along examples from other cities. No regard for Amman's majority population is given. Thus projects are imposed on a population that they may not be fit for, and in a manner that may be unsuitable. In addition to that comes, that they often do not exist for the benefit of the many but for the benefits and the prestige of the economic and political elite. One of the problems is the tight bond between political and economic elite. Despite the fact that Jordan appears to operate a democratic system, many have pointed out that political and economic practices are more autocratic than democratic.¹⁴⁸ It has thus been argued, that such networks between political and economic officials exist, that they depend on each other and complement each other. Corruption has been one of the biggest problems therein and as a consequence, funds and investments that were intended to improve on the city's services, have rarely been realised as such.¹⁴⁹

Conclusion

Such structural issues as well as the attempt to increase the presence of high modernist buildings have led me to the path of trying to understand the relationship between "average" citizens and their city. Hence, the following chapters will be dedicated to depicting and analysing various ways in which the city has been used by those who live in it. As mentioned in the previous section, I will mostly focus on the parts of creativity, beauty and aesthetics. To me this does not necessarily represent the counterweight to such neoliberal policies and high-rise buildings in the city. However, they depict a different side of the coin, one that is barely considered and looked at by "the big players".

¹⁴⁷ Scott, *Seeing like a state*, p. 4

¹⁴⁸ Abu-Hamdi, *Neoliberalism as a Site-specific Process*, p. 110

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105

4. The bigger picture

Problems related to the Greater Amman Municipality do have a direct and problematic effect on the enhancement of the citizen's rights to Amman, their right to *their* city. Its inconclusive structure and bureaucratic chaos set a big burden particularly for new ideas and projects to come to life in Amman. In a quest to maintain a steady influx of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), GAM brings forward real estate development, particularly in the western parts of the city.¹⁵⁰ While beneficial for some, one could argue that this inevitably results in citizens to keep having their city built by the rich for the rich, rather than for them. The more this continues, the more this endangers further alienation between citizens and space. On the other hand, this investment is important in enabling authorities to continuously improve the city's infrastructure. This chapter will begin by looking at what GAM does that accommodates the interests of the citizens. This is mostly concerned with the provision of essential services and the construction of city infrastructure. Even though this description of GAM does not necessarily fit into analyses that particularly look at beauty, aesthetics and creativity, a discussion GAM's basic provisions must be an inevitable component of this thesis, even if only mentioned shortly.

GAM

The size of the area which the Greater Amman Municipality is responsible for covers over 800 square kilometres and is home to more than 40% of the Jordanian population. It is divided into 23 administrative districts.¹⁵¹ Responsible for city management and development, the municipality deals with a wide range of issues. I would suggest it is important to highlight some of these areas, not least because they are directly related to the *RtC*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there have been numerous comprehensive plans structuring and planning improvements of city infrastructure. The most recent one which was the *Amman Master Plan 2025*.

Transportation

That plan is a vast urban development scheme, setting out to have a major impact on the city's infrastructure.¹⁵² It does so by planning on expanding and improving transportation system, greening infrastructure and increasing the city's renewable energy capacities among others.¹⁵³¹⁵⁴ Amman's congested streets are infamous and often used as prime example for the need of city improvement. In

¹⁵⁰ Amman Institute for Urban Development, "CIP Award 2010, independent global thinking adapted locally", Amman Institute for Urban Development, 2010, file:///C:/Users/deins/AppData/Local/Packages/microsoft.windowscommunicationsapps_8wekyb3d8bbwe/Local State/Files/S0/4/Attachments/AI%20and%20itl%20dev[2243].pdf, (Accessed 30th August 2020)

¹⁵¹ Sayaydeh, Rola, "Sustainable Urban Planning and Public Transportation, Amman", *Sustainable development program Seoul Metropolitan government*, 2018

¹⁵² Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina, *More than a Master Plan*

¹⁵³ GAM, "The Amman Climate Plan, A Vision for 2050 Amman" *Greater Amman Municipality*, 2019 (Accessed 1st September 2020)

¹⁵⁴ Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina, *More than a Master Plan*

2010 GAM released a “Transport and mobility master plan for Amman”¹⁵⁵, in which it lay out strategies to tackle such problems. In order to further combat the emissions stemming from heavy traffic, which is the second highest emitting sector, GAM has also helped incentivise the purchase of electric cars.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, road construction and improvements were funded and came under way, as well as it set out to create a “Bus Rapid Transit”, partially funded by the French Agency for Development (AFD).¹⁵⁷ Such a bus transit is heavily required, since only 14% of the journeys through Amman are conducted via public transportation.¹⁵⁸ Not requiring an own car or not having to pay for a taxi in order to move from one place to another in the city could make a big difference for many. It could enable people to go to other areas of Amman than those that immediately surround them. Improved public transport could help citizens enjoy and use the city in wider variety. In that sense, space would become much larger and give citizens more opportunities to self-realise or express themselves in a certain way. The link to the *RtC* becomes urgent; citizens do not only have the right to their district, but their *city*. Without the means to explore this city, however, that right is somewhat redundant. Another example of improving the practical side of the *RtC*, which is simply the right to walk on the streets of Amman, has been the changing of street lighting. As part of their desire to green the city, GAM has thus far replaced more than half of the city lights from regular light bulbs to the more energy efficient LED lights as well as planned to increase the number of streetlights in the city. Firstly, of course this saves money and energy in the long term. But second of all this is supposed to increase a feeling of security in Amman.¹⁵⁹ Again this has a direct impact on citizens being able to use their city’s streets as supposed.

Many actions of GAM are in the name of helping the citizen make their city a better place. The institution’s very existence is based on this function. While highlighting the fact that it does fulfil that duty to some extent, it of course does not come without controversies and criticisms.

Issues of dependency

People who try to make a change in Amman seem to be frustrated with their efforts being seriously hampered by GAM. Aesthetical and practical amendments to the city, that are meant to have a positive impact, can come across disapproval and consequential removal by GAM. GAM seems to rigidly try to maintain the infrastructure of the city as it is now.¹⁶⁰¹⁶¹ By that I mean that it appears as though every potential change is looked upon as cost to the city, in terms of money, infrastructure, time and effort. The “staying at what we know” approach seems to be the safe road. Although this may be

¹⁵⁵ GAM, “Transport and Mobility Master Plan for Amman”, Greater Amman Municipality, 2010, (Accessed 19th April 2020)

¹⁵⁶ GAM, *Amman Climate Plan*, p. 37

¹⁵⁷ Ducharme, Eliott, “Planning sustainable mobility in the Amman metropolitan area (Jordan)”, *CODATU* <https://www.codatu.org/actualites/planning-sustainable-mobility-in-the-amman-metropolitan-area-jordan/> (Accessed 23rd April 2020)

¹⁵⁸ GAM, *Transport and Mobility Plan*

¹⁵⁹ GAM, *Amman Climate Plan*, p. 31

¹⁶⁰ Zakaria, Mohammed, “7 Hills Skatepark” <https://www.7hillspark.com> (Accessed 3rd August 2020)

¹⁶¹ Beirut, Rana, curator of *Amman Design Week*, “Interview with author”, online, 25th May 2020

understandable from some perspective, it has put the organisers of initiatives and events, attempting to create something in and for the city, in front of a major challenge. Since virtually every mid- to larger scale event or initiative needs have an official permission by GAM to be legally and thus practically allowed to take place, there is a big dependence on the institution. A dependency that often does not seem to work for the other end. Apart from the question *whether* one will be permitted to work as intended, the bureaucratic process appears slow and never ending. Particularly the allocation and allowance of funding appears to be a tricky business. Mohammed Zakaria, the man who is behind the construction of the skatepark *7 Hills* in Amman, told me this:

I remember we lost 15 thousand JDs (Jordanian Dinar) worth of funding because of the bureaucracy of the city. And it was super official - an embassy donated the money to us. Then we said to GAM, we have a certain time that we can spend the money and so please provide us with a permission. They kept pushing pushing pushing back to the point that the ambassador himself called the mayor and still it did not happen, so we had to return the money.¹⁶²

This was not the only challenge posed by GAM to his project, which I will talk about in the next chapter. He told me how repeatedly permissions to build and move on with the construction of the site were delayed or even questioned all together, despite the fact that he had raised money to buy up the park, built it up and donated it back to the city. Rana Beirut, conductor of the biannual Amman Design Week, told me similar stories of nerve-racking experiences and conversations with GAM officials and the seemingly never-ending efforts with which one has to try to convince them to approve what is being done.¹⁶³ Using the city structures in order to establish something for a certain community – be it social or cultural community, is made much more difficult by the institutional and bureaucratic constraints such new projects have to overcome. This counteracts motivation to make an amendment in the first place. The effort required is *so* high, that it is not only difficult to animate more people to help, but it also makes the financing of projects much harder. This circumstance means that a call for the citizens to claim and use their *Rights to the City* is all the more pressing. Thus, the institution has a lot to work on, particularly concerning its own structures. This is essential in enabling more success of the citizens themselves to work the city in their own interest, to make changes and amendments to their cultural and social surrounding as they see fit.

Bigger structure of funding

During my interviews repeated criticism was voiced towards GAM's structure as well as it was pointed out, that urban development has failed, particularly when looking at the RtC. While it may be easy to criticise GAM for being ineffective and facing a structural deadlock, it is as important to bear in mind the scale on which this institution functions as well as the variety of areas that in that respect

¹⁶² Zakaria, Mohammad, founder of 7 Hills "Interview with author", online, 1st June 2020

¹⁶³ Beirut, Rana, curator of *Amman Design Week*, "Interview with author", online, 25th May 2020

are related to the RtC. However, not necessarily the individuals or even the institution was blamed for standing in the way of the realisation of projects, but rather the wider system. The problem does not solely seem to lie with GAM but appears to be also a structural issue.

This can be illustrated when looking at what happens in Amman concerning NGOs. There is a wide range of NGOs that have set it as their goal to “help” Amman in its quest for (urban) development.¹⁶⁴ However, structural cycles and problems with funding often come to knock down their efforts. An initiative striving to “help rebuild Amman’s infrastructure”, particularly dealing with the city’s large presence of refugees, sounds good to attract funding.¹⁶⁵ However, as I have been told, projects that are so carefully planned and have requested and perhaps even received funding from national and international donors, often do not see the light of day.¹⁶⁶ This is because the whole system is not able to cope with the amount of work and coordination. Furthermore during that process, the focus seems, again, to shift to getting the project organised rather than looking at what (or who) it is supposed to effect in the end.

*(...) their energies seem to be drawn more into getting funds rather than in developing their programmes.*¹⁶⁷

The money quickly disappears into the payment of salaries of all the officials and workers involved, in the organisation and perhaps even transportation of all the material. It is a cycle. Problems do not get fixed, someone else comes along, maybe with the heart in the right place, but it seems virtually impossible to get the job done.¹⁶⁸ The sheer amount of work someone must invest into putting such project to light require patience, money and a hands-on approach.¹⁶⁹ It takes the willingness to put all the energy one has, facing the possibility that in the end it may not work.

*My issue is with the system, not the NGOs. It is forcing the NGOs to operate in that way. (...) And who is the person in this whole equation who is not benefiting? It is the citizen.*¹⁷⁰

This is also the reason why there may be distrust between NGOs, government institutions and the citizens. I was told how someone who approached the citizens to work with them was first put off, as they said they had gone through such processes many times before – an NGO came and said they would help them. They would make all these plans and in the end, nothing happened.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁴ Dukhan, Jawad, *Interview with author*

¹⁶⁵ Zakaria, Mohammed, *Interview with author*

¹⁶⁶ Dukhan, Jawad, *Interview with author*

¹⁶⁷ Alkafawin, Mahmoud. “Exploration study on NGO’s problems in Jordan 1999”, *University of Jordan*, (1999), p. 53

¹⁶⁸ Dukhan, Jawad, *Interview with author*

¹⁶⁹ Asfour, Raed, director of *Al-Balad Theater Amman* “Interview with author”, online, 25th June 2020

¹⁷⁰ Dukhan, Jawad, *Interview with author*

¹⁷¹ Jama, Fares, researcher with Hara, “Interview with author”, online, 27th June 2020

Analysis

The problems related to the Greater Amman Municipality that I discussed earlier on do have a direct and problematic effect on the enhancement of the citizen's rights to Amman, their right to *their* city. By making it such an effort to be able to implement a project in the city, GAM certainly discourages things that could have a beautiful and important impact. The people I spoke with have been largely successful in their quests to establish their visions, though at a big cost. There are, however, also many failed projects and organisations that were not able to overcome the burdens put up by the system enforced by the municipality.

If we look at the triangle that Lefebvre created to depict the rights to the city dimensions, one can see that this means that hierarchical relations persist and consolidate the triangle to be a pyramid instead. People, whose immediate surrounding is this space, built up and planned by the elite, are not encouraged to participate in reshaping it themselves. This is despite the fact, that they perhaps are most impacted by the shaping and building of the space. In that respect inequalities integral of urbanisation are consolidated instead of countered.¹⁷²

On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind the work that *is* done by GAM. Particularly the enhancements on infrastructure and the plans to improve public transportation are crucial. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, this does not necessarily fit into the rest of the narrative and perspective of this thesis, since I am here particularly interested in the more creative realm or recreating and beautifying the city. But due to the fact, that this work expands the (possible) vision of the citizens towards Amman, I believe I must discuss it here. Giving average Jordanian citizens the possibility to travel from place to place with little money and without requiring the luxury of a car or paying for a taxi, immensely expands their space. It expands the realm that space can be practiced upon, as citizens can be influenced more by physically more space. By that I do not mean that there is more space, but that more of it is suddenly available to the citizen. Using other parts of the city and hence more of it could be argued to stand at the very basis of the *Rights to the City*. It expands the vision and visibility of the city, expands the citizen's experience of it and in turn may give them inspiration and ideas to recreate and reshape it. In that respect, the city challenges geographical inequalities.¹⁷³

UN

I chose to include an analysis of the UN's different activities in Amman, due to the problems that have been faced by GAM. The vastness of the field that the institution has to deal with has led me to also look at another institution that helps and supports at points where GAM cannot. The UN does not fall into the categories of analysis of the next chapters, in which I look at initiatives and

¹⁷² Bodirsky, Katharina. "Between Equal Rights Force Decides?" *City (London, England)* 21, no. 5 (2017): 672-81, p. 673

¹⁷³ Martin, Deborah, "Urban Politics as Sociospatial Struggles," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35(4): 856-858. (2011) p. 857

organisations that are working towards the rights of the city in Amman, since its presence has been invited and it has been able to act well alongside municipality officials. I was fortunate enough to speak to several members and employees of the UN about their sphere of influence in Amman. Especially Tina Hakim, who works with the UN Habitat division in Amman, was helpful in shining light on how the UN tries to fulfil their pledge of helping the citizens regain their rights to the city.

UN Habitat and Block by block

In my research I came across a particular kind of project that has been implemented by the UN in collaboration with the *Block by Block Foundation* in cities and countries all over the world, such as for example Lebanon and Palestine.¹⁷⁴ It aims at strengthening the link between city building and citizen engagement. Working with the computer game *Minecraft*, this project calls upon people, “average citizens” to participate in workshops that teaches them how to virtually build cities or parts of a city. Hakim explained the procedure to me, as UN Habitat had implemented this project in Zarqa, a city not far from Amman, just the year before. I will use this example, due to the fact, that a similar project is planned to be happening in Amman (in fact near the neighbourhood that I lived in), however, due to Covid 19 everything had to be postponed.

In the summer of 2019, the UN and the *Block by Block Foundation* organised and funded the construction of a neighbourhood park in a district of Zarqa.¹⁷⁵ The project started by approaching citizens that lived directly around the planned park and asking them, if they were interested to participate. Hakim emphasised that particularly women were focussed on, due to the fact that their position in public places can be difficult for security reasons.¹⁷⁶ After having confirmed a sample of participants, a two-day training was conducted, in which the partakers learned how to use *Minecraft* for designing the park and after which everyone was rewarded with a certificate of participation.¹⁷⁷ Thereafter, on the third day of the project phase, the actual workshop of designing the park took place, during which each participant built their favourite version of the park. Hakim mentioned, how especially parking elements were common features. After everyone had designed their perfect park, people would come together and discuss. This would be concluded by putting together the final version of the park, as participants combined elements deemed most popular and important.

¹⁷⁴ Andersson, Cecilia, “UN Global Public Space Programme Annual Report 2016”, UN Habitat, 2017, p. 25

¹⁷⁵ Zarqa is a little city near Amman, which due to its close proximity belongs to the metropolitan area of Amman.

¹⁷⁶ Hakim, Tina, UN Habitat Amman, “Interview with author”, online, 3rd June 2020

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

Image 5: park in Zarqa, before and after UN workshop¹⁷⁸



The project planned in *Marka*, east Amman, will look a little bit different, not least due to its location and size. But the overall structure of the event will remain the same. To my delight, Hakim mentioned that the UN had approached “one really famous street artist in Amman, Suhaib Attar” (whom I had interviewed a month before), in order to “graffiti some walls around the park in collaboration with the youth”.¹⁷⁹ Hakim illustrated that due to the fact that there is a large proportion of Syrian refugees living in Marka, this project aims to strengthening social cohesion, engaging Jordanian and Syrian youth to paint the walls together. From that appears that there *are* projects under way that are directed from the top and try to do their best in strengthening the bond between citizens and their surrounding space. Interestingly, the emphasis for achieving this seems to lay in inclusion in the planning and organising element of space.

UNICEF

I got a similar message of conduct from Giorgia Varisco¹⁸⁰ and Besan Abdel Qader¹⁸¹ from UNICEF. It is important to mention at this point, that UNICEF does not focus on urban development and the direct process of “city building”. Nevertheless, I felt as though it was beneficial to speak to them, due to Jordan’s demographic circumstance. 71% of the Jordanian population are below the age of 30¹⁸². This means, that way in which young people are dealt with and included in certain discourses and projects is significant. During the interview, Varisco explained:

We have a big skill building programme, which is very much linked to civic engagement. So, we are not just building the skills, the confidence and the attitudes of young people in being able to contribute towards the broader community, but also how they can communicate in a

¹⁷⁸ Hakim, Tina, “Email exchange with author”, 11th June 2020

¹⁷⁹ Hakim, Tina, *Interview with author*

¹⁸⁰ Varisco, Giorgia, UNICEF chief of section youth and development, “Interview with author”, online, 13th April 2020

¹⁸¹ AbdelQader, Besan, UNICEF specialist youth and development “Interview with author”, online, 13th April 2020

¹⁸² OECD, “Deauville Partnership Compact for Economic governance, Stocktaking Report: Jordan”, *OECD*, p. 83

*way that older people, family members can take on the advice and the suggestions that young people are proposing to better communities.*¹⁸³

The examples of projects include workshops with young people to, for instance, installing lights in an otherwise dark street or to build a shed for the bus station or bringing forward initiatives that ought to work on environmental protection and recycling.¹⁸⁴ Working with young people and encouraging engagement and innovation in such projects is linked to community improvement and hence also the improvement of community and space. An active (youth or not) population participates in the discourse concerning their space and what is to be done, or not to be done, with it.

Analysis and discussion

The work that the UN does in Amman is of course fantastic, as it concentrates on working with groups that stand at the periphery of society, id est. women, the youth and refugees. In combination with and relation to (public) space, in terms of the park in Zarqa as well as the potential park in Marka, this focus is highly significant. By having marginalised groups form the midpoint of participants, thus strengthening their affiliation with the park as something they helped create, also helps them to claim spaces in public in which previously they may have had disadvantages. Their presence and role gives the space meaning and relevance. The right to the city in that respect is the right to public space. This right is clearly promoted by UN projects in the city. As mentioned earlier this chapter, GAM seems to be preoccupied with other forms of urban development that do not necessarily involved the needs of most of the citizens. It is therefore even more important, that there is an institution keeping track of those marginalised, making an effort to work with and for them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the bigger picture in Amman seems to set a very high bar in terms of amount of work, for those who seek to change something for the better. Institutional constraints as well as problems of the structure, particularly of funding but also organisation, stand in the way of individuals and groups realising their projects. This is potentially fatal, as it forbids the average inhabitants of Amman to use their city for their interest and benefits. That means a denial of their rights to their city. Even though there are efforts under the way, such as the *Amman 2025 Master Plan*, that attempt to add infrastructure to the city to change and improve on it, it appears as though there need to be more deeply rooted and structural changes to the system. The work of the UN in Amman is extra ordinary on the other hand as it does not seem to have the same struggles as a national or local organisation, due to its sheer size and reputation. It has made crucial steps towards accommodating the new and old citizens in Amman and helping them improve their own space.

¹⁸³ Varisco, Giorgia, *Interview with author*

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

One needs to bear in mind, that those are top-down approaches. The actual idea and feel of creation and recreation of public space does not necessarily directly stem from the citizens but is motivated externally. This is why the discussions of the following chapters are ever more important, as they illuminate efforts and projects of individual citizens who have exercised and motivated the exercise of the *Right to the City*.

5. Recreating public space

Amman is in crisis. Particularly when looking at the wider system we saw how there are many flaws that make it harder for individuals, organisations and events to realise a vision that seeks to make the city a better, more beautiful space for its inhabitants. Despite the fact, that it seems to be very hard to come through, to tackle all the burdens and constraints that may stand in the way, there are initiatives and organisations working with citizens on improving their physical surroundings. I decided to dedicate my second empirical chapter on the recreation of space to two initiatives, two causes. Firstly, I will talk about an initiative that is called Hara. I will illuminate how people part of this initiative have worked very hard towards helping citizens to use their rights to the city, by amending their immediate surroundings, their neighbourhoods. I will then discuss the build-up and social structure of Amman's only skate park *7 Hills*. This chapter highlights the importance of social cohesion and social space when talking about the rights to the city. Talking about space, one can forget that it is not just the physical sphere but that it is composed of people's narratives and conceptions of that very space. Throughout the next few pages, I seek to highlight this dimension.

Hara - A neighbourhood initiative

Neighbourhood initiatives, such as one called "Friends of Weibdeh"¹⁸⁵ were efforts to amend and beautify district by those who lived in them, that I came across quickly at the start of my research. Jawad Dukhgan¹⁸⁶ who is an architect, researcher and co-curator of *Studio-X Amman*¹⁸⁷¹⁸⁸, mentioned how neighbourhood initiatives appear to be the *only* kind of efforts that seem to work when talking about the *Rights to the City* and citizens using *their* city to *their* interest. This is because people form a group out of self- and community interest, rather than having directions, ideas and aspirations from people that are not part of their neighbourhood. Conducting my research, I stumbled across an initiative that perhaps cannot traditionally be called a neighbourhood initiative as such, but does not stray far from it. *Hara* (حارة) is the Arabic word for *neighbourhood* and the initiative that carries this name aims for community improvement, both externally and internally.

Rebuilding the neighbourhood

The Organisation is led by Mohammad Abu Amerah and strives to work *with* neighbourhoods to bring them together in the effort of beautifying their immediate surroundings.¹⁸⁹ It was founded in the year 2005. After having worked as an advisor to both the Mayor of Amman and GAM, Abu Amerah had been left disillusioned by the slow process and discrepancy between city officials and the rest of

¹⁸⁵ Guide to Civil Society Organisations in Jordan, "Friends of the Weibdeh Cultural Association", *MENA CIRCLE*, 2005, Accessed 05th October 2020, <http://www.civilsociety-jo.net/en/organization/553>

¹⁸⁶ Dukhgan, Jawad, architect and researcher "Interview with author", online, 16th June 2020

¹⁸⁷ Columbia GSAAP, "Studio X Amman", Columbia University, 2020, Accessed 20th September 2020 <https://www.arch.columbia.edu/environments/11-studio-x-amman>

¹⁸⁸ Platform for researchers and practitioners

¹⁸⁹ Abu Amerah, "Email exchange with author", 19th June 2020

the population, particularly the population of poorer neighbourhoods.¹⁹⁰ By now his organisation has spread to include more than 40 *Haras* (a participating neighbourhood is called a *Hara*) all over the country, revealing the huge success of the initiative.¹⁹¹ It targets impoverished and poor neighbourhoods in Amman and other cities. Impoverishment does not only manifest itself in the economic position of the members of a *Hara*, but also in the poor structures and looks of the streets and buildings.¹⁹² Due to the fact that lots of money allocated to GAM's building projects has flown towards the western part of the city¹⁹³, *Hara*'s work mainly takes place in neighbourhoods located in the east. Here, a lack of investment has resulted in walls and buildings crumbling or even breaking down. Many neighbourhoods have not seen any interest by the municipality to help them improve their situation.¹⁹⁴ Broken promises for funding, project realisation and help have resulted in many people not trusting someone who comes in and wants to help them.¹⁹⁵ Such broken promises have not only come from GAM, but also from many other NGO's and organisations, claiming to help by raising funds and reinvesting them in the *Hara*.¹⁹⁶ That seems to be a reoccurring problem in Amman and the problems associated with that cycle have been discussed in the previous chapter. Pictures, such as the one below, capture the simple, yet effective and straight forward idea of the whole initiative.

Image 6: from right to left: before and after picture of street improvement initiative with *Hara*¹⁹⁷



*You judge people, not the walls.*¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁰ Ashoka, "Mohammed Abu Amerah", 2020, *Ashoka Deutschland*, Accessed 16th June 2020, <https://www.ashoka.org/en/fellow/mohammed-abu-amerah>

¹⁹¹ Abu Amirah, Mohammed, "Interview with Maiss Razem", Amman, 24th December 2017

¹⁹² Jama, Fares, *Interview with author*

¹⁹³ Al-Massadeh, Khader-Abdallah, GAM architect, "Interview with author", phone call, 10th May 2020

¹⁹⁴ Jama, Fares, *Interview with Author*

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Abu Amerah, "Hara Presentation", *Hara*, slide 9

¹⁹⁸ Quote of a Hara resident, "Interview with Maiss Razem", Amman, February 2018

Was a sentence said by a member of one of the participating *Haras*. In interviews it was mentioned numerous times how people were embarrassed to welcome one of the richer family members or acquaintances into their house. This was due to the fact that walls of buildings started to mould and slowly decay.¹⁹⁹ That changed after participating in beautifying their neighbourhood, in combined effort with their neighbours. Inviting someone to their house even amounted to a sense of pride when it came to how everything looked like.²⁰⁰ In addition to such reconstructive efforts, *Hara* puts emphasis on greening the space and keeping it clean.²⁰¹ Trees and bushes are planted and a system is introduced that clarifies how to take care of them, determining who is responsible for that. Furthermore, cleaning sessions are introduced in which public bins are installed and members (often men) pick up garbage such as the numerous cigarette butts. The communal aspect behind such team efforts, not least to keep the projects sustainable and ongoing, is enormous.²⁰²

Strengthening the community

The reason why I argue that the *Hara Initiative* is not a typical top down and externally imposed project is, because *Hara* does not try to build something *for* the community but *with* the community. The prime concern is to bring the members of a neighbourhood together, to get them to communicate, get to know each other and formulate wishes, aims and even fears. Everything to do with beautification and community improvement can only happen *after* members of the *Hara* have agreed to sit together and work with each other.²⁰³ As I was told, this is a long process that takes up to several months during which Abu Amerah tells single members of the community about the initiative and tries to get more and more people's attention and following interest.²⁰⁴ In an interview with him that was kindly shared with me, he phrased the idea as follows:

*We are a turtle and ant strategy. An ant perspective is that we look and assess matters from the ground, slow and realistic size unlike a sharp eagle's eyes.*²⁰⁵

While the *Hara Initiative* does have some models and ideas that it introduces as suggestions to communities, it is in the end all up to them *what* they want to do and *how* they want to do it. This way a feeling of ownership over the projects, streets and buildings thus ownership over their space arises. That is also why it is important that the cleaning sessions are conducted by community members, rather than an outsider. Besides beautification projects, the *Hara initiative* has been able to help the community to build up educational projects and community events. At first this might not seem directly tied to the topic of this thesis – space and the *Rights to the City*. However, the numerous *Hara* projects have proven

¹⁹⁹ Abu Amirah, Mohammed, "Interview with Maiss Razem", Amman, 24th December 2017

²⁰⁰ Jama, Fares, *Interview with author*

²⁰¹ Abu Amirah, Mohammed, "Hara Presentation", shared in email exchange with author on 11th June 2020

²⁰² Jama, Fares, *Interview with author*

²⁰³ Abu Amirah, Mohammed, *Interview with Maiss Razem*

²⁰⁴ Jama, Fares, *Interview with author*

²⁰⁵ Abu Amirah, Mohammed, *Interview with Maiss Razem*

the significance of such projects in community cohesion. Knowing each other and working with each other towards the improvement of the neighbourhood in many ways has revealed a responsibility towards each other. One member recalled, for example, how she reminded her neighbour's son not to leave the trash bags in the street as they "really cleaned and washed this alley the other day", something she would not necessarily have done before *Hara*.²⁰⁶ Engaging the community this way and motivating them to come and work together is furthermore important for raising funds. *Hara* is not funded by any outside sources or by big organisations, but instead it relies on the money that is provided by its own members, as well as on the work of volunteers.²⁰⁷ It is thus another task that the members of neighbourhoods tackle together in order to build up trust. In order to refurbish the walls of houses or the pavement, the required material needs to be bought and people with know-how knowledge need to step forward. This financial and physical contribution only works if trust is established and people work *with* each other.²⁰⁸

7 Hills Skate park

Another initiative striving to alter public space that I want to elevate in this thesis, not least due to its success, is the project that built a skate park, known as *7 Hills*. In 2013 the local owner of a skateboard shop, Mohammed Zakaria was approached by a German NGO called *Make Life Skate Life* with the idea of building a skate park in Amman.²⁰⁹ Up until this point there was no such thing in Amman and much of the skating scene, along with the rest of the hip hop scene, took place in and around *Culture Street (Sharia Al-thacafa)*. At that street skateboarders had finally started to be tolerated after years of fighting against being removed by security staff and for being accepted (despite the street being a "public space"). With the help of *Make Life Skate Life*, an organisation that had previous experience with building skate parks in countries around the world, Zakaria and his friends and colleagues built up the skate park, now known as *7 Hills*.²¹⁰

Building process

The building process was as long as it was important to the surrounding community. Firstly, Zakaria had to negotiate with GAM, in an effort for them to "allocate a public park" to the project.²¹¹ After having achieved that, a crowd funding campaign was kicked off in order to raise the money that was required to finance the project. 24 000 dollars were raised for the park. It was built up solely by volunteers, local and international alike. Zakaria described this as a crucial process, as it directly involved the local community that lives around the park. Seeing that a construction was under way, people started approaching the volunteering crew, asking what was going to be built up. It would

²⁰⁶ Hara Resident, *Interview with Maiss Razem*

²⁰⁷ Jama, Fares, *Interview with author*

²⁰⁸ Abu Amirah, Mohammed, *Interview with Maiss Razem*

²⁰⁹ Zakaria, Mohammed, founder of 7 Hills "Interview with author", online, 1st June 2020

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

perhaps be a lie to say that the answer of it being a skate park was met with enthusiasm right away. With time, however, things changed. The construction lasted for weeks during the hot summer months, and after a while parents started to send their children to the construction site for them to help out. A lot of those kids had nothing to do in the afternoon, so that this was a welcomed distraction. People sent food to the volunteers at the end of a long day and one Friday evening after prayer, even the local Imam passed a visit to greet the workers and bring Knafe (a very popular Palestinian sweet) for them.

*That also was really important in retrospect because it gave ownership of the local community over this space. It's like "we built this space, we own it".*²¹²

This is of course crucial when using it. The feeling of ownership over the space was further expanded when people started finding out that there would be no entrance fee and that this truly would be a *public space*, an apparent rarity in today's Amman.²¹³

Integration

After the Skate park was built and ready to be used, it was donated back to the city so that it could become a public space without Zakaria or *Make Life Skate Life* owning it.²¹⁴ Although it is a public space which can virtually be used by anyone, Zakaria's NGO that carries the same name as the park, *7 Hills*, uses it to operate and motivate young kids to come together and skate. This has resulted in a number of different people making use of and *claiming* the space. People ranging from young Jordanian boys and girls to adults, refugee kids from Syria or Iraq, the rich and the poor come to the park to use it. Although it can now be described as a story of success, working on developing the park is still in process. It remains a place where things need to be improved or rebuilt. Zakaria continues to find new ways of how to rearrange things, how to make it a better public space for all those people who use it. By now even a small basketball court has been installed, which Zakaria described as motivating *more* interaction during discussions who plays with whom and when. During our interview it became clear that he almost studies the park, in order to find out the patterns of behaviour and dynamics between people and space. For instance, he told me about a picnic table that had been donated and which had been placed in the park and observed for some time. The table move from one place to another, it was used by different groups of people who moved it to their favourite zone.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

Image 7: Basketball court at seven hills²¹⁵



Another interesting aspect of the park is that it appears to be a location for different street cultures to meet. In previous interviews that I had held with artists, the park had been mentioned numerous times as a place which invites graffiti artists to come and tag the walls, without having to ask for permission and getting in trouble. Zakaria told me, that such “invitation” never even had to be formulated verbally, but naturally taggers just started using the space for their interest and recreational purpose (and in light of the visual nature of graffiti also impacting other’s experience of the public space).²¹⁶ The park is a place in which street cultures enmesh, interests are being formed by witnessing each other’s work, play and passion. There are many people who, for example, start coming to the park with their friends to skate. But after a while they may start tagging or going into music and beatboxing.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ 7 Hills, “Basketball court”, *Facebook*, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/7HillsPark/photos/a.2553851017973745/3516956951663142> (Accessed 22nd August 2020)

²¹⁶ Zakaria, Mohammed, *Interview with author*

²¹⁷ Zakaria, Mohammed, *Interview with author*

Image 8: 7 Hills skate park²¹⁸



Gender

During my interview with Zakaria we discussed the element of *gender* a lot, not only in relation to *7 Hills* but gender in Amman and Jordan in general. During my previous research I had come across the topic several times. Often it was the position of women and girls which was described as difficult in public spaces for security and harassment reasons. For instance, this is a problem sometimes faced by street artists, as women painting on a wall are received as something unusual, as an oxymoron to the assumed gender identity of a woman.²¹⁹ The website of *7 Hills*²²⁰ addresses gender equality a lot, seeking equal participation of women and men, boys and girls on the yard. I asked Zakaria about the dynamics of gender at the skate park. Therefrom followed a very illuminating, honest and interesting conversation that started with Zakaria stating that:

*Of course I cannot speak of girls. I was of course never harassed in the same way that girls have been harassed.*²²¹

He spoke, however, of Jordanian boys and young Jordanian (single) men and of the discrimination they face in the whole of Amman in virtually every place. Places that are assumed to be public, such as malls, are thus revealed to not really be public, excluding certain people (young men and groups of boys) and preventing them from entering. That is based on the assumption, that such

²¹⁸ Faulkner, Jessica, „7Hills skatepark in Amman, Jordan“, *Skoll*, 2020, Accessed 17th Julz 2020, https://skoll.org/2020/09/03/collaborate-not-replicate-how-skateistan-scales-through-open-source-partnerships/?fbclid=IwAR2aZi7wx3GX-Axr9-WNo6kJn_9mgbJSK3Ktnh5Eknids_00vU9HFUmj-Y

²¹⁹ Neumann, Julia, „Mehr Farbe für Amman“, *Deutschlandfunk*, 2019, Accessed 1st May 2020, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/detail-mikrokosmos.3381.de.html?dram%3Aarticle_id=450747Wie&fbclid=IwAR3U_mhtBwEukhn_BbEJm39gF8PwKmZpFubUha21awAuKV5s9kEUZ2topgBk

²²⁰ Zakaria, Mohammed, *7 Hills Skatepark*, <https://www.7hillspark.com/mission/>, (Accessed 13th August 2020)

²²¹ Zakaria, Mohammed, *Interview with author*

groups harass women and girls. Zakaria told me, without justifying harassment, that it is a “vicious cycle”.

*They are not allowed in any public spaces, the only place that they are allowed in is in the street. And they don't interact with the girls in schools, they don't interact with girls in cafes, they don't interact with girls in public spaces. And so the girls for them are very alien. (...) And once you don't know what a thing is, then maybe you start behaving in an aggressive way, and so that is the cycle that I see.*²²²

At this point, I understood something about my personal experience in Amman. My host brother (26 years old) used to love taking me to the mall. At the entrance we always had to go through a metal detector and he was body checked by security guards, I was not. It seemed strange to me, but I did not ask further questions and decided to remain a silent observer. Back then I did not understand why he wanted to go to a mall that often - the malls were not particularly beautiful and there are so many other places to go to in Amman. But after having spoken to Zakaria it made sense that he enjoyed this, as for him those were places that he could not visit with his friends or by himself.

What is being done at *7 Hills* is thus of crucial importance in terms of enabling an exchange, a conversation between boys and girls, women and men. They come together to play, skate and “hang out” with each other. Of course this has not been a development without any problems. Especially in the beginning Zakaria described how there were issues concerning harassment. But after some time of being confronted with each other, rather than always being kept apart, things started working out so that now there appears to be a relatively normalised relationship between young men and women.²²³ The significance of the space as a truly public space, which allows for all kinds of interactions is extremely valuable.

Analysis and Discussion

Public space and ownership

I chose to discuss those examples, as I believe they highlight the importance and the resulting effects of involving the citizen in the process of city building. Despite the fact that both, the *Hara Initiative* projects, and *7 Hills* were originally initiated by people that do not strictly count as immediate surrounding community, they both heavily considered and included the community in the recreating and beautification process of *their* public space. This has had many, mostly positive consequences, first of which perhaps is sustainability. Especially the work of *Hara* reveals that community engagement is essential. Therein work and its results are valued differently than they might have been if something had been built by an outside source. Community members stand in defence of their own neighbourhoods and surroundings, keeping up the maintenance of the space, instead of leaving it to decay. This was best

²²² Zakaria, Mohammed, *Interview with author*

²²³ *Ibid.*

highlighted by the example of a resident who prompted their neighbour to get rid of the trash in the right manner. An even better illustration thereof is the fact, that in one of the *Haras*, Abu Amera mentioned that he saw a man, who had previously cleaned the alley, dispose of his cigarette butt in the bin, which is quite extraordinary.²²⁴ As such community engagement is linked to sustainability, this also means that if a community does not work with each other anymore, there is a potential for backlash. This can happen after some time, when aims and targets become secondary to the everyday life of the residents. It was witnessed by Abu Amera, after he did not visit a neighbourhood for a while to support them to work together. Returning one day, he found the neighbourhood decaying again and people barely speak to each other, as it had been the case before.²²⁵

Interactions as experience of public spaces

I believe that both initiatives are even more crucial than already mentioned, due to their extensive focus on community building and social relations (related to space). When speaking about space and the rights to the city, it is important to bear in mind, that not just “space” as such is relevant. The *experience* of space and exercise upon that experience in and around space is about as crucial and in turn gives a different meaning and form to space for each and everyone involved. Reminding ourselves of Lefebvre’s triangle, we see how space is formed and consists of not only its physical construction that had been planned, but also consists of the *experienced* space and the *mental sphere*. Despite the fact, that this experienced space may be harder to capture and understand than just the space that has been planned and organised and can be visibly seen, it is about as important.

What I mean by that more concretely is, that for example, many residents of *Hara* started experiencing their surrounding space in a different way than before. That happened not only because they recreated it and beautified it, hence the space being objectively prettier, but also because they related to the space differently (due to *their* work having been invested). The triangle in that sense seems to become a circle more and more, in which the people plan and organise their own space, which in turn is informed by their spatial practices, which in turn is informed by their mental perception of the space and all vice versa.

7 Hills is a different example in that it does not directly target the amendment and recreation of space. Instead, it put focus on the literal *exercise* of and on space. Although surely you can skate by yourself, there appears to be a whole community that stands behind that. Skating together and bringing people together from most different places²²⁶ has resulted in a unique experience and understanding of the skate park. It is a place where boys and girls can interact in ways that are not provided for and enabled in most other spaces in Amman. It is a place of leisure, maybe a place of escape from an everyday life. This whole dimensionality is of utmost significance as it makes the skate park *7 Hills* much more than

²²⁴ Razem, Maiss, *Interview with Abu Amerah*

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Not necessarily meant in the literal meaning of place

just the physical boundaries and appearances of a skate park. Hence, the mental sphere and the spatial practices are the most important influences on and defining features of space, while the physical space itself, seems to stand at the periphery. With the example of *Hara* I hope to have amplified how a creation of discourse around space can be enabling. Raising awareness among people that and how they *can* change something, *Hara* provides them with skills to change their environment, not only presently but also in the future. This expands the possibilities of space in the present and future in that it adds the ordinary citizen to the planning and organising phase of the triangle.

This is interesting as it brings back a Foucaultian thinking of space, in which space does not only represent the physical but also a mental dimension. Structure and space therein are not constructed only from *material* but crucially also by *discourse*. The equation that can be derived from that is:

$$\text{Structure} + \text{Discourse} = \text{Space.}$$

The space of *7 Hills* Skate Park is defined by *both* – the skate park structure and a discourse around it. Without its conceptualisation as *7 Hills* it would perhaps be a completely different space. It may still be a skate park, but a changing concept of it would also mean for the space to change. It is very interesting to look at this in relation with Lefebvre. Both theorists conceptualise space in that they include narratives around space to be co-defining space. However, Lefebvre focusses on the process of making and building space, while the Foucaultian approach seems to focus more on the *now*, on what has been made out of physical structure mentally.

Conclusion

Whether one chooses to focus on the dimensionality of space by looking at the relationship between discourse and physical structure or on Lefebvre's triangle, which places importance on the planning and organising phase of making space, fact is that *7 Hills* and *Hara* have had a significant impact on space in Amman. Crucially, they did not bring about this impact by rebuilding or recreating space, but they heavily involved citizen's concerned in this process. This has resulted in *social space*, space in which relationships and social cohesion stand at the forefront, rather than the actual physical structure itself. As we saw in the previous chapter, unfortunately GAM does not seem to have the capacity or focus on recreating spaces for the common inhabitants in the first place. It is all the more important, that people such as Zakaria and Abu Amra have made it their personal mission to "fill in the gap" and work with people in Amman to create their *own* spaces. In the beginning of this chapter I mentioned a comment by Jawad Dukhgan in which he argued that such initiatives are the most efficient if not the only way to move towards citizens using and owning their city. I would argue that despite the fact that there is of course more to it (as also Dukhgan expanded in the rest of the interview), their crucial importance needs to be highlighted. Although (international) organisations such as the UN and others make significant contributions to the discourse and the people's lives with projects as discussed in the previous chapter, I would suggest that initiatives are special in that they change the citizen's

consciousness. Whether this consciousness is one of being allowed in a public space – as a young Jordanian man for example – or whether it is the awareness that it is possible and doable to amend the space around oneself, the citizen starts moving into the center of attention. That in the end is the ultimate goal.

6. The Right to Street Art and Graffiti

Something that almost immediately strikes out while walking through Amman is its street art. Murals, paintings and graffiti are drawn on walls, buildings, doors and stairs from east to west Amman. It all started with the development of graffiti. Graffiti developed as a subcultural movement and has been interpreted as a form of resistance against increasing gentrification, capitalisation and also has been understood as statement of identity.²²⁷ Its origins date back to the late 1960s, early 1970s when graffiti emerged in the American cities of New York and Philadelphia, coinciding and enmeshing with the parallel developing subcultures of rap and breakdance.²²⁸ Those three, breakdance, graffiti and rap would then form three of the five elements of hip hop culture.²²⁹ Graffiti has come a long way since then and is now to be found almost everywhere around the globe. The spread to more places and artists has also resulted in many different forms, variations and exercises of the art.²³⁰ Due to its underground affinity, graffiti has traditionally been held as an art that challenges “socio spatial norms”.²³¹ Its role can be understood in opposition to privatisation and commodification - claiming spaces as their own by “simply” tagging them. While tags may be removed, they belong to the artist or tagger, and so does a certain part of the particular place. The relevance with regards to the rights to the city is cunning. It is an art form of a part of the society, traditionally not associated with participating in the shaping of the city (through things such as architecture, planning and organising infrastructure). Graffiti and street artists thus most actively participate in the “production of urban space”.²³²

Shortly before the restrictions were imposed on whole Jordan due to the Coronavirus, I participated in a street art tour, called “Underground Amman Tour”, in which I and another woman were led through the city by hip hop artist Alaeddin Pasha.²³³ This tour was key to drawing my attention to the creative sector, to art, to street art and how people that live in Amman are actively involved in shaping their city. In subsequent weeks I contacted an array of artists, some more and some less successfully, and spoke with them about their opinions, their passions and their attitudes towards Amman and street art respectively. As mentioned in the methodology section, I was most successful contacting people via Facebook, rather than Email. I was positively surprised by the number of responses that I received. Of course, some interactions did not go anywhere and were left at brief message exchanges. Nevertheless, I managed to speak with artists and people directly involved in the

²²⁷ Zieleniec, Andrzej, "The Right to Write the City: Lefebvre and Graffiti." *Environment Urbain* 10 (2016): Environement Urbain, 2016, Vol.10., p. 1

²²⁸ McAuliffe, Cameron. "Graffiti or street art? Negotiating the moral geographies of the creative city." *Journal of urban affairs* 34, no. 2 (2012): 189-206, p. 192

²²⁹ Pasha, Alaeddin, “Underground Amman Tour”, Amman, 15th March 2020

²³⁰ Zieleniec, Andrzej, *The Right to Write the City*, p. 1

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² McAuliffe, Cameron., *Graffiti or street art?* p. 149

²³³ Pasha, Alaeddin, *Underground Amman Tour*

street art scenery. In this last chapter I will discuss, how street art and graffiti are essential elements and ingredients of the *Rights to the City* in Amman. After having given an oversight and explained the connection between the arts and my theoretical framework, I will illustrate the results of my fieldwork in the city. Thereafter I will discuss those findings and evaluate if, how and why they are relevant when trying to understand how the citizens in Amman can and do use and see *their* rights to *their* city.

Street art and the Rights to the City

As established in the chapter exploring the theoretical dimensions of space, this thesis is based on the premise that cities have been built by the few, by the elite, by capitalists using cities as a further means to accumulate their capital, their funds. The RtC theory thus holds that the city has not been built by those who actually inhabit it. It is built, however, *for* them in the sense that materialism and consumption, hence a consistent flow of money into the pockets of those said capitalists, are promoted in the name of entertainment and quality of life.²³⁴ Street art, graffiti and publicly displayed art are thus extraordinary and revolutionary in the sense that they contradict that. They are amendments to the city and its structures in the name of beauty, aesthetics and creativity, rather than money and consumption. People do not have to pay money to be able to look at and thus consume street art and graffiti. Instead, they can just pass by it, on foot, car or bike, perhaps even barely looking at it. Or they can stand in front of it for as long as they please, night and day, find their comfort with the piece and find their own interpretation of the art on display. It means that space is produced by a layer of society that is not traditionally included in capitalist ideas of building cities. In Lefebvre's the triangle, the power seems to lie at the top of the pyramid, with those who plan, categorise and organise. Investigating street art and graffiti in reference to RtC the focus shifts to the two other ends, the mental sphere that motivates certain practices and the actual spatial practices. I will explore the dimensions of the triangle further during the analysis and evaluation section of this chapter, but the shifting patterns and emphases promoted by the RtC are important to bear in mind.

Publicly displayed Art in Amman

It turned out to be more difficult to find out about street art and graffiti history and development in Amman online. While a popular street art festival, *Baladk*, is well documented, most other past activities, festivals and events are hard to find on the internet. I got to learn more about it during interviews with street artists or the curator of the street art festival *Baladk* (Your country), Mu'ath Isaeid.²³⁵ It is perhaps important to begin by clarifying the terminology, define how I use the terms of street art and graffiti in this thesis. Here I will speak of street art and graffiti side by side, despite an awareness that they firstly are different forms of art and even culture and secondly may have different purposes. However, the graffiti that I will be referring to in this work is graffiti on a larger scale, the graffiti alongside and *from which* street art has grown in Amman. Often, neither one of them, one could

²³⁴ Harvey, David, *Rebel cities*, p.16

²³⁵ Isaeid, Mu'ath, curator of *Baladk*, "Interview with author", online, 5th May 2020

argue, is “free from” or without the other. Most pieces that I talk about are murals and do not necessarily include graffiti. But due to its relevance in the city and the discipline as well as due to its presence in Amman, I do want to include it simultaneously as street art.

History

Mu’ath told me, that graffiti and tagging in Amman started as far back as the 1970s and 80s with simple advertising messages. People discovered that it was an efficient and cheap method to advertise their services to a wider public audience. Therefore, they started spraying their names, service and phone number on the walls of Amman. Shortly after that, around the 1980s and 90s, such advertising tags were accompanied by messages ranging from personal to political. When the global wave of Hip Hop arrived in Amman in the 1990s, graffiti also spread alongside and started not being used for advertising services, but as an underground culture and art instead.²³⁶ Similar to the global reaction to graffiti, also in Amman it was looked upon with scepticism and disapproval. Both the local population and local authorities, such as the police, tried to remove this form of art and artists ran the danger of getting detained for tagging walls.²³⁷ Amman has undergone an important development in the past 10 years. Back at my first “more direct” encounter with street art in Amman, at the tour with Alaeddin, he mentioned that artists had major difficulties trying to select and paint on walls. Back then stereotypes of street artists as criminals and revolutionary youngsters persisted.²³⁸ But it seems as though the more present this art got the more accepted it became. Reasons for this change are varied and probably go beyond local factors. Yet the fact of the matter is that even the police force has asked an Amman artist to paint a mural on their wall, which shows that *now* art and murals are looked at with pride and as legitimate means of beautification in many areas and circles. The outside walls of the police station at the 8th circle used to be decorated with a huge mural, celebrating the anniversary of the Great Arab Revolt.²³⁹

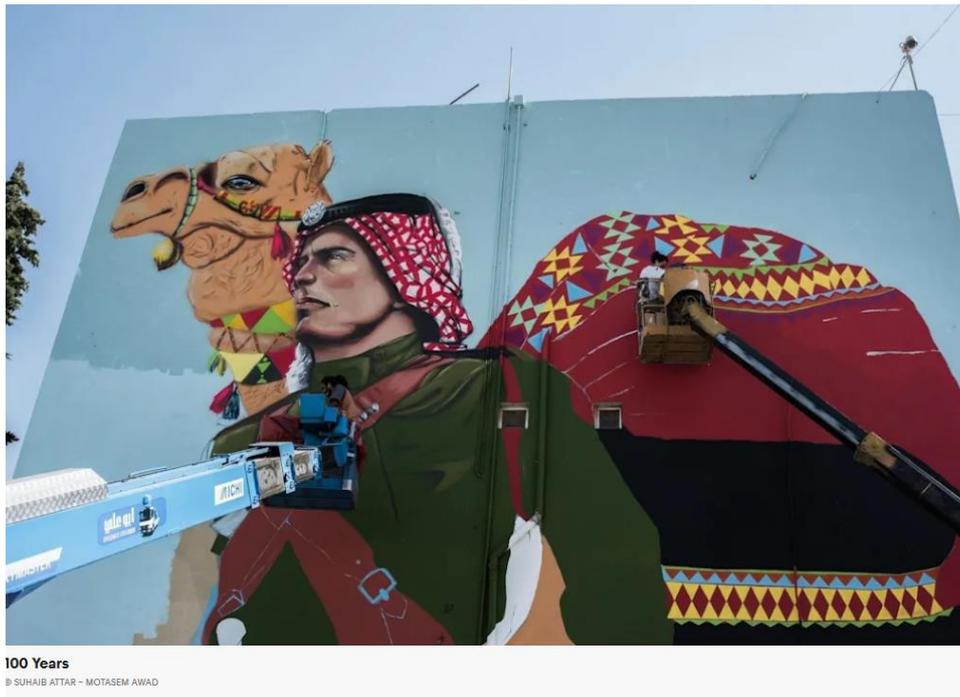
²³⁶ Pasha, Alaeddin, *Interview with author*

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Pasha, Alaeddin, *Underground Amman Tour*

²³⁹ Red Bull Jordan, “8 Beautiful Walls in Jordan”, *Red Bull*, 2017, <https://www.redbull.com/mea-en/discover-8-beautiful-walls-in-jordan> (Accessed 27th July 2020)

Image 9: *100 years*, Suhaib Attar²⁴⁰



This increase in acceptance of street art coinciding with an increase of street art itself was accompanied as well as consolidated by the establishment of a street art festival, called *Baladk* (your country) in the year 2013. There were street art and graffiti festivals before that, however, none of them existed as long and had as much presence and success as *Baladk*. During this festival, street artists and graffiti artists come together and are invited to come together to paint on and tag walls in Amman. It has been successful in both establishing and strengthening networks between artists as well as providing entrance into the scene for people who are interested and new to it.²⁴¹ Each year the festival sends out open calls, asking anyone who is interested to send in sketches of their ideas for what they would like to paint. And each year the organisers of the festival set a theme, determining a red line so to say alongside which the pieces that year ought to tell their own individual stories. By now it is so popular that hundreds of people seek to participate and send in their sketches and drafts as response to the festival's open calls.²⁴²

Art, Artists and their surroundings

Speaking to the different people involved in the street art and graffiti scene in Amman it soon became clear that there is indeed a link, a bond between the people drawing on walls and the people who live in that area or even in the particular house that the wall belongs to. On the one side there is *Baladk*, whose organisers work long before the actual start of the festival to select walls which will be

²⁴⁰ Attar, Suhaib, "100 years", *8 Beautiful Walls In Jordan*, Red Bull, 2017 <https://www.redbull.com/mea-en/discover-8-beautiful-walls-in-jordan> (Accessed 27th July 2020)

²⁴¹ Isaeid, Mu'ath, *Interview with author*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

drawn on and attain the permission to do so, not only by the owners of that building but also by the city officials. This is not only necessary to secure the walls and sites at which the festival is supposed to take place, but also to attain rights and access to cranes and other materials required for painting large murals. A good relationship with the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM), as festival curator Mu'ath Isaeid²⁴³ told me, is essential since, if they disapprove of the theme or art, they can just "shut you down".²⁴⁴ In the past years, that relationship has actively been moulded and not come without compromises from either side. Even though technically artists can paint anything they want, what would or would not be accepted by society and authorities is relatively clear. Mu'ath told me, how there is a certain kind of understanding between both parties involved – the organisers of the festival and the authorities – over what may constitute an overstepping of boundaries.²⁴⁵ Since the continuation of the festival depends on tolerance by the city's authorities, each year the curator makes sure, such boundaries are not overstepped while at the same time granting artists the necessary freedom to express themselves. The awareness of this dependence and the consequential responsibility to conduct the festival in such a way that no one could "be offended"²⁴⁶ has created a trustful and good relationship between organisers of the *Baladk* and the GAM officials, who have so far sanctified the festival every year.²⁴⁷

Throughout my interviews with artists I gathered that this imperative of "respecting the boundaries" does not only apply to art painted during the Baladk festival (during which it is clear who is to be held accountable). Pieces painted, tagged and sprayed outside the "safety umbrella"²⁴⁸ of the festival, also show how artists appear to self-censor themselves to a certain extent.²⁴⁹ On the list of the things that ought to be treated carefully are thus religion, politics and anything critical of the state and its authorities. Suhaib Attar, one of the most popular street artists in Amman, mentioned during an interview, that for some time he abandoned painting people all together, instead drawing animals, because that way nobody could get offended and that was a "safer way" to paint.²⁵⁰

²⁴³ Isaeid, Mu'ath, *Interview with author*

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Asfour, Raed, *Interview with author*

²⁴⁸ Isaeid, Mu'ath, *Interview with author*

²⁴⁹ Zu'bi, Zein. "'Itfannan': The Case For A Public Art Committee In The City Of Amman.", *CUREJ: College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal*, University of Pennsylvania, <https://repository.upenn.edu/curej/219>. (Accessed 1st April 2020), p. 33

²⁵⁰ Attar, Suhaib, street artist, "Interview with author", Amman, 13th May 2020

Image 10: *The deer*, Suhaib Attar, Jabal Al Weibdeh²⁵¹



Although the relationship between authorities, artists and art does not exactly mirror the relationship between the latter and Amman's inhabitants, it is revealing to understand the certain power structures that persist in the city. But beside the conversation with GAM, artists step into contact with the owners of walls and buildings they want to paint on. While street and graffiti artists used to carry a negative stigma in the past, they now receive increasing admiration for their work. Suhaib Attar²⁵², as well as Director of the Al-Balad theatre Raed Asfour²⁵³ recounted how people came up to them and requested them to paint also on *their* walls. A sense of pride, owning a building that is colourful and painted on has arisen and sometimes such buildings are even used as sense of orientation. Joanna Arida, another well-known Jordanian street artist, told me for example how in Hashmi Al-Shamali people use the numerous colourful murals to give or receive directions.²⁵⁴

When asking the owner to paint on their walls or buildings, a dialogue between artists and owner happens. I have been told that it is helpful to provide the owner with a sketch of the piece of

²⁵¹ Attar, Suhaib, "The deer", *8 Beautiful Walls In Jordan*, Red Bull, 2017 <https://www.redbull.com/me-en/discover-8-beautiful-walls-in-jordan> (Accessed 27th July 2020)

²⁵² Attar, Suhaib, *Interview with author*

²⁵³ Asfour, Raed, *Interview with author*

²⁵⁴ Arida, Joanna, Street artist, "Interview with author", online, 21st May 2020

art.²⁵⁵ Art often has the reputation, that it can be interpreted in ways that does not first appear clear to the untrained eye. In Amman, Joanna told me, people often think that the street art pieces *must* mean something. Some may think that if the meaning is not immediately clear, there might be a hidden message behind a mural or painting.²⁵⁶ Although surely there *are* paintings and murals that conceal a message, other times things are just painted because the artist feels to do so and expresses themselves. Joanna best described it when she said that people may be suspicious towards some of the art painted but that for example it is “just a Chihuahua in a hoodie, it does not mean anything”.²⁵⁷ Thus, when showing the owner a sketch of the mural intended to be drawn, it also opens up a possibility to discuss what it means or does not mean (of course with the room that art is always also open to interpretation). Thereafter they can like and consequentially agree to have art on their wall or they can disagree. In case of a disagreement a conversation can take place in which either amendments are made to the sketch or the whole piece changed to another. It was fascinating to hear that often owners are involved in the whole process to the extent that some artists would be open to accepting their suggestions and ideas for a new painting.²⁵⁸

It went beyond such individual interactions when a whole neighbourhood started interacting with the art and the artists. In said neighbourhood of Hashmi Al-Shamali, for example, residents did not approve of a piece of art that was painted during *Baladk*. But instead of defacing it, removing it or vandalising on it, they approached the curator of the festival and informed him that they did not like it and would like to have it removed. His response was that they should not touch the mural and wait for the next festival (which was due in a few months) during which he would make sure it would be covered up with a new mural.²⁵⁹ And that is exactly what happened, which shows the extent of communication and relationship between artists, art and community that has been established over years. Part of this relationship is also the sense of responsibility towards the community that is felt by most street artists in Amman.²⁶⁰ Many artists are aware and being made aware that they do not draw only for themselves or a selected audience of art lovers. Instead, their art is consumed and looked at by a very diverse audience that is mostly composed of the people who live around the piece of art. While the artist does not “have to look at it”²⁶¹ on an everyday basis, those people have to. Although there are surely artists and people that do not respect this exposure in the way that they try to paint something that residents can appreciate to be beautiful, in Amman it appeared that most artists do. This certainly also has to do with workshops that are given during the week of the *Baladk* festival in which young artists that are

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Arida, Joanna, *Interview with author*.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Isacid, Mu’ath, *Interview with author*

²⁶⁰ Arida, Joanna, *Interview with author*

²⁶¹ Ibid.

new to the scene are made familiar with certain codes of conduct. The “shaping of the city” thus takes place as a concerted dialogue and effort.

Beautification or challenging social norms?

It is not only important to understand the conversation that happens behind such beautifications and amendments to the physical appearance of the city. Looking at *what* is drawn and tagged or *how* places are changed of course also matters, especially when looking at the effects and “aftermath”. In Amman there appears to be a fine line between what can and cannot be drawn. It is a story full of hypocrisies and, as it seems to me, arbitrariness. It is as strange as a tag saying “kill the rich” was not removed, whilst a black duck that was feared to represent a symbol for an underground movement was covered up the next day by authorities.²⁶² As previously mentioned, steering away from drawing something related to politics, religion and “anything that could offend people”²⁶³ is suggested, if you do not want your piece vandalised on or removed.

That seems to be the idea. What it exactly means though, is unclear not least because of course in a way, *everything* is political and because there are counter examples that prove that murals thought to be inappropriate were *not* removed. For example, the mural below showing two women intimately looking into each other’s eyes has remained in place since months. It could on the one hand be interpreted as showing the loving relationship between mother and daughter. On the other hand in someone else’s eyes, this could also depict a romantic moment between two lovers.

Image 11: Artist unknown²⁶⁴



²⁶² Arida, Joanna, *Interview with author*

²⁶³ Isaeid, Mu’ath, *Interview with author*

²⁶⁴ Deinsberger, Hannah, “artist and title unknown”, Amman, 15th March 2020

As Alaeddin Pasha told me during the street art tour, this mural has been painted at a place where it cannot easily be found (and thus removed) by authorities, as well as it does not carry a tag, so the artist remains anonymous.²⁶⁵ That is extraordinary, since even though homosexuality is not illegal in Jordan, it is deemed a social taboo. And here we come to how thin said line is for artists.

A few months ago, a painting depicting Sarah Hegazi, an Egyptian woman who committed suicide earlier this year, after she had been detained and tortured by authorities for waving an LGBTQIA flag at a Mashrou Leila concert (a Lebanese band that addresses homo- and transsexuality among other things) was covered up by the city's authorities. It was a tribute to her life and legacy, with the caption below saying "But I forgive"²⁶⁶, a quote from the suicide letter that she left behind. Sadly, the clear reference to a LGBTQIA rights activist and thus LGBTQIA rights led to the picture being blacked out. I would like to emphasise, however, that it *was* drawn *despite* the knowledge that it might be removed. The removal ought not to be the point, rather the address and the seeking out to participate and engage in a global, regional and local conversation.

Image 12: artist unknown, Amman Sarah Hegazi mural before and after blackout paint²⁶⁷



And so artists draw things with the full knowledge that they might be removed, as it has happened numerous times in the past. Therewith they do not only contribute to the physical shaping of Amman but also the political and social discourse (by addressing things such as LGBTQIA rights). Nevertheless, I would like to highlight that in many cases addressing societal issues and topics does not have to be such a balancing on the cliff edge. In recent years, artists have increasingly used their pieces to draw attention to issues at their heart. The picture below, for example, shows a wall painted on by Yara Hindrawi, an artist known to draw attention to children's mental health, with their eyes and hearts as empty holes.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Pasha, Alaeddin, *Underground Amman Tour*

²⁶⁶ Isacid, Mu'ath, *Interview with author*

²⁶⁷ Flycatchr, "Amman Sarah Hegazi mural before and after blackout paint", Wikipedia, June 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah_Hegazi#/media/File:Sidebyside_image_of_Amman_mural_of_Sarah_Hegazi_before_and_after.jpg (30th June 2020)

²⁶⁸ Pasha, Alaeddin, *Underground Amman Tour*

Image 13: Yara Hindrawi, “I think of you”²⁶⁹



But also things such as the protection of the environment or women’s voices and presence in society are actively addressed.²⁷⁰

Image 14: Artist - Joanna Arida²⁷¹



²⁶⁹ Deinsberger, Hannah, “بخاطرکم”, Amman, 15th March 2020

²⁷⁰ WOW Baladak Amman, “WOW Baladk Street Art Festival”, 2015, <https://WOW Baladak Amman | ستّ الحيطّة | Women On Walls>, (Accessed 20th May)

²⁷¹ Baladk, “Joanna Arida mural”, *Universes in Universe*, <https://universes.art/de/art-destinations/jordanien/art-events/baladk/joanna-arida> (Accessed 15th June 2020)

Also, all over the city there are huge murals of women's faces on walls. As previously mentioned, each year *Baladk* determines a topic. In 2014 the festival headline was *Women on Walls*.²⁷² And not only the topics address such issues but also *Baladk* has set out to especially encourage female artists in Amman to develop and extend on their talents.

*"In 2013 it was not a public call, it was just an event where people just gathered, a two days event and there were like two women throughout 300 men." (...) "In 2018 we had 15 participants, 12 of them were women."*²⁷³

Such an achievement came from active thinking of how to advertise, for example, how to signal to young aspiring artists, that there are women on the streets painting graffiti and street art and that it is safe and accepted to do so.²⁷⁴

Image 15: Noor Qussini²⁷⁵



“No...you are a girl.” (writing in Arabic).

²⁷² Baladk, “Baladk 2 The Women on Walls Edition”, *Al-Balad Theater*, <http://al-balad.org/baladk-2-the-women-on-walls-edition/> (Accessed 22nd August 2020)

²⁷³ Isaeid, Mu'ath, *Interview with author*

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ WOW Baladak Amman, *WOW Baladk Street Art Festival*

This year the festival's topic will be "Environment is your home", trying to address issues of waste in the environment.²⁷⁶

Without purpose and efficiency? (Capitalism and finance)

Due to the fact that street art is displayed in public spaces it could be assumed, that artists are not paid or even have to pay themselves (in terms of materials etc.) to paint a mural. While that may be true in some cases, it is more complicated than that. The murals and paintings that by now exist all over Amman are a mix of pieces resulting from past Baladk festivals, individual projects but also are increasingly funded by corporations as means of self-promotion and advertisement. For example, there are a few projects in which artists paint and beautify the insides of refugee camps.²⁷⁷ Also NGOs and schools are known to approach artists in the quest of beautifying their sites or to paint a promotional message (such as the one below speaking to cultural and ethnic diversity, funded by the brand *Orenda Tribe* and the US Embassy).²⁷⁸

Image 16: "Unity in Diversity", US Embassy in Jordan ²⁷⁹



In the context of the theory, it is important to talk about the element of finance and money in street art at least to some extent. While some street art is created out of passion and at the cost of resources and time of the artist, one cannot say that money does not at all play a role. Of course not. Although some artists pursue street art as a side-job or hobby without relying on it for income, there are

²⁷⁶ Baladk, "Baladk Street and Urban Arts Festival 2020", *Al-Balad Theater*, 2020, <http://al-balad.org/baladk2020/> (Accessed 5th August 2020)

²⁷⁷ Attar, Suhaib, *Interview with author*

²⁷⁸ Alhaddad, Leen, founder of *Amman Street Art* website, "Interview with author", online, 29th April 2020

²⁷⁹ US Embassy in Jordan, "Unity in Diversity", *Facebook*, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/jordan.usembassy/photos/a.160183022815/10156559121047816/> (Accessed 10th August 2020)

a few who pursue it as a full-time job.²⁸⁰ Drawing for purpose of beautification and being hired to paint a wall does not necessarily exclude each other. Street art and graffiti are also relevant in the sense in that they are one of the most popular tourist attractions in the Jordanian capital by now. Street art tours, such as the one that I did, lead locals and tourists alike through the streets of Amman with most colourful murals decorating the buildings. This has had an effect on local businesses, as more tourists come to their shops to buy things.²⁸¹ The picture below, for instance, depicts one of those streets almost all the way covered in murals and paintings.

Image 17: Murals at Al-Kalha stairs²⁸²



Places, social strata

It is not only important to look at who draws what for whom but also to understand the relevance of the place in which this is drawn. It makes a difference whether graffiti is drawn at a skate park, where it is considered to be a complement to its surroundings, or onto the walls of a police station. I have been told that there are a few places in Amman at which anyone, any artist or aspiring artist or any person who would like to try tagging a wall is invited to do so. The parking lot at the German Jordanian university, the skate park *7 Hills* (at the foot of Jabal Al-Weibdeh) as well as a garage near the city centre are considered such open-invite calls.²⁸³ In other places artists need to, or ought to, step into conversation with the owner and perhaps even city authorities before painting a wall. Apart from that,

²⁸⁰ Arida, Joanna, *Interview with author*

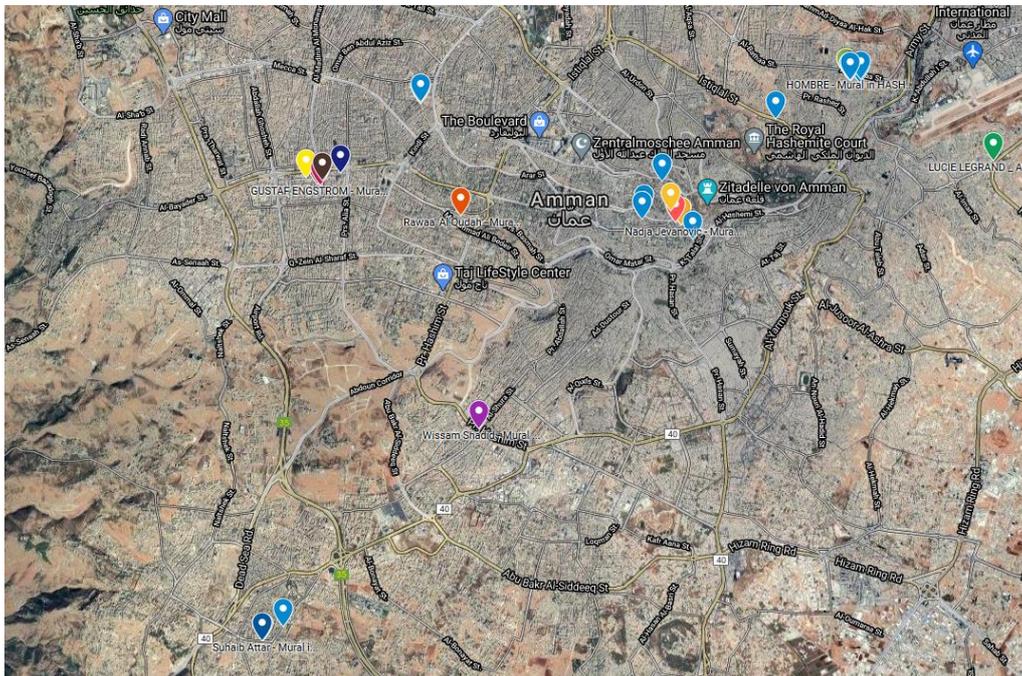
²⁸¹ Chappelle, Andrew, "Jordan's street art is bursting with colour", *Aljazeera Media Network*, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/jordans-street-art-bursting-colour-191027105142991.html>, (Accessed 16th August 2020)

²⁸² Haupt and Binder, "Murals at Al-Kalha stairs", *Universes in the Universe*, <https://universes.art/en/art-destinations/jordan/amman/tours/07/al-kalha-murals-2> (Accessed 5th June 2020)

²⁸³ Arida, Joanna, *Interview with author*

of course, also technical issues, such as moisture and consistency of the building and wall would have to be checked beforehand.²⁸⁴ With regards to location, I suggest it is most interesting that over 75 per cent of street art composed and painted during Baladk is in the east of the city.²⁸⁵ This part of Amman is considered to host the more traditional and conservative part of society, while the west is described as the “more western”, open minded and as the richer part of the city.²⁸⁶ Nevertheless I have been told, that paintings and painters are more welcome in the east as well as they are less often vandalised on.²⁸⁷ The map below shows the distribution of the locations of murals painted during Baladk 2018 and 2019 in Amman.

Image 18: map of Baladk pieces 2018/19²⁸⁸



This tendency towards the east of the city certainly also has come from the motivation of street artist Suhaib Attar to recreate and beautify the district in which he grew up, Hashmi Al-Shmali.

Analysis and discussion

Clearly there is a lot happening in Amman with regards to street art and graffiti. Both have grown immensely in the recent decades and both have had a direct impact on city’s appearance and on the people who live in it. At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that street art and graffiti help add layers to Lefebvre’s triangle, layers that are less elitist. It is important to not only look at the question

²⁸⁴ Attar, Suhaib, *Interview with author*

²⁸⁵ Isaid, Mu’ath, *Interview with author*

²⁸⁶ Al-Massadeh, Khader-Abdallah, *Interview with author*

²⁸⁷ Attar, Suhaib *Interview with author* and Isacid, Mu’ath, *Interview with author*

²⁸⁸ Baladk, “Baladk Project 2018 - Mural Mapping”, *Google maps*, Accessed 3rd September 2020

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1AOTCE8IBBa1EyXBYhg6alVJREJfVDNeQ&ll=31.937440109529884%2C35.91591687933281&z=13>

of *whether* it helps the city and citizens to work towards a RtC vision, but also to understand *how* it does so, hence what the outcomes (though difficult to measure) are. In this part of the chapter I will analyse and evaluate the data that I have presented in the previous section and draw it back to the research question and tie it into the research framework.

Who draws for whom? Issues of representation.

When analysing who draws for who, one may criticise that in the case of street art and graffiti it is not the broad masses participating in shaping their city. This is crucial, since Marxism, in the wider sense, but also Lefebvre's work calls for a revolution of the inhabitants, speaking to the masses of the working and lower classes.²⁸⁹ Instead with street art and graffiti it is the few who partially do have a background in art and architecture and are academically trained to shape the city to the best of their ability and liking. Looking at it from that perspective, they would just be another select (isolated) group who participate in a conversation *about* the people and the city, using it only for their own interest. It is important to shine light on this line of argumentation, since this representational issue at first seems to put into question the whole idea of street artists contributing the defence of reclaiming the inhabitant's right to the city. However, I found that it is not quite an accurate argument. This is firstly because while some artists *do* have a background in architecture and perhaps even art, there are plenty artists who *not* have that background and "randomly" enter the scene from any background. For instance, the annual open calls of the Baladk festival allow people from all over Amman with any background to have an opportunity to learn and try out themselves. It does not only do so formerly, superficially pretending to satisfy ideas of working towards equal opportunity, but it does so in practice, for example by offering things such as transportation stipends for those who cannot afford to travel to the locations of the event.²⁹⁰

To bring it back to the theory it is thus as David Harvey stated

*The right to the city (...) is not merely a right of access to what the property speculators and state planners define, but an active right to make the city different, to shape it more in accord with our heart's desire, and to re-make ourselves thereby in a different image.*²⁹¹

That is, that by the creation of street art and art in the street, those who are produced by the (elite) production of space, suddenly start producing space, thus challenging previously established spatial relations.

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that there is often a whole conversation that happens *before* drawing on walls and that afterwards there is a whole process in which the citizens that surround

²⁸⁹ Lefebvre, *Dissolving City*

²⁹⁰ Isacid, Mu'ath *Interview with author*

²⁹¹ Harvey, David, "Debates and development, the rights to the city", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2003, p. 941

a painting interact with it. Street art and graffiti in the city is not as simple as being created *for* the surrounding, but the surroundings have a direct effect, such as for example the decision of keeping it or removing it. This whole process afterwards is essential, as it includes the inhabitants of the city in the active decision-making process of how their city is being shaped. Due to the fact, that street art is public and part of the public space, it appears as belonging to everyone. For that reason, people *do* see their right in removing or vandalising on a piece of art, showing their disapproval. Therefore, it does not mean, that said artists impose their views, their art on all others, but rather that they attempt to create something with and for them, and then it is the responsibility of the surroundings to adopt and accept it or not. In Amman, this interaction has been shaping up to what it is today over the past 10 to 15 years. Their art being exposed to the possibility of being removed, vandalised on or painted over has been described as commonly accepted and embraced by street artists

What is drawn? Challenging social norms

And here we come to the importance to look at what is drawn and the idea that it is drawn *for*. This is a discussion around the idea of “entitlement”, *id est* addresses the question why and how an artist has a right to draw attention to a topic and paint something that the surrounding population may disapprove of. Perhaps the Sarah Hegazi painting and its quick removal are an interesting example therein. Although one has to differentiate between the authorities removing a piece of art and the general attitude of the population towards the subject, it is clear that LGBTQIA rights and discourses are disputed topics in Jordan, surely with supporters but also with many opponents.²⁹² I will not go into further detail about LGBTQIA discussions in the country, since that is not the point here as well as one ought to at least write a whole thesis about it in order to understand all the nuances involved (I am aware that it is not as simple as saying those people are for it and those against it). The point is rather about the pasting of an art piece that clearly declares solidarity with said person and her affiliation and due to its placement in Amman’s streets addressing the topic of homosexuality in Jordan and Amman. I will not dare to make any assumptions about whether people may or may not have disapproved of the piece. The fact is simply that it directly addresses a political issue that is both sensitive and disputed. So how does an artist have the right to draw something that is potentially uncomfortable for everyone else? Does that not stand in direct contrast to everyone else’s *Right to the City*?

I would argue that no, it does not.

The idea behind the *Right to the City* is not about everyone drawing or creating for everyone and neither is art. Both speak of and to the self-expression of the population or of the artist. It is inevitable to create something that people disagree with. I would go even further and suggest that such confrontations are desirable. They enable and drive discourse, in whichever direction and therewith

²⁹² El-Sharif, Ahmad. "Addressing the Question of Homophobia in Jordanian Public Discourse." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature* 6, no. 1 (2016): 47-65

stimulate political conversation, confrontation and just keeps certain topics present enough.

At this point, there is a departure from the idea of Harvey's wish for those self-expressions to be without a necessary purpose or efficiency. Such addresses as the Hegazi painting are intrinsically political and thus always speak to a wish to express something, to call upon the one looking at the piece to think about something. Despite having a clear purpose, I would suggest that this perfectly adds to the idea of the right to the city. As discussed previously, the production of space is inevitably an exercise of power, due to the fact that it shapes and defines spaces of representation, the mental sphere of the inhabitants. Adding a political voice that is not from the top to the bottom and that is expressed by the production of the space helps the citizens regain the rights to their city, participating in the shaping of its physical appearance and therewith the discourses and power structures that exist.

While an institutionalised festival plans, categorises and organises the recreation and reforming of space by setting themes, selecting walls and, to a certain extent also artists, it also helps to diversify the scene. With regards to Baladk, indeed each year themes determine the approximate direction in terms of topic that pieces ought to take. Rather than limiting artists by prescribing a certain topic, I would agree with Mu'ath Isaid that on the one hand it helps the artist get "out of their comfort zone"²⁹³ and on the other it constitutes an opportunity to emphasise certain topics that need to be highlighted in society, that need to be seen more – such as women or the environment.

How this looks in the Lefebvre's triangle

Looking at Lefebvre's triangle it only makes sense that the addition of art in the city helps to shape the space of representation and consequentially also invites to amend or enrich spatial practices. Whether it is just passing by a mural or standing in front of it and looking at it (more or less joyfully so) and/or starting to form an opinion over the beauty, the creativity behind that piece and a feeling of liking or disliking it, those are all social and spatial practices that street art and graffiti invite.

Without this emphasis on the diversification of people involved in shaping space in the city, instead in the representation of space, Lefebvre's triangle would act as a pyramid. *Spatial practices* and *space of representation* perhaps shape each other and in turn are heavily affected by the element of *representation of space*. However, essentially the weight of the then hierarchical triangle structure results in the two lower elements not having the power to shape representations of space and therewith not really being able to have a decisive effect on the shaping of their own *space*, whilst crucially *being affected* by the space, built by someone else.

With street artists and graffiti artist decorating the city walls, suddenly you have people shaping space, who are actually affected by space and exercise spatial practices in the city. They are moulded by and in turn by their work mould the element of the "mental sphere" in the city that in turn gives form to spatial practices and the use and vision of shape. Things become more intertwined, equal and fair if

²⁹³ Isaeid, Mu'ath, *Interview with author*

street artists and graffiti artists are taken into the equation. This “evening out” is also essential if we take the location of where this all takes place into consideration. As mentioned in the previous section, most of the street art in Amman is located in the eastern part of the city, as well as many artists come from that side of the city. With regards to representation, this means that suddenly another part of the population is represented in the shaping of it.

Street art and capitalism

The event of street art and graffiti provides space from which social structures, that are built upon and informed by capitalism, can be challenged. Andrew Zieleniec highlighted how inhabitants embracing art, aesthetics and creativity in a city helps them to reclaim their rights to it, as therein lies a form of composition that is neither “efficient” nor carries the purpose of making money.²⁹⁴ Instead, street art just *is* for the sake of being, existing for an uncertain and unknown and unpredicted period of time. This serves as an antithesis to what most things are built and created for. That is the idea.

Street art and graffiti in Amman can indeed be argued to set a challenge to existing capitalist structures. Even though murals, graffiti and paintings are constantly removed (for a variety of reasons), its presence is on the rise. It provides a form of consumption, comfort that can be ingested without having to pay money to either the location site or even the artists themselves. That circumstance proves its potential: the power of the art and the artists to participate from a different angle than the elite in the making, remaking and creating the city.

However, it is not as simple as that. Of course, street art and graffiti are not magically free of the “chains by which the bourgeoisie drags it in its train”.²⁹⁵ It is essential to discuss the dimension of money in and behind street art. First of all, street art is and can be used as a form of self-promotion and presentation of the artist, in order to score future jobs. As there are many artists who make a living out of street art, they rely on being seen and hired for money. Thus, although street art “for the sake of it”, may be unpaid (including artists working with and during Baladk), its perception, looks and artistic value may play a bigger role to the artist in a financial way since they might set the premise for future employment. Although I believe that this does not necessarily take away from the nature of being creative, aesthetic and for the main purpose of beautifying and recreating the city, it is important to at least mention this aspect.

Another element is that of tourism. By now Amman is well known for its street art, which has attracted tourism from all over the world. This has had an effect on its continuation, as well as it has positively impacted local businesses and the economy. Precisely that puts into question the Marxist motivation behind the *Rights to the City*. One could ask whether street art and graffiti have just become another marketplace, another niche from which profits are made and capital is accumulated. On top of that, advertisements of local and international businesses and actors are increasingly *pasted* on

²⁹⁴ Zieleniec, *Lefebvre's Politics of Space*, p. 10

²⁹⁵ Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Wage-labour and capital*. Charles H. Kerr, 1986., p. 36

Amman's walls. They hide behind that veil of street art, however in reality are just another means to manipulate people to see, want and buy their offerings or in case of PR, to accept their presence in the city. This begs the question: does that diminish the Rights to the City? Does it not take away from the other, non-profit, "just for the sake of street art" street art?

The idea of the RtC stems from a Marxist standpoint. Thus technically, while the overthrow of the capitalist system may not be the immediate objective, it does identify the bourgeoisie-biased, hierarchical social structures as root of the problem. One cannot argue that street art and graffiti seek to counter that. While surely some artists do critique the monetary, economic and social system of the world we live in, I suggest that the aim of it in Amman appears to be to make the city prettier and more beautiful for everyone. Of course money needs to be talked about and mentioned, as we cannot pretend it does not play a role, even, or maybe *especially* in street art and culture.²⁹⁶ Wishing the issue and question of money away is understandable but idealistic in many ways. Infamously dependence on donors and finance has a tricky link with the complete freedom of artists and consequently their art. But during my conversation with people in Amman involved in the scene, it became clear that artists and organisers of the scene are more than solicitous to create art for the sake of the city, its inhabitants and for the sake of certain social and political discourses. Furthermore, through that increased popularity, schools and people involved in the management of refugee camps have started to use street art to make their facilities nicer to live in or learn at for its users.²⁹⁷ Such projects, in which often the inhabitants of the camps or the children of the schools are involved in painting the artwork, ultimately show the intrinsic faculty that street art and graffiti have – beautifying and creating a better environment for and with its surroundings.

Conclusion

The *Rights to the City* framework has many facets. It can be applied to most different areas of urban and public life. However, investigating street art and graffiti with respect to that theoretical idea reveals a whole area and potential of public life that makes claims on their city. Surely, things are not as straight forward as saying: people paint on walls hence they use their city and make a claim to it. Understanding the different parties involved in street art, including the ones that stand on the funding side of things, is of essence. From some perspectives it may look as though street art and graffiti have just become another market and are just another niche in which a part of the population makes money in their own self-interest. Things could be left at that. But throughout this chapter I argued, that in Amman at least, this does not capture the reality of things. Of course there are numerous street artists that depend on funding and money coming their way as compensation for their work. But given the development and current status of street art in Amman, this does not mean that murals and art works painted, tagged and sprayed are not for their own sake. Artists and people involved in the cultural sector

²⁹⁶ Asfour, Raed, *Interview with author*

²⁹⁷ Toukan, Dina, founder of *Amman Street Art* website, "Interview with author", online, 29th April 2020

revolving around street art still put in a huge amount of work in order to beautify the city. Beyond that it has appeared that street art and graffiti has contributed to the social discourse, questioning social strata and encouraging social change, both by the topics drawn and by the conversations happening between artists and the rest of the inhabitants. With regards to Lefebvre's ideas of the Rights to the City, this has meant, that the upper element of the *Representation of space* has not only been diversified by adding more people to the planning and organising phase of the city. it has also mean that people who live and experience the space that has been built, participate and yet again form it accordingly. Although I would shy away from stating that this can encourage a revolution from below, overthrowing the capitalist system, I would suggest that it makes the process of city building more just and liveable for its citizens.

7. Concluding thoughts

This thesis has set out to investigate the RtC discourses and actions in Amman in the face of growing neoliberalism, and the omnipresence of capitalist market pressures. During my fieldwork and research, I have come across most different people, aspects and perspectives from which this could be investigated. In order to create a structured and understandable image that was perceived of the city by myself, I had decided to approach the topic from a top down and bottom-up approach, considering both individual actions, such as street art and graffiti, as well as the efforts that come from city administrative units, by GAM or UN alike. I believe to have shown how there has been a big leap forward and a great effort on different kinds of levels to help the citizens regain their Rights to the City. By that I mean, that even though capitalism seems ever more present and, in many aspects, important to the survival of a city, there are increasing discourses and actions that show how the citizens are actively participating. Such efforts cannot be one-sided, it cannot only be solely motivated from “above” as well as there needs to be close cooperation in order for efforts from “below” to work out. There needs to be a common understanding of what this connotation of RtC entails and how it ought to be executed by all different kinds of people. Unfortunately, but naturally, this is still an ongoing process and cooperation and understanding needs to be continuously encouraged by all parties involved. However, if we look at what has happened in the past 20 years it is amazing how the city has changed and how people have taken things into their own hands to help create their own city. This period coincides with the increased presence of neoliberal aims on the government’s economic agenda. It is thus interesting to observe that such developments that target the accumulation of capital have been met with creative uses of the very same city.

Hence, all things considered I would of course suggest that it is of utmost importance to draw attention to such circumstance. As mentioned repeatedly throughout this thesis – Amman has undergone a tremendous change in the past century, and some have said that the city has struggled to keep up with its own growth. Urban planning had to be hasty and often had to happen as quickly as possible, sometimes with little regard to those that were ought to be accommodated. That in combination with neoliberalism has exacerbated the need for Amman’s inhabitants claiming their city. Illuminating the successes as well as struggles of different actors and actresses involved and sown into this very process is, I would argue, crucial in motivating further change. In the end it is not as important to ask *that* changes are being made but it is rather of essence to try to understand what they change and what impact they have on their surroundings. While I was not able to interview the masses of the people on their perception of street art and *7 Hills* for instance, it appears clear that such amendments have done good to the city and particularly the consumers of such spaces. The continuation of such projects and call upon people to participate in shaping their own space is the only way of ensuring the realisation of their intrinsic right to the city, of ensuring that the city is being built (also) for and with *them*.

Limitations

Of course, this thesis only captures a small part of research that can and ought to be done concerning the Rights to the City. I chose to follow a certain structure that would allow me to talk about different arrangements and levels of power. There is of course a much bigger creative and artistic sector in Amman, many more projects and initiatives at work and many more individual people who make a tremendous effort at changing the city for the better. Language barriers or simply the barrier of not being able to extend my fieldwork certainly have been part of the challenges I faced in this piece of work. Nevertheless, I hope to have filled a gap and been able to meaningfully discuss and analyse the complex web of interactions between the city, its structures and its citizens and space. But most of all I hope to have perhaps shown the importance of such discussions to happen and that there is so much *space* and need for further research and debate.

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