

The Evolution of *Urban* and Rehabilitation in

by Lucas Oesch

From the improvement of residential areas (informal settlements, refugee camps, etc.) to the creation of attractive places (city centres, old neighbourhoods, etc.)

Urban upgrading and rehabilitation covers a wide range of activities ranging from development of historical city centres and old neighbourhoods to improvement of residential areas where infrastructures and services are inadequate (often referred to as informal, irregular, illegal or spontaneous settlements, 'slums', refugee camps, etc.).

The work is undertaken in general either by public authorities or by public-private initiatives, involving municipalities and governmental departments or ministries, as well as corporations, residents associations, NGOs, etc. The guiding principle is to take into account previously existing conditions during the implementation of urban development schemes, for example the built environment, the planning of the area and most of all the inhabitants.

Motivations for redevelopment can be economical, political, cultural or social, e.g. conservation of heritage, economic revitalisation, or the will to change a city's image or to improve living conditions of inhabitants. In Jordan, urban upgrading and rehabilitation initiatives gained momentum in the 1980s, when authorities decided to improve the conditions of urban housing, especially in informal settlements or so-called 'slums'. An Urban Development Department (UDD) was established for that purpose, through the National Planning Council and with the support of the World Bank.

Most of the hired employees were freshly graduated Jordanian engineers, architects or social workers, as well as a few international consultants. According to these employees, their work was directed toward 'real slums'. Most of these spaces were concentrated in the Amman area (Amman, Zarqa, Ruseifah) and inhabited by Palestinian refugees. Many of them were situated around refugee camps. UDD used a comprehensive

approach, targeting physical infrastructures, services, housing, as well as issues of land tenure and social and community development[i].

The East Wahdat project is certainly the most famous of these initiatives, and received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. In addition to the upgrading

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of informal settlements, 'sites and services' projects (or 'new sites') were implemented by UDD, consisting of the provision of 'plots with on-site infrastructure, a variety of on-plot development options and building material loans'[ii]. One of the primary projects was built in Rusaifah during the first Urban Development Program (UDP1) and completed in 1986. Sites and services projects are complementary to upgrading projects where planning initiatives engender demolitions of some shelters in order to permit access roads and reduce density in these areas. New sites are created in order to provide housing for low-income groups in general and people that have been displaced from upgrading sites following demolition of their shelter.

Since that time, other sites and services projects have been developed around Rusaifah, as well as upgrading projects of informal settlements (by UDD or HUDC). However, interestingly, one 'squatter area' around Rusaifah which was supposed to be included in UDP2 had to be excluded because the residents suspected the credibility of UDD. Furthermore, it is not clear if it is the same 'excluded project' or another one, but an appraisal report for upgrading Thahrieh in Rusaifah was established in 1989, but the project was not implemented. Interestingly, Thahrieh is located along Yajouz road where Omar Razzaz did his famous study about a conflict over land tenure between the government and, on the one hand, the Bani Hassan tribe (which was claiming the land) and on the other hand, the new settlers (who claimed to have acquired lands through the Bani Hassan) [iii].

In the beginning of the 90's, UDD merged with the Housing Corporation. Under the umbrella of the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC) was established. Aside from the provision of new housing schemes and serviced plots, the Corporation carried on with upgrading projects in urban residential areas up until the mid-2000s. Furthermore, in the late 1990s, a nationwide development program targeting disadvantaged areas of Jordan was launched with a Community Infrastructure Program (CIP) component. This upgrading program was implemented by HUDC and directed not only toward informal settlements, but also Palestinian refugee camps (e.g. Hittin camp in Rusaifah).

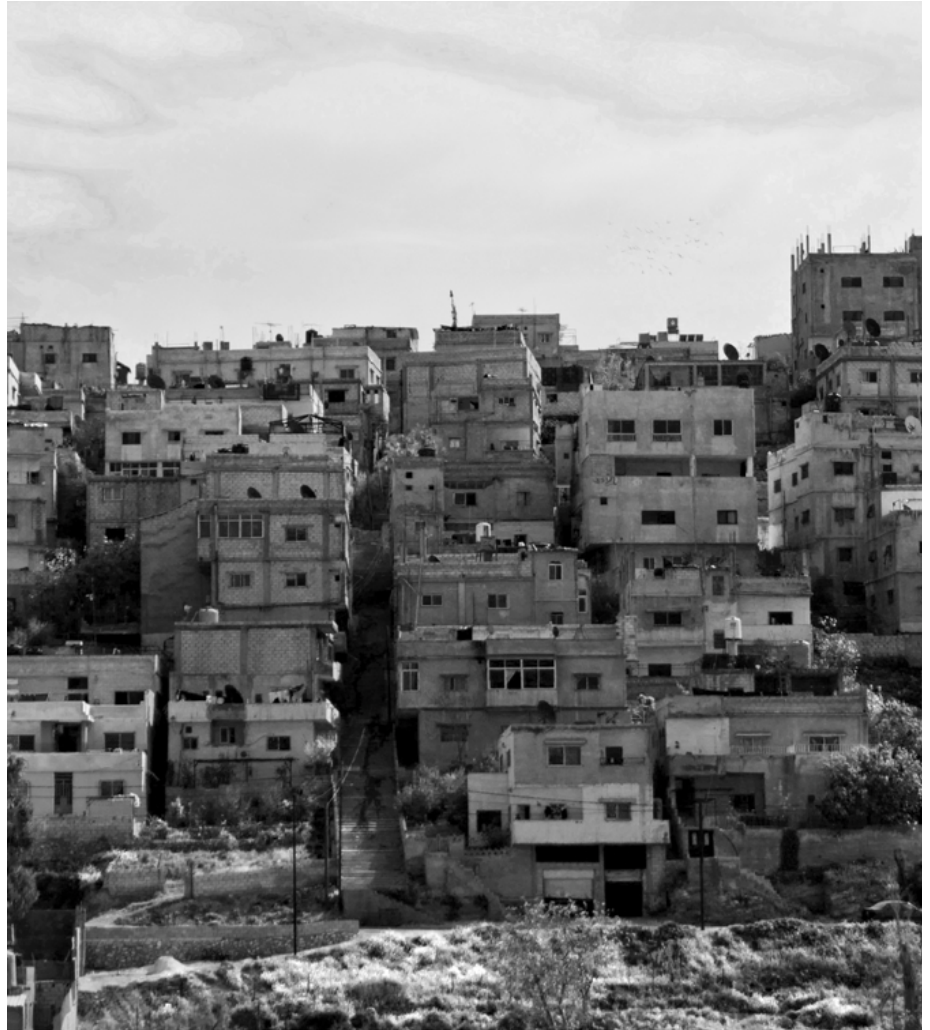


an Upgrading Greater Amman

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According to some engineers who were involved in this program, the physical conditions of the chosen areas were better off than the ones that had been upgraded during the 1980s. Most of the shelters were already built with concrete and not with metal sheets. Some infrastructures and services already existed. Interventions were minimal and limited to the upgrading of physical infrastructures, as well as, in the case of informal settlements only, the creation or widening of roads and paths (which led to the demolition of some buildings). Upgrading was limited and less costly than the projects done in the 1980s; no cost recovery mechanisms were put in place. Land tenure issues as well as social and community development were not included. As one HUDC employee declared: 'our work was to arrange the situation.'

Today, the activities of HUDC are focused on the provision of new housing schemes, particularly since the Royal Initiative on Affordable Housing has been launched, and upgrading projects have almost stopped. For their part, the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM), the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (MOMA) and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA) have started rehabilitation projects, targeting mainly 'historical places' and 'old neighbourhoods' and aiming at the creation of attractive places, such as the Wadi Amman Regeneration Project, which focus on the ancient centre of the city of Amman (Wast al Balad). On occasion, it is even the same employees who were working for UDD or HUDC who are now doing rehabilitation work for MOTA, MOMA, GAM or UNRWA. Indeed, other entities, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) or the Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA) are now involved with planning and infrastructure improvements programs in refugee camps.



It therefore seems that Jordan has shifted to some extent from upgrading or 'rehabilitation' activities centered on the improvement of living conditions of residential areas (informal settlements, refugee camps, etc) to rehabilitation actions aimed at the creation of attractive places, such as city centres or old neighbourhoods. Does this mean that Jordan is done with upgrading projects of urban housing and residential areas?

Perhaps, though, this does not take into account initiatives promoted by new actors that could take place in the area.

Notes

[i] Al Daly, J. (1999), *Informal Settlements in Jordan: Upgrading Approaches Adopted and Lessons Learned*, unpublished document, Lund University.

[ii] Jodallah, G. et al (1988), *Jordan First Urban Development Project, Completion Report*, Urban Development Department.

[iii] Razzaz, O. (1993), "Contested Space: Urban Settlement around Amman," *Middle East Report*, No. 181 : 10-14.