Thesis Report

Changes in the nature and governance of public spaces in the historic city centre: the case of Damascus

Rema Goerge Haddad

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Heriot-Watt University
School of the Built Environment

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ABSTRACT

Public space is a component of our physical environment which has an important role in city life. This thesis is primarily about investigating public space and public realm in the historic city centre of Damascus in order to understand the potential for its improvement, and secondarily about recommending specific actions towards this. The research takes a qualitative approach focusing on public space as a ‘product’ which is the result of a process. In terms of the product, the nature, morphological and functional aspects of public spaces in Damascus are examined. The governance process is analysed at local level to define main actors, the rules they interact with and the rationalities they use to intervene in public space. This analysis includes locality-specific literature review and interviews with key informants. Such case study analysis is undertaken against the background of a survey of public space regeneration in selected cities around the Mediterranean.

Public spaces in Damascus historically developed under strong endogenous social and cultural rules creating a hierarchy of ‘traditional’ spaces which supported public, parochial and private realms. In the contemporary period, these spaces have gone through modernisation in their governance process through introducing new actors and more formal rules, which have led to more ‘publicness’ and tension between tradition and modernisation. This has affected their nature as well as morphological and functional aspects.

Analysis showed that strong centralised political and public sector control is found over the governance process through a top-down representative approach. Capacities, interests and perception of public spaces among actors, in addition to poor management, strict legislation and lack of qualified cadres, have all contributed to the continuing deteriorating situation of public spaces. Moreover, interventions for improvement occurred on a short-term basis and mainly to restore historical monuments and improve traffic. An integrated approach to upgrading open spaces is still needed on a long term basis, subject to the available financial resources, with wider governance arrangements and further collaboration and integration between different governmental bodies.
Background to the research

This research focuses on urban public spaces in the historic fabric of Damascus city centre. Damascus, the capital of Syria, is one of the main cities in the Eastern Mediterranean. It has played a leading role for a long time not only in Syria but also in the Arab World. The high significance of Damascus’s historic core emanates not only from its extensive “urban longevity” – “Damascus started its existence in the second millennium BC” (Kostof, 1992, p.250) – but also from being one of the oldest historic cores in the world that still serves a residential purpose. Besides, it still contains many remains from different civilisations.

Damascus is situated in the south of Syria. From a geographic point of view, the urban area of Damascus is defined by three elements: Kassioun Mountain; Barada River; and Al Ghouta (agricultural land surrounding the city). These elements provide the connection between the outside, the site, and the defences (physical, economic, etc.) which help the city to survive (Elisseeff, 1976). Throughout history, Damascus was subject to a whole range of invaders: Hittites, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Mongols, Mameluks, Ottomans and French until Syria got independence in 1947 and the city became the capital of the modern state.

The diversity of urban forms in Damascus has been the result of many processes: social, environmental and a series of urban development approaches – the latter having been largely promoted by the state in recent decades, as well as other interventions. We can understand to what extent these processes have influenced these urban forms by analysing the urban growth of the city.

The urban forms that existed in Damascus until 1850 are tend to be seen as ‘vernacular’ or organic urban forms, which have developed depending on endogenous social and environmental factors. These forms are based on courtyard buildings, which are clustered composing the urban fabric in the old town (inside the walls, i.e. “intra-muros”) as well as some suburbs located towards the West, North and South areas outside the walls (i.e. “extra-muros”). These forms expanded horizontally along narrow lanes with modest
building heights (in general with two floors). The main circulation axes are occupied by the commercial functions and essential services (Bianca, 2000).

From 1850 and during the first half of the 20th century, the urban development of Damascus was influenced by the European impact in terms of social structure, typology, building types and materials. The European impact is revealed through many changes: new expansion towards the north and the west areas of the old city; cutting through of wide streets and linkage axes; tenement buildings (3-4 floors) with commercial activities on the ground floor; detached buildings such as villas; tall buildings (5 or more floors) and construction of some governmental buildings.

During the second half of the 20th century Damascus witnessed many political and socio-economic changes, accompanied by a huge urban expansion because of population growth and migration towards the city, which put a great pressure on the historic fabric. At the same time, and especially between 1930 and 1970, Damascus was subjected to a series of modernising master plans, which adopted functional planning and called for improvement in accessibility and appreciation of monumentality. These plans were prepared by foreign/local teams and supported by the state. Due conservationist objections, as well as other factors, these master plans for Damascus were only partly implemented. This was limited to demolishing parts of the historic fabric in order to create public squares and/or provide room for roads and parking areas, with a parallel focus on upgrading of individual buildings and monuments.

Legislation was passed in 1972 to prevent demolition and monitor construction inside the old city, this being updated in 1986 and 1996. Along with these regulations, in 1979 the old city (inside the wall) was enlisted in the historical heritage of United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Alghaffari, 1985, p. 94). Urban planning generally in Damascus is regulated by Law 5/1982, which still relies on the master plan paradigm, with governmental institutions being considered as the official and approved approach towards upgrading public space in the historic fabric. This is because the political model in Syria matches the state-led one described by Owen (2004), in which the state takes the leading role in promoting large programmes of economic development and social welfare.
In spite of all the legislation trying to protect the historic fabric as cultural heritage, the historic fabric was reported at risk by International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)\(^1\) in 2001-02. The report noted the unsophisticated traffic management, incompatibility of urban form due to the insertion of high-rise alongside low-rise historical buildings, and construction of big roads and huge concrete buildings in order to modernize the cityscape. On the other hand, the report indicated that protection was applied to individual monuments, but not to their wider urban setting (i.e. the wider public realm) as an ensemble with the monument, and that this kind of protection – in addition to the lack of protection given to historic urban extra-mural neighbourhoods – frequently led to a slow but continuous destruction.

Defining the nature of high quality urban public space has been addressed in the literature and practice of urban regeneration, which has become a crucial concern for planners and architects in many so called “developed” countries (Gehl, 1987; Tibbalds, 1992; Roberts & Sykes, 2000; Llewelyn & Davies, 2004; Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007). Particular attention has been paid to the realisation that the public realm has an essential role in reviving the vitality of city life (Gehl & Gemzøe, 2000; Madanipour, 2003; Corbett, 2004).

In some cities of the Mediterranean region there have been regeneration policies and actions that have addressed the public realm and public spaces which have been documented (Bianca 2000; Marshall 2004; Busquets 2005). Moreover, an important project – RehabiMed\(^2\) – highlighted the significance of Mediterranean heritage, promoted knowledge about heritage among the public and decision makers, and created a compendium of know-how and techniques used in Mediterranean heritage regeneration. Yet, despite this, very little attention has been given to the situation in Damascus.

Literature in different fields related to urban development in Syria, and specifically on Damascus, has expanded in the last few decades: on urban development of Damascus (AlFraa, 1986; Bianquis, 1994; Masanori, 1989; Qaddur, 1992); on the history of Damascus (al-Shihabi, 1986&1996; Sack, 1998 & 2005; Al- Rihawi, 1970); future studies and statistics on population growth and circulation in Damascus (JICA, 1999;


\(^2\) RehabiMed was launched in 2004 within the ‘Euromed Heritage’ a regional programme within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and finished in 2008.
General Company for Technical Studies and Consulting, 1999; Roujon & Vilan, 1999). Besides this, there have been many conferences, seminars and reports focusing on the importance of conservation of the old town and the Citadel in Damascus (e.g. Alghaffari, 1985; Elisseiff, 1976). While much of this literature has focused on public spaces in the historic fabric, the meaning and processes of regeneration of these public spaces in the city, however, have not been discussed in detail. The physical aspects of these spaces and their governance processes are therefore the main focus of this research.

There are two key reasons for doing this research. Firstly, the quality of public space and the nature of public realm in the historic fabric within and around the city centre are under threat, this having recently become an urgent problem in Damascus, but understanding of the problem and of how to deal with it is very limited. Most recent research and policies have emphasised the importance of conservation issues and the regeneration of the public realm has not been handled in any depth. Secondly, the public realm and urban regeneration of public space are crucial issues in urban studies, and much research and many case studies have been carried out not only in “developed” countries (e.g. UK, Germany, and Spain), but also in “developing” countries, in particular Mediterranean countries (e.g. Egypt, Tunis, and Lebanon). However, research focusing on the public realm and public spaces in historic Damascus as ‘product’ and as the result of a ‘process’ is still at a primary level. This research will be an opportunity to link the Damascus case with the growing stream of urban regeneration studies and will enrich the material available for international comparisons.

**Research focus**

The public realm and public spaces in the historic fabric of Damascus have been a concern to the researcher for some time. This concern about the public realm started to develop 10 years ago during the fifth year of academic study in the university. In addition, university trips to Germany in 1997 and 2001 led to a realisation of how the West gives a great appreciation to the role of the public realm and public spaces in presenting the image of the city. During subsequent work as a teaching assistant in the Faculty of Architecture after finishing undergraduate studies, and also through working as an architect for 5 years, the researcher’s particular interest was generated to investigate the situation of public spaces in
the ‘extra-muros’ areas on the edge of the old city and to explore the processes through which these spaces are managed and regenerated.

These spaces have not been transformed adequately after the incomplete implementation of the master plans. They have become open wounds in the historic fabric which are deteriorating, dominated by car movement or used as parking lots. As a result the public realm has been transformed from a social place with rich and lively public spaces into an area supporting vehicle movement and storage, but lacking in meaningful public life. These spaces highlight how difficult it is to decide what is compatible with the pre-existing environment: high buildings or low buildings? Should buildings be inward-looking as courtyard buildings are, or should they face the outside? In other words these spaces present an extreme case of the clash between modernity and tradition, between new and old. These spaces are the focus of this research.

Research Aim, Questions and Objectives

Recently, some actions have been taken to renew some of the public spaces in the ‘extra-muros’ areas on the edge of the old city. These actions followed an approach which has prioritised the restoration of historical buildings and monuments and/or improving traffic circulation. However, as noted above, such an approach has contributed to affect the public realm’s role as place for human socialising negatively. The social space diminishes and lacks human integration and engagement to become a space for movement and storage of vehicles. In addition to that is the continuous deterioration of its physical aspects. The commitment to deal in depth with regenerating the public realm and public spaces appears not to exist; there appears to be no integrated, defined system that guides the regeneration of public realm and public spaces in the ‘extra-muros’ areas on the edge of the old city. This is due to the latent deficiencies in the current planning and administrative system.

Therefore, the overall aim of this research is to achieve a clearer understanding of the potential for improvement of public spaces in historic city centre of Damascus. To achieve that aim, the research has five key objectives. In order to meet each objective, a key question has been formulated, which can be subdivided into a series of further sub-questions for which answers are developed in the thesis.
Key objective 1:
To develop an analytical framework for assessing public spaces and analysing the governance process of public spaces, drawing on the existing literature.

Key question 1:
What have been the main theories and approaches towards analysing public spaces as a product and as the result of a process? Is the analytical framework defined on the basis of the review of these applicable to contexts similar to Damascus?

Sub-questions:
1a) What is public space? What is public realm? What is the role of public space within the city and why is it important? What are the approaches to understand public spaces as a product, based on the literature?
1b) What is the governance process of public space? What are the concepts to analyse the governance process of public spaces?
1c) What analytical framework can be proposed to study public space as a product and as the result of a process?
1d) Does the analytical framework need to be altered for specific socio-cultural/geographic contexts such as the Mediterranean area?

Key objective 2:
To analyse the historical evolution of public space and public realm in Damascus, and to evaluate the spatial qualities in terms of urban form, movement and use/activities.

Key question 2:
How have public space and the concept of public realm evolved in historic Damascus and continue to evolve in the contemporary period?

Sub-questions:
2a) What has been the historical development of public space and public realm in Damascus? How and why did they develop this way?
2b) How have public space and the concept of public realm continued to evolve in Damascus in the post independence period?
2c) How has the meeting between old and new been resolved in contemporary Damascus in public spaces?
Key objective 3:
To explore the different actors involved and especially the role of the planning system in the process of producing the public spaces in the historic fabric in Damascus, with particular reference to the spaces on the edge of the old city.

Key question 3:
What is the process that produces the current public spaces in the historic fabric of Damascus?

Sub-questions:
3a) Who are the main actors involved in the governance process of the current public spaces in the historic fabric? What are their responsibilities and roles? What are their capacities?
3b) What are the rules of the governance process? How do the actors interact within these rules?
3c) What are the rationalities they use? How are the actors thinking about public space in historic Damascus? What perceptions and attitudes do they hold and how do these link to their governance?

Key objective 4:
To explore the experience in regeneration of public space in other Mediterranean cities and to draw alternative mechanisms and possible proposals which could be useful to improve the governance process of public spaces in Damascus.

Key question 4:
How are other similar Mediterranean cities’ experiences relevant to Damascus and what lessons do these hold for the improvement of public spaces in historic Damascus?

Sub-questions:
4a) What similarities are there in public space and public realm in historic city centres across Mediterranean countries?
4b) What has been the experience of public space regeneration processes implemented in selected cities around the Mediterranean?
4c) What lessons can be drawn from these experiences in relation to the governance process of public space in historic Damascus?
A final fifth key objective of this research is – on the basis of the answers to the above research questions – to identify recommendations that could be made to promote and achieve changes in the governance of public space in historic Damascus with a view to improving it, and to reflect on the relevance of these elsewhere.

**Research Methodology**

The research as a whole takes a qualitative approach, focusing on both product and process. In terms of the final outcomes, the morphological and functional aspects of open spaces within the historic fabric of Damascus are examined using morphological analysis and direct observation. The governance process is analysed at local level to define the main actors, the rules they interact with and the rationalities they use in relation to the upgrading of the public spaces in these areas. This analysis includes locality-specific literature reviews, and interviews with key informants.

A detailed description of the methodology is given in chapter 3. This section provides a summary of the methodology. The methods used to achieve the above objectives are:

Objective 1 was addressed through a combination of academic and professional literature review which permitted the development of an analytical framework. This framework was tested and refined in the process of meeting Objective 4, i.e. through the undertaking of a comparative analysis of selected case studies from countries which have similarities with Damascus – in terms of experience, culture, climate, urban morphology and society – using the analytical framework, as well as enables evaluating and refining the framework proposed in Chapter 2.

For objectives 2 and 3, the historic city centre of Damascus, particularly public space on the edge of the old city, was used as a case study that highlights the changes in the nature of public space and public realm and their underlying causes. The main methods for analysing Damascus were specific literature review (including archival materials) and analysis of documents such as municipal records to obtain information about the planning system in Damascus. The methods of inquiry into the process of producing the public spaces included semi-structured interviews with key informants and experts. To carry out the analysis of the selected public spaces and assessment of their physical qualities, morphological and functional analysis through the application of evaluation
criteria developed in chapter 2 were used – these being based on methods that have been used successfully by many planners to help understanding how the public spaces are used (Gehl, 1987; Whyte, 1988).

Objective 4 was addressed through the already mentioned comparative analysis of selected case studies from countries which have similarities with Damascus – i.e. in the Mediterranean area. The information was gathered through surveying academic books and selected journals and analysed following the framework proposed in chapter 2. This provides a broad view of understanding public spaces (product & process) in similar contexts to Damascus.

To address the final objective (5), the understanding gained from comparative analysis across the Mediterranean, the analysis of changes in public spaces and of the governance process of historic city centre in Damascus, together with the literature review, is integrated to discuss available routes and possibilities for Damascus to upgrade public spaces.

A summary of how the above research methods contributed to meeting the research objectives is provided in Table 1.1. Key objective 5 is not included in this table, as it is met through reflection on the results from objectives 1-4.
Overall research aim

1. To develop an analytical framework to analyze public space product & process.

2. To analyse the historical evolution of public space and public realm in Damascus, and to evaluate the spatial qualities of two public spaces on the edge of the old city of Damascus, in terms of urban form, movement and use/activities.

3. To explore the different actors involved and especially the role of the planning system in the process of producing the public spaces in the historic fabric in Damascus, with particular reference to the spaces on the edge of the old city.

4. To explore the experience in regeneration of public space in other Mediterranean cities and to draw possible proposals which could be useful to improve the governance process of public spaces in Damascus.

Key objectives | Key questions | Sub-questions | Methods | Location
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
1. To develop an analytical framework to analyze public space product & process. | 1. What have been the main theories and approaches towards analysing public spaces as a product and as the result of a process? Is the analytical framework defined on the basis of the review of these applicable to contexts similar to Damascus? | 1a. What is public space? What is public realm? What is the role of public space within the city and why is it important? What are the approaches to understand public spaces as a product, based on the literature? | - Literature review. - Analysis. | Chapter 2 & 4

2. To analyse the historical evolution of public space and public realm in Damascus, and to evaluate the spatial qualities of two public spaces on the edge of the old city of Damascus, in terms of urban form, movement and use/activities. | 2. How have public space and the concept of public realm evolved in historic Damascus and continue to evolve in the contemporary period? | 2a. What has been the historical development of public space and public realm in Damascus? How and why did they develop this way? | - Literature review. - Archival materials. | Chapter 5

3. To explore the different actors involved and especially the role of the planning system in the process of producing the public spaces in the historic fabric in Damascus, with particular reference to the spaces on the edge of the old city. | 3. What is the process that produces the current public spaces in the historic fabric of Damascus? | 3a. Who are the main actors involved in the governance process of the current public spaces in the historic fabric? What are their responsibilities and roles? What are their capacities? | - Documentary analysis of Archival materials, Documents gathered from key informants and Governorate reports. - Semi-structured interviews. - Triangulation. | Chapter 6

4. To explore the experience in regeneration of public space in other Mediterranean cities and to draw possible proposals which could be useful to improve the governance process of public spaces in Damascus. | 4. How are other similar Mediterranean cities' experiences relevant to Damascus and what lessons do these hold for the improvement of public spaces in historic Damascus? | 4a. What similarities are there in public space and public realm in historic city centres across Mediterranean countries? | - Literature review - Analysis of the survey of selected journals + books | Chapter 4&7

**Table 0.1** Methods of inquiry to meet the research objectives and questions.
Contributions of the research

The research aims to provide an original contribution to knowledge in several ways.

The research aspires to make a contribution to theory by developing an analytical framework for analysing public space as a product and as the result of a process, thus building connections between spatial approaches and an institutional analysis approach. The research applies this analytical framework in order to analyse the product in Damascus and in relation to the Syrian context.

The research has three important contributions to empirical knowledge on the public realm in Damascus. It analyses current developments in the public realm of Damascus with reference to social and economic contexts. The second is that the research analyses two open spaces as a ‘product’ relying on a framework which has been developed from the literature review. Thus it provides a framework for a morphological and functional approach to open space as a ‘product’. More importantly, the research provides an investigation of the institutional arrangements for upgrading the open spaces in the historic fabric of Damascus as a process. Thus a key contribution of this research is to produce a document which draws the links between the key actors of the current management process in order to explain the relationship with public spaces in the historic fabric and to show the process of interaction between these to manage or improve these spaces, as well as an interpretation of how this interaction affects the public realm.

The research analyses case studies from the Mediterranean region, with a main focus on the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean cities (SEMC), which have regeneration experiences of the public spaces in their historic cores, generating information about these cases based on the analytical framework developed in chapter 2, and enabling the research firstly to refine the analytical framework and to locate the case of Damascus in a wider context. It therefore also contributes to advancing methodology.
Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, including this chapter – the introduction – which explains the circumstances which encouraged the researcher to undertake this research and the reasons behind the choice of study. It provides an introduction to the research topic and sets out the main research aim and the research questions and objectives.

Chapter Two - A review of knowledge and understanding of public realm and public space in urban areas – reviews theories and approaches to analysis of the public realm and public spaces, organised around a theoretical framework based on product and process, and an analytical framework to use throughout the research is developed.

Chapter Three – Research Methodology - starts with the discussion of the research approach and methodology and methods adopted in general, followed by a description of the actual methods that have been taken in the research in the later part of this chapter.

Chapter Four - Comparative survey of regeneration of public space in Mediterranean Cities – starts by discussing the definition of the Mediterranean region, the context for production of public spaces in the Mediterranean cities and the issue of open spaces in their historic fabric. It analyses the regeneration process in case studies in Aleppo, Cairo, Tunis and Barcelona, drawing conclusions on these processes of relevance to the analytical framework and to the case of Damascus.

Chapter Five - The evolution of public realm and public space in Damascus - advances understanding of the concept of public realm and public spaces and how this has developed within the political economy context of Damascus, using specific literature review on Damascus/Syria which includes morphological and functional analysis as well as historical background on political, economic and social context. It also explains the pressures on the historic fabric in Damascus and analyses the changes in nature of the public spaces through morphological and functional analysis, with a qualitative assessment of two open spaces in the historic fabric.

Chapter Six - The governance process over public space at the local level in the historic fabric of Damascus - explores and analyses the governance processes through which the historic fabric in general is managed and regenerated, leading to identifying and analysing the
current approaches through which public spaces in the historic core in central Damascus are managed and improved. In addition, it reflects on the consequences of such processes for the two open spaces in Damascus analysed in Chapter 5.

Finally, Chapter Seven – Conclusions - summarises the main findings, addresses the key research questions and makes recommendations for the improvement of public spaces and public realm in historic city centre of Damascus, focused on the governance processes around these. Finally, it identifies opportunities for further research.

Summary of the main findings of the research

The overall aim of this research was to understand the concept and nature of the public spaces and public realm in the historic city centre of Damascus and their governance processes, in order to achieve a clearer understanding of the potential for improvement of the public spaces and public realm in these areas.

This research went through several key stages. These were arriving at the definition of an analytical framework in chapter 2; refining it through reviewing other similar cities experiences in the regeneration of public spaces in historic cores in Mediterranean cities in chapter 4; analysis of the historical evolution and evaluation of public spaces in historic Damascus in chapter 5; and exploration of the governance processes of these spaces at the local level in chapter 6.

Chapter 2 was a review of current published knowledge on the concepts of public space and public realm, their role within the city, dimensions to analyse public space as a ‘product’ and different approaches to analyse the production and governance processes around public space. It was found that definitions of public space and public realm tend to be conflated in the literature produced by urban designers and planners, while sociologists make a clearer distinction between the two, emphasising the notion of public realm as a social territory.
A significant body of Western literature provides different approaches to analyse public space and the process of producing and managing it. There is a variety of ways to approach public space as a ‘product’ in order to analyse and understand it. Increasingly the process of producing and managing public space is analysed following an institutional approach through defining the actors (roles, responsibilities and capacities), the rules and the rationalities they use (attitudes and perceptions), and understanding how these are articulated into the built environment.

A review of literature to understand the production of public spaces and public realm in the Mediterranean context was provided in Chapter 4 along with a survey of the experiences of Aleppo, Cairo, Tunis and Barcelona in the regeneration of public spaces in their historic cores. The survey of the background of these cities highlighted that they own valuable historic cores with a long history. It showed that the degradation of public spaces in their historic cores is a common and pressing issue across Mediterranean cities. However, critiques of the regeneration experiences showed that this issue has not been addressed in a holistic way and that, in some cases, more attention has been paid to the physical aspects of public space than to social aspects.

With regard to the process, while the theoretical issues of governance have defined analytically and discussed in Western-based writing, these approaches in fact also underpin practice in urban intervention in the SEMC region – which tends to be donor agency-driven, this being the link to Western literature. Moreover, other analytical work within the SEMC region reinforces the need (stressed by some Western writers) for an emphasis to be put on the wider context in which these processes take place, including how global impacts affect local action. Another key point found from this survey was the importance and usefulness of initiating broader change in governance processes for long term benefits rather than initiating change led by projects with short term benefits.

The survey in Chapter 4 showed that the availability and variety of ways of funding helped the regeneration projects of public spaces become real on the ground. In Barcelona, EU funding and the Olympic Games greatly supported the regeneration process. In the other cities, the international agencies and donors played an important role in providing financial support for the projects, particularly in supporting the local authorities. Technical expertise and knowledge was also one of the most important aspects in the cases analysed. While a long planning tradition and
remarkable planning culture distinguished Barcelona and helped shape its ‘way of doing’ planning, other cities still rely on imported Western planning approaches.

In chapter 5 the research tried to understand the changes in the nature of public space and its relationship with the public realm in historic Damascus, and its morphological and functional transformations. Chapter 6 looked at the governance process of public space at the city and neighbourhood levels. In post independence and at the country level, Damascus was the capital of Syria, which adopted the approach of state-driven growth through national schemes and the modernist planning paradigm. This approach guided the planning and evolution of city space, which has been far removed from daily realities and, in the case of public space, has mimicked Western public spaces with little consideration of social-cultural specificity.

The change in nature of public space is the product of the different governance processes. At the city level, analysis showed a historical hierarchy in the nature of public space managed and controlled by local people on the basis of strong social and cultural rules. This has been transformed to less hierarchy and more ‘publicness’ of public space, with the power of the local population over the control of public space decreasing and that of local authority increasing. Rules have been set in place to formalise the way of controlling and governing the public spaces. In recent years these rules have set the stage for two rationalities to become apparent: the rationality predominantly of the local authority emphasising exchange and economic values, while the local population are more interested in maintaining the traditional values of public space.

Public space presents a clash between modernisation and tradition at many levels and in many ways. In this context, modernisation means new to local people and tradition means old – what they are used to. At the city level, modernity came through colonialism to affect different aspects of public space and public life, shifting the line between public and private spheres, introducing new building forms and new types of movements to public space. Public spaces in the historic fabric have developed in response to unique contemporary conditions, which could be summarised in one word: modernisation. Introducing vehicles and electricity (first coming to Damascus in 1907) was an attempt to modernise the mobility system, which was limited originally to pedestrian and animal movement. Gradually, movement spaces enlarged and
experienced new types of movement, thus reducing the possibility and the space for socialising functions. Opening hotels and restaurants is a way to modernise the old city and gave it a new face, but this in turn affects the nature of public space and often exposes what was a parochial realm to increasing numbers of strangers.

In contemporary Damascus, new institutions were introduced to the planning system, and new actors to the governance processes around public spaces. This in turn transformed the rules of governance making these more formal, different from social and cultural rules. Applying master plans was an attempt to modernise the planning system by introducing new tools which were not always applicable to culturally different public spaces.

These were the main findings from the key stages of this research, the following section summarises the answers to the key research questions.
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Rema Haddad/2009


