

Arab Cities in Evolution

At a time of devastating conflict and uncertainty in the Middle East and the Arab World in general, it can seem futile to focus on the evolution of its cities, past and present. And yet, it is precisely because of such violence, that it seems also urgent to turn to the region's history, mining its cities' rich past and complex present to enable the projection of possible, diverse and progressive futures.

In the past decade alone, the MENA (Middle East North Africa) region has fostered a wide array of radical experiments in architecture and urbanism. From leading the wave of 'instant urbanism' to building the first zero carbon city, MENA cities have also witnessed a resurgence of new social housing and institutional buildings, led major reconstruction and preservation efforts as well as re-affirmed for the world the importance of public space through its recent (albeit now repressed) democratic revolutions.

Moving beyond the contemporary production of wildly broadcast 'iconic' projects, this seminar will contrast the region's emerging and struggling cities while also situating the work within a long history of complex exchanges regionally as well as between East and West. Working through specific discursive 'lenses' - accompanied by architectural and urban case studies and focusing in particular on issues of Representation, Post World War II Developmental Strategies, Pan Arabism and Environmental Orientalism - we will build a repertoire of references through which to apprehend the present transformations, as well as inspire other possible trajectories.

While focused specifically on production in the Arab World, the seminar will attempt to both learn from local specificities and move beyond them, considering the issues apprehended, from questions of representation to the challenges posed by globalization, as presenting a wealth of critical

opportunities to learn from and point to alternate possibilities, not only for the region's cities but also for our increasingly urbanized world.