

## Requalifying the Irbid Refugee Camp: Towards Integrated Urban Development in Jordan

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### ABSTRACT

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The issue of refugee camps in Jordan stems from a complex combination of political and socioeconomic factors, resulting in lasting consequences. The main challenge lies in the growth and integration of spontaneous urban settlements within the larger urban framework, which has remained persistent over time. This hinders the proper integration and adaptation of the camps to their surrounding metropolitan contexts. The absence of comprehensive methods to include these refugee camps in broader urban development plans exacerbates the situation, perpetuating the existing untenable conditions. To address this issue, the study gathered data from various sources to highlight the current situation and identify the problems that need to be resolved before considering future solutions. The collected data describe the social and economic structure of the Irbid Refugee Camp, with a specific focus on the camp's construction. The research employed a mixed approach to data collection, including questionnaires administered to camp residents, interviews conducted with both inhabitants and policymakers to gain a comprehensive understanding of their needs and perspectives, and observational methods to study interactions between inhabitants and the surrounding environment. Data analysis reveals that refugee camps are disproportionately located on the outskirts of cities, underscoring the importance of integrating the camps into the city's spatial, social, and political structures. To address this, new spatial configurations are required to accommodate changing needs, services, and infrastructure, including the establishment of warehouses. Key findings from the analysis emphasize the promotion of integration between the Irbid Refugee Camp and the municipal fabric, the necessity of investing in infrastructure that connects the camp to the city center, and the equitable allocation of resources and services between refugee groups and host populations, thus reducing socioeconomic disparities. The research highlights the need for a masterplan that can address the demands and aspirations of the local community while ensuring long-term planning for the city of Irbid.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jordan hosts many refugee camps established during the region's political crises. A distinctive feature of these camps is a lack of integration policy, resulting in underdeveloped areas lacking in infrastructure. Consequently, these areas should be integrated into the urban texture. This issue is particularly evident in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, including the Irbid Refugee Camp—one of two camps established in Irbid for Palestinian people. Initially conceived as temporary geographical and demographic sites, these camps have been neglected and excluded from the urban development and planning policies of Irbid over the years. This neglect has resulted in overcrowding and disorder, which directly or indirectly influence the long-term future of the city at many critical levels, imposing a heavy burden on society, health, economy, space, and infrastructure.

The Irbid Refugee Camp (IRC) should be considered an integral part of the urban planning of Irbid City, aligning with pioneering sustainable urban planning policies. This is an idea that needs to be embraced at various levels to address the current or anticipated future problems arising from the urban planning of the Irbid Refugee Camp. The camp began to grow after the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for

Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) rented the camp land from Jordanian landlords and supplied tents and roofing materials. Over time, these tents were replaced with concrete and other materials. The suggested site's importance emerges from the camp's impact on the profile of Irbid city. The Irbid Refugee Camp is one of 10 camps in Jordan established for Palestinian refugees. With an area of 0.24 square kilometers, the Irbid camp is located near the city center of Irbid and has a population of 29 thousand within the camp borders [1]. The camp contributes to urban density, affecting the social, economic, and environmental infrastructure. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate current status trends that highlight the needs within the camp and propose applicable and sustainable design criteria in sync with policymaking. Solutions that foster healthy social and economic interaction between the camp and its surrounding context are needed [2].

### 1.1 Research objectives

This research aims to investigate the present status of Irbid Refugee Camp (IRC) to develop a comprehensive analysis of the study area. The perspective outcome is a proposed design criterion for reviving the camp as well as integrating it with the surrounding context socially and economically satisfying

the following objectives:

- To define the factors of increased randomness and overcrowding and to what extent it reflects on the social enclosure and exclusion.
- To evaluate the influence of the existing image of the camp on the community and social behaviour.
- To determine the architectural trends and design characteristics that emerged from the local perception of a 'home' and formed the identity of the space.
- To explain the limitations and obstacles of sustainable development inside Irbid Camp.
- To address the opportunities of development and explore design standards and acts that put these opportunities into the implementation process.
- To develop design criteria that take into consideration social and economic barriers and the possibilities.

### 1.2 Population and social composition of the refugee camp of Irbid

The camp was established in 1951 on an area of 0.24 square kilometers near the town of Irbid, in northern Jordan. Originally, it was intended to house 4,000 refugees. By 1954, the camp's inhabitants began to replace the tents with mud shelters, and UNRWA provided them with roofing material. Over the years, the refugees replaced these dwellings with concrete shelters, and the camp now resembles some urban quarters in Irbid. UNRWA's facilities in the camp also provide services for the refugees in the surrounding areas [3, 4].

**Table 1.** Irbid Refugee Camp statistics

Date of Establishment	1951
Camp space	244,000 m squared
The expropriated area, with its usufruct right and its annual fee	0
Population according to UNRWA restrictions up to 2020	29,124
Number of families	6788
Number of registered housing units	1719
Number of total unregistered housing units	5,069
Unit space	64 m squared
Date of Establishment	1951

Source: [4]



**Figure 1.** Original configuration of the refugee camp

Source: [4]

Table 1 shows the difference between the original configuration (1719 units) and the current state of construction. The total number of units added from 1951 to the present has

tripled. The ratio between the total area and the number of residents is 8.5 m sq per person, which includes streets and open spaces.

As shown in Figure 1, the refugee camp, originally composed of tents, began to be transformed into single units built from mud or cement blocks. Gradually, due to the unresolved political situation, it turned into a consolidated urban texture. The emergency forced policymakers to confront the issue, often neglecting other related problems and without any foresight given the dramatic humanitarian and health crisis [5].

### 1.3 Fabric and urban texture description of the refugee camp of Irbid

The camp, in its original configuration, was a simple arrangement of containers and tents designed to accommodate the large influx of refugees and meet their immediate needs. It was intended for short-term, provisional use. As seen in Figure 2, the Irbid Refugee Camp has transformed into a consolidated urban reality. The absence of planning (the camp is not included in any master plan), and the uncertain authority - since the camp is managed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which doesn't exercise control over the territory - has resulted in the current situation, which can be summed up as poor governance.



**Figure 2.** Transformation of the refugee camp gradually in a consolidate urban texture

Source: Authors



**Figure 3.** Street planning and circulation of the refugee camp

Source: Authors

### 1.3.1 Urban texture and spatial organization

The urban texture of the camp reflects a complex interplay of many factors that contribute to its overall character. This includes a key layout as well as spatial organization and interactions within the community. The design of sidewalks, streets, and open spaces can significantly influence traffic flow and the distribution of activity. It's critical to examine how these elements were either designed or spontaneously evolved over time, reflecting the unique demands and dynamics of the camp that influenced its spatial organization at both official and informal levels.

The absence of communal areas, administrative buildings, and specialized function zones are examples of the camp's informal structures. The lack of spaces for social interaction is a result of the camp's initial arrangement and is exacerbated by informal development. Investigating how these informal structures interact with the formal layout and their effect on overall urban design might reveal insights into residents' inventiveness and their ability to modify their environment to meet their needs.

The influence of informal building on urban architecture is significant. These spontaneous buildings are often constructed due to a lack of adequate building materials and financial resources. Our analysis examines how these structures fit into the broader urban texture, whether they form clusters or blend seamlessly with formal elements, providing insight into the balance between planned and organic growth. This study focuses on evaluating the camp's urban texture, including an investigation of the layout, spatial organization, and the delicate interplay between formal and informal elements, as well as their impact on overall urban design.

### 1.3.2 Street planning and circulation

The camp plan reveals a grid-like arrangement of blocks. Each line in the grid represents a paved road or alley of varying widths. The roads are constructed from different materials - asphalt or reinforced concrete. Asphalt-paved roads cover an area of 12,500 square meters, while concrete-paved alleys cover an area of 8,800 square meters. There is a scarcity of open spaces within the camp, as the remaining land is entirely occupied by structures (see Figure 3). The poor sanitation and sewage system result in water frequently running off onto streets that are tightly enclosed by buildings. This leads to a sense of intense overcrowding, visual discomfort, and unbalanced proportions, heightened by the dense population surrounding the roads and bridges.



**Figure 4.** Internal situation of the refugee camp  
Source: Authors

### 1.3.3 Architectural features

Due to the manner in which camp residents constructed their homes and the strict rules enforced in the camp, many characteristics of the camp's construction are repetitive. In 2012, refugees were granted permission for vertical expansion of their units. However, the existing units couldn't accommodate the addition of stairs, leading residents to encroach upon the roads and alleys to construct them (see Figure 4). They primarily used concrete and steel structures as their building materials, many of which were later tiled. Benches have been placed in front of house entrances to define them and elevate them above street level. The need for space drove the informal extension, which proliferated throughout the camp (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Modification of external spaces in the refugee camp  
Source: Authors

Due to economic constraints, residents used raw finishing materials for the exterior facades, such as stone, cement, bricks, paint, and ceramic. Many facades feature multiple finishing materials applied simultaneously (see Figure 6). Each house has a single door entrance, some of which are elevated with stairs and benches while others are without. The buildings in the camp don't stand out distinctly; they all share a cubic shape and are finished with the same raw materials. Apart from the mosque and schools, all buildings follow the same rhythm and identity. Many residential blocks have doors facing other residential blocks, resulting in a low level of privacy. Each row of blocks typically contains 10–12 buildings, surrounded by roads on all sides. To mitigate privacy concerns, many buildings have added second-story mashrabiyas, which come in a variety of basic shapes.



**Figure 6.** Modification of facades in the refugee camp  
Source: Authors

The structural components of the IRC illustrate its evolution over time, influenced by a variety of factors, needs, and advancements. These characteristics encompass diverse building materials, construction methods, and interior designs. The materials and construction techniques used can be traced to the camp's architectural features. The earliest buildings were likely made with limited resources, using locally available materials such as thatch, mud, and timber. These materials, chosen for their affordability and availability, reflect the camp's formative days of necessity.

The physical arrangement of the camp's buildings illuminates the changing needs and sociological dynamics of the area. The initial strategy might have been fairly straightforward, with densely packed buildings for convenience and efficiency. However, the spatial configuration was likely to evolve as the camp expanded, adjusting to shifting social structures, roles, and cultural practices.

For instance, communal areas may have been developed to foster a sense of belonging and shared identity among the inhabitants. The design of these communal spaces within the buildings could serve as a metaphor for the importance of interpersonal communication and teamwork. As privacy and individual needs grew in importance, the spatial structure may have been adjusted to include more private areas, mirroring the evolving preferences and values of the camp's residents.

The architectural elements of the camp might have also been influenced by environmental factors. As the camp expanded over time, climate-responsive strategies such as natural ventilation systems, shading devices, and changes in orientation may have been introduced. These features not only enhance the comfort of the buildings, but also demonstrate how responsive the camp is to its environment.

In conclusion, the architectural components of the camp exhibit their evolution over time, reflecting shifts in building materials, construction techniques, and spatial organization.

#### **1.4 Social and economic texture of the refugee camp of Irbid**

Originally, the resident population had strong social and familial ties, primarily due to a shared history of suffering and being from the same regions in Palestine. Today, the social fabric maintains the same composition, but it's expanded due to demographic growth. Land use in the Irbid Refugee Camp (IRC) is complex due to the need to satisfy various needs within such a limited space. Since its inception, the IRC has been a closed-off zone, both physically and in terms of population and social activities. Numerous factors have played key roles in this, including emotional ones such as a shared political vision among IRC residents and a close-knit social cooperation arising from a shared destiny.

Physical limitations related to space have led to various informal activities. Legal issues concerning land ownership and an undefined management system between UNRWA and the local government also contribute. To understand these factors, we conducted interviews and issued questionnaires to primarily investigate trends and thought processes in the IRC. The local Jordanian community has been impacted by the long-term presence of Palestinians on Jordanian territory. The social, economic, and environmental effects of this displacement have been key areas of investigation.

A cohesive society is often described as inclusive, cooperative, and characterized by a sense of belonging, trust, and generally strong, positive relationships. Conversely, low cohesion in a society is often marked by social conflict, fragmentation, and negative emotions such as resentment, anxiety, and perceptions of threat among neighbors. Palestinian refugees share most of their cultural values and environmental conditions with their host country, Jordan, which makes them more integrated into the Jordanian social structure.

We conducted interviews and surveys with the inhabitants to investigate the social and economic components of the refugee camp in Irbid, Jordan, including demographics, employment prospects, and absorption into local society. Both camp inhabitants and members of the surrounding community were targeted to highlight the social and economic elements of the IRC. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

We polled 200 people, evenly split between camp inhabitants and nearby community members. The questionnaire asked about work status, sources of income, perceptions of integration, and challenges. To provide a well-rounded perspective, interviews were also held with key policymakers.

The research's key findings highlighted the perseverance of camp members in developing livelihoods despite constraints, the importance of access to education and vocational training, and the need for targeted activities to promote stronger social cohesion between the camp and the neighboring population. Challenges included limited access to formal employment, competition for resources, and occasional cultural misunderstandings.

In conclusion, the refugee camp in Irbid, Jordan, presents a complex social and economic situation influenced by its demographic composition, employment dynamics, and relationships with the local population. The research, including interviews and questionnaires, provides insight into the diverse nature of these interactions, emphasizing the significance of inclusive policies and efforts that encourage both self-sufficiency and meaningful integration. A key conclusion from the questionnaires and interviews is the desire for integration with the surrounding city, particularly among those under the age of 50. Some older individuals expressed objections because they view the camp as a reminder of the Palestinian predicament and fear that integration may undermine the right to return to Palestine.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Integration programs often have a socio-economic focus, aiming to facilitate the rapid transition of refugees into the labor market. However, recent research highlights that increasing participant heterogeneity is placing strain on integrated programs and services that are already grappling with resource and time constraints [6]. In the case of the Irbid Refugee Camp, additional pressures arise due to the camp's transformation into an urban reality, which presents its own integration challenges. Current studies and research focus on refugee integration, specifically the challenge of integrating an urban refugee reality [7]. The Irbid Refugee Camp is a part of the city's evolution, which is a core research focus and cannot be reduced to just a study of refugee problems.

## 2.1 Post-war planning: A matter of identity

Post-war planning is laden with technical and political challenges. Questions have been raised about the ideal image of a refugee camp, and whether they should have existed in the first place. Ideally, people who flee and seek refuge should have been given opportunities to integrate with the host community by providing housing and services within the existing built environment. However, political situations and delayed decisions have distorted this image, leaving refugees suspended between the need to settle and the desire to return.

Recent attention has focused on the relationship between the identity of the people and the image of the space. Malkki [8] suggests that identity is an integration of self-construction and forced categorization, encompassing both compulsory and permissive conditions and statuses. This concept outlines the factors that contribute to creating the identity of spaces, which, in the case of refugee camps, is a multi-layered reflection.

People forge connections to places through their social relationships with their surroundings and other people. The memory of space continues partially, interpreting the past in terms of the present and preserving cultural continuity despite changes over time. Refugee camps have recreated societies with collective images of spaces that were forcibly abandoned, yet to which they remain attached. Maintaining the image of their homeland has become a form of resistance, albeit limited by economic, political, and social barriers.

The study of social memory is non-paradigmatic [9]. The image of space preserved by the first generation was subsequently reshaped based on the conditions the new generation had to confront. The elements of their 'place of birth' and the definition of 'home' have been reconstructed, creating what can be termed 'the new image of the old space'. The camps have tried to reassemble the social formations of home countries within the host countries, resulting in an organic growth of sustained and reproduced identity.

In the case of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, the unique nature of Palestinian-Jordanian bonds has resulted in a distinctive narrative of refugee camps. Starting from temporary tents and evolving into permanent residences, camps in Jordan have become their home away from home. Generations have succeeded each other in the same plots of land, integrating into Jordanian society, while economic conditions and limitations have forced a significant number of refugees to live in enclosed communities with limited resources.

The complexities of Palestinian return and the resulting extended stay have led refugees to live the paradox of striving to provide their children with proper education and a decent future in the host country, while preserving the right to return to their homeland. This situation, along with economic factors, has reduced needs to basic demands for shelter, water, and food. The loss of stability has influenced their priorities as the surrounding communities developed [10].

In terms of definition and distinctness, the exact terminology fluctuates between refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, and residents. These terms are often used interchangeably and imprecisely in the context of Palestinians in Jordan, presenting another challenge for planners and designers in the process of building and redeveloping what lies between a temporary camp and a permanent residence [11].

Camps started under extraordinary circumstances and evolved with an undefined organizational structure. The overlapping and inseparable barriers have created difficulties

for planners and designers. The psychosocial issues arising from the refugee experience also play a role in decision-making when it comes to creating or recreating spaces. Experiencing the loss of community and the struggle to fit into a new community or recreate the lost one poses a significant obstacle to planning. Individuals may suffer from social alienation both inside and outside the camp community [12].

## 2.2 Emerged self-built community

In the case of Palestinian refugee camps in neighboring countries, a dilemma arises due to the sensitivity of the Palestinian case and the refugees' commitment to the right of return. The increased demands for shelter and services, along with the recommencement of the state of refuge, resulted in the growth of the camps. Further, the delay in responsive planning solutions motivated the residents to self-build their communities. What began as an act of containing the crisis through temporary shelters developed into a crisis of overcrowded and underdeveloped structures. This resulted in enclosed and socially isolated communities. The oscillation between formal and informal states of the settlements suspended the situation and hindered attempts to address the emerging problems.

In her review of the architectural and spatial evolution of camps in Jordan and Lebanon, Maqusi [13] was able to simulate the emergent spatial constructions that Palestinian refugees cast in parallel with host country regulations, economic barriers, rights of use, and conflict scenarios. Drawing on the concept of 'protracted displacement', Maqusi [13] drew attention to the political scale of the spatial patterns that began as a form of resistance and shelter but ended up as a series of 'spatial violations'.

As the settlements continued to exist, the need for expansion developed a typology of architectural elements. Adapting to the limits of space and setbacks, the residents used temporary materials and prefabricated elements to build external stairs and thresholds (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** External stairs as an emerged architectural element of expansion [13]

Maqusi [13] concludes that these self-built communities within the borders of Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon forced host authorities to reconsider the social and humanitarian dimensions of imposing conditions and

replacements. This led to a conflict that must be addressed and put into negotiation between residents and authorities.

### **2.3 From individuals to functional communities: Camps and cities**

The trauma of displacement is embedded in the social, psychological, economic, and spatial experiences of those displaced. However, when displaced communities arrive at their first safe haven away from their native geography, they face a type of spatial containment. The intent of containment is to provide a first line of defense, either formal – institutional protection provided by an international organization – or informal – provided by the local 'host' community, which offers 'in-transition' refuge areas to limit and address the crisis at hand.

When Palestinian refugees moved into or were forcibly migrated into camps, they left behind a legacy of earlier village inhabitation. This repetition of habitual forms was not intended to recreate village life or even to protect a spatial culture that had been forcibly removed (though these acts may have been at play on a subconscious level). Instead, this replication arose from a historical understanding of a relationship with land and space, which was clearly disrupted and reconstructed when it encountered a political spatiality – especially that of the camp [14].

Jordan has always been influenced by migration patterns and has welcomed many waves of refugees, the most notable of which have been Palestinians [14]. As a result, ten Palestinian refugee camps have sprung up around the governorates. Due to these precarious circumstances, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with the High Commissioner for Refugees of the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees [15]. As these camps began to face the prolonged situation of refugee crises, there arose a need to meet the demand for long-term residences and related services.

Camps exist in a state between the temporary and the permanent, but as they become increasingly permanent, they develop into locations of daily living and routines [16]. The urbanization process of refugee camps has led to comparisons with cities, or cities in the making. For Jansen [17], the concept of urbanization is a metaphor for the persistence and normalcy of extraordinary circumstances. The author argued that this connection with urbanity refers to processes of settlement and organization in environments that were designed as transitory, detached from host communities. This was reflected in social organization processes and the establishment of camp economies, infrastructure, and public services, which led to a sense of normality, or adaptability, albeit in a specific humanitarian setting.

Applying the urbanity perspective to camps welcomes the transformation of what were once transient locations into something far more vibrant, sociable, and long-term. As refugees move through camps, back home, or forward to major cities, they are always on the move. As a result, these locations are at a crossroads between movement and residence, which puts camps under the notion of 'accidental cities'. Alshoubaki [18] used the term 'temporary city' to describe the status of transformation from refugee camps into urban areas. Alshoubaki highlighted that in terms of population density and physical transformation over time, a camp can be classified as a city. The durable structure that replaced temporary shelters over time shaped the sprawl of the provisional settlement.

Refugee camps are common urban phenomena in the twenty-first century. The emergency settlements are urbanizing as a result of demographic explosion and precarious expansion over a prolonged period, which generates deep modifications to the city's territorial structure, shaping a new identity and creating a contingent change in the city's form and history. "Accidental cities" are the state of refugee camps. Since the Second World War, the approach to catastrophic occurrences has been the same: build refugee camps under the arc of short-term solutions, focusing on emergency tactics to deal with refugee crises swiftly and cheaply. Alshoubaki [18] argued in her work that typically, refugee camps become urban and stable realities over time, and that it's important to see them as future urban centers.

The implications of urban developments for both refugees and host nations could significantly enrich research by connecting theoretical debates with real-world consequences. Such an investigation would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various effects of these shifts. By examining these consequences, we gain a better understanding of the complex interplay between urban developments, refugees, and host nations. This research emphasizes the importance of comprehensive, context-sensitive policies that consider the various consequences on multiple stakeholders and strive for equitable and sustainable outcomes [19].

## **3. METHODS**

This research characterized by social, physical and political complexity to take into consideration is based on data collected by questionnaire, interview, and observation with the finality to define the impacts of future spatial changes and interventions. This paper focuses efforts to investigate if it is possible the integration of the IRC with the city of Irbid or all solutions should be not applicable due the strong and radical situation of this urban reality.

### **3.1 Research instruments**

Due the scarce of data and specific studies that define the development of refugee camps in Jordan for many reasons we adopted the direct research methods such as survey, interview, and observation to trace a minimal realistic vision of the research question and how to develop a prediction of the future of the IRC.

### **3.2 Data collection methods and analysis**

The methods applied include a variety of approaches, including survey, interview and observation. These methods have been deliberately chosen to include a wide range of users whether they are inhabitants or policymakers. This approach is designed to comprehensively shed light on the physical and psychological needs of the user.

The survey method serves as a central element of our overall assessment strategy, providing valuable insight into the prevailing conditions in the camp. This approach involves engaging directly with refugees, directly capturing their perspective. Using a hybrid approach, we meticulously collected on-site data, combining quantitative and qualitative information. This holistic approach has facilitated a multidimensional understanding of the refugee experience. It is noteworthy that the survey helped to quantify different

aspects, while the interviews and observations provided rich qualitative context.

The integration of a powerful associative approach allows us to meticulously focus on many aspects, ensuring an in-depth exploration of the topic. This approach is instrumental in gaining a deep understanding of the refugee experience and needs in the camp setting:

1. Data sets come from statistical organizations, enriching our analysis with reliable and verified data.
2. Our research methods include both site and site surveys, strategically designed to generate a mix approach of quantitative and qualitative methods.
3. In site observations played a central role in our study, allowing us to gather first-hand information about context and conditions.
4. In-depth interviews with refugees added a human dimension to our research, providing invaluable insights and stories that enrich our understanding.

The quantitative data has identified key areas for data analysis, including environment, housing, transportation, society, economy, and services. On the other hand, the qualitative data collection method aims at a global understanding of the current state of the camp from three perspectives: environmental, social and economic. This allows for a comprehensive classification of the collected data.

Using structured questionnaires, a quantitative approach allows us to obtain information that will provide information about the desired design plan. The questionnaire incorporated value statements, providing respondents with a range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", enhancing the depth of data collected. This dual-method approach not only facilitates powerful data analysis, but also allows for a nuanced understanding of the various aspects that shape current camp conditions.

#### 4. METHODS IN DISCUSSION AND PERSPECTIVES

The long-term perspective must be the guiding principle in complex reality (as defined by the IRC). This necessitates considering the long-term effects on a city of any humanitarian response. The cooperation of humanitarian organizations and local actors is another guideline for good practice in urban humanitarian responses. Planning refugee camps is considered crucial in terms of policy and decision making. In the case of IRC, the camp is managed by the UNRWA, yet the services are provided by its local council. In addition to the authorities, it is unneglectable that public participation is evident and local community involvement. The idea of public involvement has existed in the camp since it started as a self-built community, however, it is mandatory to highlight the process, planning or re-planning.

##### 4.1 Planning IRC: Emerged patterns and public participation

The management of the camp existed as a resultant situation to a series of spontaneous upgrades over time, the status is nearly an application of 'joint management strategy' yet not in the formal framework. This strategy regulates policies and plans in a collaborative frame that joins all stakeholders on the same ground.

The pillars of collaborative planning in IRC are Greater Irbid Municipality, the UNRWA, and the local community. Planners play a major role in placing public participation in the

right place inside this triangle, not only by putting plans under experiment with public feedback and consultation but during the early phases of setting plans and policies [20]. Directed involvement needs collaborative planning as a communication method and compromising to set the agenda. However, Planners' role is to link between vision, councilors, and local community under local and regional circumstances to come up with a shared but controlled solution.

Utilitarianism is another concept that can be supportive of the idea of public participation and collaborative planning. Utilitarianism calls for 'the greatest good for the greatest number'; this means that the distribution of benefits must consider social justice and public interest. Considering that individuals can define their own needs and goals means that planning with the concern of public interest and social inclusion will achieve the greatest possible satisfaction for the greatest number.

Utilitarianism is a philosophical theory that suggests that the best course of action is the one that maximizes overall happiness or welfare. It focuses on the idea of the greatest benefit to the most people. Essentially, utilitarianism assesses the moral or ethical value of an action based on its consequences in terms of promoting happiness and minimizing suffering [21].

Applied to IRC planning and management, utilitarianism can help guide decisions by considering potential impacts on participant health and satisfaction. This view encourages IRC administrators and planners to weigh the pros and cons that may arise from different actions or policies, with the goal of creating an environment that maximizes experience. positive for the majority of users.

Pragmatic thinking in managing IRC can involve assessing issues such as user policy, moderation strategy, and feature implementation. For example, if a certain policy change is proposed, administrators can assess its potential impacts on user engagement, enjoyment, and any potential negative consequences.

##### 4.2 Design from within: The image of the space

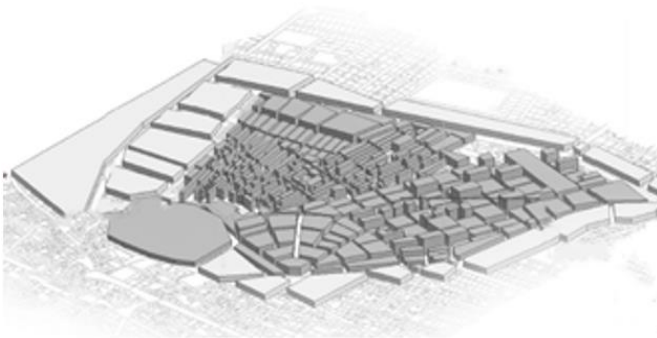
Starting from the need for shelter and the evolution in needs and demands over time, IRC residents started to build their own walls and ceiling in a try to create a 'home'. Building using local materials to formulate a 'place' rather than a 'space', starting with rigid materials and process of building space, and adding social behaviour to the equation to promote it to a place.

People of IRC are the designers and the builders of their environment, thus far, it is an enclosed introverted expansion. The limited boundaries forced the direction of expansion and the typology of the building, yet residents added details in a try to simulate their perception of the liveability of spaces. Every area should have its own characterized regeneration plan under the local circumstances, standing against re-planning is moving backwards but the proper collaborative planning and implementation eventually mean that the area is moving forward. Investing time and energy to understand social needs and work on them to catch up with the rapid development surrounding is worthy, and both good planning and sustainable development are the main points in this process. Planners are the milestone between government and local communities; they are responsible for understanding the two parts of the equation and compromise for the greatest benefits to the greatest number.

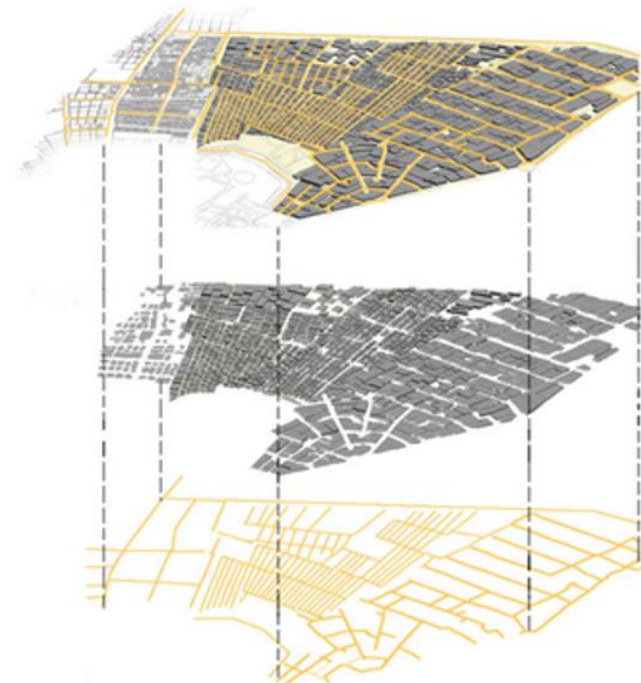
### 4.3 Spatial distribution in Irbid Refugee Camp

In this part, we report the findings of our geographical investigation of the IRC's solid and void distributions. These findings are communicated through precisely designed figures and tables generated by powerful computer models. To assure the quality and comprehensiveness of the offered data, our research process involves both provided maps and direct analysis procedures.

We can notice when studying spaces in Irbid Refugee Camp (IRC) that construction rates are very high compared to open spaces designated for social or economic interactions and other vital activities. The buildings in Irbid camp varied according to their uses to: only residential, commercial only and buildings with mixture of commercial and residential. The high densification of buildings, caused a lack of privacy in homes, low quality of ventilation entering them, in addition to other problems (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Simulation of mass-void in the Irbid Refugee Camp  
Source: Authors



**Figure 9.** Spatial analysis of solid and void on Irbid camp  
Source: Authors

The high ratio of residential buildings and the absence of public space which is reduced to the just internal roads (as shown in Table 2) puts in evidence the unbalanced land use in IRC.

**Table 2.** Percentage of solid and void in Irbid Refugee Camp

Land Use	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Area (%)
Residential	472,965	58.7
Mixed use	79,286	9.8
Utilities	20,880	2.6
Religious	2,380	0.3
Cemetery	15,738	2
Commercial	214,345	26.6
Total area	805,595	100

Source: Authors

Figure 9 shows the limited or the absence of enough space for circulation and gathering as result of the level of crowd and over population in all IRC districts.

### 4.4 Reflections on the built-up of Irbid Refugee Camp

The IRC's diversity of building typologies is demonstrated by the continual extension of existing temporary structures, which is driven by the absence of legal frameworks that allow for diverse architectural implementations. As a result of this scenario, the variety of building shapes is constrained. Regrettably, a significant number of the inhabitations fail to meet criteria in various dimensions, including privacy, comfort, and health concerns.

As mentioned before, IRC growth in habitat units from 1900 (original number of units) to more than 6000 ones in abusive manner and without any process of densification and infrastructure development. The abusive growth represented the continuous implementation of the units using the space around the units and adding other floors. The absence of authority of the municipality on the IRC permits the inhabitants to change the use and shape of their buildings. In fact, there are different illegal forms and typologies of buildings in the IRC.



**Figure 10.** The continuous change of use and shape of buildings the Irbid Refugee Camp  
Source: Authors

Figure 10 shows the undefined structural use of buildings in IRC such it is difficult to imagine a requalification plan without hard interventions. The main issue that many people had modified their habitations with different level of structural definition. Some houses are built in manner that allows rehabilitation interventions.

The necessity of a master plan to define which buildings should be maintained or demolished seems the first step of



reviving or recovery plan in the IRC. The second step is to define the social and economic texture of the IRC. At last, but not least defining the circulation system and how to overcome the difficulties related to the existing narrow alleys.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper tries to define a prediction of the future of IRC and its integration with Irbid city while maintaining IRC identity due to many inhabitants in the IRC connect their permanence in the camp as form of resistance to express their determination to return back to Palestine, in other words, a nostalgic factor that had influenced the planning policies in the past seventy years. As well as providing the inhabitants with the basic services through a requalification project. Requalifying IRC to meet the physical and psychological needs of inhabitants faces some obstacles such as inability to expand horizontally, so the solution will be expanding vertically through build steel structure over the existing building and that creates open spaces that would be landscape zones or gathering area. In addition, changing the function of the buildings which are located on the main road that link Irbid city with IRC from residential buildings to be mixed use buildings so that could help in integration socially and economically. However, social, economic, and political reasons related to particular current situation induced policymaker and planners to exclude the IRC from Irbid masterplan which's mean that a very large part of Irbid city lacks basic services.

Finally, the impossibility of IRC development without the active participation of the original IRC inhabitants among flexible technical choices allowing them to be part of the targeted development. As well as, Gradual self-construction inserted in the municipal plans of development will allow a major participation of refugees producing a collaborative design process which is the base when resolving complex urban issues.

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