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## CAREP – CITERES/EMAM STUDY DAY

30th JUNE 2022 from 9am to 5:15pm

CAREP Paris - 12, rue Raymond Aron - 75013 Paris (Métro 6 Quai de la Gare / Métro 14  
Bibliothèque François Mitterrand)

# “Sustainable cities in the Middle East and North Africa?”

## Argument

Due to the prevalence of today's world ecological stakes and the development challenges in the Arab world in particular, we have witnessed since the 2000s the emergence of a so-called "sustainable" urbanism as well as the institutionalization of sustainable urban development (SUD) in the Maghreb and the Middle East.

The idea that the city should be "produced where it is needed" has a long history in Western thought and has led to the emergence of the hegemonic concept of urban development. The literature in geography and urban studies is now full of examples of cities built in arid areas that were deemed naturally uninhabitable.

Since the concept of sustainable urban development was coined by the Brundtland Report of the United Nations in 1987, it has gradually become a hegemonic concept in the Gramscian sense. In other words, the SUD has generated the "common sense", that is to say the uncritical and partially unconscious way in which the professionals of the sustainable city have now perceived it.

As with any hegemonic concept, this vision has been carried beyond state institutions by certain actors within the civil society, such as private companies. The latter play an important role in the propagation of ideas and ideologies that structure the meaning given to the SUD, such as "green cities" and "eco-districts" for example. However, this conception and representation of the "sustainable city" has favored certain actors over others. Much driven by landscape architects, construction companies, and even the states themselves, who saw it as a way to attract foreign investors or to assert their political authority, the SUD has lost its "ecological embeddedness" (Makhzoumi, 2020; Klinger, 2022). In other words, the dominant



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conception of SUD has done little to promote local approaches and existing expertise in ecological urbanism.

If this observation is meant to be general, it is acutely true in the Arab world. The scientific literature has indeed pointed out at least three obstacles to SUD in the countries of the region: the monopolization of this development by the States with the aim of legitimizing the regimes in place, the virtual absence of a "city diplomacy" in the region likely to place environmental issues more strongly on the political agenda, and a fragmented eco-activism that does not lead to strong pressure networks (Barthel, 2020).

Despite the innovative nature of some projects, sustainable development policies in Arab cities seem to remain largely centralized and dependent on nongovernmental organizations and international aid, a fact that has not escaped the criticism of "green imperialism". Indeed, since Gilbert Rist's pioneering work on "development" as a Western belief (Rist, 1996), it is no longer possible to omit the performative character of these concepts and their various presuppositions, such as social evolutionism, individualism, economism, etc. Sustainable urban development - as promoted by international organizations and large consultancy firms, such as McKinsey, known for having drafted all the "vision plans" of the Gulf countries - reflects a certain understanding of development that more often responds to Western values than to the values and ambitions of local societies.

In architecture, this can also be seen in the architectural and technological choices made in the cities of the Arab world. As the American political theorist Langdon Winner observed as early as the 1980s, artifacts also have politics (Winner, 1999). This observation, which comes from the field of STS (Science and Technology Studies), seems to be equally applicable to the field of urban geography and to urban planning in particular. Since the choices of technologies and techniques used in the construction of so-called "sustainable" cities also embody social relations and power relations, these latter also need to be highlighted and studied.

In this context, our study day seeks to combine analyses from the fields of development studies, science and technology studies, critical political ecology and urban geography around the notion of sustainable urban development in the Maghreb and the Middle East. We will review the elasticity of the concept of sustainable urban development, its appropriation and its impact on public action in the countries of the region. We will also discuss the actors involved in those projects -including the communicational strategies of legitimation of political actors- as well as the viability of local and citizen initiatives in the cities of the Arab world that propose alternative paths. Finally, we will also look at the proliferation of so-called "smart cities" to which the label of sustainability is often attached. But are they sustainable?



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## Program

**9am | Reception of the participants and the audience**

**9:15am | Presentation of the objectives of the Study Day**

By **Isabel Ruck** (CAREP Paris) and **Roman Stadnicki** (University of Tours / CITERES - EMAM)

**9:30am - 11:00am | First panel: What is a sustainable city? Theoretical and critical reflections applied to the case of the Arab world**

Moderation: **Myriam Ababsa**, CAREP Paris

- **Pierre-Arnaud BARTHEL**, AFD: *Can we talk about "sustainable cities" in the Arab world?*
- **Lana SALMAN**, Harvard University: *Contesting the post-revolution city: sustainability and durability of politics in Tunisia*
- **Jala MAKHZOUMI**, American University of Beirut: *Nature in/of cities: A landscape framing of Urban Sustainability*

**11:00am - 12:30pm | Second panel: Towards a sustainable urbanism in the Arab world?**

Moderation: **Roméo Carabelli**, University of Tours / CITERES - EMAM

- **Thibaut KLINGER**, Associate researcher at CITERES - EMAM: *Sustainable cities in Oman? A geopolitical issue.*
- **Myriam ABABSA**, Associate Researcher at CAREP Paris: *The bets of the Amman climate strategy (Zero Emission 2050)*
- **Eric VERDEIL** and **Alix CHAPLAIN**, Sciences Po Paris / CERI: *Diversification and hybridization of electrical configurations in the Middle East in the context of crisis*
- **Abderrahim KASSOU**, School of Architecture and Landscape of Casablanca: *Urban planning and sustainability in Casablanca*

**12:30pm - 2:00pm | Lunch break**

**2:00pm - 3:30pm | Third panel: Citizen initiatives and urban sustainability in the Arab world**

Moderation: **Roman Stadnicki**, University of Tours/ CITERES-EMAM



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- **Bénédicte FLORIN**, University of Tours / CITERES - EMAM: *Exemplary recyclers: ambiguity of discourse and perverse inclusion of waste collectors (Cairo, Casablanca)*
- **Mohamed AYOUB**, Executive Director of the NAHNOO association (Lebanon): *Mobilizing local communities to free public spaces in Lebanon*
- **Jalel BOUSLAH**, Co-founder of the association Tounes Clean Up: *Environmental protection in Tunisia and the role of civil society*

### 3:30pm - 5pm | Fourth panel: Smart cities, sustainable cities?

Moderation: **Isabel Ruck**, CAREP Paris

- **Emmanuel EVENO**, University of Toulouse: *Between sustainable city and smart city*
- **Laure ASSAF**, New York University Abu Dhabi: *Vocabularies of urban development in Abu Dhabi: Discourses and practices of the city*
- **Gökçe GÜNEL**, Rice University: *Masdar City: A spaceship in the desert?*

### 5pm | Conclusion



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## Participants

### **ABABSA, Myriam**

Myriam Ababsa is a geographer specializing in the Middle East, a research associate at the French Institute of the Near East and the CAREP Paris and works as a consultant for the World Bank. Her work focuses on public policies for land use planning, urban policies, housing and land in Syria and Jordan. She contributed to the preparation of the *Amman Climate Strategy 2018* as well as to the preparation of urban growth scenarios for Amman-Russeifa-Zarqa.

### **ASSAF, Laure**

Laure Assaf is Assistant Professor of Arab Crossroads Studies and Anthropology at the New York University in Abu Dhabi and a research associate at CEFREPA, Kuwait. She holds a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Paris Nanterre and specializes in the Gulf region. Her research, which focuses on youth, the city and migration in the United Arab Emirates, has been published in the journals *City*, *Population, Space and Place*, *Arabian Humanities*, *Echogéo*; and *Les Cahiers d'EMAM*.

### **AYOUB, Mohammad**

Mohammad Ayoub is one of the founders and current president of NAHNOO, a Lebanese NGO that has been operating since 2009 as a platform for research, capacity building and advocacy for participatory policy making, working towards an inclusive society. An activist at heart and driven by the desire to develop strong communities and dissolve sectarianism, Mohammad has led several high-profile awareness campaigns for the development of public spaces, the promotion of good governance and the preservation of cultural heritage.

### **BARTHEL, Pierre-Arnaud**

Pierre-Arnaud Barthel is a former lecturer in urban planning at the French Institute of Urban Planning (University of Paris-Est). He joined the French Development Agency in 2014 as a project manager in the *Urban Development, Planning and Housing Division*, before becoming the head of the *Capacity Building Unit* in August 2020 (now called Public Transformation and Citizens Division). His work focuses on supporting project owners in their preparation public policies in foreign countries by providing them with expertise in organizational transformation, engineering of citizen participation and methodology and design of public policy. Pierre-Arnaud has written several articles and participated in collective publications dedicated to the Arab Mediterranean countries.

### **BOUSLAH, Jalel**

Jalel Bouslah is a legal consultant in corporate law and secretary general of the association *Tounes Clean Up*, a Tunisian NGO for the preservation of the environment. He is also vice-



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president of *Tunisie Recyclage*, a Tunisian association for waste sorting and recycling, and vice-president of *Soli & Green*, a Tunisian association for reforestation and the fight against environmental disasters.

### **CARABELLI, Romeo**

Romeo Carabelli is an architect and geographer. After an early career as an architect in Italy, Southern Africa and the Balkans, Romeo focused his research on the processes of patrimonial (re)territorialisation of cultural heritage and, more specifically, on the contemporary arrangements of dispersed and multinational productions. He animates and manages one of the 4 teams of his laboratory. His research activities focus on structured urban landscapes and heritage architecture and planning in France, in the Mediterranean basin and in the global South. His current research fields are located in the Centre-Val de Loire region, in the Western Maghreb and in the geographical area of Mandatory Palestine.

### **CHAPLAIN, Alix**

Alix Chaplain is a doctoral student at CERI (Sciences Po Paris) and studies in her thesis the hybridization of electrical configurations in Lebanon.

### **EVENO, Emmanuel**

Professor of Geography and Vice President of the Board of Directors of the University of Toulouse Jean Jaures. His research focuses on the relationship between cities and information and communication technologies (ICT). His work analyses both, the uses made by urban authorities of ICTs in their governance of the city, and the social uses of ICTs by urban populations.

### **FLORIN, Bénédicte**

Bénédicte Florin is a lecturer in geography at the University of Tours and a researcher at CITERES, *Équipe Monde arabe et Méditerranée* (EMAM). Her work focuses on the Arab world and, in Cairo, on residential mobility, urbanity, social housing and closed neighborhoods. Since 2007, she has been interested in waste collectors, waste management systems and public service in Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey. More recently, she works on scrap metal dealers in the Paris region.

### **GÜNEL, Gökçe**

Gökçe Günel is an assistant professor of anthropology at Rice University (Texas). Her most recent book *Spaceship in the Desert: Energy, Climate Change and Urban Design in Abu Dhabi* (Duke University Press, 2019) focuses on the construction of renewable energy and clean technology infrastructure in the United Arab Emirates, with a particular focus on the Masdar City project.



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### **KASSOU, Abderrahim**

Abderrahim Kassou is an architect and urban planner. He graduated DPLG from the School of Architecture of Paris La Villette, and holds a degree in Anthropology from the University of Paris VIII Saint Denis and a DEA in Geography and Planning from the University François Rabelais in Tours. He has been practicing architecture as a freelancer for nearly 20 years and has been the author of several projects for the rehabilitation of historical monuments, cultural facilities, and urban development, among others. In addition to his work as an architect, Abderrahim is the former president of the *Casamemoire* association, and active in several associations including *Icomos*, the *Moroccan Forum of Alternatives and Architecture & Development*. He is also a lecturer at the School of Architecture in Casablanca.

### **KLINGER, Thibaut**

Thibaut Klinger is a graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure and a high school teacher. In 2020, he defended a thesis in geography on land use planning and national identity in the Sultanate of Oman at the University of Tours, which was published by De Gruyter in 2021.

### **MAKHZOUMI, Jala**

Jala is a landscape practitioner who applies an ecological, community-centered framework to development, landscape conservation, and post-conflict recovery. She is the President of the Lebanese Landscape Association and co-founder of UNIT44 Consultancy, which provides architecture, landscape architecture and ecological planning services. Jala received the Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe Award 2021 from the International Federation of Landscape Architecture for her outstanding contribution to landscape architecture practice and research.

### **RUCK, Isabel**

Isabel Ruck is a political scientist by training and Middle East specialist who is heading the research and scientific coordination at the CAREP Paris. Isabel leads the "Ecology & Politics" research axis of the center.

### **SALMAN, Lana**

Lana Salman is a specialist in international development and the politics of urban protest. She is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Middle East Initiative at Harvard University. Her book-in-progress manuscript *Sidewalk democracy: governing popular urbanism in Tunisia* argues that Tunisia's political modernity has been articulated with and against the governance of its popular neighborhoods. In the fall of 2022, she will begin her new position as a Marie Curie Fellow in the Department of Conflict and Development Studies at Ghent University.

### **STADNICKI, Roman**

Geographer is a senior lecturer at the University of Tours in delegation to the French National Research Council (2021-2023) and member of the Arab and Mediterranean World Research Team (UMR CITERES). He has co-authored of the *Abécédaire de la ville au Maghreb et au Moyen-Orient* (PUFR, 2020). His previous collective book, *Villes arabes, cités rebelles* (Éditions du Cygne, 2015) focused on the effects of the post-2011 political changes on



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urbanization and urban policies, which he analyzed from Cairo, where he piloted CEDEJ's "city & sustainable development" cluster for 4 years. His current work focuses on the role of image and communication in the urban production of Gulf countries.

### **VERDEIL, Éric**

Éric Verdeil is a professor of geography and urban studies at Sciences Po Paris and researcher at the CERI. His research focuses on the political ecology of urban infrastructures, which he studies particularly in Lebanon and the Arab countries. He currently directs a National Research Agency project called *Hybridelec*, which seeks to understand the socio-technical diversity of electrical infrastructures from a comparative perspective between India, several sub-Saharan African countries and the Middle East.