

Provisional Settlements and Urban Resilience: The Transformation of Refugee Camps into Cities

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Abstract : The world is now confronting a widespread urban phenomenon: refugee camps, which have mostly been established in 'rushing mode,' pointing toward affording temporary settlements for refugees that provide them with minimum levels of safety, security and protection from harsh weather conditions within a very short time period. In fact, those emergency settlements are transforming into permanent ones since time is a decisive factor in terms of construction and camps' age. These play an essential role in transforming their temporary character into a permanent one that generates deep modifications to the city's territorial structure, shaping a new identity and creating a contentious change in the city's form and history. To achieve a better understanding for the transformation of refugee camps, this study is based on a mixed-methods approach: the qualitative approach explores different refugee camps and analyzes their transformation process in terms of population density and the changes to the city's territorial structure and urban features. The quantitative approach employs a statistical regression analysis as a reliable prediction of refugees' satisfaction within the Zaatari camp in order to predict its future transformation. Obviously, refugees' perceptions of their current conditions will affect their satisfaction, which plays an essential role in transforming emergency settlements into permanent cities over time. The test basically discusses five main themes: the access and readiness of schools, the dispersion of clinics and shopping centers; the camp infrastructure, the construction materials, and the street networks. The statistical analysis showed that Syrian refugees were not satisfied with their current conditions inside the Zaatari refugee camp and that they had started implementing changes according to their needs, desires, and aspirations because they are conscious about the fact of their prolonged stay in this settlement. Also, the case study analyses showed that neglecting the fact that construction takes time leads settlements being created with below-minimum standards that are deteriorating and creating 'slums,' which lead to increased crime rates, suicide, drug use and diseases and deeply affect cities' urban tissues. For this reason, recognizing the 'temporary-eternal' character of those settlements is the fundamental concept to consider refugee camps from the beginning as definite permanent cities. This is the key factor to minimize the trauma of displacement on both refugees and the hosting countries. Since providing emergency settlements within a short time period does not mean using temporary materials, having a provisional character or creating 'makeshift cities.'

Keywords : refugee, refugee camp, temporary, Zaatari

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