RETHINKING THE CONCEPT OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD: AN ENABLING OR A HOUSING MODEL?

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Abstract
Aiming at achieving the utopian housing scheme, contemporary housing studies have exhibited an increasing interest in the concept of the neighborhood; its design, components, and relationship with the surrounding. The concept of the neighborhood, as introduced by Perry in 1929 is considered a utopian approach that seeks to create a residential community, socially and spatially, in which the sense of community as existed in pre-industrial cities prevails. It arose as one of the modern reformist approaches that appeared in response to the urban ills that characterized the modern capitalist society such as social disintegration, inequality, and injustice in resource distribution and life chances. Likewise, aiming at achieving the socio-spatial ideal, many postmodern approaches emerged to create the ideal residential community; most prominently is the movement of “New Urbanism.” But did these utopian approaches succeed as community-housing ideals in providing appropriate housing (spatially) and realizing the sense of community (socially) at the same time? This research attempts to read critically the concept of contemporary neighborhood, particularly the movement of “New Urbanism” in terms of its ability to fulfil its aims in producing a residential coherent community, socially and spatially. It compares the production mechanisms, decision-making processes, and distribution and nature of rights in New Urbanism with the concept of residential communities in traditional Islamic built environments. It is concluded that, adopting capitalist production mechanisms characterized by centralized domination, hierarchical power structure, and lack of residents enablement, New Urbanism was no more than a spatial solution that produced residential compounds (spatially) rather than enabled communities (socially). As such, it is merely a housing scheme that failed to be qualified as a socio-spatial ideal, as targeted.

Keywords: The neighborhood; khitta; Community; New Urbanism; Rights; Spatial; Social; Levels of the built environment

INTRODUCTION
In its modern definition, the term “housing” embodies the meaning of providing accommodation or shelter by one party to another. As such the housing process involves two parties: the producer and the beneficiary or the user. The concept of housing has become widely recognized in urban studies in light of the urban problems that followed the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century in Europe, such as homelessness, a situation that required intervention from the State to provide appropriate housing to those who cannot afford it. However, in spite of such efforts, the problem still persists today and even increased in scope and severity. According to the United Nations statistics, the number of those who live in slums rose by 55 million people since the year 2000; in some cities, up to 80% of the population live in slums. What is more is that by 2030, 40% of the world’s population, or about three billion people will need proper housing and access to basic services such as water and sanitation. This means that 96,150 new affordable residential units have to be supplied every day or about 4,000 units every hour until the...
year 2030 to cover this need (UN-Habitat, 2014a). Such statistics are a clear manifestation of the crisis and the malfunctioning of this urban sector.

Consequently, the concept of housing had to be dealt with from a more comprehensive perspective; as an urban question that is related to many urban social and economic problems prevailing in capitalist societies. The housing question is not anymore an isolated matter that can be tackled quantitatively by providing more housing units; it is a question of the housing and the housed together; i.e. a socio-spatial question. In light of the emergence of the Modern State or the “Welfare State” that has become responsible for providing the basic services to its citizens, including housing, and in light of the rising of many social problems such as social disintegration and poverty resulting from inequality and injustice in the distribution of resources and life chances, produced by modernity and capitalism and led in turn to the emergence of the housing crisis in capitalist societies, calls mounted in an attempt to bring attention to societal issues such as social justice, freedom and democracy as a crucial part of the socio-spatial question of housing.

As Engels in 1872 has attributed the housing crisis (The housing question) to the capitalist system per se (Murphy and Hourani, 2013), several modern reformist approaches occurred seeking to provide socio-spatial housing solutions, most important of which are those calling to achieve the sense of coherent, utopian community that is enabled, i.e. has the power of decision making within its residential area. Examples of such approaches are those of Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, the Garden City of Howard, and the neighbourhood unit of Perry in 1929. Through these approaches, the concept of the neighborhood arose as a utopian socio-spatial housing model that deals with the housing question as related to some social issues. Today this concept is still in use (with different foundations) in several post-modern approaches, most well-known is the New Urbanism movement that seeks to create the concept of utopian community within its neighborhoods. However, were these approaches able to provide socio-spatial housing solutions, i.e. provide proper housing for citizens and fulfill the sense of enabled community at the same time? In other words, did the modern neighborhood and later the contemporary (postmodern) neighborhood succeed in developing an enabling socio-spatial housing model, or is it no more than a physical housing (spatial) model per se?

This research aims to critically read and evaluate the concept of the contemporary neighborhood in terms of its ability to achieve its goals as an enabling socio-spatial housing model, with a special focus on the movement of New Urbanism as an example, due to the movement’s widespread and acceptance worldwide. Scrutinizing the history of housing, it can be noted that the concept of housing was not prevalent in the pre-modern age, specifically in traditional Islamic cities. This brings us to the question that: why housing crisis and related urban social problems did not occur in the past whereas they are today of the most discussed issues locally and globally? The main reason for this, as this research argues, lies in two main changes associated with the emergence of capitalism and modernity. Those are, first, changes in the mechanisms of housing production and related decision-making process; second, changes in the agency (party) responsible for the production of the built environment, including housing. To understand this transformation, the research scrutinizes the built environment production process at its roots, following a comparative methodology between residential communities in traditional Islamic cities and the transformation that took place in the age of modernity and capitalism in terms of the production mechanisms and some related concepts, mainly the decision making process and rights distribution, and its impact on the housing question, socially and spatially. Thereby, the residential communities in Islamic cities and their production mechanisms will be explored first to be followed by the transformation that took place, clarifying the reasons of that transformation and its impact on the concept of the neighbourhood.
RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES IN TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC CITIES

The territorial structure of traditional Islamic cities is made up of a group of contiguous and overlapped spaces known as (khittat) (singular khitta) (the closest term in English is “territory”), where each khitta is owned and controlled by a certain party. The dead-end street and all abutting houses is a khitta and the residential neighborhood (hara) is a bigger khitta. Khitta, as used by historians in their manuscripts about Islamic cities, is indicative of control; it is a defined area of influence controlled and managed by a specific party (Akbar, 1992). The dead-end street is in effect owned and controlled by residents of abutting houses which doors open onto it thus constituting a khitta; the through street is a khitta owned and controlled by all passers-by collectively, and so on (Akbar, 1988, 1992). Substantial evidence of khitta's control and autonomy is the gates at their mouths.

The word khitta in Arabic is derived from the root verb khattah which implies possession of a place by the person for himself, with the ruler’s consent. Residential communities in Islamic cities constitute the greater part of those territories or khitat, where they interact physically and in terms of their associated rights, i.e. socially. They are thus territory-based communities.

As to the production mechanisms of those territorial communities, they were relatively self-directed and applied. Residents themselves mark out (ikhtitat) their houses and neighborhoods, however, with the ruler’s consent. It was, in today’s terms, a decentralized mechanism with bottom-up decisions without any external intervention. The decision making process was in the hands of the people themselves, at their sites, where the ruler’s permission was sought only as to the location of the khitta and not in determining its internal organization. Ibn Manzur (a prominent Arabic linguist, died 711 H.) states in that respect: “the property is territorialized by a man in an unowned land who demarcates it and builds over it, this is if it was approved by the ruler for a certain group of Muslims to territorialize properties in a specific location and build their houses on it, as did in al-Kufa, al-Basrah and Baghdad” (vol.1, p.858). Al-Baladhuri (d. 279H.) in his description of al-Basrah, mentioned that: “…the people marked out and built their houses…” (p.342). Also, Abu Yusef (d. 182H.) relates about al-Kufa that “people marked out al-Kufa and settled in it” (p.30). In the same respect, al-Ya’qubi mentioned about settling in al-Kufa that “…Yazid bin Abdullah marked out the area towards the desert, and Bajla marked out around that” (vol.2, pp.150-151). Thus, territories and their internal spaces of streets, squares (rihab) and dead-end streets were owned and controlled by their users without any external intervention from the higher authorities, for example. They enjoyed autonomy and freedom in decision making. In al-Kufa, for example, each tribe had an independent territory (khitta) that includes multiple functions to serve its residents such as a mosque, a market and a cemetery; it was like a multi-functional neighborhood, in the contemporary sense. Streets between khitta defined the external boundaries of the khitta (Akbar, 1992).

To understand these mechanisms and their operation in the production and management of Islamic residential communities, a case study (nazila) will be presented from historical Islamic jurisprudence books. It was reported that if a man owned a house in a through street which back faces a dead-end street, and he wanted to open a door in the back of his house that opens onto the dead-end street so that passers-by in the through street can reach the dead-end street, then he is now allowed. An-Nawawi (d. 676 H.) justified that in his book Al-Majmou' by stating that: “if the door of the house opens to the street and its back to the alley, and he opened a door from the house to the alley, the case is looked at: if the door is opened to pass through it to the alley, then it is not permitted as he granted himself the right of istitraq in an alley that is owned by its residents and he has no right in its driveway …” (vol. 13, pp. 411-412). Ibn Qudamah in his book

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1 The reader might think that the term "bottom-up" as a mechanism of decision making in Islamic residential communities embodies a positive meaning versus the "Top-down" mechanism that embodies a negative connotation. The social and physical structure in Islamic cities is a non-hierarchical structure that is devoid of levels of decision-making; there is no top or bottom level. These terms are used here because they are very common in the field of urban planning and sociology, thus they are not intended to be used here in their precise meaning which reflects the vertical structure of their capitalist society.
Al-Mughni (of the Hanbali school) avers that “... if the house door was to the street and the back of his house to the alley which is not through street, and he wanted to open a door to the alley to get the right of use, it is not allowed as he has no right in the alley which is owned by its residents” (vol. 4, pp.570-71). In other words, if the owner of the house with two doors wanted to enable people to pass through to the dead-end alley, then he is not allowed because such an action grants the right of istitraq to someone who does not have this right, thus increasing the number of passers-by or users of the dead-end street.

Highlighting what an-Nawawi reported in this case that “the alley is owned by its people,” and “the man has no right in it,” and l‘bn Qudamah’s saying that “he has no right in the alley,” the issue of property rights is clearly stressed here and its regulative quality of people’s relationships among each other and to the place. That is, the production process of Islamic built environment and its management is in principle governed by a structure of rights derived from Shari‘a (Islamic legal system) that is associated with the place to regulate its relationships with other places (e.g. property rights and associated right of control, right of istitraq). Let us name these rights “spatial rights.” There is also a structure of rights that regulates people’s relationships with each other and as related to their properties, which in turn prevents domination of one party over the other, such as the rights derived from the prophet tradition “No harm, no reciprocal harm.” These rights will be referred to here as “social rights.” The resident has a right in his house as a khitta, and he has also rights in the street to which his house door opens. Similarly, the house has rights, and the dead-end street has rights, and so on. Those rights are enabling rights that grant their parties power of decision making in their respective sites (Al-Lahham, 2005). The dead-end street in Islamic cities was owned by its people who have rights of control and use over it, thus decisions regarding any physical changes in the dead-end street were in the hands of its people themselves. Their permission has to be sought before any physical action can continue. As mentioned in the above case (nazila), permission of the alley’s residents has to be sought to undertake the changes. In other words, decisions emanated from residents without any external intervention from the ruler or his representatives. This enabled residents in their territories and granted such territories great autonomy in their production and management processes, and connected people together into a coherent community. Hence, decision-making mechanisms in Islamic residential khitat were enabling consensus-based mechanisms without any external intervention.

The Islamic city can thus be visualized as comprised of a large group of relatively independent spatial territories (khitat), however, they are overlapped due to the overlapped circles of their respective spatial and social rights (fig. 1). The party who owns a house in an alley is a partner in the party in control of the alley, and a partner in the party who uses the through street, or of an adjacent alley, and so on. Thereby, the Islamic city is composed of two layers: spatial layer and social layer. Both layers are intertwined because rights, including social and spatial rights, regulate and interact with both layers, producing proper physical-social solutions. The spatial khitat form independent khitat sometimes and sometimes overlapping ones which support the city’s physical/social structure, enhances its cohesion, and prevents it from turning into fragmented, mosaic city/society divided into isolated communities behind closed walls, as the case in contemporary gated communities.

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2 Istitraq right determines the rights of all residents in the dead-end street according to location of house doors in the road. It is not permissible for the party whose house is near the mouth of the street to object to the actions of the owner of the house at the end of the road if the first party is not affected by the second as his house is remote from the latter’s house. Izz bin ‘Abd as-Salam explored this principle as “doors that open onto dead-end streets indicate the partnership in these streets up to the door of each house, so that the first is a partner from the mouth of the street up to his first house door, and the second is a partner from the beginning of the street up to his second door, so as the third and the fourth till the one at the end of the street become a partner from the beginning of the street to the last door, and has solely the right of what is beyond these doors to the end of the street, according to the doctrine” (vol. 2, p. 118).

3 For more on the concept of damage, see (Akbar, 1992; Al-Lahham, 2005).
In one case (*nazila*), some people had dead end alley onto which their house doors open as well as the backside of their neighbour’s house which has no access to the alley, however, he had an old covered septic tank attached to his house’s wall and had a conduit that comes out of his house. The neighbour did not use the septic tank and the conduit for a long time, and later he wanted to use it, but the people of the alley did not allow him. Their decision was ruled out and the septic tank continued as it has the right of precedence in the alley (spatial right) (al-Wansharisi, vol.9, p.32). In this case, and in spite of the autonomy of both adjacent *khитat*, they overlapped in terms of their rights through the septic tank, prompting the owner of the septic tank who is a partner in his alley to negotiate with the party of the alley in which his septic tank is, thus the two adjacent territories (*khитat*) were not isolated, but intertwined, physically and rights wise. Those rights were self-enforcing except in case of disputes between involved parties where the judge’s rule is mandatory for all parties concerned. In that sense, rights in Islamic cities organized the relationship between adjacent territories (*khитat*) and their residents.

By enabling people through granting them the necessary power derived from their rights, residents were able to produce physical solutions from within their sites that were commensurate with their needs, values, and specific conditions. As each party in the residential *khитта* is aware of his rights in his site as well as others’ rights, this resulted in a physical/spatial structure in which vertical relationships between parties were reduced to the minimum, if not completely diminished. No domination existed between parties as well as no external intervention. The enabling rights (social and spatial) direct the interaction between the spatial and social layers and regulate them; they perform through the enabled party to produce and reproduce the place. In other words, the two layers, through the structure of rights, are in a mutual ever-interacting process. To understand this more profoundly, the built environment has to be analysed at its different levels, as contended by this research.

![Territorial structure (*khитат*) in an old district of Tunisia. The circles do not denote the exact boundaries of the *khитат*, but only indicate the overlapping between these *khитат* in terms of their spatial and social rights (Source: Author)](image-url)
LEVELS OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment, in general, can be viewed as consisting of three levels or structures: first, the manifested structure which comprises the end-products as streets, neighborhoods, buildings and alike. Second, the operative structure which includes the economic and administrative systems, as well as people’s customs and traditions. Those are relatively dynamic. Thirdly, the imperceptible structure which is the deep level that includes power and rights distribution, mechanisms of decision making processes, and alike. The three levels are interrelated in a manner determined by the type of its built environment, specifically its production processes and decision making mechanisms.

The Islamic built environment is characterized by perpetual overlapping and interaction between its levels as if they are three intertwined circles; they represent structures or circles of exercitation (operation) and not levels of domination (with the hierarchical meaning of the word) (fig. 2). The structure of rights (social and spatial) at the imperceptible level interacts with the spatial layer (territorial/ khitta structure) in the manifested level, and with the economic and social structures in the operative level, thus there is no domination of one level over the other. Mechanisms of decision making (from the imperceptible level) of Islamic built environment production were self-employed by the parties concerned themselves. The party in its territory (khitta) (from the manifested level) enjoys social rights, also his property enjoys spatial/property rights (imperceptible level) where both structures of rights interact leading to the production of physical solutions that fit their operating social and economic systems (operative level), as if the acting party is the main axis that connects the three levels of the built environment together, thus constituting the connection between their centres (fig. 3). That unification of the acting party in the three levels led to overlapping, non-hierarchical socio-spatial structure that rendered its society with equality and justice, and accomplished a state of equilibrium clear of socio-spatial housing crisis such as that worrying the world today.

Figure 2. Overlap and interaction between the three levels of Islamic built environments. The size and organization of the circles (levels) are diagrammatic and not definite. They are defined by the relationships between the three levels in the site itself (Source: Author)
TRANSFORMATION OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Accompanied by the emergence of capitalism and modernity as a corrective progressive project in the eighteenth century, the concept of the modern State as the rational, organizational party responsible for fulfilling the project of modernity transpired. The modern State was founded on principles of sovereignty, legitimacy, and representation to form a “superstructure” independent from its people, however representing them. Hence, it holds the higher legislative authority that helps it protect its people’s good and manages its affairs. It possesses the power that conferred it rights to intervene in all aspects of society under the name of organization. To protect its sovereignty and authority the State enacted laws and regulations which it views as serving the society’s general good, also it expanded its circles of acceptance (control) through the built environment.

Stemming from its confidence in the concept of environmental determinism based on science and rationality which embodies the idea that changing the built environment will inevitably change its society, known as social engineering, the State since 1870 converted streets and railroads into public properties and appropriated the infrastructure and other related services. This gave the modern State a legitimate cover to intervene in and control the built environment, a matter that marked out the transformation in the production of the built environment and related decision making process. Whereas the decision making mechanisms in Islamic built environments were self-implemented with residents at their centre, each in its site, it turned under the modern State into a centralized mechanism, with the State at its centre. Under the emblem of organization and social engineering (changing society into a rational, organized society) and provision of urban development, the State seized the responsibility of built environment production including the infrastructure from the hands of the society to be the sole party responsible of them, and the people are subject to its dictated laws and regulations that is stemmed, as claimed, from its commitment to their public good. On the basis of its patriarchal role, the modern State became the “Welfare State” that is responsible for many aspects of its society’s life such as education, health, housing, provision of infrastructure, urban planning, city management, and alike.

4 At the end of the Ottoman Empire, lands owned by all Muslims collectively in the Arab world began to be converted into State lands owned and controlled by the State. Following the example of European countries, the Ottoman Empire issued a set of laws and regulations, among which are the Ottoman land system of 1858 in which lands were categorized into five types: owned lands, Amiri lands or State lands, waqf (endowment) lands, vacant lands left for public benefit such as grazing fields, and dead lands which are unowned and unutilized lands far from the urban areas with at least one and a half miles, and not left for public use. Later on, the Syrian civil law of 1949 has changed dead lands or vacant lands into State lands, so as the Iraqi law of 1938. In Egypt, revivification of dead land has been cancelled gradually, however, in 1964 the entire system of revivification of dead lands was cancelled and all dead lands were converted into State lands (Akbar, 1992, p. 117, 131).
Accordingly, most aspects of people's lives became politicized, and the State became the reference in formulating and allocating their rights and duties, part of which is their rights and role in the built environment. The State became centralized, responsible for the people and their built environment, i.e. the social and the spatial.

To sum up, the transformation occurred as a result of two main changes, first, changing the decision making mechanisms of built environment production, and second, changing the party responsible of built environment production. As a result, the built environment has transformed from a residents-based, self-produced environment to a built environment that is produced by an external party, and residents themselves were transformed from being an "intraneous" enabled party involved in the decision making process of its built environment production into a passive party that is detached from the process and acts as a recipient only, turning the State into the central party in control of the built environment production. The crisis started here; the socio-spatial housing crisis.

Looking at this transformation from the perspective of the levels of the built environment, it can be noted that these levels have been transformed from being overlapping circles in the Islamic built environment into separate levels that are correlated through one-way hierarchical relationships; from the imperceptible level to the manifested level, a matter that resulted in the dominance of the deep level (imperceptible) over the lower levels (operative and manifested) (fig. 4). As the State is based on concepts of modern power and authority, the power structure and related enactment of laws and regulations (at the imperceptible level) were in control of the operative as well as the manifested levels. Hence, one of the main criteria of obtaining a state of equilibrium in the built environment, which is the interrelationships and perpetual interaction between the three levels of the built environment, has diminished, leading to a state of instability in the contemporary built environment, socially and spatially. This transformation and separation between the levels of the built environment has been associated with another separation, that is the dispersal of the axis of these levels. Instead of having one pivotal party linking the three levels and their interactions together, as in Islamic built environments, this was dispersed in contemporary built environments into several parties controlled by a one external, dominant party. Residents as a party are in the manifested level, professionals, politicians, economists, and alike are in the operative level, and the State in the imperceptible level. As if rights were scattered among different parties instead of being concentrated in the hands of a one core party. Each level has its party instead of one pivotal party that links all levels together. Accordingly, rights distribution has been changed and consequently societal power structure, which led to rendering the relationship between these parties as hierarchical, with the State holding the supreme power. Seizing rights from the previously central party (residents) into a one dominant centralized party led to dis-enablement of residents in the decision making process of built environment production. However, how does this transformation affect the concept of housing in the contemporary built environment?
As part of its role of society upkeep and provision of basic living services, the concept of housing has shifted from production of houses by the resident himself based on his enabling rights to a basic service that the State provides. The production process of houses has shifted from being a self-based process disseminated among all residents into a centralized process controlled by the State. This led to intensifying the process to become an increasingly heavy burden that cannot be handled easily, thus arose as an urban crisis. First signs of this crisis have begun to occur in the nineteenth century, in the wake of the industrial revolution and its subsequent social, environmental, health problems, and decline in the standard of living, especially of housing. In these circumstances, housing problems, physically and socially, started to escalate. Calls to resolve this crisis have arisen; unions were formed calling for providing citizens with adequate housing and considered it as a right; the right to housing. This right is recognized in many national constitutions and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In other words, what people are demanding today as a right that the State has to realize was in traditional Islamic cities a self-based, enabling right in the hands of the residents themselves, however, that right has been transferred with the transformation of the built environment production from the people to the State, thus residents became an external party, calling to regain that right. Such a right did not only shift in the party associated with it, but also in its nature. It changed from being an enabling right in Islamic societies that grants its holder the power to decision making into housing right per se that enables its holder on the manifested level only, with no power to decision making in the operative and imperceptible levels. Consequently, many studies and approaches emerged to resolve this crisis, ranging from merely housing approaches that dealt quantitatively with the problem, aiming at producing the largest possible number of housing units, i.e. perform on the manifested level solely and is controlled by the imperceptible level through housing policies and schemes set by the State, to more comprehensive reformist approaches concerned with the physical housing and its residents together, thus focused on how to create residential communities characterized by social cohesion instead of social disintegration that concerns many scholars today. The concept of the neighbourhood came to the forth as a result.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD: IS IT A SOCIO-SPATIAL HOUSING MODEL?

Many urban social reform approaches that emerged since the 19th century attributed the urban ills that dominated the capitalist society socially and spatially to capitalism per se and its centralized decision making mechanisms, or according to this research, to the transformation that took place in the production process of the built environment. Several of these approaches were founded on the rejection of some aspects of modern capitalist society and aim to realize the concept of the collaborative community characterized by cooperative social relationships among its residents, where decision making is in the hands of the community and not with any external party (Hall, 1996; Friedmann, 1987). Of these approaches are those of Charles Fourier and Robert Own which stressed the ability of the built environment to affect its residents and create the good community through the modern concept of environmental determinism. Similarly, Howard introduced through his theory of the Garden City a utopian reformist program that

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5 The right to housing is the economic, social, and cultural right to adequate housing and shelter. This right was discussed at the 1996 Habitat meeting in Istanbul where the steps required by governments to “promote, protect and ensure the full and progressive realization of the right to adequate housing” were identified in paragraph 61 of the agenda (UN Habitat, 2014b).

6 Fourier introduced the idea of “Phalanstere” as a new model for small self-contained communities. Each community is comprised of a group of four story buildings, where the rich live in the upper floors while the poor live in the lower floors. The population of each community ideally consists of 1,620 people working together for mutual benefit. Robert Owen used the idea of “Phalanstery” which means “love of humanity” to improve the conditions of workers and the poor. He founded a number of ideal self-contained cooperative settlements in Britain and America based on his idea (Alexander, 1992). Owen’s community consists of 1,200 people, living in a square-shaped area of 1000 to 1500 hectares so that each group lives in one square-shaped building with a shared kitchen and a public room, and each family has its private apartment. Owen’s ideas failed when implemented (New World Encyclopedia).
includes the creation of self-contained, -managed, and -governed settlements which he called “social city,” characterized by the spirit of the community, cooperation, and liberation especially from the large-scale State intervention. These communities can be produced gradually through a series of housing cooperatives. Howard claimed that his model offers an alternative social economic system that can replace capitalism and bureaucratic centralized socialism (Alexander, 1992). Evolving from the Garden City and embracing the concept of modern determinism, C. Perry introduced the concept of the neighbourhood unit in 1929. It aimed at finding or, to be more accurate, “industrializing” the good community within a defined territorial space. Hence, all the above approaches were, as claimed, socio-spatial solutions in which the physical housing schemes were but a step towards creating the requested sort of community.

Relating these approaches to the argument of this research, they seem to be calling for returning to the mechanisms of built environment production before the transformation. They call for adopting self-based production mechanisms, applied by the residents themselves without intervention from any external authority. That includes the exclusion of the State as an external party from the decision making process and transferring the capacity of decision making to the residents to be the in intrusive party responsible for the built environment production and reproduction. Hence, the three levels of the built environment are to be re-joined as overlapping circles with continuous interactions between them and the enabled residents as the pivotal party of all of them. However, these modern approaches did not propose any mechanisms of how to reverse the transformation and re-transfer the rights from the State to residents.

In the light of the modern State’s sovereignty and basic underpinning concepts of power and authority (Al-Lahham, 2005), these reformist approaches were unable to pull power and capacity to decision making from the State and alter the societal power structure, thus could not change the imperceptible level and its central party. Accordingly, their schemes turned out to be partial, hypothetical, and unrealizable. In practice, as employed in some housing communities, they were reduced to mere self-managed gated housing compounds, governed by certain agreed-upon rules set by the residents themselves, within closed walls. They had no social reformist impact on the broader society whatsoever. If such housing compounds spread in the capitalist society, they will form isolated circles with no overlap socially or spatially, thus forming isolated, closed islands, leading, contrary to their goals, to further fragmentation of society and turning it into a mosaic, not-coherent society, socially and spatially. Moreover, rights embodied in the laws and regulations enacted by the State belong to the imperceptible level and control the built environment on the manifested level. The separation between city levels (social (rights) and spatial) made the spatial layer limited within the manifested level only, and relates it to rights within the imperceptible level through a one-way vertical relationship, from the imperceptible to the manifested, leading consequently to the failure of these approaches.

Despite the failure of these modern approaches in accomplishing their objectives of reform, whether to change the mechanisms of built environment production or to change the relationship between the levels of the built environment and linking them together in an interactive and reciprocal way, many of these approaches began to emerge again today, however, in a new form. With the advent of postmodernity and its calls of re-communication with the user and the revival of the spirit of the place through bonding it with its past and context, and based on Jane Jacobs’s theory (1961) which advocated some urban concepts that were prevalent in Middle Ages cities in Europe such as mixed-use planning, several approaches emerged since the seventies of the last century which referred to the community-based systems (e.g. commune) in the pre-industrial western world as a way to tackle contemporary urban crisis. The most important

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7 In achieving his socio-cultural goals in the residential unit, Perry attempted to develop the role of local schools into community centers through parents’ involvement. The elementary school and its playground became the center of the neighborhood which is reachable on foot within half a mile, local shops are located on the corners of neighborhoods, and a few community institutions are located in the central common place (Hall, 1996).
of these approaches since the end of the eighties of the last century and until today is the movement of “New Urbanism.” It aims to reform the urban residential areas following postmodern notions derived from traditional pre-industrial western cities. This movement has received widespread acceptance in U.S., Europe and in other parts of the world including some Arab cities such as Dubai, Doha, and Abu Dhabi.

THE NEW URBANISM MOVEMENT

The movement of “Neo-Traditional Development” emerged in the U.S. since the eighties of the last century, but the term “New Urbanism” (henceforth NU) began to take effect since the 1990s to denote the urban development undertaken by Duany & Plater-Zyberk, and the “Transit-Oriented Development” pioneered by Peter Calthorpe, Doug Kelbaugh, and Daniel Solomon. This movement originates from the rejection of the principles of modern urban development and urban sprawl, and, as an alternative, adopts postmodern principles such as those of Leon Krier, Jane Jacobs, and Lewis Mumford, as well as Perry’s concept of the neighbourhood.

This movement aims to create residential communities with pre-set qualities under the umbrella of capitalism. That is, NU does not reject capitalism as a societal system, neither its mechanisms of decision making and built environment production, however, it rejects the physical end-product as produced by modernity. NU movement, unlike modern reformist approaches, accepts the prevailing power structure in the capitalist society and does not seek changing it. In other words, it accepts the imperceptible structure of the built environment including the centralization of power in the hands of its pivotal party, the State. It also accepts the vertical relationship between the levels of the built environment. However, in light of the social disintegration and the lack of the spirit of community produced by modernity, and the resultant rupture between the building, the user, and the context, NU strives to create (or “industrialize”) the sense of community as existed in pre-industrial societies. That can be achieved, according to NU, through relating architecture to its context, historically and geographically so as to create the sense of place and belonging. NU attempts to achieve that through using images from the past that are connected with the user’s memory, or what is referred to as the “urban memory.” This methodology to reproduce the place through influencing the user’s perception and communication with the place focuses in effect on the spatial layer (formal) that belongs to the manifested level of the built environment more than on the social layer. It uses formal/spatial solutions to resolve social problems. In that sense, NU adopts the same modern concept of determinism which was the reason behind the absenteeism of the sense of community in modern residential areas in the first place, however, in a postmodern sense (Al-Lahham, 2011). Sorkin in that respect mentions that “New Urbanism reproduces many of the worst aspects of the Modernism it seeks to replace. [it] promotes another style of universality that is similarly over reliant on visual cues to produce social effects” (cited in Dewolf, 2002).

NU links between the house and the resident, or between the place and the community (socio-spatial), where the community is identified through its relationship to the place geographically; it is thus a place-based community. This is similar to the concept of khitta in Islamic cities, however, on the manifested level only and not in the production mechanisms and distribution of socio-spatial rights and relationships between the levels of the built environment, or put differently, without enabling the residents, as explored below. Accordingly, the term “residential compounds” will be used here to refer to UN residential districts as against the term...
“residential communities” used for Islamic built environments. But, did this movement succeed in creating the good community in its compounds through establishing a connection between residents and their places, as planned?

Methodologically, despite the growing number of studies conducted on NU, most of these studies focus on the effect of a few physical features of NU built environments (such as pedestrianism, diversity, mixed land use) or of some social aspects (such as social interaction, user perception, identity, homogeneity) on establishing the sense of community (Kim, 2007; French et.al., 2014; Talen, 2008). They depart in their investigations from their definition of the sense of community based on their acceptance of capitalism and its mechanisms of production. In other words, they are trapped within the sphere of capitalism. The current research, different from other studies, focuses on the roots of NU production and mechanisms; it explores NU based on the three levels of the built environment and their interaction. Moreover, as NU movement received many criticism in terms of its approach and mechanisms to fulfil its goals (Talen 2008; Kim, 2007; Grant, 2006), also its compounds such as Celebration district in Florida, Kentlands in Washington DC, and Uptown district in San Diego were assessed (e.g. Bressi, 2002; Kim, 2007), the current research will investigate NU movement on a theoretical level based on the argument it put forward, however, it will refer to these empirical studies to support its argument.

Several social studies have shown that the absolute deterministic relationship between the built environment and social relationships inside residential areas, or between the spatial layer and the social layer of the built environment, is unviable and such a relationship is flawed and unsatisfactory in its attempt to establish the sense of community, which dissipates the dream of modernity to change society through the built environment, and that of postmodernity and NU to create the good coherent community as that of pre-industrial cities (Kashef, 2009; Talen, 1999). Wood and other authors (2010) found that mixed land use was negatively associated with sense of community in Atlanta, USA. Similarly, Nguyen (2010) found that compact living, high population density, and street accessibility at the county level in the USA were inversely associated with social interaction, bonding, and bridging social capital. This shortcoming might be justified by the separation of the levels of contemporary built environment and their subsequent pivotal parties. The social layer belongs to the operative level (values and customs) and to the imperceptible level in terms of the societal power and rights distribution, whereas the spatial layer belongs to the manifested level. Each level has its pivotal party, thus connecting the two layers (social and spatial) together requires rearranging the relationships between the three levels by eliminating domination between them and then overlapping or even unifying the acting parties of the three levels. This is of course most unlikely to take place in the contemporary built environment. Whereas spatial rights from the imperceptible level in Islamic communities were overlapped with the manifested (spatial) level, and the social rights were also overlapped with the operative level as to the social relationships governed by society’s customs and values prevailing in each region, and with the manifested level as to property rights, this led to tying these levels together as an intertwined network. However, this network has been disintegrated in contemporary built environments into vertically-related levels.

Social and spatial rights are dictated over people in the operative and the manifested levels in the form of rigid social laws and building regulations, thus parties in those two levels have no role in its formulation or implementation. They ordain the subjected party (residents) what to do and define their circles of freedom in their respective levels. Hence, splitting the built environment levels led to splitting its layers, a matter that makes it quite difficult to deal with the setting

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11 This differentiation is because NU developments, as explained here, were no more than compounds to house people, with no foundation to create the good, coherent community. Moreover, NU compounds are quite different in their principles from those of Perry’s neighborhood; therefore, the term “residential compounds” will be used to refer to NU developments and not neighbourhoods.

12 Such as the social studies of Urry, Sayer, and Giddens which proved that space is a contingent factor rather than an essential factor in studying social relations (Saunders, 1993).
comprehensively. This led to increasing the severity of the housing crisis and the associated social ills, thus resolving the social and spatial housing problems together became very problematic despite their actual interdependence.\textsuperscript{13} Accordingly, as revealed by studies conducted on some NU compounds in the US such as Seaside and Celebration districts in Florida (Bressi, 2002) and Uptown in San Diego,\textsuperscript{14} the NU movement did not succeed in changing residents’ behavior and consolidating the social relationships among them and, thus, in producing the coherent “good community” in place (Gottdiener & Budd, 2005; Grant, 2006, p.227-8).

The reason for this, as posed by this research, is due to the production mechanisms adopted by NU. They are the same mechanisms that operate in the modern capitalist society outside these compounds. Proceeding from the movement’s acceptance of the relationships between the three levels and their production mechanisms as exist in the capitalist society, NU adopted these mechanisms without change. The residential compound became like a microcosm of the broader capitalist society, dominated by the same mechanisms and relationships between its levels. However, how can NU achieve the desired change in society and create the sense of community through the reproduction of a microcosm of that society with the same mechanisms that produced the urban problems and ills in the first place? Mechanisms of NU compounds are characterized, as in capitalist societies, by central planning controlled by professionals (planners/architects) from the operative level, who are subject in turn to building rules and regulations set by the State from the imperceptible level. The role of the resident is limited to the manifested level as a recipient/user only, which might be expanded in best conditions to participation in the design process through expressing his opinion regarding some design issues, according to the designer’s wish, a mechanism that might increase the sense of belonging. Yet, many new urbanists, unlike other community neighbourhood planners, view NU as consisting of normative design principles and believe that participation does not lead to social equity. “It is the professional planner,” as Talen declared in her investigations of Mississippi NU developments, “that has the role of finding out how neighbourhood planning goals are to be accomplished through design and physical improvement.” As such, unlike the stated commitment to social equity in the Charter of the New Urbanism (Congress of the New Urbanism, 2000), NU design process does not show any particular interest in achieving social equity in its compounds (Talen, 2008, p.290). The user here relates to the designer/developer in the operative level in a vertical (dominance-subjection) relationship, where the latter is related to the State in the imperceptible level in a vertical relationship of dominance-subjection as well. As such, relationships between levels of built environment are vertical relationships characterized by dominance and control, where the resident in these compounds enjoys restricted rights within a very confined circle that might not exceed his house’s boundaries. They are non-enabling rights that do not grant the resident capacity to decision making; his role is limited to only being a resident/user, thus his rights in the compound are housing- and not enabling rights; they regulate his relationship as a resident with the compound (spatially) and with its population (socially). In that regard, studies of Kim on Kentlands (2007), designed by Duany and Palter-Zyberk in 1988, and of Buckner (1988) have shown that sense of community and belonging is associated with the sense of ownership in NU compounds, and it is even stronger in case of actual home ownership (Kim, 2007, p. 225). As ownership is a right that embodies control over the owned property, thus sense of community is

\textsuperscript{13} Separation between the levels of the built environment was reflected in many housing theoretical studies. During the last few decades, studies had two different approaches as to their focus: non-spatial social studies that attempt to address the social issues and the right to housing, i.e. concerned with the social layer such as the studies of Friedmann (2000) and Amin (2006), and spatial studies that focus on the housing issues, i.e. concerned with the spatial layer, such as the housing studies, and NU movement. Hence, contemporary mechanisms of built environment production proved to be deficient in facing the social and spatial problems of the housing sector together, theoretically and practically.

\textsuperscript{14} Many projects have been implemented according to the principles of NU movement in the United States and Europe, examples of which are the Seaside in Florida (1981) and the village of Poundbury in Dorsetshire, Britain, designed by Leon Krier (1993). Such projects began to spread in the Arab world and particularly in the Gulf States, specifically in the city of Dubai.
evidently associated with the right of control which belongs to the imperceptible level of the built environment, a fact that new urbanists negates. As Gill asserts, “the new urbanists show little interest in the structures of power and inequality that undermine older districts or that disadvantage large numbers of urban residents. Instead, they look for simple, and sometimes wishful, strategies to guide development” (Grant, 2006, p.213).

The management system in the UN compounds and related rules imposed enhance this matter. Property management and control within the compound is divided between, first, a residential owners association as a representative of residents, which board is elected by the residents and is responsible for the residential area and the included public areas. Second, a commercial property owners association, which is responsible for the compound’s commercial center, including the public areas, parking lots, commercial buildings, and alike (Al-Lahham, 2011). These two associations have dominance over residents and users; they define their rights that are no more than housing rights within the boundaries of each resident’s house, which is also subject to strict rules set by the compound associations, such as restricting building changes in residents’ houses; a restrain that shrinks the circle of the resident’s rights, limits his freedom, and impedes his enablement. Areas between houses are subject to the residential owners association where the user has the right of use only in these spaces. Relationships between residents and the owners association in these areas tend to be domination-based relationships, regulated by certain rules set by the controlling party, not through consensus. Hence, there is no overlap between the spatial and social rights of areas in-between houses on the one hand and between them and the public spaces on the other hand, which lead to not relating residents with each other, spatially and in terms of their rights, as well as not relating residents to the place outside his house as his rights are limited to the regulated benefit of use only; right of control of these places belongs to the association (fig. 5). This separation and non-overlapping between circles of rights lead to separation between the social and spatial layers in the compound, as well as separation between the levels of its built environment, and the domination of one level over the other which contradicts with the goal of NU to create the sense of community. This is in direct contrast with the situation in khitat in Islamic communities which intertwining of social and spatial rights was the main rationale behind the solidarity and coherence of its community, socially and spatially. The resident in Islamic communities was part of the party that owns the street to which his house door opens, thus was involved with his neighbours in any case that might occur in the property. He was also part of the larger khitta and so on, until all khitat are connected spatially and in terms of their rights. However, what NU produces is fragmentation of society’s coherence by finding one party for the house, another for the street and a third for the centre of the compound, where all these parties are related to each other in a vertical relationship of dominance which positions the resident at the end of the ladder with very limited rights confined within a very small circle that is separated from other parties’ circles, spatially and in terms of rights, leading ultimately to a state of non-coherence and abolishes the sense of community.

With regard to rules and regulations governing the NU compounds, Duany and Plater-Zyberk, the pioneers of the movement, have set a few laws and regulations as to the zoning and use of public areas in Seaside district which they designed in Florida, USA. In 2003, they developed these laws into a prototype that came to be known as "smart codes" to govern later NU compounds.\(^\text{15}\) These laws included detailed codes to ensure the full control over the compound; they were design-based codes that were concerned with the three-dimensional designs of the compound and not only with its two-dimensional planning schemes (as in zoning and land-use regulations). This intensifies the designer, developer, and owners associations’ control over the compound’s built environment as well as over its users and shrinks the circles of

freedom of its residents (Al-Lahham, 2011), a matter that is inconsistent with the concept of enablement in these compounds, unlike the situation in residential Islamic communities (khitta).

NU methodology to find the coherent community works in opposite to its target. Referring to khitat distribution in Islamic cities which enjoyed social cohesion, they were overlapping territories arranged in size from the smaller to the larger, as well as in their related rights, from the house to the dead end street to the through street and so on. Hence, Islamic cities were divided into small but numerous and interdependent territories (khitat), each indicates its party’s circle of control, thus, control over decision making was distributed between the largest possible number of parties (residents), or in contemporary term, decentralized (fig. 1). Moreover, the overlap between these many circles restrained the potential social or spatial domination between territories and its parties, which in turn led to a coherent society with, in principle, no domination from one party over another. Controlling parties in their territories enjoyed enabling rights, socially and spatially, which circles expand and intersect with other rights circles in larger territories. This makes the party connected to his territory spatially and as to his rights. This situation results in connecting the three levels of the built environment together into one solid structure which levels cannot be discerned. Comparing this with the distribution of spatial and social rights in NU compounds, every resident in NU compounds has a narrow circle of social rights that corresponds to his spatial rights limited within his house boundaries (fig. 5), where each circle does not overlap with other parties’ circles as circles of control of owners associations (imperceptible level) separate between them. Accordingly, the number of controlling parties in the NU compounds is very few, thus decision making is shared between very few parties, leading to centralization in the decision making process.

In addition to the limited rights of residents in the NU compounds compared to Islamic communities, the quality of these rights is also different. As the centralized party (owners

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16 These compounds are subject in their production mechanisms to the forces of the economic market which limit the resident’s freedom of choice. The designer and the developer head the design and implementation process which is directed to ensure the highest profit and the least risk possible. Thus, the freedom of choice given to residents becomes very limited and equal to what other housing models prevailing in the capitalist society offer. Accordingly, the end product of the compound is produced by external parties, unlike the situation in the Islamic societies where decisions and solutions were brought about from within the site by the residents themselves without any external intervention (Al-Lahham, 2011).

17 Architects and planners adopting NU principles stressed the importance of adopting NU smart codes in all cities and suburbs of U.S. in order to achieve what is known as “smart growth” as against the modern “growth” which resulted in urban sprawl with low density, total reliability on the car, and a rise in the cost of infrastructure. These codes were applied in some cities such as Davidson in North Carolina as well as in Cornelius and Huntersville (Walters & Brown, 2004).
assessments) controlled the production process of the built environment, it appropriated the power to decision making, thus turning residents’ rights from enabling rights in Islamic communities into housing rights in NU compounds. This shift in the nature of rights has changed the relationship between the resident and his context, thus intensifying the user-context split and thus user’s acceptance of the existence of a supreme controlling party that weakens user’s awareness and sense of belonging and responsibility towards the surrounding built environment outside his circle of control; a point at issue that is very incompatible with the targeted sense of place-based community. Accordingly, NU, adopting the capitalist mechanisms of built environment production and the embodied separation between its vertically related levels, is not qualified as a socio-spatial solution; it did not succeed in resolving the urban ills through creating the good community within the good residential built environment. In conclusion, it could be argued that the lack of residents enablement in these compounds turned them into merely housing compounds, thus they deserve the title of housing schemes or compounds and not communities, as suggested by this research.  

FINALLY

The concept of contemporary neighbourhood (including the New Urbanism compounds) as a solution to address the housing problems and related social issues is not able to prosper unless the capitalist built environment production mechanisms which produced the housing-social problems are relinquished. These mechanisms are characterized by centralized control, vertical power distribution, and lack of resident’s enablement which form the basis of the housing crisis. Hence, the sought reformation cannot be accomplished in this respect without reformulating the mechanisms that produced it. Through liberating the built environment production mechanisms, changing the societal power structure, and enabling the residents through granting them power to decision making to produce physical solutions by themselves and for themselves, societies could become of high, ideal quality. Our role as professionals in the built environment is to implant the mechanisms that will inevitably lead to production of solutions by the people themselves who will through time become aware of their built environments. In other words, we have to transform people into conscious citizens that are aware of their built environments, not ignorant as the case in contemporary societies which isolated its people from the decision making process. The main motor in capitalist societies is idle as a result of its centralized dominance relationships, and there is no way to create the good coherent community except through enabling its people by granting them enabling rights and not housing rights solely, and that can only be realized through liberating the mechanisms of built environment production and adopting enabling mechanisms as those of the Islamic city.

REFERENCES


18 All NU compounds in America, due to their high cost resulted from the provision of public areas such as parks and squares and supporting services and infrastructure, have become affordable to only high to above average income people. They are designed to fit the requirements of a certain class of society who share similar interests and qualities such as homogeneity in the level of income and desire to live in a quiet and clean area. Hence, the case returned to where it began. Housing has become a scarce resource that is available only to those who can afford it. In that sense, the housing issue arises as part of the question of life chances and justice in the distribution and access to resources. Thereby, the main objective of the NU movement is negated, where the house in these compounds became a kind of social privilege that can be enjoyed only by those who can afford it. Thus, one of the most important criteria to achieve the good community has been abolished in NU.


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