

THE URBAN SYSTEM AND ITS INTEGRATIVE POTENTIAL IN THE ARAB NATIONS

Salah El-Shakhs and Hooshang Amirahmadi

INTRODUCTION

The post World War II development of the Arab nations is unique among the world's regions in the view of at least four interrelated phenomena: Strong common heritage and history of interaction, sudden major oil wealth, rapid population and urban growth, and extensive intra-regional labour migration. These forces have combined to produce and articulate a regional urban hierarchy compatible with the area's potential overall development and integration. Nevertheless, the region remains largely underdeveloped and disintegrated with substantial imbalances among its constituent countries (table 1). The state of national integration of the countries in the region also continues to be weak and may have in fact regressed in recent years.^{1/}

Examination of this contradiction requires a closer look at the interplay of regional and extra-regional socioeconomic, spatial, and political forces; a task that will not be attempted in this paper. Instead, we propose to focus on the urban system in the Arab nations, outline the major contemporary forces affecting it including labour and capital mobility, and identify the integrative/development potential of the existing urban system in the region and its planning implications.

THE URBAN SYSTEM

The Arab nations have had a long urban tradition which dates back to the dawn of civilization. Water, land fertility, religion, and strategic location were and continue to be among the major factors influencing the region's settlement patterns. Many of the ancient cities not

TABLE 2. URBANIZATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTHERN AFRICA*

Countries ranked from the most to the least urbanized (1982 data)	Urban Population		Average annual growth rate (per cent)		% Share of net migration in urban growth		Percentage of Urban Population In largest city		In cities of over 500,000 people	
	1960a	1982a	1960-70	1970-80	1970-75	1980	1960	1980	1960	1980
Kuwait	72	91	10.1	7.4	24.4	75	32**	0	0	
United Arab Emirates	40	79	14.9	14.4	..	..	..	..	..
Lebanon	40	77	6.9	2.8	44.4	64	79	64	79	
Iraq	43	70	5.8	5.3	34.0	35	55	35	70	
Saudi Arabia	30	69	8.4	7.6	61.9	15	18	0	33	
Jordan	43	60	4.7	4.0	34.7	31	37	0	37	
Libya	23	58	8.4	8.0	16.0	57	64	0	64	
Tunisia	36	54	3.8	4.0	45.2	40	30	40	30	
Syrian Arab Rep.	37	49	4.8	4.4	21.4	35	33	35	55	
Egypt, Arab Rep.	38	45	3.5	2.9	43.6	38	39	53	53	
Algeria	30	45	3.5	5.4	43.9	27	12	27	12	
Morocco	29	42	4.2	4.1	52.9	16	26	16	50	
Yemen, PDR	28	38	3.5	3.7	50.0	61	49	0	0	
Sudan	10	23	6.8	5.8	..	30	31	0	31	
Oman	4	20	6.3	15.6	..	..	..	..	..
Yemen, Arab Rep.	3	14	10.2	8.3	76.3	..	25	..	0	

.. Not available.

* Countries with population of less than a million are excluded.

** Only Kuwait City. The 1960 figure is for Kuwait City, Hawalli and Salmuja.

a Few figures are for years other than those specified. See the source below.

Source: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, (1984) World Development Report, 260-61 and B. Renaud (1981) National Urbanization Policy in Developing Countries.

The Urban System and Its Integrative Potential

TABLE 3: URBAN AREAS WITH POPULATION OF OVER 500,000 IN 1980 BY SIZE AND RANK IN 1950, 1980, AND 2000

Urban Area	Population (thousands)					
	1950	Rank	1980	Rank	2000	Rank
Cairo	2,466	1	7,609	1	13,345	1
Alexandria	1,037	2	2,680	3	4,747	3
Casablanca	721	3	2,152	4	4,499	4
Baghdad	579	4	5,112	2	11,037	2
Tunis	481	5	1,001	10	1,734	15
Algiers	445	6	1,306	8	2,508	10
Damascus	389	7	1,437	6	3,265	6
Aleppo	299	8	957	12	2,134	12
Marakesh	250	9	523	17	1,109	17
Beirut	238	10	1,887	5	...	7
Khartoum	183	11	1,389	7	4,072	5
Rabat-Sale	177	12	912	13	2,283	11
Makah	173	13	449	19	876	19
Mosul	144	14	511	18	970	18
Basra	116	15	898	14	1,990	14
Tripoli Libya	116	16	994	11	2,722	8
Riyadh	101	17	1,010	9	2,513	9
Jeddah	...	18	838	15	2,059	13
Amman	...	19	657	16	1,485	16

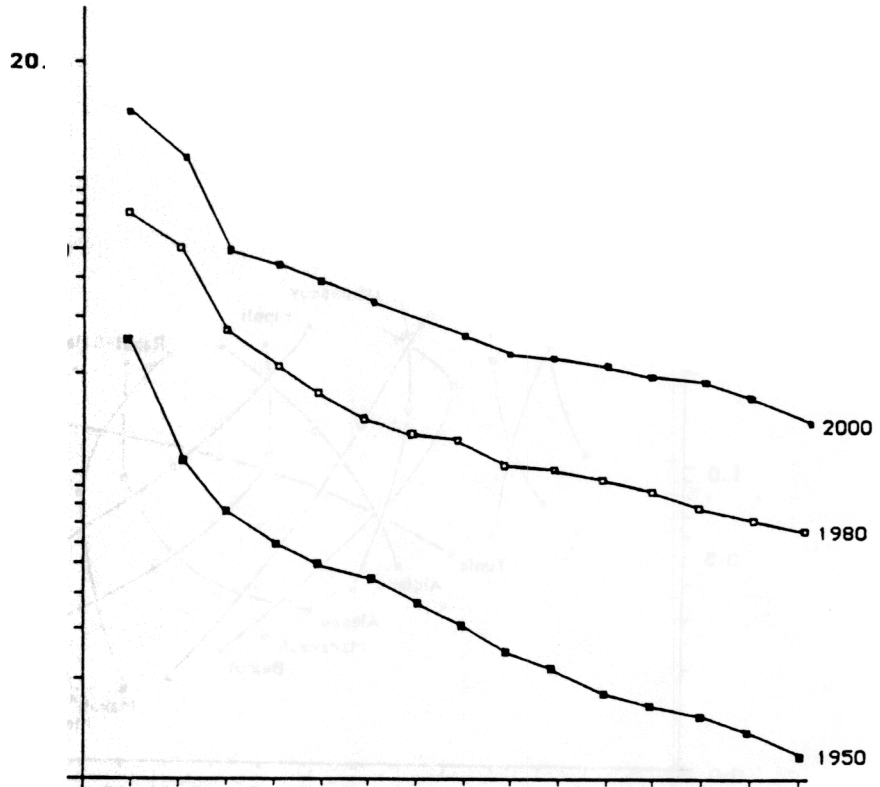
Source: United Nations, *Urban, Rural and City Population, 1950-2000, As Assessed in 1987*. (New York: U.N. Population Division, 1980).

and economic functions. The post World War II history of the region abounds with evidence of major shifts of political, economic, and service functions among the 'region cities' in response to local, regional or international events and crises in spite of the inhibiting effects of political boundaries and national sovereignties. The presence of an already well-established interdependent system of settlements provided a necessary spatial framework which facilitated such adjustments through increased local and regional mobility of labour and capital.

quire

in

opu a
M Hian



The Urban System and Its Integrative Potential

MOBILITY OF LABOUR

The Arab nations had an estimated population of 193 million, or about 4 per cent of the world total, in mid-1985. Their overall annual rate of natural increase (3.0 per cent) is estimated to be higher than the average for both the world as a whole and for the less developed regions (LDRs) (2 per cent - see table 4). As a result, the relative increase in the region's population by the year 2000 is expected to be higher (52.6 per cent) than that for the world (26.3 per cent) or the LDRs (32.0 per cent), and its share of the world total will thus increase from 4 per cent to 4.8 per cent. This is primarily due to a relatively faster decrease in death rates in the region (table 5), while birth rates are expected to continue to be higher, relative to the world's or the LDRs' averages.

TABLE 4: POPULATION SIZE AND RATE OF INCREASE: WORLD, MDRs, LDRs AND ARAB MENA MID-1985-2000

Area	Population estimates mid-1985 (million)	Population estimates mid-1985 (%)	Annual natural inc. of popn. (per cent)	Population estimates 2000 (million)	Population estimates 2000 (%)	Increase mid-1985 to 2000 in (per cent)
World	4,485.0	100.0	1.7	6,135.0	100.0	26.6
MDRs	1,174.0	24.2	0.6	1,271.0	20.7	8.3
LDRs	3,671.0	75.8	2.0	4,863.0	79.3	32.0
LDRs (excl. China)	2,629.0	54.3	2.4	3,666.0	59.8	39.4
Arab Nations in MENA	193.5	4.0	3.0	295.3	4.8	52.6

Sources: El-Shakhs and Amirahmadi (1984), and Population Reference Bureau (1985), *1985 World Population Data Sheet*.

On the average, over 50 per cent of the region's population is in the working age groups, i.e., between 15 and 64. This large base of labour force is increasing at annual rates ranging from 2 to over 4 per cent in various countries of the region (table 5). The distribution of

The Urban System and Its Integrative Potential

this growing labour force is uneven over the regional space and among economic sectors. Generally speaking, the low-capital countries have the largest working population, and most of the region's labour force is still in agriculture and lives in rural areas.

Fortunately, labour migration among nations in the region has played a significant role in redressing the mismatch between labour and capital and in the spatial redistribution of the labour force. The size of migratory labour flows more than doubled between 1970 and 1975, and while the share of non-Arab nations, as a source of migrants, became increasingly significant over that period, it remained lower. Migrant labour constituted nearly half of the labour force of 3.5 million in the oil-rich Arab countries in 1975 (table 6). Since then, the size of the migrant labour force is estimated to have grown to between 4 and 6 million in the early 1980's, before it began to decline sharply over the last two or three years. Unemployment problems in the low capital countries seem to have been somewhat mitigated, at least for a brief period, by labour force migration to capital-rich countries.

TABLE 6: EMPLOYMENT BY NATIONALITY IN THE CAPITAL-RICH ARAB STATES IN 1975

Country	Nationals %	Non-Nationals %	Total Employment
Saudi Arabia	57.0	43.0	1,799,900
Libya	57.5	42.5	781,600
Kuwait	30.6	69.4	299,800
United Arab Emirates	15.2	84.8	296,500
Oman	66.0	34.0	207,700
Bahrain	60.4	39.6	75,800
Qatar	18.9	81.1	66,200
Total	51.3	48.7	3,527,600

Source: J.S. Birks and C.A. Sinclair, *International Migration and Development in the Arab Region* (Geneva: ILO, 1980), p. 132.

The existing unity within the region's urban settlement system was one of the primary factors which led to and facilitated the increased international migration among the Arab nations, following the sudden rise in oil wealth

The Urban System and Its Integrative Potential

transport links particularly by air, and major increases in regional tourism to certain cities. Other new developments include the proliferation of multi-lateral regional organizations and institutions for cultural and economic cooperation, increased diffusion and sharing of professional and technical knowledge in the areas of development, institution building, and education, and finally, the popularity and frequent attempts at unification or political federation, the most successful of which is the creation of the United Arab Emirates in 1971.

Such integrative linkages are not without historical precedent or foundation. The region had been unified under several empires both before and after the advent of Islam. Its fragmentation under colonial rule and the weakening of its position as a cross-roads in international trade, however, seem to have led to divergence in interests and paths of integration within the world community, which heightened the tension between forces of integration and disintegration within the region. Political and economic fragmentation created barriers to the rational development of the region's economy.

Under such conditions, new found oil wealth tended to aggravate inequalities and the mismatch between labour and resources, and increased duplication and redundancy in the region's industrial and urban infrastructure. The 'region cities' and their transportation and communication networks seem to have become increasingly externally oriented. They are better connected to New York, London, or Paris than to each other, or to smaller cities within their own subsystems. Integration of the region into the world market, according to Bani Hani is the primary reason for lack of integration among Arab nations. Such integration on the one hand limits the size and permanence of the processes and resource transfers within the region while, on the other hand, increases such transfers between the region and the extra-regional markets. Inequalities inhibited the free flow of labour and hindered major resource transfers or complementarity in production. Thus the urban settlement system in the region is undergoing major transformations which, more often than not, ignore its existing capacity, urbanization economies, locational advantages, and development potential.

Many of the large cities in the region (e.g., Cairo, Beirut) grew and developed partly in response to their special role and functions within the regional system. Any developments or policies which weaken the system's integration are likely to leave such cities with major unutilized capacity, localize problems that are largely multinational in nature, and drive the 'region cities' to substitute alternative multinational linkages and functions, which may be far removed from the region's own

The Urban System and Its Integrative Potential

interest. This, in turn, will tend to weaken the region's prospects for integrated development and its potential for sustained growth, independence, and importance within the world economic and political system.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ROLE OF PLANNERS

Should the disintegrative tendencies precipitated by colonial fragmentation, increased inequalities, ideological and political differences, and narrow nationalisms continue, they are likely to overwhelm the historical, cultural, and economic forces of integration in the region and undermine the integrative potential of its urban system. Any meaningful change in direction will require cooperative developmental policies and approaches which reinforce existing integrative forces, encourage greater unrestricted mobility in factors of production, promote complementary spatial specialization through sector diversities, and expand regional markets.

For such policies to materialize, however, there must be a clear understanding and commitment to the long-range benefits of integration to the region and its individual countries. The burden of developing this understanding rests with the intellectuals, professionals, and planners in the region. This should become the primary focus of their professional society meetings and a reason to further strengthen their contacts and regional associations. Admittedly it is not a simple task to convince politicians and decisionmakers that the development disadvantages to each individual country, of dependency on the rest of the world, far outweigh the real or perceived threats of interdependencies and integration within the region. Such threats can be mitigated by an effort on their part to develop mutual trust and tolerance of political differences, and respect for the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of others.

NOTES

- 1/ S. Amin, *The Arab Economy Today* (London: Zed Press, 1982); R. Ailboni, ed., *Arab Industrialization and Economic Integration* (London: Green Welm, 1979); and A. Gueciouer, ed., *The Problems of Arab Economic Development and Integration* (Boulder: Westview, 1984).