Planning for Post Conflict Phase: Case Study of Syria

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PhD Thesis

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Abstract

This research focuses on post-conflict reconstruction and development. While security is important after war, this research looks beyond peacekeeping and focuses on medium-to-long-term social, urban, and institutional recovery and stability. This study is primarily concerned with post-war reconstruction, and development approaches and practices and the ways development in the aftermath of conflict can help build and consolidate sustainable recovery and return for displaced people in the future. Therefore, this research aims at investigating the adequate spatial planning approach for the reconstruction era in post-conflict countries. With selecting Syria as a case study, a country that has experienced severe armed conflict for the last decade; the research specific aims are threefold: first, to review the planning culture in Syria before and after the conflict; second, to investigate the physical change of Syrian cities during the conflict and foresee the potential spatial development in post-conflict phase; and third, to investigate the potential return of the displaced Syrians. In addition to the literature review that covered the main topics of the thesis, culturised planning model and institutional analysis are followed to review the planning culture and system in Syria. Also, the research projects four scenarios, each with varying numbers and characteristics of returning refugees and IDPs. Next, it compares the returnees' potential residential patterns and urban concentration to Zipf's Law, a normalised distribution of 'ideal' city sizes. Using the semi-structured open-ended question, 25 interviews were conducted with Syrian families and individuals who were displaced during the conflict to inspect their opinion on returning home. The results indicate that the planning system in Syria requires substantial change and propose a polycentric development approach as a turning point towards balanced and sustainable development in the post-conflict phase. For the potential return of the displaced Syrians, the findings highlight the differences and similarities of Syrian perspectives on returning home. We conclude with, first, the importance for deep further analysis to be conducted with consideration of intersectional returning dynamics drivers; and second, the importance to develop immediate and long term solutions and ensure capacity building for the post-conflict phase, and third, the importance to have people-centred-cities and enhance public participation in the planning process in order to create inclusive spaces that respond to citizen needs.

Keywords: Post-Conflict Development; Syria; Polycentric Development; Planning; Scenarios, Return

Abstrakt

Tento výzkum se zaměřuje na postkonfliktní rekonstrukci a rozvoj. Jakkoliv je po válce důležitá především bezpečnost, předkládaný výzkum jde dále nad rámec udržování míru: zaměřuje se na střednědobou až dlouhodobou sociální, urbánní a institucionální obnovu a stabilitu. Vychází ze studia přístupů a praktik poválečné rekonstrukce a rozvoje a způsobů, jak po ukončení válečného konfliktu dosáhnout udržitelného rozvoje ke konsolidaci a obnově a návratu uprchlíků v budoucnu. Cílem práce je vyzkoumat přístup územního plánování odpovídající období postkonfliktní obnovy a rekonstrukce; jako případová studie byla vybrána Sýrie, země, která v posledním desetiletí zažila těžký ozbrojený konflikt. Specifické cíle výzkumu jsou trojí: zaprvé přezkoumat kulturu plánování v Sýrii před a po konfliktu; za druhé, prozkoumat fyzickou proměnu syrských měst během konfliktu a předpovědět možný prostorový rozvoj ve fázi po skončení konfliktu; a za třetí, prozkoumat možný návrat vysídlených Syřanů. Kromě rešerše literatury, která předvedla hlavní témata práce, je použit kulturizovaný plánovací model a institucionální analýza, aby bylo možné přezkoumat kulturu a systém plánování v Sýrii. Práce dále prezentuje čtyři scénáře, založené na různých předpokladech počtu a sociálních charakteristik navracejících se uprchlíků a vnitřně vysídlených osob. Pro potenciální prostorové rozmístění navrátilců do urbanizovaných území je využit normalizovaný model rozložení „ideálních“ velikostí měst podle Zipfova pravidla. Ke zjištění názorů uprchlíků na jejich návrat domů bylo provedeno šetření formou 25 rozhovorů a polostrukturovaných otevřených dotazníků se syrskými rodinami a jednotlivci, kteří byli během konfliktu vysídleni. Výsledky práce naznačují, že plánovací systém v Sýrii vyžaduje podstatnou změnu. Navrhuje se polycentrický přístup k rozvoji jako bod obratu směrem k vyváženému a udržitelnému rozvoji v postkonfliktní fázi. Pokud jde o potenciální návrat vysídlených Syřanů, zjištění zdůrazňují rozdíly a podobnosti syrských pohledů na perspektivu jejich návratu domů. Závěry práce zdůrazňují za prvé, že je důležité dále prohloubit analýzu s ohledem na interakci mezi hnacími silami návratu; za druhé, že je důležité vyvinout okamžitá i dlouhodobá řešení a zajistit budování kapacit pro fázi po ukončení konfliktu; a za třetí, že je důležité utvářet města s ohledem na jejich uživatele a zvýšit účast veřejnosti v procesu plánování s cílem vytvořit inkluzivní prostory, které odpovídají potřebám občanů.

Klíčová slova: Post-Conflict Development; Sýrie; Polycentrický rozvoj; Plánování; Scénáře, Návrat

ملخص البحث

يركز هذا البحث على إعادة الإعمار والتنمية في مرحلة ما بعد النزاع. في حين أن الأمن مهم بعد الحرب ، إلا أن هذا البحث ينظر إلى ما هو أبعد من حفظ السلام ويركز على الاستقرار الاجتماعي والحضري والمؤسسي على المدى المتوسط إلى الطويل. تهتم هذه الدراسة في المقام الأول بنهج وممارسات إعادة الإعمار والتنمية في أعقاب النزاع ، والطرق التي يمكن أن تساعد بها التنمية في بناء وتعزيز التعافي المستدام وعودة النازحين في المستقبل. لذلك ، يهدف هذا البحث إلى التحقيق في منهج التخطيط المكاني الملائم لمرحلة إعادة الإعمار في البلدان الخارجة من الصراع. باختيار سوريا ، البلد الذي عانى من نزاع مسلح عنيف على مدى العقد الماضي ، كدراسة حالة ؛ يحدد هذا البحث ثلاثة أهداف رئيسية: أولاً ، مراجعة ثقافة التخطيط في سوريا قبل النزاع وأثنائه. ثانيًا ، استقراء التغير المادي للمدن السورية أثناء النزاع وتوقع التطور المكاني المحتمل في مرحلة ما بعد الصراع ؛ وثالثاً ، البحث في العودة المحتملة للنازحين السوريين. بالإضافة إلى مراجعة الأدبيات التي شملت الموضوعات الرئيسية للأطروحة ، تم اتباع نموذج التخطيط الثقافي والتحليل المؤسسي لمراجعة ثقافة التخطيط ونظامه في سوريا. أيضًا ، يعرض البحث أربعة سيناريوهات ، لكل منها أعداد وخصائص متفاوتة للاجئين العائدين والنازحين داخليًا. من ثم ، يقارن البحث الأنماط السكنية المحتملة للعائدين والتركيز الحضري بقانون زيف ، وهو توزيع طبيعي لأحجام المدينة "المثالية". باستخدام السؤال شبه المنظم ، تم إجراء 25 مقابلة مع عائلات وأفراد سوريين نزحوا خلال النزاع لاستطلاع آرائهم حول العودة إلى ديارهم. تشير النتائج إلى أن نظام التخطيط في سوريا يتطلب تغييرًا جوهريًا ويقترح البحث نهجًا تنمويًا متعدد المراكز كنقطة تحول نحو التنمية المتوازنة والمستدامة في مرحلة ما بعد الصراع. فيما يتعلق بالعودة المحتملة للنازحين السوريين ، تسلط النتائج الضوء على الاختلافات والتشابهات في وجهات النظر السورية حول العودة إلى الوطن. يختتم البحث ، أولاً ، بأهمية إجراء مزيد من التحليل المعمق مع مراعاة محركات العودة المتقاطعة ؛ وثانيًا ، أهمية تطوير حلول فورية وطويلة المدى وضمان بناء القدرات لمرحلة ما بعد الصراع ، وثالثًا ، أهمية وجود مدن متمحورة حول الناس وتعزيز المشاركة العامة في عملية التخطيط من أجل إنشاء مساحات شاملة تستجيب لاحتياجات المواطنين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التنمية بعد الصراع؛ سوريا؛ تطوير متعدد المراكز تخطيط؛ سيناريوهات العودة

Table of Content

Acknowledgment ... i
Abstract ... iii
Abstrakt ... v
ملخص البحث ... vii
Table of Content ... ix
List of Figures ... xiii
List of Tables ... xv
Acronyms ... xvii
Chapter I Introduction ... 19
1.1. Theoretical background ... 20
1.1.1. Concept of planning ... 20
1.1.2. Institutional analysis ... 21
1.1.3. Planning culture ... 23
1.1.4 Spatial Planning and Planning Culture ... 25
1.1.5. The concept of polycentricity ... 26
1.2. Spatial planning and post-conflict recovery ... 28
1.2.1 Post-conflict planning ... 28
1.2.2. Post-conflict vs. post-war vs. post-disaster ... 30
1.2.3. Post-conflict development ... 31
1.2.4. Conflict impact ... 33
1.3. Literature review on post-conflict reconstruction: A benchmark ... 33
Chapter II Research approach and methodology ... 41
2.1. Research area ... 42
2.2. Research Objectives ... 43
2.3. Method, Data, and Analysis ... 45
2.4. Thesis structure ... 49
Chapter III Planning in Syria ... 51
3.1. Background of Syria ... 52
3.1.1. History of settlement ... 52
3.1.2. The governance system in Syria ... 54
3.1.3. Urban context pre-conflict ... 56
3.1.4. Urban context during conflict ... 59
3.2. Planning system in Syria ... 60

3.2.1. Urban planning laws in Syria 60
3.2.2. Urban development decision making process 64
3.3. Planning culture in Syria 70
3.3.1. Culturised Planning Model 70
3.3.2. Planning artefacts: visible urban structures, planning products 71
3.3.3. Planning Environment: shared values of planning professionals 71
3.3.4. Societal environment: the unconscious and underlying perceptions and values affecting planning 72
3.4. Analysis of current legal framework 72
3.5. Conclusion 76
Chapter IV Future Urban Development Scenarios for Post-conflict Syria. How Will Returning Refugees Shape the Future? 79
4.1. Introduction 81
4.2. Background 83
4.2.1 Refugees' return and post-conflict reconstruction 83
4.2.2 Polycentric development 84
4.2.3 Planning and urbanisation: the pre-conflict situation in Syria 85
4.2.4 Conceptual framework 86
4.3. Methodology 87
4.4. Results 90
4.4.1 Possible Future Scenarios 90
4.4.2 Scenarios Sustainability Analysis: Zipf's Law Approximation 91
4.5. Discussion 96
4.6. Conclusion 97
Chapter V To Stay or to Return. Syrians' perspectives on returning home in post-conflict Syria 101
5.1. Introduction 102
5.2. Theoretical background 104
5.3. Methodology 105
5.4. Results and discussion 108
5.5 Conclusion 112
Chapter VI Conclusion: Planning for Post-Conflict Syria 115
6.1. Discussion and conclusion 116
6.2. Recommendation and outcomes 122
6.3. Research contribution 122
6.4. Future research 123
References 125

Summary... 143
Curriculum Vitae & List of Publications... 147

List of Figures

Figure 2-1. Methodology outline 46
Figure 2-2. The culturised planning model 47
Figure 3-1. The government hierarchy 55
Figure 3-2. Main flows of IDPs 59
Figure 3-3. The Process of Approving Urban Plan 66
Figure 3-4. Strategy for Spatial Development of Syria: Spatial structure in the future 76
Figure 3-5. The National Development Approach 77
Figure 3-6. Syrian Regions 78
Figure 3-7. Potential Polycentric Development Approach on National and Regional Levels ... 78
Figure 4-1. The conceptual framework 88
Figure 4-2. Impact/uncertainty matrix for Syrian cities characteristics 89
Figure 4-3. Future possible scenarios for Syrian cities characteristics 91
Figure 4-4. Population Change in Syrian Cities According to Scenarios Assumption 93
Figure 4-5. Zipf's law analysis for the years 2011 (a) and 2018 (b) 94
Figure 4-6. Zipf's law analysis for plausible scenarios 95
Figure 5-1. The host country of the interviewees 106

List of Tables

Table 1-1: A benchmark based on different post-conflict planning practices 38

Table 2-1: Polycentricity at three spatial scales 48

Table 3-1: Urban planning laws and related regulations 63

Table 3-2: The potential cultural categories of the culturised planning model 70

Table 4-1: The returning percentage division for the scenarios. 93

Table 5-1: Housing Damage Estimates across Governorate in Syria 102

Table 5-2: Sample Characteristics 107

Table 6-1: Research Objectives and Questions 116

Acronyms

BBR	Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung Agency for Construction and Regional Research
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics in Syria
CEC	Commission of the European Communities
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EU	European Union
GAR	Global Assessment Report
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoS	Government of Syria
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced People
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
MAM	Municipal Administration Modernisation
MHUD	Ministry of Housing and Urban Development
MOPWH	Ministry of Public Works and Housing
MSEA	Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs in Syria
NAPC	National Agricultural Policy Centre
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa’s Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SANA	Syrian Arab News Agency
SAR	Syrian Arab Republic
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
WB	World Bank

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1. Theoretical background

1.1.1. Concept of planning

One of the major concerns of countries worldwide is the development of their cities; education, economy, infrastructure, law, planning, etc. and other fields that can contribute to cities' development. Planning sector has always had a major role in the developing process, and it has become an important indicator of development in advanced countries.

Planning as a concept is considered as one that is “subject to constant evolution”. Countries differ in their perspective on the planning process; also, planning systems, laws and regulations that deal with planning also differ between countries.

Planning notion can be perceived differently in different countries; because the theory of planning is a shifty and slippery subject of study (Campbell & Fainstein, 1996). It is based on a variety of disciplines and has no widely accepted canon, and it interferes with the theory in all social disciplines, which makes it hard to limit its scope or to stake out a territory-specific to planning (Campbell & Fainstein, 1996).

Planning adjusts to changes in the city, which in turn is transformed by planning and politics. Thus, planning discipline is influenced by a wide variety of fundamental and procedural ideas beyond its own modest disciplinary boundaries. Studies of planning refer to works in political science, law, decision theory, and public policy; therefore, planning is also embedded in economic, political and socio-economic contexts, which define a framework that has to be considered when analysing a planning system and practice (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009a).

Among many definitions of planning; (Fürst, 2009) describes planning as “a learning device which induces the actors involved to modify their mind sets, to clarify their interests and to accept and appreciate the diverging interests of other stakeholders. It is a process of give-and-take which requires an attentive sensitivity to the sentiments of others.”

From an urban and regional planning perspective, it refers to “the methods which are used in order to influence the built environment, especially the future distribution of people, activities and resources in cities and regions by public and private measures and activities as well as the coordination and control of interdependent activities like housing, land-use planning, transport, water management, etc.” (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009b).

Faludi (1978) noticed that “planning theory deals with those features of organizations and procedures of planning which are similar in all its field, including their systematic variations”.

Planning is represented as a set of activities, albeit affected by external 'constraints', which rationally provide for the solution of 'problems'. Planners have a “progressive tendency toward righting wrongs, correcting social imbalances, and defending the public interest, it has always been difficult to define theoretically, thus it can be said that planning has had only briefly a dominant paradigm and has remained on the fringe of critical social theory” (Dear, 1986; Friedmann, 1987).

Finally, we can conclude that planning is an interactive and expository process, that focuses on "deciding and acting" within a range of specialized, allocative, and reliable systems; but also draws on the multidimensionality of "lifeworlds" or "practical sense", rather than a single formalized dimension (Healey, 1996).

1.1.2. Institutional analysis

Understanding institutional systems is considered essential in many disciplines (economy, agriculture…etc.). In the social sciences, the institutional analysis looks at the "rules" that people develop to govern group behaviour and interaction in political, economic, and social spheres of life (World Bank 2007, p.4). It responds to the question of which organizations carry out these rules or policies reforms and what are their characteristics? Thus, it assesses the capacity and behaviour of organizations that carry out reforms; and helps identify constraints within an organization that hinder policy implementation. Therefore, Institutional analysis provides the understanding that these rules—whether formally constructed or informally embedded in cultural practice—mediate and change, sometimes fundamentally, the expected impacts of policy reform. It identifies relative stakeholders that are likely to support or hinder a given reform. (World Bank, 2007, 2009).

Definitions of institutions tend to vary widely in society, whether it is a significant rule, a practice, an arrangement, or an organization. The more usual definitions of institutions emphasise the rules and constraints aspect of institutions which are considered as precedents for the evolution of behavioural norms. These norms are visible in formally written texts such as legal frameworks (Savini, 2020). They are also tacit because they are internalized in people's worldviews and minds (Helmke & Levitsky, 2006). Therefore, Institutions are concretized patterns of social norms (March & Olsen, 2010); and social norms are the bricks through which institutions are built; they are the rules that orient people's behaviour in their daily life.

Social life patterns are shaped collectively through individual and organizational behaviours and through the institutions that frame the actions of civil society.

For instance, Matsaert (2002) identified institutions as "organizations or sets of conventions, policies or legislation which regularize social behaviour. Institutions operate at all levels from the household to the international arena and in all spheres from the most private to the most public" (p.2). Similarly, North (1986) sees "institutions are rules, enforcement characteristics of rules, and norms of behaviour that structure repeated human interaction" (p. 86). For Ruttan and Hayami (1984) "institutions are the rules of a society or of organizations that facilitate coordination among people by helping them form expectations which each person can reasonably hold in dealing with others." (p. 204).

In urban studies, institutional analysis helps to understand the complex urban system. It can explain the underlying power structures that have shaped urban areas. The importance of examining the spheres of relations and institutional sites between different groups in society when interacting within urban governance context was realized after the paradigm shift in understanding planning from the 1970s rational comprehensive model to an institutional and communicative approach in the late 1990s (Healey 1997, 2007 cited in Hasan, 2012)

Inam (2002) sees that institutional analysis plays a significant role in urban planning in two aspects; first, as a means, which analyses the outcomes of planning actions by multiple actors. Thus, it inspects the nature of the institutional framework/actor (i.e., the source of the institutional authority); and their purposes (i.e., the role within the institutional framework). Second, the significant role of the institutional analysis as an end is witnessed in its analysis of the action of the different related institutional bodies. It inspects the interaction of planning institutions or, in other words, why they act the way they do. Thus in the means dimension, it provides a better understanding of urban planning, while in the ends dimension, it provides a better understanding of the institutional behaviour through inspecting the decision making process.

Mandelbaum (1985) recognizes the role of routines in planning through the repeated forms of cognition and interaction in planning processes of which citizens (individuals or groups) develop and choose their repertoire of behaviour from within it. These processes are often institutionalized, and thus the location of a planning group within an organization and the group's external relations are certainly matters of institutional design.

Identifying policy structure and stakeholders is one way to help understand institutions through their relationships and engagement networks. Institutions have two significant purposes, formal and informal. The first one defines and structures policies (conservative purpose), while the latter gathers different strategies for improving the intentional behaviour of involved actors (constitutive purpose) (Clemens & Cook, 1999).

Matsaert's (2002) definition of institutions indicates that regularizing social behaviour means regularizing social action. According to Ostrom (2011), identifying an action situation is considered a key part of the institutional analysis framework, as well as the identification of the resulting patterns of interaction and the outcomes and the evaluation of these outcomes. The institutional analysis development framework (IAD) of Ostrom (2005) helps to establish the underlying diagnostic, analytical, and prescriptive capabilities through the analytical and institutional base that it provides. In terms of institutional action, Healey (1998) sees that some political cultures provide much more fertile ground for collaborative approaches in planning. Their institutional histories have allowed a store of institutional capital to build up which encourages horizontal consensus-seeking and fosters awareness of spatial issues. The legal and administrative systems reflect the formal institutional rules and agenda, whereas cultural systems enriched by customs and norms represent the informal institutions.

Both the New Institutionalism and the Communicative Planning Theory recognize the significance of cultural assumptions and relational processes of governance in reflecting and shaping social, political and economic relations. The overlap between both frameworks recognises the role of deliberative processes in their interactive dimensions, transforming the way governance works (Healey, 1999). However, the New Institutionalism keeps the focus on structural dynamics that outline the prospects and limitations to which actors develop changing responses, while communicative planning theory relies on interaction and ways of collaboration to define governance issues and follow-up programs, to constitute interests and to develop policy agendas (ibid).

Hasan (2012) sees that Healey (2007) provided an institutional analytical framework that consists of three levels. Of which, the first two levels are concerned with the analysis of the social actors and their relations through examining the interactions that occurred in a specific spatial strategy-making process routine, and analysis the practices and discourses between the formal government established agencies and the informal groups and networks. While the third is concerned with examining the formal and informal frameworks that shape the structure of the certain governance context (i.e., it is "concerned more with the ‘cultural assumptions’ of those involved in ‘doing governance’ and their prioritising to come to a more suitable governance module" p.30)

Therefore, for the institutional analysis of the urban development in Syria, three main aspects will be identified, 1) the key actors, their mental model and organization structure, 2) the urban development governance, and 3) the urban decision making process.

1.1.3. Planning culture

Planning is part of a specific cultural framework composed of actors engaged in an interactive process with their cultural structure and the particular planning procedures and instruments. Scholars suggest that planning has two functions, the first one is controlling and restricting development functions, which consists of a kind of drawing or mapping of future land use policies, and the second function is an activating process or methodology for urban and regional development (Greed, 2000; Alexander, 1992; Young, 2008). The second function refers to strategic planning and basically consists of assessing environmental and social impacts of proposed development projects, as well as of encouraging endogenous actors and cooperating both public and private interests (Gleeson, 2003). Nevertheless, both functions of planning have one thing in common: they have to be seen in the context of urban or regional culture contexts. Thus, planners and planning systems need to be responsive to their cultural context. Huxley (2000) argues that it is important to enlarge the methods of studying planning by emphasising ‘the importance of listening to planners’ views of their worlds to understand the cultural contexts which are affecting their planning practice.

Planning culture is not a scientific term and is not bound to a specific body of theories; it addresses a diffused research area. Rather, it is a mere integrating term covering a full range of variables that can be observed in practical planning (Fürst, 2009). The German Federal Agency for Construction and Regional Research (BBR) considers “planning culture” as the production of the built-up environment and everyday deal with it (BBR, 2002). In the United States, the term is less used (Friedmann, 2005), instead of the term “planning style” is in use more frequently, particularly after the study of Carl Abbott (‘The Oregon Planning Style’). According to Faludi (2005a), planning culture is ‘the collective ethos and dominated attitude of planners regarding the appropriate of the state, market forces, and civil society influencing social outcomes’. Friedmann (2005) considers planning culture as ‘the ways both formal and informal, that spatial planning is conceived, institutionalized, and enacted’. Fürst (2009) sees the former authors argue in common that planning culture refers to mental predispositions which the majority of those involved share; he considers that planning culture refers to attitudes, values, mind sets and routines shared by those taking part in planning; it also

influences the perceived planning tasks, the behaviour of groups or communities and pursuit of particular interests therein. Planning culture can therefore be understood as an aggregate of the social, environmental, as well as historical grounding of urban and regional planning (Young, 2008).

Culture has an impact on planning practices and procedures, and it is very important to understand the meaning of the term 'culture' since it is a comprehensive term. The English anthropologist E.B Tylor was the first who defined the concept of culture in 1871: "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". (Tylor, 1871; Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009b). While Gullestrup (2006) defines culture as: "culture is the world conception of values, moral norms, and actual behaviour". Culture essentially consists of traditional ideas, ideologies and the values attached to them. Culture consists of the derivatives of experiences more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including images or decodements and their interpretations or meanings, as well as the forms of discourse transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves (Holden, 2002, Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Avruch (2002) considers culture as not homogeneous but rather heterogeneous because, from his perspective, it is a collection of different subcultures of which may exist among genders, social classes, races, occupational groups, religions, professions, corporations and social movements.

This leads to another idea; that planning professionals might also be considered as a subculture of urbanists, developers, planners, geographers and other actors involved in the planning progress which are sharing and producing knowledge, practices, norms, rules, values, cognitive frame, and beliefs. From the above, actors involved in the planning process are conditioned by the planning system they act in, which leads to considering planning culture as a specific subculture (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009b). Thereby, planning culture, in general, according to Alexander (1992), indicates a process of formulating objectives and developing plans for future activities.

Thus, defining the concept of planning culture is not a simple task due to the broad fields of planning, as well as its different objectives and approaches (Fürst, 2009). However, planning culture might be understood to be the way where a society possesses shared planning practices. It refers to the interpretation of planning tasks, the way of recognizing problems and use of certain rules, procedures and instruments, or shortly, the methods of stakeholders´ participation. This includes informal aspects (traditions, habits and customs) as well as formal aspects (constitutional and legal framework), which vary significantly across countries and regions (Fürst, 2009; Greed, 2000; Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009b). Consequently, planning culture is determined by several framing factors and is working within political-administrative and institutional structures as well as in socio-economic and cultural frameworks which differ across the world.

Recent research has shown that the emphasis of planning culture lies on planning systems, planning styles, planning phases and planning perceptions (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009b). Yet, planning culture refers to a collection of various planning characteristics but not to a systematic approach or a common conceptual framework for discussing the role of culture in

planning practice (Newman & Thornley, 1996; Balchin & Sýkora, 1999). Waterhout et al. (2009) observed that laws and regulations, administrative and organizational arrangements as well as policies; which they refer to as 'system'; are part of a domestic planning culture. As for cultural change, they say that it is a continuous process and the result of a multitude of intended or unintended top-down or bottom-up influences, both from the inside and outside the planner's realm. And so, cultures do not change in a linear way.

Whilst some elements are involved in the planning process, like planning institutions and public or private actors, or planning artefacts such as urban structure and urban master plans; there are cultural attitudes, values, habits and traditions that have a remarkable influence on the planning process, structure and outcomes that are not obvious immediately. According to (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009b), these assumptions and values of culture can be divided into two dimensions: "the planning environment" and "the societal environment". In this context, "Planning Environment: shared assumptions, values and cognitive frames that are taken for granted by members of the planning profession (e.g. urbanists, urban and regional planners, geographers etc.)", whilst "Societal Environment: underlying and unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings which are affecting planning". A legal planning system cannot emerge from nothingness; even if it was 'imported', the country's life practice would interpret it in its own way by guiding a prevailing social perception in the required direction.

1.1.4 Spatial Planning and Planning Culture

Spatial planning is recognized as a function that aims at influencing the even (future) spatial distribution of activities, resources in cities and regions, and the way in which territory develops (Othengrafen & Reimere, 2013; Yoshida et al., 2020; CEC, 1997; Williams, 1996; Waterhout et al., 2012) to balance demands for the social and economic development with the need to protect the environment (Wegener, 1998) (i.e. sustainable development) through the territorial organization of land use and the linkages between them as well as the coordination and improvement of the impacts of other sectoral policies on land use (ibid).

Spatial planning is more than a technical task of preparing analysis and plans; it covers various policy domains and planning traditions (Waterhout et al., 2012; CEC, 1997; Stead & Nadin, 2009; Farinos Dasi & Milder, 2006; Othengrafen & Reimere, 2013). It also describes a way of connecting planning knowledge and forms of action in the public domain (Waterhout et al., 2012; Othengrafen & Reimere, 2013 based on: Friedmann, 1993, page 482). Thus, it is a governmental activity oriented towards the attempt to shape the future built environment (Waterhout et al., 2012; Othengrafen & Reimere, 2013), i.e., it is part of a project of "place-making" (Huxley & Inch, 2019); especially concerning the future distribution of people, and harnessing spatial development processes to foster and augment the qualities people value in environments. Spatial planning is a comprehensive activity that includes the attempts to plan the processes of social, economic, and environmental change to bring about certain ends (such as sustainable development) and respond to the demands of society or specific interests.

Due to the different cultural contexts between countries, the understanding of planning and planning strategies, models and objectives that countries follow are also different/diverse (CEC, 1997, page 23; Friedman, 2005, page 31). This is considered one of the reasons that many studies are made to understand spatial planning in different countries. Othengrafen and Reimere (2013) see that despite all these studies made, they do not provide a coherent understanding/explanation of how spatial planning is affected by cultural contexts and traditions; i.e., they do not include the 'unconscious routines' (p. 1270) that explain the different urban phenomena that appear in some countries but not so in others; or even explain the application of specific planning strategies in some countries but others do not do so.

Despite reconsidering spatial planning as a "culturally determined process" (Booth, 1993, p. 219)[1] in the 1990s and adopting the term "planning culture", the focus remained on the formal planning structure in the comparative studies, and the term was limited to describe phenomena such as "governance", while either neglecting the role of culture tradition, context, values and customs or addressed in a conceptually fragmented way (Young, 2008). This could be because there is no consensus on the use of the concept of culture, or even a comprehensive work analysing the 'unconscious routines' of planning (Othengrafen & Reimere, 2013).

Many researchers share the opinion that the good understanding of the culture issue helps to explain the several planning aspects (political, economic, administrative...) (Burke,1967; Bolan, 1973; Dror, 1973; Friedmann, 1967a; 1967b). Othengrafen and Reimere (2013) see Friedmann's (1967a) analytical approach relevant for planning culture concept because "it provides the following decisive factors for the analysis of spatial planning practices in different cultural contexts" (p. 1271): the institutional context (the bounded rationality), the nonbounded rationality (including the ideological and normative thoughts), and the extrarational thoughts (including traditions, intuitions, and wisdom, or in other words, the 'experiential knowledge'). While Keller et al. (1996) (similarly to Friedmann, 1967a) defined planning culture by three levels (1) organisations, judicial and administrative structures; (2) tasks and objects of planning and their perceptions; and (3) fundamental beliefs, values, and orientations. From these studies, it becomes obvious that they refer to a collection of various planning characteristics that are visible in many countries.

1.1.5. The concept of polycentricity

The concept of polycentric development has attracted much attention from both scholars and policy-makers. It is considered as the tool to achieve territorial cohesion (Urso 2016, Salone, 2005; Faludi, 2005b). Polycentricity in urban systems was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century (Davoudi, 2003). Waterhout et al. (2005) pointed out the embeddedness of the polycentric development concept in Europe's many spatial policies on the national level before it obtains the explicit term “polycentricity”. Yet, only a few policies were actually included in the implementation process, and this is what many researchers consider a weakness

[1]"in which the interaction of decision-makers and the meaning they assign to the instruments they use will affect the outcome" (Booth, 1993, p. 219)

point (ibid); while recently in Europe, polycentricity has become a goal of regional spatial planning policies.

The polycentric urban system lacks a strong hierarchy. “The meaning of polycentricity is wholly context-dependent – that is, it depends on countries’ territorial and demographic characteristics, their urban development patterns, their institutional organization and so forth. In its wider scope, polycentricity can refer to the multiple spatial clustering of almost any human activity at any scale” (Maier et al., 2006, p. 2). Its characteristic on the national level is that no city dominates over other cities in economic, cultural and other respects. Rather, a feature of polycentric urban systems is that cities often tend to be relatively similar-sized.

Polycentric development could create critical economic mass by combining efforts of smaller urban centres, while also delivering more balanced development between regions and more cooperative and functional urban-rural relations.

Many definitions address the complex and broad meaning of polycentricity, which differ according to various perspectives. Since emerging as a policy concept, polycentricity has been praised and criticized. First, it is praised for contributing to achieve social development goals, such as combating social exclusion, environmental degradation, and contributing to sustainable urban and economic growth. In other words: polycentric development can be justified by the public interest. Second, polycentricity is criticized for hampering economic growth by proponents of specialization and clustering.

Additionally, its vague definition allows gaps between the purpose of polycentricity and its implications as a policy tool (Hoyler et al., 2008). For Rauhut (2017), without a coherent definition, empirical evidence cannot be compiled to support polycentricity (see also Borges & Johansson, 2012; Brezzi & Veneri, 2014; Burger & Meijers, 2012; Governa & Salone, 2005; Meijers et al., 2007; Veneri & Burgalassi, 2012). In contrast, Davoudi (2003) argues that the vagueness is a strength—allowing multiple embedded interpretations that "mean different things to different people" (p. 979). Similarly, Burgalassi (2010) shows how the multiple meanings capture several dimensions (morphological, economic, political) and multi-scalar applications (e.g., local, regional, and national).

Gløersen (2005) defines polycentricity as follows: a) Using a normative definition, according to which the concept is about promoting balanced and multiscalar types of urban networks. The specific types of urban networks are more beneficial from a social and economic point of view both for the core areas and for the peripheries. b) Using an analytical definition, according to which polycentricity is a spatial organization of cities characterized by a functional division of labour, economic and institutional integration, and political cooperation. Krätke (2001: 107) defines a polycentric system as «a system in which a whole series of ‘high-ranking’ location centres exist side by side with a large number of small and medium sized towns and cities.

Davoudi (2003) identifies three different scales to which the concept of polycentricity refers: a) the internal structure of a city (intra-urban scale), b) an urban region with multiple settlements (inter-urban scale), and c) an inter-regional scale, which are also defined as micro, meso and macro levels by ESPON (2005: 4). The spatial scale referring to polycentricity is

very important because when spatial scale changes, polycentricity goals may become inconsistent (Radvánszki, 2009: 318).

Polycentricity, in general, is based on two complementary aspects: the first concerns morphology, i.e. the distribution of urban centres in a specific territory (number of cities, hierarchy, distribution in space), and the second concerns the relations between urban areas, i.e. the flow and cooperation networks as well as commuting by people. As far as morphological polycentricity is concerned, ESPON (2005: 45) identifies two extreme patterns of urban networks, the mononuclear pattern, with one dominant city and several peripheral/dependant places, and the poly-nuclear one, with no dominant city and centres of similar size. Similarly, relational or "functional" polycentricity, according to Green (2004), can be either mono-directional or multidirectional. In the first case, all relations tend to move towards one centre, while, in the second, relations do not follow a specific direction.

In addition, according to ESPON (2005), two polycentricity development processes can be identified: a) institutional polycentricity, which is based on voluntary cooperation, and b) structural polycentricity, which is the result of a "spontaneous" spatial development. Institutional polycentricity concerns administrative/political or institution-driven cooperations among cities, while structural polycentricity contains the flows of goods, people, data, etc. This category includes the corresponding flows affected through communication axes.

For Humeau et al. (2010), polycentricity's value is its ability to reduce territorial disparities and foster territorial cohesion (see also Meijers et al., 2007; Geppert & Stephan, 2008; Meijers & Sandberg, 2006; Brezzi & Veneri, 2014; Urso, 2016; Salone, 2005; Faludi, 2005b). Polycentric development can reduce demographic and economic imbalances and "ensur[e] equality in terms of access to infrastructure and knowledge, sustainable development, alert management and the protection of the natural and cultural inheritance" (Humeau et al., 2010, p. 26). Finka and Kluvánková (2015) see "territorial polycentricity and multilevel polycentric governance offers a promising tool to mitigate disturbances in urban systems" (p. 607). Polycentric development distributes the urban system's economic functions, allowing urban centres to gain a competitive position in a more balanced spatial structure where no city dominates over others (Meijers & Sandberg, 2006).

1.2. Spatial planning and post-conflict recovery

1.2.1 Post-conflict planning

Throughout history, many societies have experienced devastation and dispersal. Some have disappeared while others have rebuilt, in one form or another, their new place from the rubble of the past. Countries emerging from violent conflict face enormous challenges, leaving behind physical and psychological marks that take a long time to go away. Social relations, infrastructure, economies and government institutions get damaged or completely destroyed. Post-conflict reconstruction is the first step that has to be taken in the development process following a war. It is the task that has to be undertaken in the most pressing and demanding economic, political, social and cultural circumstances.

It is important to note that conflicts are not entirely internal affairs as they negatively affect neighbours, regions and, in some cases, the world. This happens through the spread of fighting and instability beyond borders, refugee flows, and disruption of trade and movement of goods, services, and people. Because of this, Newman et al. (2009: 3) stress that conflicts (civil wars in some references), apart from being a challenge facing war-torn countries, are also a “pressing global challenge.”

In the aftermath of conflict, there is a need to rebuild countries and establish long-term peace and stability. Post-conflict recovery efforts aim to establish security, stability, good governance, and the rule of law, promote justice and reconciliation and enhance the socio-economic well-being of citizens in war-torn countries (Hamre & Sullivan 2002: 89). Ultimately, post-conflict processes and operations aim to create a stable environment, consolidate lasting peace, and prevent the return of violent conflict in the future (Paris, 2005: 767). (Heleta, 2013).

War within a nation is often more damaging and invasive into the lives of more families in every community, making reconstruction more challenging and psychological repair almost impossible. However, Barakat (1992) believes that if the people's interests could be represented by their government, then peaceful, stable, and prosperous development is certainly what they would choose in partnership with the government.

In short, the physical rebuilding is just one segment of a broader reconstruction process following the war, which involves economic, social, and psychological readjustment. Barakat (1992) considers post-war reconstruction a high-level complex development task that has to be undertaken in the most pressing and demanding economic, political, social, and cultural circumstances. It comprises many aspects such as emotional energy, righting wrongs, rebuilding lives, solving differences to achieve national goals, etc. Thus, it goes beyond normal building activity. Similarly, Heleta (2013) sees physical infrastructure rebuilding, creation of an inclusive and accountable governance system, economic recovery and repair of social relationships as the main aspect of post-war reconstruction (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009: 130). Whilst Heleta (2013) divides the rebuilding phase into two stages, short-term humanitarian assistance and relief and medium-to-long-term reconstruction and development.

It seems that if the rebuilding of human settlements after the war is to be, in any way, responsive to the real needs of the people, immediate attention is needed to counter the complete lack of specialised knowledge on post-war rehabilitation. There is an urgent need for a considered holism of reconstruction. It would establish and widely disseminate a general framework of recommendations for approaching reconstruction (in a multi-cultural context) to meet foreseeable needs of war-torn communities and draw the attention of the world community to the costs of reconstruction and their responsibilities to act accordingly.

From the African cities experience, Büscher (2018) sees that “urban centres represent critical arenas in and over which this violent conflict occurs”, and how they produce “a series of regional destabilising effects through massive forced mobility” (p.193). At the same time, conflict dynamics are important to understand the urbanism that resulted in conflict areas. They redefine the urban economic, political and socio-cultural roles as well as the roles and positions of urban centres within regional, national and global dynamics of war and peace (ibid). Thus,

conflict not only puts cities under pressure, but it also creates openings, opportunities and capabilities for new urban constellations to unfold.

1.2.2. Post-conflict vs. post-war vs. post-disaster

Due to the lack of specialised literature on post-war reconstruction, scholars sought deeper and detailed research on natural disasters as a source of knowledge and an attempt to obtain information that could be generalised to war situations to understand the characteristics of war to better plan the reconstruction phase. Davis (1986) was the first to suggest the existence of many similarities between war and natural disaster in terms of their impact and their disruption of peoples' normal life. Thus, in the field of disaster management, it was in the writings of Cuny (1983; 1986; 1992) and Davis (1978; 1986) that war was counted as a disaster. Later on and based on these established similarities, scholars attempted to explore the issue of post-war reconstruction by studying cases of emergency response and reconstruction after natural disasters. (e.g., Lewis, 1988; Cockburn & Zargar, 1989; Zargar, 1988a; 1988b; 1989b; El-Masri, 1992: Meyers, 1991).

There was no recognition of wars as a 'disaster' - particularly by international development and aid agencies- neither in terms of emergency nor in reconstruction. (UNDRO, 1988 ignored war when it counted the impact of disasters)'. As well, neglecting the investigation of the social and cultural identity impact of war on the civil population in disaster literature (Amirahmadi, 1991: Meyers, 1991); and the relative lack of specialized literature and recorded experiences on rebuilding after the war, in particular literature dealing with the developing countries where the majority of wars have taken place since 1945 (Davis, 1988); all led to continuing study wars in a similar approach to disaster. The current studies tend to be overly technical, segmented, and short term. Results are rarely placed in a standard framework that would allow for translation from one post-conflict scenario to another (Calame, 2005).

Despite accepting the similarities that have been identified between natural and war disasters', the too much/excessive dependency on natural disasters literature could be misleading because of the considerable differences in the nature of post-war reconstruction and that of disaster. An obvious example is the highly political context in which reconstruction after the war must be undertaken. These differences are the consequence of the basic contrast between war and other natural phenomena. In the absence of hard data, it is best to work on hypotheses and be tested under various conditions. It attempts to understand war by formulating a general framework based on identifying a number of dimensions in which the war is different from natural disasters, and that can be used to measure war and its aftermath.

Calame (2005) considered conflicts as a type of disaster resulting from social phenomena differing little in their physical impacts from disasters resulting from natural phenomena. Further, Calame (2005) sees that the difference is felt in the aftermath when the strength and effectiveness of coping mechanisms vary greatly. Quarantelli (1987) quoted the definition reached by Fritz's (1961) as one of the well-known definitions of disaster when he wrote, disaster is any event:

"... concentrated in time and space. in which a society or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of society undergoes severe danger and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfilment of all or some of essential functions of the society is prevented". (p. 655)

Such a definition made it possible for a number of researchers to construct general principles of social effects under which a phenomenon can be considered a disaster. Thus, war was counted as a disaster under this classification too. This definition also led to the widening of the scope of what is a disaster. Nonetheless, war is distinguished from virtually all other disasters (natural and man-made) by the deliberate and conscious attempt by the warring parties to inflict harm, suffering and damage to individuals and settlements as we are seeing in Syria today and Bosnia and Lebanon in the past. Furthermore, the war in general and civil strife, in particular, are characterised by social and political conflicts, a phenomenon that is not readily found in disaster situations.'

However, a formal end of war does not always bring an end to violent conflict and fighting. In most instances, some form of conflict continues between various groups, especially groups that are unhappy with a peace deal or military defeat (Goodhand & Hulme, 1999; Moore, 2000; Campbell, 2008; Binns et al., 2012). According to Nathan (2010), the use of the "post-conflict" term instead of "post-war" is inaccurate and even impossible because "conflict" exists in all communities and is a continuous state to infinity, and it does not stop with the announcement of the end of the war. Yet, the term "conflict" is used in this research for its multi-layered meaning and due to the international widespread preferred use of the term to describe similar cases.

1.2.3. Post-conflict development

Several terms were used to refer to the contemporary reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of conflicts, such as "post-conflict peace-building" (Menkhaus, 2004; Pouligny, 2005; Krause & Jutersonke 2005; Paris, 2005), "post-conflict reconstruction" (World Bank, 1998; NEPAD, 2005; Englebert & Tull, 2008), "post-conflict recovery" (Boyce, 2008; Barakat & Zyck, 2009; Blattman, 2010) and "post-conflict state-building" (Samuels & von Einsiedel, 2009).

According to Mac Ginty and Williams (2009: 2-3), theories of conflict and theories of development "have largely evolved in isolation from one another." Prior to the 1990s, many development actors, experts and practitioners worked "in conflict and around conflict" areas but did not work "on conflict" related issues (original emphasis) (Tschirgi, 2006: 47). Only in the last few decades, development and conflict practitioners have begun exploring how development and conflict relate to each other. This change was primarily caused by the increase in the number of civil wars around the world in the aftermath of the Cold War and urge by many institutions and individuals to find ways to deal with these violent conflicts, minimise their effects on people, countries and the world as a whole and ensure that they do not return in the future (Mac Ginty & Williams 2009: 2).

Thus, since the early 1990s, conflict and development experts began looking closely into links and complex relationships between the two fields. They focused on issues such as

underdevelopment, uneven development and the effect of development aid and assistance on fragile countries, aiming to find ways to prevent conflict and violence from breaking out. Over time, conflict and development experts realised that equitable development could contribute to conflict prevention and that in the case of countries emerging from violent conflict, post-conflict reconstruction and development were necessary for lasting peace and stability.

According to Haleta (2013), some authors argue that establishing security, stability, and peace-building needs to be separated from socio-economic reconstruction and development after conflict. They point out that establishment of security and peace-building are aimed at stopping fighting and preventing further violence in the short-to-medium run. At the same time, they see reconstruction and development as long-term processes aimed at restructuring war-torn societies and promoting economic growth (Busumtwi-Sam, 2004). On the other hand, Sandole (2010) stresses that the lack of integration of development, conflict management, governance, peace-building and other fields has undermined peace-building and post-conflict recovery efforts since the early 1990s. Boyce and Pastor (1998) argue that post-conflict, stabilisation, peace-building and socio-economic reconstruction and development should not be separated into distinctive boxes because they are in many ways linked. They see successful stabilisation and peace-building as key prerequisites for economic reconstruction and development. At the same time, economic reconstruction, development and growth can help consolidate peace and stability and prevent the resurgence of violent conflict.

A report by the African Union (2007: 1) states that peace and development are “two sides of the same coin” and that they are mutually reinforcing in post-conflict situations. A similar opinion is voiced by the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD, 2005): “Without peace there can be no sustainable development and without development it is impossible to establish enduring peace” (p. 2). Schomerus and Allen (2010: 81) add that “peace holds a meaning far beyond “peacefulness” or simply “absence of conflict.” The establishment of lasting peace requires improvements in living conditions, including better infrastructure, employment opportunities, basic services and reliable and effective government structures.

Post-conflict recovery is comprised of security, social, political, institutional and economic elements, all of which are equally important (Cilliers, 2006; Jhazbhay, 2009). Socio-economic reconstruction and development are integral parts of post-conflict recovery efforts. Without reconstruction, inclusive development, livelihood improvements, poverty eradication and delivery of basic services to the population in the aftermath of conflict, it is unlikely that there can be long-term stability and peace (Annan, 1998; Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009). Because of that, establishment of security, state-building and development of a stable political environment are as important as socio-economic reconstruction and development. While “social and economic development [can] reinforce peace in the long-run, unstable politics and reversion to violence [will] undermine development,” peace and other post-conflict gains (Busumtwi-Sam et al., 2004: 379).

1.2.4. Conflict impact

The immediate impact of all wars can be summarised in human casualties and suffering, as well as destruction to the built and soft environments. There are a variety of reports and research that monitor the effects of wars, some studies are concerned with the effects of war on demographic patterns (Curson, 1989; Dahlen, 1989; Faour, 1988); others concerned with social and psychological effects (e.g., Ikle, 1958; Raphael, 1986); others with human behaviour and social response to air-raid warning (e.g. Mack & Baker, 1961); and yet others, with physical damage and architectural heritage loss (many articles on Dobrovnik); and finally those concerned with refugees (Hamermesh, 1979; Simmonds et al., 1983), etc.

Barakat (1992) categorized the war impact into three categories: First, the *immediate impact*: it affects the population, state, market and the environment (in its wider sense). Second, *indirect effects*: Due to the immediate impact of war, a number of side effects would result; these include socio-economic, cultural, political, administrative and organizational disruption. Third, *side effects* and long-term results of war are the accumulative results of the direct impact that appeared over a period of time. These are directly related to the amount of rehabilitation that has been carried out during and immediately after the war.

The direct impact of war on the population can be summed up in mortality and injury, psychological impact, and migration (both displacement and refugees).

1.3. Literature review on post-conflict reconstruction: A benchmark

The assessments of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ have been attributed retrospectively to a number of post-war reconstruction processes, these evaluations have been based on the criteria of external actors, not those of national stakeholders (i.e., attributing external measures of value, and assessing what value the intervention has been to the intervening actors not to the recipients) (Barakat et al., 2005). Thus, measurable indicators, such as the absence of violent conflict, the holding of multiparty elections and the growth in GDP, are taken as the sole indicators of success (ibid). Later on, it became essential to not just with whether the policy or programme has worked in the case investigated, but also whether it would work elsewhere’ (Gomm et al., 2000, p. 99).

“However, as the aims and objectives of aid programmes evolved to encompass broad social issues such as poverty alleviation, good governance, institution building, community empowerment and, more recently, peace building, so logically the aid world was led to consider other styles of evaluation” (p. 835). “Oakley et al. (1998, pp. 48 – 49) state that ‘Conventional and largely quantitative evaluations are more concerned with inputs and outputs. Social development evaluation, on the other hand, is not so amenable to such limited methods and demands an approach which is capable of picking up and explaining the qualitative change which may have taken place’” (p. 835).

Since the pace of wars may return for long periods of time and at the same time extend for long periods of time, most references and studies may not give an appropriate assessment or lessons for the current reality. Also, the change in the merits of cities and nature, the development of

urban planning considerations and the emergence of new concepts to some extent impose new indicators that must be taken into account (such as the social aspect, urban inclusion, etc.), in addition to the goals of sustainable development, global warming and climate change. In benchmarking, it is very important to understand what is suitable for local circumstances in light of international best practices. The main aim of benchmarking studies is to review a wide variety of cases that will support the research in exploring how to enhance the best practice of achieving sustainable recovery that is tailored to the targeted stakeholders. With benchmarking review, it is important to keep in mind that we cannot fully adapt approaches from different cases, as there is no “one size fits all” approach, whereas each country has its own circumstances. However, international and common standards would support in addressing the general outlines to guide this research. Hence, depending on the benchmarking in Table 1-1, we managed to identify and assess key approaches and main practices of the post-conflict reconstruction as well as the processes that need to improve and immediate response.

During and after conflict, citizens, local and central governments, as well as some international non-governmental organisations, will undoubtedly embark on the necessary task of reconstruction and the costly return to normal life. Yet, there appears to be little or no systematic understanding of this task and its requirements; international agencies and academic institutions have largely ignored the reconstruction following the conflict. Post-conflict recovery approaches vary, the most widely used approach is the externally driven approach, where powerful Western governments and international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), World Bank, and many international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and aid agencies, as well as numerous international experts and practitioners, drive the post-conflict recovery processes. The second approach is the internally driven approach. Under this approach, local political elites and citizens design and implement recovery programmes and projects with or without the help of external actors (Heleta, 2013).

Some countries have attempted internally driven post-war reconstruction and development, such as Somaliland. Although the recovery process was considered "relatively" successful, still there is not much literature on Somaliland (Barakat, 1992), and it hardly ever figured in state-building debates. Still, Somaliland represents an "alternative path to recovery and development" after the war (Bradbury, 2008, p. 1). Some researchers, such as Hohne (2006), sees that it presents an innovative way for reconstruction and development in all its social, economic, and political aspects. Somaliland case proved that an "internally driven, bottom-up approach can achieve post-conflict nation-building and regional stability" (Jhazbhay, 2009, p. 195). Furthermore, it shows that "new forms of state-building that do not simply copy the Western model of state but draw on customary institutions which are rooted in the local communities can have positive results" (Boege et al., 2008, p. 14). Similarly, Kaplan (2008, p. 154) writes that success in Somaliland shows that societies emerging from violent conflict need to "look inward for their resources and institutional models and adopt political structures and processes that reflect the history, complexity and particularity of their peoples and environment.". Jhazbhay (2009, p. 208) adds that Somaliland shows a way to "reconcile 'tradition' and 'modernity'" and build a functioning state and democratic system rooted in local needs and experiences instead of only importing foreign models and blueprints.

Several researchers think that post-conflict recovery success in Somaliland has been due to being "home-grow" and "bottom-up," rooted in local culture, customs and traditions, while fully internally driven and owned (Jhazbhay 2009; Walls & Kibble 2010; Eubank 2010). According to Bradbury (2008), post-war stability has been due to the long-term timeframe, broad public participation and locally designed, driven and managed processes. The security establishment has been the major factor that led to stability as well as basic socio-economic and physical reconstruction and development, and the subsequent economic recovery has been crucial for the stability of Somaliland and its institutions, Bradbury (2008).

Barakat (1992) and Ottaway (2003) see that post-war literature were mainly maid by external views where the focus was on the externally driven interventions and operations and imposition of ready-made solutions, and often excluding local voices and initiatives from academic and policy debates (Sandole, 2010). Similarly, for a study made for the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on Iraq, the role of Iraqi academics/researchers was limited to conducting interview surveys. The security concerns in Iraq prevented the CSIS researchers from conducting the survey themselves. Despite the significant contribution of the Iraqi researchers to the validity of the data collection and its interpretation, it was made within parameters already set by the external research team. (CSIS, 2004). Therefore, the research design was composite and mainly qualitative but it is not participatory." (p. 846). According to Barakat et al. (2005), this research failed to focus clearly on what Iraqis see as the root causes of their situation and key conditions for long-term solutions (P. 846). This can be related to excluding the local/national/Iraqi researchers not only from research conceptualization but also from the choice of statements that represent the 'successful end-state for Iraq'.

Such external interventions (based on such studies) always raise questions around the reasons behind the success of some state-building external interventions and the failure of others. It is, therefore, necessary to know if interventions deliver value for effort in the eyes of the recipients. Reaching the final judgement/evaluation for such interventions will not be clear until many years later, by which time the international community has usually moved on to the next crisis. Thus, recipients´ evaluation of the post-conflict reconstruction assistance they receive, the inputs they perceive as making a crucial contribution to recovery, and the effort and resources that brought no tangible benefits or were actually counter-productive are of essential relevance not just to them but to how future crises may be handled.

In Bosnia and Kosovo, the post-conflict recovery processes (e.g., peace-building and state-building) were externally driven; with local authorities often having limited or no influence over the important decision- and policy-making in Bosnia (Barakat, 1992), while in Kosovo, the international support programmes[2] worked on the redevelopment of an institutional framework, on-the-job training of civil servants, enhancement of the level of planning education, investments in capacity building in NGOs and consultants, and encouraging repatriation of Kosovar experts that were trained abroad (Boussauw, 2012).

In South Sudan, the post-conflict recovery was driven by a mix of internal and external support. The external actors focused on humanitarian assistance, or in other words, on short-term relief,

[2] Boussauw's (2012) article studied the two support programmes (MuSPP by UN-Habitat, and MobKos by the Flemish Government (Belgium)) that are operating in the regional city of Peja/Pec.

not post-war reconstruction and development, while the government of South Sudan has initiated and implemented a number of post-war initiatives and programmes on its own (i.e. focused on the medium-to-long-term reconstruction process). According to Heleta (2013) (based on Schomerus & Allen, 2010), externally driven peace-building in Sudan has made many local communities dependent on foreign solutions and funding and ignoring traditional approaches to conflict resolution.

In many works of literature, the focus was on housing strategies in post-conflict countries. In Kosovo, a housing reconstruction programme was applied after the war ended; this programme was implemented during the period (1999-2001). The European Union was involved in the recovery process through different institutions that have helped in assessing the war damage and providing highly qualified technical assistance to the reconstruction efforts, namely The European Agency of Reconstruction (EAR) and The International Management Group (IMG) (Minervini, 2002). In Bosnia, a property restitution strategy was proposed to encourage the refugees to return. It led to the return of almost half of the displaced population, and the majority of them returned in the first two years of the post-conflict phase. However, it encountered several obstacles. Lack of security reduced the possibilities of the minority groups to return, which prevented any economic activity. Simultaneously, the absence of solutions for the groups seized others' properties, and lack of social services made minority groups seek durable alternatives by replacing their original properties (Calame, 2005; Stroschein, 2014).

On the contrary, in Colombia, housing strategies did not encourage people to return. The (continuous) armed conflict since 1964 resulted in over six million displaced people who were forced to leave their homes to safer areas. The government in 2012 has released a large-scale social housing programme for the IDPs who have lost their homes due to the conflict in order to mitigate the housing deficit (Sliwa & Wiig, 2016). Displaced families preferred to stay in the hosting cities. The reason behind that attitude was probably due to Colombians' belief that their continuous civil war might never end, and instead of waiting for their 'storm' to calm, they started a new life in the new place. Although these houses were provided free of charge, it did not make the housing programme the ideal solution for the problem of housing shortage and poverty among the displaced population (ibid).

Despite the externally driven post-conflict reconstruction in Kosovo, the lack of experts might lead to irresponsible decisions, as in Kosovo (Boussauw, 2012). The need to respond quickly to an emergency situation focuses on physical refugee settlement, resettlement or reconstruction, which often neglect the wider objective of maximising linkages with the local community and local economy (Armstrong, 1991). For instance, the returnees faced difficulties such as proving their properties ownership (Boussauw, 2012, Minervini, 2002). The issue was exacerbated due to non-official and unrecorded real estate transactions (Boussauw, 2012). The focus on durable return in Kosovo's (and Bosnia's) case(s) without considering sustainable, comprehensive solutions prevented many displaced people from returning. On the other hand, the high degree of instability of the administrative environment in which urban planning and mobility management practices are embedded was an added challenge in Kosovo. The main cause is the transition from a rather centralised form of urban planning, a typical aspect of the

Yugoslav planned economy, into a markedly free form of development characterised by loose control by the authorities (ibid).

In the situation of post-conflict development, the focus is commonly directed towards transferring the best practices from previous experiences. Usually, this is embedded within the policy transfer approach (usually, the policy transfer concept is discussed when talking about transferring best practices). Policy transfer is mostly applied within an international framework (under international supervision) (or in other words, a form of an international intervention/externally driven in post-conflict development), as the case of the World Bank in Afghanistan. The World Bank had the role of an agent of international policy transfer in post-war reconstruction and development. (Evans & Barakat 2012) argued that “transplanting” best practices may be “serves donors’ interests and not be appropriate for each recipient post-conflict state” (p. 543). Thus, the stress on policy transferring during post-conflict interventions should reflect on lessons learnt in other places while adapting this knowledge to local circumstances and ‘working within what exists’.” (Ibid; Barakat & Chard, 2002). Therefore, development after conflicts, when it is international development, needs local technocrats who understand the nature of work and know the country's capabilities. The focus should be mainly on (local, institutional, governmental) capacity building to serve the affected countries in achieving post-conflict recovery (Ibid).

"Ultimately, this approach should lead to a situation where planning becomes an instrument to develop a sustainable, democratic and equal society." Despite all problems, challenges, and lack of local capacity after decades of war and destruction, local authorities still had a significant say in the post-conflict recovery development process. In general, the gradual shift of responsibility for service delivery from external actors to the government is necessary for the stability and credibility of local authorities in the long run. Susan Woodward (2011: 108) thinks that “it is time that research focuses on local processes” of post-conflict recovery and the “ways that international assistance can promote or obstruct peace and political stabilisation.”

Mapping methodology helps materialise the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies and allows participants to construct and direct their own narratives of space (Forde, 2018). It shifts the focus towards spatial dynamics of conflict transformation instead of traditional analysis of the city at (post-) war (Lefort, 2019). It depends on the involvement of local actors, which contributes to more inclusive memory work and (material and social) reconstruction, as in Lebanon (Lefort, 2019) and Cape Town and Mostar (Forde, 2018). This methodology might not be ideal, but it definitely can ‘emancipate potentials, enrich experiences, and diversify worlds’ (Corner, 1999, p. 231) by addressing some of the challenges facing peace and conflict research. There is the potential for such method to create an opportunity for local actors to engage in the socio-spatial transformation of space through their narratives of movement and memories of space.

Table 1-1: A benchmark based on different post-conflict planning practices

Study Area	Approaches of Post-conflict planning	Author(s)	Year	Name of the Study	Case Area	Proposed Approach	Research Methods
Post-war	International Intervention in local development	Barakat & Kapisazovic	2003	Being Lokalci: Evaluating the Impact of International Aid Agencies on Local Human Resources: The Case of Post-War Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina	- Sarajevo - Bosnia and Herzegovina	International intervention is limited to develop local staff to help in reducing their vulnerabilities while increasing their capacities.	Field research study (questionnaire survey)
Post-war	Reconstruction Assessment	Barakat et al.	2005	Attributing Value: evaluating success and failure in post-war reconstruction	Iraq	Participatory approach as a way to develop evaluation methodology in post-war time	Review of similar case-studies
Post-war	Conflict transformation	Lefort	2019	Cartographies of encounters: Understanding conflict transformation through a collaborative exploration of youth spaces in Beirut	Lebanon	Collaborative ethnography	Innovative collaborative-mapping methodology through interviews
Post-conflict	restoration of municipal urban planning practice	Boussauw	2012	Challenges, threats and opportunities in post-conflict urban development in Kosovo	Kosovo	sustainable redevelopment of the institutional framework	Evolution and assessment possible solutions based on field experience from two support programmes (MuSPP by UN-Habitat, and MobKos by the Flemish Government (Belgium)) that are operating in the regional city of Peja/Pec.
Post-conflict	Conflict transformation	Forde	2018	Cartographies of Transformation in Mostar and Cape Town: Mapping as a Methodology in Divided Cities	- Mostar - Cape Town	Mapping in divided cities	Investigating social movement in post-conflict space through cognitive maps and narrative interviews
Post-war	Recovery	Barakat & Zyck	2011	Housing Reconstruction as Socioeconomic Recovery and State Building: Evidence from Southern Lebanon	Beirut	A hybrid approaches combining owner-driven and contractor-driven models to strengthening local ownership and structural integrity, while ensuring a greater degree of flexibility than either is able to provide independently.	Household surveys and in-depth interviews with recipients of housing compensation

Post-conflict	Regulation / Informal Settlement	Garstka	2010	Post-conflict urban planning: The regularization process of an informal neighborhood in Kosova/o	Kosovo	New strategies must be adopted from the Zatra case to more realistically accommodate community development, data creation, and regularization for other informal communities	Interviews with urban planners and community leaders involved with urban planning activities
Post-war	Recovery: Local governance, capacity building, institutional development	Barakat & Chard	2002	Theories, rhetoric and practice: recovering the capacities of war-torn societies	Afghanistan	Bottom-up approach for local governance and international cooperation	Literature review of best practices and lesson learned
Post-conflict	IDPs Return	Sliwa, & Wiig	2016	Should I stay or should I go: The role of Colombian free urban housing projects in IDP return to the countryside	Colombia	Post-conflict housing and return policies that consider the local context and the individual preferences and needs of the IDP households.	Qualitative and qualitative methods, including ethnographic interviews with involved IDP households, semi-structured interviews with informants and stakeholders, as well as direct observations. Respondent Driven Sample (RDS) survey data are applied and secondary data from relevant literature and media.,
Post-war	Policy transfer, National Programme	Evans & Barakat	2012	Post-war reconstruction, policy transfer and the World Bank: the case of Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme	Afghanistan	- The focus on building governmental capacities to receive best-practice knowledge in a critical manner for Long-term strategies of post-war reconstruction - Domestic capacity as an improvement for the structural constraints of rational policy transfer.	The methodological pluralism in which complementary theories of policy development are combined in order to develop a theory of policy change that accounts for the role of particular agents of policy transfer in forging policy change. It includes: - The policy transfer network approach combined with an implementation perspective to provide a heuristic method for mapping processes of policy-oriented learning in developing societies. - The concept of participant observation

Post-conflict	Post-conflict recovery was driven by a mix of internal and external support	Schomerus, & Allen,	2010	Southern Sudan at odds with itself: dynamics of conflict and predicaments of peace	South Sudan	- strengthening of constructive local mechanisms and the delivery of tangible peace benefits - Developing appropriate solutions that work in each specific local context, thus, working with the affected populations is needed	- Extended qualitative interviews with local government officials, NGO and UN staff as well as individual or focus group discussions with local leaders and residents. - Questionnaire-based surveys administered to randomly selected individuals. - Drawing competitions in schools. - Participatory exercises with women, youths, and elders
Post-war	Post-war reconstruction and development approaches and practices	Heleta, 2013	2013	Post-War Reconstruction and Development. A Collective Case Study	- Somaliland - South Sudan - Bosnia and Herzegovina	An internally driven and externally supported approach to post-war reconstruction and development	- Interpretive research methodology - Collective case study approach -The grounded theory approach

Source: Author

Chapter II

Research approach and methodology

2.1. Research area

Syria, as a middle-income developing country, had witnessed major changes in its urban areas. There are many trends that shaped these changes, such as increased population, rapid urban growth, rural-urban migration, central planning, informal settlement, and environmental and resources stresses.

Syrian cities before conflict

In Syria, because of the rural-urban emigration caused by environmental degradation, 38 per cent of the total population lives in informal settlements. In Damascus, informal settlements were growing at 40 to 50 per cent per year. In 2010 the urban population was estimated by 11,754 thousand people while the informal settlements proportion prevalence in 2005 was 10.5 per cent (UN-Habitat, 2012).

Overall, the urban population in Syria counts for more than 50 per cent of the total population. The main two largest cities, Damascus and Aleppo, accounted for nearly 42 per cent of the urban population and 31 per cent of the total population. Cities ranging in size from 300,000 to 1 million – including Homs, Lattakia and Hamah – accounted for 39 per cent of the urban population (CBS, 2012). The unbalanced urban growth, as well as the concentration of population in few cities, were direct results of inefficient urban planning or, in other words, the limited urban legislations and the lack of a comprehensive framework for urban planning that takes into account all aspects of development (Al-Dajani & Abdeen, 2009).

Besides the migration issue, other challenges in the urban environment. The unsustainable use of water was expected to affect the population growth negatively. At the same time, the demand for water was increasing because of rapid urbanization, which led to a water scarcity challenge. Therefore, there was a need to increase wastewater treatment for agricultural purposes in order to reduce demands for freshwater (UN-Habitat, 2012).

Current situation

Recently, the country has been under a severe conflict that has affected all living areas. Infrastructure is being destroyed, and many people have escaped their homes and fled away. There are around 13 million Syrians who left their home, of which 6.5 million people are internally displaced (IDMC, 2020).

The escape of so many people to the relatively “safe” cities has led to more pressure on urban services, such as housing, electricity, potable water, fuel supply, transportation and such. A large percentage of internal refugees came to the cities’ suburbs that are increasing currently with an absence of good planning that considers sustainability measures (Ahmad, 2015). Even though there was a huge focus on expanding suburbs before the crisis, this expansion formed another pressure on the cities (namely Damascus and Lattakia), as most people living in suburbs worked in the city centre, which means that the population density is at its highest in

the day hours. The lack of services in those areas has also affected transportation which increased the challenges on the daily commuting to cities (Gada & Maya, 2013).

The situation after the war conflict is over may even aggravate in the attractive urban areas where the current exiles will probably be returning from abroad. Therefore, there is a need to start thinking of post-war reconstruction solutions and how spatial planning should respond; finding the right process and creating a new appropriate policy. The needed solution should be effective and appropriate for the Syrian context/culture.

2.2. Research Objectives

Despite the increased literature on post-conflict studies, and from the aforementioned case studies (Table 1-1), the focus of the reconstruction and/or recovery practices was on whether it was externally driven (Kosovo), internally driven (Somaliland), or a mix of both (Sudan). While some of the studies focused on more particular practices such as housing (Colombia, Kosovo, Bosnia), IDPs return (Colombia), and informal settlement (Kosovo). Furthermore, conflict transformation was investigated in some cases while scale focus varied between neighbourhood scale (Lebanon) to city-scale (Mostar and Cape Town). Still, the policy transformation is rarely considered, and it is mainly studied within a national programme framework that is externally driven (Afghanistan).

These works of literature emphasise the vital role of local authorities and building capacities in the recovery process. However, those studies do not indicate the role of national policies in implementing the national programmes for reconstruction or the impact of post-conflict recovery on the daily practices of planning. Moreover, there is no evidence that indicates whether new planning strategies or approaches have been adopted for the post-conflict phase. In other words, those studies do not mention if a certain planning strategy could be appropriate to achieve sustainable recovery and development in post-conflict time. They do not analyse this phase comprehensively from a planning perspective nor discuss the different potentials of spatial planning development approaches.

The contrast of reconstruction experiences between success and failure highlights the importance of the recovery phase being sustainable and comprehensive. From a spatial planning perspective, the recovery and development in post-conflict areas are not limited to physical reconstruction only; it goes beyond that; it is rather a comprehensive process that seeks to create liveable places for all citizens. Thus, it becomes essential that such countries adopt/follow a planning approach and policies suitable to their contexts and provide sustainable recovery.

This research focuses on post-conflict reconstruction and development. While security is important after war, this research looks beyond peacekeeping and focuses on medium-to-long-term social, urban, and institutional recovery and stability. This study is primarily concerned with post-war reconstruction and development approaches and practices as well as the ways development in the aftermath of conflict can help build and consolidate sustainable recovery and return for displaced people in the future.

Therefore, this research aims at:

> *Investigating the adequate spatial planning approach for the reconstruction era in post-conflict countries.*

With selecting Syria as a case study, a country that has experienced severe armed conflict for the last decade; the research more specifically aims:

Aim 1: To review/inspect the planning culture in Syria (before and after the conflict).

Aim 2: To investigate the physical change of Syrian cities during the conflict and foresee/forecast the potential spatial development in post-conflict phase. (how it might influence the planning culture).

Aim 3: To investigate the potential return of the displaced Syrians.

Research Aim 1

Syria is a country whose laws are still affected by French rule. And its cities still bear witness to the effects of almost all previous rulings that Syria underwent (Ummayad, Ottoman, French). This aim (aim 1) stems from the need for a good understanding of the planning system and planning practices in Syria to help better prepare for post-conflict planning. Review planning culture (or, in other words, unconscious practices) contributes to a better situated and contextualised understanding of planning. Thus, it may contribute to achieving a better understanding of the complex relationships between the cultural context (including the specific socioeconomic patterns and related cultural norms, values, traditions, and attitudes) and spatial planning as an operative instrument of territorial policy. This research explores the projects conducted by the authorities and seeks to understand the country's vision on planning development in the pre-during-and-post-conflict phase. Thus, the research questions (Q1 and Q2) are (this aim is met by answering the questions):

Q1: What form of (urban) planning development organization/approach exists in Syria?

Q2: What is the institutional context of urban/spatial planning in Syria?

Research Aim 2

The current conflict has reshaped the urban demography and cityscape; it has escalated the pre-conflict phase challenges (like rural-urban migration, environmental challenges) along with recent ones, including environmental disasters and internal displacement. The return of refugees en masse might exacerbate these challenges. However, the influx of returnees could also offer a chance to reset Syria's imbalanced urban distribution systemically. Deliberate management could foster more balanced urban development and a shift to sustainable cities in the post-conflict recovery process. The demographic distribution in Syria will (continue to) change significantly in the post-conflict phase. However, there is no adequate framework to

predict this transformation. As several regions regain relative stability, much remains unknown about the Syrian context. Therefore, it becomes essential to think about how post-conflict reconstruction can support sustainable recovery for cities and more balanced development. The research aims to outline how Syria can develop more liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places in the post-conflict phase. Consequently, research questions Q3 and Q4 are:

> Q3: What are the potential development patterns for the post-conflict phase? And could polycentric development be a suitable approach for that phase?
>
> Q4: How should the current spatial planning approach be altered to deliver more liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places?

Research Aim 3

The aim is to provide a better understanding of the reconstruction process, particularly the priorities and volition of the affected people in order to transfer control and the capacity to plan solutions to them so that they become directly involved in their own reconstruction. The research provides an understanding of not only the visible effects of conflict and reconstruction but also the invisible, emotional and attitudinal changes, which are the real determining factors in developing a harmonious nation. It enables those recovering from conflict to share a vision for themselves that will meet their needs and aspirations in a politically and culturally acceptable way and, therefore, more likely to be sustainable. Therefore, the research question Q5 here is:

> Q5: What are the perspectives of displaced Syrians on returning home?

The focus is on the group of displaced Syrians living in refuge countries as they have been acquainted with life in those countries. Their choice of the way to restore their lives when they return is an important aspect to pay attention to. Whether they would build their living environment inspired by their European/neighbouring countries´ experience or their choice of place and the city of settlement, this knowledge will highlight the importance of further inspecting the local residents' attitude towards the newcomers and the potential of inviting/admitting the latter group to the planning process.

2.3. Method, Data, and Analysis

In contexts of violent change and instability, combining different data sources and research methods in a composite methodology pays. Barakat et al. (2002) see that conducting research in a context affected by armed conflict involves more challenges than those on non-conflict areas (e.g., lack of data, difficult field study…etc.) where uncertainty is dominant due to a multitude of unpredictable parameters which tightly control appropriate action (Barakat & Ellis, 1996). For instance, developing a coherent sampling strategy is considered as one of the challenges, where much of the credibility of research depends on the criteria and procedures

for choosing what is to be studied. While for conflict-affected areas, it is often conditioned (especially for qualitative research) by what is practically possible (in terms of access and security) than by a theoretical analysis of their typicality (Nordstrom, 1995). Thus, the generalisation of research results might prove troublesome.

Thus, combining several methods could help in mitigating the challenges associated with conflict areas studies (Barakat et al., 2002). It depends on the use of multiple sources and methods in response to changing conditions and the combination and integration of the ethnographic approach with the use of surveys and, in some specific instances, quasi-experiments. Hence, the Composite Approach represents an effective way to deal with these research challenges.

Besides the literature review conducted above, this thesis uses multiple and complementary methods to collect data and inspect the research aims and questions, mainly qualitative methods as in Figure 2-1.

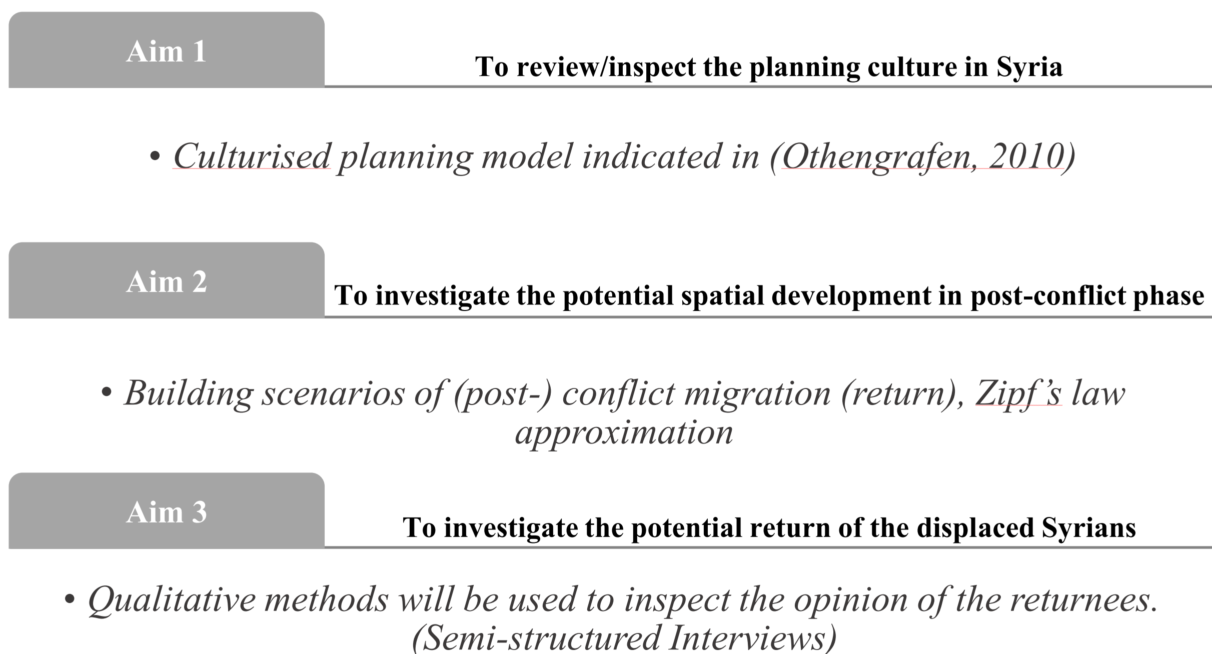

Figure 2-1: *Methodology outline. Source: Author*

The review of literature, conducted above, was performed to cover the topics of planning theory, spatial planning, planning culture, and planning in (post-) conflict and war areas. A benchmarking was made to highlight key practices and main studies in the post-conflict areas. Planning theory was discussed as a "subject to constant evolution". Planning with its formal aspect (legal context, political-administrative structure, spatial planning system, etc.) and informal aspect (traditions, habits, customs, etc.) both represent the result of the accumulated attitudes, habits and customs shared by the group of people involved (mainly professionals) (Fürst, 2009; Greed, 2000; Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009a) or in other words, planning culture. is related to planning culture. As both spatial planning and planning culture can experience change during the conflict, it remains important to develop a good understanding of those topics

and their interrelation, which will be further discussed in Chapter II, where the focus is on Syria as a case study. Consequently, research published in scientific databases and reports from international organizations was the main data collected for review purposes.

For the research Aim 1:

Culturised planning model indicated in (Othengrafen, 2010) is followed. The model is inspired by (based at) the three levels of culture defined by Schein (2004), the levels are: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and the underlying assumptions. When applied to planning context, Othengrafen (2010) identified this model with the three dimensions: 1) "*planning artefacts*" refer to physical urban developments, the organization of the planning process and the scope of planning; 2) "*planning environment*" refers to the core values, principles and conception of planning, and the type of actors who have access to the planning process; and 3) "*societal environment*" refers to more general, underlying norms, beliefs, and perceptions of a particular society (Figure 2-2).

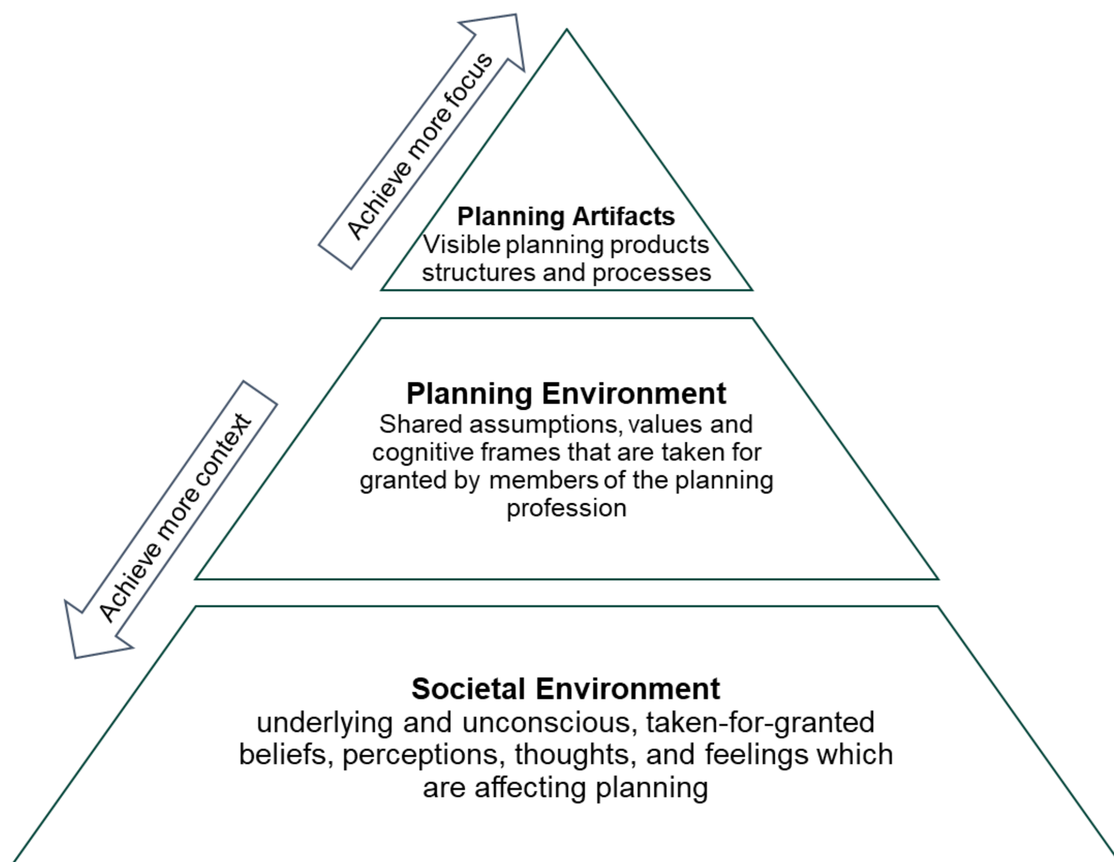

Figure 2-2: *The culturised planning model (Othengrafen, 2010) based on (Knieling & Othengrafen , 2009b)*

Following the culturised planning model and its levels, the inspection of planning culture in Syria includes background about Syria and the analysis of the planning system of Syria (including law, institutions, strategies, and decision-making process). It also includes traditions and history of spatial planning, planning objectives and principles. The society's orientation towards past, present, and future is studied, as well as people's respect and acceptance for plans

and what urban phenomena emerged. In addition to the review of Syrian planning - (culture), the impact of the current conflict on planning in Syria is studied. A review of research published in scientific databases (e.g. Web of Science, Science direct and like) was conducted.

Additionally, reports and research papers from international organizations (UN-Habitat, UNHCR, EU, OECD) were reviewed. Regarding the Syrian situation, a review of the planning system is performed with the help of national data available from CBS, the Regional Planning Commission, and other national reports, in addition to published studies and academic research. The background about Syria is made through using statistics based on reports from local institutions and national organizations.

For research Aim 2:

This research puts forward four scenarios for how Syrian returnees might impact national and urban development, each with varying numbers and characteristics of returning refugees and IDPs. Next, it compares the returnees' potential residential patterns and urban concentration to Zipf's Law, a normalised distribution of 'ideal' city sizes.

This study used a simplified version, the Matrix approach (also named: the four quadrants matrix or 2*2 matrix approach), to build the scenarios. The scenarios explore several settlement patterns to argue that polycentric development is the best planning approach for the post-conflict phase. Based on available data, polycentricity is measured using Zipf's Law approximation (the rank-size rule) according to its morphological dimension.

The focus is on the national scale, depending on the OECD report's division (Brezzi & Veneri, 2014). In the report, the objective of measuring polycentricity on the national scale aligns with aim 2 as shown in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1: Polycentricity at three spatial scales

Geographical Scale	Policy Objectives	Measures
Intra-metropolitan	Improve efficiency in land use Deal with environmental challenges (e.g., air quality, landscape, ecosystem) Improve efficiency of transport and other public services	Sprawl index Share of people and jobs in urban centres
Regional (inter-metropolitan)	Exploit regional agglomeration and network economies Tackle intra-regional disparities in access to services and amenities	Relative importance of the largest city Size distribution of cities Connectivity among cities
National	Design national urban policy to focus on the potential of all cities, fostering agglomeration economies and ensuring policy coherence Tackle territorial disparities (income, services, consumption)	Relative Importance of the largest city Size distribution of the cities

Source: OECD Regional Development Working Papers 2014/01. (Brezzi & Veneri, 2014, p. 5).

Besides the review of related literature, the research draws on various resources for demographic data (e.g., UNHCR, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; IDMC, 2020; UN-Habitat & SDC, 2014; CBS, 2020, 2012; United Nation (UN), 2019; UN-Habitat, 2012; UNHCR, 2015, ESCWA (2017) to evaluate migration patterns and predict the returning behaviour of refugees and IDPs.

For the research Aim 3:

Based on the research question to investigate the displaced Syrians' perspective (who have been acquainted with life in host countries) as potential returnees. A qualitative method is used to inspect the opinion of the returnees. A semi-structured interviews method was applied to collect the data. 25 interviews were conducted with a duration of 45-60 minutes each interview, on average. The research uses semi-structured open-ended questions. The selection of the participants depended mainly on snowball and convenience sampling method. In addition to answers analysis, memoing, non-verbal communication and observations were captured. Three coding methods were used. The questions mainly revolved around the comparison of the interviewees' lives before and after conflict and after moving to a refuge country. The questions focused on their vision of the preferred place to live (in Syria and the refuge country), and what the term “home” means to them.

2.4. Thesis structure

The research is outlined as follows to address the main objectives and answer the research questions:

Chapter III

In Chapter III, it is aimed to answer the research questions (Q1 and Q2):

> Q1: What form of (urban) planning development organization/approach exists in Syria?
>
> Q2: What is the institutional context of urban/spatial planning in Syria?

And thus address *Aim 1: To review/inspect the planning culture in Syria (before and after the conflict)*

The chapter starts with a general overview of the history of settlement in Syria, followed by a background on the urban context before and after the conflict. Then, the chapter provides an institutional analysis of the Syrian planning system. Finally, a reflection on the planning culture is conducted based on the previous analysis.

Chapter IV

In Chapter IV, it is aimed to answer the research questions Q3 and Q4, and they are:

Q3: What are the potential development patterns for the post-conflict phase? And could polycentric development be a suitable approach for that phase?

Q4: How should the current spatial planning approach be altered to deliver more liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places?

And thus address *Aim 2: To investigate the physical change of Syrian cities during the conflict and foresee/ forecast the potential spatial development in the post-conflict phase*.

This chapter investigates how Syria's current spatial planning approach can be altered to deliver more liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places for the post-conflict phase. The focus is on forecasting different residential patterns of refugees and IDPs' return by projecting four scenarios, each with varying numbers and characteristics of returning refugees and IDPs. Then it compares the returnees' potential residential patterns and urban concentration to Zipf's Law, a normalised distribution of 'ideal' city sizes. This chapter proposes polycentric development approach for the best chance at balancing development, sustainability, and mass returns in the recovery phase.

Chapter V

In Chapter IV, it is aimed to answer the research question Q5:

Q5: What are the perspectives of displaced Syrian on returning home?

And thus address *Aim 3: To investigate the potential return of the displaced Syrians.*

This chapter inspects the displaced Syrians' opinions on returning decisions. It will compare these results with the previous analysis on plausible post-conflict development scenarios in Chapter IV and see to what extent they are consistent and what methods could be recommended to help better awareness to possible future. Using the semi-structured open-ended question, we conducted 25 interviews with Syrian families and individuals who were displaced during the conflict. Several questions were raised, most importantly were: what are the motivations behind the return decision? Where will they plan to settle? And what is the deeper meaning of "home" for them? The findings highlight the differences and similarities of Syrian perspectives on returning home. We conclude with the importance for deep further analysis to be conducted with consideration of intersectional returning dynamics drivers.

Chapter VI

This chapter presents thesis findings from summarising previous chapters with a focus on thesis objectives and the associated/main questions. It also highlights the limitations associated with this research. This chapter provides recommendations for policymakers and planners and suggestions for future research avenues.

Chapter III

Planning in Syria

This Chapter is based on several publications:

Wind B., Ibrahim B. (2020). The war-time urban development of Damascus: How the geography- and political economy of warfare affects housing patterns. *Habitat International*. 96. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2019.102109

Ibrahim B, Novotny V. (2016). Governing for Sustainability and Resilience: Case Study in Latakia, Syria. Conference Proceedings: AESOP YA 2016. Ghent, 21-24 March 2016.

Ibrahim B, Novotny V. (2018). Planning for Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection in Post-Conflict Phase - Case Study: Syria. Conference Proceedings: ERDev 2018. Jelgava, 23-25 May 2018.

Ibrahim B, Wind B, Maier K. (2019). Polycentricity As Transition Path Planning Approach for Future Urban Poles in Post-Conflict Era – Case Study: Syria. Congress Proceedings: AESOP 2019. Venice, 9-13 July 2019.

This chapter aim at answering the research questions:

Q1: What form of (urban) planning development organization/approach exists in Syria?

Q2: What is the institutional context of urban/spatial planning in Syria?

To answer these questions, reviewing the planning culture in Syria will be conducted. Understanding the planning culture helps to systematically understand the spatial planning system.

The chapter starts with a general overview of the history of settlement in Syria, followed by a background on the urban context before and after the conflict. Then, the chapter provides an institutional analysis of the Syrian planning system. Finally, a reflection on the planning culture is conducted based on the previous analysis.

3.1. Background of Syria

3.1.1. History of settlement

Syria is a Mediterranean country in the Middle East. Geographically, it is a semiarid country with scarce water resources. It can be divided into the following regions; the narrow coastal fertile plain along the Mediterranean Sea from the west and limited from the east to a range of mountains and hills that go from north to south parallel to the Mediterranean Sea. They are densely forested regions only. To the east of the mountains exist the interior semiarid plain region; it can be divided to a cultivated steppe region constitutes the principal wheat zone; and the desert region, which occupies a large area of the south-eastern part and it extends to the borders of Jordan and Iraq; where rocks and gravel plateau is the main form of the desert.

"*Cultural landscape is a historically balanced system in which natural and cultural components form a harmonious unity*" (Houssin, 2015). The cultural landscape helps in observing the history of settlement since the culture in landscape represents the interference between nature and human activities (anthropogenic landscape), which we can inspect within the historical evidence and agricultural landscapes. The historical cultural landscapes are a testimony of activities of different cultures (the successive historical eras) in the settlement landscape.

The ensemble characterized by Ancient Villages of Northern Syria creates a series of unique cultural landscapes that have preserved their authenticity because of the lack of any human activity for a thousand years, and the absence of any restoration or reconstruction works in the 20th century. A characteristic feature of this area is its well-preserved landscape with the architectural monuments, including all remains. Their cultural landscapes, including the landscape structures and the village remains, illustrate the different settlement patterns and eras. The preserved fragments of the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria show that their inhabitants were skilled in agriculture. There are some remains of olive oil and wine production as well as mills (Houssin, 2015; UNESCO, 2011).

The geographical factor was the main influence on the history of settlement in Syria, where it has been inhabited by various powers since ancient times; it is one of the oldest inhabited regions in the world. The urban settlement in Syria dates to the eighth millennium BC in Tel Mribit on the Euphrates, Setmarkho east of Lattakia and some areas in Rural Damascus. While the most important early settlement in the area was in Tell Brak, dating back to at least 6000 BCE, civilization began in southern Mesopotamia in the region of Sumer and then spread north. The excavations reveal that an agrarian civilization was already prosperous in the region prior to the domestication of animals c. 10,000 BCE, emphasising the significance of the mass migration theory because it explains how agriculture became so widespread in the region when it did (Ancient History Encyclopedia, 2014).

Agriculture is intensively pursued along the banks of the rivers where the high density is noted, which determines the choice of village site near available water resources; some of the villages in the mountains have given priority to the requirements of defence and fortification. Village dwellings stand close together, and village streets are extremely narrow (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018).

Tribal mobility remains, and its primary structure is the Arab tribes was found before Islam; and some of them settled in the Umayyad era in Al_Ghab Plain (Al Ghab Depression) and Rural Damascus. Attempts to restrict the Bedouin took place during Ottoman rule and were later taken up again by the French. These efforts continued after Syrian independence in the 1940s. The emergence and prosperity of cities such as Deir Al-Zour, Bu Kamal and Manbaj is mainly due to the settlement of the Bedouins at that stage, which continues in the twentieth century, especially after the establishment of the Euphrates Dam. Few Bedouins remain in a mobile state.

In 1958 tribal holdings were no longer recognized by the state. As well, Syrian Bedouin pursued employment in the urban centres due to the massive drought of 1958–61, when pasturelands were ruined and vast quantities of sheep and camels were lost. Nevertheless, some Bedouins did not return to their pastoral lifestyle after the drought was over. However, pastoral endeavours were revived, although in a new form where pastoral activities grew more market-oriented, making migration progressively individualized. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018).

Syrian countryside is widespread and accounts for about 46per cent of the population. Because of rural inflation and modernization, some areas that have historically been attributed to the countryside have been transformed into small and well-served cities, while other rural areas have maintained their rural-agricultural character.

The population density rises in Al_Ghab Plain, Zawiya Mountain in northwest Syria, the coast in the west and Ghouta in the southwest, decreases in the East and totally disappears in the southeast at the Syrian Desert. The largest population concentrated in Aleppo then Damascus, followed by Homs and Lattakia, although 44per cent of the total population live in Damascus, Rural Damascus and Aleppo.

3.1.2. The governance system in Syria

The system of governance in Syria is a republican system. The government of Syria consists of three authorities, the executive authority, legislature and judiciary. The legislative authority of the state is assumed by the People's Assembly in accordance with the manner prescribed in the Constitution. The President of the Republic and the Prime Minister exercise executive authority on behalf of the people within limits provided for in the constitution.

The public elects the President of the Republic. The President might name one or more deputies and delegate some of his authorities to them. The President names the Prime Minister, his deputies, ministers and their deputies, accept their resignation and dismiss them from office. The President of the Republic passes the laws approved by the People's Assembly. He also passes decrees, decisions and orders in accordance with the laws.

The Council of Ministers is the highest executive and administrative authority of the state. It consists of the Prime Minister, his deputies and the ministers. It supervises the implementation of the laws and regulations and oversees the work of state institutions. The Prime Minister supervises the work of his deputies and the ministers.

The mandate of the Council of Ministers is as follows: 1. It draws the executive plans of the state's general policy; 2. It guides the work of ministers and other public bodies; 3. It draws the state's draft budget 4. It drafts laws; 5. It prepares development plans 6. It concludes loan contracts and grants loans in accordance with provisions of the constitution; 7. Concludes treaties and agreements in accordance with provisions of the constitution; 8. Follows up on enforcing the laws and protects the interests and the security of the state and protects the freedoms and rights of the population; 9. Passes administrative decisions in accordance with the laws and regulations and oversees their implementation.

The Syrian Arab Republic consists of administrative units, and the law states their number, boundaries, authorities and the extent to which they enjoy the status of a legal entity, financial and administrative independence. The organization of local administration units is based on applying the principle of decentralization of authorities and responsibilities. The law states the relationship between these units and the central authority, their mandate, financial revenues and control over their work. It also states the way their heads are appointed or elected, their authorities and the authorities of heads of sectors. Local administration units shall have councils elected by the public.

The judicial authority is independent, and the President of the Republic ensures this independence assisted by the Supreme Judicial Council. The President of the Republic heads the Supreme Judicial Council, and the law states the way it shall be formed, its mandate and its rules of procedures. The law regulates the different branches, categories and degrees of the judicial system. It also states the rules for the mandates of different courts.

Despite the fact that it was initially intended to represent a decentralised administration for the country, as determined in the Syrian constitution, and in the Local Administration Law 107/2011 preceded by the Law 15/1971, the former Local Administration Law that aimed at giving the local administrative units more power and be responsible for all affairs of which concerns citizens. However, the GoS retained a great deal of central authority (Maya, 2009);

the state's administrative division is pyramidal in structure with a dominant one-way (top to bottom) function.

The state's administrative division first established in 1956 and amended in 1971. Syria is divided into 14 governorates. "*Governorate*" is the official term used for the "*province*" according to the Central Bureau of Statistics of Syria. Syrian governorates follow the same administration division system, each governorate (*mohafatha*) is divided to districts (*manatiq*) and each district (*mantiqa*) is divided to sub-districts (*nawahi*) and each sub-district (*nahiah*) contains several villages (*qura*) and municipalities (*baladiyat*). Except for Damascus, where it is a city and governorate together. It is divided into municipalities, and municipalities are subdivided into neighbourhoods.

A governor for each governorate is proposed by the Minister of the Interior, approved by the Council of Ministers, and announced by executive decree. The governor is assisted by an elected provincial council where 60 per cent of the elected members are representatives of major community groups in the related city or governorate (Hasan, 2012). Figure 3-1 illustrates the government hierarchy, with a focus on urban development decision-making related bodies.

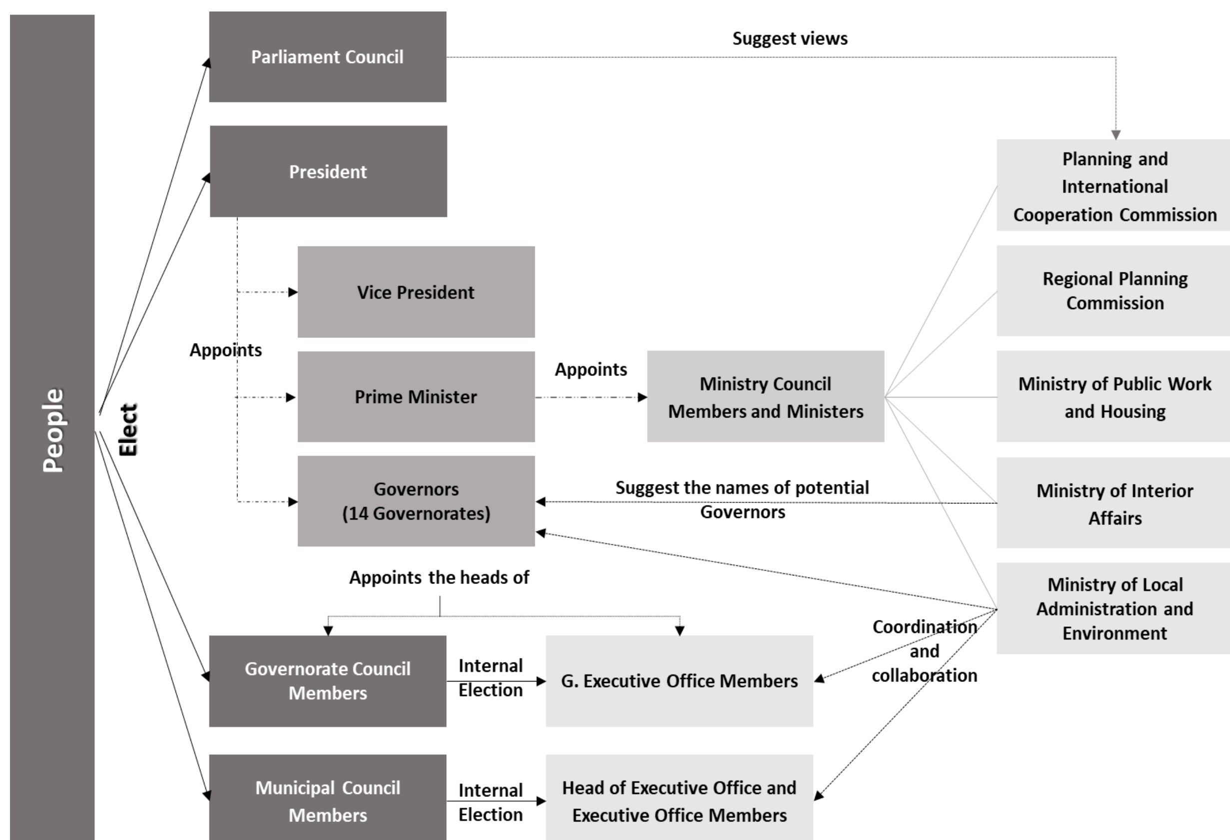

Figure 3-1. *The government hierarchy. Author's elaboration based on the Local Administration Law 107/2011 and the Syrian Constitution in its 2012 amendment*

The government in Syria is seen to be firmly under central state control. This applies to the urban development process where the central government is in the position of power over development decision-making on all levels, from strategic to local. This is meant to be reduced by implementing decentralisation policies emphasised in the FYP (2006-2010) and in Law

107/2011 by re-dividing areas of responsibility and resource ownership among the central and local bodies in a way that makes development decision-making more local.

3.1.3. Urban context pre-conflict

Syria is a middle-income developing country with 185,200 km^2 of land area (WB, 2008) and has a population of 21,660,000 (July 2010 est.). Syria is a developing nation; its economy is based on agriculture, oil, tourism, and industry, yet, it shaped the settlement among history, with an annual growth rate of 2.37 per cent (2010 est. MAM, 2008 p. 3). Overall, the urban population in Syria counts for more than 50 per cent of the total population. The main two largest cities, Damascus and Aleppo, accounted for nearly 42 per cent of the urban population and 31 per cent of the total population. Cities ranging in size from 300,000 to 1 million – including Homs, Lattakia and Hamah – accounted for 39 per cent of the urban population (CBS, 2012).

Syria had witnessed major changes in its urban areas. There are many trends that shaped these changes, such as: increased population, rapid urban growth, rural-urban migration, informal settlement, and environmental and resources stresses. Due to the rural-urban emigration caused by environmental degradation, 38 per cent of the total population living in informal settlements and, in Damascus, informal settlements were growing at 40 to 50 per cent per year. In 2010, the urban population was estimated by 11,754 thousand people, while the slum proportion prevalence in 2005 was 10.5 per cent (UN-Habitat, 2012).

Besides the migration issue, there were some challenges in the urban environment. The unsustainable use of water was expected to affect the population growth negatively. At the same time, the demand for water was increasing because of rapid urbanization, which led to a water scarcity challenge. Therefore, there was a need to increase wastewater treatment for agricultural purposes to reduce demands for freshwater (UN-Habitat, 2012).

The roots of migration issue come from rural areas, as the result of water scarcity (water (un)availability as the most important danger to the sustainability of rural areas), land fragmentation (the rural tradition of splitting the land between the sons of the farmer, this has led to ever-smaller farm sizes and subsequent decreased average crop yield per farm), and crop failure that pushed the farmers to migrate. In 2010 alone, 50,000 rural families left their homes to seek prosperity in big cities (UN, 2014), increasing the competition for homes, jobs, water and land in the receiving communities. The combined pressure of droughts and growing population has already been bearing its poisonous fruits. 75per cent of farmers faced total crop failure in 2011, causing 800,000 Syrians to lose their livelihood and rendering another 1,000,000 food insecure (GAR, 2011).

The government of the Syrian Arab Republic (hereinafter GoS) responded by approving a set of measures aimed at increasing sustainability of the society, which focused both on increasing water efficiency (to promote replanting of forests to increase infiltration, support construction of wastewater-treatment plants and efficient irrigation technology) and on easing the grave situation of new urban dwellers (job creation, provision of public services and dwellings)

(NAPC, 2011). This task was assigned to the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs (MSEA).

Nevertheless, the effects of these measures proved not to be strong and fast enough. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics data, in Homs and Aleppo, the two greater Syrian cities that received the bulk of the immigration of poor rural families, the share of illegal (informal) housing stock amounted to 59 per cent and 39 per cent of total housing stock respectively. This implies that almost three out of five families in Homs and more than a third of families in Aleppo lived in neighbourhoods deprived of proper sanitation as well as other basic public services (UN-HABITAT & SDC, 2014).

The MSEA pointed out the following dangers to the sustainable development of the Syrian society for the years of 2001 to 2010 (MSEA, 2011):

- Increased population rates and economic growth lead to a greater demand for drinking quality water exceeding the capacity of water resources and wastewater treatment plants—the effects of that account for the deterioration of both quantity and quality of aquatic ecosystems.
- Water intensive agriculture accounted for 89 per cent of water used overall and its influence on depleting groundwater resources.
- The increasing risk of catastrophic droughts.
- Increasing fragmentation of agricultural land ownership.

The development of the urban legislations and their updates have a very important influence in performing the visions, policies, and orientations of the general master plans, which are established with advanced mechanisms that achieve their development goals. The success of these urban legislations is subject to the building of unified and comprehensive legislation for urban development and urban renewal. Consequently, the impressive results of giving transparency, the ease of urbanism sector management and the harmony in meeting the current and future needs; that are emerged from this comprehensive legislation will put the foundations to build sustainable communities according to the set plans.

Urban policies vis-à-vis informal settlement

According to (Clerc, 2016), the reason behind the variation of policies is related to choices made relying on the stakeholders, countries and times, and precisely on the way in which these settlements are conceptualized by those intents on tackling them. Those former reasons represent the criteria the national and local policies formulated on. Thus, the land dimension represents the basic role in shaping policies. The way that stakeholders/decision-makers understand the landforms the settlement policy. “The different views and approaches to land; as property, place, territory, value, location, space of social anchorage, of rights, norms, economic development, or collective use; set the urban actors at odds in conflicts of strategy or ideal visions, with the result that land has become embedded in these policies as a multidimensional criterion”, (Clerc, 2016).

Regarding informal settlements, (Clerc, 2016) said that urban policies barely worked within the context of the international institution recommendations; such as the first international recommendation at Habitat I Conference (Vancouver, 1976); when dealing with informal settlements as it is becoming a destination for many people as it is considered as an affordable housing which causes a rise in the number of this type of houses. On the contrary, in some countries, policies related to informal settlement were far from the context of these recommendations. (Clerc, 2016) emphasises that “two main trends repeatedly oppose each other: keeping the residents on-site or relocating them” when countries deal with informal settlements. Thus, the situation was that decision-makers in Syria are divided between supporters to rehabilitation solution and others to urban renewal solution. These two approaches are related to the purposes and strategies of each group, and they are represented in political strategy: which group will control the land?; and economic one: who will gain the profits of these lands?.

Thus, the dilemma of the informal settlement areas is around two tendencies: rehabilitation (improvement of existing) and renewal (destruction and reconstruction) (Clerc, 2011; Saidaoui, 2012).

The spatial dimension, mainly the land dimension, is considered the base for putting projects and policies. While the informal settlements are known with disobedience to laws and norms, all decisions in relation to them are commanded by a settlement’s location, its surface area and built environment, type of tenure, property rights, owners, social space, land rights, territorial situation, property values. These representations of the space and land occupied by informal settlements can be matched with one or more types of public intervention.

The legalization for the informal settlement made by the Syrian government is connected with supplying the settlement areas with public services (water, sewage and electricity) to not turn into slums. The problem is that these public services are provided without any studied plan; besides, these areas are often lacking appropriate waste dump processes. Consequently, the legal situation and the prospects for legalization and introduction of services differ if the informal settlement occurred within the master plan or outside of it.

The Ministry of Local Administration is entitled to determine precise criteria of settlement agreements that can be applied to informal areas. Decree No. 26 from the year 2010 was issued in order to establish the Regional Planning Commission. It is concerned with the organization of regional and spatial planning and development at the national and regional level, and future planning for spatial strategies and policies for development plans; the Commission was concerned in putting the national map of the informal settlement in order put the national framework to improve/treat the informal areas. The implementation of this process was stopped due to the recent crisis.

Law 107/2011, which includes the Local Administration Law, aims to apply the decentralization policy and allow the local administrative units to put and execute development plans. Thus, the task of the central authorities is limited to planning, legislating, introducing modern technical methods and implementing the major projects that are not able to be implemented by the administrative units.

3.1.4. Urban context during conflict

Since 2011, the country has been under a severe conflict that has affected all areas of living. Infrastructure is being destroyed, and many people have escaped their homes and fled away. Between 2011 and 2019, about 13 million Syrians migrated (the pre-conflict population was 22 million). More than 5.5 million people found refuge in neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey) (UNHCR, 2020a), and more than one million migrated to countries outside the region (e.g. EU countries) (UNHCR, 2020b). Around 6.5 million people were internally displaced (IDMC, 2020). Figure 3-2 illustrate the displacement waves in 2012.

The ongoing conflict in Syria heavily influences the way of life of the population locked in the conflict zones as well as the population safe behind the frontline. On one hand, the relatively safe areas receive an ever-growing number of people fleeing the unliveable conditions on the battlefield. On the other hand, the different cities of pre-conflict Syria specialized in producing and supplying different products that the Syrian population needed. Having lost multiple important cities (Deir Ezzor, Raqqah, and large parts of Aleppo, among others), it is the population of the cities left under government control that has to take over their former roles. This is difficult to manage, and it is unsustainable in the long term.

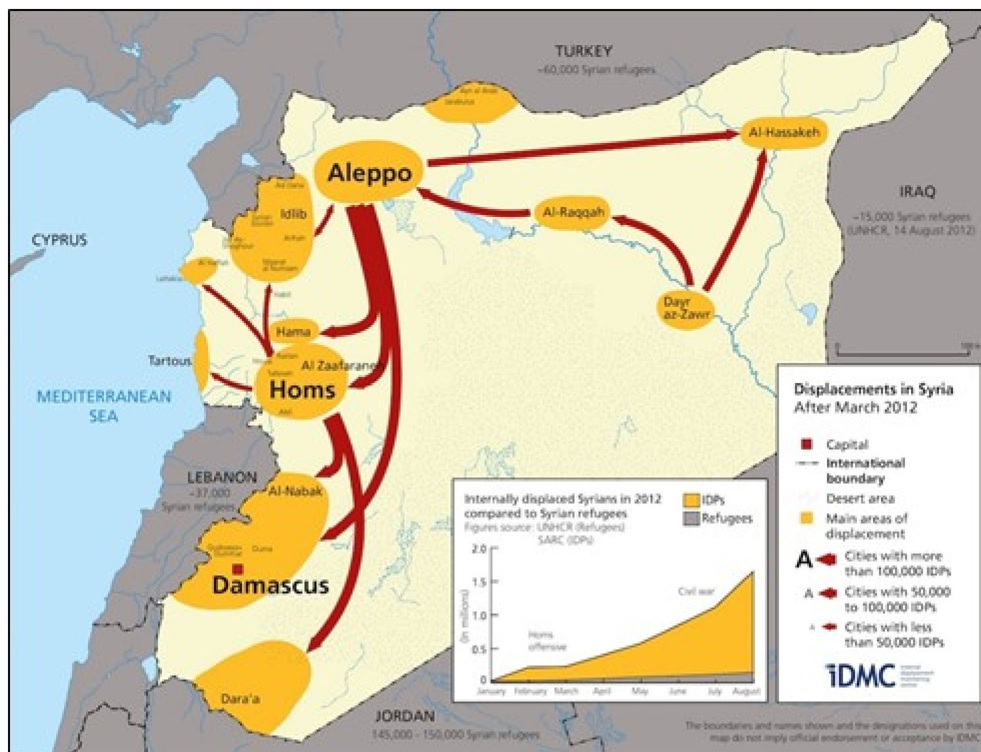

Figure 3-2. *Main flows of IDPs Source: The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (SW), (IDMC, 2012)*

Furthermore, the sudden increase of the city population as well as the unsatisfied demand of Syrian people caused by collapse of the supply network created an opportunity for economic expansion of the city. At the same time, the overall agricultural production of the Latakia region has severely decreased, mostly because of the complicated security situation in the rural areas.

(Parts of the rural Latakian region are a stage for direct armed clashes between the government and opposition forces, which stay behind the total destruction of nearly 50per cent of the Frunlok Natural Reservation and probably the burned 10,000 ha of forests as well). (UN-Habitat & SDC, 2014).

Because of the growing population and its resulting activities, this has led to increased pressure on the quality and quantity of resources and available water and its impact on loss of vegetation, soil erosion, and loss of biodiversity due to urban sprawl (expansion). The deterioration of freshwater quality is also observed in the discharge of wastewater in rivers and waterways without any treatment.

In terms of the natural environment, residential activities are the drivers of biodiversity loss. Deforestation/land clearance to expand the human settlements is witnessed, in addition to overgrazing, random quarries, and many forest fires that have eroded the soil and caused biodiversity loss. Poor land management of limited arable lands led to soil extinction in Syria as well.

The conflict affected the landscapes in many different aspects. In the countryside of Homs for example, many pipelines that form the water supply system were affected due to conflict by being cut off. As the water supply system is used to support local agriculture, this negative impact of the conflict has resulted in a significant reduction of the irrigated fields. These changes in the landscape are added to other ones caused by the anthropogenic influence in these same areas where groundwater abstraction is claimed to have caused land subsidence in the last decades (Tapete et al., 2015).

The informal settlements represent another aspect / challenge to consider within this overall. Countries under conflict conditions are usually unable to provide enough appropriate housing for low-income families. The reluctance of the private sector for constructing for low-income people makes the poor class solve the housing problem with their own efforts through the formation of slums. Slum areas were multiplied inside and outside the cities in developing countries, and they became impossible to get removed and to provide alternative housing for their residents (Saidaoui, 2012). In Syria, little is known or documented about them during the current crisis. What is known is generally related to the population increase/pressure in some of these districts as well as the transformation of some of them to a conflict zone (e.g. Al Yarmouk camp for Palestinian refugees near Damascus). The informal settlements issue was problematic for development plans in Syria. Still, there is no one comprehensive solution to this urbanization syndrome, except that some of these settlements became finally integrated into the city, built in cement or concrete structures and legally served by public infrastructure.

3.2. Planning system in Syria

3.2.1. Urban planning laws in Syria

Urban development decision-making is based on a substantial body of laws and regulations which are directly or indirectly relevant to urban planning. Many Laws and regulations in Syria

go back to the Ottoman era and the French mandate, as well as many inherited practices. Similarly, some planning (related) laws and practices go back to those eras. In Damascus, for instance, A large part of Malki is built as an elitist estate during Ottoman rule (Muhajereen) or during French rule (Abou Roumaneh). Moreover, the legal framework for defining property rights in Syria is a complex system that evolved based on different political visions for organizing society – Islamic, Ottoman, French Mandate, and the current era. The Ottomans progressively organized the myriad types of property rights into specific categories. Many of the exceptional rules and regulations regarding land tenure were forced into these broader categories. While the basic ownership right (known in Islamic law as Raqabah) was at the core of the new reforms, the many usufruct rights had to be aggregated and defined for tax purposes.

The type of real estate is still influenced by the Ottoman time (see Box 3-1). Similarly, the French attempted to develop a unified private property law to aggregate all tenure rights into a single law (Reg. 3339/1930). The law managed to eliminate many of the Ottoman special categories of personal claims of rights to land and transferred those to legal restrictions on the properties themselves. The law, however, fell short of being able to tackle some of the more difficult questions like charitable and private endowments, as well as collective ownership. These were tackled by the post-independence government.

The French regulations played into the hands of a nascent urban bourgeoisie to facilitate the governance of distant and rogue areas of the country. The post-independence governments were heavily biased towards the urban notables, which further attempted to reinforce their control over the Syrian geography by expanding the French mandate's bureaucratic and legal models throughout the whole Syrian terrain. Far from merely transforming specific statutes, this process deeply transformed the very understanding of the law and the legal system.

A European (French) approach to planning and housing was introduced to Damascus during the period of the French mandate (1919–1948). The colonial administration aimed to increase the quality of life and to make the city more 'governable' by putting an end to the organic growth of the city, using socio-spatial analyses and urban design (Khoury, 1984). The colonial administration introduced the distinction between formal and informal housing construction in a city that until then grew informally. In 1935, Rene Danger drew the first masterplan for Damascus, envisioning French-style neighbourhoods with a high level of public facilities. Malky, north of the Old City, is an example of such a neighbourhood, which has developed into a second city centre (Stockhammer & Wild, 2009). The master plan could be enforced due to the implementation of several institutional changes (e.g., the Law on the Organisation and Construction of Cities [1933], Municipalities Financial Law [1938], and City Building Regulation Law [1938]).

Box 3-1

Types of Real-Estate in Syria

There are several types of real estate which are identified in Article 86 of the Civil Law / 1949, they are:

- ***Land property estate***: (susceptive to) absolute ownership and existed within the built-up areas that are administratively determined, i.e., within the administrative borders of cities and villages. This type of real estate enables applying ownership rights.

- ***"Amiri" or crown real estate "in Ottoman times"***: owned by the government which allows applying the right to dispose of a property but not the ownership right; it includes all areas out of the built-up areas that are administratively determined, e.g., agricultural lands that exist out of the borders of cities and villages. It is considered private governmental property.

- ***Real estate of a conditional usufruct***: are the properties that belong to the state but can be subject to a conditional usufruct to the benefit of a certain group of people. It is part of the entailed "Amiri" real estate. Its characters are determined through local traditions and administrative systems. For example, pastures are lands that belong to the government and citizens who live in the village(s) next to it, have the right to use them.

- ***Protected state-owned lands***: owned by the state and/or any of its administrative bodies or public persons and compose a part of the public domain, e.g. roads, streets and public parks.

- ***Empty permissible***: owned by state i.e. "Amiri" lands, however it is not demarcated yet and therefore the first processor (a person who use the land) is permitted to claim ownership under certain conditions (15 years of possession, tranquil possession…etc.).

- *Note: Public properties do not form a real-estate unit, and they are not subjected to demarcating procedures that are applied on the private real-estate. Also, it is not registered in real estate's archives. It is enough to recognize these lands on the cadastral maps where they are referred to as D.P "Domain Public". On the contrary, the private properties of the government or municipalities are subjected to public cadastral procedures because they form a real estate unit, also they are documented, and they are registered on private sheet in real estate archives. Demarcation system is applied on this type of lands.*

Source: Article 86 of the Civil Law / 1949

Table 3-1 summarises these according to the area of concern of each legal instrument. These form the mental models of urban development actors and shape their spheres of relationship to a great extent. These laws and regulations were translated by the author from the official website of the Syrian Parliament Council. The table highlights the laws that are in effect.

It should be noted that many old urban practices and plans were based on laws that are no longer in effect, such as Urban and Land Division Law 9/1974 (amended by Law 46/2004) the Urban Expansion Law 60/1979.

Table 3-1: Urban planning laws and related regulations

Urban Planning and Related Areas of Concern	**Related Laws and Regulations**
Urban planning	Urban Planning Law 5/1982 (amended by Law 41/2002)
	Urban Renewal Law 10/2018
	Cities Urban and Planning Law 23/2015
	Decree Law 26/2012 on Establishing Two Master Plans in Damascus
	Decree Law 26/2013 on that defines the cases of allowing and not allowing owners of lands located within the boundaries of the Master Plan
Urban and land acquisition	Acquisition Law 20/1974
	Plots Distribution System based on applying the Urban Expansion Law 1558/1984
	Expropriation Inside Urban Plan for Public Needs Decree 20/1983 (amended by Decree 437/1983 to define planning standards) Land Acquisition Law 60/1979 (amended by Law 26/2000) Land Evacuation Law 232/1956
	Acquisition Law 20/1983
Regional Planning Law 26/2010	
State and International Planning Law 1/2011	
Real estate regulations	Editorial and Division Regulation Decision 186/1926 Optional definition within unregistered areas Decision 2576/1929 Estate improvement duty Law 153/1949 and Decree 68/1965 Syrian civil law regarding changes of real estate status Law 84/1949 The executive bylaw for Agrarian Reform Decree 109/1963 Common ownership removal Law 21/1986 Marine ownership Law 65/2001
	The executive bylaw for land registry law Decision 189/1926
	Real estate Law and its amendments Decision 188/1962 (amended by Decree 48/2008)
	Real-Estate Development and Investment Law 15/2008
	Real-Estate Development Law 25/2011
Real estate improvement duty fees Decree 98/1965	
Building on plots Law 14/1974 (amended by Law 59/1979)	
Informal development	Building infractions Law 1/2003 Property regulation Law 33/2008

	Illegal buildings Law 59/2008
	Decree Law 68/2011 on the application of provisions of the Illegal Building Law
	Informal Buildings Removal Law 40/2012
Organisational structure	SAR institution Municipal Act 172/1956 Local Administration Law15/1971 (amended by Decree 61/1974) Local Administration Law Executive By Law Decree 2297/1971 Environmental administration Decree 11/1991 Handing urban development duties over to MoLA Decree 64/2004
Finance	Non built plots fees Decree 39/1966 Local Administration financial Law 1/1994
Infrastructure	Wastewater connections Law 125/1959 Solid waste collection and disposal and waters pollution Law 49/2004

Source: Author's elaboration

3.2.2. Urban development decision making process

In general, planning in Syria is concerned with putting master plans, planning programmes and building regulations based on the development guideline of the Five-Year-Plan (see Box 3-2 for the terminology); it follows almost the same procedures in all governorates.

According to Decree-Law 5/1982 "The Urban Planning Law", the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MOPWH) (previously, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD)) defines, through a decree, the principles of urban planning. These unified principles organize communities planning process, including the general engineering scientific principles of urban planning and construction. The principles aim at meeting the needs of the communities within the available resources in the comprehensive regional planning framework of Syria. The administrative authority (usually it is the administrative unit or the municipality of each city, town or region) prepares the planning program based on the urban planning principles and the development guideline and forwards it to the MOPWH for approval of amendments within 20 days. After approval, the administrative authority prepares the general and detailed master plans and the building regulation and forwards them to the Council for review.

Once approved, the Council announces the previous plans and regulations and their amendments in the administrative authority and people whom are involved in the declared project also will be informed to review them through a personal notification, or a statement published in two local newspapers, or one of the metropolitan newspapers most prevalent among the advertiser where it is acceptable to use the media, audible and visual ones in the country, according to the discretion of the administrative authority. The appeals should be made within 30 days from the date of the announcement.

Box 3-2

Planning Terminology in Syria Planning System

The General Master Plan: is the plan concerned with the future vision of a community "i.e., the city, town, or village that follow one of the administrative units" and its urban expansion. Within this plan, the urban boundaries, major road network, land use, and building system are determined.

The Detailed Master Plan: determines all the planning details for the main and secondary roads network, sidewalk, public spaces, and all urban details of lands depending on the land use map and the guidelines of the general master plan and building system.

Planning Program or ***Schematic Program***: is a program that determines the current and future needs of a community according to the urban planning principles. This includes the determination of densities, population, and type and census (numeration) of the necessary public services for a 20 years period.

Directory plan: It represents the initial spatial development maps in order to determine the urban development areas. It is made by the related town or municipality under supervision and support of the related technical services department.

The Five-Year-Plan, in its essence, is an economic comprehensive plan issued by the government and supervised by Planning and International Cooperation Commission. It aims at developing all sectors (economy, social, planning, health, education…etc.). It is concerned with defining policies, plans and related indicators to achieve long-term goals of the national development strategy. In more details, it aims to define:

- Goals derived from the long-term objectives and its quantitative and qualitative indicators
- The policies needed to achieve these goals
- Programs and projects that are required to implement policies to achieve the goals

Demarcation: is the process in which a land border is designated technically by its four sides followed by issuing the necessary official statement which is to be later copied to the cadastral. However, not all types of real estate are included in this system, only the ones that consist of a certain piece of land with one (legal status), which their owners have the ownership rights and the right to dispose of a property.

Information adapted from Urban Planning Law 5/1982, the Tenth Five-Year-Plan (2006-2010)

After approval of this step, the executive office of the administrative unit prepares all documents and forward them to the directorate of the executive services for examination within 60 days. Afterwards, the latter office forwards the approved document to the regional technical committees for final approval within 30 days. The decision goes back to the Council for the final approval within 30 days. Figure 3-3 illustrates the decision-making process.

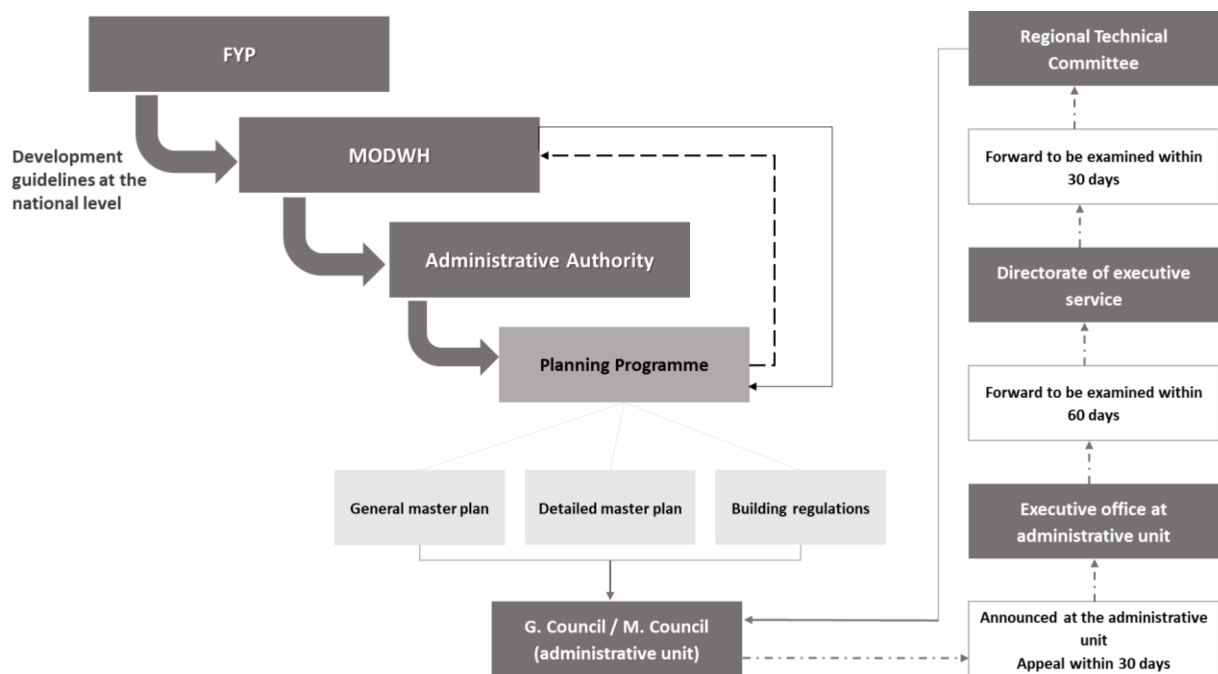

Figure 3-3. *The Process of Approving Urban Plan. Source: Author's elaboration based on the Urban Planning Law 5/1982*

Within the Governorate Councils, the following steps are added:

a) The General Master Plans and construction systems and their amendments of the governorate cities centres are issued by a decision of the (MOPWH), based on the suggestion of the executive office of the Governorate Council.

b) The Detailed Master Plans and their amendments of the governorate cities centres except Damascus City are issued by executive office decision based on the proposition of the Council.

c) The Detailed Master Plans of Damascus City are issued by a decision of the Governorate Council based on the proposition of the executive office.

d) The master plans and construction systems and their amendments in the rest of the administrative authorities are issued by each executive office.

e) Taking into account the urban planning principles and planning program, the master plans and the construction systems in the model villages, suburban, and generated communities are issued by the (MOPWH) based on the suggestion of the executive office.

The governorate and municipalities can collaborate with the private sector to develop a master plan, and this process does not need acquiring planning permission. Building permission is the only type of permission needed within the master plan process (Box 3-3 explains the process of obtaining building permission).

Also, the limited role of regional planning in the urban development decision-making process is witnessed. However, a more role is given to the regional planning development after

establishing the Regional Planning Commission in 2010. Its role aimed to bridge the gap between national and local levels and institutionalized tools for effective planning patterns by introducing a new level of planning that is also concerned with spatial development.

Box 3-3

Process of Obtaining a Building Permission in Syria

In Syria, getting building permission does not require a planning permission. Furthermore, planning permission process does not exist in the Syrian building permission process. However, building permissions differ according to:

- Type of land use (e.g., agriculture land, development land…etc.)
- Type of building (e.g., house, commercial, mixed used, Factory…etc)
- Location of the land (e.g., city, village, country borders…etc.)

In Addition, building permissions differ according to Construction Regulation System "or Construction System" which is a building criterion that building permissions are issued according to it, in all different regions depending on the features that is settled for it within the master plan, such as (the minimum and maximum area for the lot that is allowed to be built with the condition that the maximum area should twice the minimum one at least, and so on). Each administrative unit "i.e. governorate, city, town or municipality" has its own Construction System; however, Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MOPWH) issued general principles as a framework and guideline for all Construction Systems.

EX. Building permission in Latakia *

To get a building permission within Latakia City "i.e. the land is used for building purposes and within master plan" the owner, or who represent them, should prepare the following papers:

From the Directorate of real -estate:

- Real estate extract.
- Sorting scheme at scale 1/500: sort means dividing the land into smaller lands each one is designated to be built; also sort in real estate has several meanings besides the former one "e.g. story sorting/dividing for residential buildings which means giving each floor or the apartments in each floor a real estate number. So, for building permission the sorting scheme should contain the border of this estate and it should show all old existing buildings if there were any; besides, the neighbouring estate, roads/streets, squares …etc have to appear on this scheme with the area of everything that exists on it.

From the Municipality:

- Sketch of the estate: it shows the percentage of the building area to the total estate, balconies, number of floors and their height...etc.
- Site plan of the estate.
- Archaeologist Directory approval: this step can be skipped only when the building permission is given for building additional floor in a residential building.
- Appropriation Directorate approval.
- Taxes/fee Directorate approval.
- Blueprint schemes for the building with the structural analysis "these are prepared by a private construction architecture office; these schemes should be made according to Construction Regulation System of Latakia City".

Detecting supervision should be made by engineers working in the municipality to detect certain issues such as slopes, trees, steers, existing buildings…etc.

Continued..

After that all these papers get check-up by engineers work in the municipalities and in engineers union in order to give approval or not.

Additional document to complete building permission folder [4]:

- Architecture Blueprint with the scale 1/100 at least.
- Structural Blueprint with the scale 1/100 at least.
- Plumbing Blueprint with the scale 1/100 at least.
- Electric and Mechanical Extension Blueprint with the scale 1/100 at least.
- Geotechnical report from the specialized engineer.
- Cadastral praedial map
- Topographical map shows the present situation of the lot with scale 1/100 or 1/50.
- All structural and analytic studies of the building.
- Ownership documents.

All these maps and papers should be approved by Engineers Union. [4]

This folder is submitted to the municipality that the land follows to, whereas the responsible employee of receiving permission applications and then he/she sends it to a specialized engineer whose job is to study the application and approve it. Finally, this application should be approved by the chairman of building supervision office and then by technical affairs manager and finally by the chairman of the municipality [5].

Additional documents might be required depending on the type of land and the construction in order to avoid some restrictions, for example:

- It is not allowed for the municipality to give a building permission to for lands nearby the archaeologist area without getting a paper from archaeology authority that allows it. [6]
- It is not allowed to give a building permission to the owners of land nearby roads without getting a special permission from the department of transportation of each governorate. [7]
- It is not allowed to give a building permission to build on lands that are located under the power lines webs without making arrangements under coordination with the related electricity department. [8]

For the governmental lands that are included within master plan and had been distributed to the beneficiary; it is allowed to get a building permission under the following conditions:

- The land should be for residential purpose according to the General Master Plan.
- The building position should be compatible with the general master plan and planning system or with the directional plan of a town or municipality.
- Getting a declaration from the related department of agriculture and land reform approving the beneficiary's right to benefit from this type of land which he wants to get a building permission for.[9]

The example provided by an interview with government employee who works in the Latakia City Municipality

3.3. Planning culture in Syria

3.3.1. Culturised Planning Model

This section aims to provide a situated and contextualised understanding of planning. Understand the planning system and planning practices in Syria to help better understand post-conflict planning. As planning culture stands for collective modes of thinking and acting of built environment professionals, stemming in particular from a shared professional ethos and also from more general societal values. This includes informal (traditions, habits, customs, etc.) and formal aspects (legal context, political-administrative structure, spatial planning system, etc.) as far as they are a result of the accumulated attitudes, habits and customs shared by the group of people involved (Fürst, 2009; Greed, 2000; Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009b).

Therefore, the Culturised Planning Model is followed to inspect the planning culture (Figure 1-2). This model was first introduced by (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009b). The model is based at the three levels of culture defined by Schein (2004), but when applied in the planning context, Othengrafen (2010) defined this model through three main categories they are 'planning artifacts' (manifest culture), 'planning environment' (both manifest and nonmanifest) and 'societal environment' (nonmanifest culture), as explained in Table 3-2. These three categories represent the main outline of systematically approaching the enduring phenomenon of culture and its impacts on spatial planning.

Table 3-2: The potential cultural categories of the culturised planning model

	Specifications
Planning artifacts Visible planning products; structures and processes	Urban design and structures; urban plans; urban and regional development strategies; statistical data, planning institutions; planning law, decision-making processes; communication and participation; planning instruments and procedures; etc
Planning environment Shared assumptions; values and cognitive frames that are taken for granted by members of the planning profession	Planning semiotics and semantics; instruments and procedures; content of planning: objectives and principles planning is aiming at; traditions and history of spatial planning; scope and range of spatial planning; formalised layers of norms and rules; political; administrative; economic and organisational structures; etc.
Societal environment Underlying and unconscious; taken-for-granted beliefs; perceptions; thoughts and feelings which are affecting planning	Self-conception of planning; people's respect for and acceptance for plans; significance of planning: social Justice; social efficiency or moral responsibility; consideration of nature; socioeconomic or sociopolitical societal models; concepts of justice: egalitarianism; utilitarianism or communitarism; fundamental philosophy of life; etc.

Source: Othengrafen, 2010

The use of the Culturalized Planning Model covers the different concepts of planning culture that Jaššo and Finka (2019) summarized in three main definitions. First, operational, in terms

of planning tasks, organization, structure, legal framework, and planning endeavours. Second, behavioural, in terms of the formal and informal interactions between planners and stakeholders. Third, holistic, in its both vertical and horizontal dimension (Gullestrup, 2007). It also helped in understanding the semiotic level of planning culture that Jaššo and Finka (2019) also identified based on (Jaššo, 2011 in Jaššo & Finka, 2019). Whether its typology "*Material, Urban, and Architectural Symbols"*, the administrative system (the decentralized system) "*Spatial Configuration and Patterns on Macro Level*", decision-making process and planning governance "*Social and Behavioural Symbols*", the availability of policy documentation and participatory planning "*Visual and Cartographic Representation*", and the used terms in the planning system in Syria "*Language*".

3.3.2. Planning artefacts: visible urban structures, planning products

Spatial planning in Syria does not seem to follow a coordination pattern. So far, no clear spatial planning vision or strategy is visible, despite the role of the Regional Planning Commission and its new mission to develop an international framework for spatial planning. Unconventional development and creative planning construction and activities (such as the informal areas) appear to be continually occurrence. The urban planning system is the one that is clearly witnessed through its two main products, the master plan and the planning programme. From the discussion above, the master plan and the planning programme are both approved through ministerial/administerial hierarchal decisions. Ultimately, all urban plans have finally to be approved by a ministerial decree.

Many studies related to the planning system in Syria do not provide a dynamic analysis of the planning practices, including the consideration of social and cultural contexts, which make spatial planning less significant in Syria and lead the citizens to reject the requirement of a spatial plan. The rejection can be seen in the continuous emergence of urban sprawl in the metropolitan area of Damascus and other cities.

The analysis of planning practices requires further study of the invisible structures of planning (i.e., the planning environment and the societal environment), as will be discussed in the following two sections.

3.3.3. Planning Environment: shared values of planning professionals

So far, reports on spatial planning are neither related to existing regulatory plans nor to wider strategic policy. One explanation lies in the process of the ratification and implementation of a plan, as well as the interference between many planning laws and their scattered text between different official institutions, which, in general, appears to be highly complicated and centralised. This has led to hampering the implementation of many development plans making them outdated and leading the planning system limited to dealing with daily activities instead of developing long-term and durable solutions.

The continuous urban sprawl can be considered another explanation. Despite the conflict in Syria, this phenomenon continued to be visible in many areas, like Lattakia and Damascus.

Even before the conflict, the urban sprawl was clearly witnessed in Damascus as it represents the political, economic and social core of the country. Such unconventional development can be explained by the fact that municipalities in Syria had never been granted a comprehensive function of coordinating and controlling local development. Despite the decentralised administrative system addressed in Law 107/2011, which gives more responsibilities and power to municipalities, the government retained a large amount of control.

Planning regulations and acts, on the local level, follow the top-down approach. They only consider the citizen's participation in legal objections displayed to the regional communities to review them and ratify the plan for execution. This implies that the decentralized system did not prove successful. Furthermore, the current reality confirms the absence of the balanced hierarchical system of communities, and the application of the Local Administrative Law did not achieve the expectation due to several challenges.

First, the tendency to maximize the role of central power prevails, limiting the actual power of local administration. This is shown through the vertical and serial structure of legal supervision that is mentioned in Law 15/1971, which shows the nature of the administrative system characterized by monocentric concentration. Second, the unclarity of the actual amount of income dedicated to local units, in addition to the lack of transparency in the process of the income distribution. Besides, local plans are financed from the central budget, which increases the central control over local planning, and financing of the plan execution is not guaranteed, making the implementation a weak part of the planning process. Annually, 10per cent of the state budget is allocated to the Ministry of Local Administration for developing purposes, which is not sufficient to finance most municipal developing activities (Maya, 2009).

3.3.4. Societal environment: the unconscious and underlying perceptions and values affecting planning

The social environment is another invisible structure, besides the planning environment, that help to explain the reasons why planning development appears as uncoordinated. Unconsciously, people tend to resist the hierarchal system when meeting their demands. For instance, the high housing demand can explain the ongoing urban sprawl and informal settlements. This explains that the national government seems unable to consider local needs adequately in plan making. At the same time, the national government is unable to stop development; on the contrary, planning tends to legitimise these activities afterwards (Saidaoui, 2012). Moreover, people tend to do local networks to fulfil important tasks in terms of the provision of social services.

3.4. Analysis of current legal framework

Urban legislations and their updates heavily influence the performance of urban and regional planning through the visions, policies and orientations of the general master plans and other advanced mechanisms that aim at achieving their development goals. The success of these urban legislations is subject to the building of unified and comprehensive legislation for urban

development and urban upgrading. Consequently, the impressive results of giving transparency, the ease of urbanism sector management and the harmony in meeting the current and future needs that emerge from this comprehensive legislation put the foundations to build sustainable communities according to the set plans.

Generally speaking, the weakness of urban legislation and planning in Syria lies in the inefficient implementation process and ineffective enforcement mechanisms as in Law 5/1982. For instance, plans do not always cover the whole territories of municipalities; they focus more on procedures than qualities, they deal with all Syrian regions equally without differentiating between characteristics of each region and their special needs, and the processes of plan-making and implementing are slow. A gap emerges between the text of the Act itself and its implementation aspects, allowing for unregulated urbanization. Although Law 5/1982 determines local councils' responsibilities, it does not give the councils enough power to manage planning issues, which contradict with the decentralization policy intended in Law 107/2011, the Local Administration Law. The latter Act also limited the local administration units' powers to small development projects, leaving other tasks such as planning, legislating, introducing modern technical methods, and implementing the major projects that smaller administrative units could not implement to the central authorities.

The aforementioned Act was not the first attempt by the Government of Syria (GoS) to move towards decentralization. It was preceded by Law 15/1971, the former Local Administration Law, which aimed to give the local administrative units more power and be responsible for all affairs that concern citizens. However, the GoS retained a great deal of central authority (Maya, 2009); this reflects the socialist-inspired model of spatial planning, with a large role of the state. The state was able to dominate urban development through public ownership of land, banks, and developers. A core characteristic of this model was the aim to more or less evenly distribute people across cities: at least to prevent the emergence of a primary city.

After the year 2000, Syria has moved towards a rather neo-liberal planning model, through decentralization, deregulation, and liberalization (Wind & Ibrahim, 2020), where the concept of administrative decentralization received great attention in Syria on both development levels: the political and administrative. It was effectuated through a connection between administrative decentralization and local development, which was supposed to become the ground for economic and development plans. The Tenth Five-Year-Plan (2006-2010) represents the application of the new planning model where is meant to enhance decentralization and local development[3]. Previous Five-Year-Plans acted as first aids to relieve the development issues. Yet, they did not achieve the inclusiveness between different planning levels (i.e., national, regional, and local) or depend on the spatial strategies, but only focused on a sectoral dimension (Maya, 2009; Daaboul et al., 2009).

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3 The Five-Year-Plan is a comprehensive plan issued by the government and supervised by Planning and International Cooperation Commission, aiming at developing several aspects or sectors (economy, social, planning, health, education…. etc) “basically economic plan”. It is part of the development strategy and concerned with defining the goals derived from the long-term objectives and its quantitative and qualitative indicators; the policies needed to achieve these goals; and programs and projects that are required to implement policies to achieve the goals.

The Tenth Five-Year-Plan attempted to integrate the regional levels with both the national and local levels and integrate the spatial and urban dimensions with the planning strategies and policies (Maya, 2009). Nevertheless, the plan did not achieve its goals. The absence of technical programs (i.e., time, financial, and administrative programs), the unclarity in defining the responsibilities among ministries, the centralism of the plan elaboration, and the lack of specialized professionals in planning sectors were the main reasons for the unfulfilling of the targets (ibid).

Moreover, due to the absence of one unified, comprehensive, and integral urban legislation[4], legal procedures related to urban planning interfere with scattered texts related to several fields. Limitations appear in the legislation itself (e.g., the planning legislation does not cover all the related details, besides the unnecessary regulations, which led to an increased bureaucracy). This, in turn, caused a restriction to follow the hasty changes to handle the social and local disharmony, preventing the phenomena of urban sprawl, or even the response to economic, social, and local administrative alternations and the compliance with sustainability and investments needs. Moreover, the need to amend some acts caused a stay of the execution process of the plans; and accordingly, the increasing speed of emerging new, unorganized urban regions exceeds the capacity of administrative authorities. As well, the existing errors within some plans lead to their suspension, as is the case of Damascus and Latakia (Maya, 2010).

This all had caused weakness in reliability and credibility in the total of legal instruments related to urban development. Stakeholders face statements of contradictions, confusion and difficulties in managing this field, which caused losing the identity in the civilized structure and the emergence of many urban and planning problems within Syrian cities that are hard to cope with within the existing legislation.

These burdens hampered both the pace of development and the adoption of practical procedures for integrating the informal areas according to the general master plan and public security.

As a result of previous practices, several phenomena such as rural-urban migration, informal settlement, and unbalanced urban development emerged. In 2011, before the start of the armed conflict, more than 50 per cent of the total Syrian population lived in an urban environment. The main two largest cities, Damascus and Aleppo, accounted for nearly 42 per cent of the urban population. This means that 31 per cent of the total population lived in the two largest cities. Middle-rank cities (between 0.3 and 1 million inhabitants, such as Homs, Lattakia and Hamah) accounted for 39 per cent of the urban population (CBS, 2012). An ineffective planning system contributed to the excessive dominance of a few large cities.

Several national projects worked on developing the many informal agglomerations,

4 By that we mean: the interference of the executive panels/regulations sometimes 'which are the regulations issued by different Executive Authorities' bodies and powered by the law.' This has led to a lack of harmonization between the competent authorities. In 2010, the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) was established according to Act. 26 (2010); that considers RPC as the authority that is responsible of everything related to planning subject/field; and the general supervisor and the coordinator between all competent authorities; but its aspired positive impact is not tangible yet.

specifically by providing basic public services (Maya, 2009) in order not to turn into slums[5] but on minimum quality level. The low spatial quality in most informal settlements has an individual and an institutional cause. First, the individual financial situation of most residents does not allow for investments in housing or spatial quality. The largest share of the family income is generally spent on basic living expenses such as food, rent, gas, and fuel, as they occupy a higher position in Maslow's pyramid. Second, the lower provision of services compared to formal neighbourhoods by the public authorities limits the liability of these environments. Besides a shortage of basic infrastructures such as electricity, water, and paved roads, many informal settlements do not have enough schools and health care facilities.

The growth of informal settlements pushes the environmental boundaries of the larger cities; they contribute to water scarcity and a reduction of arable land (UN-Habitat, 2012). An example is the rapid growth of informal construction in the Ghouta Oasis, which is the major source of potable water for Damascus. The Syrian government responded by approving a set of measures to increase society's sustainability. They focused both on increasing water efficiency (e.g., promoting replanting of forests to increase infiltration, supporting the construction of wastewater treatment plants, and providing efficient irrigation technology); and on easing the difficulties of new urban dwellers (e.g., job creation, provision of public services, and dwellings) (GAR, 2011). However, most of these projects are not put into practice.

The current reality confirms the absence of the balanced hierarchical system of communities, and the application of the Local Administrative Law did not fulfil the expectation due to several challenges. First, the tendency to maximize the role of central power prevails, limiting the actual power of local administration. This is shown through the vertical and serial structure of legal supervision that is mentioned in Law 15/1971, which shows the nature of the administrative system characterized by monocentric concentration. Second, the unclarity of the actual amount of income dedicated to local units, in addition to the lack of transparency in the process of the income distribution. Besides, local plans are financed from the central budget, which increases the central control over local planning, and financing of the plan execution is not guaranteed, making the implementation a weak part of the planning process. Annually, 10per cent of the state budget is allocated to the Ministry of Local Administration for developing purposes, which is not sufficient to finance most municipal developing activities (Maya, 2009). Therefore, most municipalities rely on other sources of financing, including building permit fees, cleaning and improvement taxes, property sale and registration of lease contracts fees…etc. (ibid). This attitude cemented the weakness in local institutional capacity, which can be seen through the inability to encourage public participation in local plans.

These problems widened the gap between reality and comprehensiveness of plans and caused the failure to achieve urban feasibility. The absence of coordination, consultation, and time-bound program implementation; failed to keep up to date with the social and economic growth, which made the value of plans a tool for forward-looking planning questionable. In summary, the planning regulations and acts, on the local level, follow the top-down approach. They only consider the participation of the citizen in legal objections that are displayed to the regional

5 The informal settlement in Syria means the structures that are built either on state land or on the owner's land without building permission.

communities to review them and ratify the plan to become ready for execution. This implies that the way the decentralized system is applied does not prove to be successful.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to uncover the planning system in Syria to help understand the cultural and societal preconditions that can explain relevant attitudes, traditions, values, and unconscious motives. Institutional analysis as well as the culturised planning model were applied to highlight these issues.

This research explores planning culture in Syria to help understand the unconscious practices of planning. This will help in systematically understanding the spatial planning system in Syria. Undoubtedly, planning in Syria requires reform in terms of institutions, legislation, and practices to help achieve sustainable recovery in post-conflict time and balanced development in all Syrian regions. This raises the question on the change-initiating factor in planning culture.

The future vision of the development of Syrian urban areas by JICA (2008) (Figure 3-4) is consistent with the concept of polycentric development in terms of establishing urban centres with the interrelationship between them. This study proposes the development of multiple urban centres that are mutually linked with each other while forming a coherent urban agglomeration as well as mutually linked with other agglomerations. At the same time, the JICA's vision coincides with the National Framework of the Regional Planning Commission (Figure 3-5).

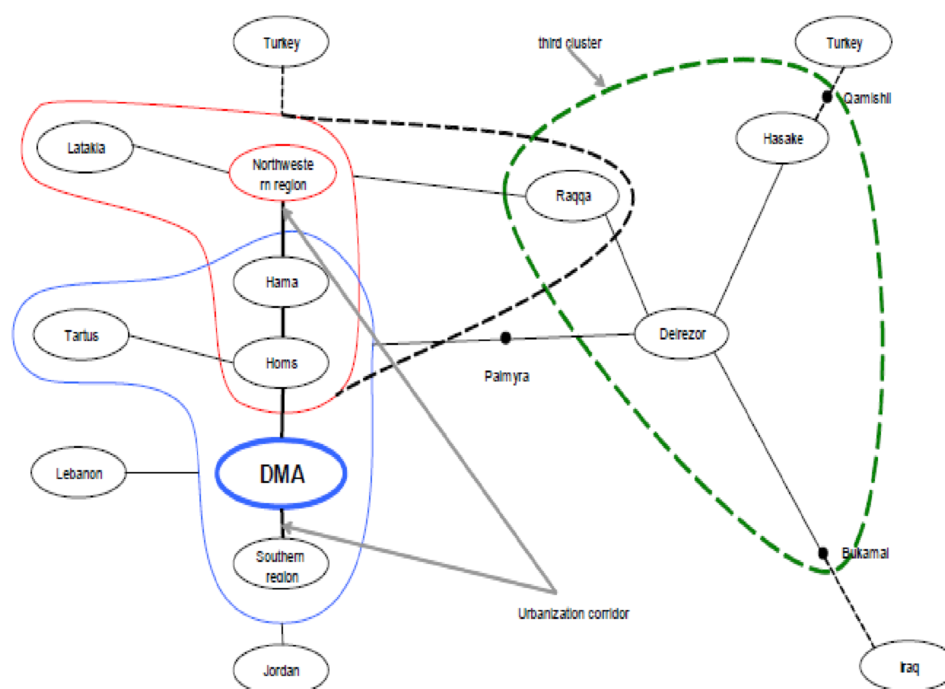

Figure 3-4. *Strategy for Spatial Development of Syria: Spatial structure in the future. Source: (JICA, 2008)*

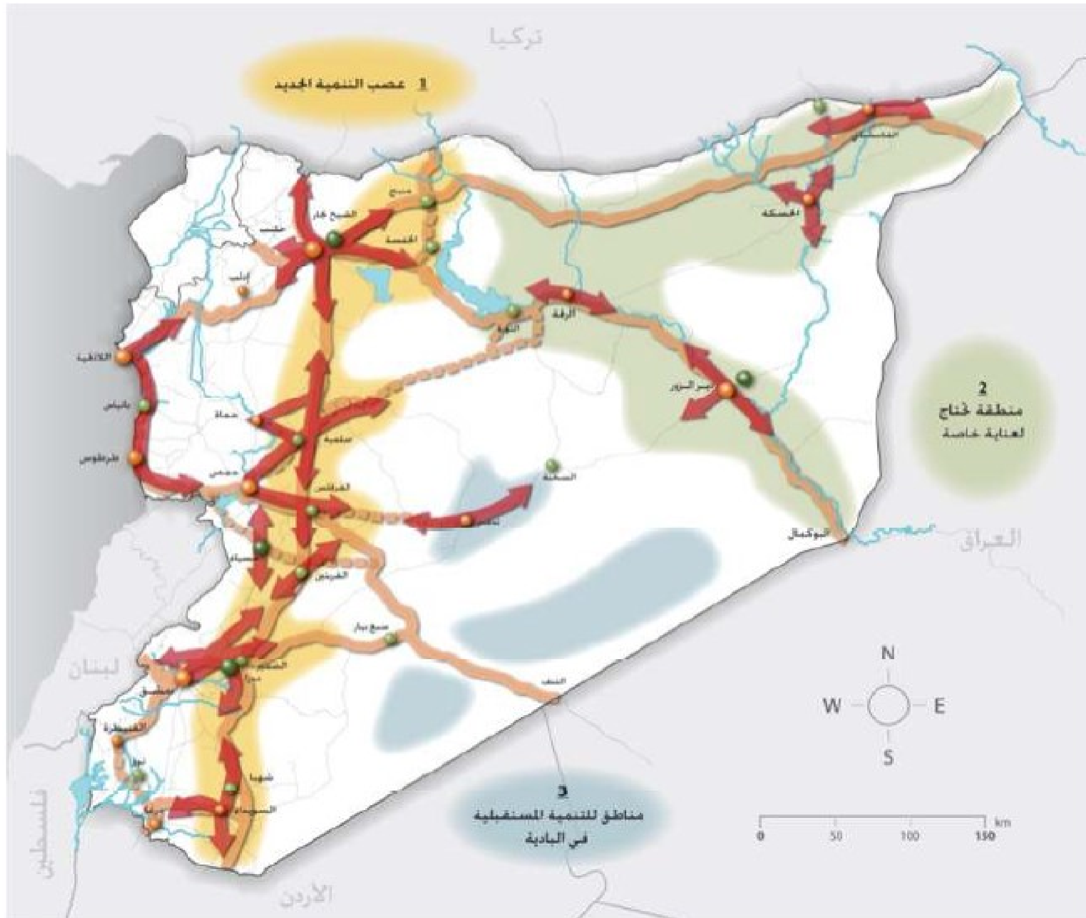

Figure 3-5. *The National Development Approach. Source: (RPC, 2012)*

The National Framework of RPC aimed at moving from the concept of growth understood in its general form and spreading development geographically to the concept of the development pole through the feasible investment of the place (RPC, 2012). This indicates the need to have balanced and SD in Syria on the national level; it also indicates the ability of the application of polycentric development on the national and regional level. JICA's vision is also consistent with the regional division of Syria, as illustrated in Figures 3-6 and 3-7.

From the above, the question could be raised whether polycentric development can be a change-initiating factor in the planning culture for the post-conflict phase?

Further exploration will be conducted in the following chapter to inspect this question.

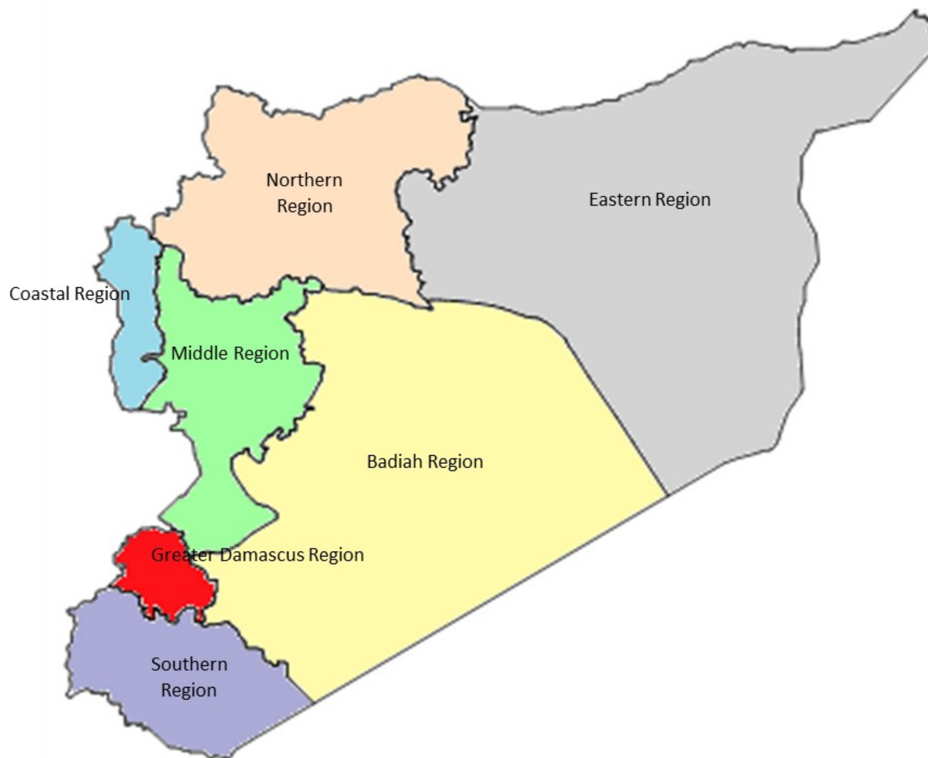

Figure 3-6. *Syrian Regions*

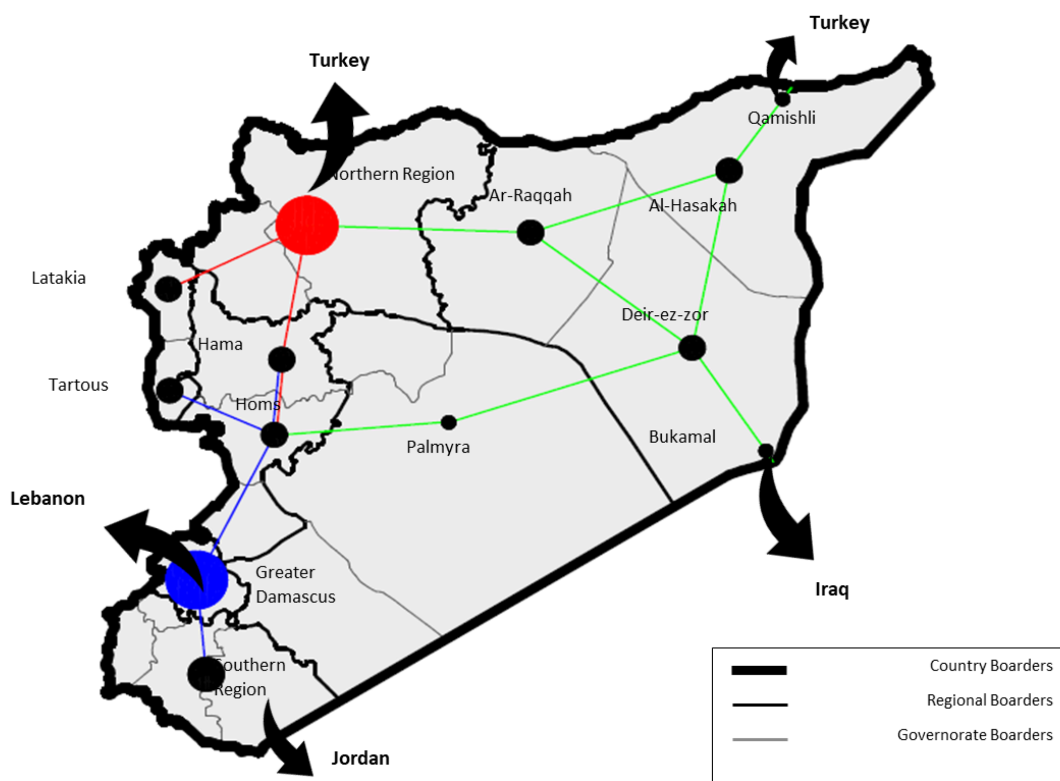

Figure 3-7. *Potential Polycentric Development Approach on National and Regional Levels. Source: Author's elaboration based on the JICA future vision (JICA, 2008) and RPC national development plan (RPC, 2012).*

Chapter IV

Future Urban Development Scenarios for Post-conflict Syria. How Will Returning Refugees Shape the Future?

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Abstract

As relative stability returns to many parts of Syria after ten years of armed conflict, several cities are beginning to restore urban life through planning interventions and reconstruction projects. However, unbalanced urban growth, partly due to the presence of internally displaced persons (IDPs), presents significant challenges for major cities. Yet, the odds of the returning decision are reduced due to several challenges such as lack of infrastructure, inadequate public services, housing shortage, and social barriers. This paper outlines how Syria can develop more liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places in the post-conflict phase. It projects four scenarios, each with varying numbers and characteristics of returning refugees and IDPs. Next, it compares the returnees' potential residential patterns and urban concentration to Zipf's Law, a normalised distribution of 'ideal' city sizes. The paper proposes polycentric development approach for the best chance at balancing development, sustainability, and mass returns in the recovery phase. It is concluded that the effectiveness of post-conflict administration of spatial development will affect the Syrian exiles' behaviour, both the number of those who decide to return and the spatial choice for those who actually return.

Keywords: Syria; post-conflict; polycentric development; scenarios; Zipf's Law.

4.1. Introduction

For the past decade, Syria has experienced severe armed conflict[6] that negatively impacted social and economic life. Acts of warfare destroyed much between-city and within-city infrastructure. In the larger urban areas, nearly one-third of the housing stock was damaged or destroyed (Statista, 2020). The direct effects (homelessness) and indirect effects (reduced economic livelihood) of warfare triggered domestic, regional, and global migration flows. Between 2011 and 2019, about 13 million Syrians migrated (the pre-conflict population was 22 million). More than 5.5 million people found refuge in neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey) (UNHCR, 2020a), and more than one million migrated to countries outside the region (e.g., EU countries) (UNHCR, 2020b). Around 6.5 million people were internally displaced (IDMC, 2020).

As the conflict eases, several spontaneous retuning waves are witnessed; an estimated 230,000 refugees and 494,000 IDPs returned between 2016 and 2019 (with 94,971 returnees in 2019 alone) (UNHCR, 2020c). Yet, a slight decline in the number of returned refugees and IDPs was estimated in 2020 to be 38,563 and 448,000, respectively (ibid). People were encouraged to return by government collaborations with international organisations (like the UNDP) to rehabilitate the destroyed areas, provide critical humanitarian services, and support local workshops and business owners with training and small cash interventions. Such interventions occurred in Aleppo (Razzouq, 2021; UNDP-Syria, 2019a), Al-Yarmouk in Damascus (Talal, 2021), Darayya in Rural Damascus (Al-A'dawi, 2021), and Deir-ez-Zor (UNDP-Syria, 2019b; Khalidi, 2021; SANA, 2021a; Al-Dhalli, 2021). However, little is known about these returnees' motives or their settlement patterns. The ongoing armed conflict contributed to urban imbalance by reshuffling the population between regions, cities, and neighbourhoods. People moved away from areas of open warfare and fled the adversities of food shortage, insecurity, and destruction. This trend simply expedited an urbanisation process that was underway in the pre-conflict period. Previously, relatively restrictive housing policies had suppressed urbanisation, but it intensified during the conflict due to the government's reduced regulatory capacity.

The shifting economic position of several cities in Syria's urban network also shaped migration flows. In the second half of the twentieth century, Syria established an urban network with several larger cities, each specialising in specific goods or services. This internal balance was upended when the government lost control of large swaths of economically vital cities like Aleppo, Deir Ezzor, Raqqa, Homs, and Hama. While most of these cities were eventually returned to government control, their economic functions had already been absorbed by the two larger cities that remained under government rule throughout the conflict, Damascus and Lattakia. Therefore, it is not surprising that most internally displaced persons (IDPs) settled in these two areas (UN-Habitat & SDC, 2014; CBS, 2020).

In 2017, after the Astana talks, the Geneva conference, the ceasefire announcement, and the return of several cities to government control; the Syrian conflict is taking a new direction;

[6] The term "conflict" is used for its multi-layered meaning and due to the term's widespread international use to describe similar cases.

destroyed and abandoned cities are coming to life again. Many displaced households began to consider returning home (IDMC, 2019, 2018). Important, if small, steps towards rebuilding destroyed cities have begun (e.g., rebuilding the old Souq in Aleppo (AKDN, 2021)). Many urban development projects have been initiated or are being discussed under the "rebuilding Syria" umbrella (SANA, 2020).[7] A comprehensive spatial planning approach is urgently needed to prevent downstream societal costs and to align the needs of various economic sectors with the common interest. If reconstruction projects are based on old regulations, they might repeat, or even exacerbate, planning mistakes from the pre-conflict era. The rapidly changing context requires a new comprehensive planning framework that is adaptive, flexible, and accommodating of variegated socio-economic scenarios.

This paper first reviews the Syrian pre-conflict planning framework and urbanisation process from 2000 to 2018. The latest data available for this time (20 years) is a period long enough to identify trends and short enough to be manageable. Next, it explores four (post-) conflict migration scenarios to reveal the bandwidth of potential changes in people's distribution across space using Zipf's Law approximation. The authors draw on various resources for demographic data (e.g., UNHCR, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; IDMC, 2020; UN-Habitat & SDC, 2014; CBS, 2020, 2012; United Nation (UN), 2019; UN-Habitat, 2012; UNHCR, 2015) to evaluate migration patterns and predict the returning behaviour of refugees and IDPs. Ultimately, it is aimed to identify how the current spatial planning approach should be altered to deliver more liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places.

This paper embeds urban planning into debates on post-conflict development. Spatial planners are often confronted with the devastations of conflict and volatile migration patterns. However, the literature has not detailed how spatial planning strategies can reinforce or counter the spontaneous urban orders built on millions of people's short-term solutions and acute needs (Boussauw, 2012, Minervini, 2002; Sliwa, & Wiig, 2016). Rather, the focus has been either on evaluating the reconstruction experiences of post-conflict countries (Boussauw, 2012), a single aspect of a reconstruction strategy, or studies at a limited scale (El-Masri & Kellettb, 2001). There is an urgent need for such strategies and to start thinking of how city planning should respond in such event. If no interventions are planned, environmental problems like water shortage, pollution, and housing unaffordability will be aggravated in the cities most attractive to the mass of returnees from abroad.

Lastly, this paper critically appraises the role of polycentric development in fostering post-conflict societies. Previous studies did not discuss the potential of applying polycentric development in the context of post-conflict recovery. Some focused on its effect on human settlement dynamics (Humeau et al., 2010), while others concentrated on territorial coherence (Sýkora et al., 2009). Polycentricity is both celebrated and criticised. It helps achieve social development goals, like combating social exclusion, environmental degradation, and contributing to sustainable urban and economic growth. However, proponents of specialisation

[7] These initiatives include projects based on Decree 66/2012 in Damascus, Marota City and Basilia City (Ajib, 2017); the master plans in Tadamon based on Law 10/2018 (MOLA, 2018); Qaboun, and Al-Yarmouk (Safi, 2020); the reconstruction of Baba Amr and Sultaniyeh areas of Homes based on Law 5/1985 (Jammoul, 2015); in Daryya in Rural Damascus (MOPWH, 2018); and in Aleppo based on Law 15/2008 (SANA, 2017a,b).

and clustering criticise polycentricity for hampering economic growth and for its vague definitions.

The next section reviews the concept of polycentric development and outlines the planning systems in pre-conflict Syria. The third section details the Matrix approach methodology used to build the four plausible scenarios of returnees' influence on Syrian cities. The fourth and fifth sections discuss the outcomes of these scenarios using Zipf's Law approximation as a baseline for settlement population distribution patterns. The paper concludes with several recommendations for urban planning and development in Syria and points to areas for future research.

4.2. Background

4.2.1 Refugees' return and post-conflict reconstruction

The transition from war to peace is complex, unique, and unpredictable. A country's actual war-to-peace experience is only revealed as it advances through each stage of the transition. For post-conflict efforts to truly support war-to-peace transitions, they would have to be prepared to 'discover' the stages of each transition as they appeared, possibly as a result of the intervention's influence but heavily dependent on the social and institutional realities of the country. The national strategy should align with key benchmarks in the peace process, target the needs and capacities of the post-conflict society, and balance potentially contradictory activities that may be equally necessary but do not fit neatly within the same priorities (Chimni, 2002).

As people are assumed to belong in a certain place, known in shorthand as "home", it is often expected that displaced people will return there after a conflict (Hammond, 1999). However, this mass return can cause new problems for the returnees, the country, and those who stayed (UNHCR, 1997). Black (2002) asks, 1) should refugees return to their home or their homeland? 2) who should decide where they should return to—the refugees themselves, governments, or international organizations? 3) what motivates such decisions, and 4) what is the deeper meaning of "home"? Returning migrants need employment, housing, access to public and social services, education, public utilities, and security (UNMIK & UNHCR, 2003). Without access to these basic necessities, their reintegration may fail, with negative ramifications for the whole society (Black, & Gent, 2006). As the UNHCR (2004) notes, "greater efforts will have to be made to successfully anchor returnees in their original places of residence, if they are to regain productive livelihoods again" (p. 9). Returnees may face difficulties in proving property ownership, which can be exacerbated by unofficial and unrecorded real estate transactions or forgery (Boussauw, 2012, Minervini, 2002). Additionally, IDPs and refugees might refuse to return "home", especially if they come from rural areas (see Sliwa, & Wiig, 2016 on Colombia). People may not want to uproot their re-established lives or may not believe that the continuous armed conflict actually ended.

4.2.2 Polycentric development

Polycentricity in urban systems was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century (Davoudi, 2003). Waterhout et al. (2005) pointed out the embeddedness of the polycentric development concept in Europe's many spatial policies on the national level before it obtains the explicit term “polycentricity”. Yet, only a few policies were actually included in the implementation process, and this is what many researchers consider a weakness point (ibid); while recently in Europe, polycentricity has become a goal of regional spatial planning policies.

Many definitions address the complex and broad meaning of polycentricity, which differ according to various perspectives. Since emerging as a policy concept, polycentricity has been praised and criticized. First, it is praised for contributing to achieve social development goals, such as combating social exclusion, environmental degradation and contributing to sustainable urban and economic growth. In other words: polycentric development can be justified by the public interest. Second, polycentricity is criticized for hampering economic growth by proponents of specialization and clustering.

Additionally, its vague definition allows gaps between the purpose of polycentricity and its implications as a policy tool (Hoyler et al., 2008). For Rauhut (2017), without a coherent definition, empirical evidence cannot be compiled to support polycentricity (see also Borges & Johansson, 2012; Brezzi & Veneri, 2014; Burger & Meijers, 2012; Governa & Salone, 2005; Meijers et al., 2007; Veneri & Burgalassi, 2012). In contrast, Davoudi (2003) argues that the vagueness is a strength—allowing multiple embedded interpretations that "mean different things to different people" (p. 979). Similarly, Burgalassi (2010) shows how the multiple meanings capture several dimensions (morphological, economic, political) and multi-scalar applications (e.g., local, regional, and national).

The European Commission (1999) considers polycentricity to be a key instrument in achieving balanced competitiveness in Europe. Following the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (1999), polycentricity became a common EU spatial policy used by all EU states. However, the understanding and interpretation of polycentric development varies between EU member states based on their diverse spatial pattern, size, population, and governance culture. Some European countries with strong, growing metropolitan capital regions use polycentric policy to counterbalance the influence of these regional centres (e.g., France, Hungary, Czechia). Other states are polycentric even at the level of metropolises (the Netherlands, Poland, Ireland, Germany) or they combine both approaches. Accordingly, Sýkora et al. (2009) conclude that the debate on polycentricity must integrate both large-scale, top-down perspectives and a bottom-up view embedded within local urban systems and everyday life.

For Humeau et al. (2010), polycentricity’s value is its ability to reduce territorial disparities and foster territorial cohesion (see also Meijers et al., 2007; Geppert & Stephan, 2008; Meijers & Sandberg, 2006; Brezzi & Veneri, 2014; Urso, 2016; Salone, 2005; Faludi, 2005b). Polycentric development can reduce demographic and economic imbalances and “ensur[e] equality in terms of access to infrastructure and knowledge, sustainable development, alert management and the protection of the natural and cultural inheritance” (Humeau et al., 2010, p. 26). Polycentric development distributes the urban system’s economic functions, allowing

urban centres to gain a competitive position in a "more balanced spatial structure" where no city dominates over others (Meijers & Sandberg, 2006).

4.2.3 Planning and urbanisation: the pre-conflict situation in Syria

Syria is characterised by the lack of a comprehensive planning framework to mediate economic, social, and environmental needs (Al-Dajani & Abdeen, 2009). Urban legislation, like Act (5/1982), is hindered by inefficient implementation processes and ineffective enforcement mechanisms, Plans do not always cover municipalities' entire territories and they do not consider the individual qualities and needs of each region. While Act (5/1982) outlines local councils' responsibilities, it does not empower them to manage planning issues. This contradicts the decentralisation policy outlined in the Local Administration Law (107/2011), which allows local administration units' to only manage small development projects (Maya, 2009). Syrian spatial planning reflects a socialist-inspired model in which the state dominates urban development through publicly owned land, banks, and developers. This model long prevented the formation of a primary city by distributing people evenly across smaller cities.

However, since 2000, Syria has shifted toward more neo-liberal planning models of decentralisation, deregulation, and liberalisation (Wind & Ibrahim, 2020). Decentralisation, in particular, was a major theme in the Tenth Five-Year-Plan (2006-2010).[8] The transition to a social market economy was a compromise between socialism and capitalism (Wind & Ibrahim, 2020; Syrian Law Journal, 2016). Economic liberalisation opened Syria to foreign and private investment and large sums of money entered the Syrian market through foreign investors and real-estate speculation. This caused real estate, land, housing, and rent prices to increase. However, the resulting economic growth was unfavourable for employment (i.e., jobless growth) so unemployment increased. The new strategies also failed to prioritise public spending, which led to regionally uneven services and catalysed internal migration to more developed areas. These internal migrants—mainly with low and moderate incomes—settled in informal areas on the outskirts of the receiving cities like Damascus (Raddawi, 2010).

The interference between law procedures related to urban planning and scattered texts related to several fields, and the absence of one unified, comprehensive, and integral urban legislation,[9] weakened the objectivity of law texts related to the urban structure. This widened the gap between the Acts' texts and its implementation, causing contradictions and confusion among stakeholders, leading to loss of the urban structure identity and the emergence of many urban and planning problems within Syrian cities (e.g., the rural-urban migration and the informal settlements).

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[8] The Five-Year-Plan is a comprehensive government plan supervised by the Planning and International Cooperation Commission. It aims to develop all sectors "basically economic plan". It is part of the broader development strategy and concerned with defining policies, plans, and indicators for long-term goals.

[9] i.e., the interference of the executive regulations 'which are the regulations issued by different Executive Authorities' bodies and powered by the law.' This led to a lack of harmonization between the competent authorities.

In 2011, over 50per cent of the Syrian population lived in urban areas. The two largest cities, Damascus and Aleppo, accounted for nearly 42per cent and 31per cent of the urban population, respectively (CBS, 2012). Middle-rank cities (between 0.3 and 1 million inhabitants) such as Homs, Lattakia, and Hamah accounted for 39per cent of the urban population (ibid). The increased urban concentration can be attributed to the neo-liberal turn that brought increased levels of income and wealth inequality and reduced social welfare (Abu-Ismail et al., 2011). These economic changes, combined with reduced agricultural yields, triggered migration to the larger urban areas (United Nation (UN), 2014).

The increase in urban-rural migration was not anticipated in the destination cities' spatial plans. Newly planned neighbourhoods were too small and too expensive to house the recent migrants. Furthermore, neither land nor funding existed for a new wave of (affordable) housing construction (Wind & Ibrahim, 2020). Consequently, informal settlements grew rapidly. In 2010, 38per cent of Syrians lived in informal settlements, while 10.5per cent resided in slums[10] (UN-Habitat, 2012). In Aleppo and Homs, which received the bulk of the rural migrants, the share of informal housing to total housing stock was 39per cent and 59per cent, respectively (CBS, 2012), while in Damascus, informal settlements grew at a rate of 40per cent to 50per cent (UN-Habitat, 2012).

The current reality confirms the absence of any balanced hierarchical system of communities. The Local Administrative Law failed due to several challenges, particularly the centralisation of power at the expense of local administrations. This is shown through the vertical and serial structure of legal supervision that is mentioned in the Act (15/1971), which shows that the nature of the administrative system is characterised by monocentric concentration. Moreover, the lack of transparency concerning the income dedicated to local units, its distribution, and local plan financing processes increased the central control over local planning. Only 10per cent of the annual state budget is allocated to the Ministry of Local Administration for development. This amount is insufficient to finance most development activities, meaning municipalities rely on other financing sources like taxes and official documents fees (Maya, 2009). The decentralised system was unsuccessful—planning legislation still follows a top-down approach, only considering citizens' input in legal objections displayed to the regional communities to review them and ratify the plan for execution.

4.2.4 Conceptual framework

Syria's urban system faces several challenges like rural-urban migration, environmental challenges, and informal settlement. The conflict escalated these challenges along with recent environmental disasters (e.g., water depletion in Al-Hasakah and catastrophic fires in Lattakia), and internal displacement. Now, the return of refugees *en masse* might exacerbate these challenges. However, the influx of returnees could also offer a chance to systemically reset

[10] In Syria, "informal settlement" describes the structures built either on state land or on private land without permission. Unlike slums, 90per cent of the informal settlements have access to public services (albeit poor quality) provided by the government (Maya, 2009). However, many informal settlement areas lack other infrastructure such as schools and medical points. This puts pressure on the limited capacity of nearby infrastructure in formal areas.

Syria's imbalanced urban distribution. Deliberate management could foster more balanced urban development and a shift to sustainable cities in the post-conflict recovery process. The demographic distribution in Syria will (continue to) change significantly in the post-conflict phase. However, there is no adequate framework to predict this transformation. As several regions regain relative stability, much remains unknown about the Syrian context.

This research puts forward four scenarios for how Syrian returnees might impact national and urban development. The scenarios anticipate the patterns of geographic development in Syrian cities and will help stakeholders prepare to manage the consequences and complexities presented. The Damascus metropolitan area has little remaining capacity to receive returnees; therefore, a polycentric approach is needed to balance the development of sustainable cities. Figure 4.1 presents the main concepts underpinning this paper.

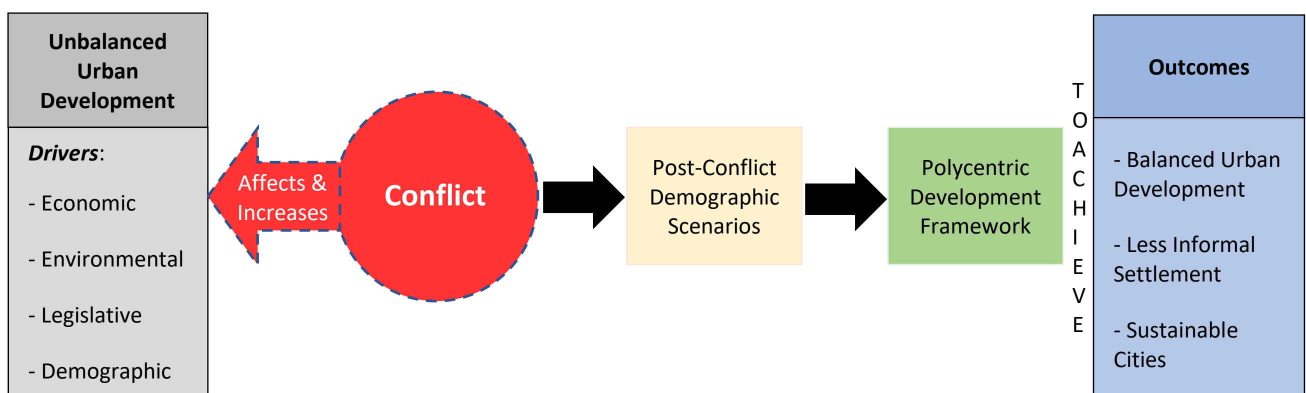


Figure 4-1. *The conceptual framework. Source: Authors*

4.3. Methodology

Building plausible future scenarios are a preferred method for planning in uncertain situations like Syria. In the 1970s, the Royal Dutch Shell company developed scenario planning techniques (van der Heijden, 2005; Wulf et al., 2013; Wack, 1985; Khosravi & Jha-Thakur, 2019) that have since been used in the business world (Lowy, & Hood, 2004), urban planning (Stojanović et al., 2014), and other planning and development disciplines (Garfias Royo et al., 2018; Ratcliffe, 2000) to help stakeholders make informed decisions. This study used a simplified version, the Matrix approach (also named: the four quadrants matrix or 2*2 matrix approach), to build the scenarios presented here (see van der Heijden, 2005; Khosravi, & Jha-Thakur, 2019 for more on scenario Matrix methods). Unlike traditional scenario planning, the Matrix approach allows for a shortened timeframe of under five years.

The scenarios detail multiple plausible future situations and simulate various combinations of realities within a bounded range of uncertainty. The scenarios are not an end state and do not predict the future (Amer et al., 2013; Godet, 2000). Neither are they forecasting, that is concerned with predicting the most probable future. Rather, the scenarios explore all possible outcomes within the uncertain parameters (Amer et al., 2013).

The Matrix method is sometimes criticised for its lack of accuracy and not presenting the shortcomings (Ramirez & Wilkinson, 2014; Rhydderch, 2017) which makes the scenarios less self-evident. It does not consider the "interaction between a large number of variables" and also does not integrate "stable and gradual development" since it concentrates only on key uncertainties (Rhydderch, 2017). Therefore, integrating the predictable elements (Figure 3.3) is essential to increase the accuracy of scenario-building (Khosravi & Jha-Thakur, 2019) to make it more self-evident.

Scenarios emerge from the two key factors (the two axes that form the matrix quadrants). Each end of an axis represents the extreme values of each key factor and scenarios are formed by gathering the ends of both axes that define each quarter of the matrix. The two key factors were concluded from the impact/uncertainty matrix (Figure 4.2). This matrix consists of several factors that significantly influence city features and shape the urban environments and were selected from the literature on uncertainties. These factors were classified based on their level of uncertainty and impact. The authors grouped the factors perceived to be most relevant to the Syrian context into three main groups: critical uncertainty, predictable elements, and secondary elements. The choice of the two key factors is conditioned with being unrelated factors with high uncertainty and high impact (form the critical uncertainty group). These are 1) the size of the returning wave and 2) the spatial distribution of the re-exiles´ flows.

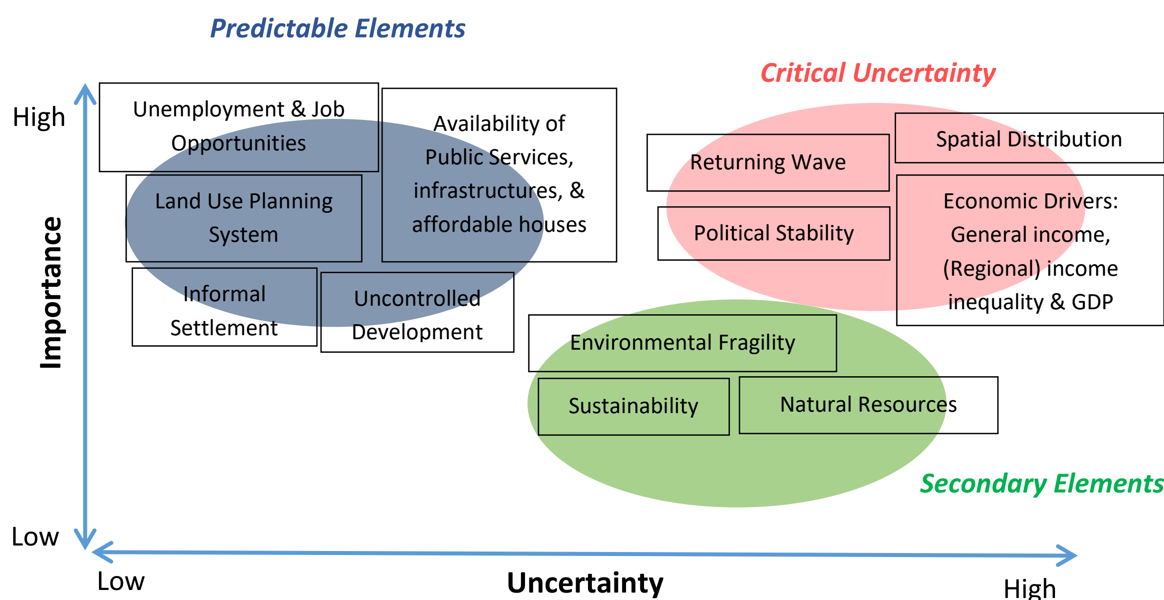


Figure 4-2. *Impact/uncertainty matrix for Syrian cities characteristics. Source: Authors*

The scenarios explore several settlement patterns to argue that polycentric development is the best planning approach for the post-conflict phase. Polycentricity is measured based on its morphological dimension due to the accessibility of demographic data only. However, it is important because it allows "cross-sectional and time comparisons" (Burgalassi, 2010, p.39). The lack of "flow data", which mostly measured the travel-to-work intensity between cities, prevented the functional dimension measurement. The focus is on the national scale, depending on the OECD report's division (Brezzi & Veneri, 2014). In the report, the objective of

measuring polycentricity on the national scale, "Design national urban policy to focus on the potential of all cities, fostering agglomeration economies and ensuring policy coherence" (ibid, p. 5), aligns with the paper's objectives. And the recommended method to measure polycentricity at the national scale is the city size distribution (ibid), or in other words, the rank-size rule or Zipf's Law (Burgalassi, 2010). The rank-size rule was used to measure the morphological dimension of polycentricity. As a settlement system, it means that people a variety of goods and services are dispersed throughout the society. Greater proximity to services reduces the commuting time required to access those goods and services, meaning economic development is dispersed.

Zipf's Law was applied to analyse the distribution of city sizes in the country. The Zipf approximation ranks cities by population (from the highest to lowest) and compares them to the "ideal Zipf approximation," which assumes the size of the first city should be twice the size of the second city, and triple the size of the third city, and so on. This paper follows several studies which have applied Zipf's Law for cities (Josic, & Bašić, 2018; Gabaix, 1999; Soo, 2005; Ioannides & Overman, 2003; Giesen & Südekum, 2011; Arshad et al., 2019, Gan et al., 2006) to test whether the scenarios' potential urban settlement patterns align with the ideal Zipf approximation.

For this analysis, the 2025 populations of major urban centres in each governorate was estimated.[11] This estimate considered the urban population in 2011, governorate population in 2018 (CBS, 2020,2012), the rural-urban ratios, the growth rate (United Nation (UN), 2019), and the IDP and refugee population (UNHCR, 2020a,b,c; IDMC, 2020). The number of displaced people for each governorate was obtained from CBS (2020). A comparison with different resources (e.g., IDMC, 2020; UN-Habitat & SDC, 2014; United Nation (UN), 2019; UN-Habitat, 2012) was made to complement the conducted desktop research and refine the population estimates. Twelve cities from the 14 governorates were included in the analysis—Rural Damascus and Al-Quneiterah governorates were excluded. Rural Damascus data was included within Greater Damascus (metropolitan) numbers, while Al-Quneiterah governorate was excluded because it lacks an urban centre.

This study informs medium-to-long-term policy (Rhydderch, 2017). The year 2025 was selected because it is seven years after 2018 when displacement started to stabilise. 2018 was also the halfway point between the beginning of the conflict and the estimation year, 2025. According to ESCWA (2017), the average percentage of returning IDPs and refugees is 30per cent. While the UN assumes that 40per cent of Syrian refugees will return between 2020 and 2025, with an additional 30per cent from 2025-2030, and a remaining 10per cent from 2030-2035 (United Nation (UN), 2019). In total, 80per cent of refugees are estimated to return to Syria by 2035. Therefore, for this study, each scenario adjusts the percentage of displaced Syrians who will return, with 75per cent returnees as the upper limit and 20per cent as the lower limit.

[11] "Governorate" is the official term used for the "province" according to the Central Bureau of Statistics of Syria.

4.4. Results

4.4.1 Possible Future Scenarios

Authors considered four potential spatial development scenarios for Syrian cities in 2025 (Figure 4-3).

Scenario 1: Managed concentrated deconcentration (Polycentricity Strong / Polycentric development AND high returning wave(s)): In this scenario, displaced people will generally return to their regions of origin, but some will prefer to stay in regional centres. It assumes political stability in almost all areas. Additionally, economic prosperity in the recovered regions will include job opportunities, rehabilitated and developed infrastructure and public services, and adequate housing. This scenario requires a robust institutional planning capacity at both the national and regional levels. While it is certainly a desirable scenario, it will only come about gradually. A preceding provisional stage will see a concentration of returnees living in the major entry hubs. Environmental rehabilitation will also take time. Several fires have damaged important forests and nature reserves in October 2020, and repeated water supply issues in Al-Hasakah city left residents without water for about 20 days in August 2020.

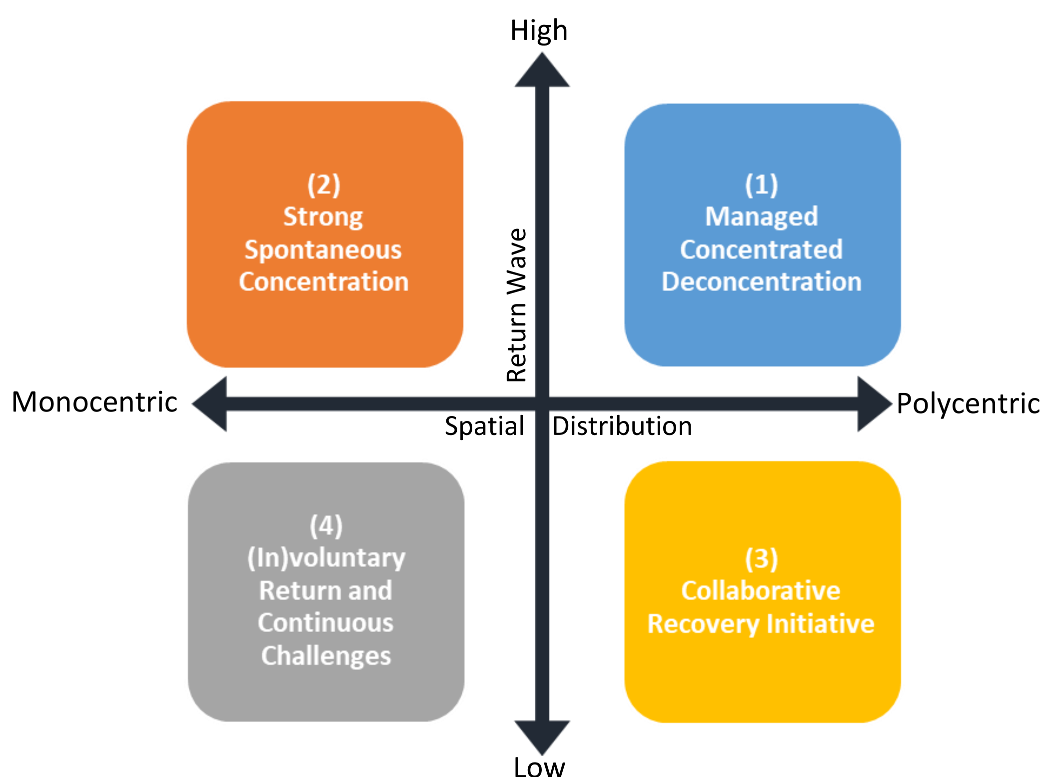


Figure 4-3. *Future possible scenarios for Syrian cities characteristics. Source: Authors*

Scenario 2: Strong spontaneous concentration (Monocentricity Strong / Monocentric development AND high returning wave(s)): This scenario assumes high political stability but weak regional policy, leading to increased disparities between the central metropolitan region

and the rest of the country. Most regions will be characterised by low economic prosperity. The decision to return strongly depends on people's willingness.. The returnees here will probably be financially prosperous and will prefer to settle in the metropolitan area and, perhaps, other major cities with better living conditions. However, housing availability could be an obstacle in the major cities, forcing them to compromise the residence location. This scenario is most likely at the beginning of the post-conflict phase (if it starts in 2025). The concentration of returnees will put pressure on the driving factors, mainly the predictable and secondary elements groups (Figure 3.2). Due to the high returning wave, this scenario is highly risky in its outcomes.

Scenario 3: Collaborative recovery initiative (Polycentricity Mild / Polycentric development AND low returning wave(s)): In this scenario, there are fewer returnees, giving the state more time to prepare for and invite refugees and IDPs back to their regions of origin. The political-economic situation in Syria will improve slightly, but economic recovery will be slow. The returnees may find the economic and employment conditions in the metropolitan area unfavourable due to overcrowding and a housing shortage. They may prefer to return to their hometown or the centre of their home region where they can re-establish local social networks and face less competition in business. However, the lack of public services and inadequate infrastructure will be a major disincentive. In this scenario, returnees are either financially prosperous people seeking to rebuild their properties or people who are struggling financially and unable to improve their situation in the hosting communities (i.e., camps). The second group could contribute to economic development by establishing small businesses or working in construction or agriculture. They will find better opportunities at the metropolitan fringe or in other regions, where the first group will be looking to renovate their properties and establish their businesses.

Scenario 4: (In)voluntary return and continuous challenges (Monocentricity Mild / Monocentric development AND low returning wave(s)): The scenario offers more of the same for Syria. Economic retrogression will continue, and the western regions will maintain relative stability. State planning authorities and resettlement policy will not have any significant impact. Most returnees will have faced terrible conditions in host communities. Their choice to return cannot be considered a "voluntary" decision, as it is the best and/or only option. This group might settle in the informal settlement areas or shelters in major cities. Additionally, their return could coincide with an internal displacement or a migration wave from other cities. The informal settlements will expand, further challenging hosting cities' already stretched natural resources and basic services.

4.4.2 Scenarios Sustainability Analysis: Zipf's Law Approximation

Table 4-1 illustrates the hypothesised percentages of returning refugees and IDPs in each scenario.

Table 4-1. The returning percentage division for the scenarios.

	Returning percentage division
Scenario 1	75per cent of IDPs and refugees return to their hometown + the net[12] urban population + 25per cent of IDPs (will stay in the refuge city)
Scenario 2	60per cent of refugees return to main cities (Damascus will receive 50per cent, Aleppo 30per cent, Homs and Latakia 10per cent each) + urban population (*assuming IDPs might not consider returning to their hometown*)
Scenario 3	40per cent of refugees (mostly from the neighbouring countries) return to their hometown while 5per cent will reside in main cities + urban population (*supposing IDPs will remain in the hosting cities*)
Scenario 4	20per cent of refugees return to main cities: Damascus 60per cent, Aleppo 30per cent, Lattakia 10per cent (*Lattakia is one of the least affected cities and received large waves of IDPs in recent years*) + urban population

*Source: Authors**

Figure 4-4 illustrates the population changes in Syrian cities in each hypothesised scenario based on the available data.

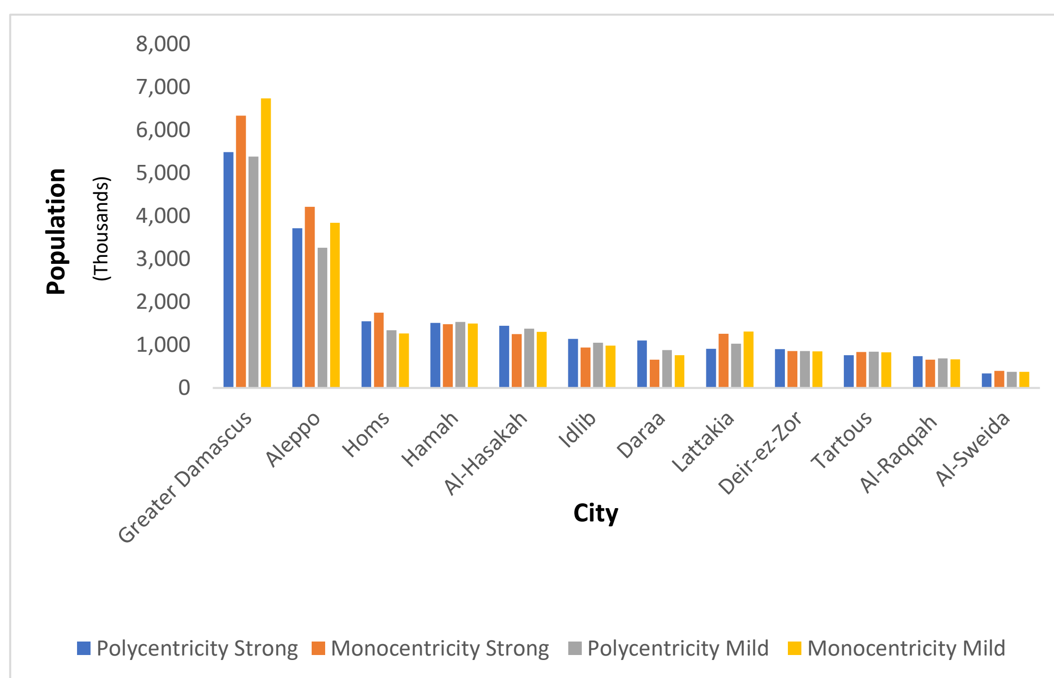
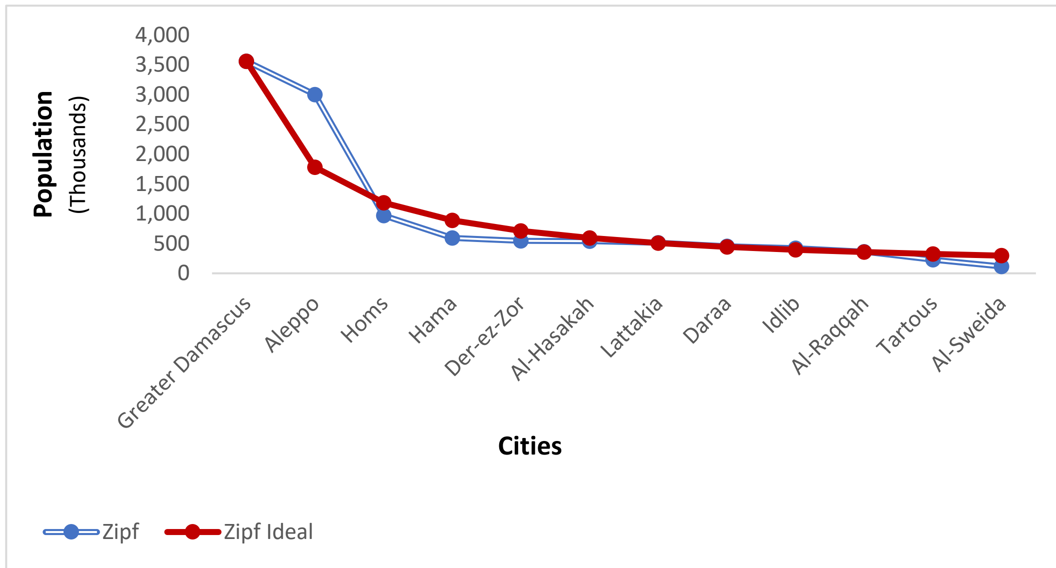


Figure 4-4. *Population Change in Syrian Cities According to Scenarios Assumption. Source: Authors*

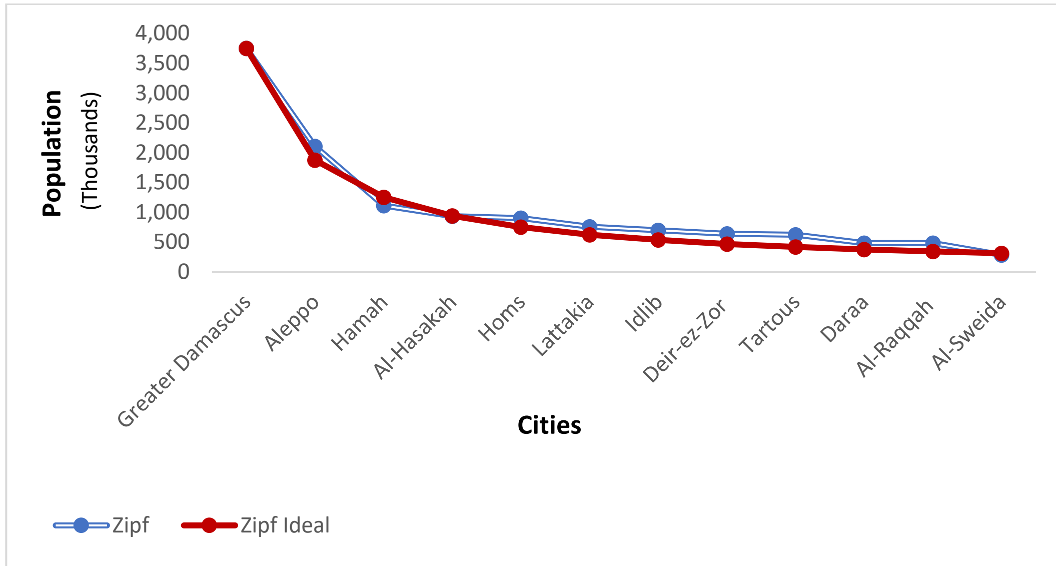
[12] i.e., the population of the residents without the IDPs.

* The urban population refers to estimated urban population in 2025

The scenarios were compared to the Zipf approximations at the beginning of the conflict (2011) and in 2018 (Figure 4-5). Figure 4-6 displays the results of the Zipf approximation for each hypothesised scenario. In both figures (4-5 and 4-6), the "*Zipf*" curve represents the estimated population from each hypothesis, while the "*Zipf Ideal*" curve simply calculates the Zipf's Law standard based on the population of Greater Damascus.



(a) *Zipf in numbers - Syria 2011*



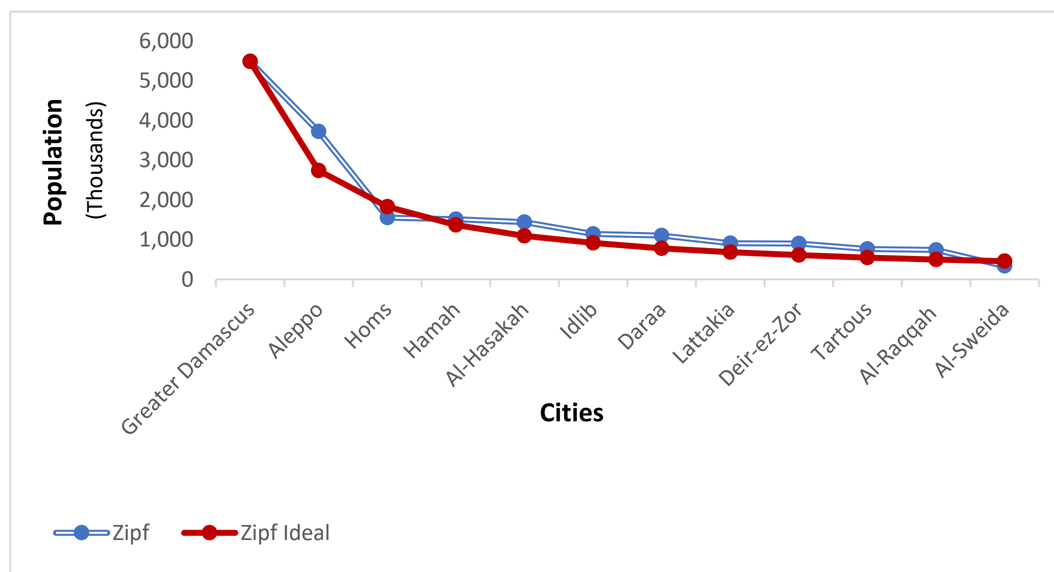
(b) *Zipf in numbers - Syria 2018*

Figure 4-5*. Zipf's law analysis for the years 2011 (a) and 2018 (b). Source: Authors*.

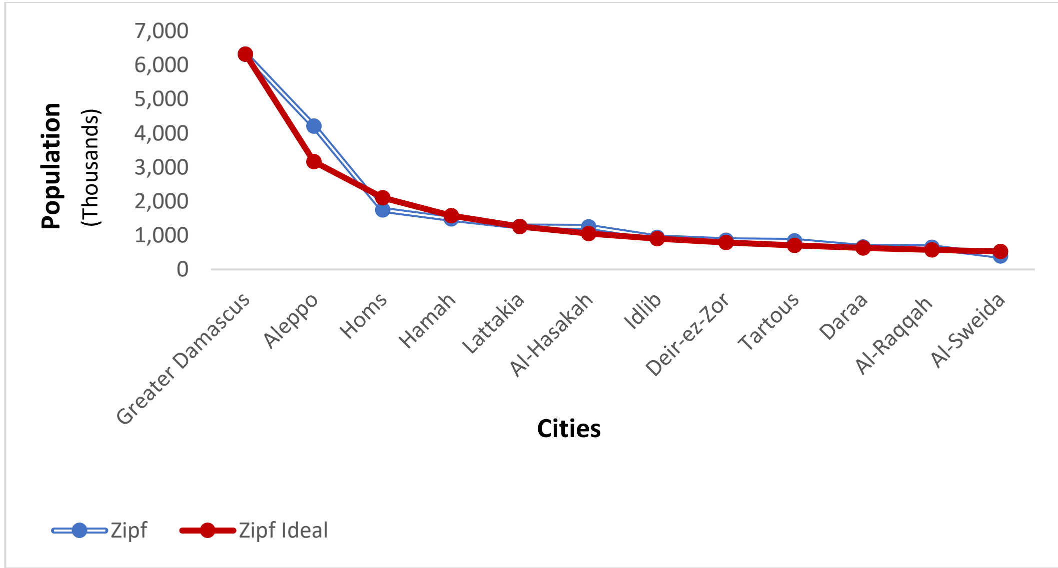
In Figure 4-6, cities hierarchy shifts between scenarios (except for Greater Damascus, Aleppo, AlRaqqah, and Al-Sweida). The "*Zipf*" curve dips below the "*Zipf ideal*" at the third city, indicating the dominance of the two major cities, Greater Damascus and Aleppo. In other words, the concentration of the population is in big cities. The gap between "*Zipf*" and "*Zipf*

ideal" denotes irregularity between city size and rank. This means the population is concentrated in cities with the presence of extremism. Comparing to Scenarios 2 and 4, Figure 3-5 (year 2011), and pre-conflict studies in 2007 (Al-Dajani & Abdeen, 2009) and in 2008 (Maya, 2010), urban dominance declines in Scenarios 1 and 3 since polycentric development offers more normalised concentrations in smaller cities. Figure 3-6 shows that many medium cities may soon become large cities. This corresponds with both monocentric scenarios (2 and 4). The Zipf approximation in 2018 denotes more regularity in cities size and rank (Figure 4-5). However, in reality, the relatively safe cities witnessed massive population concentration, which put pressure on public services.

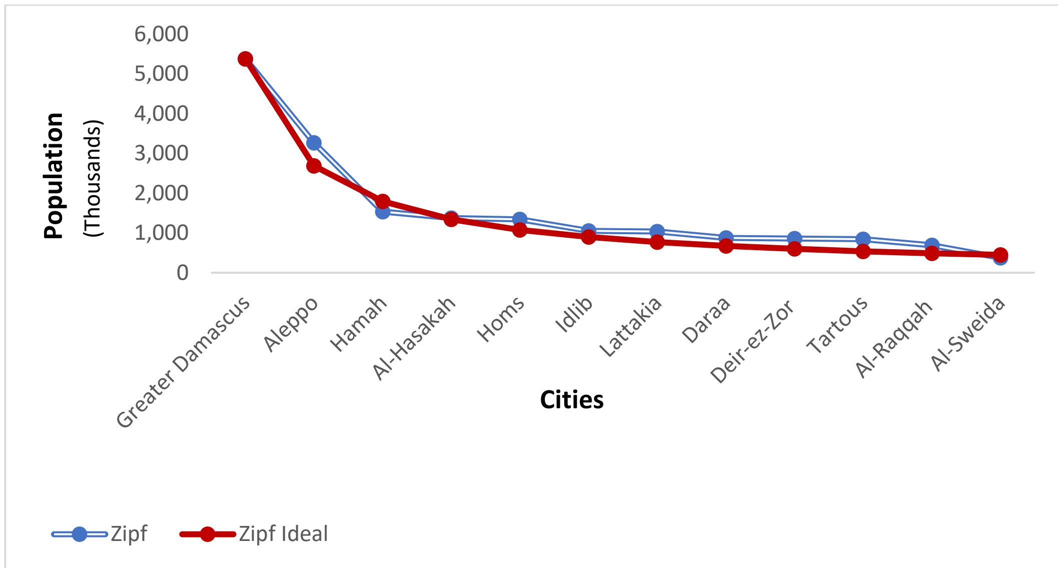
Generally, a larger gap between the curves indicates a less sustainable settlement system. The gap is clearly present in Scenarios 1 and 2, particularly in Aleppo. Though the gap is less prominent in Scenario 4, it is notable in Hamah. Aleppo and Hamah are, therefore, the most vulnerable cities in terms of sustainable development and further action is needed to reduce this gap. While Scenarios 2 and 4 seem sustainable, this may not be the reality, particularly in Greater Damascus. The city's capacity cannot meet the needs of the large population proposed in those scenarios. Scenario 3 includes fewer population pressures on major cities and appears to be the most sustainable overall. The gap between its curves for all cities is relatively less compared to other scenarios, mainly in the second and third cities, and both curves are approximately similar (Figure 4-6-c).



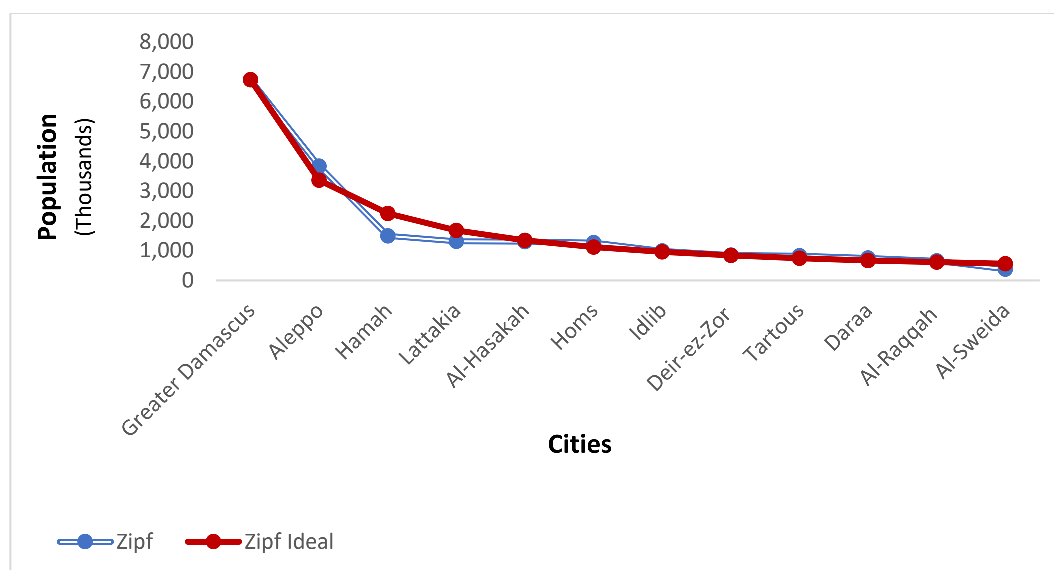
***(a)** Zipf in numbers - Syria 2025 - Scenario 1*



***(b)** Zipf in numbers - Syria 2025 - Scenario 2*



***(c)** Zipf in numbers - Syria 2025 - Scenario 3*



***(d)** Zipf in numbers - Syria 2025 - Scenario 4*

***Figure 4-6.** Zipf's law analysis for plausible scenarios. Source: Authors*

4.5. Discussion

This study's 2025 population estimations relied on multiple resources because accurate Syrian population data after 2011 does not exist. In the absence of detailed urban population data and governorate rural-urban share percentages, the urban centres were used instead of Functional Urban Areas. This might decrease the fit of Zipf's Law at the chosen scale of the study (the national level) (Veneri, 2013).

Managed concentrated deconcentration (Scenario 1) is the best scenario for the post-conflict phase. It aligns with UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) to facilitate a safe, voluntary, and sustainable return of refugees to Syria. However, this scenario will be extremely challenging in terms of time, finance, institutional capacity, and environmental issues. In contrast, Scenario 2 is an undesirable post-conflict development pattern that couples high population return with a lack of capacity. It will exacerbate the current urban and environmental challenges leading to unsustainable outcomes. Scenarios 3 and 4 include less pressure from returnees and posit less extreme outcomes. Given Syria's current capacities, Scenario 3 is most realistic. It requires less capacity than Scenario 1, giving institutions time to recover and slowing the flow of returnees. Scenario 4 is harmless but undesirable; its challenges lie in the new waves of displacement and resulting informal settlement expansions.

One reason motivating exiles' return will likely be property restitution. This strategy was proposed in Bosnia to encourage refugees to return and, in response, almost half of the displaced population returned (most returned in the first two years of the post-conflict phase). However, Bosnia's security situation did not allow for minority groups to return, which prevented any economic activity. A lack of policies regarding seized properties and poor social services pushed minority groups to seek more durable alternatives and replace their original properties (Calame, 2005; Stroschein, 2014). The Syrian reaction might parallel the

Colombians who refused to return to their former lives, despite the housing shortage programme that the Colombian government initiated to encourage the displaced people to return. In this case, the stress on the receiving cities would continue (Sliwa & Wiig, 2016). While the lack of experts might lead to irresponsible decisions, as in Kosovo (Boussauw, 2012). The focus on durable return in Kosovo and Bosnia's cases without considering sustainable comprehensive solutions prevented many displaced people from returning

A comprehensive public reconstruction plan should focus on all social classes and, especially, on rural areas to encourage return. Public participation is essential in meeting local needs (see El-Masri & Kellettb, 2001 on Lebanese village reconstruction). A comprehensive approach might encourage refugees to return to their hometowns, but it does not guarantee an extended stay. Therefore, the state should encourage a sustainable return through economic reconstruction, offering soft loans, technical support, jobs, and/or lands. The level of support provided to institutions—whether through development programmes in cooperation with international organizations or through technical and legal support to local urban authorities—remains a decisive factor differentiating the outcomes of each scenario.

Strengthening the Local Administration Law by enhancing the decentralised administration could empower local authorities and enhance community participation. The state must also consider a legal status of informal settlements that were destroyed during the conflict (e.g., within organisational schemes or compensating the affected population). New laws on housing, land and property rights should be implemented alongside a decentralised administration of lands. Past policies encouraging investment, real estate development, and scattered planning laws did not properly address these issues.

Current examples of returning refugees and IDPs in Deir Ez-zor, Al-Raqqa, and Rural Damascus prove residents' desire to return to their hometowns. This behaviour is similar to the ones expected in scenarios 2, 3, and 4, people want to return, despite limited services and poor conditions. and aligns more with scenario 3 in terms of the place choice (the hometown). The state has partnered with international organizations, such as UNDP, to restore services like roads and electricity. The UNDP also supported the restoration of local professions and handicrafts through training workshops and financial support (UNDP-Syria, 2019b). Such international development is incredibly important. The UNDP has applied Area-Based Development approaches, often used in conflict areas (Ayad, 2011), in Syria since before the crisis (UNDP-Syria, 2019b). Currently, UN-Habitat is using a similar approach to support municipalities and communities in identifying priority interventions for urban development (UN-Habitat, 2013). This approach aims to foster regional equality and balanced development, in other words, polycentric development.

4.6. Conclusion

This paper presents four plausible scenarios for the return of Syrian refugees and IDPs in 2025, the expected start of the post-conflict phase. The Matrix approach method was used to build scenarios based on two key factors: the size of the returning wave and the returnees' spatial

distribution. The paper uses Zipf's Law approximation to analyse each scenario's development type (polycentric or monocentric) and its effects on Syrian cities.

Undoubtedly, the return of refugees and IDPs will introduce social and technical tensions. Returnees, especially young returnees, may face social barriers and trouble integrating with locals. They will be used to life in Europe, Turkey, or Jordan and may construct a living environment inspired by these hosting countries. It is unclear how the locals will react to the newcomers or whether returnees will be admitted into the urban planning process. The first steps in overcoming these social obstacles include enhancing public participation in decision-making and empowering returnees to rebuild their lives.

The technical obstacles centre around the lack of infrastructure, inadequate public services, and housing shortages. Solutions should be tailored to fit both the short-term stage (the first three years of peace-building) and the long-term stage (a seven-year state-building phase) of the post-conflict phase (ESCWA, 2017). The capacity building would be the starting point in the short-term stage of solutions, and it could continue through the long-term stage. Whereas the revision of planning policies, strategies, and masterplans comes at the top priority of long-term solutions.

The driving factors reflected opportunities, challenges, and restrictions. The political and economic drivers are the decisive factors influencing the returning decision. Furthermore, "attention can be focussed on high-impact / low-uncertainty forces giving a relative certain future, for which planning must prepare; and high-impact / high-uncertainty forces that could provoke significant future change, for which longer-term planning should prepare" (Ratcliffe, 2000, p. 135).

The scenarios presented can be used to shape a deliberate resettlement policy consisting of sequential phases of post-conflict recovery. In the initial phase, a few returnees will be concentrated in the major cities. This will be followed by another wave of returnees after the political situation stabilises and institutional capacity is enhanced. In the next phase, the stabilised conditions will trigger a large wave of returnees who will be highly concentrated in major cities. Finally, the last phase introduces polycentric distribution, in which all cities are recognised in the reconstruction plans.

The scenarios are not certain futures nor static plans, but tools for urban revitalisation that help stakeholders identify planning weaknesses and develop resilient strategies to withstand unpredictable events. Thus, understanding the potential future allows better response in the post-conflict recovery to achieve economically advanced, socially cohesive, and environmentally sustainable cities.

Maier (2009) sees that polycentric development should be considered as a way to achieve sustainable development and decrease territorial disparities, rather than consider it as an aim itself. The functional connection between urban centres is significant for joining their efforts, which might help to create critical economic mass when applied in a polycentric development context (Hague, 2015). The future should not resemble the past. Planning approaches must utilise 'out-of-the-box' solutions and empower local authorities to achieve a balance between development and sustainability. A hybrid polycentric and monocentric framework could result

in a sustainable post-conflict society if it was applied at a particular territorial level and within particular territories (Maier, 2009).

Recently, the Regional Planning Commission in Syria, in collaboration with academic experts, initiated a spatial planning agenda work plan. Critics note that this agenda will be built on existing ineffective legal frameworks. Unless the agenda introduces a new legal framework, it will simply be another burden to Syria's planning system.

Although this paper focuses on Syria, it may also provide a paradigm for similar conflict-affected countries. Polycentric development could be the key to a comprehensive and inclusive spatial planning approach that guarantees the smooth transition to peace, eases refugees' return, and establishes the foundations of a sustainable post-conflict recovery. Managing the in-flow of the returning population will be extremely challenging to the institutional capacity of governance and planning as its instrument and adequate resources for investment in public infrastructures in the receiving places. The effectiveness of post-conflict administration of spatial development will impact the behaviour of Syrian refugees and IDPs, both in terms of how many decide to return and the spatial choice for those who actually return.

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Chapter V

To Stay or to Return. Syrians' perspectives on returning home in post-conflict Syria

This chapter aims at addressing the Research Aim 3 "*To investigate the potential return of Syrian refugees and IDPs"*. Thus, it aims at answering the research question 5:

Q5: What are the perspectives of displaced Syrians on returning home?

To answer this question, this chapter starts with an overview of the Syrian context in terms of displacement, the effect of conflict, and the current return initiatives. Then the chapter gives a background on the previous studies and the concept of home and return. Then the chapter provides a qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with displaced Syrian in Europe. Finally, the chapter concludes with several recommendations based on a reflection on the results and comparing them with the Chapter IV results.

5.1. Introduction

The Syrian conflict forced many people to flee. After more than a decade of the Syrian conflict, it remains one of the largest displacements events in the world. Out of 22 million people of pre-conflict population, 13 million Syrians migrated. Around 6.5 million people were internally displaced (IDMC, 2020); while more than 5.5 million people found refuge in neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey) (UNHCR, 2020a), and more than one million migrated to countries outside the region (e.g., EU countries) (UNHCR, 2020b). The amount of destruction in housing was estimated in the most affected areas (as in Table 5-1) to be around 2.9 million units (World Bank, 2017); further detailed information is presented in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1: Housing Damage Estimates across Governorate in Syria

Governorate	Units in 2010	Damaged units in 2017		Damaged units in 2017 (per cent of 2010 value)	
		Partial damage	Destroyed	Partial damage	Destroyed
Aleppo	889,884	236,947	68,743	23.3	7.5
Raqqa	145,374	27,054	8,899	12.9	4.3
Dar'a	157,430	44,081	12,596	12.0	3.0
Rif Dimashq	600,955	103,794	40,259	18.5	4.7
Dayr az-Zawr	171,679	48,070	13,734	31.2	10.0
Homs	356,577	97,936	28,144	17.3	5.8
Hama	305,518	18,402	27,547	2.5	3.0
Idlib	261,302	73,165	20,904	25.3	6.3
Total	2,888,719	649,449	220,826	22.8	8.6

Source: World Bank staff calculations (World Bank, 2017, p.26)

UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) aims at finding the right policy that can be implemented to build a safe and voluntary return of refugees within the context of the Syrian spatial planning and for the return to be sustainable. Till now, the return of displaced Syrians faces many challenges such as access to employment, public services and infrastructure; and difficulties in proving property ownership. With further emphasis on providing greater efforts to ensure the successful return of displaced people where they can restore productive

livelihoods in their original places of residence (UNHCR, 2004). The collaborative projects between the Syrian government and the international organizations such as UNDP were encouraging initiatives/factors for people to return (e.g., rehabilitating the destroyed areas, providing critical humanitarian services, and supporting local workshops and business owners with training and small cash interventions). Such interventions occurred in Aleppo (Razzouq, 2021; UNDP-Syria, 2019a), Al-Yarmouk in Damascus (Talal, 2021), Darayya in Rural Damascus (Al-A'dawi, 2021), and Deir-ez-Zor (UNDP-Syria, 2019b; Khalidi, 2021; SANA, 2021a; Al-Dhalli, 2021).

As the conflict eased after 2017, many displaced households began to consider returning home (IDMC 2019, 2018). Important, if small, steps towards rebuilding destroyed cities have begun (e.g., rebuilding the old Souq in Aleppo (AKDN, 2021)). Many urban development projects have been initiated or are being discussed under the "rebuilding Syria" umbrella (SANA, 2020). Several spontaneous returning waves are witnessed; an estimated 230,000 refugees and 494,000 IDPs returned between 2016 and 2019 (with 94,971 returnees in 2019 alone) (UNHCR, 2020c). Yet, a slight decline in the number of returned refugees and IDPs was estimated in 2020 to be 38,563 and 448,000, respectively (ibid). However, little is known about these returnees' motives or their settlement patterns.

This chapter inspects the displaced Syrians' opinions on returning decisions. The focus is on the group of displaced Syrians living in refuge countries as they have been acquainted with life in those countries. Their choice of the way to restore their lives when they return is an important aspect to pay attention to. Whether they would build their living environment inspired by their European/neighbouring countries′ experience or their choice of place and the city of settlement. The aim is to provide a better understanding of the reconstruction process, particularly the priorities and volition of the affected people in order to transfer control and the capacity to plan solutions to them so that they become directly involved in their own reconstruction. The knowledge from the previous chapter (chapter IV) highlights the role that displaced people will play in the hosting communities when they return and the importance of knowing the potential attitude of this group. In this chapter, an exploratory study is performed with the aim to support and compare its results with the previous analysis on plausible post-conflict development scenarios and see to what extent they are consistent and what methods could be recommended to help better awareness of possible future. While the previous chapter modelled various scenarios in a top-down manner, now we attempt to look at the possible future from the bottom of individual viewpoints. In this way, this chapter aims at providing better awareness of the future to support stakeholders in post-conflict recovery response towards achieving a sustainable return.

Using semi-structured open-ended questions, 25 interviews with Syrian families and individuals who were displaced during the conflict were conducted. Based on previous studies, several questions were raised: How do Syrians perceive their urban life before and after displacement? What could be their motivations behind the return decision? Where will they plan to settle if they return? And what is the deeper meaning of "home" for them?

Although several previous studies discussed the return of displaced Syrians and its features (Lokot, 2018; Aravanitis & Yelland, 2019), they do not discuss it within the urban lens. They

tend to either discuss the economic and the political dimension only and/or limit the focus on the refugees in neighbouring countries (whether in or outside the refugees' camps).

The findings highlight the differences and similarities of Syrian perspectives on returning home. The chapter provides an understanding of not only the visible effects of the conflict and reconstruction but also the invisible, emotional and attitudinal changes, which are the real determining factors in developing a harmonious nation. It enables those recovering from the conflict experiences to share a vision for themselves that will meet their needs and aspirations in a politically and culturally acceptable way to them and, therefore, more likely to be sustainable.

This knowledge will highlight the importance of further inspecting the attitude of the local residents towards the newcomers and the potential of inviting/admitting the latter group to the planning process. We conclude with the importance for deep further analysis to be conducted with consideration of intersectional returning dynamics drivers.

5.2. Theoretical background

As people are assumed to belong to a certain place, known in shorthand as “home”, it is often expected that people who the war conflict made to leave their homes will return there when the conflict is finished (Hammond, 1999). When the conflict ends, displaced people face the dilemma of whether to stay at the host country, to go back to their country of origin, or move to a third country (Arias et al., 2014). Black (2002) criticized the concept of “home” by posing a set of questions: 1) should refugees return to their home or their homeland? 2) who should decide where they should return to—the refugees themselves, governments, or international organizations? 3) what motivates such decisions, and 4) what is the deeper meaning of “home”?. From the last question, Black and Koser (1999) propose that displaced people might feel home in the host country if they have been living there for a long time or they found economic opportunities there.

The forcibly displaced people might face a situation of multiple allegiances to home. This is due to the multiple movements they might make (Arvanitis & Yelland, 2021). The painful loss makes this group live in an uncertain situation, unable to predict whether they will return or continue being in exile (the future). In other words, they are in an ‘in-between’ state (ibid); the situation of ‘living in more than one country but belonging to ‘‘neither’’ place’ (Salih, 2002 p. 52). The geographical dislocation from home has emphasised the idea of home as a 'tangible physical place’ (Taylor 2009: 11) or ‘sites of nostalgia’ (Massey 1994 p. 5). Therefore, many forcibly displaced people consider the notion of home as a stable entity. In the refugee imagination, spatial and temporal distance transforms home into a ‘mythic place of desire’ (Brah 1996 p. 192).

According to Arias et al. (2014), the decision to return to the original country in the case of forced displacement have similar characteristics as voluntary migration. For refugees, the UNHCR seek durable solutions. In order of preference, these solutions ere: Voluntary repatriation; Local integration in a neighbouring country of asylum: Resettlement in the third country of asylum". (Simmonds et al., 1983:3). Barakat (1992) sees the main points that need

to be considered for durable solutions for refugees and displaced people as follows: First, the timeframe and the methods of the return of these groups are often unclear. After a natural disaster, the survivors start almost immediately desiring to go home, but usually, it takes a year or two before they return home or settle permanently where they are. Second, the number of refugees can fluctuate with the respective period of peace and war.

The return topic is crucial for the post-conflict phase, especially when putting policy scenarios. Therefore, this topic needs to explore the displacement dimension, characters of displaced people, and the factors influencing the willingness to return (ibid). This issue exposes the planners to questions like when to start and where to build, making them face one of the common dilemmas of dealing with post-conflict reconstruction and addressing the issues individually. Only a few studies highlighted these aspects altogether (Arias et al., 2014; Chimni, 2002; Black, 2002; Black & Gent, 2006).

Returning programmes find the reduction of the amount of violence is a crucial condition to be successful. Nevertheless, when it comes to reconstruction, it has been observed in Khuzestan, Iran, and Kuwait that the poor are the ones who returned first to their homeland. The rich and the businessmen were still feeling too insecure (Barakat, 1992).

5.3. Methodology

Conducting research in conflict-affected areas involves manifold challenges (e.g., lack of data, difficult field study…etc.) Barakat (2002). It makes researchers, especially when conducting qualitative research, compelled with what is practically possible (in terms of access and security) rather than a theoretical analysis of their typicality (Nordstrom, 1995). Therefore, combining different data sources and research methods in a composite methodology[13] helps in mitigating 1) the challenges associated with conflict areas studies (Barakat, 2002), and 2) the dominant uncertainty that emerges from the multitude of unpredictable parameters which tightly control appropriate action (Barakat & Ellis, 1996).

The study follows an exploratory qualitative research design. In-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of 25 Syrian respondents who moved (relocated / displaced) to European countries during the conflict.

Exploratory studies are more important when there is little knowledge about a topic, or to get new insights that lead to generate new hypotheses about an already known topic (Swedberg, 2020). There is no need to use statistical tests to prove the significance of the study hypotheses. While many researchers heavily criticize this as a lack of evidence, Anderson and Scott (2012) argue that qualitative research can provide policy solutions through the notion of "process causality". In other words, providing a multi-level causal explanation by describing the factors or mechanisms that shape social action in a specific context.

Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to select the 25 cases for this study. This small sample size is preferred since selecting a few cases would allow a more in-depth analysis of the Syrians´ perspectives on returning back home and generate "fine-grained" data that could

[13] The Composite approach discussed in Chapter II

not be otherwise generated by a large random sample (Crouch & Mackenzie, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

During the research for the potential interviewees, seven rejections were received. The interviews were conducted in person and via phone call.

The duration of each interview was around 45-60 minutes on average. The in-person interviews were conducted in the Netherlands in 2019. The author visited a migrants´ support centre and asked potential Syrian respondents if they accept to be interviewed and also whether they recommend other interviewees among other Syrians among their acquaintances.

The other part of the interviews was conducted via phone due to the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented the researcher from travelling. However, it allowed reaching a more variety of Syrians who lived in different countries in Europe. Figure 5-1 illustrates the host countries of the sample. The majority of interviewees lived in the Netherlands, followed by France and Germany. At the beginning of the interviews, all interviewees were informed about the study and asked for consent. For the recorded interviews, the content was recorded too.

The interviews were conducted in four: In person-recorded (five interviews), In person-handwriting (three interviews), call-recorded (14 interviews), and call-handwriting (one interview). The study sample was composed of families (three interviews), males (11), and females (11). Of this sample, 13 were married, and 12 were single.

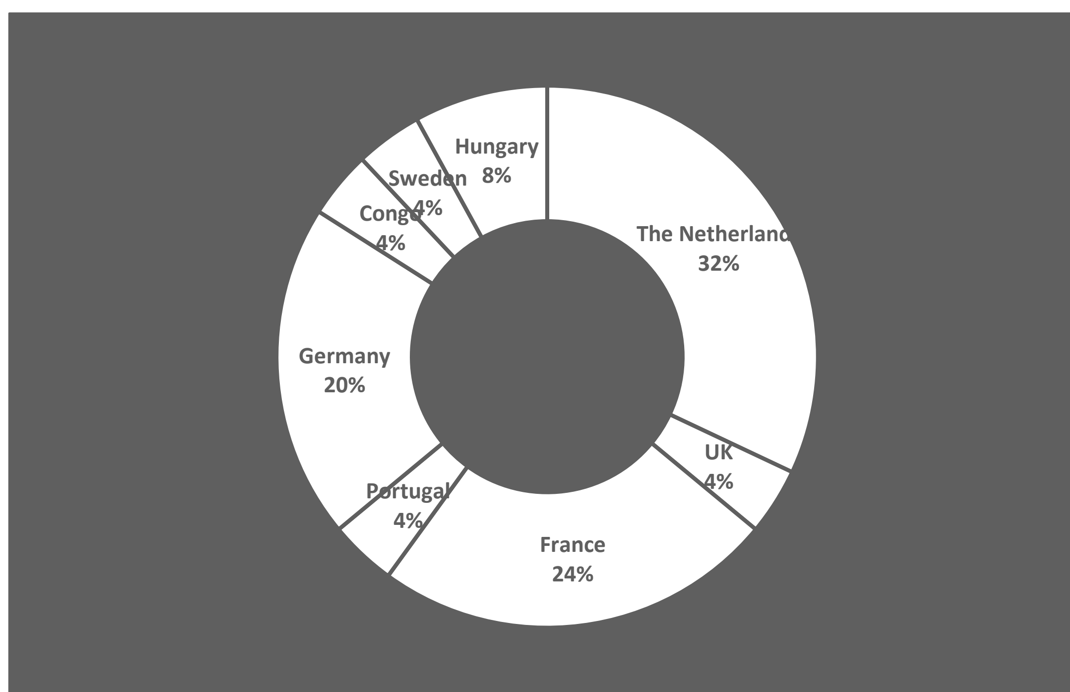

Figure 5-1. *The host country of the interviewees*

The age of the interviewee ranged from 20 to 60 years. Of them, 17 were at the age between 30 to 39 years, and they form the majority of the sample. The rest of the age range is addressed in Table 5-2.

For the family category, the request for the interview was made through the father, but at the time of the interview, the whole family was present, and in all cases, the narrative by the spouse was insightful. So, it was useful to put in a separate category as "families".

Table 5-2: Sample Characteristics

Sample Characteristics		Number of respondents
Gender	Male	14
	Female	14
Age	20-29	5
	30-39	17
	40-49	3
	50-60	3
Marital status	Single	12
	Married	19
	Divorced	1
Employment	Employed	11
	Unemployed	10
	Student	6
	Self employed	1
Educational level	University and higher	24
	High school	4
Duration of stay in the host country (in years)	1-3	8
	4 - 5	13
	6 >	4

Source: Author's elaboration

The recorded interviews and verbatim data were manually transcribed, and content analysis was applied. Memoing, observations, and non-verbal communication were captured for the in-person interviews. The research followed thematic analysis as it is an activity that is used in many approaches to qualitative data analysis, such as grounded theory, critical discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis, and narrative analysis (Bryman, 2012).

Using semi-structured interviews, the respondents were mainly asked about their (urban) lives before leaving Syria and after arriving in the host country. They were also asked whether they considered returning, and if so, what could be the motives behind their return. Furthermore, and based on their response, the interviewees were asked what the potential choice of their place could be if they returned. And lastly, what the deeper meaning of “home” is to them. The motivation of return and deeper meaning of home were based on Black's (2002) study.

5.4. Results and discussion

Eight themes were identified according to the previous questions, and they are

1. The journey of leaving the country
2. Living conditions in host countries (challenges)
3. Living conditions in Syria (before leaving)
4. The returning decision
5. Motivations behind the return decision
6. Location choice when returning
7. Essential aspects needed for urban development
8. What is the deeper meaning of “home”?

For “*The journey of leaving the country*”, the question was concerned with the duration of stay in the hosting country the number of movements. The research did not focus on the deep reasons behind the displacement (migration) or the reasons of the country's choice due to the reason of this analysis is concerned with the return and the development in Syrian (country of origin) but not the host country. The common denominator that is the flee out of country due to the conflict was the main concern; especially that current migration theories have a low level of consideration of the distress migration (or, in other words, the forced displacement) (de Haas, 2021).

It is found that the majority of the interviewees were in the host country for four to six years by the date they were interviewed. Six of the interviewees left Syria for around three years, while four of them left more than six years ago. Furthermore, seven of the interviewees faced multiple movements until reaching the final destination; this happened before arriving in the host country, and eight were within the host countries. Seven respondents were displaced in Syria several times. The groups that were displaced multiple times are the most traumatized group.

For “*the living condition in Syria*”, from the provided answer, it was concluded that all the respondents belonged to the middle and upper-middle class, except of one respondent who lived in poor areas. The latter respondent (who also belongs to a minority group) faced many difficulties and challenges in Syria before the conflict; consequently, these challenges were exacerbated after the conflict. As in many other countries, the poor areas are deprived of basic services, or they are in poor condition if they even existed. The living conditions in the other

urban areas, as described by the rest 24 respondents, share similar features in terms of living in big-size houses that were suitable for families and proximity to transportation, school and shops. The common term used is "*everything is around us*", which means they have access to all services whenever they are needed. However, five interviewees highlighted the lack of hospitals, public spaces, and leisure activity places. Five respondents reported the loss of their houses during the conflict, being either fully or partly damaged.

For "*the living conditions in the host country*", interviewees were asked about the areas they live in and what were the challenges they faced when they arrived. The language barrier, cultural shocks while trying to integrate, and the lack of social life/connections were the main challenges at the beginning (21 respondents). In terms of living conditions, the answers varied between very suitable houses (20 responses), while five interviewees see these houses are smaller than the ones they used to live in Syria and, most importantly, are not suitable for families. The latter group was compelled with the host country's housing system (e.g., the point system in the Netherlands). Nonetheless, they are all satisfied with the living areas in terms of wide and clean streets and availability of all basic services.

In terms of employment, 14 of the respondents used to have a permanent job in Syria. The rest was distributed as follows: three were teenagers when they started their displacement journey, ten were university students, and one was a housewife. After arriving in hosting countries, three of the respondents from the student group had part-time jobs. In the currently unemployed group, three respondents are housewives; seven respondents were unemployed at the time of interview because they were learning the language and attending vocational training that should qualify them for work in the host communities.

In terms of "*the retuning decision",* "*motivations behind the return decision*", and "*location choice when returning*", the results from the questions related to these categories are displayed together since it would be hard to disentangle their individual outcome due to the strong connection between these themes. Therefore, based on the answers provided by the interviewees, the most frequent term was: ***"Maybe …. If"*** (i.e., Hope to return home someday…but under certain conditions) was the common response on returning decision among respondents. This conditional return addressed by interviewees shared the same elements such as "when the situation is better", "when there are better job opportunities", "better conditions at cities to live in after the conflict in our home country", or "when safety is fully guaranteed". Two interviewees wanted to have a life between Syria and the host country. One is desperate to return and aims to return to the same place and the same house because they hold lots of good memories; an important aspect that was noticed in this respondent answer was the inability to integrate with the host community where the feeling of discrimination (and to some extent racism) is dominant. Previous studies (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002) showed that displaced people maintain a strong emotional connection with their original home; however in this case, this result cannot be generalized because only one respondent shows this intention. Nevertheless, it is an interesting point to consider for further investigation.

Similarly to (Arias et al., 2014), safety, economic stability, and availability of better housing conditions were the main encouraging factor for returning (17 responses).

> "*The basic needs of any neighbourhood have to be available in the area that I would choose to live or, if not found, at least I should be able to manage to solve it (have the accessibility to solve them), but they are secondary requirements ..... The other essential requirements that I can't solve and are very important are safety/security.*"

One of the respondents stated that they do not want to return if they find a job in the hosting country but might do because they feel desperate. Five of the respondents refuse to return to Syria, and if they did, they would go as visitors to see their families, but permanent return is not an option under any circumstances. The respondents who suffered the most during the conflict are the least willing to return due to loss of the connection and ties in Syria, not seeing hope that the conflict will resolve, nor that the Syrian situation will get better. The result here aligns with (Cordero 2002; Arias et al., 2014), where they see displaced people are less likely to return if they were direct victims of aggression in the past.

While the majority of respondents prefer to return to their hometown (18 respondents), there are two who favoured living in Damascus (the capital), where better living conditions and services are expected to be available while at the same time they want to have a vacation house for the holidays in their original hometowns. Their responses also indicate their willingness to improve their living conditions and surround themselves with a better environment.

> *"One has to learn from the past, so if I decided to return, I want to have a house in Damascus (not on the fringe), and I can't accept living in the informal settlement at all. And if I had to choose a certain area, it would be Dummar or Qudsayya."*

Also, from another respondent…

> "*I would definitely change my house because my perspective of housing changed; for me, my house represents my lifestyle. I like to live in a diverse neighbourhood similar to here, but this is only available in Damascus city centre, where population density is high. So, I would prefer to buy land and build my own home that is suitable for my needs, and I would prefer to be socially isolated because I don't guarantee how? The neighbourhood would develop. I would compromise the location because I can achieve the same quality of life as the one in the city centre*s."

In terms of "*essential aspects needed for urban development*", the aspects mentioned by interviewees intersect with retuning motives to some extent. In this theme, questions related to the role of government and the role of citizens were asked too. The answers varied: some see the importance of capital to finance the reconstruction project:

> "*The (urban) neighbourhoods need big capital/finances, and only government could do that. Such projects happen at the government level (national), and they can be implemented by (private) investors, but the plan has to be put by the government, and not allow anyone to build their houses based on their wishes (unless it was in the rural areas).*"

While others see they can contribute to building their homes with the support of the government as a win-win situation:

> "*I prefer to live with my family in multiple floor house than living in a single-floor apartment with a big area (...). If the government support us with infrastructure and building materials at good prices, then I can build my own house, and I would help with providing jobs for other people because I will need some workers to help me in building my house.*"

Another respondent sees the importance of equality in post-conflict development, they want:

> "*To see more of middle-class neighbourhoods (...), increase in the quality of public services in rural areas and make them easily accessible; this will encourage people to live outside the city, and that will help to increase the green spaces within the city."*

Three respondents emphasize that the first step starts with "*rebuilding citizen's mentality*", because the "*role of citizens*" (or public participation and volunteering culture) is a culture that doesn't exist in Syria:

> "*This can be achieved starting from the top, having institutions that work with integrity, it could be a role model for citizens who will unconsciously improve themselves… the government should initiate such a thing.*"

Multiple perspectives (four responses) see the role of citizens lies in planning with the help of professionals (planners and engineers), and the role of government lies in providing the finance the facilities to help them adapt to the regulations and understand the law.

Other interviewees highlighted the role of social organizations in enhancing the interaction between the government and the citizens:

> "*There is a need for social organizations because they will work as mediators between the society and the government. It will work with the government in terms of planning and funding, and with citizens in terms of raising awareness on the importance of neighbourhoods to enhance the belonging feelings to the neighbourhood and thus the city.*"

When discussing the role of citizens, a feeling of responsibility towards their community was stressed by interviewees:

> "*I also studied masters on building Syria in post-conflict, so I feel I have a social responsibility to return, help and do something, even if my return is temporary or I can organize my time between both countries.*"

The final question that was asked to all interviewees was about how they perceive the *"deeper meaning of home"*. Answers showed various perceptions related to this notion; some

considered home simply as Syria, others reduced it to family, few of them were not limited to one place and understand the meaning of home as the place that provides security, stability, and better life. The multiple perceptions of the concept of “home”, according to (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002), is due to the strong emotion that they grow towards their home. In that context, the meaning of home is considered as an ‘acts of imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing and moving’ (ibid, p. 6). Some quotes are shared below.

Home is:

“A place that gives psychological relief”

“Whenever I find a better living conditions, I am not tied to any place, and I have plenty of bags to move to any comfortable place”

“Any place where I feel stability without worrying about tomorrow”

“a familiar place. A place where I can achieve what I want and don't want to leave it”

5.5 Conclusion

The findings highlight the differences and similarities of Syrian perspectives on returning to their home country.

The majority of displaced people will not return soon and perhaps not in the timeframe in the scenario study (the year 2025) that were studied in Chapter IV. These results corroborated with the UNHCR (2019) survey among Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq) of Syria. The study resulted that around 75 per cent of respondents hope to return one day, 19 per cent do not hope to return, and around 5 per cent are undecided. The result of both studies (this research and UNHCR) are similar despite the difference in the characteristics of the host countries and the legal status provided to refugees. Similarly, Alrababa’h (et al., 2021) did not find any strong relation relationship between conditions in the hosting country and people’s return intentions. Nevertheless, this issue requires further investigation and, on a larger scale, to gain deeper insights.

In the study of UNHCR (2019), the returning decision is subject to safety, access to basic services, livelihood opportunities, and access to shelter, which also coincides with our results as well as previous literature mentioned previously in the discussion. Therefore, defining the priorities of the returning motivating factors reinforcing and implementing strategies should be on the immediate response agenda.

Thus, by looking at this study from an urban lens and compared to the results from Chapter IV, the results of the interviews are consistent with Scenarios 1 & 3 concerning the willingness to return to hometown and more with Scenario 3 in terms of returning waves. This is also consistent with “Durable Solutions for Syrian Refugees” by the same UNHCR study where 75 per cent of the respondent hope to return one day (5per cent intended to return within a year). The rather slow tide of returning opens a chance to develop a policy of deliberate polycentric development for the post-conflict phase to ensure balanced urban recovery in all cities.

Also, as mentioned in Chapter IV, the return of displaced people will collide with many obstacles that can be classified as social and technical. The social obstacles lie in the situation of coming to a new environment and contact with the community of the already settled population, with possibly different values and habits than the re-exiles who spent part of their lives with quite different cultures. The technical obstacles, including the lack of infrastructure, adequate public services, and housing, seem more urgent for the initial phase of the return.

In the long run, the importance of social obstacles may be increasing. The results from Chapter V highlighted the willingness of returning people to participate in post-conflict planning. Thus, enhancing public participation in decision-making and empowering returnees to rebuild their lives may be the first step to overcoming social obstacles.

The effectiveness of post-conflict administration of spatial development will impact the behaviour of Syrian refugees and IDPs, both in terms of how many decide to return and the spatial choice for those who actually return.

As people consider a return, they need to assess the conditions of the post-war economy to learn whether they will be able to meet their family's basic needs. Arias et al. (2014) find that people who own land or have prospects for employment in their place of origin have higher return intentions to return. Beber et al. (2013) find that the South Sudanese residents of North Sudan who were least likely to return were the middle class for whom employment opportunities were scarce in the South. In our results, we found the majority of the respondents to belong to the middle and upper-middle class; however, we could not establish evidence for a causal relationship between the intention to return and belonging to the middle class. Therefore, more profound research in this aspect as well is important.

Policies to restitute assets lost or to provide access to land are important incentives to return. The overview of the return programs in countries during post-conflict periods has shown that returning beneficiary households faced major challenges because they were unable to prove formal ownership titles, which hampered or impeded land restitution. This difficulty was frequent in Peru, while in Iraq and Afghanistan, new conflicts emerged since asset restitution was not an alternative (Bascom 2005; Davies 2004; IDMC 2007; Rogge & Lippman 2004). Similarly, in Bosnia, this strategy was proposed to encourage the refugees to return. It led to the return of almost half of the displaced population, and the majority of them returned in the first two years of the post-conflict phase. This policy could be one of the methods that support overcoming technical obstacles.

Box 4-1

Interview Questions (example was for the interviewees who live in the Netherlands)

1. How long have you been in NL?
2. How is your housing situation in the Netherlands?
    - How do you feel about your life here in NL? What was your impression? What difficulties you faced so far?
    - Do you have a job in NL? What type is it? Is full time/part time? Or are you continuing your education?
3. How was your life in Syria before the crisis? {where did you live? Is it your home town? (if no what is your hometown?) what was your age at that time? Education?}
4. Describe your housing situation in Syria? (Did you owned your house that you lived in? Do you used to live with your family? Do you have another property? Where? Did it get demolished?)
    - Did you have a job in Syria? What was it? (type: Agriculture “farming”, government employee, merchant, …)
5. Do you consider returning? Under which conditions?
    - If Yes, what will you do? Where are you going to live? (Are you planning to settle in the same city that you used to live)? If No, where then and why? {Is it because the job opportunity? Better living condition (public services)?}
    - If No, explain why? Is it because you settled in NL and you started a new job, you don’t to start again in Syria? Did you like the living here? Is it because there is no chance to go back to your job/or you lost your property?
6. How do expect ‘imagine’ your life in Syria will be when you return? (which neighbourhood do you want to live in (in terms of facilities, spatial qualities, housing quality)
    a. What are the requirements you want to have of your living environment in Syria when you go back (regarding accessibility by different modalities, housing standards, affordability, greenery, facilities, etc)? How will you prioritize these requirements, how do you think this can be achieved (How would you improve the quality of life in the affected neighborhoods?)? What the perspective that you want to take with you from the NL? What are the things that you find in NL, and you want to see/have in Syria?
7. How such a result should be achieved (how do you think this can be achieved?).
    a. What role should the state take?
    b. Which role should citizens / inhabitants take?
8. (for those who do not want to go back or choose to live in a city different than their hometown) If you got offered a job opportunity and a house would that be a motivation for you to go back?
    a. yes.
    b. If no, why?
9. What does “home” mean to you?

Chapter VI

Conclusion: Planning for Post-Conflict Syria

This chapter summarizes the PhD thesis concept, aims, and key questions and conclusions. Based on that, the chapter discusses the conclusion with reflection on the literature and theory. Also, it compares and intersects the results and conclusions from the analyses conducted in this PhD thesis. The chapter builds up recommendations and outcomes based on the conclusion discussion. Furthermore, it outlines the key contributions of the research. Finally, the chapter highlights research limitations and opens the discussion for further improvements through future research.

6.1. Discussion and conclusion

This research aimed at "*Investigating the adequate spatial planning approach for the reconstruction era in post-conflict countries*".

The study focused on the national level and on the medium-to-long-term social, urban, and institutional recovery and stability. In order to achieve the goal set out in this way, the research set the specific aims and related questions (Table 6-1).

Table 6-1: Research Objectives and Questions

Research Aim	Related Questions
Aim 1: To review/inspect the planning culture in Syria (before and after the conflict)	Q1. What form of (urban) planning development organization/approach exists in Syria?
	Q2. What is the institutional context of urban/spatial planning in Syria?
Aim 2: To investigate the physical change of Syrian cities during the conflict and foresee/ forecast the potential spatial development in the post-conflict phase (how it might influence the planning culture).	Q3: What are the potential development patterns for the post-conflict phase? And could polycentric development be a suitable approach for that phase?
	Q4: How should the current spatial planning approach be altered to deliver more liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places?
Aim 3: To investigate the potential return of the displaced Syrians	Q5. What are the perspectives of displaced Syrians on returning home?

Source: Author's elaboration

To accomplish the research Aim 1, the planning culture in Syria was reviewed through the three levels of the Culturised Planning Model, which included the planning law and legislation, the planning practices, institutional analysis, and planning governance in Syria. Furthermore, the research questions Q1 and Q2 on planning approach and institutional context of spatial

planning help better understand the planning culture and identify the main issues in law, practices, and administration, as well as explaining urban phenomena such as the informal settlement.

When responding to the research questions Q1 and Q2, it was found that the planning system in Syria follows a top-down approach. Despite the decentralized administrative system (addressed in Law 107/2011), local authorities have limited power to implement small scale projects, while the decision on implementing major projects is from the central authorities. The delay in implementing many development projects highlights the lack of capacity in planning institutions, and limitation in planning law were also considered one of the factors that hamper the successful implementation of development projects and master plans for cities.

The top-down approach in planning and the centralized decision-making process proved to be insufficient to the Syrian planning system; the same practices did not overcome the pre-conflict challenges nor reduce their effects. On the contrary, the challenges exacerbated, the urban sprawl in some areas in Syria continued, furthermore the projects of rebuilding Syria were not successful in meeting people's needs. A bottom-up approach is more preferred to address people's needs, or in other words, "participative culture" (Jaššo & Finka, 2019). This approach (according to Jaššo & Finka, 2019) focuses on balanced and sustainable development and ensuring balanced and cohesion in any change made. However, it may imply several issues such as 'Lower efficiency of crisis management', which can be overcome with good leadership (ibid), as "no planning culture is optimal or ideal". Planning culture is highly contextual, always embedded in broader cultural, social, political, and institutional frameworks that work as facilitators or obstacles for any new element. It does not mean that the planning culture is static, but the shifts are more or less evolutionary and must be assessed in broader horizons" (ibid, p. 150).

Furthermore, reviewing the planning culture in Syria helped in understanding the cultural and societal preconditions that can explain relevant attitudes, traditions, values and unconscious motives. The informal settlement, for instance, is one of the phenomena that represent the unconscious reaction of people to the unmet demands that a hierarchal system failed to fulfil. Thus, planning systems and practices require substantial changes, or in other words, a change in the planning culture is much needed, it can contribute to better planning system and practices. However, this is a long-term process for planning practices. Despite planning culture is not a prescribed or institutionalized process; however, certain practices can help / contribute to making this change in the long-term. They can also help provide immediate solutions for the post-conflict phase.

According to (Othengrafen & Reimere, 2013), the change in planning culture can be twofold, internal "change-initiating factors occur 'within' the observed culture—this refers to changes in the shape of norms, rules, attitudes, and values as well as to changes in the political-administrative system and political attitudes" (p. 1278); and external "change-initiating factors, in contrast, "are rooted outside the given culture, namely in its surrounding environment" (Gullestrup, 2006, page 111; see also Chin, 1989), including impacts from other cultures as well as changes in the (surrounding) nature" (p. 1278).

The change in planning culture can happen in three stages; the first stage is when planning policies and tools become ineffective or, in other words, fractured and void due to 'shock events'. The second stage is when new practices are applied, “a change happened”; the third is when the new practice became acceptable and replaced the old practices (Othengrafen & Reimere, 2013 citing: Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Gullestrup, 2006; Schein, 1988). From here, it can be concluded that post-war and the return of the displaced people could be the 'shock events' that can be used to introduce the new practices (which could be the polycentric development). Othengrafen and Reimere (2013) see this process is similar to models of individual learning.

Othengrafen and Reimere (2013) pointed out that these changes can be mainly witnessed in the ‘planning artefacts’ and ‘planning environment’ (i.e., the conscious routines) and that through planning policies and planning practices, processes and outcome. An example of that was provided on the European planning strategies on competitiveness, including regulations and spatial planning discourse such as the polycentricity and sustainability (ibid). The challenge remains in the ‘societal environment’ because it is rooted in the society, which makes it difficult to change, and thus, attention should be paid to it because it determines what aspects to consider in planning. Thus it can be considered for the short-term / immediate solutions.

It is concluded that polycentric development can be the change-initiating factor in planning culture. This is explained by previous planning studies made by international and national organizations that aimed to achieve sustainable and balanced development in Syria. The studies indicated an approach consistent with the concept of polycentric development in terms of establishing urban centres with the interrelationship between them. As these projects were not implemented due to the conflict, however, if they were implemented based on top-down command, the success of these projects would not be guaranteed. Now, and with planning, priorities are changed due to the conflict, yet considering a balanced approach within the new context of planning culture would support meeting the immediate needs of the post-conflict phase.

The understanding of the recent failure of the effort for decentralisation will make a framework and, at the same time, may be a lesson for any effort for management of possible future migration flow of re-exiles.

The research Aim 2 followed the findings from the preceding analyses by identifying polycentric spatial development as a potential planning approach that could be suitable for the post-conflict phase to achieve balanced, sustainable development. Through the Impact / Uncertainty Matrix, and based on the available literature, the research identified key factors that encourage displaced people to return base; it was possible to identify four plausible scenarios for the post-conflict phase based on the returnees’ potential residential patterns and urban concentration.

To respond the research question Q3, it was found, through analysing the resulting four scenarios on potential future urban developments for the post-conflict phase, that polycentric development is the suitable approach to achieve balanced development and sustainable recovery of the Syrian cities. Its features allow for a balanced distribution of the population within cities; thus, less pressure on main dominant cities and their natural resources as well as

less informal settlement phenomena will be witnessed. Maier (2009) sees that polycentric development should be considered a way to achieve sustainable development and decrease territorial disparities, rather than an aim itself. The functional connection between urban centres is significant for joining their efforts, which might help to create critical economic mass when applied in a polycentric development context (Hague, 2015). Applying polycentric development to the urban system will help several urban centres gain more importance and hence a more competitive position due to the distribution of the economic functions on the urban system. (Meijers & Sandberg, 2006, p. 2).

Planning approaches must utilise 'out-of-the-box' solutions and empower local authorities to achieve a balance between development and sustainability. A hybrid polycentric and monocentric framework could result in a sustainable post-conflict society if it was applied at a particular territorial level and within particular territories (Maier, 2009).

Verifying the results of the scenarios through Zipf's Law approximation helped to identify which of the scenarios provides more sustainable development for the Syrian cities, and propose recommendations for the short- and long-term responses (answering research Q3).

The results of these analyses arose the need to investigate the opinion of displaced Syrians on returning home, in order that the rational concepts of theories should be complemented by bottom-up views of the refugees. The content analysis of 25 interviews with displaced Syrians helped to achieve research Aim 3 and answer the research Q5. It was also aimed through the inspection of people's opinions on returning home to identify to what extent the results are consistent with the ones from research Aim 3 as well as to other previous studies on Syria and countries that faced similar situations. Furthermore, this analysis helped to pinpoint the returning motivation factors and essential urban needs for the interviewed group. The results were consistent with ones from Chapter IV. This exploratory study proposed to do further research.

It is found from interviewing the displaced people the returning decision varies among the people who shared the same age range; rather, the decision on return depends mostly on their personal experience. The group that suffered the most is the least willing to return. The majority of displaced people will not return soon and perhaps not in the timeframe in the scenario study (2025) that were studied in Chapter IV. These results are corroborated with the UNHCR (2019) survey among Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq) of Syria. The study resulted that around 75 per cent of respondents hope to return one day, 19 per cent do not hope to return, and around 5 per cent are undecided.

With looking at this study from an urban lens and compared to the results from Chapter IV, the results of the interviews are consistent with Scenarios 1 & 3 in relation to the willingness to return to hometown and more with Scenario 3 in terms of returning waves. This is also consistent with "Durable Solutions for Syrian Refugees" by the UNHCR study, where 75per cent of the respondent hope to return one day (5per cent intended to return within a year). This indicates the importance of polycentric development in the post-conflict phase to ensure balanced urban recovery in all cities.

However, the returning, as expressed by most of the interviewees (17 participants) is conditioned. Similarly to (Arias et al., 2014) and UNHCR (2019), safety, economic stability, and availability of better housing conditions were the main encouraging factor for returning. The result also coincides with the impact/uncertainty matrix (Figure 4-2), as they represent the main factors that will affect the characteristics of the Syrian cities. In terms of the essential urban needs, they mostly centred around the basic services (also see Figure 4-2) and little to the social aspect (such as the social class), which indicates that the majority of the potential returnees are not concerned with social obstacles. Despite several studies considering property restitution as important incentive to return (Arias et al., 2014; Barakat, 1992; Boussauw, 2012), property ownership, however, was not one of the motivating factors for returning decision.

Despite the difference in the characteristics of the host countries than the ones in this study and the legal status provided to refugees. Nevertheless, Alrababa'h (et al., 2021) did not find any strong relation relationship between conditions in the hosting country and people's return intentions. Based on previous experiences discussed by Valenta et al. (2020), they expected that most of those who got permanent protection in Europe and North America would never return to Syria even if they were offered generous repatriation assistance. It is also anticipated that many Syrians in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan will lose their temporary protection status and that these host countries will coerce them to leave. Thus, there is a positive association between better conditions faced by refugees in exile and the likelihood of returning to Syria (Beaman et al., 2022). With these two opposite results, this study requires further investigation and on a larger scale to gain deeper insights.

As people consider a return, they need to evaluate the conditions of the post-war economy and whether they believe they will be able to meet their family's basic needs. Arias et al. (2014) find that people who own land or have prospects for employment in their place of origin have higher return intentions to return. Beber et al. (2013) find that the South Sudanese residents of North Sudan who were least likely to return were the middle class for whom employment opportunities were scarce in the South. While in our results, we found the majority of the respondent belong to the middle and upper-middle class, however, we could not establish evidence for a causal relationship between the intention to return and belonging to the middle class. Therefore, a deep search in this aspect as well is important.

The synthesis of the rational theory-based and individual-oriented sociologic research showed a possible way how to overcome the identified cultural barriers against polycentric development and decentralised planning and decision-making, to deliver liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places (research Q4). The experience of the re-exiles who spent some years in Western countries, with their subsidiary and polycentric policies, could be a valuable asset in this way.

When responding to research question Q4, the positive and negative aspects of each of the resulting scenarios were addressed. It is found that in order to alter the spatial planning approach towards delivering more liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places, overcoming the challenges attributed to the return of the displaced people is essential. These challenges are twofold, social and technical. In Chapter IV, it was concluded that enhancing public participation in decision-making process and empowering returnees to

rebuild their lives is the first step to overcoming the social obstacles. The return of refugees and IDPs will introduce social and technical tensions. Returnees, especially young returnees, may face social barriers and trouble integrating with locals. It is unclear how the locals will react to the newcomers or whether returnees will be admitted into the urban planning process. The results from Chapter V highlighted the willingness of people to participate in post-conflict planning. Thus, enhancing public participation in decision-making and empowering returnees to rebuild their lives will be the first step to overcoming social obstacles.

The technical obstacles centre around the lack of infrastructure, inadequate public services, and housing shortages. Solutions should be tailored to fit both the short-term stage (the first three years of peace-building) and the long-term stage (a seven-year state-building phase) of the post-conflict phase (ESCWA, 2017). The capacity building would be the starting point in the short-term stage of solutions, and it could continue through the long-term stage. Whereas the revision of planning policies, strategies, and master plans comes at the top priority of long-term solutions.

Policies to restitute assets lost or provide access to land are important incentives to return. For example, return programs in countries during post-conflict periods faced major challenges because beneficiary households lacked formal land titles, hampering or impeding land restitution. This difficulty was frequent in Peru, while in Iraq and Afghanistan, new conflicts emerged since asset restitution was not an alternative (Bascom 2005; Davies 2004; IDMC 2007; Rogge & Lippman 2004). Similarly, in Bosnia, this strategy was proposed to encourage the refugees to return. It led to the return of almost half of the displaced population, and the majority of them returned in the first two years of the post-conflict phase. This policy could be one of the methods that support overcoming technical obstacles.

Research limitations

This PhD thesis faced several challenges; first, the lack of data has limited the focus of the research to the national level, where data related to population were only available for governorates (urban and rural population) instead of the population of cities (the urban data only). Identifying the data related to urban areas depended on intersecting several sources, which could provide less accurate data. Also, the lack of data led to studying one dimension of the polycentricity, "the morphological dimension".

The scenarios presented can be used to shape a deliberate resettlement policy consisting of sequential phases of post-conflict recovery. In the initial phase, a few returnees will be concentrated in the major cities. This will be followed by another wave of returnees after the political situation stabilises and institutional capacity is enhanced. In the next phase, the stabilised conditions will trigger a large wave of returnees who will be highly concentrated in major cities. Finally, the last phase introduces polycentric distribution, in which all cities are recognised in the reconstruction plans.

The effectiveness of post-conflict administration of spatial development will impact the behaviour of Syrian refugees and IDPs, both in terms of how many decide to return and the spatial choice for those who actually return.

6.2. Recommendation and outcomes

Planning for the post-conflict phase has many challenges but also offers several opportunities to build back better. Based on this PhD thesis conclusion, practitioners are recommended the following.

Planning restructures: introducing good governance practices and reforming planning practices and laws as well as the actual implementation of the decentralized administrative system. To this end, capacity building should be strengthened within the institutions that contribute to the decision-making process, as well as giving more power to the local authorities.

To consider polycentric development as a planning approach that can lead the post-conflict recovery efforts as a change-initiating factor for planning culture. The Syrian government needs to adopt such a comprehensive framework that could prevent the reoccurrence of past planning mistakes.

Based on technical obstacles discussed in Chapter IV. Solutions should be tailored to fit both the short-term stage (the first three years of peacebuilding) and the long-term stage (a seven-year state-building phase) of the post-conflict phase (ESCWA, 2017). The capacity building would be the starting point in the short-term stage of solutions, and it could continue through the long-term stage.

People-centred-cities: Enhance public participation in the planning process in order to create inclusive spaces that respond to citizen needs. The research recommends the adaptation of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework as an analysis tool for informed decision-making in a community workshop to perform this analysis.

6.3. Research contribution

This research contributes to the body of the literature that studied post-conflict/war planning. It builds on the experience from other similar cases and on the application of theoretical resources on the particular case of Syria, as well as the author´s personal acquaintance with Syria and its culture. It also contributes to the discussion of the philosophy of the reconstruction planning strategies. It proposes a spatial planning approach for the post-conflict phase that aims to achieve sustainable recovery. Although this paper focuses on Syria, it provides a paradigm for similar conflict-affected countries. More specifically, conflict-affected countries that share similar urban context and planning culture (e.g., top-down / centralized decision making process with monocentric settlement pattern). However, the specific governance and planning culture of each country in case must be thoroughly considered to avoid a simplified, uniform approach. The methodology that is followed in developing potential post-conflict scenarios provides flexibility in application in similar countries within their urban context and planning and according to their needs and priorities. The methodology adopted a valid instrument to measure the expected demographies and their spatial distribution. This results in an original contribution of this research to both method and knowledge within the Syrian context, especially with the challenges of lacking and patchy data.

Identifying the key role of institutional development and capacity building in establishing good governance based on collaboration between state and civil society are the cornerstone of recovery strategies and objectives (i.e., empirical consensus).

6.4. Future research

This knowledge concluded in this research highlights the importance of further inspecting the attitude of the local residents towards the newcomers and the potential of inviting/admitting the latter group to the planning process. This research has further potential to be conducted on a deeper level of analysis by considering intersectional returning dynamics drivers. To better understand the implications of the results of this PhD thesis, future studies could address this analysis to inspect the perspectives of three main groups that could be affected by the returning process: the displaced people from rural areas, the IDPs and the local residents. Further, it recommends conducting this research, within the availability of data, in a comprehensive way to cover local and regional levels.

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Summary

The PhD thesis is concerned with planning in the post-conflict phase. It selects Syria as a case study as it has been under severe armed conflict since 2011. The current conflict has reshaped the urban structure and demography, increasing with this the urban challenges, among others. These challenges emphasise the need to focus on post-war reconstruction and development approaches and practices and the ways development in the aftermath of conflict can help build and consolidate sustainable recovery and return for displaced people in the future.

This research aimed at "*Investigating the adequate spatial planning approach for the reconstruction era in post-conflict countries*".

The study focus is on the national level and on the medium-to-long-term social, urban, and institutional recovery and stability. The research specifies further aims and questions to address these aims:

Aim 1: To review/inspect the planning culture in Syria (before and after the conflict)

This objective is met by answering the following questions:

Q1. What form of (urban) planning development organization/approach exists in Syria?

Q2. What is the institutional context of urban/spatial planning in Syria?

Aim 2: To investigate the physical change of Syrian cities during the conflict and foresee/ forecast the potential spatial development in the post-conflict phase (how it might influence the planning culture).

This objective is met by answering the following questions:

Q3. What are the potential development patterns for the post-conflict phase? And could polycentric development be a suitable approach for that phase?

Q4. How should the current spatial planning approach be altered to deliver more liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places??

Aim 3: *To investigate the potential return of the displaced Syrian*

This objective is met by answering the question:

Q5. What are the perspectives of displaced Syrians on returning home?

For the "*Aim 1*", to study the planning for post-conflict Syria, it was important to develop a good understanding of planning systems and laws in Syria and planning practices to achieve better addressing for the pre-and-during conflict urban challenges. Therefore, the research

contributed to understanding the urban development pattern of the related responsible institutions (research questions Q1 and Q2) by applying institutional analysis of the urban planning system in Syria and studying the planning culture by following the Culturised Planning Model. This helped identify the gaps in the system and the related law texts and indicate the shortage in the capacities of the institutions.

For the "*Aim 2*", to plan for post-conflict development, it becomes important to understand the changes in the urban structure and demographics and the new challenges associated with it. Post-conflict planning practices that were applied by countries that faced similar situations are diverse in terms of the needs and the goals aimed to be achieved. This research focused on investigating the methods and strategies that are needed to achieve sustainable and balanced post-conflict development (research question Q4). Therefore, the research worked on exploring the different urban patterns that can potentially emerge in the post-conflict time (research question Q3). Thus, the research studies four plausible scenarios of urban development based on the potential flow of returnees.

For the "*Aim 3*", to deepen the understanding of the potential urban pattern in the post-conflict phase, and to identify the reconstruction process priorities, the research goes further with inspecting the opinions of displaced Syrians on returning home (research question Q5) through conducting interviews with a sample of this group. This investigation helped in understanding the needs of this category and knowing their visions for the future.

In Chapter III, when responding to the research questions Q1 and Q2, it is found that the planning system in Syria follows a top-down approach. Despite the decentralized administrative system (addressed in Law 107/2011), local authorities have limited power to implement small scale projects, while the decision on implementing major projects is from the central authorities. The delay in implementing many development projects highlights the lack of capacity in planning institutions, and limitation in planning law are also considered one of the factors that hamper the successful implementation of development projects and master plans for cities.

The top-down approach in planning and the centralized decision-making process proved to be insufficient to the Syrian planning system; the same practices did not overcome the pre-conflict challenges nor reduce their effects. On the contrary, the challenges exacerbated, the urban sprawl in some areas in Syria continued, and the projects of rebuilding Syria were not successful in meeting people's needs.

In Chapter IV, research questions Q3 and Q4 were answered. To respond to research question Q3, it is found, through analysing the resulting four scenarios on potential future urban developments for the post-conflict phase, that polycentric development is the suitable approach to achieve balanced development and sustainable recovery of the Syrian cities. Its features allow for a balanced distribution of the population within cities; thus, less pressure on main dominant cities and their natural resources as well as less informal settlement phenomena will be witnessed. Applying polycentric development to an urban system will help several urban centres gain more importance and hence a more competitive position due to the distribution of the economic functions on the urban system.

When responding to research question Q4, the positive and negative aspects of each of the resulted scenarios were addressed. It is found that in order to alter the spatial planning approach towards delivering more liveable, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable places, overcoming the challenges attributed to the return of the displaced people is essential. These challenges are twofold, social and technical. Enhancing public participation in the decision-making process and empowering returnees to rebuild their lives is the first step to overcoming the social obstacles. The return of refugees and IDPs will introduce social and technical tensions. Returnees, especially young returnees, may face social barriers and trouble integrating with locals. It is unclear how the locals will react to the newcomers or whether returnees will be admitted into the urban planning process.

In Chapter V, to answer the research question Q5, it is found that the majority of displaced people will not return soon and perhaps not in the timeframe in the scenario study (2025). The returning decision is subject to safety, access to basic services, livelihood opportunities, and access to shelter, which also coincides with our results as well as previous literature mentioned previously in the discussion. Therefore, defining the priorities of the returning motivating factors reinforcing and implementing strategies should be on the immediate response agenda.

The effectiveness of post-conflict administration of spatial development will impact the behaviour of Syrian refugees and IDPs, both in terms of how many decide to return and the spatial choice for those who actually return.

Planning for the post-conflict phase has many challenges but also offers several opportunities to build back better. Based on this PhD thesis conclusion, practitioners are recommended the following:

- Planning restructures: introducing good governance practices and reforming planning practices and laws as well as the actual implementation of the decentralized administrative system. To this end, capacity building should be strengthened within the institutions that contribute to the decision-making process, as well as giving more power to the local authorities.
- To consider polycentric development as a planning approach that can lead the post-conflict recovery efforts as a change-initiating factor for planning culture. The Syrian government needs to adopt such a comprehensive framework that could prevent the reoccurrence of past planning mistakes.
- Based on technical obstacles discussed in Chapter IV. Solutions should be tailored to fit both the short-term stage (the first three years of peacebuilding) and the long-term stage (a seven-year state-building phase) of the post-conflict phase (ESCWA, 2017). The capacity building would be the starting point in the short-term stage of solutions, and it could continue through the long-term stage.
- People-centred-cities: Enhance public participation in the planning process in order to create inclusive spaces that respond to citizen needs. The research recommends the adaptation of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework as an analysis tool for informed decision-making in a community workshop to perform this analysis..

Curriculum Vitae
&
List of Publications

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Nationality:	Syrian
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Research Interests

Civil engineer with interest in resettlement in post-conflict areas; polycentric policy; inclusive cities; urban and regional planning; sustainable development; and land administration

Education

[2016–Present]

PhD Candidate
Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

Dissertation title
"Planning for Resettlement in Environment Where Rules Are Not Quite Respected – Case Study in Latakia, Syria"

Field of Study
Applied Geoinformatics and Spatial Planning.

[2009-2013]

Degree in Civil Engineering
Damascus University (Syria)

Thesis title
"Structural Study and Analysis of a Residential Building"

Work Experience

[2014-2016]

Civil engineer at the Directorate of Archaeology in Lattakia (National Museum – Ministry of Culture)

Training

[Sep. 2021–Mar. 2022]	Intern at UNHABITAT/ Programme Development Branch, Global Solutions Division, Nairobi, Kenya

Teaching

[2017–2020]	Instructor and examiner in the Practical Classes (Studio) of the Spatial Planning Course – Faculty of Environmental Sciences – Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

Volunteering

[Jul. 2018–Jun. 2020]	Elected Member of the Coordination Team of the Young Academic AESOP Network.
[Sep. 2019-Present]	Member of the Editorial Board of *plaNext* – Next Generation Planning e-Journal.
[2019]	Managing Editor in *plaNext* – Next Generation Planning e-Journal, Volume 9 and Volume 11

Grants and Scholarships

[2020]	Research grant awarded through the Arab Land Initiative's Research Innovation Fund	Research title: "Towards a Spatial Polycentric Approach for Sustainable Land Administration in Syria as a Key Tool for Social and Economic Recovery and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Strategies." https://arabstates.gltn.net/2020/09/08/17-research-grants-awarded-through-the-arab-land-initiatives-research-innovation-fund/
[Sep. 2018-Feb. 2019]	Erasmus Traineeship/Internship at Department of Spatial Planning and Environment - Faculty of Spatial Sciences – University of Groningen."

Research Activities

[2018]	Attending Winter School "*Land Acquisition, Resettlement and Social Sustainability*" at University of Groningen, November 12 -23, 2018, Groningen – The Netherlands.
[2018]	Attending the Designing inclusion final conference "*Successful inclusion of migrants and refugees in European Cities: How local players are making it happen and what support is needed from EU level*". European Parliament, Brussels, 18 October 2018. Organized by Housing Europe. (Without Presentation).
[2018]	Participating in the Doctoral Colloquium on Research Methods and Methodology. Prague, 23 and 24 April 2018. Czech University of Life Sciences. Organized by Euroleague for Life Sciences (ELLS).
[2017]	AESOP 2017 - PhD Workshop - Spaces of dialog for places of dignity: challenges for planning research. July 5-8, 2017. Aveiro, Portugal

[2017]	Summer Workshop of Department of Land Use and Improvement, about developing an applied working knowledge of how assess and propose remedial improvements to a rural landscape that has experienced habitat fragmentation, water quality problems resulting from existing land use, losses of landscape diversity and integrity, and impacts to cultural landscape features May 8 - 12, 2017, in Slavonice – Czechia.

Skills

Computer	MS office suite | Engineering Software AutoCAD, ETABS and WEAP | GIS, SQL – Basic Level
Languages	Arabic – Native |English - Very Good (Reading and Writing) | French - Beginner level (Carry on learning) | Czech – Beginner Level

Training Courses

- "International Development Engineering" ETH-Swiss Federal institute of Technology Zurich. Online course: 04 March 2021 – 03 June 2021
- "Project and Financial Management EN1" Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. 27 October 2020 to 15 March 2021.
- "Circular Economy and the 2030 Agenda." UNSSC Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development. Online course: 02 November – 04 December 2020.
- "Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development." UNSSC. Online course: 15 June – 17 July 2020.
- "Sustainable Development in Humanitarian Action." IFRC ICRC. Online course: July 2020.

List of Publications

Publications – *Peer Reviewed Articles*

- Wind, B., Ibrahim, B. (2020). The war-time urban development of Damascus: How the geography- and political economy of warfare affects housing patterns. *Habitat International*. 96. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2019.102109
- Ibrahim, B., Wind, B., Maier, K. (2021). Future Urban Development Scenarios for Post-conflict Syria. How Will Returning Refugees Shape the Future? *Habitat International*, 11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2021.102499
- Maya, R., Ibrahim, B. (2022). Towards a Spatial Polycentric Approach for Sustainable Land Administration in Syria as a Key Tool for Social and Economic Recovery and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Strategies. Working Paper.

Publications – *Conference Proceedings*

- Ibrahim B, Maier K, Wind B. (2021). Syrians' perspectives on returning home in post-conflict Syria. Conference Proceeding: The 6th IHSA Conference on Humanitarian Studies 2021. Paris, 3-5 November.
- Ibrahim B, Wind B, Maier K. (2019). Polycentricity As Transition Path Planning Approach for Future Urban Poles in Post-Conflict Era – Case Study: Syria. Congress Proceedings: AESOP 2019. Venice, 9-13 July 2019.
- Ibrahim B, Novotny V. (2018). Planning for Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection in Post-Conflict Phase - Case Study: Syria. Conference Proceedings: ERDev 2018. Jelgava, 23-25 May 2018.
- Ibrahim B. From Decentralization to Polycentricity: A Promising Approach for Post-Conflict Phase - Cases of Damascus and Latakia Regions in Syria. Conference Proceedings: AESOP YA 2018. Groningen, 26-29 March 2018
- Ibrahim B, Novotny V. (2016). Governing for Sustainability and Resilience: Case Study in Latakia, Syria. Conference Proceedings: AESOP YA 2016. Ghent, 21-24 March 2016.