

Italian Association for Middle Eastern Studies (SeSaMO)
Annual Conference
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Call for papers

Deadline for abstracts (English and French) September 5th, 2014.

Experimental and alternative urbanism in the MENA region: building a critical and 'political' research on the 'new' modes of making the city

Directors

- Pierre-Arnaud Barthel, CNRS Latts, Université Paris-Est, barthelp@enpc.fr
- Valérie Clerc, IRD CESSMA, valerie.clerc@ird.fr

Argument

This panel proposal focuses on the renewed forms to build the city in the MENA region. Without exhausting the adjectives to qualify these modes, it is possible to refer to:

- the 'environmental planning', which refers to a field of emerging practices at the origin of the eco-districts or eco-cities;
- the 'resilient urbanism' which is defined by the robustness of neighbourhood;
- the 'responsive urbanism' which highlights the adaptive character of urban responses in informal settlements;
- the participatory and 'collaborative' initiatives (bottom-up), which result in the action supported by local government and communities
- more conventionally, the 'sustainable' urbanism.

This panel will tackle two types of spaces. First are informal settlements, which represent an 'urban fabric' where experimental forms and new methods are at work, because they are the most important part of the urban development of the Global South to come.

The second type of space is related to major eco-projects (eco-districts or cities) in the MENA region, which have adopted in recent years ecological processes in the design and maintenance of the city, along with global strategies, or claim to do so.

The major research hypothesis is that the MENA region shows at least since the 2000s, like other regions of the world, new forms of urbanism that, to varying degrees, bring weak but maybe harbinger/forerunner signals of change and innovation, driven by the concepts of environment and sustainability in its three fundamental dimensions. This is valid for both

urban governance and the theoretical underpinnings of it, whereby professional training and the learning ways of doing, thinking and working on the city, shows some progressive changes.

However, when contrasted to other regions of the world, the MENA seems to experience difficulties in ‘refreshing its software’ on regional, national and local theory and practice of urban planning. Moreover, new experiments (along with the so-called ‘best practices’) lack replication and dissemination (construction of networks, impact on policy design and urban governance).

The panel will seek to understand why. What renewed, experimental and/or alternative forms to build the city are emerging in the MENA? Where do these changes and innovations appear? What are the obstacles? Where are the blockages? Which stakeholders resist to the replication of new modes? Why the voices of the pioneers find difficulties to be visible? How the gaps can be filled at the end?

More specifically, the panel will thus focus on three angles of research:

- 1) ‘Innovative’ or alternative urban planning project in the MENA region: a resurgence since the ‘Arab Spring’?
- 2) False pretenses, obstacle and blocking in the implementation of projects: symptoms of contradictory principles?
- 3) Alternative urbanism versus mainstream urbanism: change or inertia in the governance of cities?

We seek contributions (English and French) with strong empirical basis, and advancing critical reflection. Insights from other cultural areas are welcome. Papers could be subsequently be published in a peer journal issue and/or synthesis in a specialized website.

A more complete description of the panel is available in French on request

Submission guidelines

Paper proposals should be submitted in English or in French in a 250 words abstract in a .doc or .pdf format.

Proposal should be sent by email **before September 5th, 2014** to both organizers :

Pierre-Arnaud Barthel: barthelp@enpc.fr

Valérie Clerc: valerie.clerc@ird.fr

Notification of accepted proposals: September the 20th, 2014.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.sesamoitalia.it/call-for-papers-sesamo-annual-conference-venice-january-16-17-2015/>