The challenge of conflict-affected cities:
Building peace through architecture and urban design
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Abstract:

The goal of this paper is to show that architecture and urban design should be considered part of peacebuilding efforts aimed at helping find long-term sustainable solutions to conflict by fostering ownership, cohesion, and inclusion. The paper argues that recent developments in the field of peacebuilding and development, and particularly the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which have the motto "No one should be left behind," make a strong case for addressing the spatial, specifically urban needs of people living in cities inside conflict-affected countries. It goes on to point to policy gaps and to the practical challenges involved in devising urban solutions for cities in conflict. Finally, the paper claims that finding creative and innovative ways to prioritize sustainability in conflict-affected cities is not only possible, but a necessary part of addressing conflict. Our arguments are supported by examples from the field, focused specifically on the case of Kabul.

I. INTRODUCTION:

An article published in *The Atlantic* in 2013, featuring pictures from the 1950s and 1960s in Kabul, Afghanistan, painted the picture of a city unknown to visitors after 2001. People were shown gathered in open public spaces, walking on tree-lined roads and shiny and accessible government buildings free of bullet holes.[1] This forgotten vision of the city is the same as the one the renowned Afghan writer Khaled Hosseini portrayed in his novel *The Kite Runner* (2003)[2], describing his protagonist's childhood in the affluent neighborhood of Wazir Akbar Khan: "People gathered for picnics on Fridays in parks, on the banks of the Ghargha Lake, in the gardens of Paghman … stunted mulberry trees that lined our street." Although this Kabul had stark divisions both between rich and poor, and among its ethnic communities, its vibrant public spaces were still able to accommodate a shared social life.

The Afghanistan of today is a war-stricken post-conflict country, where recovery efforts have not managed to reinstate the lively streets, sidewalks, parks, gardens, and marketplaces of the past. Kabul is defined by bad air quality, high concrete walls topped with barbed wire, restrictions on access, and heavy traffic that are exacerbated by security checkpoints. The city lacks both the public infrastructure and the spaces that might aid the physical, social, and psychological recovery of its inhabitants, presenting a visual image of division, conflict, and despair. From an urban design and architecture perspective, the promises made to Kabul since the intervention in 2001—*establishing a*

[1] The full article can be located at http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2013/07/afghanistan-in-the-1950s-and-60s/100544/

[2] See Hosseini, K. (2013), *Kite Runner (10th anniversary edition),* Riverhead Books: New York City.

unified, inclusive, equitable, and peaceful country, where the economic and social needs of its people are addressed and where state-society relations were defined by mutual trust—haven't been fulfilled. Most of the responsibility in this, of course, belongs to the continuous wars, as well as the planning failures since the late 1970s. This paper will argue, however, that if urban issues were prioritized after 2001 with particular attention given to public spaces, some of these problems could be rectified.

On September 25, 2015, the United Nations adopted an ambitious set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), under the rubric "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."[3] The SDGs were presented as "a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity" where "no one is left behind," and underlined the determination to "take the bold and transformative steps that are urgently needed to shift the world on a sustainable and resilient path." The eleventh goal of the 2030 Agenda focuses on making cities sustainable, inclusive, safe and resilient by the year 2030. Both the development and peacebuilding communities are increasingly focused on "making the sustainable development agenda work for conflict-affected situations," in order to ensure that the development needs of populations living in conflict are met." This might be a good time to look at peacebuilding efforts from an urban and built-environment lens, to identify policy gaps and practical challenges hampering urban solutions to cities in conflict.[4] This might help us not only to find ways to prioritize sustainable cities in conflict-affected countries, but also to be a part of the creative and innovative solutions needed to build and sustain peace today.

Material footprints of intervention in a conflict-affected city

Kabul in 2001, the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Taliban regime, was a city in ruins (Bittner, Hackenbroich and Vockler: 2009). The 2001 Bonn Agreement set out clear goals for building peace in Afghanistan: fostering cohesion, inclusion, participation, prosperity, and local ownership geared towards sustainable peace. The same message has been reiterated and reproduced in various fora since 2001, including the UN Security Council and the 2011 Bonn Conference[5], which intended to craft another ten-year vision for the country. Seven years after the first Bonn Conference, in 2008, the Canadian journalist and urbanist Charles Montgomery walked through Kabul with his friend Tilo, a parks planner from Vancouver, for an article for *The Walrus* magazine (Montgomery: 2009). They saw little evidence that the agreement's ideals had been realized on the ground, from an urbanist perspective. Access and linkages were broken, walls created

3 The full text of the SDGs can be found at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld.

4 See, for instance, http://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/making-2030-sustainable-development-agenda-work-fragile-and-conflict-affected-states

5 The Bonn Agreement (The Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions) was the first set of agreements that intended to set the path f2or the reconstruction of Afghanistan following the NATO operation. The full text is available at http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/afghan-agree.htm. The 2011 Bonn Confeence aimed to mark the transition to stability, democracy, and prosperity, with the closure of the ISAF mission. The full text is available at http://eeas.europa.eu/afghanistan/docs/2011_11_conclusions_bonn_en.pdf

deep physical and social divisions, public spaces that might have accommodated diverse groups of people were nonexistent, and there was no infrastructure to hold the city together. Ordinary Afghans were allowed little access to the "Green Zone," the heavily guarded area in the center of the city that hosted embassies and the UN and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) compounds as well as government institutions[6], all of which intruded on the streets thanks to concentric layers of blast walls and razor wire. Sidewalks and street lanes were buried under cement blocks, bunkers, and privately owned generators (Goodhand and Sedra: 2010, Montgomery: 2009). Meanwhile, a construction-industry cartel exploited the lack of urban planning and regulation in Kabul, catering to the needs of Afghan elites, war profiteers, and drug lords by building multi-story Dubai-style office blocks, glittering mansions, and enormous villas with heavy security around them (Goodman and Sedra: 2010, Bittner, Hackenbroich and Vockler: 2009).

People on the other side of the walls, meanwhile, lived an entirely different reality (Montgomery: 2009). The Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which includes criteria such as material and living conditions, physical and economic safety, and the natural and living environment,[7] ranked Afghanistan 169th among 187 countries in 2014. When we visited Kabul in 2012, we discovered a city that was covered in dust, and that had missing or inadequate basic infrastructure, water, and electricity, and no proper sewage system. The center of Kabul was the most difficult to wander in, with some areas completely inaccessible to ordinary Afghans, who must instead take detours. The territorial impact of international missions was reflected not only in the compounds, but also deep in civic space (Piquard and Swenarton: 2011). Traffic was bad, moreover, foreign embassies sometimes shut down entire streets to local traffic for security reasons (The Guardian: 2009).

Attempts by Afghan authorities to improve accessibility and urban life in the city since 2006 have either been met with resistance from the international community or simply not materialized.[8] In 2006, former President Karzai ordered the streets and sidewalks of Kabul cleared, but the international community ignored the decree (Montgomery: 2008). The Mayor of Kabul in 2009 pushed the diplomatic compounds to move from densely populated urban areas into a higher security zone, to prevent roadblocks and the constant disruption of traffic. This also never materialized.

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6 These include the President's residence, his offices, the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs, the National Treasure and other key institutions (Goodhand and Sedra: 2010).

7 See http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2014-human-development-report.html

8 The Mayor of Kabul in 2009 pushed the diplomatic compounds to move from densely populated urban areas into a higher security zone, to prevent roadblocks and the constant disruption of traffic. This also never materialized; also they Deputy Head of Mission of the United States Embassy did join the mayor in taking down some razor wire round the heavily fortified American Embassy (The Guardian: 2009). According to some interviewed diplomats, the Mayor of Kabul tried to remove sandbags and t-walls from sidewalks in front of embassy compounds in 2012, but the international community did not like this idea either.

There was no master plan in place to provide asphalt roads, clean water, or sanitation, despite the tireless efforts of Yunus Nawandish, the mayor of Kabul.[9] The last master-planning effort had been the Soviet-led modernist Third Master Plan, in 1978, which had not been fully implemented because of conflict and governance-related problems (Calogero: 2011). In the meantime, massive flows of displaced people had overcrowded the city and strained its already feeble service-delivery capacity and infrastructure. By 2008, the population in Kabul was 4.5 million – double the 1978 Master Plan holding capacity. This negatively affected the lives of citizens and economic activities of enterprises because of the unpredictable status of land and properties. As of 2015, international initiatives to develop new master plans had not materialized beyond early phases[10]; as such, the 1978 plan is still used by the Kabul Municipality when making decisions about planning and building permissions (Matti: 2015, Calogero: 2011).

Using the example of Kabul, this paper will investigate the broad consequences of the failure to sustain public spaces in war-afflicted cities, and will probe the potential for restoring, rebuilding, and cultivating these social hubs as part of peace-building operations. Our hypothesis is that healthy public spaces are key to building and sustaining peaceful societies.

Urban flaws and sustainable peace:

Urban designers love to emphasize that public space—encompassing streets and sidewalks, parks, marketplaces, squares, gardens—is the heart and soul of cities, not least because it plays a crucial role in bringing together diverse populations and cultivating physical and social interactions between them. The accessibility, design, implementation, and programming of such spaces help to determine how inclusive they are, and how successful they are at creating cohesion. Presence in public space correlates strongly with participation in urban life, and with a city's sustainability and prosperity (Whyte: 1980).[11] According to the Future of Places forum, "well designed and managed public spaces are a key asset for a city's functioning and has a positive impact on its economy, health, climate, safety, integration and connectivity."[12]

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9 Several articles have been written on the efforts of Mayor Nawandish to make improvements in Kabul, who has been pushing aid agencies to make durable investments to the urban life in Kabul. For examples, see the Globe and Mail (http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/ideas-lab/meet-ten-mayors-who-are-changing-the-world-starting-with-their-cities/article17414392/ and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-17145494) websites.

10 There have been several planning studies on Kabul City, yet none of them have yet materialized. The first is a study supported by the World Bank and Intercontinental Consultants and Technocrats from 2007 – 2008, the second is the "Kabul Metropolitan Area Urban Development Master Plan" supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) from 2009 – 2010, and the third is a JICA-supported project entitled "Draft Kabul City Master Plan". For further information, see the Draft Kabul City Master Plan, available at http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00JMMJ.pdf.

11 According to Whyte (1980), the connections of public spaces with each other as well as with other neighboring urban spaces of varying functions in the urban network constitute the foundations of a healthy urban life. This argument underlines the importance of public space for healthy, sustainable cities.

12 The Future of Places forum, which brings together UN Habitat and Project for Public Spaces, underlines that "public space is a vital component of a prosperous city". See http://futureofplaces.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/FoP_Benefits-of-Public-Space.pdf

From this perspective, Kabul's lack of public spaces and damaged social networks present clear challenges. Designations attendant to post-war systems of spatial control—security and military zones, humanitarian sanctuaries, inaccessible sites, forbidden areas—pervade the city, influencing the way people produce, understand, and inhabit it (Piquard and Swenarton: 2011). The division of space and the closing off of some territory undermine their sense that they belong to a spatially bounded community and society. Blockades disrupt street networks, while concrete walls with barbed wire take over sidewalks and diminish the walkability of the streets, the most essential element of urban public life.

These features of the city affect citizens' regard for their surroundings and the prospects for peacebuilding in multiple ways. Firstly, the walls surrounding the compounds of embassies, international institutions, government buildings, and local elites' mansions create feelings of alienation between those inside and outside, serving as a stark reminder of the divisions between the local and the international, the rich and the poor, the government and its people. These divisions in turn help to create or exacerbate feelings of anger, distress, surprise, and helplessness (Piquard and Swenarton: 2011). The urban landscape in Kabul speaks a language of power, exclusion, instability, and fear, and reproduces feelings of hostility and insecurity instead of pointing toward normalization. The message the people of Kabul receive stands in deep contrast to the declared goals of the international community in Afghanistan, and reminds them of the absence of stability, cohesion and integration.

Secondly, the city's walls both physically and metaphorically impose physical wedges between people and their communities. In Kabul, many government institutions are situated behind high walls, sometimes in the Green Zone itself, inaccessible to the general public for security reasons. An Afghan government official interviewed for this article complained that, because many government offices are located in secure areas where ordinary people cannot go, even local Afghans working for the government are perceived as "the other" by people on the street, and believed to be unable to relate to their needs, wishes, and interests. The message again is clear: a lack of inclusion.

Thirdly, because Afghanistan depends on foreign aid and service-delivery to get by, the physical disconnect between the international community and the local populations has led to difficulties in adequately addressing the needs and interests of local populations. International aid workers often do not know any local Afghans beyond the cook, cleaner, translator, and driver , are pushed behind walls for security reasons and often cannot visit their own projects (Montgomery: 2008). When we toured the Babhur Gardens in Kabul, which were reconstructed by the Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN), we were surprised to discover that American diplomats were not allowed to visit a project they had funded there: ironically, a photo exhibition on Eisenhower's visit to Afghanistan in the 1950s. Absent such basic connections, it becomes very difficult to connect aid with needs on the ground, hindering people-centered approaches to peacebuilding and development.

The fourth way citizens' relationships with the peace-building project are affected relates to safety and security. Different elements of the international community bring different security structures to conflict zones, including sometimes importing their own building materials, walls, and style. This abundance of bespoke, exclusive structures can lead to perceptions that the security of international actors is prioritized over the security and development needs of local populations, fueling negative reactions, resistance, and resentment among local populations (Billerbeck: 2015, Montgomery: 2008). As such, while the aim of building physical fortifications might be justified given short-term security concerns, the resulting sense of exclusion hampers efforts at creating sustainable peace in the long run. At their outer reaches, the consequences of such feelings can be dire. As a 2015 report of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Preventing Violent Extremism: Promise and Pitfalls,"[13] notes, the root causes of radicalization include social marginalization and fragmentation, poorly governed or ungoverned spaces, elite impunity, corruption, and perceptions of existential threats to one's culture or religion. In other words, too much security, however justified, can lead to less security.

To summarize, poor design in conflict-affected cities works against people-centered approaches to development, hampering citizens' sense of ownership and cohesion, and in turn harming efforts at stability, security, cohesion, and integration. That this issue is urgent becomes obvious when we consider that in the future, rapid urbanization is expected to shape many cities, that fifty fragile states will account for nearly 30 percent of the global increase in urban population until 2030, and that conflict-affected countries will on average experience a 60% increase in urban population (OECD: 2015). The Kabul example demonstrates how conflict can exacerbate the problems that rapid urbanization creates on its own: damaged infrastructure, stark divisions between rich and poor, informal settlements with limited or no services, refugee flows, ruined neighborhood structures and support mechanisms (Bittner, Hackenbroich and Vockler: 2009). In examples like Kabul, the international community sometimes contributes to the problem instead of alleviating it, both by building its own walls and barriers, and by not prioritizing urban-planning needs in their policies.[14]

This article questions whether there is room to explore the transformative role of cities and the potential that architecture and urban design offer, in peacebuilding contexts, with a view to contributing to the kinds of creative and innovative solutions that will help peacebuilding efforts. To this end, in Section II, we will survey the academic and policy literature on the evolution of international efforts meant to establish sustainable peace. In Section III**,** we look at the field of architecture and urbanism, focusing particularly on approaches that foster cohesion, ownership, belonging, and inclusion in cities—elements that are often regarded as being at the heart of sustainable peacebuilding. Section IV will identify the opportunities and challenges involved in prioritizing inclusive architecture and urban design in conflict situations. Finally, this article will propose potential ways

13 The article is available at http://csis.org/publication/preventing-violent-extremism-promise-and-pitfalls.

14 On the other hand, massive urbanization also creates opportunities for economic growth and service provision due to density (OECD: 2015). These opportunities, while important to note, are not the direct focus of this article.

that architectural solutions might assist with peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts. The ultimate goal is to see understand how urban perspectives can help to foster such peacebuilding goals as safety, security, ownership, belonging, inclusion, integration, and cohesion, and to achieve sustainable development goals in conflict-affected cities.

II. DURABLE SOLUTIONS TO CONFLICT: THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS AND THE NEED FOR NEW SOLUTIONS

i) People-centered peacebuilding: Prioritizing inclusion, ownership and cohesion

The 2015 Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations (HIPPO Report) points out that changes in the nature of conflict might be outpacing the ability of the United Nations, national governments, and the international system to respond. Change is needed, the authors write, to adapt to new circumstances and ensure effective international response.[15] The apparent mismatch between the continued need for rapid and comprehensive solutions, and the inability of the international system to respond has led to much soul-searching about the effectiveness of the international response intended to sustainably end conflict (Randazzo: 2014). Recent studies seeking sustainable solutions to conflict have identified problems with previous 'one size fits all' responses, the inability to prioritize national ownership and leadership in the design of peacebuilding strategy, the lack of inclusive and broad-based, people-centered solutions, and the increased focus on the security aspect of interventions (Hameiri: 2009, Newman: 2010, Mac Ginty and Richmond: 2013, Billerbeck: 2015). In doing so, past interventions have sent a message of "force rather than consent," while paying lip service to concepts such as local ownership and inclusion (Billerbeck: 2015, Donais: 2012). Looking at Kabul from an urbanist perspective helps to visualize how these criticisms play out on the ground: Despite various efforts to rhetorically define the design and implementation of the international response in Afghanistan as favoring local ownership, the material footprints of intervention in Kabul send a clear message of imposition and exclusion rather than security, belonging, ownership, integration, cohesion, and peace.

While deep gaps between rhetoric and action persist, both the AGE and HIPPO Reports suggest that genuine local ownership should be the driving force behind successful peacebuilding. They argue for prioritizing long-term prevention, engaging more with host communities, addressing underlying causes of conflict, advancing reconciliation and healing, and combatting economic and social marginalization. This vision, which suggests that success in peacebuilding goes beyond achieving technical and measurable outcomes, might open up the possibility to explore the connection between architecture and ownership, participation, cohesion and inclusion. It could allow using urban design to close gaps between people, empower the state and enhance its relations with its subjects, and prioritize the wishes and needs of local communities (Donais: 2012, Billerbeck: 2015, Belloni: 2012, McGinty and Richmond: 2013).

15 For the full text of the 2015 Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, see http://www.un.org/sg/pdf/HIPPO_Report_1_June_2015.pdf.

Recent changes in development policy have echoed the peacebuilding field, signaling a new concentration on ownership, inclusion and cohesion, by emphasizing the broader agenda of state transformation and local ownership. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) latest report entitled "States of Fragility 2015: Meeting Post-2015 Ambitions" [16] argues that addressing the evolved nature of fragility necessitates addressing root causes of conflict and instability, building trust in government, and increasing the resilience of individuals, communities and countries. The "New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States"[17] also proposes to change the way business is done, by ensuring that transitions are country-owned and country-led, and resources are used effectively to build local capacities.

The new concentration on inclusion, ownership, and cohesion suggest new avenues, and a new receptivity, to connecting urban design to conflict. So, too, does the focus of the reviews on the need for creative and innovative solutions to tackle conflict. The opportunities and inclusive debates created by the adoption of the "2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" signal that this move is already happening. The 11th SDG, entitled "Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Communities", aims to add an urban focus to the development agenda, proposing to make cities inclusive, safe, sustainable and resilient[18]. The 7th Target of Goal 11 is particularly acknowledges the significance of public space: to provide universal access to safe, inclusive, accessible and green public spaces by 2030. This target is fully in line with academic and policy discussions regarding the 'built environment' in the last decades. It emphasizes that sustainable development cannot be achieved without transforming the way we build and manage our public spaces, and talks about maintaining cities in a way that would promote jobs and prosperity, basic services, adequate housing, better infrastructure and less pollution. (IPI: 2015). Considered in conjunction with Goal 16—increasing the resilience of individuals, communities and countries—the overall affect is to start treating cities as transformative bastions of stability, from which peace and prosperity ripple across conflict-affected countries (IPI: 2015).

III. PEACEBUILDING AND PUBLIC SPACE: PERSPECTIVES FROM KABUL

This part suggests that, from the perspective of urban issues in conflict cities, cultivating urban public spaces should be taken into account as an essential part of peacebuilding efforts. Lack of concern for public spaces in such urban centers can cause a rapid failure of the physical and consequently social urban structures, threatening the core objectives of peacebuilding efforts. The primary issues, evidently influential in the sustenance of urban public spaces in post conflict cities will be explained in this section.

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16 See http://www.oecd.org/dac/governance-peace/publications/documentuploads/SOF2015.pdf.

17 The "New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States" is a key agreement between fragile and conflict-affected states, international development partners and civil society to improve current development policy and practice in fragile states. It was signed by more than 40 countries and organizations at the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011 in Busan, Republic of Korea. For further information, see http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/en/.

18 For more information, see http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/, and http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/post-2015-development-agenda/goal-11.html

In Kabul, the connection between peacebuilding and public space can be considered from three angles:

i) The broken network of access and linkages, the loss of streets and sidewalks,
ii) The division of space, leading to the segregation of communities and people,
iii) The loss of mixed-use and shared public space, and separation of functions,

i) Access and linkages: Streets as public space:

From an urbanist perspective, the absence of a healthy street network manifests itself in two ways: a lack of accessibility and a lack of urban public space. Hillier et. al. (1993) explain how the configuration of the urban grid determines movement in cities, privileging some space over others. Hillier and Vaughan (2007) further stress how the physical configuration of the street network, by providing or blocking access to spaces within the city, has the power to integrate or segregate, as much as or even to a greater extent than the social and economic factors do. A study by Vaughan et. al. (2005) focusing on the immigrant neighborhoods in East London shows how the level of low street connectivity, and consequently segregation was directly correlated with the level of poverty and lack of development in these areas. These studies underscore how the lack of a healthy urban street network hampers accessibility and public space in Kabul, contributing to segregation, exclusion and underdevelopment.[19]

Kabul's urban problems did not start in 2001. In 1978, the (Third) Master Plan of Kabul attempted to address the needs of the city's growing population, introducing a top-down model for modernist urbanization (Matti: 2015, Calogero: 2011). However, as the Afghan authorities were not able to reinforce the plan due to the rapidly growing population, informal and unplanned settlements flourished, mostly outside of planned areas (Matti: 2015). The settlement of the returning populations of Kabul hours away from the center, contributed to the 'segregation and exclusion by distance'. The rise of rents in central Kabul arising from the presence of Western military and aid personnel, as well as the local elite's demands of accommodation, today leads to the same outcome of segregation and exclusion, pushing populations to more further but yet affordable areas.

The most apparent disruption to daily life in the center of Kabul is its blocked-off streets and walled-off areas, which were built to protect the government buildings, embassies, foreign aid offices and residences, and house the country's wealthy elite. Ironically, the majority of these are the physical footprints of peace interventions. Noori (2009), when analyzing existing and suggested transportation infrastructures in Kabul, points out that traffic congestion and inaccessibility resulted from the imposition of one-way and blockaded roads by embassies for security reasons.

Another problem is the loss of streets. Street networks are valuable not only for vehicular transportation, pedestrian walkability, and access, they function as significant public spaces (Jacobs: 1992). In 2011, UN Habitat and Project for Public Spaces released a ten-

19 Also see UN's publication: Streets As Public Spaces and Drivers of Urban Prosperity (Mboup and Warah: 2013).

step guide for "placemaking" in cities, which emphasized the significance of streets, squares, parks, and other public spaces in building "inclusive, healthy, functional and productive" cities[20]. Indeed, the first step in their guide calls for the creation of a network of pedestrian-friendly streets that function well as public spaces.

The opposite has happened in Kabul. In addition to blocking off streets and lots, the foreign presence has invaded major parts of the sidewalks. Calogero (2009): "Numerous sites where foreigners and Afghan leaders live and work are protected by Hesco barriers and razor-wire. Usually these barriers and guardposts are built in the sidewalk space, forcing pedestrians, wheelchairists, and pushcart-vendors out into vehicular traffic lanes. Drivers, who are already an upper class by definition of their ability to afford a car, resent the obstruction of their vehicular routes by pedestrians and pushcart-vendors. At their request, the Kabul Police regularly harass the vendors in particular. I witnessed vendors being whipped with electrical cables in 2007 to drive them off the edges of congested streets—a policy which Westerners normally attribute only to the Taliban. In this very specific appropriation of urban space, outsiders defer risk to themselves onto Kabulis who are struggling to move and trade in public space."

Accessibility and public space in urban centers has been the focus of urbanism in the Global North for many decades. The 2030 Agenda's call for the "right to city" for every citizen in the world, including those in conflict-affected countries, require that these ideals are extended to cities in conflict as well. Calogero (2011) points out the discrepancy between "modern" urban practices in Kabul and what donor countries to Afghanistan are doing in their own home cities (2011: Calogero). Local authorities in Kabul are encouraged to carry out selective road expansions to make them better suited to vehicular traffic, whereas many western cities are abandoning vehicular-traffic-centered planning in order to enhance pedestrian access and other means of healthy transportation (Calogero: 2011). It is ironic that the incentives for fortifications in Kabul are safety and security, when urbanists consider the contribution of sidewalks to urban participation to be fundamental—and to have a direct relationship with safety. The next sub-section attempts to explain, from an urban designer's point of view, how these walls might harm safety and security.

ii) Division of spaces and communities:

The obvious consequence of walls and Hesco barriers is that they divide up spaces and segregate people. Jane Jacobs (1961), an influential urban activist whose ideas laid the groundwork for community-centered urban design principles, defines a healthy city as a place where strangers live and feel safe, side-by-side, on each other's doorsteps. For Jacobs (1992), safety on the streets is primarily provided by the people who occupy sidewalks and buildings, as they voluntarily oversee the safety and security of a street's inhabitants. Several studies following Jacobs's (1961) "Eyes on the Street" theory confirmed the contribution of a street's occupants and its visibility from neighboring buildings to its safety and security (Van Nes &Lopez: 2007). Barriers not only prevent

20 The full document can be downloaded here: http://www.pps.org/reference/placemaking-and-the-future-of-cities/

inhabitants from living side by side, peacefully, in cities, they also outright harm safety. The ethnic and religious diversity in Kabul adds further urgency to this issue, as the lack of common public space and barriers can foster divisions rather than cohesion.

The Minimum Operational Safety Standards (MOSS) that the UN requires for their guesthouses offers a strong example of how Kabul's division-of-space problem formed (Colagero: 2011):

- Blast-film coating on all windows,
- Armed guards posted outside houses, often in boxes occupying sidewalks,
- Backup generators,
- Bunkers built to withstand attacks by small rockets,
- Two-way radios, powered by a backup battery located in the bunkers.

It's well known that international actors deal with serious security threats in places like Kabul. But the long-term effectiveness of these types of security measures is questionable: they can equally draw attention to western-occupied buildings, rendering them targets (Colagero: 2011). These structures can also potentially disconnect the locals from peacebuilding and development efforts, and cause resentment towards the international community (Colagero: 2011). Indeed, separating the residence and workplaces of international workers from the local residents of Kabul divides spaces and communities into "international" and "local," even when they are living on the same street. The rich and the poor are also segregated. For instance, the "Golden City," a residential tower complex in Kabul, separates Afghan elites who are able to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for housing from average Afghans.

iii) Separation of functions and mixed-use public space:

Jacobs (1992) points out to the advantages of mixed-use spaces and functions in a city, by comparing purely residential areas to those where the ground floors of residential buildings are used as shops. While single-use urban spaces are only active at certain hours of the day (in residential areas: mornings, after-work hours, and early evenings), a street with shops will be active throughout the day, including the late evening hours. Both the United Nations and the Projects for Public Spaces seem to agree: "If public squares and parks are planned around major public destinations, they build local economies, civic pride, social connection and human happiness. These spaces serve as 'safety valves' for a city. People can find breathing room and relaxation in a well-planned park space, and fear and danger in a badly planned one. The most successful public spaces are 'multi-use destinations' with many attractions and activities, where citizens can find common ground and where ethnicity and economic tensions can go unnoticed."[21]

Calogero (2011) criticizes top-down regulations aimed at creating a suburbanized land-use policy, separating various functions in the city—this, despite the poor track record of these types of regulations in the United States, for instance Detroit's abandoned urban

21 The full document can be downloaded here: http://www.pps.org/reference/placemaking-and-the-future-of-cities/

center and widespread security problems in downtown Los Angeles. It is curious, to say the least, that Kabul is being reconstructed along these lines. Locals of Kabul would agree; an Afghan state official interviewed for this article commented that it feels much safer being in areas where there is economic and cultural activity, as opposed to segregated spaces.

Adina's (2012) "Staking Space" focuses on three popular public spaces that Afghans frequent and enjoy: Mandawi, a popular marketplace area popular where Kabulis gather to shop and socialize; Mikroroyan 3, a Soviet-built residential block that has a marketplace and a nearby maidan where Afghans often socialize; and Shahri Naw, a relatively wealthy area that represents western modernity for the local Afghans, and where they mix with expats and foreign visitors. Adina's interviews with locals show how important these spaces are in the social lives of Afghans, because they're among the few public spaces in Kabul where the city's diverse population mixes and socializes. However, all three are under threat of partial or complete destruction mainly due to vehicle road improvement and formalization efforts still based on the Third Master Plan.

If the peacebuilding and development efforts in Kabul took into consideration an urbanism perspective, the city could perhaps play a transformative role in the Afghan conflict, by helping to build inclusive, cohesive, equitable urban spaces—and consequently, to help forge communities (IPI: 2015). The question of how architecture and urban design can help this project along will be the focus of the next section.

IV. CONFLICT-SENSITIVE URBAN PLANNING: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

At least since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and HABITAT II in 1996,[22] the world has been discussing the importance of urban planning in social processes. Following from this concern, organizations such as the Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN) in Afghanistan have been trying to foster solutions for the benefit of local communities. Yet, introducing urban concerns to conflict-afflicted areas is not an easy task. Below are some of the opportunities and challenges involved.

i) The possibility of conflict-sensitive urban planning:

Despite the increasing number of studies exploring their connection between peacebuilding and urban planning, the spatial dimensions of conflict and need for conflict sensitivity are often overlooked by those working on the subject (Bittner, Hackenbroich and Vockler: 2009, Piquard and Swenarton: 2011, Montgomery: 2009). Divorced from the conflict realm, urban planning is not treated as a priority area pertaining to conflict. As such, inclusive architecture or better urban design tends not to be given strong consideration in conflict-affected cities. There have been studies on improving the physical footprints of peacekeeping operations by introducing architectural design in their

[22] For further information on both events, see their websites respectively at http://www.un.org/geninfo/bp/enviro.html and http://www.un.org/en/development/devagenda/habitat.shtml.

planning processes[23], however, these studies apply solely to military compounds in conflict cities, and do not explore how architecture can help peacebuilding efforts generate and shape permanent conditions on the ground, including after the departure of peacekeeping missions.

Architects and urban planners, too, rarely see their activities as relevant to the conflict realm. Even discussions of sustainable cities arising from the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals are confined to the development realm. They do not tend to explore how inclusive architecture and planning in cities and urban environments can help foster peacebuilding goals like ownership, integration, belonging, and cohesion. Nor do they consider the manner in which conflicts play out inside urban spaces, or how architectural practices and urban planning can help to provide refuge from violence (Piquard and Swenarton: 2011). As a result, people and communities living in conflict-affected cities have been left behind in the larger cities agenda.

On the other hand, introducing conflict-sensitive urban planning as part of peacebuilding efforts could lead to important gains, especially in the early days after a conflict has ended. Post-war cities often don't have viable city administrations in place, and the demand for housing and infrastructure is high (Bittner, Hackenbroich and Vockler: 2009). So, during these early days, absent centralized and viable state institutions, the international community has the ability to significantly affect urban policy (Ghani and Lockhart: 2008). Cities often have no building regulations in place, and limited ability to enforce ones that do exist, while ownership of buildings and vacant lots is often disputed (Bittner, Hackenbroich and Vockler: 2009). This state of affairs enables the UN and other international actors an entry point to internal urban-planning processes (Billerbeck: 2015). Given that aid flows are typically at their highest and massive reconstruction projects are getting under way, these actors have the ability to promote high standards of urban development. Donors may not control the conflict or hold golden keys to engineer change, but they can still support and fund inclusive urban development initiatives (Goodhand and Sedra: 2010, Bittner, Hackenbroich and Vockler: 2009). Given the need for a less thoroughgoing approach, the international community could also play a positive role by engaging and actively using available local specialists, for example.

In order to have this kind of effect, donors, the UN, and other international actors would need to adapt their capacities to particular urban contexts and incorporate current urbanist thinking into their approaches—and specifically tactical urbanism, which recognizes that centralized urban-planning institutions do not have the capacity to carry out their historical mandates, the all-comprehensive planning of a city. As Burdett and Cruz (2014) write, "Driven by ideology or economic incapacity the ability of the national state to intervene in the contemporary city seems to recede everywhere."

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23 See the work of the Foundation for Achieving Seamless Territory (FAST) on compounds at http://seamlessterritory.org/drones-honeycombs/, and particularly the essay of Malkit Shoshan entitled 'The Legacy of Peacekeeping Missions: Pre-cycling the Compound" at http://drones-honeycombs.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/sites/default/files/essay_volume_v40_shoshan.pdf

Of course, the international community should also still try to strengthen local urban planning institutions, which are ultimately responsible for promoting housing construction and affordability, as well as facilitating economic development and coordinating investments in infrastructure and services. Tactical urbanism can only be a vital complement to efforts at building institutional capacity. Matti (2015) partially attributes the destruction of the physical and urban fabric of Kabul to the exodus of Afghan urban planners – this capacity should be reinstated. Moreover, the implementation of targeted, community based high impact projects should be seen as a method for achieving long-term city planning practices. These projects should also consider the physical footprints of the UN and other international actors.

ii) The Inclusive City and Development:

All of these efforts could perhaps be best viewed in light of the concept of the "inclusive city." An inclusive city is one where processes of development include a wide variety of citizens and activities, focusing on concepts such as social justice and the inclusion of marginalized people by providing access to means of social and economic betterment, while avoiding designs that foster exclusivity and dislocation[24]. Inclusive cities take into account the interrelationships between the spatial and the economic, social, cultural, and historical aspects of poverty and social exclusion. They fold in such issues as urban planning, international development, architectural design, geography, economic design, and social design, while also concentrating on addressing the needs and desire, among city-dwellers, for healthy and accessible neighborhoods and housing; safe public realms; community facilities and gathering places; and walkability (Goldman and Iacafano)

The rethinking of urban growth cannot begin without directly confronting socioeconomic inequality. This in turn entails having contemporary architectural and artistic practitioners take on a more activist role, to ensure that people who have been marginalized from urban political processes, are able to participate. This renewed sense of engagement requires an attendant sense of urgency that pushes us to rethink our existing procedures. From this emerges the idea that architects, besides being researchers and designers of form, can be designers of political processes, as well as facilitators of critical collaborations across institutions and jurisdictions to assure accessibility and socioeconomic justice (Cruz and Burdett: 2014)

From this perspective, long-lasting solutions, including urban solutions, should be compatible with the specific social, cultural and economic circumstances of a city (Bittner, Hackenbroich and Vockler: 2009). This requires prioritizing local solutions and empowerment strategies so all segments of society can influence, participate in, and benefit from urban planning. It is equally crucial to engage local planners, build national and local planning capacities, and ensure broad-based participation in decision-making and execution. Any kind of construction should have awareness for the local situation, as urban design can raise tensions in cities where ethnic or religious conflicts are endemic

24 See The Inclusive City Conference Publication: http://fletcher.tufts.edu/~/media/Fletcher/Microsites/IBGC/InclusiveCity/TriumphReflectionInnovation_FINAL.pdf

(Goodyear: 2012). The urban landscape can escalate social polarization; but design that is sensitive to local concerns and conditions can also have a healing effect and bring divided communities together peacefully.

It is also important to provide and maintain access in post-conflict cities through a well functioning network of roads that can accommodate vehicle traffic and, more importantly, facilitate pedestrian and other accessible forms of transportation. Nouri (2010) presents a set of guidelines and recommendations for the specific case of Kabul; she/he encourages prioritizing investment in pedestrian and public transport, an approach that could be useful in other contexts, as well.

Restoring, sustaining, and creating a network of public spaces in a given city, especially one where diverse communities will be required to live side by side, will help lead to better communication, if not to the outright integration of these populations. It is essential to have parks, marketplaces, streets, gardens, and squares that accommodate people in the city and allow them to mix together; this helps to sustain and restore collective urban memory, especially in post-conflict countries that are in the process of healing.

The inclusive city, as defined above, is in line with the vision of SDG 11, which points out the importance of urban planning and inclusive architecture. What is required henceforth is mostly a change in mindset—to the understanding that sustainable cities and public spaces are not a luxury, but a necessity, and that urban solutions can provide momentum for a country's transformation to inclusivity, resilience, and cohesion. It will also be important to apply the best contemporary urbanist thinking to peacebuilding efforts. The need for creative, innovative solutions, and better responses, is abundantly clear (IPI: 2015, AGE: 2015).

iii) The transformative effect of cities: Fostering ownership and belonging:

An additional challenge for urbanist thinkers in post-conflict settings relates to how peacebuilding efforts define and understand ownership. "Local ownership" and "participation" have become buzzwords during international interventions, partly to avoid accusations of intrusion and to enhance the international community's legitimacy (Richmond: 2012). However, ownership tends to be framed merely as building trust in government—strengthening capacities of government institutions and improving the quality of public service—not as a feeling of belonging and trust to a community, state, and country (Billerbeck: 2015, OECD: 2015). As such, the material, social, economic, political, ideological, cultural, and customary aspects of ownership tend to be neglected (Richmond: 2012). Exploring broader conceptualizations of ownership, such as being part of a social fabric, belonging to a society or identifying with certain groups could help rethink the importance of urban planning and inclusive architecture (Garbutt: 2009, Christiansen and Hedetoft: 2004).

People identify with their surroundings. For citizens, the loss or transformation of land, houses, or buildings can mean the loss of social links; radical changes of space and environment can lead to radical disruptions of community (Piquard and Swenarton: 2011,

Montgomery: 2009, Bittner, Hackenbroich and Vockler: 2009). By contrast, familiar landscapes, monuments, buildings, and public spaces fortify people's sense of belonging to a place, a city, a nation, or a country. It is not surprising that wars often include scenes of deliberate destruction of countries' cultural and urban heritage; such attacks violate citizens' sense of national identity and disrupt their sense of belonging. Roger and Lavrakas (1981) explore the importance of the quality and nature of the relationship between inhabitants and their territory, and in this regard, emphasize the importance of spatial solutions that would foster ownership and belonging.

Peacebuilding and post-conflict development efforts should aim at fostering the collective memories that people have attached to their built environment. Architecture and public space can define identities and build or break cohesion, especially in conflicts where groups attempt to re-own places and re-ground their identities spatially. Building original structures in accordance with the collective memory of residents, with their active participation, could be one way forward[25]. Speaking around the same lines. Matti (2015) argues, "As Kabul (…) expands rapidly, the decline of historic centers due to development, neglect and other threats require urgent and ongoing policy attention".

Architecture in conflict contexts should look beyond delivering the merely physical, to try and break down barriers and build cohesion between people, accommodate and manage diversity, foster feelings of belonging and strengthening state-society relations (Birch: 2014). These aims are in keeping with inclusive concepts that have been introduced in the discourse of urban design and development in some cities outside conflict areas. Properly applied, they lead people with disabilities, minorities, refugees, indigenous people to help rethink conventional architecture, and insure that everyone participates in community life (Man Oram: 2014). The international community can strive to facilitate such processes by mobilizing representation, participation, and civic engagement in neighborhoods. In Cruz and Burdett's words: "To sponsor mediating agencies that can curate the interface between top-down, government-led infrastructural support and the creative bottom-up intelligence and sweat equity of communities and activists." The international community should also seek ways to ensure that its own physical footprints do not promote exclusion and division, and seek creative solutions to promote inclusion while not compromising security and safety.

V. CONCLUSION - THE WAY FORWARD:

Today, while the intensity, duration and number of global conflicts and humanitarian crises on the agenda of the UN Security Council are on the rise, restrictions imposed by the global financial climate and the 'intervention fatigue' felt across many donor countries necessitate looking for innovative and creative solutions in the quest for

[25] A positive example of a reconstruction project that prioritized the restoration of the collective memory of inhabitants is the rebuilding of Nahr el-Bared Refugee Settlement in its original location in Tripoli, Lebanon**.** Through a six month long process, the accessibility to the premises, local infrastructure, and the quality of public spaces were improved as a next step. The reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge in Bosnia and Herzegovina is another positive example of cases where the plans of the original structural units were redrawn in accordance with collective memories.

sustainable peace and stability (AGE: 2015). Looking at conflicts from a spatial perspective through inclusive architecture and urban planning provides an interesting opportunity for finding answers outside of the peacebuilding toolbox. Spatial perspectives can shape the urban fabric, buildings and spaces, but also open up new developmental opportunities, support and develop livelihoods and foster collective identities, the sense of belonging and cohesion in communities.

Of course, bringing urbanist perspectives into the conflict arena is a challenging task. The first challenge is financial: improving urban structures and public space in the aftermath of conflict requires sizable investment in housing, services, infrastructure, as well as strengthening government capacity to respond to urban-planning needs. The second challenge is the difficulty of prioritizing longer-term durable response efforts that do not yield immediate and visible results. The third challenge is security: whether it is feasible to seek open, inclusive, cohesive cities in countries that experience grave security threats, such as Afghanistan. In conflicts, how can urban solutions be prioritized? How can sustainable cities and communities be seen as a need and a right for citizens of conflict-affected countries? Can we address pressing security and logistical needs in the construction of compounds without sending messages of exclusion, discrimination and division? Can innovative design and architectural solutions relieve some of the need for traditional security measures?

The answer is fairly straightforward. UN Reports indicate that 50% of countries that emerge from violent conflict slip back into instability or violence within five years.[26] If we want to bring forth sustainable solutions and ensure that conflicts do not relapse, we need to adopt a comprehensive approach to conflict response. In conflict-affected countries, civil institutions stop functioning, critical health and education systems break down, infrastructure is destroyed, agricultural activity is interrupted, food supplies become scarce, poverty increases, populations are uprooted, epidemics run unchecked, discrimination against vulnerable populations increases, and violence and criminality become commonplace.[27] Architecture and urban planning have been preoccupied with these issues for decades. Moreover, new trends in building and sustaining peace, and current architectural-design approaches share similar end goals: fostering security, local ownership, integration, participation, and cohesion in the places we live. Their points of intersection may help to provide answers for people living amid conflict, ensuring that they are not left behind.

In *Happy City*, Charles Montgomery wonders whether urban design is powerful enough to make or break happiness, looking at examples of big metropolises around the world. It is hard to seek answers to these questions and prioritize urban solutions when there are so many violent conflicts, people are dying every day, refugees are crossing borders, and extremism is increasing. It is hard to advocate exchanging cars for bicycles in cities where it is impossible to replace armored cars with regular ones.

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[26] See UN's study on "Sports and Peace: Social Inclusion, Conflict Prevention and Peace-building, at http://www.un.org/wcm/webdav/site/sport/shared/sport/SDP%20IWG/Chapter6_SportandPeace.pdf

[27] Ibid.

"You can't design your way out of conflict," Goodyear (2012) says. "But the way we build neighborhoods can either help or hinder polarized communities." If we are ambitious enough to talk about long-term solutions that foster belonging, ownership, cohesion, and integration, urbanism is one place to start.

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