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METROPOLIZATION IN CRISIS: THE IMPACT OF WAR ON URBAN SPACE IN SYRIA

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Sessão Temática 4: A metropolização do espaço: planejamento, governança e gestão

Abstract: *This study explores the dynamic process of metropolization and its disruption by war, with a focus on Syria as a case study within the Global South, and highlighting the profound shifts in the socio-economic landscape since 2011. The war has led to significant physical destruction and the emergence of new urban forms, including informal settlements and refugee camps. By focusing on two cities Aleppo and Latakia, this study contrasts the effects of varying levels of destruction on urban fabric, governance, and cultural identities. It investigates the interplay between infrastructural damage and the resilience of urban communities, proposing that war not only disrupts but also reshapes urban spaces and governance strategies. The findings underscore the need for adaptive urban planning that addresses the challenges posed by war.*

Keywords: *Metropolization, War, Syria, Informal settlements, Governance.*

METROPOLIZAÇÃO EM CRISE:

O IMPACTO DA GUERRA NO ESPAÇO URBANO NA SÍRIA

Resumo: *Este estudo explora o processo dinâmico de metropolização e sua disruptura pela guerra, com foco na Síria como um estudo de caso dentro do Sul Global, destacando as profundas mudanças no cenário socioeconômico desde 2011. A guerra levou a uma destruição física significativa e ao surgimento de novas formas urbanas, incluindo assentamentos informais e campos de refugiados. Ao focar em duas cidades, Aleppo e Latakia, este estudo contrasta os efeitos de vários níveis de destruição no tecido urbano, governança e identidades culturais. Ele investiga a interação entre danos infraestruturais e a resiliência das comunidades urbanas, propondo que a guerra não apenas interrompe, mas também remodela os espaços urbanos e as estratégias de governança. As descobertas ressaltam a necessidade de um planejamento urbano adaptativo que aborde os desafios impostos pela guerra.*

Palavras-chave: *Metropolitanização, Guerra, Síria, Assentamentos informais, Governança.*

METROPOLIZACIÓN EM CRISE:

EL IMPACTO DE LA GUERRA EN EL ESPACIO URBANO EN SIRIA

Resumen: *Este estudio explora el proceso dinámico de metropolización y su disrupción por la guerra, con un enfoque en Siria como estudio de caso dentro del Sur Global, y destacando los profundos cambios en el panorama socioeconómico desde 2011. La guerra ha llevado a una destrucción física significativa y al surgimiento de nuevas formas urbanas, incluidos asentamientos informales y campos de refugiados. Al centrarse en dos ciudades, Alepo y Latakia, este estudio contrasta los efectos de los distintos niveles de destrucción en el tejido urbano, la gobernanza y las identidades culturales. Investiga la interacción entre el daño infraestructural y la resiliencia de las comunidades urbanas, proponiendo que la guerra no solo altera sino que también reconfigura los espacios urbanos y las estrategias de gobernanza. Los hallazgos subrayan la necesidad de una planificación urbana adaptativa que aborde los desafíos planteados por la guerra.*

Palabras clave: *Metropolitanización, Guerra, Urbanización, Asentamientos informales, Gobernanza.*

INTRODUCTION

Metropolization is a dynamic and multifaceted process that reshapes urban spaces through various socio-economic transformations, reflecting the growth and expansion of metropolitan regions. Driven by factors such as economic restructuring, globalization, changes in governance, and demographic shifts, metropolization has accelerated urbanization trends significantly in the past few decades, leading to the emergence of megacities across the globe. As cities become the focal points of economic, social, and cultural activities, they also face challenges related to infrastructure, inequality, and sustainability. Understanding metropolization necessitates examining how urban areas expand and transform in response to intertwined political, economic, and environmental factors.

Syria presents a profound case study of the impact of war on urbanization. The ongoing war since 2011 has deeply marked the Syrian urban landscape, resulting in extensive physical destruction while also transforming cultural identities and social structures because of massive waves of migration and displacement. This war has disrupted the metropolization process, leading to the emergence of new urban forms such as informal settlements and refugee camps and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities within the urban fabric. This research paper explores how the war in Syria has altered urban and regional spaces both culturally and morphologically, situating these findings within the broader context of metropolization in the Global South.

The central research question guiding this study is: How does war influence the metropolization process in urban areas, particularly in terms of infrastructure development, social fabric, and cultural identity? To address this, we will explore hypotheses related to the impacts of infrastructural destruction, formation of informal settlements, and shifts in governance structures. Projecting this on two cities that have been interconnected since ancient times in Syria, but was affected in different forms and levels by the war, namely: Aleppo, which is one of the most important metropolitan cities in Syria, and was subjected to a great deal of destruction. The other city is Latakia, which is also considered one of the metropolitan cities in Syria, but it is smaller than Aleppo and much less damaged.

This work is structured into several parts: first, an examination of the theoretical framework surrounding metropolization; secondly, metropolization in Syria pre-war; thirdly, an analysis of the impacts of war on urban morphology in Syria and a discussion on the implications for urban governance; and finally, several future challenges are raised regarding the need to reach different strategies that would enhance resilient and inclusive urban environments in post-war contexts.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1-1. METROPOLIZATION OF SPACE

Metropolization is primarily driven by factors such as population growth and migration, economic development that attracts investment and creates jobs, and globalization that enhances connectivity and competition among cities. particularly in countries experiencing rapid urbanization (DUMONT, 2015).

Metropolization tends to reshape spatial organization, redefining the boundaries that separate urban from rural areas. For example, when cities become engines of economic activity, attracting labor and resources from surrounding areas, this creates a dynamic interaction between urban centers and peripheral areas, and rural areas thus adapt to the increasing influence of nearby megacities, which can lead to changes in social, economic, and cultural landscapes (SOJA, 2011).

One of the most important features of metropolization is the creation of polycentric urban areas that are functionally interconnected, which play a pivotal role in shaping national and regional economies. This model is the opposite of the spatial structure of the traditional monocentric city model, which is characterized by a single dominant urban center (BRENNER, SCHMID, 2014). Polycentricity can be observed in regions like the Randstad in the Netherlands or the Pearl River Delta in China, where various cities collaborate and compete within a shared economic and infrastructural framework (MEIJERS,2005; WEBSTER, 2006). Moreover, the decentralization of urban functions also redefines transportation, housing, and public services, leading to new patterns of mobility and commuting (BRENNER, SCHMID, 2015).

However, metropolization poses significant challenges. The rapid growth of urban areas often leads to problems such as social inequality, environmental degradation, and lack of infrastructure in the newly annexed surrounding areas. For instance, the outskirts of rapidly expanding cities may witness the emergence of informal settlements, where access to basic services such as water, electricity, and sanitation is limited. In addition, as metropolitan areas expand, they often engulf rural communities, threatening local cultures and identities (Suga, 2011). These challenges make urban expansion a pressing issue for city planners and decision-makers, as they seek to balance growth, sustainability, and inclusiveness.

1-2. GLOBAL SOUTH PERSPECTIVE

The Global South perspective on metropolization of space offers a nuanced view of urban growth, one marked by rapid expansion, informal settlements, and uneven development. Cities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are experiencing unprecedented urbanization, often without the adequate infrastructure, governance, or planning found in the Global North. According to the United Nations (2019), over 90% of future urban growth will occur in the Global South, where informal economies and settlements play a crucial role in shaping

metropolitan landscapes. This trend highlights the distinct challenges in these regions, where housing shortages, traffic congestion, and inadequate access to public services exacerbate the vulnerabilities of urban populations and social inequality becomes more pronounced (Roy, 2009).

Metropolization in the Global South is deeply influenced by historical factors like colonial past exploitation, unequal land distribution, and global economic integration. These elements contribute to fragmented urban landscapes where infrastructure is often concentrated in wealthy neighborhoods, leaving marginalized communities in peripheral areas with poor access to services (Parnell and Pieterse, 2014). This contributes to what scholars have called "splintered urbanism," where infrastructure and services are unevenly distributed across the urban landscape (Graham & Marvin, 2001). For example, in cities like Johannesburg and Rio de Janeiro, the historical segregation and spatial inequalities continue to affect how metropolitan regions develop, with gated communities and luxury developments emerging alongside vast informal settlements (Parnell and Pieterse, 2014). These conditions necessitate urban policies that focus on inclusivity and the redistribution of resources to ensure more balanced urban growth.

Furthermore, the cultural dimension of metropolization in the Global South reflects a dynamic interaction between global forces and local traditions. As cities grow, they are often shaped by global capital and architectural trends, but they also retain unique cultural identities that challenge homogenization. Urban spaces in cities such as São Paulo or Lagos illustrate this duality, where global corporations set up modern skyscrapers while local, informal economies thrive in surrounding areas. Recent scholarship by Watson (2018) emphasizes the importance of "urban diversity" in the Global South, where bottom-up urbanism shapes much of the city's development. This approach recognizes that solutions for metropolization must be context-specific, leveraging local knowledge and practices to create sustainable and inclusive urban spaces.

1-3. IMPACT OF WAR ON URBAN MORPHOLOGY AND CULTURE

War has a profound impact on the process of stimulating urban transformation, as it reshapes the urban landscape and disrupts processes that are usually crucial in determining traditional urban growth. It affects in different ways, the first of which is a direct physical impact. It leads to widespread destruction of infrastructure and changes in land and building uses. In addition, it creates a shift in the morphology of urban areas by changing the spatial organization of the city and the emergence of informal settlements, as a result of the settlement of massive displaced persons in them without planning, in addition to the emergence of mass refugee camps (ABBAS, 2023).

On the other hand, an economic demographic change occurs, and the social fabric of urban areas changes as a result of migration and internal displacement. The social networks that were established before the war, which were based on economic activity, cultural exchange, and shared spaces, are disintegrating. The influx of refugees and internally displaced persons

to safer urban centers also leads to increased pressure on public resources. These shifts can lead to increased fragmentation within urban areas, as people tend to congregate in more accessible areas. This exacerbates social disparities and increases inequality within urban spaces in terms of basic living conditions and deepens social gaps (MARUNIAK; LISOVSKYI; RUDENKO, 2023).

Cultural significance is another aspect that has been severely affected by war in urban spaces. War destroys cultural heritage and public spaces, fundamentally changing the identity of cities. According to the 2021 UNESCO report, which was co-authored with several international bodies to assess the status of World Heritage sites in emergencies from disasters and conflicts. Conflicts have destroyed the cultural treasures of countries such as Iraq, Nepal, Syria and Yemen, thus fundamentally changing the cultural identity of cities, stripping them of their collective memory, as happened with the destruction of old historic neighborhoods and traditional markets in the city of Aleppo in Syria (UNESCO, 2021). Urban Centres, often seen as the heart of national or regional identity, have become battlegrounds for control of cultural narratives, with belligerents targeting symbolic sites to demoralize or displace communities.

Metropolization is conceived as a multidimensional process that includes demographic, economic, socio-cultural, and spatial aspects. It promotes economic growth by connecting regions, cities and towns.

The perspective of the Global South on metropolization highlights the rapid urban growth, characterized by informal settlements, often driven by inadequate infrastructure and historical influences and growing social inequalities, Changes in land tenure and property rights. It underscores the need for inclusive urban policies that leverage local knowledge while prioritizing social justice and environmental sustainability.

In developing countries experiencing wars, the dimensions of this process are affected in many ways. Table 1 shows the effects of wars on the metropolization process.

Table 1: shows the effects of wars on the metropolization process.

Metropolization		
Spatial Structure	Social Fabric & Economic	Cultural Significance
Infrastructure Destruction	Changes in the economy (loss of assets, loss of production in different sectors)	Destruction Of Cultural Heritage
Informal Settlements	Social transformations due to internal displacement and migration, and rapid decline in quality of life	Identity Destruction
land use change		

Source: the authors.

METROPOLIZATION IN SYRIA PRE-WAR

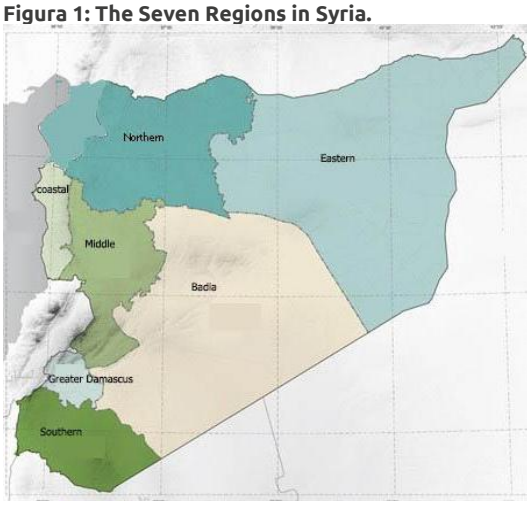
2-1. SYRIA OVERVIEW

Geographically, Syria has a significant geographical site on the eastern gate of the Mediterranean Sea which gives it a strategic and global location Since ancient times. The civilization of Syria goes back tens of thousands of years, to prehistoric times. Its area is 185,180 km² and its Mediterranean coast is 183 km long. The population of Syria is 21,660,309 million people (according to statistics from the year 2006). Damascus is the oldest inhabited capital in history, which is the capital of Syria. Its location links the three continents of Asia, Europe and Africa and as such it is located at the intersection of lines of exchange and trade between these continents.

Syria went through many historical colonial stages. The Ottoman occupation lasted for 400 years, starting from 1516 until 1918. Then came the French occupation from 1920 to 1946. On April 17, 1946, Syria gained independence from the French mandate.

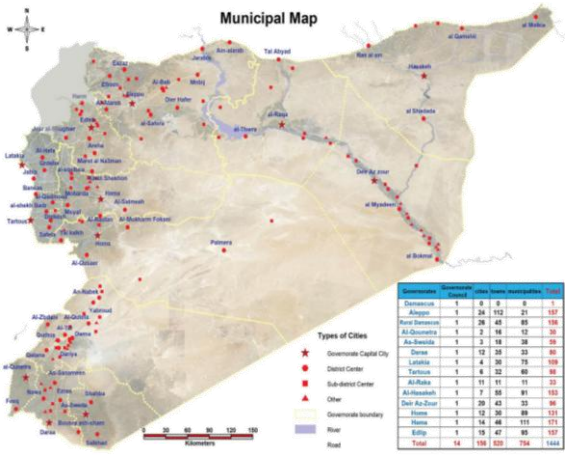
At the planning level, Syria was divided into seven urban areas: Greater Damascus, Southern, Badia, Central, Coastal, Northern, and Eastern, figure 1. These regions comprise 14 governorates; 60 sub-districts (districts); 14 wards (districts); and 6,432 towns/villages as figure 2 shows (UN-Habitat, 2012, P 70). A five-year development plan was adopted in 1965, which caused various problems, such as imbalance in development, imbalance in demographic distribution, decreasing agricultural land, and increasing urban sprawl, leading to megacities.

Figura 1: The Seven Regions in Syria.



Source: Regional Planning Authority , 2018.

Figure 2: Governorate divisions and city distribution.



Source: Decentralization and local governance, 2022, p22.

2-2. URBANISATION, METROPOLITAN REGIONS AND CORRIDORS

Urban settlements have historically grown and flourished along riverbanks, coastlines and road infrastructure. Modern transnational transport networks have covered highways that

connect major cities across more arid lands. Most of Syria's cities are located in rain-fed agricultural regions, including the basin of the Euphrates River, or along interior trade routes. Before the outbreak of war in 2011, there has been some population spread to smaller cities as a result of migration caused by environmental degradation in some rural areas. Syria witnessed a unique form of urban expansion, characterized by rapid urban growth and demographic changes, leading to 55% of the population living in cities by 2011 (MAYYA, 2014, p22). This process was associated with increasing urban challenges from the growth of slums around cities that suffer from low levels of urban services, and developmental disparities between human settlements and their socio-economic systems. It is estimated that 40% of Syria's urban population now lives in informal areas (UN HABITAT, 2022).

The percentage of urban population increased from 43% in 1970 to 50% in 1995, to 53.5 in 2007 and to 55.7% in 2010. This percentage is expected to reach 70% in 2025, and 80% in 2050 (MAYYA, 2014, p22). There are three large cities, Damascus, Aleppo, and Lattakia.

Damascus and Aleppo account for nearly 37 per cent of the urban population and 20 percent of the total population (UN-Habitat, 2012).

- Damascus: As Syria's capital, Damascus played a central role in the country's urbanization process, marked by developments in infrastructure, cultural institutions, and housing. Its historical significance also shaped its urban identity.
- Aleppo: Once a prosperous economic center, Aleppo's urban landscape combined ancient heritage with modern development, characterized by vibrant markets and diverse communities.
- Lattakia, a major Syrian city located on the Mediterranean Sea, serves as a vital port, playing a crucial role in facilitating imports and exports for Aleppo (Syria's industrial hub) and the eastern region of the country.

Major cities such as Damascus, Aleppo and Homs were located within the most important vital corridors, figure 3. Syria's Damascus-Homs Corridor is another important emerging urban region and encompasses the country's key cities and industries (UN-Habitat, 2012). In addition to many corridors that connect Syrian cities to cities in surrounding countries such as Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, and the Arabian Gulf. The corridor includes Hissya, a new industrial city 47 kilometres south of Homs, which is considered another development for the Metropolization. It has four major economic sectors: textiles, food, chemicals, and engineering. The city accommodates 66,000 workers and their families.

Syria was moving towards regional integration like other Arab countries, signing trade agreements with each other, with African countries, and with the European Union. This

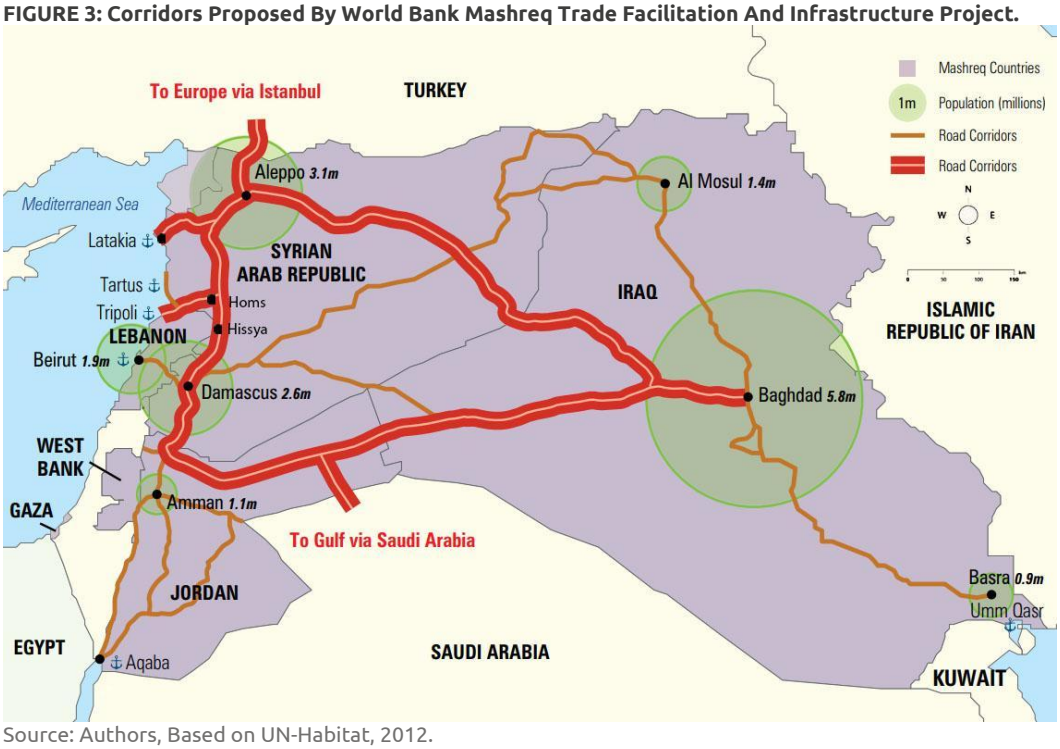
represented a first step towards the future Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (UN-Habitat, 2012).

Moreover, Prior to the war, Syria's road network had rapidly expanded to keep pace with the growing population. Generally, secondary roads were in good condition, and construction was underway to extend the major highway network to join Latakia and Aleppo. In terms of rail transport, Syria had one of the Middle East's most extensive railway systems prior to the war. The major rail routes connected Syria's main cities, and a freight only line for phosphates connected Homs to the port of Tartous. During the first decade of the 21st century, trains carried goods and passengers throughout the country, and transported over 3.5 million passengers and more than 8 million tons of goods in 2010 (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank,2022). The Electricity sector in Syria operated as a vertically integrated model under the Ministry of Electricity. 99 percent of the population had electricity and approximately 85 percent of consumers were residential and industrial (the other 15 percent were commercial and government consumers).

The agriculture sector (excluding agri-food processing) contributed 20 percent of Syria's GDP in 2010. The agricultural labor force accounted for 14.5 percent of total employment in 2010, given that 44 percent of Syria's population lived in rural areas.

Prior to the war, the country played an important role in global agricultural trade, connecting supply routes between Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Russia, and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank,2022) Until the war happened in 2011.

FIGURE 3: Corridors Proposed By World Bank Mashreq Trade Facilitation And Infrastructure Project.



Source: Authors, Based on UN-Habitat, 2012.

2-3. METROPOLIZATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

Before the crises, Syria had a centralized local administration system established post-independence 1946. Despite various legislative updates, the system remained largely centralized, with authorities primarily managed by centrally appointed Governors who had limited delegated responsibilities. Although a lower tier of administration existed, it lacked genuine decentralization. There was recognition of the need for reform as early as 2005, leading to the introduction of a Local Administration Law in 2011 aimed at modernization and decentralization. This was part of a broader trend in the region, indicating a growing acknowledgment of the need for more local governance to adequately address the needs of a rapidly expanding urban population (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Before the crisis, the planning frameworks in Syria had several weaknesses, including:

1. Sectoral Focus: Planning was primarily sectoral, with five-year plans that did not consider the unique needs or circumstances of different regions. This led to a one-size-fits-all approach that ignored local dynamics.
2. Limited Participation: The planning process lacked significant input from local communities and stakeholders, resulting in plans that did not reflect the needs and aspirations of the population.
3. Ineffective Implementation: There was a disconnection between planning and implementation. Regional plans were often not executed effectively, with local authorities lacking the necessary authority and resources.
4. Weak Institutional Framework: The absence of a general guiding framework for regional and local plans resulted in inconsistent application and execution, hindering coherent urban development.
5. Insufficient Data Utilization: Planning efforts did not adequately rely on empirical data, leading to poorly founded decisions that did not address pressing urban issues.
6. High Centralization: Planning processes were highly centralized, limiting local authorities' ability to adapt plans to their specific contexts, which restricted responsiveness and innovation (UN-Habitat, 2022).
7. Land Ownership: the old laws inherited from the Ottoman Empire and European colonial powers, which made land management difficult. For example, the influence of the Ottoman system on land management and ownership (e.g., the Tabu documents/Ottoman title deeds/ indicating land ownership, and reliance on witnesses when documents are lost. The role of Sharia courts in transferring property rights (CONIAl,2016).

These weaknesses in the planning frameworks contributed to inefficiencies and a lack of effective governance, setting the stage for further challenges during the crisis.

4-2. AGENTS OF METROPOLIZATION AND PLANNING

The metropolization process in Syria involves a complex interplay of various agents, including state-led planning, private development, and international actors.

- State-Led Planning: primarily orchestrated by the central government, is responsible for setting the broader regulatory framework within which urban development occurs. The Ministry of Public Works and Housing, along with regional planning commissions, plays a pivotal role in formulating urban policies and approving local development projects, thereby guiding metropolitan growth in alignment with national priorities. However, these policies often lacked effectiveness and responsiveness to local needs.
- Private Development: Private development has significantly influenced the urban landscape, particularly since the early 21st century with the introduction of neoliberal policies. Private sector investment has surged, motivated by legislation facilitating public-private partnerships (PPPs) aimed at addressing urban infrastructure needs. Various private entities, including real estate developers and engineering firms, are now actively engaged in shaping metropolitan areas.
- International Actors: including NGOs and UN agencies, contribute to the metropolization process by providing expertise, funding, and implementing development programs tailored to local needs. Their involvement enhances local governance and service delivery while addressing socio-economic challenges faced by communities.

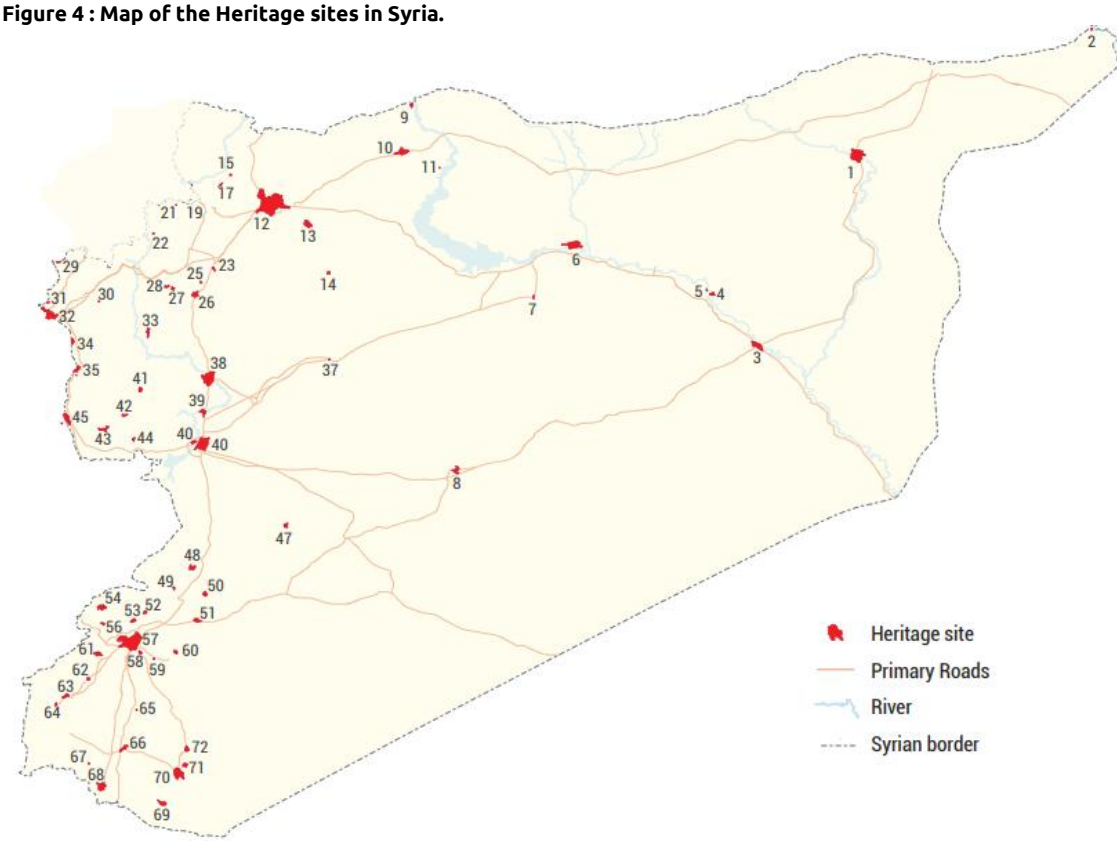
In 2010, with funding support from the government and UNDP, it started to develop the national framework for regional planning, structure plans for the regions and to assist governorates in preparing strategic urban growth plans.

Through the Municipal Administration Modernization programme, funded by the EU, local governments in Aleppo, Damascus, Deir-ez-Zor, Homs, Lattakia and Tartous have improved their capacity to plan and implement much needed urban improvements.

2-5. CULTURAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Syria is home to some of the world's most diverse and significant cultural heritage sites in the Mediterranean, where tangible and intangible heritage have been interwoven over thousands of years. It includes some of the oldest continuously inhabited cities globally, such as Aleppo and Damascus, which are known for their complex identities, distinct typo-morphologies, and rich socio-cultural characteristics, both individually and in wider regional and national contexts. The country has over 1,200 culturally, religiously, and historically significant sites, with six recognized on the World Heritage List between 1979 and 2011. Figure 4 illustrates a map of heritage sites in Syria (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank, 2022).

Figure 4 : Map of the Heritage sites in Syria.



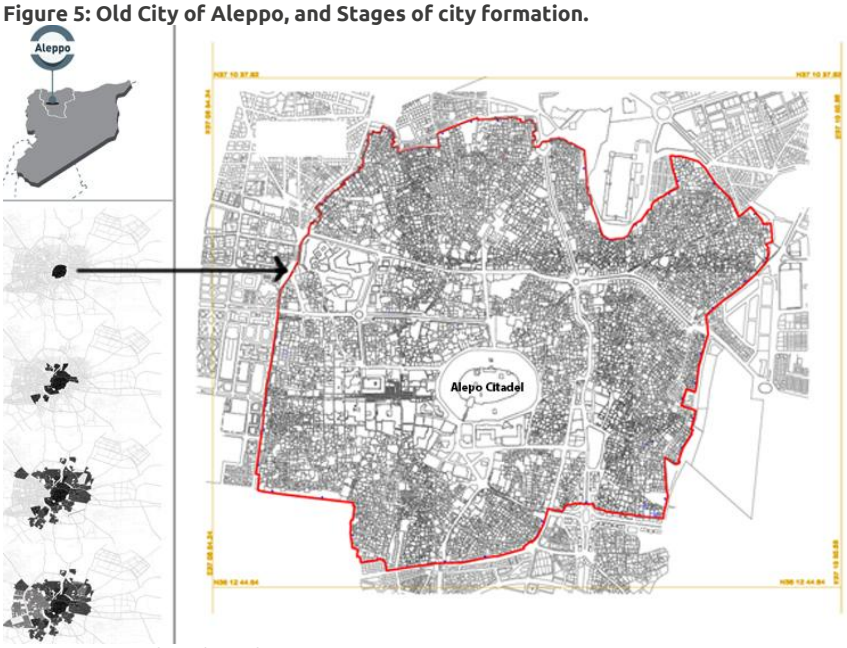
Source: Authors, based on UN-Habitat. "Restoration of cultural heritage and urban identity in Syria". 2021.

Syria's metropolitan regions were marked by rich cultural diversity and unique urban morphologies shaped by historical, social, and economic influences. The urban landscape featured a mix of traditional architecture, modern buildings, and dynamic marketplaces. The coexistence of various ethnic and religious groups contributed to a vibrant urban culture with diverse cultural expressions. Cities typically developed in successive growth rings. The oldest areas, such as historic medinas (e.g., the old city of Aleppo, shown in Figure 5), which are part of the UNESCO World Heritage List, are characterized by densely packed buildings with commercial spaces at ground level.

During the colonial period, urban expansion occurred through planned extensions that included wide boulevards, larger city blocks, and multi-story buildings, reflecting the influence of European lifestyles on the upper class. Many of these residential neighborhoods were later converted into office spaces.

After gaining independence, successive governments implemented land reforms that nationalized large estates and reclaimed properties from foreigners who had left the country, significantly increasing the public land reserves. However, as urbanization accelerated from the 1960s to the 1980s—with annual city growth rates between 4% and 8%, then slowing to 2% to 4% in the 1980s—the public land reserves were insufficient to meet the growing land demand. The land area of major cities nearly doubled, driven by substantial private capital and remittances from expatriates. Urban expansion led to a third layer of unplanned subdivisions on peripheral agricultural land, which rapidly densified (UN-Habitat, 2012).

Figure 5: Old City of Aleppo, and Stages of city formation.



Source: Researchers based on https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/21/multiple=1&unique_number=24

Housing typologies in Syria are generally categorized into three main urban areas: formal, informal, and heritage. Before the war, housing units were distributed among various types: private apartments (36%), dense popular housing (19%), countryside houses (21%), Arabic traditional houses (18%), and villas (4%), as detailed in Table 2 (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Table 2: Housing Types in Syria.

		
Residential buildings (Apartments Buildings)	**Arabic traditional houses**	**Countryside houses**
		
Popular dwellings	**Villas**	**Agricultural House**
Informal Settlements		

Source: Authors. Based on UN- Habitat. Considerations for a housing sector recovery framework in Syria, 2022.

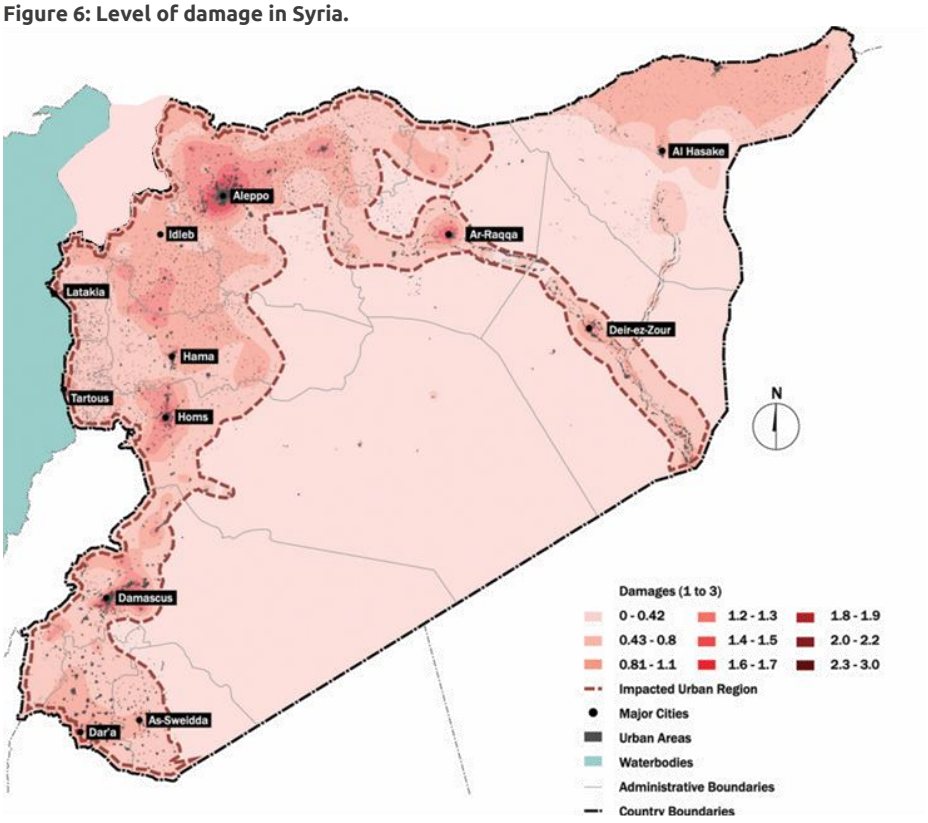
3. IMPACT OF WAR ON URBAN SPACE IN SYRIA

The ongoing war in Syria has led to dramatic transformations in urban spaces. Key aspects of these transformations include:

3-1. DESTRUCTION OF INFRASTRUCTURE:

The conflict has inflicted widespread damage on Syria's housing stock, affecting 13 of the 14 governorates. Approximately 328,000 homes have been destroyed or severely damaged, rendering them uninhabitable. Moreover, an estimated 600,000 to 1 million dwellings have suffered moderate to light damage (UN- HABITAT, 2022). Figure 6 offers an level of damage in Syria.

Figure 6: Level of damage in Syria.

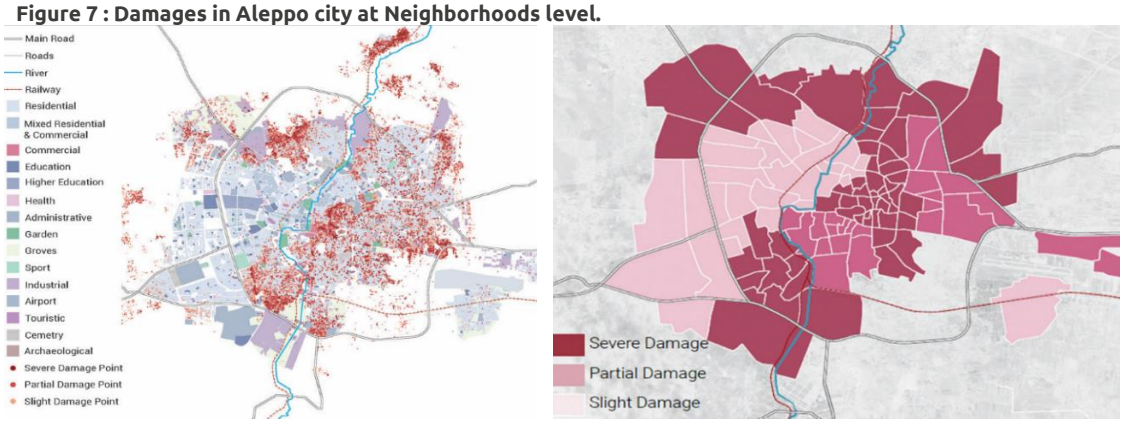


Source: Authors, based on UN- HABITAT, 2014.

The damages to the urban fabric in cities did not affect the housing stock, but rather affected the local infrastructure networks and their service facilities (water, sewage, electricity, etc.) at the neighborhood (UN-Habitat, 2022). As of January 2022, the damage was estimated at 68% in relation to physical infrastructure (50% of the damage to the infrastructure sector is to irrigation systems, 22% to transport, 18% to electricity, 6% to cultural heritage, 3.5% to water and sanitation, 0.5% to municipal services), 30% to housing, education and health, and 2% to the environment and public institutions sectors (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank, 2022).

To illustrate the extent of destruction, we will take Aleppo as an example. Aleppo city has suffered great damage, heavily affecting its infrastructure. Figure 7 shows the extent of the destruction, as 46% of neighborhoods are severely damaged mostly in eastern and northern areas. 14% of neighborhoods are partially damaged. 40% of neighborhoods are slightly damaged, mostly western Aleppo (UN- Habitat, 2020).

Figure 7 : Damages in Aleppo city at Neighborhoods level.



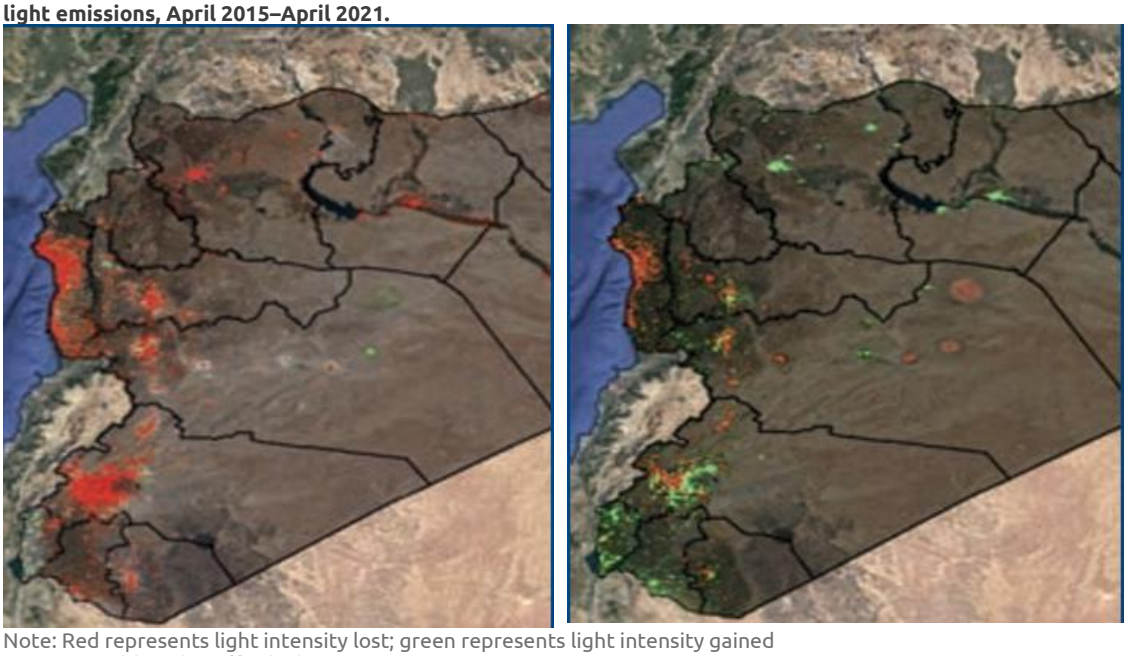
Source: UN Habitat -Aleppo city profile, 2020.

Approximately 25 percent of bridges in Aleppo are uncrossable, and 1.4 percent of roads need maintenance and repair due to war-related damage and lack of maintenance. Access to Aleppo through the two national highways is repeatedly interrupted. trips duration and transport costs are having a negative impact on other cities' economic activities. In the case of Aleppo, Latakia's main trade partner, the travel time has increased from 4 to 12 hours. Also, long detours using local roads are providing limited alternatives to major supply routes, some of which currently pass through contested areas. As a result, there has been a drop in supplies between the city of Lattakia, and rural agricultural areas in Aleppo. There has been an increase in prices of basic commodities, a lack of fuel supplies in the neighboring governorates, and a decrease in the port's operation (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank, 2022). Aleppo's electrical infrastructure has been damaged by 28%, with nearly 6% of facilities completely destroyed. Three out of 14 power stations, some of the most valuable assets in the sector, have sustained some degree of damage, and nine out of four substations have been damaged. As a result, power supplies have been severely impacted, with rolling blackouts becoming a common occurrence. Electricity is now available for four hours or less per day. Moreover, access to electricity is uneven across neighborhoods; in the west, some neighborhoods average 12 hours of electricity per day, while in the east, most neighborhoods have no electricity and residents rely heavily on generators (UN Habitat - Aleppo city profile, 2020).

The findings from night-time lights data, which are consistent with national accounts data, indicate a 72 percent reduction in light intensity from April 2012–April 2015, and a 50 percent

recovery by April 2021. The pace of recovery is uneven across regions. Demonstrating the persistent impact of the war, light intensity has further declined in some war-affected areas since April 2015 as shown in figure 8 (The World Bank, 2022).

Figure 8: on Left: Change in night-time light emissions, April 2012–April 2015. On Right: Change in night-time light emissions, April 2015–April 2021.



Note: Red represents light intensity lost; green represents light intensity gained
Source: World Bank staff calculations, 2022.

In terms of water supply and sanitation, about 17% of assets were damaged, mostly wells and water towers. Although most of the remaining physical infrastructure was undamaged, about 51% of it was operational, including 11% that were completely non-functional. At the same time, alternative service providers have proliferated, providing water by tanker at high cost (about $7 per cubic meter) and without any controls on the source and quality of the water (The World Bank, 2022).

This also affected the infrastructure in the cities that hosted the displaced like the city of Latakia. The recent increase in population has resulted in a drop of 40% in water supply. Also, all city neighborhoods are evenly subject to electricity blackouts which range from 6 to 18 hours per day depending on the seasonal demand. Moreover, the municipality in Lattakia reported doubling of waste production from 400 to 850 tons per day. This increase reflects both population growth and increase in the economic activities by the idPs. In addition to pressure on sewage pipes in collective centres and high-density neighborhoods; excessive pressure on available school infrastructure; extreme strains on the public health centres (UN-Habitat, 2014).

3-2. CHANGE IN SOCIAL FABRIC AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

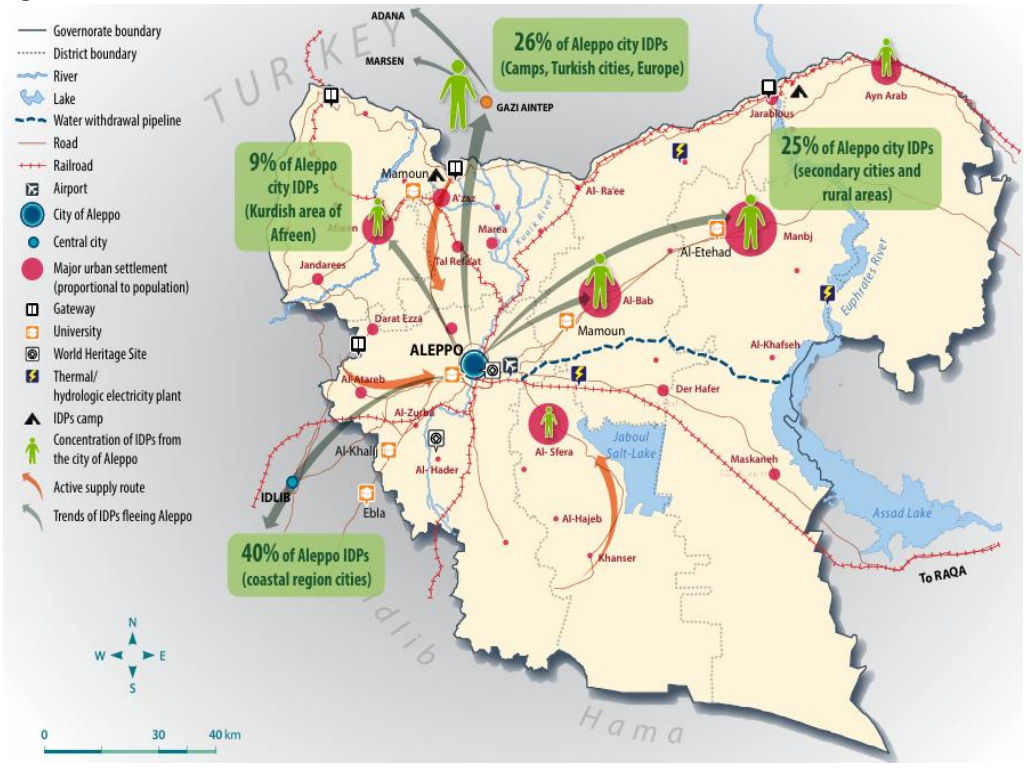
Syrian cities have experienced significant demographic changes during the war. According to the UNHCR, "after 10 years of crisis, the war in Syria has led to more than 6.6 million Syrian

refugees and 6.7 million internally displaced as of March 2021 (UN- Habitat, 2022). Moreover, The destruction of cities (including the destruction of infrastructure, housing, etc) has caused a massive loss of income and pushed millions into poverty. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) highlights the issue: By 2016, Syria had fallen to 173rd place on the UNDP's Human Development Index, out of 188 countries (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank, 2022).

The displacement of populations has led to the abandonment of buildings and neighborhoods (as in Aleppo). At the same time, relatively safer urban areas have attracted large numbers of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), as in Latakia. This affected the Syrian social fabric in terms of Migration.

In Aleppo, which is the largest Governorate in Syria in terms of population (4.68 million, CBS, 2011). It is one of the mostly impacted amongst all Governorates) Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, UN- habitat, 2014(. The urban population was 55% of the total Governorate population in 2011. 1.73 million inhabitants are currently displaced, either within cities or between cities and rural areas, representing 35% of the Governorate population. 2.1 million inhabitants have completely fled the Governorate, almost 90% of whom are from the city of Aleppo itself. Main displacement destinations are the Syrian coastal Governorates (Lattakia and Tartous), GAP Region (Turkey), Egypt, Lebanon and Arabian Gulf. Figure 9 shows the city of Aleppo, and the trends and rates of displacement from the governorate (UN-Habitat, 2022).

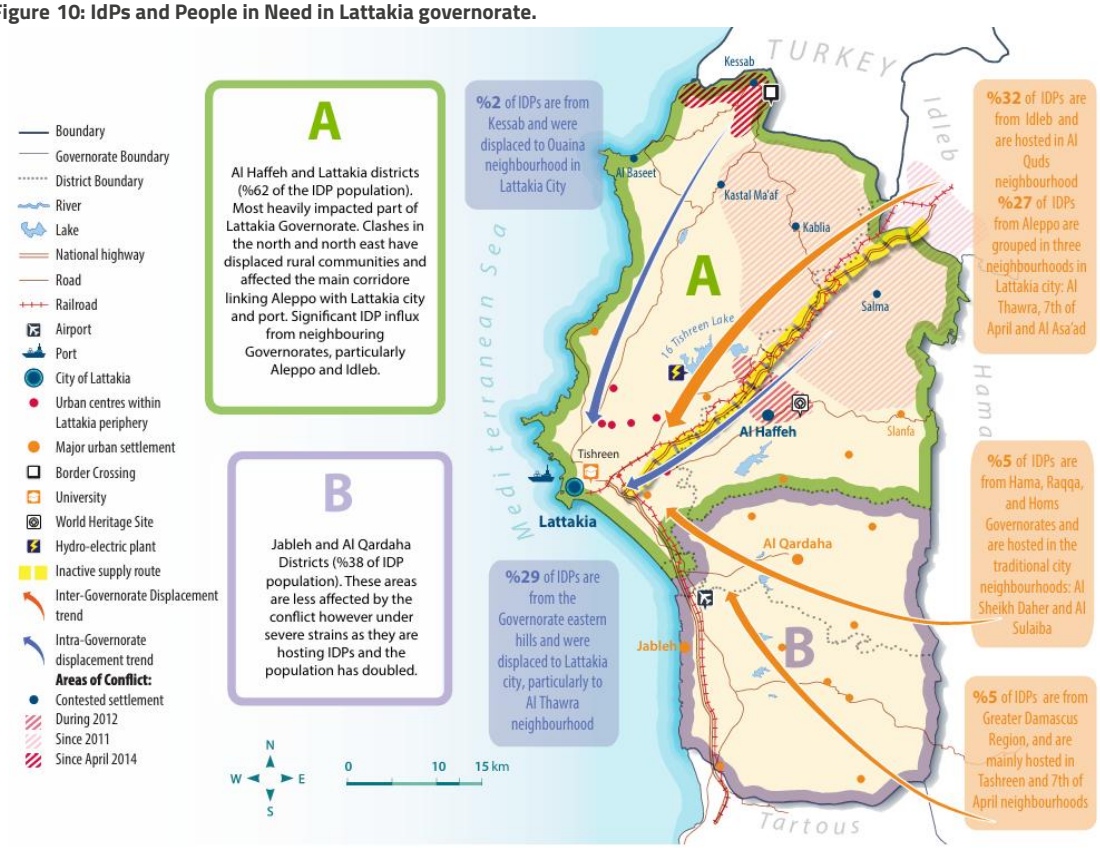
Figure 9 : CITY OF ALEPPO WITHIN GOVERNORATE CONTEXT.



Source: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, UN- habitat, 2014.

In return, since the beginning of the crisis, Lattakia city has become a main displacement destination for idPs due to its relative safety and security. In May 2014, oCHA reported that 167,000 idPs are registered in lattakia. This figure is based on the following factors: the increase in primary school enrollment; the increase in the solid waste produced in the city; and the housing intake capacity within the city. The city population has almost increased by almost 40%. 68% of the city's idPs originate from outside the governorate. They are mainly from neighboring governorates such as Idleb and Aleppo, whereas only 32% of idPs come from Lattakia governorate as shown in figure 10 (UN- HABITAT, 2014).

Figure 10: IdPs and People in Need in Lattakia governorate.



Source: UN- HABITAT, 2014.

Nearly 65% of the idPs are concentrated in just 4 low-income housing neighborhoods (Al Quds, 7th of April, Al Asa'ad and Al thawra, virtually doubling the population) as housing is affordable and informal jobs can be found to generate basic income. This however had a huge impact on the city housing, services and infrastructure, as well as different social and economic effects on the local community. For instance, the density in some of the hosting neighborhoods has increased significantly. In Al thawra for example, the density has increased from 555 people per hectare in 2010 to 848 people per hectare in 2014 (UN-HABITAT, 2014).

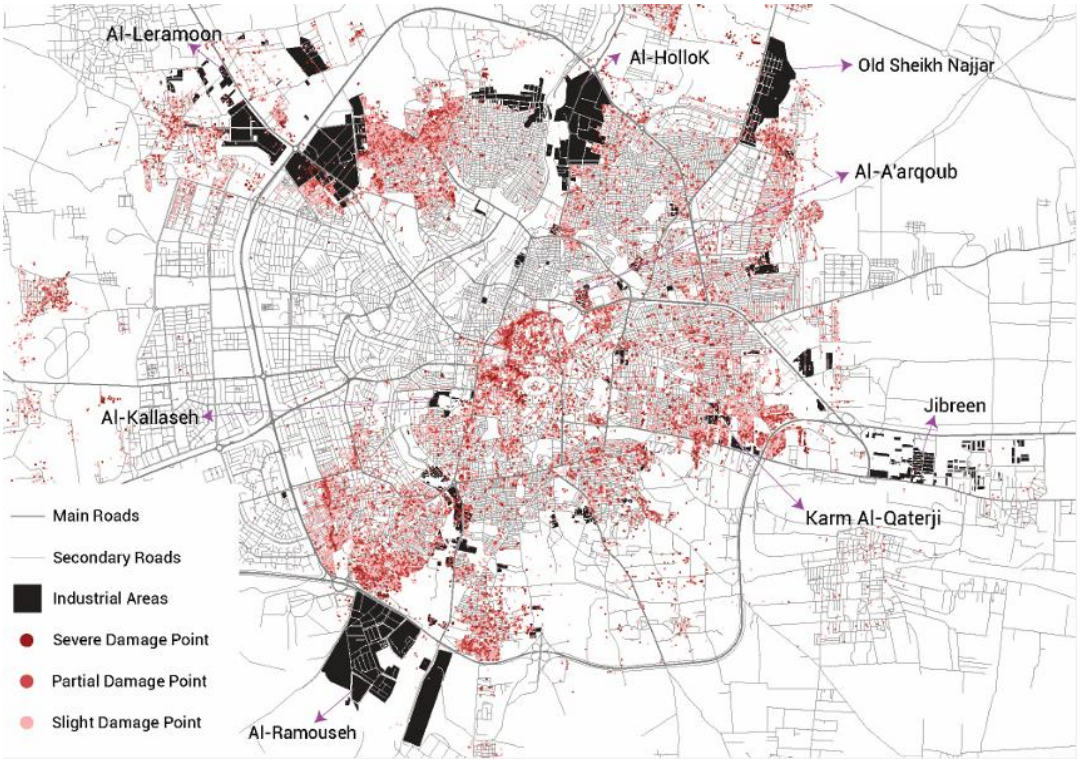
This has resulted in the city being divided into neighborhoods that are much richer than others, more severely affected by the lack of basic services, more populated and poorer. This has led to a social divide within the city. Also, gender imbalances can be observed in many

traditional neighborhoods where IDPs reside, with relatively few adult males and youth compared to adult females and youth. The changing family structure, and the increasing needs (for example, new generations struggling to live in a single room of a family home without privacy).

When mentioning the impact of the war on the Social aspect, it is completely linked to the economic aspect, which was also affected by the war. The collapse of economic activities has led to a deterioration in the living conditions of the population. By 2019, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) had shrunk by more than half from its 2010 level. Foreign trade declined sharply, especially exports, due to international sanctions (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank, 2022). Private activities, ranging from commerce and arts and crafts to transportation, also suffered losses and disruption in the affected cities (as in Aleppo), but at the same time the economic situation changed in cities where people were displaced (as in Latakia).

Aleppo Governorate had a dominant economic role at the national level. Linking coastal cities with the eastern region, and playing a pivotal role in transportation between the Arab Gulf, Syria and Europe. Main economic drivers in the Governorate were agriculture, tourism, and industry (UN habitat, Aleppo, 2014). The crisis was particularly devastating for Aleppo because it both forced the displacement of Aleppo's industrial base elsewhere and isolated the city from its rural base and surrounding markets. The main industrial areas, Sheikh Najar, Heidariya, Billeramoun, and Al-Ramouseh, shut down and were heavily looted during the crisis, the figure 11 shows the locations of industrial areas and their proximity to destroyed areas (UN- habitat, 2022). As a result of the severe damages that the industrial and commercial centers in the city were subjected to, many workers became unemployed, and that accompanied by a noticeable rise in the prices of basic commodities, which created a large gap between the need for consumption of poor and affected families and their purchasing power.

Figure 11: shows the locations of industrial areas and their proximity to destroyed areas.

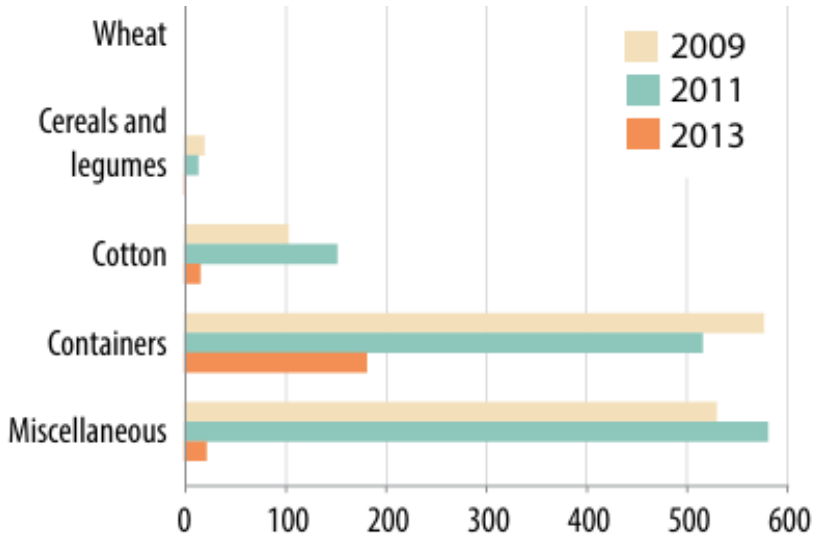


Source: UN- habitat, RECOVERY OF SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN SYRIA "NOT IF, BUT HOW?", 2022, p69.

Before the crisis, Lattakia's economy relied on three main sectors: the transport of goods through its port (mainly to and from Aleppo, as Lattakia was historically the gateway port for Aleppo's imports and exports), agriculture, and tourism. However, all of these sectors have been severely affected by the war. The collapse of the industrial sector in Aleppo has reduced Lattakia's regional transportation and economic role. The Port was severely impacted by the crisis and the situation in Aleppo has had a huge negative impact on the port's operations. operations decreased by 40% between 2011 and 2012 alone (CbS and Port Authority, 2013), with a further decrease in 2013. Figure 12 shows that the number of containers exported through Lattakia port dropped from 577,000 tons in 2009 to 182,000 tons in 2013. This is a strong indicator of the economic impact of the crisis on the country's industrial, agricultural and transportation sectors. As a result, some 1,800 laborers were laid off due to reduced operations (UN_HABITAT, 2014).

The growing IDP population has led to a significant increase in demand for food, housing, local businesses, goods, and services. The surge in housing demand has boosted private investments in new construction and home extensions, generating local revenue. The number of business licenses in Lattakia actually surpassed pre-crisis levels in 2013, with most investments concentrated in the housing, commercial, and manufacturing sectors (UN-Habitat, 2014). In addition, thousands of beach resort chalets have also been occupied by middle income idPs or by 3 to 4 low-income displaced families. Therefore, the negative impacts of the idP influx has been offset, somewhat, by the economic benefits obtained by local inhabitants (UN- HABITAT, City Profile Lattakia, 2014).

Figure 12: Exports through Lattakia port – 000 Ton (Lattakia Governorate).



Source: UN_HABITAT, 2014, p 7.

3-3. NEW FORMS OF URBANIZATION

The impact of war is not limited to the destruction of major cities, but extends to include cities to which people have migrated due to the availability of the element of security. This has led to emergence of urban forms, including Informal Settlements; Refugee Camps; Loss of Public Spaces and public buildings; and Land use change.

Informal areas existed before the war, but their percentage increased during the war. For example, in the city of Latakkia which consists of three main areas formed of 20 neighborhoods as illustrated in figure 13, the informal housing sector has grown massively since 2011. Before the crisis, 8 informal settlements used to occupy only 8% of the city's land area. This made Lattakia one of the few major Syrian cities with a small proportion of informal housing. This is significantly low as compared to Aleppo where informal housing formed 32% of city area, and to Homs where informal housing comprised as much as 59% of the city's total area. Currently, it is around 22% of the total housing stock because there is 4 times in increase in rental prices in lattakia due to increased housing demand by idPs. This informal growth includes the addition of new floors to existing buildings and houses and new city extensions along the main regional roads; Figure 14. New buildings and extensions have also represented a way to take in the unexpected influx of population through renting, hosting, purchasing or squatting (UN-HABITAT,2014). Although most of the new informal expansions enjoy quality building standards, most of them came at the expense of farming areas in area 3 As shown in the figure15.

Figure 13: Lattakia Urban composiion.

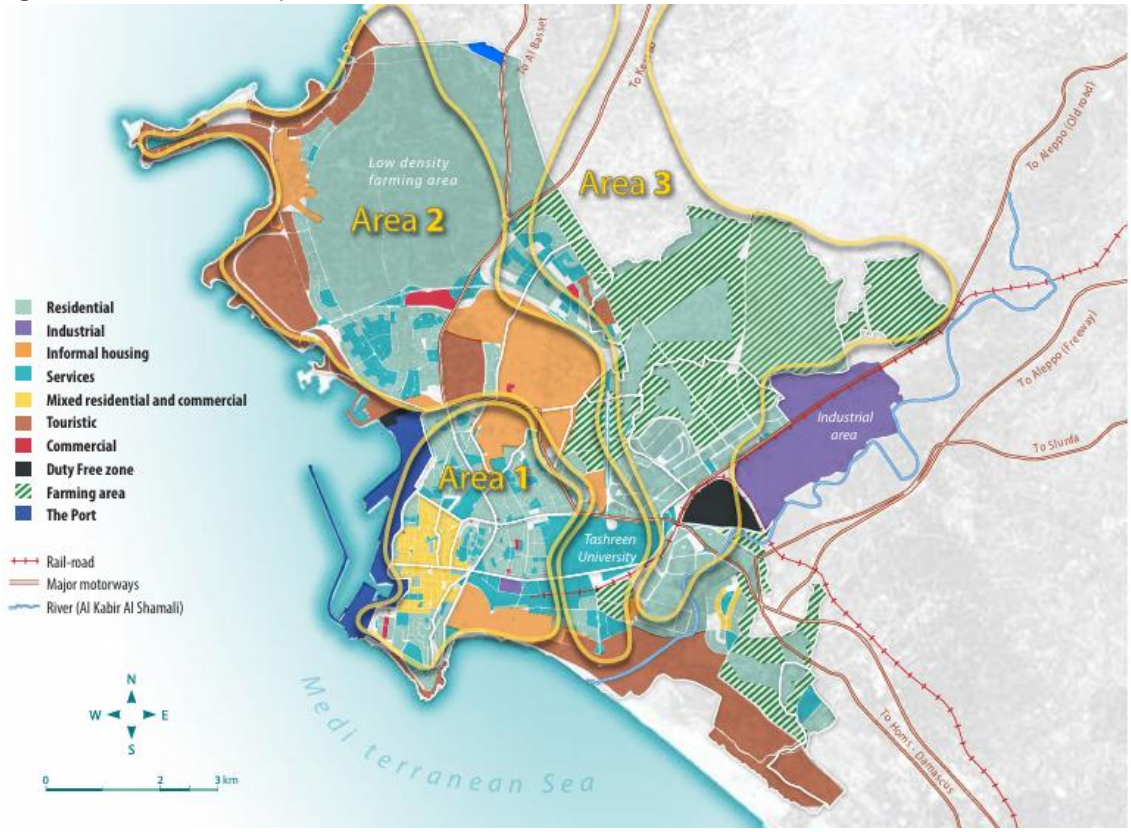
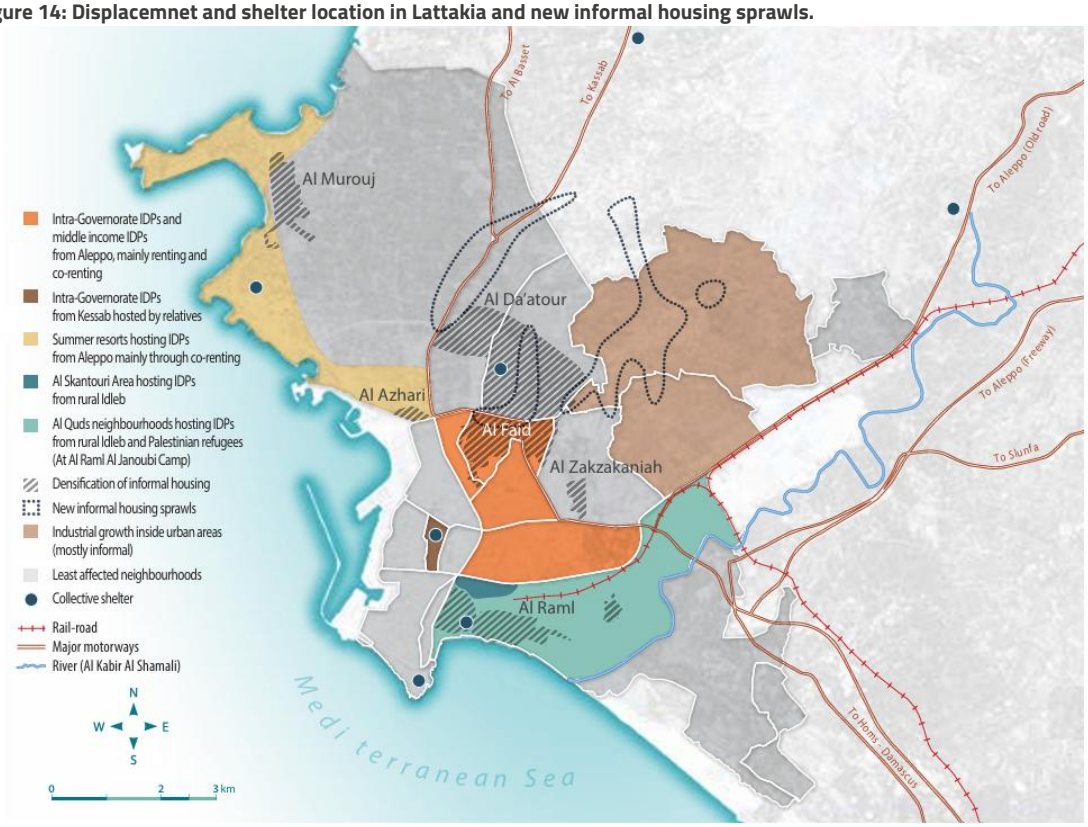


Figure 14: Displacemnet and shelter location in Lattakia and new informal housing sprawls.



Source: UN- Habitat, 2014.

Figure 15: Informal expansion of informal housing in Latakia.

Source: UN- Habitat, 2014; Maya, 2014.

IDPs have either moved into cities or settled in camps. Camps or informal settlements are often tents or other types of housing units created by the IDPs themselves, and are built on land without any legal justification. The majority of these camps do not meet international standards in design and provision of services. Living conditions remain below the norm, and there are minimal public safety requirements. According to the latest available information, there are 220 informal camps hosting 188,323 individuals in northern Syria (CONIAL, 2016). We can notice the extension of the camps in figure 16 that are located in the north of Latakia on areas designated for agricultural land, which may turn into urban areas over time, and this affects the natural landscape in the region.

Figure 16: Refugee camps in Syria.

Source: https://www.cccmcluster.org/

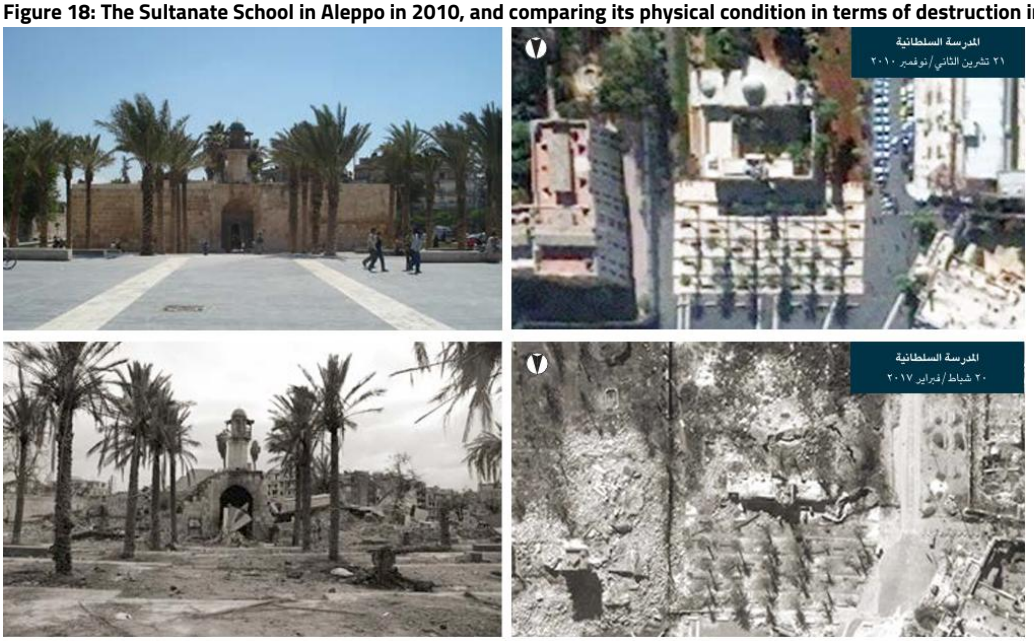
Public spaces and buildings in destroyed cities are affected, impacting social interaction and community life. For example, most open spaces in Aleppo suffer from issues related to access, damages, and deteriorating environmental conditions as shown in figure 17. And generally, in need of maintenance or rehabilitation such as: Rubble/debris cleanup; Street

lighting; upgrading/repairs to access and internal road systems, and Repair top public buildings including schools and markets. (UN-habitat, Recovery of Services and Infrastructure, 2022). Figure 18 shows the Sultanate School in Aleppo in 2010.

Figure 17: Destruction of the public spaces in Aleppo in the area near the citadel.

Source: https://www.getty.edu/publications/cultural-heritage-mass-atrocities/part-2/10-bandarin/

Figure 18: The Sultanate School in Aleppo in 2010, and comparing its physical condition in terms of destruction in 2017.



Source: UNESCO/C. Menegazzi, 2017.

Likewise, in cities that were not affected, we notice the lack of access to public buildings. In the city of Latakia, and as a result of the need to accommodate displaced people in urban spaces, cities have responded to this transformation by reusing existing buildings, which has had an impact on the original inhabitants of the city by making these public buildings unusable. Collective shelters have been allocated, where most of the most vulnerable

displaced people live in collective shelters in public and private buildings, including community centers, town halls, hotels, gymnasiums, warehouses, unfinished buildings, and abandoned factories. (CARE International – UNHCR, 2017). Collective Shelters are sheltering 5% of the idPs. Sports City is hosting 7000 idPs alone. Tents and caravans are used inside the sports collective center to host idPs (UN- HABITAT, 2014). In addition, some buildings may be suitable for dual use, for example: schools. They achieve a dual purpose: they constitute a common residential center for people, and an educational center, as shown in the Figure 19. Only 3% of idPs are living in non-residential spaces such as shops and offices and 1% in unfinished buildings (UN- HABITAT, 2014).

From the above, we find that many public buildings in cities that received displaced people can no longer be used. In addition, public buildings and squares in damaged cities cannot be used.

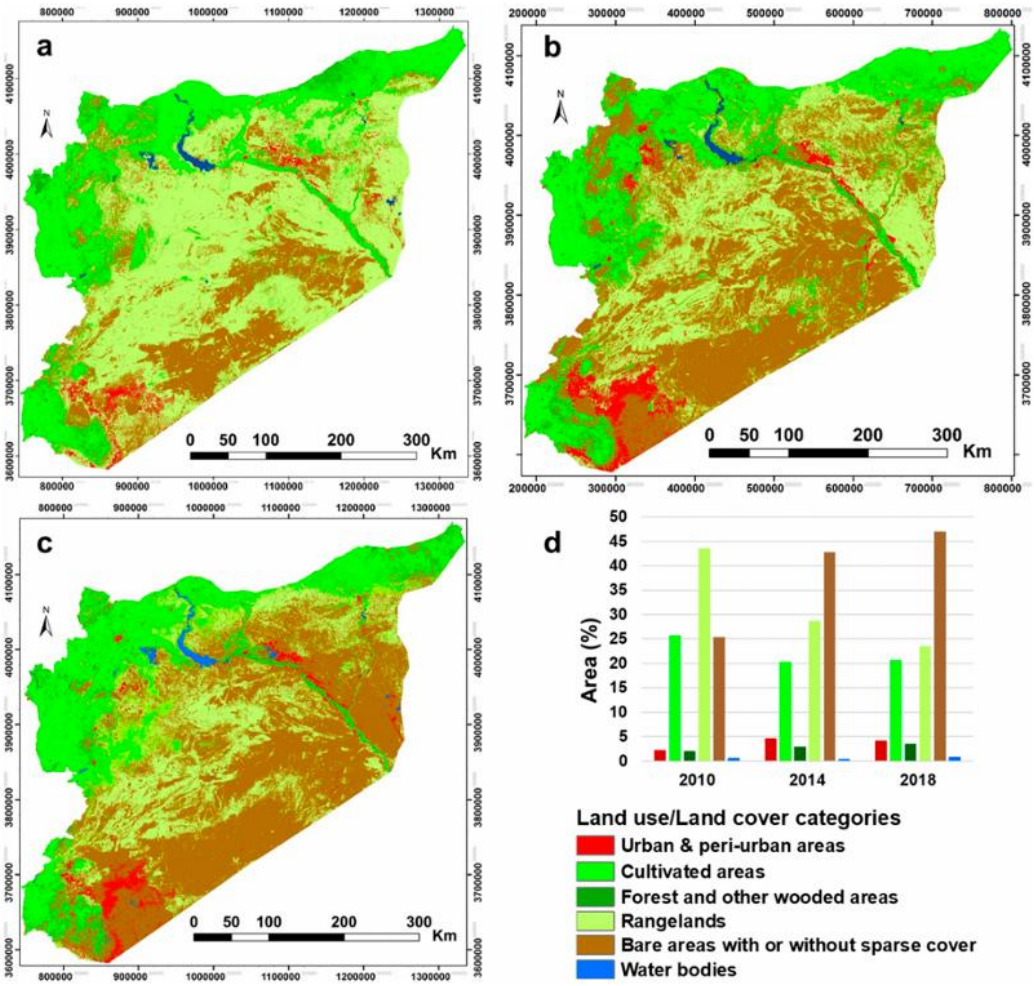
Figure 19: Collective shelter which is a school.

Source: https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/emergency-reports/syria-crisis-response-update-issue-no-67

Land use in Syria is broadly categorized into four main types: (1) Cultivable land, encompassing around 6.2 million hectares. Of this, approximately 5.7 million hectares, or 94%, are actively cultivated, which represents about 33% of Syria's total area. Notably, 62% of the cultivated regions are situated in the northern governorates of Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, and Al-Hasakeh. (2) Uncultivable land spans 3.7 million hectares, making up 20% of Syria's total area, and includes infrastructure such as buildings, public utilities, bare and rocky lands, and water bodies. (3) Rangelands, steppe, and desert areas cover 8.2 million hectares (44% of the total area), used seasonally for grazing when rainfall is sufficient. (4) Forests and wooded regions occupy 0.6 million hectares, accounting for just 3% of the country's area (CBS, 2010).

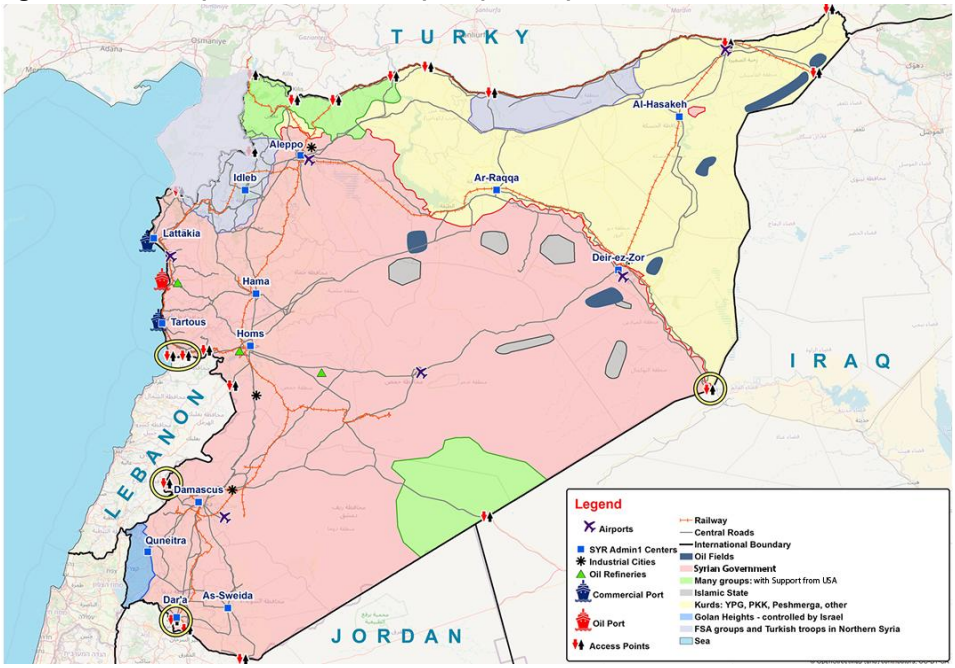
During the war, land use has changed across Syria. In a study by Mohamed; Julian; Christoph, (2020), which examined these changes using multi-temporal Landsat images and geographic information systems for the years 2010, 2014 and 2018, the study found increases in bare areas, forests and urban areas, while pastures and cultivated areas witnessed significant decreases, as shown in Figure 20. This is attributed to military operations that rendered the land unusable and the increased abandonment of agricultural practices due to the occupation of a group of the most important Syrian lands designated for agriculture by Current colonial powers. Figure 21 shows the lands that were occupied by various parties with the support of external colonial powers, where an annual loss of cultivated land was found at a rate of 943 hectares from 2010 to 2018. In addition, urban and semi-urban areas witnessed a significant increase in their spatial extension, doubling by 105% from 2010 to 2014. This is due to population displacement and shifts in social and economic conditions (Mohamed; Julian; Christoph, 2020).

Figure 20: **Land use maps of Syria for 2010 (a), 2014 (b), and 2018 (c). The area (in %) of land use categories after computing adjusted area estimates is given in (d).**



Source: Mohamed; Julian; Christoph , 2020.

Figure 21: Status of Syrian Land which is occupied by various parties.



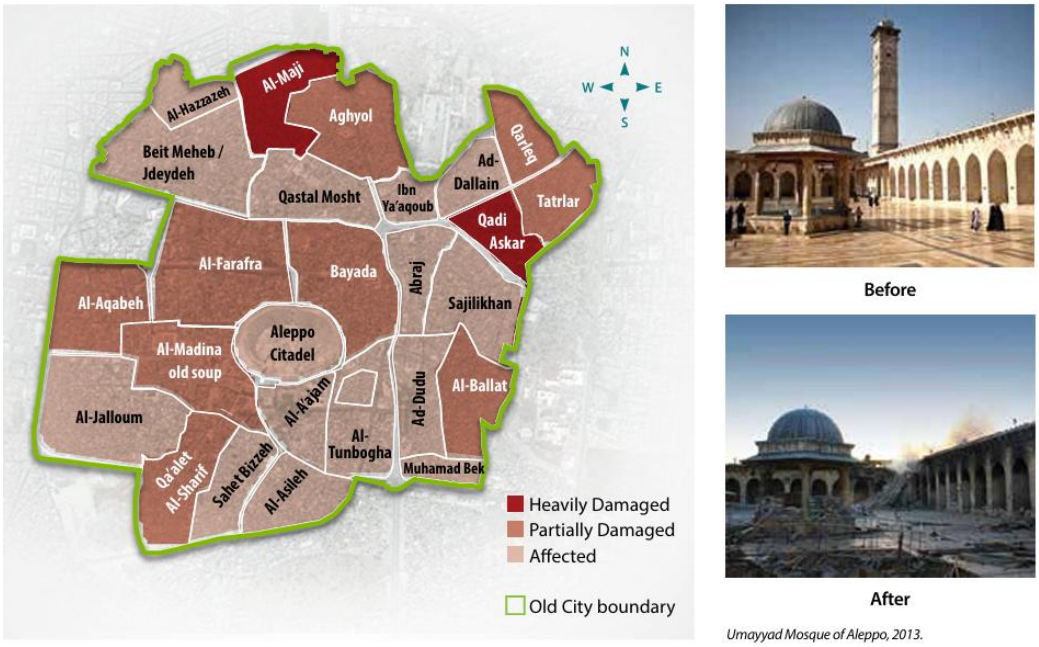
Source: Authors, based on UN- Habitat. "Recovery of Services and Infrastructure in Syria. 2022. P 21.

3-4. DESTRUCTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HISTORICAL LANDMARKS

Syria has suffered widespread destruction, including its cities and towns. This destruction has affected the country's rich and diverse cultural heritage, with many sites of great cultural, religious and historical significance in the country severely damaged. The effects of war on cultural heritage in Syria can be summarized as follows:

- Damage to historic city centres. This could lead to the potential loss of World Heritage sites, for example, the Old City of Aleppo as shown in the figure22. The old cities of Homs, Daraa and Bosra have also been severely damaged. This has resulted in a significant loss of historical and archaeological value. This destruction contributes to the alteration of the urban fabric and the erosion of the coherent architectural expression of historic cities with their dense traditional neighborhoods (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2022).
- Damage to historic buildings such as the Great Mosque of Aleppo which was also damaged by the fire, and its minaret destroyed in 2013, as shown in figure 22. And in August 2012, the Ayyubid-era entrance to Aleppo's historic citadel—one of the world's oldest and largest castles, in use for at least 4,000 years—was partially destroyed (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank, 2022).
- Loss of traditional crafts: The destruction of markets and old market areas such as Aleppo's seventeenth-century souk, as well as damage to traditional craft production buildings (such as soap factories and silver production) has threatened the preservation of existing traditional crafts and local identities, and the transmission of this knowledge and traditions from one generation to the next (UN-Habitat,2021).

Figure 22: Heritage sites reported to be damaged.



Before

After

Umayyad Mosque of Aleppo, 2013.

Source: UN-HABITAT, 2014.

3-5 - SHIFTS IN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND PUBLIC INTERVENTION:

The planning efforts prior to the war exhibited significant shortcomings in governance structures, and did not effectively address the intricate challenges posed by urbanization, particularly in urban planning and crisis management. This inadequacy became evident as the war unfolded, underscoring the urgent need for urban governance systems that prioritize resilience and adaptability.

The Law (107), published in September 2011 regarding government decentralization has not been activated. As a result, Law 37 of 2021 on the Finance of Administrative Units was issued, which is a real test of the willingness to invest in decentralization. It aims to better structure the local revenue system, allowing for an increase in the self-source revenues of local administrative units (UN-Habitat, Decentralisation and local governance, 2022).

Another result is the emergence of Informal Governance. In some areas, local communities have sought to fill the governance void through informal networks, leading to alternative urban management practices. One prominent example is the establishment of the Committee for Development Affairs in cities such as Aleppo and Homs to engage local residents in decision-making processes. This committee, formed through a public meeting, aimed to crowdsource funding for community projects that the local council couldn't finance, demonstrating a grassroots approach to local governance (UN-Habitat, 2022).

In the context of local development amidst war, three key groups of actors play essential roles: the State, the private sector, and civil society in conjunction with local communities. The State, represented by the central government, continues to exert the most significant influence over local economic development. Meanwhile, private sector enterprises are crucial contributors, as their collaboration with public entities represents a contemporary approach

that could foster local development. This partnership is particularly vital for bridging the gaps in development created by the ongoing conflict in Syria. Civil society organizations also play an instrumental role, typically organized around humanitarian or development-focused goals that often align with the needs of local communities, authorities, and the private sector. These objectives can significantly bolster local development initiatives.

Additionally, international organizations, such as UN-Habitat, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO); Agha Khan Foundation have shifted their emphasis since 2015 towards providing humanitarian assistance, have focused on mobilizing local volunteers to address health and educational needs, further embedding community participation in recovery efforts. further influencing local development processes by collaborating with local authorities and community-based organizations (UN-Habitat, 2022).

4. DISCUSSION

The outbreak of the war in Syria in 2011 caused widespread changes in the structure of regional centers in the destroyed cities, along with significant socio-economic transformations. Despite this, the host city (Lattakia) has shown diverse patterns of development capacity and resilience, as well as the ability to absorb massive demographic changes and cope with the significant pressures that prolonged crises impose on urban development.

These changes include significant destruction of urban spaces at various scales. Aleppo's residential areas have been destroyed, and damage to infrastructure such as roads and bridges has disrupted traffic flows, hindering the movement of people and goods, and access to jobs and services. Road closures have forced road users to choose longer alternative routes, increasing travel time and transportation costs for the movement of passengers and goods. This has also had an impact on agricultural land, as agricultural production has decreased due to inaccessibility and high fuel prices. Road damage has also affected access to healthcare facilities and schools. As a result of interruption of regular public services provided by the municipality and the Governorate of Aleppo, local neighborhoods committees were formed as a reaction to pressing local management needs.

On the other hand, the influx of displaced people into Latakia has changed the character of the city and its role in the country. This changed the city's economy from tourism- and transportation-oriented investments to housing, manufacturing, and trade. The city has become a major provider of shelter for displaced people from neighboring provinces, especially Idlib and Aleppo. This provides a new source of income for local communities. However, it also creates new pressures on services, infrastructure. The increase in population has resulted in an increased demand for housing, which has led to the growth of the informal housing sector. Finally, damage to monuments and historical and heritage sites has resulted in a significant loss of historical and archaeological value. Table 3 summaries the impact of war on urban space in Syria:

Table3: THE IMPACT OF WAR ON URBAN SPACE IN SYRIA.		
ASPECT		RESULT
DESTRUCTION OF INFRASTRUCTURE	Damage to housing stock	328,000 homes either destroyed or severely damaged. Between 600,000 and 1 million dwellings have sustained moderate to light damage.
	Damages to bridges main roads	Frequent road closures. travel time has increased between cities. increase in prices of basic commodities. lack of fuel supplies in the neighbouring governorates. Agricultural activity has declined.
	Service facilities (water, sewage, electricity)	Disrupting traffic flows, impeding the movement of people and goods. Shortage of water supply used for irrigation. Inequality in electricity distribution.
CHANGE IN SOCIAL FABRIC	Migration and Displacement	More than 6.6 million Syrian refugees and 6.7 million internally displaced.
	Gender imbalance in internal displacements	There are relatively few adult and young males compared to adult and young females.
	Inequality and class separation	The city is divided into neighborhoods that are much richer than others, more affected by the lack of basic services, more populated and poorer.
CHANGE IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY	Displacement Economy	Most investments concentrated in the housing, commercial, and manufacturing sectors. Providing sources of income in the form of basic labour occupations.
	Job loss and layoffs	1,800 laborers were laid off in Lattakia port.
NEW FORMS OF URBANIZATION	Informal housing growth	The increase in the housing demand has led to increase in the percentage of informal housing in Lattakia from 8% to 22%
	Refugee Camps	There are 220 informal camps hosting 188,323 individuals in northern Syria, affecting the natural landscape.
	Loss of Public Spaces and public buildings	Making public buildings unusable, impacting social interaction and community life. Or could be suitable for dual us such as schools.
	Land use change	Increases in bare areas and forests and urban areas, while pastures and cultivated areas witnessed significant decreases. Urban and semi-urban areas witnessed a significant increase in their spatial extension.
DESTRUCTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HISTORICAL LANDMARKS	Damage to historic city centres	Damage to the Old cities as in Aleppo which is On the World Heritage List since 1986.
	Damage to historic buildings	Such as the medieval Al Hosn Castle, and historic infrastructure in Hama such as ancient water systems. In addition, the Great Mosque of Aleppo.
	Loss of traditional craftsmanship	The destruction of traditional craft production buildings (such as soap factories and silver production in Aleppo) has resulted in a loss of production as well as the loss of traditional crafts such as woodwork, jewelry, glass, textile making, etc.
INSTITUTIONAL	Shifts in governance structures and public intervention	Engaging Local Communities.
Source: Authors.		

5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the deep connection between metropolization and the disruptions caused by war, particularly in regions like the Global South. Metropolization, typically a process that drives economic growth, cultural exchange, and regional integration, takes a drastically different course in areas affected by conflict. In Syria, the war has caused devastating changes to the urban landscape, marked by widespread destruction and major demographic shifts. This research examines these impacts through the experiences of two cities: Aleppo, Syria's largest metropolitan hub, which endured extensive destruction, and Latakia, a smaller metropolitan city, which suffered far less damage. The findings reveal how war has not only reshaped the physical structure of cities but also disrupted socio-economic systems, community dynamics, and cultural identities.

Despite these challenges, Syrian cities have shown remarkable resilience, adapting to crises through informal governance, emergency responses, and rapid urban transformations that differ from traditional patterns of development. The war has redefined the forces and scales of urban change, creating a new reality for affected areas. As Syria moves toward recovery, it is crucial for rebuilding efforts to focus on inclusive planning and localized governance that address the needs of displaced communities and restore the essence of metropolitanism in a post-war context. The insights from this study provide a valuable framework for understanding urban development in crisis-hit regions worldwide, emphasizing the importance of context-sensitive policies to support sustainable and equitable urban futures.

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