


Article

The Role of Urban Planning and Architecture in Sustainable Peacebuilding: Lessons from Belfast to Syria

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Abstract: The peacebuilding process plays a critical role for urban planning in paving the way for sustainable peace or upcoming conflicts, where it is not innocent and not impartial. The paper aims to draw out lessons learned from Belfast to Syria, focusing on the urban intervention role in sustaining the peace process. The article reviews Belfast's literature review, using the timeline to scan the recovery process and extract a few lessons learnt. This is followed by reviewing the current interventions for the recovery of Syria based on chosen articles in the Venice charter on reconstruction that define specific indicators of the role of architects and urban planners. Authors debate the way and the aspects of urban intervention in dealing with conflicts. The paper shows the critical role of urban interventions in sustaining peace process implementation and concludes with essential areas to ensure the integration of the urban intervention part of the peace process.

Keywords: post-war; reconstruction; peacebuilding; recovery plan; urban planning



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1. Introduction

Northern Ireland experienced decades of conflict from the 1960s to the late 1990s, where more than 3500 people were killed. This period is known as the “Troubles”, the historical conflict between Protestants against the Catholic minority. The conflict ended with a peace agreement signed in April 1998; the agreement called Good Friday Agreement was based on a power-sharing government that included political forces and armed groups. After twenty years, most of the agreement has been implemented, where the armed group still exists, but with different shapes and roles, and violence has noticeably decreased. Whereas sectarian tensions still exist, and the conflict has taken on another form, recently, as part of Brexit, the situation has become complicated and there are threats of the rise of conflict again. In this paper, we examine the timeline of Belfast city, a symbol of religious (Catholic/Protestant) and nationalist (Irish/British) conflict that has experienced violent sectarian conflict since 1969. This sectarian segregation was applied at the urban level, where inner community violence resulted in the creation of 15 peace lines made of various materials, ranging from metal to light fabrics. Most of them still exist [1]. Understanding the Belfast's journey and what has happened internally and externally that resulted in the current segregated reality is important to reflect on the lessons learnt for the case of Syria, where currently there are several documents being developed for the future recovery of the country. By highlighting the sustainable recovery factors for any future recovery plan, the paper describes those factors within the context of Belfast. Emphasizing that there is no recovery blueprint and understanding the internal and external context is essential for developing a recovery plan. The paper answers the following questions:

- What are the sustainable recovery factors that can be extracted from Belfast? Additionally, how can we ensure a better sustainable recovery plan for Syria based on the current situation?

2. Materials and Methods

The article aims to understand the recovery journey of Belfast, from which sustainability recovery factors can be extracted that can lead to a sustainable recovery plan and process for Syria. The paper achieves this through the following methodology as shown in Figure 1.

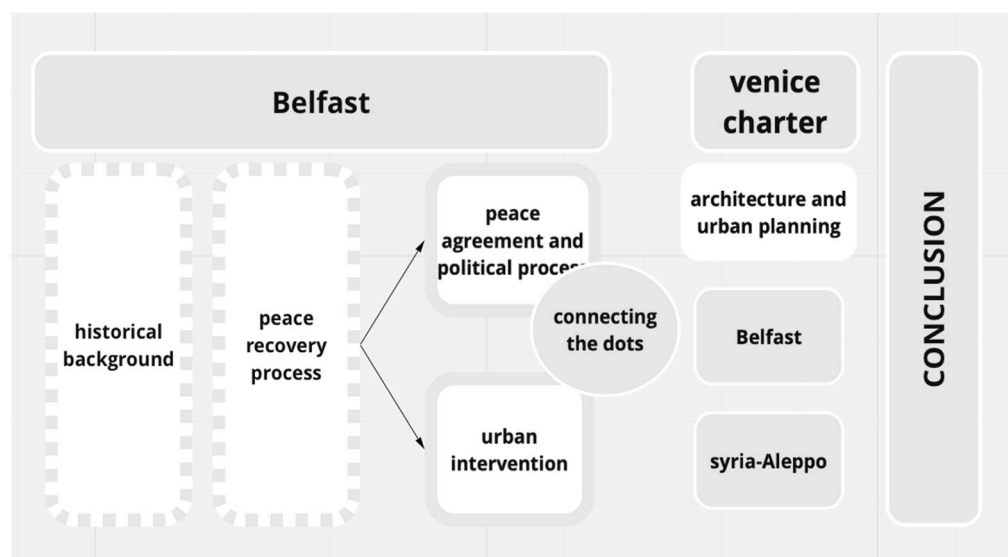


Figure 1. Structure of the study (developed by the author).

- A literature review by looking at the Belfast case study documents, the main events and their effects at the urban and community levels using the timeline tool.
- Analyzing the main events and their effect on the recovery sustainability at the urban and community level.
- Extract recovery sustainable factors within the context of Belfast.
- Based on the extracted factors, review the context of the Syria case as preparation for a post-war recovery.

The conclusion of the paper consists of several questions defined along the reviewing process of the current practices in Syria.

3. Article Contents and Results

The article consists of three sections to pave the way for a comprehensive understanding of the interrelation of the political process and urban intervention in Belfast. The article helps to understand the role of urban intervention in the case of Belfast, which is used to manage the conflict instead of peacebuilding. Then, it is followed by two sections that reflect on what can be learnt from this case study based on the “Venice charter” for the post-conflict reconstruction of Syria’s urban intervention.

The Belfast case study sections include:

- Background of Belfast Civil War: Provide a scan of the history of Northern Ireland, how it started and the development of the city of Belfast until the day of Good Friday; this chapter sheds light on the historical root causes of the conflict.
- Peace Design Process: Review of the Good Friday Agreement and all related agreements that were essential to the start of the peace process, as well as presenting the political architecture that ensured the implementation of the peace agreement articles.
- Belfast City Recovery Journey: This section sheds light on the urban intervention, at the policy and project levels, through a description of the current status quo of Belfast city, that consists of peace lines, regeneration projects and barriers. It revises Belfast’s vision and the implication of this vision at the policy and project levels by centralizing

the development and the vision on the impartial areas and the city centre, presenting the monitoring tools of the peace process and ending with the current status quo after more than 20 years of intensive effort in the recovery of the city. This section ends with an analysis to understand the interrelation between politics and urban intervention shaping the city's status today.

The results and conclusion for the Syria sections include:

- Lessons To Syria (Based on the Venice Charter and Belfast Case Study): This section reflects on how the post-war reconstruction could be for Syria, based on the Venice Charter for post-war reconstruction and the Belfast case study. These lessons for Syria are discussed in the Venice Charter's article (architecture and urban planning). The chapter ends with a recommendation for Syria's post-war reconstruction based on the current context.
- Conclusion: The conclusion covers the lessons learnt that are captured from the whole chapters; some of these conclusions are designed as a set of questions that could be considered a continuation for this paper, to be explored in more depth and to come up with findings, guidelines and methods if possible.

4. Belfast Case Study

4.1. Background of the Belfast Civil War

Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland; it is a relatively new city. From a population and economic perspective, it is considered the most important city in the region [2,3]. To better understand the root causes of the conflict in Northern Ireland, the paper performed a history scan of the main events, ending with the Good Friday agreement, where the agreement is reviewed as is its implication in the following years until 2021. The history scan considered the following main categories Figure 2, according to three perspectives: changing of control, a significant development in the city and the main agreements.

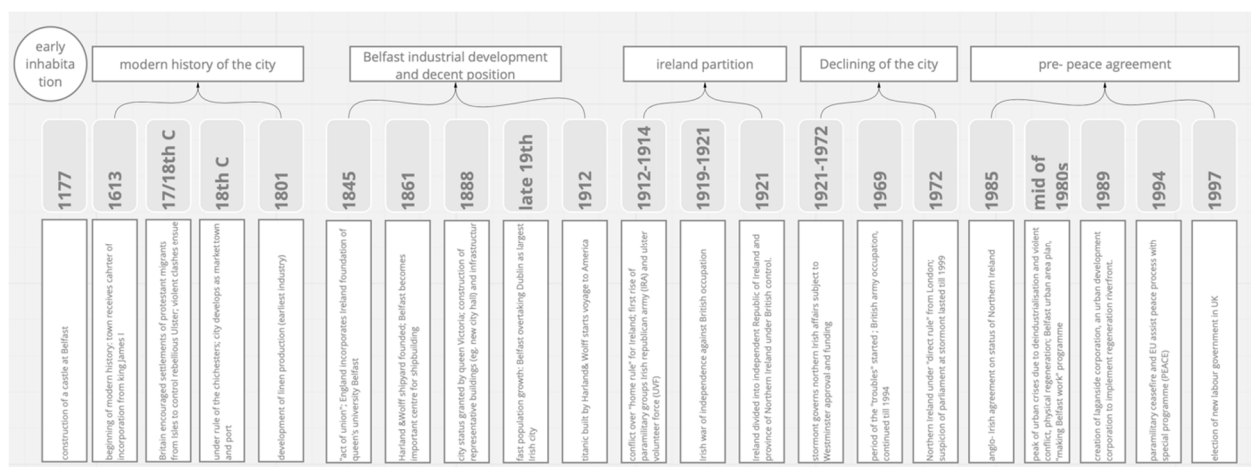


Figure 2. Background of the Belfast walls: main events.

- Early inhabitation and the modern history of the city: This phase paved the way for the "civilization and ethnic division" and is a root cause of the division of the city by introducing newcomers to an area (Protestants), where they settled within their walls and away from the resident Catholic people; they are perceived by Catholics as a "pocket of civilization" [4].
- Belfast industrial development and recent position: In this phase, considered as a cornerstone for "state division", there was a high need for workers, where Catholic moved inside the walls of Protestants and the interaction in the community gave rise to class divisions, because the Catholic community gathered in clusters [4].

- Ireland partition: As part of this phase, the “nationalist division” became the main shape of the state and religious division. Catholics claimed Irish independence, and Protestants called for unification with Great Britain [4].
- Decline of the city: At this point, the conflict surfaced and took a violent form with clear and defined conflict parties. The segregation of the communities became much clearer and increased during with the troubles in Northern Ireland in 1969 [4].
- Pre-peace agreement: To attempt to settle the conflict, several action projects in 1977–1985 reflected all shapes of the conflict in the spatial design of the city [4].

4.2. Peace Design Process

Several agreements were established until the peace process started without violence in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement was a starting point for peace implementation, even though the contents of the Good Friday Agreement were not put in place directly. There was a need for several complementary agreements and negotiations to shift the conflict between the conflicting parties to the political level, in addition, to establish several entities that could put the agreement into practice as part of a political architecture design.

Good Friday Agreement (1999): The agreement ensured power-sharing between political parties. It promised the city a better future, attracting investment development projects from the EU and UK. Despite this progress, peace lines still exist between sectarians, dividing communities and waiting for the conflict lying under the ashes [3]. It was signed by the British and Irish governments and the major political parties in Northern Ireland. One of the significant points in the agreement established that Northern Ireland is part of the UK. The reunion with the rest of Ireland was possible through a majority vote in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The agreement contributed to the transference of authority from the UK to a Belfast parliament, which helped in abolishing weapons of fighting groups and joining political process, which resulted in a noticeable reduction in violence [3].

Complementary agreements: There was a need for several complementary agreements and negotiations to shift the conflict from the conflicting parties to the political level: (1) The St. Andrews Agreement (2006) and (2) The Hillsborough Agreement (2010).

Political Architecture: As part of the peace agreement (Good Friday), different entities and structures were developed to ensure the implementation of the peace agreement. The power-sharing between the conflicting parties was the guiding principle for this architecture as well as activating the role of different sectors in peace agreement implementation and ensuring their involvement in the process [5,6]. Three bodies that were created include (1) The Northern Ireland Assembly, (2) North–South and East–West, and (3) Equality And Human Rights Commission.

4.2.1. Current Status Quo of the Peace Agreement

Complementary (Initiative/Agreement): There were several events that led to ensuring the peace agreement’s survival and the continuation of the peace process, such as the 2013 Haass Initiative, the 2014 Stormont House Agreement and the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement [7]. Those complementarity initiatives and agreements supported the peace process procedures. Still, they did not deal with the root causes of the conflict [7–9], such as the division in the city at the community and political levels and the lack of trust among them.

Crises in the Peace Process: The political instability led to reviving the unrest and violence in the city; this event started in 2017 and was followed by a series of events, ending with the return of the violence in 2021. The following are the events and their sequences [7,9,10]: (1) March 2017 early (unexpected) Assembly Elections, (2) re-establishing of the government in 2019, (3) leadership crisis in April 2021, and (4) the return of violence in March–April 2021.

Ongoing Challenges: More than 20 years after the signing of the peace agreement, there are various levels of achievement, such as establishing the democratic power-sharing

institution, decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, policing, and security normalization and human rights and equality [7]. However, the peace process is facing several ongoing challenges, such as sectarian divisions, dealing with the past, the paramilitary at the local level, and economic development and equal opportunities. In addition to Brexit influencing the power-sharing dynamics between the conflicted communities and related parties, the USA has an ongoing concern by supporting the Northern Ireland peace process and has noticeable mutual economic benefits through the city's main events. Considering the external and internal contexts, starting with the Good Friday Agreement through to Brexit to the present day, to understand the trends and causes of those events and discuss the possible way to deal with them, this analysis emphasizes the importance of focusing on peace as a long-term goal that needs effort and continuity to highlight that peace is a journey, not an objective that can be easily reached. It needs to be part of all city dynamics aspects; more specifically, the paper focuses on the urban planning and architecture's role in sustaining peace.

4.2.2. Belfast Status Quo When the Peace Agreement Was Signed

Peace Lines or Peace Walls: From 1969 to this day, even though the peace agreement took place in 1998, there is still a part of those peace walls that exist. The purpose of the peace line is to separate the two opposing parties and related communities that are in religious, nationalist and ethnic conflict [4]. The size of the walls varies; the largest is 12 m in height with 1.6 km width, and the smallest is 3 m in height with 30 m width. The walls are not fully closed and do not surround the areas; some have a gate controlled by the police or residents [1]. Recently, artists painted the walls with graffiti representing belonging and the identities of the conflict parties, with defined colours and flags for each. These graffiti are a sign of the ongoing conflict that has now taken cultural shape, and it is now as a tourist attraction [4]. The plan to remove all peace walls by 2023 seems unlikely to be achieved.

Regeneration Projects: There was a considerable lack of trust in public authorities, but still, in the mid of what was called "the Troubles time", several regeneration projects started in 1977, which paved the way for the development of the city. At the same time, the urban development participated in more division at the urban and social fabric levels [11]. Despite the excellent quality of those projects, they are widening the mistrust gap with the authorities because the projects structured new social classes and served the wealthiest people in the city. The redevelopment project started in 1977 aimed to solve and deal with housing problems. In 1996, another project started on "visioning the city" for the upcoming 25 years (for details, see City Vision Section). The focus of those projects was to work on neutral areas and the economic development of the city [12], envisioning a detailed master plan in 2004 that aimed to achieve this vision by transferring the city "from decline to revival" [13].

In 2020, the process was followed by the launch of the local development plan (2020–2035), which focuses on the development of the centres in the city at different levels, and it will ultimately create more opportunities for the city to play an active role in its economic growth. Additionally, it focuses on the following areas: city centres, district centres, local centres and neighbourhoods centres [11–14].

Hidden Barriers: The results of the regeneration projects led by the government ensured the restricted movement of vehicles and pedestrians to provide a more secure, enclosed and defensive environment for the residential areas. The designs were influenced by political and military authorities under the name of social renewal projects, because those projects implemented in the period of the pre-peace agreement were part of a trust-building exercise to solve the housing problem and improve the living conditions of the houses that were categorized as unfit for living, but security and defensive mechanisms influenced all programs and projects. A means to ensure security among the conflicted communities was developed, where there was a confidential committee working in a hidden way in parallel to all development and housing programs. Regeneration and

urban development interventions legitimized and even ensured the divisions between the communities. The mental maps of where one can move in the city still limit and guide people's movements and decisions of going to certain places and using services located in specific areas. These mental maps came from the violent accidents during the conflict, which most people still hold in their memory, and thus do not feel comfortable crossing those lines.

"It's not a wall, it's a silent wall . . . What would you call a wall that's there, but not there? . . . It used to be that you couldn't walk down to the turn [beyond the traffic island.] It was just a no-no. You can do it now. I'm going to the wee butchers now up at the turn of the road. I'm up here 30 years, and I only started going there just before Christmas. That's something I wouldn't have done before." [11]

Physical Barriers Among The Communities: Within the community, barriers developed by using architectural and urban designs Figures 3 and 4, whereas as part of the housing program that took place from 1977 to 1985, open-ended streets were replaced with new close-ended roads Figure 5, which severed the connection of neighbourhoods in within the same community as well. This practice was part of an architectural and urban trend at that time that emphasized the privacy and local ownership of the public spaces, but designers have also added to it to fit within the security concerns in Belfast, as can be seen from the testimonies of the architects and urban designers who participated in the design of these neighbourhoods.



Figure 3. Separation of Catholic housing from Protestant housing [11].



Figure 4. Industrial estate established to separate Catholic from Protestant housing [11].

"We tried to make a clear divide between pedestrians and cars, trying to make areas much more secure and controlled for the residents, to try and give people privacy and security." [12] Figure 6

"We tried to break the areas down and make them much more private for those that lived there. We built quite crude ways, building walls here and here to stop traffic and through-movement and give the folks that lived here more ownership. That certainly was

the theme. The design thinking around these redevelopment areas was how do you move back to something that gives local people control, and I suppose, keeps those that aren't from the area out." [11]



Figure 5. House in the centre of the picture built in the middle of a former street [11].



Figure 6. Cars cannot cross neighbourhoods for security reasons [11].

Urban spatial arrangements at the neighbourhood level prevented any chance of daily natural meetings among residents. The same is true for the residential passages, which were disassembled into fragmented unconnected paths that were just opened to the residents of the quarters.

4.2.3. Belfast Vision

As part of the agreement preparation, work on envisioning Belfast started in 1994. A committee from all sectors was established to perform a broad consultation work to envision the city within 25 years. The development steps toward peacebuilding released the energy towards working on the city development at the economic level. The vision aimed to cover different sectors under a widened umbrella vision of a connected and mutual city. The vision's concept focused on economic development that encourages the connection of and mutual profit for all actors and builds on common areas among them [12].

For this reason, they developed a set of criteria needed to be in place to achieve the vision and deal with the current conflict context and dynamics, to ensure the competencies that support economic development and, at the same time, to deal with the community's division. Developing the vision is centred on encouraging creativity, which will help to boost the city and be a considerable step forward in its development process. The initial idea to ensure originality within the highly conflicted and polarized community was to work on the neutral (in-between) areas, which raises the question of how will neutral spaces manage division problems and support the development of the city centre. In addition, the other question raised as part of the visioning related to leadership, that is, who will lead the process and the importance of the leadership role to ensure the long-term implementation of this vision. Additionally, what are the circumstances that need to be in place to safeguard the influential role of the renewal leadership? The importance of building a broader partnership and participatory approach with the community and

activists is also acknowledged, where the urban problem cannot be solved without a more comprehensive partnership network.

In conclusion, the vision focuses on developing and preserving the existing local business and internal investment, while opening up to the broader market and supporting community-based enterprises and the social economy [12]. It aims to ensure the diverse role of the city centre and have the full awareness that democracy is an essential element of urban development [12].

4.2.4. Belfast Urban Recovery Policies

Urban policies, as defined by the Good Friday Agreement, must be impartial, not reflect or be biased toward any conflicting parties, and protect people's land and property, predominantly those of the Catholic minority [1]. The policies developed to achieve specific aims are aligned with the peace agreement, whereas the executive plans and projects diverted the original policies' aims from their direction, as shown in the Table 1 below [15].

Table 1. Designed policies vs. implemented projects.

Policies	Plans and Projects
Encouraging the increase in residential population in Belfast city centre	Planning provided about three times more hectares for business use in the city centre compared to residential use
The growth of housing has been set as an indicator of the city centre	Few projects implemented in the city centre with mixed use to encourage housing
Develop public transportation to enhance the connection between the different areas and for all people	No new routes were designed and implemented to connect the west to the north of Belfast
Develop a comprehensive regional transportation network for vehicles and cyclists	Only adding to what already exists without reinforcing the missed connection
Ensuring balanced opportunities for economic development	The high rent values for offices in the centre do not encourage newly created creative businesses to move to the city centre
New urban areas should respect the surrounding context	Bedford Street is located in a historical area and does not respect its surrounding
Improve living conditions of the already existing housing	No funds were allocated for this purpose

4.2.5. Belfast City Centre as an Impartial Area for Development

The aims were to focus on the impartial areas for development and recovery to create a shared space for people to meet and interact, shift the focus from the comprehensive approach and the deepened divided community, and just design areas for them to meet by keeping the divisions and dealing with it. This helped to reduce conflict for over two decades, but it could not manage to unite the city and the community [1]. At the exact time, the current policies focus on connecting people to the city centre and public services, which is essential. However, economic development needs to be aligned with healthier social relationships that lead to thinking more about the connection between communities. Visible and invisible barriers must be tackled compressively at all levels, city centres and among communities.

5. Results (Connecting the Dots between the Peace Process and Urban Interventions)

This section provides a multidimensional presentation of the Northern Ireland peace process and Belfast city more specifically. In conclusion, with the need to zoom out and rethink the connection between all working areas of the peace process, Figure 7 shows the areas that have been covered in this section: (1) the political process (in green), (2) external influence (in purple), (3) urban intervention (in red) and the monitoring process that reflects

community participation (in yellow). The lack of interaction between those areas created the current status quo, consisting of sectarian division, the paramilitary at the local level, and a lack of economic development and equal opportunities.

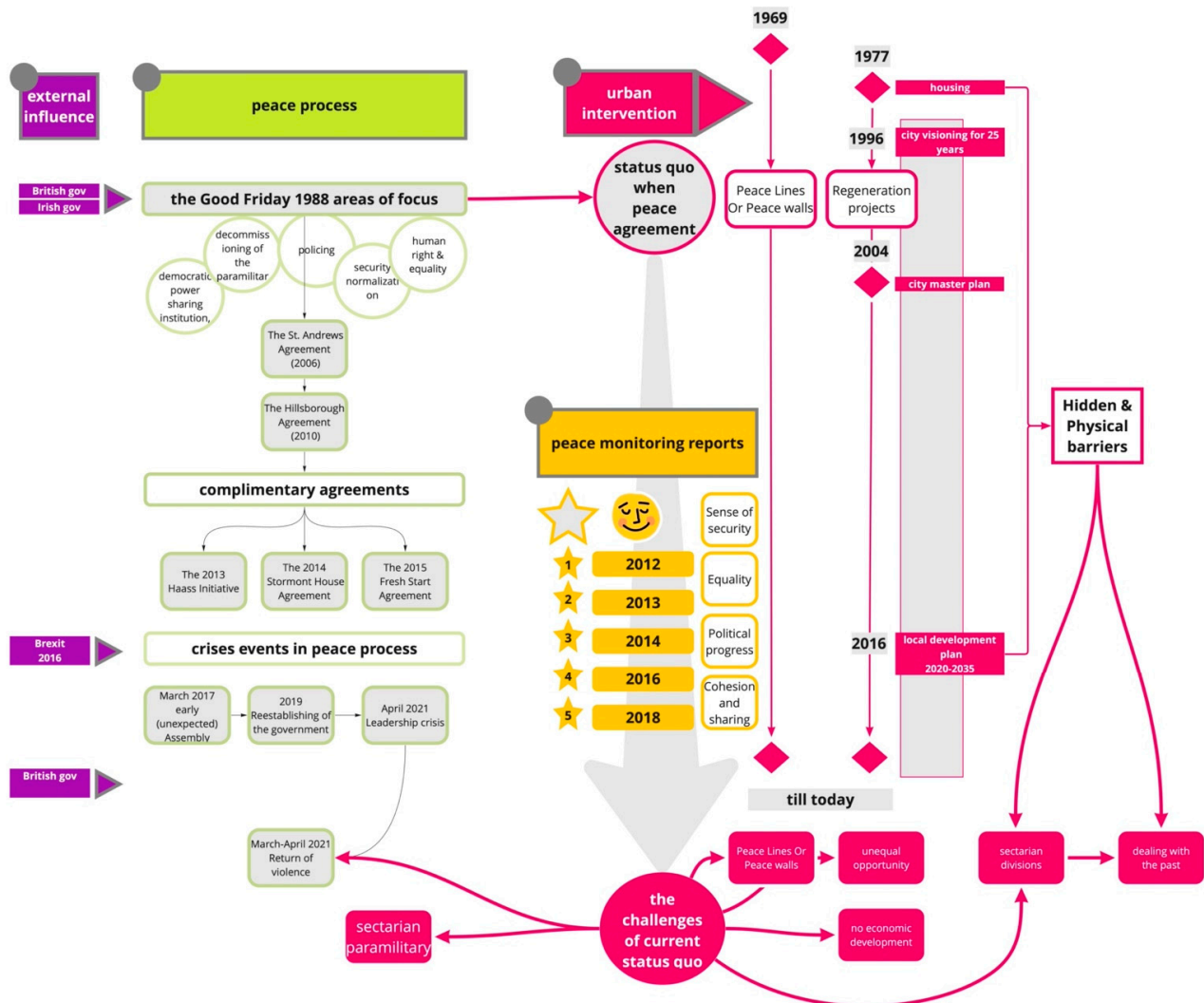


Figure 7. Connecting the dots of the Belfast recovery journey.

The figure shows that peace is achieved at the political level without ensuring its application across all stages at the urban/local level. It is a peace that keeps the community on standby, ready to revive the conflict. Even when the peace agreement was signed and implemented, the community were not prepared and did not go through the process at the urban/ local level to move toward peace. They have been waiting for the worst to come, where divisions between the conflicting communities stayed in place and were reinforced by urban policies and interventions [16]. We can also see that the transfer of the sectarian tension from violence to the political forum was essential but not enough for sustainable peace.

In contrast, the divisions at the urban level increased and interaction areas decreased, with the number of peace walls increasing. The process did not manage to achieve an integrated and built-in change at the community level. Urban demographic changes, the existence of the peace wall, as well as the empty centres and hidden barriers emphasize the idea that peace is a more complex issue and beyond the process defined by the international community.

Peace agreement partners and the external connection of these parties helped to root the conflict and transferred it to other levels, with a high risk of return to violence. They empowered the conflicting parties with financial tools and legitimized their position to lead the recovery process when the process could not support the rise of other small political parties.

How could the peace process include urban interventions? Can peace-oriented urban interventions play a role in changing the power dynamics to extend beyond the conflict actors and open the floor for peace actors from the community level supported by urban policies and interventions? What needs to be conducted differently as part of the peace process journey in the emphasis on the critical role of urban intervention?

From the review, it was clear that urban interventions played, at least, a negative role, if not harmful, and could not participate in managing the sectarian division; urban interventions are never impartial.

6. Discussion (Lessons Learnt and Applied to Syria Based on the Venice Charter and Belfast Case Study)

6.1. Factors for Sustainable Peace

The challenges that hinder Belfast's sustainable peace are (1) the mentality seen in the existence of physical and hidden barriers between the conflicted communities; (2) urban visions and interventions that do not deal with the root causes of the conflict, which is seen in the implemented generation projects and the vision of the city; and (3) the conflict actors that are the same as those who control people's daily life and urban policy, which is seen on the governance structure and the misuse of the urban policy.

For sustainable peace, three main factors are needed based on:

- A general theory is that the relationship between the political process and the urban/local practices must be coordinated and linked. This relationship is the only way that decisions can be transferred to local people's daily lives [17]. This connection deals with the challenges that hinder sustainable peace in Belfast by changing people's mentality, dealing with the root causes of the conflict and including peace actors in the process.
- The Venice charter was launched to present a proposed guideline for post-war reconstruction based on the Syrian conflict. It aims to be applicable in any other similar context as well. The charter covers seven focus areas for post-conflict reconstruction: one is the "urban planning and architecture", which consists of three articles on (1) the role of the architect, (2) grassroots facilitators and (3) a master plan [16].

The factors assume that the connection between urban intervention and the political peace process must be "based on the Belfast case analysis", and the most significant positive impact that could be achieved out of this connection was inspired by the Venice charter. The three factors complement each other and are summarized in the following:

- The early connection between the political process and the urban/ local interventions will pave the way for gradual transition at the community level. Changes need time, but they will not happen without focused, planned actions that can deal with people's mentality, fostering new actors and creating a quick win reality on the ground. People living in a diverse neighbourhood show more openness and less racial attitudes toward others from different backgrounds [18]. While working on peacebuilding, we need to spotlight such practices, plan for the gradual transition to diverse neighbourhoods and keep in mind the flexibility and porosity of urban interventions.
- It is essential to include urban planners and architects in the early stage of the peace-building process because politics is the opposite of building bridges. The daily issues of people's lives are politicized and discussed based on differences and fears, not on the commonality and shared hopes and concerns. Urban intervention tools provide a space for including marginalized communities and dealing with the underlying root causes of the conflict [18].

- Opening spaces for discussion and sharing, away from the political actors, where the urban planning tools can play an essential role. The discussion of a master plan or a regeneration project with the community will provide a significant opportunity for interaction and meeting. It is a technical tool that can be used for peacebuilding and needs to be considered. The planning process is as critical as the final results of the urban interventions, and the urban planners can thus connect urban/local interventions with national politics [16,17].

6.2. Syria Context: Aleppo City (Architecture and Urban Planning)

The review is conducted from an architecture and urban planning perspective and related factors for sustainable peace.

Pre-war urban planning and architecture: Visiting the context before the war to measure differences is essential. The Aleppo city council played a pioneering role, especially in the last ten years before the war. In 2003, it had its first four-year plan aligned with the country's fifth plan, which became a guiding document for the work of all administrative units. It is worth mentioning that it ensured the role of public and private organizations and NGOs in the city's development. In addition, the city council's role has been redefined from a service provider to a development agency [19].

From 2004–2010, the Aleppo city council developed a master plan for the city in close coordination with the Aleppo university of architecture. The master plan did not deal with class segregation between the east and the west part of the city; it dealt with them as two individual areas. In addition; the master plan did not deal with the unequal distribution of the services and did not build a connection in between the two-part of the city. Instead, the main character of the east part of the city is the location of the industrial area and cemeteries and vineyards spaces. The following Figure 8 are the listed objectives of Aleppo's master plan [18].

- Green atmosphere, sustainable clean air preserved by a conscious society
- Reaching a sustainable economically developed society
- Preserving the heritage and revive it to consolidate the individuals' belonging to the environmental and cultural surrounding
- Organizing illegal settlement to be well-served residential areas
- Preventing the emergence of new illegal settlements
- Ideal social and economical status for better life with identity

Figure 8. Master plan's objectives (source: Aleppo diverse open city) [19].

In addition, the informal settlement's objective, mainly located in the east part of the city Figure 9, focused on ensuring excellent and balanced services without dealing with class segregation and different opportunities related to this segregation. In keeping the division without providing interaction between the various communities [20], a rapid profile developed for those settlements for their better understanding settlements at the historical, social, economical, infrastructural, services and environmental levels, which is a good start. Still, it dealt with those areas away from the rest of the city, with no plans or vision put in place to ensure the interaction at all levels between the various groups in the city. During the development of Aleppo's master plan, a new law 15 was released in 2008, targeting the informal settlement to be developed by the real-estate developers. Still, there was a discussion on the importance of developing informal settlements without demolishing the social fabric of those areas.

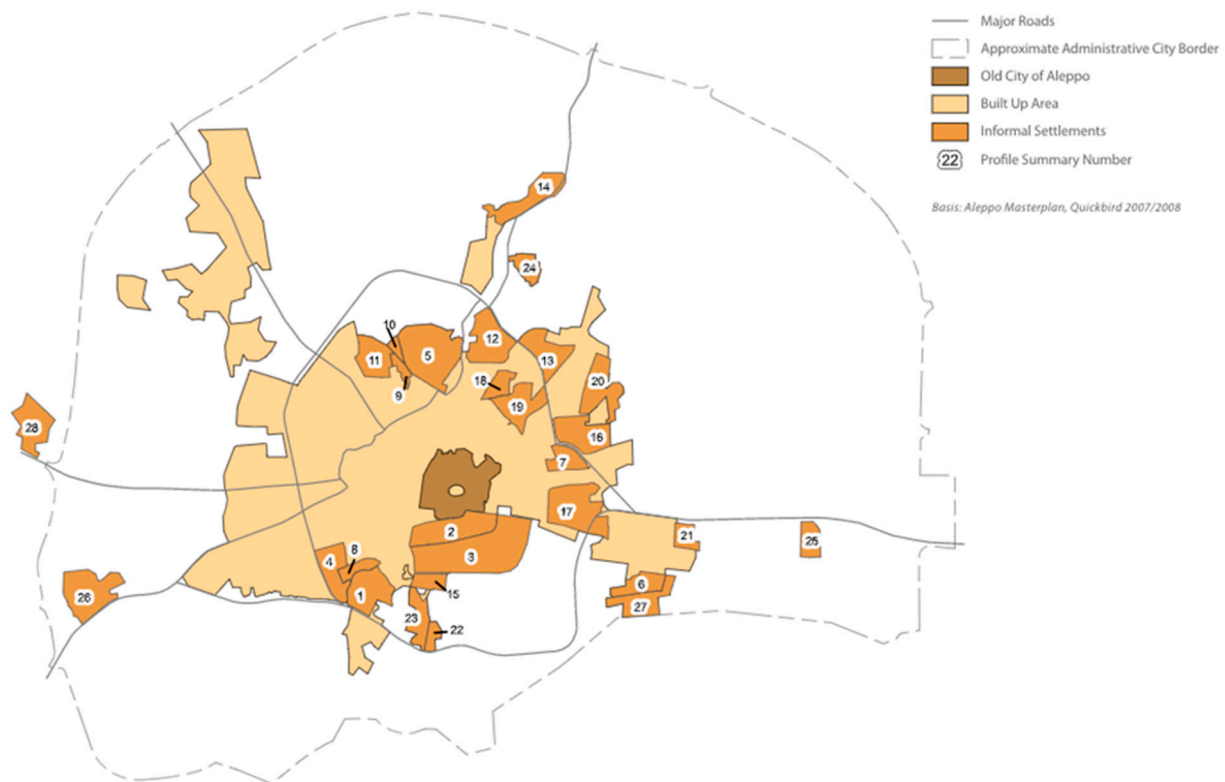


Figure 9. Aleppo informal settlement map [20].

Even as part of the city development strategy, to last for 15 years until 2025, the vision developed for the city is very ambitious and long, consisting of about 500 words, where just two lines of 27 words mention the connection between the east and west of the city.

“...Connecting East and West and linking the city with its surrounding historical landscape, it is the social interface for all of Aleppo’s citizens and contributes to their collective identity.” [18]

This work in Aleppo city development strategy raises the need for an integrated spatial plan of the city to ensure the quality of the city and a participatory approach as a tool to ensure quality by reflecting people’s needs, hopes and concerns. It is designed to provide participation and involvement to a wide range of people in Aleppo city and the different partners from different sectors [20]. Most of the city’s local issues were raised and dealt with at the local municipality level. In conclusion, the city’s development strategy is considered a good start for the city’s development and raised critical issues that could be considered as root causes of the current conflict in the city. Unfortunately, there was no political will to take the theoretical work to action. At the end of 2010, the work stopped, and many in the team were arrested and under investigation.

During the war, urban planning and architecture: Aleppo city council returned to the service’s role with minimal resources and no partnerships. The sanction and start of the war pushed out international partners, such as the German agency of development and the European Union. Additionally, partners at the local level are not coordinated with the local administration because of the sanction as well, since the received funds must benefit the community directly. At the planning level, the central government in coordination with the Aleppo city council and the governor worked on releasing the developed master plan in 2012. At that time, the city was divided into the eastern part under the control of the opposition and the free army, and the western part was under a control regime. This division reflects the previous urban interventions’ behaviours, which reinforced the segregation between the east and west of the city, as well as being a result of the unequal service provisions to the eastern part of the city [21].

In late 2015, the regime regained control of the eastern part, and several laws and plans were developed and released as preparation for the reconstruction of the city, where almost a third of the city's population was displaced or were refugees in other countries. In addition, a number of real-estate developers aligned with the regime registered. This shows that the focus of the developed master plan in 2018 and the related laws 10/2018 and 23/2015 was to deal with and run the reconstruction work by closing the door of the city to just those who stayed and redistributing the resources and rights among the actors that are aligned with the regime.

Some efforts for Aleppo's recovery were conducted by the international organization and Syrian diaspora, where they documented the damages and designed scenarios for recovery, keeping in mind that the city went through a year of physical division between east and west. At present, there are no plans, visions or even documentation for the impact of this division at a social level. In addition, there are a few initiatives across Syria run by international organizations working on designing the post-recovery process for Syria by working with Syrian experts from all sectors and other capacity buildings to create a network of Syrian engineers and architects. All these efforts are disconnected from what is happening on the ground at the city level and do not influence the daily reality of people's lives.

In 2012, a political process started in Geneva. It included several meetings, either run by countries supporting the political parties or created to organize and unify the opposition, whilst other meetings were primarily for armed groups. In addition, several meetings for Syria did not include Syrians; in conclusion, these meetings did not lead to any political solutions.

In 2016, there was an explicit declaration from the European Union and countries called "friends of Syria" that they would not support funding reconstruction work without a political agreement as a tool to weaken the regime and support the just revolution of the Syrian people against the dictatorship. However, the political process worked hard to include Syrian people through civil society organizations in peace process platforms. Still, none of these efforts participated or affected people's daily life because the topics raised were generic and not applicable, and reconstruction is considered a forbidden topic. In addition, it is considered in those platforms that it is too early to discuss reconstruction, so there is no need to explore this topic in depth. However, in parallel, a good number of recovery projects are being conducted at the local level through local NGOs, with no experience and no coordination with local authorities. Additionally, there is no overall vision for the city's recovery.

Figure 10 shows that urban interventions are used as a political tool. The political process is disconnected from the actual development and changes happening at the urban/local level and emphasizes the idea that the urban cannot be separated from the political process. The reality now is: (1) a blocked and isolated political process, (2) the city is controlled by the central administration (regime) and work for the benefit of the regime aligned investors and (3) the city is facing division challenges as it is designed as a city for foreigners where its people's right are not upheld.

6.3. Recommendation for Syria's Post-War Reconstruction

The paper follows the same methodology for reflection based on the three factors for sustainable peace to list the recommendations based on the lessons learnt from the Belfast case study and the current context of Syria's Aleppo city.

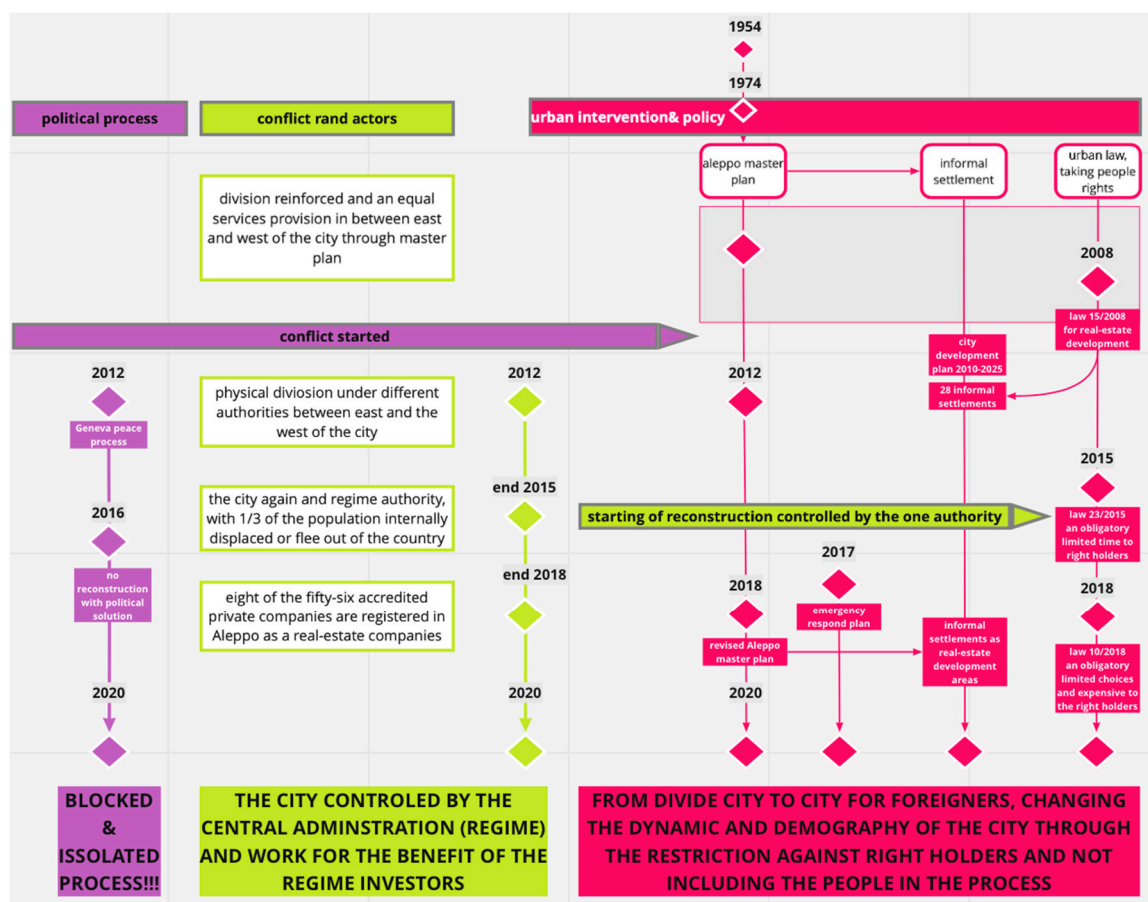


Figure 10. Urban intervention, the conflict and the political process.

The analysis shows that the connection between politics at the national and urban/local levels is essential for sustainable peace. In the Belfast case study, it was clear that urban interventions deepened the segregation between the conflicting communities; despite its good development in the political peace process, Belfast is still at risk of reverting to violence. In the Aleppo case study, it was clear that there is no progress at the political level, which is now blocked. The international community and the civil society hold the conflict and people's life (except for the relief work) until the international community pushes the regime to play an active role in developing a political solution. Still, at the same time, the regime is active at the local/urban level, where urban tools have been used to ensure the regime's power, remove people's rights, and change power dynamics and the city's character.

Three factors of sustainable peace include:

- The early connection between the political process and the urban/local interventions.
- Include urban planners and architects in the early stage of the peacebuilding/political process.
- Opening spaces for discussion and sharing, away from political actors by using urban planning tools.

These three factors and thinking of their role in peacebuilding raise the following questions:

- How can we ensure the inclusion of the urban intervention as part of the political/peace process in the early stage, since it is already used as a political tool (in the case of Aleppo) or influences the implementation of a political agreement (in the case of Belfast)?

- How does the international community (in the case of Aleppo) narrow and limit the urban intervention concept to the funding aspect? This limited or delayed the role of urban planners and architects until the achievement of a political agreement.
- Which spaces for discussion, away from political actors, can be established at the city level?

The unresolved conflict in Syria, which has been taking place for more than 11 years, is hiding more complicated upcoming conflicts, since the current approach focuses on the conflicting parties at the international and national levels and ignores the realities and changes happening at the local/urban level [19].

7. Conclusions

The Belfast case study and the timeline of the Belfast peace agreement in parallel with its urban intervention showed the close connection between peacebuilding and urban interventions; the main points are summarized as follows:

- Peace agreement design: Maintaining peace is of the same importance as peacebuilding, as it affects all the international and national context changes. Peace agreements are essential to stop violence by ensuring power-sharing. Still, it should pave the way for changing the power dynamics by setting an objective of developing the political life and supporting the rise of new parties that could deal with the conflict by minimizing the polarization between the communities and narrowing the lack of trust.
- How the peace agreement is designed defines the future. Using urban, cultural, and economic tools, will it normalize the conflict's status quo [11,22]? The critical role of the urban intervention needs to be in parallel with the peace process to ensure the practical implementation of urban justice, which is at the top of people's claims, Especially when there are no equal opportunities, unequal development, poverty, corruption and violence [23].
- Spatial spaces and hidden barriers: The city's division needs to be dealt with to help the community deal with their memory and, at the same time, find the way forward, working on urban regeneration without considering the root causes of the divisions and directed by conflict management and used as a tool for war. Thus, it will change the development opportunities of the city later on [22] as well as wasting resources because the divisions will still be there and take different shape and will be much more rooted and hard to deal with [4].
- These hidden barriers are considered a primary challenge for peacebuilding and other related recovery projects and programs; these hidden barriers influence the policies and the built environment, which raises the need to understand how this built environment affects peace and conflict. However, unfortunately, those hidden barriers are not considered a priority when the decision-makers and urban planners set policies and develop plans and programs for the city's development. These hidden barriers are the main obstacle to their plans and aims for developing the city. There is a need to pay attention to these barriers, which could appear as an honest urban component, such as a street, green areas or even a market centre.
- "Architecture produces positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the actual practice of people in exercising their freedom" [11].
- Understanding the power structure as part of the urban intervention and dealing with it as part of the recovery projects is essential to ensure sustainable peacebuilding and comprehensive development. Urban policies are a tool for peacebuilding and conflict at the same time. Additionally, we need to be careful that we are not paving the way for the upcoming conflict by unequal application of the urban policy that provides more benefits to one group than another [1].
- Working on developing impartial spaces that might be helpful for a short time but will not provide sustainable peacebuilding and will not participate in dealing with the root causes of the conflict. The impartiality of post-conflict urban development and

recovery and the unequal distribution of the resources might lead to other unforeseen conflicts. Sometimes, the need is to focus on the most affected community.

- Post-conflict urban recovery is sensitive because it might establish or emphasize a particular power structure. One of the political actors could use it to ensure their control over the city's development and widen its legitimacy.
- Understanding the different needs of each ethnic and cultural group is essential in designing urban policies and interventions. The needs could be moral (psychological) or physical, which will help to define the criteria for the peaceful coexistence of the different groups and develop a common identity that includes and respects all smaller identities. All these aspects need to be discussed as part of urban policy and recovery interventions [1,24].

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