



The Effects of Urban Conflict & the Role of Community-Based Initiatives in Baghdad

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Urban Planning
Graduate School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation
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May 09, 2014

ABSTRACT

The invasion of Iraq by America and its allies in 2003 represented a transformation for the country's capital city, Baghdad. This conflict was particularly urban, maintained a neo-liberal agenda to change the political and economic structures, and resulted in strong divisive security measures being implemented throughout the city, thus altering the urban environment. The changes to the city created significant challenges for Baghdad's residents - they became isolated, segregated, and often immobile. Consequently, many of their social and economic networks have been severed. While governmental plans for redevelopment have been mired in corruption and stalled implementation, several community-based initiatives have emerged which seem to transcend and/or address the urban challenges that Baghdadis face. These initiatives will be explored through case studies in terms of their network structures, successes, limitations, and potential to contribute to the redevelopment of Baghdad. It is evident, furthermore, that planners have an important role in identifying these initiatives, analyzing them to illuminate successful paths for both sustainability and growth, and understanding the stakeholders who are part of the universe the initiatives operate in for beneficial partnerships and stronger networks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and feedback of my Advisor, Professor Clara Irazábal, my Reader, Professor Amale Andraos, and my classmates and friends, Fatema ALZeera, Shraddha Ramani, and Yiwen Chen.

I would like to extend a special thank you to Professor Ghada ALSilq of the Department of Architecture at the University of Baghdad, Bilal Ghalib of Gemsy, Layla Shaikley at MIT, and the leaders/founders of the initiatives who put in the time and consideration to answer my questions and inform my work.

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Cover image source: CS Monitor

INTRODUCTION

Baghdad was once a highly diverse city of exchange, social connection, interaction, and integration. By the time of the 2003 invasion by the United States, Baghdad and Iraq had been subject to years of war and sanctions. Consequently, its economy became inwardly oriented and underdeveloped. However, the Iraq War marked a significant turning point for Baghdad because the conflict was a particularly urban one, which took place in Baghdad's streets.

The invasion forces intended to turn Iraq's economy into a free-market, capitalist model for the Middle East such that international private firms could invest in and profit from the political and economic change as well as Iraq's oil resources. This intention was not immediately realized due to the insecurity and instability which resulted from the invasion. Investors were reluctant to participate in Iraq's economy and, instead, the informal economy grew and GDP shrank.

In an effort to remedy this and gain control of Baghdad and, thus, its economy, US military policy began to implement strong security measures, including the walling of several of Baghdad's neighborhoods, despite the protests and disapproval of many residents. The walls are one of a list of ways in which conflict and military policy have altered the urban landscape of Baghdad in order to take control of the city and which can be described as evidence of conflict urbanism. These short and long term urban changes have come with significant social and economic change,

especially the extreme segregation of Baghdad's neighborhoods. The major consequences of conflict urbanism on Baghdadi residents have therefore been their physical and socio-economic isolation and reduced access to and participation in the city and its functions.

Several attempts at reconstruction and new urban plans have been made, but many have stalled because of low quality practices evident in their implementation, corruption, and continued instability; Baghdad's infrastructure thus remains severely limited. Furthermore, it is difficult to accept the contradiction present in any dependence on redevelopment plans implemented by the municipality and/or by international organizations who are implicated in the division and alteration of Baghdad, especially considering the continued significant presence of the US in the city's Green Zone. In any case, the goals of the municipality and the national government for redevelopment in Baghdad do not necessarily match up with residents' needs. The prime example of this disconnect is in the political approach to security, the social costs of which are considered worthwhile by policy makers but too great to bear by residents.

There is an argument to be made, therefore, to approach the challenges created by conflict urbanism from amongst Baghdadi citizenry through community-based and crowd-sourced initiatives. These groups effectively transcend the divisions which conflict has rendered in the city's social fabric by reconnecting residents

regardless of ethnicity or religion and allowing them to participate in the social redevelopment of Baghdad, share resources and contribute human capital. If they can survive the strong political forces of division, they may also be the most promising route to deeper, sustainable security and a more stable, diversified economy in Baghdad as they slowly, but surely rebuild the networks which Baghdad was once based on and focus on crowd-sourced education and project development. Planning can play an instrumental role in both identifying what initiatives need for success and sustainability as well as in charting pathways through which their members can turn around and use what they have gained through participation in such networks to then contribute to the redevelopment of Baghdad.

This thesis will use three case studies to illustrate this alternative to redevelopment in Baghdad as they currently exist. It is evident from the case studies that community-based initiatives successfully build strong networks and fill gaps in Baghdad's physical, social, and economic infrastructure for their target demographics. As such, they are also clearly limited in terms of addressing the needs of more varied groups (i.e., people from different age groups, economic class, and educational status). Finally this thesis will recommend methods and considerations for the growth, strengthening, and support of community-based initiatives along the lines of replicability/scalability and from the perspectives of different stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

Baghdad, Pre-Conflict Socioeconomic Diversity

Since ancient civilizations lived in a land called Mesopotamia, now modern-day Iraq, the region has been “one of the most religiously and ethnically diverse societies in the Middle East” (Blake, 2014, People). Besides Arabs, there have historically been ethnic communities of Turks, Turkmen, Assyrians, Lur, and Armenians in addition to the large northern region of predominantly Kurdish Iraqis. Religions have also always been varied, including both Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, Mandaean, Jews, and Baha’is. (Blake, 2014, People) The Iraqi nationality is directly related to and often defined by the religious and ethnic mix of its people. However, this mix has been diluted and seriously threatened as a result of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, a point which will be explored further in following sections of this paper.

As the capital of Iraq and “...

the country’s political, economic, and communications hub” (Blake, 2014, People), Baghdad has always attracted members of all of these communities. Furthermore, Baghdad’s varied communities often lived side by side. “Baghdad was once a city where Sunni, Shiite and Christian lived side by side, conscious that they belonged to different sects but not frightened of one another” (Cockburn, 2013). Although the city’s people were different, they were not always differentiated - at least not in everyday life.

The rich social diversity of Baghdad contributed to the city’s economic diversity and intellectual wealth as well. Descriptions of the city at its social and economic height paint a picture of a highly interactive stage for the crossing of different beliefs, traditions, and values. “Baghdad is a multi-faith multi-ethnic city, of crowded markets, cafes, mosques, churches, temples, monuments and shrines for all faiths” (Zangana, 2010, p.

48). Indeed, the city’s markets and cafes reveal deep traditions of exchange and intellectual production. There are many historic markets such as those found in the Shorja neighborhood where Baghdadis could find all sorts of spices, foods, and goods. The centrality and reputations of such markets drew many people from all neighborhoods of the city to come together and interact. Al Mutanabbi Street, as the destination to shop for and discuss books, is a favorite example of the Baghdadi intellectual market (Abdul-Ahad, 2008). A contemporary magazine based in the Middle East describes the intellectual flow within the region, saying “[b]ooks are written in Cairo, published in Beirut and read in Baghdad” (Kalimat, 2011).

During times of political stability, Iraq’s economy did very well by international standards. The nationalization of oil gave the Iraqi government considerable resources to develop and grow the country. In fact, the government was able to quadruple oil revenues within 3 years and support Iraqi growth in various economic sectors such that “[b]y 1980 Iraq had the second largest economy in the Arab world...and had developed a complex, centrally planned economy dominated by the state” (Blake, 2014, Economy).

Baghdad, Conflict & the Turning Point

Since 1980, Iraq has suffered some sort of conflict, whether by war or economic sanctions. Iraq’s society and economy slowly regressed over this period such

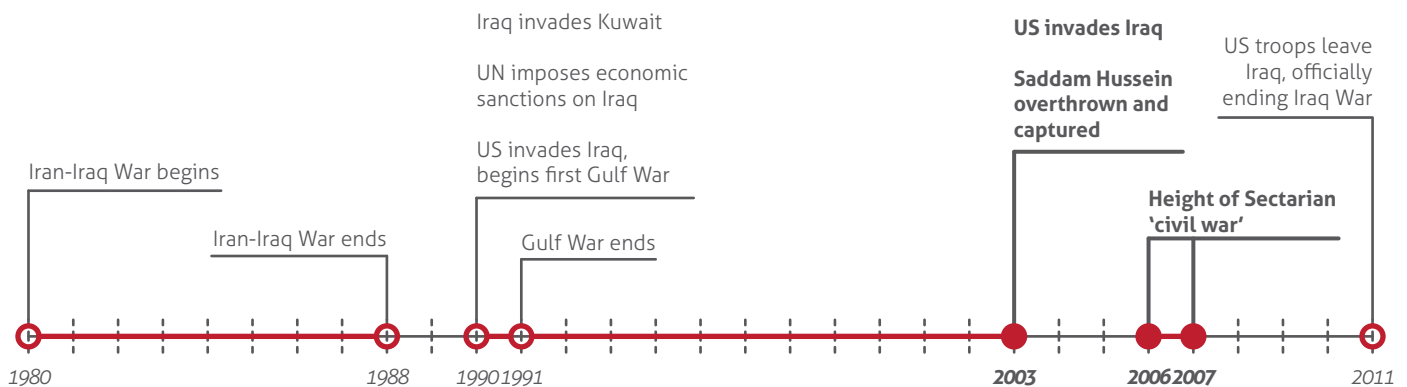


The main gate of the University of Baghdad.

Image source: Sada Facebook page

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Fig. 1 Iraqi Conflict Timeline



that, by the time of the American invasion in 2003, Iraq's economy became highly inward-looking. Many of the achievements gained during Iraq's period of growth described above were lost as the infrastructure that was built deteriorated and the government could no longer take full advantage of its oil resources. During this time, GDP dropped significantly and the effects changed people's lives and reduced the former vibrancy of Baghdad and its local markets. "[M]ost Iraqi cities had lost their historic economic centers of gravity," and their residents could not make a living wage and were thus stuck in poverty (Gregory, 2011, p. 7). The Iraqi economy was not productive - it had lost the ability to trade, could not export its resources, had lost any reliable infrastructure, and could neither find nor educate skilled workers. Despite all of this, the government was able to maintain strict political control of the country and it may even be argued that the effects of conflict and sanctions actually worked to "further [consolidate] power in the hands of the government" (Blake, 2014, Government and society).

This is the picture of Iraq at the time of the invasion by the US - economically weak, deteriorating, and politically stagnant.

The invasion of Iraq by the US and its allies in 2003 was not just another in a list of conflicts. It represents a crucial turning point in the history of Iraq for several reasons. First, this war was a particularly urban war, both relative to Iraq's previous conflicts and in the general history of warfare. The front lines were in the city streets and Baghdad, as the capital of Iraq and seat of Saddam Hussein's government, was the primary strategic target to achieving victory. Civilians were very directly affected - their daily lives were altered, school and work were suspended, millions migrated and almost as many were injured or killed (Gregory, 2006, p. 12). Furthermore, the invading forces were intent on implementing a neo-liberal agenda (Gregory, 2011) by transforming Iraq's political system from a dictatorship to a democracy and its economy to a free market model in order to profit off of private investment in the country's reconstruction (Looney, 2006, p.

991). Baghdadi blogger Riverbend expresses the reality she sees daily in her home city, saying "...this war is about oil but it is also about huge corporations that are going to make billions off reconstructing what was damaged during this war" (as cited in Gregory, 2011, p. 1). The invasion was furthermore motivated by interventionist strategy, using the perspective that "[d]emocracy and human rights could be missile-delivered as the by-product of removing Saddam Hussein" (Strawson & Collins, 2012, p. 311).

However, political and economic transformations were hindered by the instability which followed the overthrow of the Iraqi government. An insurgency made up of different groups had formed and prevented security in Baghdad. Consequently, investor confidence was undermined, "preventing market-driven mechanisms from playing their anticipated role" (Looney, 2006, p. 991). These challenges were met with a hasty strategy from the Coalition Provisional Authority, a temporary governing body appointed by the US, in the form of "...liberal reforms [which] did little to improve conditions for Iraqis or

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calm a growing insurgency” (Blake, 2014, Economy). The priority of the invading coalition then was to gain control over the city and reduce instability through strategies of division. The concept of “ethno-sectarianism” was thus created “as a framework for managing Iraqi political society...[in which] separation would block any collective nationalist movement that could otherwise threaten the neo-liberal project” (Gregory, 2011, p. 5). Policies of division and segregation were implemented throughout Baghdad based on this concept.

Ethno-sectarianism would take over the city and culminate in the 2006-07 sectarian civil war, which was the high point of violence in Baghdad (Iraq Body Count). It is during this time that the most dramatic movement toward the segregation of the city would occur. As people living in mixed neighborhoods felt threatened by violence due to ethnic cleansing, they chose to move to more homogenous areas. During this time, the American military increased the number of troops in Baghdad in a strategy known as the surge. Although the strategists who implemented the surge credit it with reducing violence, there is evidence to show that changes in levels of violence in Baghdad were actually due to a cycle in which segregation promoted violence, which furthered segregation, which increased violence until the city was nearly fully segregated such that people did not have the motivation to instigate violence for ethnic cleansing any longer.

The demography of Baghdad has changed drastically over this very short period of time as a result of the strong force of segregation and, inevitably, this has had a huge impact on the pre-conflict socio-economic dynamics which were so connected to the city’s diversity. It is interesting to note that those dynamics were altered around new definitions of identity in Baghdad. Derek Gregory (2006, p. 14) asserts that the Sunni/Shia dichotomy “is an essentialist identity on a complex cultural-historical field” and “violence...has been a significant means of manufacturing identity in Baghdad” more than it is a “pure expression of sectarian affiliation.”

Furthermore, the city-wide control policies are crucial in setting the trajectory of the development of Baghdad and the potential for real democratisation. As such,

the long term implications of the divisive actions taken in the city cannot be overemphasized. Scott A. Bollens (2008, p. 1259) has found that, “[a]midst democratisation, urban policies can articulate early in political transitions new city-building logics and expectations regarding how private-power and public interest, and ethnic interests and city-wide needs, are to interact under a new regime.” Recently in Baghdad, urban policies that have been implemented are setting negative logics and expectations; the very process of transition to democracy, therefore, may “severely restrict and weaken the eventual democratic state” (Bollens, 2008, p. 1256), indicating a bleak future for Baghdad’s governance and for the meaningful participation of its residents in political and development processes.



The damage wrought by sectarian violence.
Image source: Mohammed Ameen, Reuters

Fig. 2 Cycle of Violence & Segregation



EFFECTS OF CONFLICT

Urban Landscape

As described earlier, the conflicts Iraq has suffered since 2003 have been particularly urban. As such, their effects manifest in the urban environment of Baghdad and directly affect the daily experience of Baghdad's residents. Furthermore, the effects of conflict were primarily the result of military and political strategy, which intentionally changed the city in order to gain control. The most prevalent urban control strategies included the walling of volatile neighborhoods, checkpoints in conjunction with walls and throughout Baghdad's roads, and the creation of the Green Zone. All of these strategies are exclusionary, promote segregation and division among Baghdadi people, and reduce mobility in and access to the city - in other words, they were the catalysts for ethno-sectarianism.

Urban walls come in two basic forms: the high blast walls, which are made of 12-20 foot high concrete blocks weighing 14,000 pounds, and the shorter "Jersey" barriers of the type often used as highway dividers in the US (Zangana, 2010, p. 43). At the height of their implementation during the surge, coalition forces had "erected more than 3,000 individual sections of concrete blast walls throughout the city" (Zangana, 2010, p. 43). Military strategists claim that the walling of neighborhoods is effective at reducing violence essentially by the isolation of volatile areas such that surveillance can be comprehensive and restrictive (Kilcullen, 2007). Former Chief Strategist to the US State Department David Kilcullen

(2007) describes their effectiveness according to three parameters: by restricting the entry of terrorists into the area, restricting terrorists' ability to attack from the area, and protecting the residents of the area from retaliation by outside terrorists. Therefore, they have been implemented for the extreme control of specific neighborhoods as a way to address the very high violence associated with the sectarian civil war. Most of the walls were built around Sunni neighborhoods, with the obvious and significant effect of "reinforc[ing] the major ethno-sectarian fault lines" (Gregory, 2006, p. 34). The neighborhood of Adhamiya stands out as being the first to receive this treatment and as a historically Sunni center within Baghdad which had become surrounded by majority Shia areas during the civil war. The argument for walling Adhamiya was to contain this highly volatile area from which insurgents and Al Qaeda were operating and carrying out violent attacks on Baghdad's Shia population.

In a way, this transformation of the city into dozens of highly controlled checkpoints, walls, and surveillance mechanisms works to temporarily prevent violence. This approach is certainly not sustainable, however, because Baghdad's citizens do not support it, deep resources are required to keep it going, and the city cannot fully function under such restrictions. "A short journey across the city can take hours with roads blocked off and numerous checkpoints" (Gregory, 2006, p.

36), which means that people are increasingly isolated in their gated neighborhoods, making it more difficult for them to get to school and work or to safely operate their shops and restaurants in areas where they may not be welcome. Especially "in the city's poorer districts, the air is still rife with tension...safety has not returned to the city in any lasting fashion. Military vehicles still lurk on every corner and murders and bombings strike" (Erickson, 2013). Clearly, the effect is some safety with the price of strong social and economic isolation and stagnation. Derek Gregory quotes journalist James Denselow, who commented that these "gated communities" are "'a systematic attempt to transfer the conflict into a deep freeze rather than address the root causes of violence'" (2006, p. 35).

Instead, the walls have negatively affected Baghdadi life in ways which have likely reduced potential for true structural change for safety and redevelopment. The city's social, economic, and physical flows have been interrupted for years. "Baghdad has been segmented by a maze of 'security walls' that has fundamentally altered the nature of Iraqi life, reinforcing the sectarian divisions that were foisted upon the country with the Anglo-American invasion and occupation" (Zangana, 2010, p. 41). Although policy makers and military strategists assert that the benefits of walling outweigh these repercussions, Baghdadi residents are acutely aware of the severance of their networks by the walls and the ways in which their lives and

homes will be negatively affected. The walls are thus commonly known amongst Baghdadis as occupation/hatred/sectarian/segregation walls (Zangana, 2010, p. 43). Ghaith Abdul-Ahad (2008), a journalist who grew up in Baghdad and emigrated, returns to visit Adhamiya and the Shia dominated neighborhood of Qahira on the other side of the highway. These neighborhoods are divided by the walls, creating a scene along the highway which "resembles the West Bank" (Abdul-Ahad, 2008). However, Abdul-Ahad interviews a resident of Qahira who lives near the wall and expresses dissatisfaction with the policy, going so far as to say that it is unnecessary. Indeed, "the walling of Baghdad is a measure to control the popular and to enforce a new social reality...impacting commerce, social relations and the Iraqi culture" (Zangana, 2010, p. 43). They have also enabled the homogenization and labelling of certain areas, both to make a case for building walls and to speed up segregation. In Adhamiya, for example, which had been designated as a particularly dangerous neighborhood and hotbed for Al Qaeda activity, "Muslims and Christians [had] been living in a closely knit community for centuries" (Zangana, 2010, p. 45). The neighborhood's identity and demographics have been transformed as a result of the "Great Wall of Adhamiya" (Nizza, 2007).

One of the most controversial gated communities created in Baghdad by the security walls is that of the Green Zone. This neighborhood houses Iraqi politicians and bureaucracy as well



The walls of the Green Zone.
Image source: media.worldbulletin.net

as foreign embassies, including the US embassy compound, which is the largest embassy presence in the world. For the people inside this area, the walls are considered 'security walls' (Zangana, 2010, p. 43). The walling of this neighborhood differs, therefore, because it has been implemented not only to keep the area secure, but also because those within it choose to be isolated. As Haifa Zangana so eloquently puts it, "[o]ne type is to wall in Iraqis...[a]nother is to wall in the occupiers and their client regime" (2010, p. 42). The Green Zone is thus one of the safest areas in Baghdad, but at the cost of incredible impermeability and isolation. The result is that those who claim to be strategizing and working for the Iraqi people are highly isolated from the people and are living in a different, insulated reality. Furthermore, it is clear that, despite appearances and media claims to the contrary, the US has not left Iraq. The embassy compound is heavily walled and fortified and is so large as to provide space and facilities enough such that American personnel

do not have need to leave its borders. Furthermore, it has altered Baghdad's urban landscape. It is fundamentally a new type of urban development through militarization and denaturalization of the city in which naturally green areas are replaced (Mehta, 2013, p. 59). The embassy and associated security apparatus have altered Baghdad's skyline and symbolize the "replicating network of mirroring walls that reflect and authenticate the occupying presence of the coalition, while refracting Iraqi lives through their divisiveness" (Mehta, 2013, p. 59).

This environment has created a regulatory vacuum that is being taken advantage of by investors who are actually attracted to the chaotic scene created by insecurity. These are people looking to make a quick profit in construction and they are doing so without regard to Baghdad's urban character. According to Professor of Architecture Ghada Al Slik of the University of Baghdad, construction and development is happening on formerly green areas, often using cheap contractors and cheap

materials. This sort of movement is negatively affecting the city's urban landscape. For example, illegal subdivision of lots has become common so, where house plots were originally 200-1,000 sq km, many have been split down to 50-70 sq km, thus rapidly and significantly increasing Baghdad's density without consideration for residents' living standards. Furthermore, high-rise buildings are given exceptions to permit construction regardless of their effects on the city's skyline or local height regulations. (G. Al Slik, personal communication, February 6, 2014)

The urban effects of conflict have thus created an environment in which residents have reduced access to the city and little to no control over the fast paced transformations occurring around them. This is important because sovereignty in the city for the individual resident has to do with a sense of owning the city, or, as Diane E. Davis (2011, p. 231) points out, it has to do with Lefebvre's conceptualization of the "right to the city." She further explores the concept by pointing out that "it is not merely that the political ideals of citizenship are met by the 'right to the city' but also that all citizens enjoy social and spatial inclusion...through everyday urban social practices built on unrestricted flows..." (Davis, 2011, p. 231). Sovereignty for the resident indicates citizenship and contributes to identity, but identity is being manufactured through violence (Gregory, 2006) and neither spatial inclusion nor unrestricted flows truly

exist in Baghdad; without these ingredients, it will be difficult for Baghdad's current structural challenges to be remedied because the city's character and identity will be constituted by those of its residents.

Local Economy

The isolation, immobility, and segregation caused by the policies that were implemented for control of the city caused serious disruptions to Baghdad's local economy. The flow of not only people, but also of goods is hindered by walls and checkpoints and is often times even stopped. A vegetable seller describes the ordeal, saying "[i]f they don't let me through that checkpoint I have to drive all around the area and try to get through another checkpoint, and 99% I will be dead" (Abdul-Ahad, 2008). The risk is huge, but people must maintain livelihoods. The economy has simply slowed as a result and people have often chosen to relocate businesses closer to their own residences, such that they do not have to face these dangers. Business began to be "conducted along sectarian lines" in much the same way that residences had been segregated as "...many customers and shop owners in the capital say they will not return to their old mixed neighborhoods, fearing a revival of the bloodshed" (Hadid, 2007). The effects are clear in some of Baghdad's most important economic centers: "lack of security, in addition to building the segregation walls, is causing the gradual decline of central wholesaler markets such

as al-Rasheed market in Baghdad's southern district of Doura and Shorja market in the heart of Baghdad." Furthermore, violence has been highly unpredictable and can transform a neighborhood or market from one day to the next. Abdul-Ahad (2008) describes the chaotic scene following an explosion in a popular shopping neighborhood called Karrada:

[T]he traffic stopped, cars reversed and started driving on the wrong side of the road, bullets were fired and ambulance cars raced in and out of the area. Smoke began to rise from two explosions that had killed 68 people and injured 120. Karrada's tranquility had been shattered. The next day the stores were empty and there were no shoppers on the street.

In order to cope and sustain livelihoods, many Baghdadis work within the informal economy. Iraq's informal economy was already well established during the period of sanctions in the 1990s. However, instability and corruption have contributed to the growth of the informal economy since then. "The only part of the economy to have survived both Saddam Hussein and the post-2003 period of instability and insurgency is the country's informal economy" (Looney, 2006, p. 991). GDP took a hit, shrinking by about 35 percent at the time of the American invasion and it has not rebounded (Looney, 2006, p. 991). When shop-owners, for example,

have found it difficult to reach the neighborhoods their shops were formerly located in or have found themselves trapped living within a walled neighborhood which is costly to travel in and out of, they have often resorted to hastily setting up shop instead on their front lawns or wherever they could afford a space nearby. It is now conservatively estimated that the informal economy makes up about 65 percent of GDP (Looney, 2006, p. 1006).

Impact on Women

The restrictions implemented throughout the city have also had a disproportionate effect on women's lives in Baghdad. Women have been susceptible to gender-based violence and are thus even more isolated as a result of divisions. A professor at the University of Baghdad was interviewed about the ways that security is affecting mobility and he specifically pointed to widespread concern for the well-being of women in this situation:

It took me three hours to reach home compared to the 15 minutes before 2003...We no longer ask a taxi driver to take us to so and so place but to the next Izdiham (traffic jam). Women staff members suffer the greatest. You see them waiting for taxis at 5:30 or 6 am, to reach work at 8.30 or 9 and you wonder who is looking after their children or taking them to school. Women report wide scale sexual harassment

from taxi drivers or youngsters at checkpoints... At university we now let women leave at noon so as to reach home before dark. (Zangana, 2010, p. 52)

Furthermore, women's roles have had to change as conflict has taken its toll. As described above, when women are especially vulnerable to violence, they are further isolated for protection. However, as men became more vulnerable as targets of kidnapping and violence during civil war, women increasingly had to take on new roles within the context of conflict. They were the ones who could more safely (albeit still in considerable danger) run errands and access the city and the effect

of their mobility was the renewal of "initiatives and resilient part[s] of the social and service network of the people who remained in the city" (Zangana, 2010, p. 50). Women were essentially forced to take on this role in order to make up for the sudden changing dynamic where men were either targeted or had already been kidnapped or killed. They therefore organized within small communities so that they could protect and support each other and their children, took on employment more often, and became responsible for tasks formerly in the male domain, such as waiting in line for gasoline and burying the dead. (Zangana, 2010, p. 50-51)



Baghdadis protesting the segregation walls.
Image source: Sinan Salaheddin, Associated Press

RESEARCH QUESTION

Exploring the effects of conflict on the city of Baghdad leads, of course, to questions of whether and how urban challenges can be remedied. Violence levels are on the rise again and every month seems to bring record high casualties which have not been seen since at least 2008. Al Jazeera English dubbed the summer of 2013 a “season of terror” (Arraf, 2013). When the U.S. withdrew its troops, many were worried that Iraq’s government and institutions were not developed enough to operate on their own. Parliamentary elections were recently held and are on track to continue the sectarian trajectory and re-elect Prime Minister Maliki. These elections were surrounded by increasing violence, protests met with crackdowns, and continued difficulties in development (Hendawi, 2014).

Martin Chulov (2012) critically analyzes Baghdad’s limited options

going forward: partition, federalism, or do-nothing. Partition would create new nation-states - one for Shia, one for Sunnis, and one for Kurds - and break up Iraq as we know it. Federalism would follow Kurdistan’s lead and allow regions to claim a certain level of autonomy from the central government based in Baghdad. “The Sunni provinces of Anbar and Diyala have made steps in this direction, but Maliki has vowed to prevent any such move taking hold” (Chulov, 2012). Finally, “do-nothing” would entail just that, allowing Baghdad to continue in a segregated, volatile state (Chulov, 2012). However, do-nothing on the ground would definitely not look like inactivity. There are always stakeholders who are trying to maintain the status quo or to alter Baghdad in any number of ways, so there should inevitably be positive action fighting the effects of conflict within that mix.

There are two main perspectives which are central in considering the urban condition - those of policy makers and of Baghdad’s residents. Furthermore, since conflict has caused the city to regress in terms of its infrastructure and economy, the process of remedying the urban challenges created by conflict is directly related to the process of reconstructing and redeveloping the city. Therefore, the goal of this thesis is to search for what is successful and/or has potential to positively affect Baghdad at the intersection of mitigating current urban challenges and redeveloping the city in the long-term. The question being posed is: what can be done to mitigate the impacts of these changes on the daily lives of Baghdadis and how can that mitigation in turn contribute to the redevelopment of Baghdad?



Murals on Baghdad’s blast walls.

Image source: The Pickett Lens blog

FINDINGS

Inadequacy of the City of Baghdad's Plans

The Mayorality of Baghdad does consult with architects and planners to create plans for city redevelopment. However, many of these plans have stalled because of low quality implementation, lack of funding, or changes in contractors and planning (G. Al Slik, personal communication, February 4, 2014). The deteriorating economy has a direct impact on the projects as well, as fluctuations in costs of building materials and other resources are volatile. "Salam Ibrahim Kuba, an Iraqi consulting engineer, explains that 'the widespread use of concrete blocks led to an astronomical increase in cement prices. It rose from 50,000 Dinars per ton to 240,000 Dinars per ton in the last five years'" (Zangana, 2010, p. 47-48). The implementation of the projects is also subject to corruption, which "is never far out of sight" (Erickson, 2013). Peter Beaumont uses the "state of the pavements" of Baghdad, which are often dug up and abandoned by contractors who have bribed politicians for street renewal contracts, to illustrate the visibility of corruption and its effect on Baghdad's infrastructure (as cited in Erickson, 2013).

Furthermore, the City's plans do not generally include the participation of the public and are therefore based on different priorities than what residents of Baghdad need. This seems to be simultaneously a cause and symptom of the perspective held by many of the government's illegitimacy. "Whereas in most



The \$35 million Mansour Mall.
Image source: Omer Laith, skyscrapercity

cities there is a belief [that] governance is properly configured and capable of producing fair outcomes...governance amidst severe and unresolved multicultural differences can be viewed by at least one identifiable group in the city as artificial, imposed or illegitimate" (Bollens, 2008, p. 1260). The sense of imposition or illegitimacy compounds the difficulties for government in implementing plans as it widens the gap between administration and citizen. It was military and political strategy which implemented control and security measures in the first place and the current government continues to prioritize control for the sake of security. The municipality also seems to be supporting multi-million dollar developments such as Mansour Mall (Iraq's Dinar, 2013), which help create an image of beautification and development, but do not really address the structural problems on the ground which affect Baghdadi residents daily.

An Alternative for Redevelopment

An alternative is needed

because government-led plans do not include the participation of the public, have different priorities than residents have, and are difficult to implement because of the layers of corruption and bureaucracy at the government level. Considering Zangana's (2010, p. 50) example of women taking on new roles and thus creating resiliency for community initiatives and networks, there is great potential for such networks to impact the city if they can be identified and supported. The best answer in Baghdad, therefore, are active community-based initiatives. This answer was arrived at based on three findings. First, the inadequacies of municipality plans all derive from their lack of public voice. Second, based on those inadequacies, the alternative should be based on public voice and derive from the perspective of Baghdadi residents. Third, news and social media have pointed to the prevalence and success of this alternative.

The community-based initiative is a network of members, whether online or in physical space, who contribute to the creation of and

sustain the mission of the group. In the context of Baghdad, they are venues for people to organize without regard to identity and often in the face of the divisive effects of conflict on the city implemented by strategies for control and security. The identification of community-based initiatives as an alternative posits that the group can achieve more than the individual in terms of mitigating urban challenges. It also connects their activities to the legacy of the pre-conflict socio-economic dynamics integral to Baghdad. Considering the lack of mobility, lack of agency, and isolation that Baghdadis experience, what is possible or what can be done better as a group that is difficult or less beneficial to do as an individual?

The case studies described below reveal that community-based initiatives are able to transcend the urban divisions and isolation created by conflict and benefit from shared resources contributed by various members of the networks. Specifically, in terms of the urban effects of conflict, community-based initiatives are able to provide inclusion and set up unrestricted flows. The initiatives also address economic impacts by filling gaps in education and increasing potential for successful employment and/or self-employment. As Fig. 3 shows, three case studies have been chosen to illustrate the role of community-based initiatives. Each of these represents a type within the universe of similar groups: communal, curated, and entrepreneurial. The three types are differentiated by the way in

which their networks are created as well as the relationships between the members of their networks. The communal type is a network of peers from within Baghdad which is more managed than led by some of its members; it also has occasional mentors entering the network, as much of the knowledge is self-taught, and occasional funding, as much of its operations are self-funded. The curated type is a network of peers connected to a network of mentors and funders through a central leader who curates educational programming and is the source of connection between members. This model operates internationally and depends on more differentiated roles within the community. The entrepreneurial type is initiated and led by an entrepreneur, but is crowd-sourced and thus connects peers indirectly through an online platform.

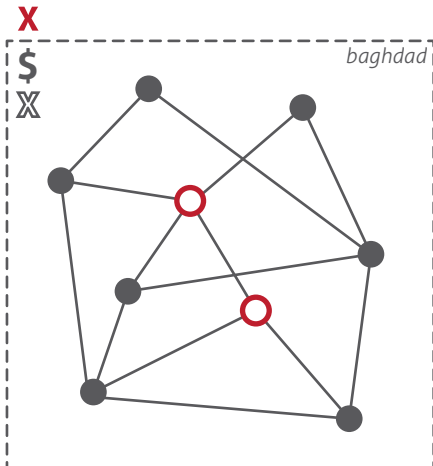
All three types in these cases target similar populations - young adult, college educated residents of Baghdad. This is important and strategic; young Baghdadis have also been disproportionately impacted by the effects of conflict similarly to women because they were educated within a deteriorating system and now face low job prospects as newcomers to the labor market. There are likely to be parallels between the initiatives and resiliency created by women's activities during conflict and those that can potentially be created by youth. Furthermore, these Baghdadis are necessary and desirable in Baghdad because they are the ones who will be

able to contribute to the city's redevelopment, but they are also the ones with the most incentive to leave because Baghdad's infrastructure cannot provide for their educational and employment needs. Youth unemployment in Iraq as of 2011 was at an average of twenty percent and this is a major incentive for young, educated Iraqis to emigrate (IRIN, 2011). For example, "Baghdad taxi driver Ahmed Hassan qualified as a mechanical engineer in 2001, but has since struggled to find a job commensurate with his skills, despite sending off numerous applications" (IRIN, 2011). As explained earlier, the Municipality's priorities do not align with the needs of this important group. Despite studies which show the need to plan for youth, "[p]olitical wrangling and security challenges [have] diverted the government from focusing on youth" (IRIN, 2011). At the same time, Iraq's National Youth Survey shows that young Iraqis do not want to abandon their country and hope that development will allow them to find stable employment (IRIN, 2011). There is a major gap, of course, between the optimistic youth's hopes to be successful in Baghdad and the reality that the economy is not ready to support them. This is where community-based initiatives can build that missing support by sharing resources, attracting funds for educational activities and startup capital and allowing the youth to develop themselves and be successful in Baghdad despite the city's broken infrastructure.

Fig. 3 Community-Based Initiatives / 3 Case Studies

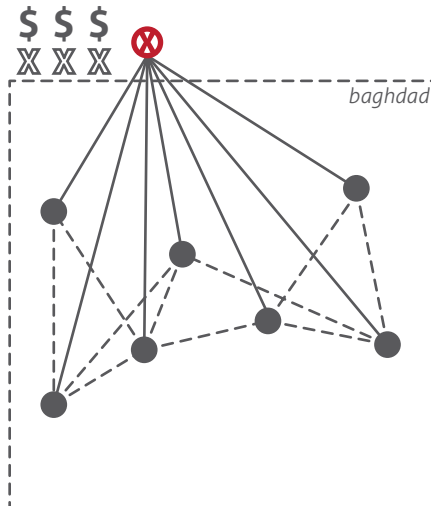
Fikra Space

/ communal
/ hackerspace
/ 14-30 yr old participants



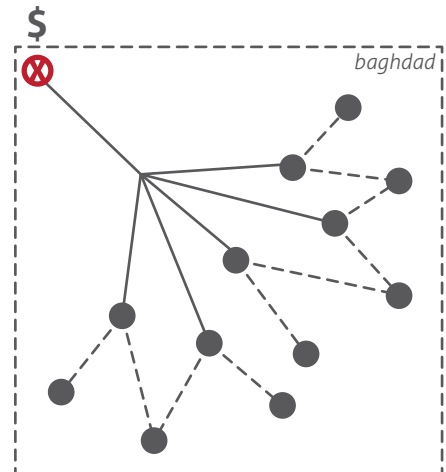
Sada

/ curated
/ arts education/support
/ 18-35 yr old participants



GoPhast

/ entrepreneurial
/ crowd-sourced traffic app
/ 28 yr old founder



● participant ○ leader X founder X mentor \$ funder

mission

to facilitate the development of participants' projects by providing the tools and space to work freely

to support new and emerging arts practices through education initiatives in Iraq and public programs internationally

to ease mobility in Baghdad by addressing issues including traffic jams and street closures

membership

no restrictions

students / by application
mentors / by credentials

mobile data/internet access

programming

weekly hacker meetings, build nights, tech and music workshops, book club, social events

seed production, residency grants, online workshops with mentors, independent arts workspace, summer arts intensive

live mapping by app users of street and traffic conditions

scale & reach

up to 30 participants per week

about 15-20 participants per program

up to 5,000 app visits per day
180k likes on Facebook

funding

self-funded / donations by members, tools and space donated by professionals

sponsorship by ArteEast (a non-profit in NYC), grants and support by a network of non-profits, individual donations

self-funded / funding is a challenge and it is still unclear how the app will produce profit

future vision

to develop individuals who will in turn develop the group and contribute to Baghdad

to expand artistic possibilities and promote critical investigations

to add features and provide increased access where bandwidth and mobile data use are low

CASE STUDIES / FIKRA SPACE



Fikra Space is Baghdad's first hackerspace, which is a "community-operated physical [place], where people can meet and work on their projects" (Hackerspaces, 2014). This initiative represents the communal type because it operates through a network of peers. Fikra Space is made up of and run by Baghdadis who are interested in collaborating with other people, sharing resources and knowledge, and developing projects and ideas in a horizontal (non-hierarchical), inclusive way.

It was initiated by the Global Entrepreneurship and Maker Space Initiative (GEMSI), an organization which seeks to spread the hackerspace movement throughout the Middle East (GEMSI, 2013) and was founded by Bilal Ghalib, an Iraqi-American computer scientist and entrepreneur. He was inspired by a trip to Baghdad to provide a space for smart, creative, optimistic people to collaborate. GEMSI's goal has been to identify leaders with interesting projects or ideas in the communities in which GEMSI works, rather than to run the hackerspaces themselves (B. Ghalib, personal communication, February 17, 2014). GEMSI is thus no longer directly involved with Fikra Space - and it was intended that way. Instead, it is led and managed

independently and from within by some of its community members. The leaders' goal is not to program the space, but to channel the flow of ideas and creativity in a productive direction while providing the tools and space for people to work freely on any project (Fikra Space leaders, personal communication, March 27, 2014).

Participation & Membership

Ghalib described the participants as "...people who were optimistic change-makers, people that wanted to be a part of Iraq's future" (Fikra Space, 2013). Their membership is not exclusive or restricted in any way - according to their Facebook marketing, anyone who is interested is free to attend any of their events. However, there

does seem to be a demographic which is especially interested in and attracted to participating in Fikra Space. The core group is made up of 14-30 year olds who are mostly male and educated (Fikra Space leaders, personal communication, March 27, 2014). Most of their events attract anywhere between 15-50 participants.

Programming

While most hackerspaces are identified as tech-centric, Fikra Space has spawned projects and classes based on tech, social media, music, and literature. For example, through Project Read More, participants nominate and vote on ten books per year to read and discuss regularly as a group. Some members have produced a podcast intended to entertain Baghdadis stuck in the city's inevitable traffic (Hume, 2013). Fikra Space Media Entertainment is a new Youtube channel created by members of the hackerspace who are interested in sharing a platform on which to create their own shows. The usual process of project development has participants meet, define what



A 3D printing workshop with GEMSI's Bilal Ghalib.
Image source: Fikra Space Facebook page

CASE STUDIES / FIKRA SPACE

they want to learn, look for others who can teach them, create an agenda and post it online. In most cases, the participants are teaching each other, although professionals do get involved in some projects. (Fikra Space leaders, personal communication, March 27, 2014)

Geographic Scale

Fikra Space's programming is highly bounded by Baghdad in terms of its production. Its major relationship outside of Baghdad is with GEMSI and, specifically, with Bilal Ghalib. The Space is therefore indirectly connected with other hackerspaces in the Middle East which are associated with GEMSI and those connections are evident in some of their social media network. Furthermore, several of Fikra Space's participants are Iraqi expats who live in Canada and the US, but visit Baghdad every so often to work on projects in or bring some outside resources and knowledge to the Space. Social media, especially Facebook, reveals that the most visible participants, including those expats, are generally active in community-based and educational initiatives and workshops throughout Iraq. For example, there is a significant overlap between members of Fikra Space and of a social media education group called Iraqi Network for Social Media.

Internet & Social Media Presence

Fikra Space exists both physically and online. However, its main and strongest network is its physical network between regular members who physically participate in project development and attend



*A music workshop at Fikra Space.
Image source: Fikra Space Facebook page*

events at the headquarters. This is the central network that allows participants to take full advantage of the supportive and sharing system created by the Space.

The space does take advantage of social media both to promote the space itself and to develop projects such as Fikra Space Media Entertainment. Its primary presence online is on the Facebook page, which members use to network, schedule and advertise events, and post photos of their activities. This type of online presence clearly allows the Space to expand its network and reach collaborators and supporters from outside Baghdad. At the same time, it is conceivable, considering that most of its projects are developed locally and its members are all local, for Fikra Space to exist without social media, albeit in a much more limited capacity.

Funding

In order to do this, they depend on their members to share resources and knowledge. They also use

donated resources. For example, they use member donations to some extent, but they also accept assistance from professionals in limited ways. Most recently, they were able to establish headquarters in the Karrada neighborhood when a professional organization donated some of their office space that was not being used. Based on this system of sharing resources, they are able to remain largely independent and self-funded. (Fikra Space leaders, personal communication, March 27, 2014)

Government & Politics

Fikra Space does not have any stated relationship with the government or with any international political bodies. Although the current leaders of Fikra did not take a stance regarding the government, Ghalib emphasized the importance of maintaining independence from the government for the success of the Space (B. Ghalib, personal communication, February 17, 2014). Fikra therefore also does not

CASE STUDIES / FIKRA SPACE

take a political stance or take on political roles in Baghdad.

Future & Growth

The hope for the future is to create an environment in which participants can develop themselves through their projects and shared education and that this will in turn allow them to contribute back to the city. Leaders of the Space are considering scaling the hackerspace by maintaining and growing their central location while starting satellite hackerspaces around Baghdad and throughout Iraq (Fikra Space leaders, personal communication, March 27, 2014). Ghalib's vision for growth is to scale up with independence in mind; therefore, he hopes that Fikra Space will focus on multiplying the space and growing horizontally in order to remain sustainable without depending on too much outside funding (B. Ghalib, personal communication, February 17, 2014).

Contribution to Baghdad

The major accomplishment of Fikra Space within the context of Baghdad's conflict and division is its inclusivity. They transcend the destructive trend in Baghdad of segregation by consistently defining and advertising events as open to all, avoiding political association, maintaining independence, and structuring their network as beneficial between peers. Furthermore, the Space is a venue for interaction between people of different ethnic and sectarian identification. The products of the Space have great potential in terms of what they might contribute to the redevelopment of the city. Fikra Space's participants are creating a network of human capital for Baghdad; together, they are able to access technology, resources, and knowledge which they would likely otherwise be isolated from individually.



Fikra Space's one year anniversary event at Beit Babel art gallery.

Image source: Fikra Space Facebook page

CASE STUDIES / SADA

Sada, Iraq is a non-profit, primarily educational initiative to strengthen Iraqi artists and arts practices. Sada represents the curated type because it is based on guided programming provided by scholars and mentors. Furthermore, its programming is structured and bounded by its focus on the arts and its dependence on funding from and partnerships with other artists and non-profit organizations.

It was founded by and continues to be led by Iraq-American artist and scholar Rijin Sahakian. Sahakian poses the question, "what does it mean that there's not a lot of information coming out of a radically changed place" (Sahakian, 2013, April 5)? The answer she found and the impetus for the founding of Sada is that a gap in arts education and insecurity for artists are preventing them from putting out new work. The goal of the organization is to provide participants with education and resources they need to create and sustain their own arts practices and spaces (Sada, 2013).

Participation & Membership

The initiative works with fine arts students who are usually about

19-35 years old and are looking to practice and teach art in Baghdad (Sahakian, 2013, April 5). Sada is exclusive in the sense that it targets artists and often has limited capacity for its programs, especially when travel is involved and visas are required. However, it has a far reach within the international arts community, from which it receives funding as well as participation by various artists who volunteer as mentors and educators. Thus, Sada's membership is made up of both students and practicing artists who constitute a larger, global network made up of the local network of Baghdadi artists and the network of mentors outside of the city. Sahakian is the central connector between networks.

Programming

Sada's work is done through several programs, including seed production and residency grants, online workshops for emerging artists to learn from experienced artists around the world, independent arts workspace to give artists a physical center, and a summer arts intensive through which young artists have the chance to travel and learn (Sada, 2013).

Specifically, the independent arts workspace is described by the organization as key to helping local artists get around the problems and barriers they face. For example, the presence of this community space is intended to remedy "disruptive interference by government and university administrators into the work of artists...intimidation and threat...lack of a substantial arts library...and no independent spaces to serve as art-making studios or exhibition centers" (Sada, 2013). Sada supported the creation and installation of a large artwork depicting an eye and the words "I can see you" in Arabic (Sahakian, 2013, June 8). The eye was displayed in Baghdad on top of a tall building which faced both Tahrir Square and the Green Zone as a very public commentary on residents' limited mobility and restricted freedom to organize in public spaces while living under strong security and surveillance measures.

Geographic Scale

In order to fully expose students to the arts and to reach both mentors and funders, Sada really takes advantage of an international arts network. Sada



CASE STUDIES / SADA

requires international relationships in order to address Sahakian's primary concern about the isolation of Iraqi artists. For example, in October 2013, the initiative set up an online exchange with artists in El Paso, Texas, creating connections between two "urban deserts" and a dialogue between artists living on either side of the Iraq War (Sada, 2013). In this way, Sada allows for artistic knowledge and expression to flow two ways - both into and out of Baghdad.

Internet & Social Media Presence

Although Sada's artists do travel for some of its programs, the initiative's networks depend on the internet to exist because they are international and because Baghdad's insecurity usually prevents mentors from coming in to the city to interact with students physically. Sada also maintains a presence on social media, especially Facebook, to update on its activities, publicize member artists' work, and connect with the international arts community as well as with those who are interested in and write about or otherwise feature Sada in their own work.

Funding

Sada is "fiscally sponsored" by a nonprofit called ArteEast based in New York City. It is also funded through individual donations as well as grants from other nonprofits and arts foundations including the Hivos Foundation and the Prince Claus Fund, both of which are based in The Netherlands and co-fund arts and culture with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (Sada,



*The 'I Can See You' installation supported by Sada.
Image source: Sada Facebook page*

2013) Although these foundations seem to be quite transparent and Sada clearly does not restrict its programming or its artists politically, it should be noted that Royal-Dutch Shell, a British/Dutch oil company, does have significant contracts and, thus, corporate interests in Iraq (UPI, 2013).

Government & Politics

Sada is not registered with the Iraqi government (Sahakian, 2013, April 5) as of yet and does not seem to need to be. Although there is much to say about the state of Baghdad, the politics surrounding the city, and the effects of conflict on the urban environment, it remains difficult and dangerous for artists to express themselves. One of Sada's students, a photographer, describes the way that he photographs the

city "stealthily. I snap the picture and I run without anyone seeing me" (Bilal, 2012). As Sahakian's questions about the lack of expression coming out of Baghdad indicate, Sada does not restrain its support based on politics. The "I can see you" installation is a prime example of Sada's encouragement for artistic expression regarding Baghdad's political issues.

Future & Growth

Sahakian has specifically stated that Sada's vision is not to start an art scene in Baghdad, because one already exists (Sahakian, 2013, April 5). Rather, Sada is looking to develop and sustain arts practices by providing a stronger infrastructure. Therefore, it seems that Sada's vision actively avoids the commercialization of Iraqi

CASE STUDIES / SADA

art. Its strategy for the future is to enable a sustainable model through which artists are more involved in programming and thus teach and support each other. There is no stated intention specifically to grow or replicate; Sada's focus is instead on sustainability.

Contribution to Baghdad

Sada primarily fills the gap in arts education found in Iraq today. Sahakian reflects often on the isolation which Iraqi artists suffered as a result of brain drain and lack of access to educational resources, especially in the past decade since the Iraq War. She was shocked to find that their knowledge of art history ended in the 1960s with the work of Jackson Pollock (Sahakian, 2013, April 5). Baghdad's own Academy of Fine Arts, once a center for art and culture and the home to a large library, was victim to the city-wide looting which took place immediately after the invasion. Today, the school is surrounded by blast walls and checkpoints, but it uses an outdated arts education system anyway. Furthermore, there are few museums and galleries left open in Baghdad. (Bilal, 2012)



*A group of Sada participants with Rijing Sahakian (seated, second from right).
Image source: Sada Facebook page*



*An online workshop with Professor Sinan Antoon.
Image source: Sada Facebook page*

CASE STUDIES / GOPHAST

GoPhast is an innovative mobile application which relies on crowd-sourced information to feed users live, mapped information on blocked or closed streets and traffic jams. It is an entrepreneurial initiative whose community is the online crowd-source.

It is developed by Sadeq Shnaishel, a computer scientist who was discussing ways to deal with Baghdad's traffic problems with his friends when they came up with this solution. GoPhast's mission is to address issues of mobility in Baghdad by helping people get around deteriorating infrastructure and the urban control measures which have been implemented throughout the city. (S. Shnaishel, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

Participation & Membership

The app is accessible to anyone who has mobile internet capability. It currently has up to 5,000 visitors per day and the app's Facebook page claims 177,000 "likes." Shanishel remains the primary developer of the app, but has limited assistance from other computer scientists. (S. Shnaishel, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

Programming

GoPhast works by providing an online platform featuring a map and options for labeling streets as closed, accessible, blocked, flooded, etc. Points are geolocated using GPS. Users can open the app as they are travelling through Baghdad, label streets they encounter by dropping a point on the map, and



Founder, Sadeq Shnaishel.
Image source: StartUp Weekend Baghdad

pan through the map to plan easier travel routes based on other users' labels. Furthermore, the street labels are color coded and time stamped.

Geographic Scale

GoPhast is highly local. The app is completely operated by Shnaishel, used within Baghdad, and almost totally self-funded.

Internet & Social Media Presence

Although GoPhast is not considered a social media platform, it currently depends completely on mobile internet access. The initiative is supplemented by a social media presence used to advertise new features, solicit contributions, and further the collaborative mapping process through the sharing of photos of Baghdad's traffic conditions.



The GoPhast mobile app interface.
Image source: Mobile app screenshot

Funding

One of Shnaishel's main concerns and challenges is funding. He currently develops and funds the app himself as a side project with occasional help from collaborators, but would like to turn the initiative into his full time job. He is also strategizing to find ways that the app could bring in revenue to fund itself. (S. Shnaishel, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

Government & Politics

GoPhast does not take any official political stance. It operates on the ground to address mobility issues without reference to or attempt to directly influence the government's role in providing transportation and creating road barriers.

CASE STUDIES / GOPHAST

Future & Growth

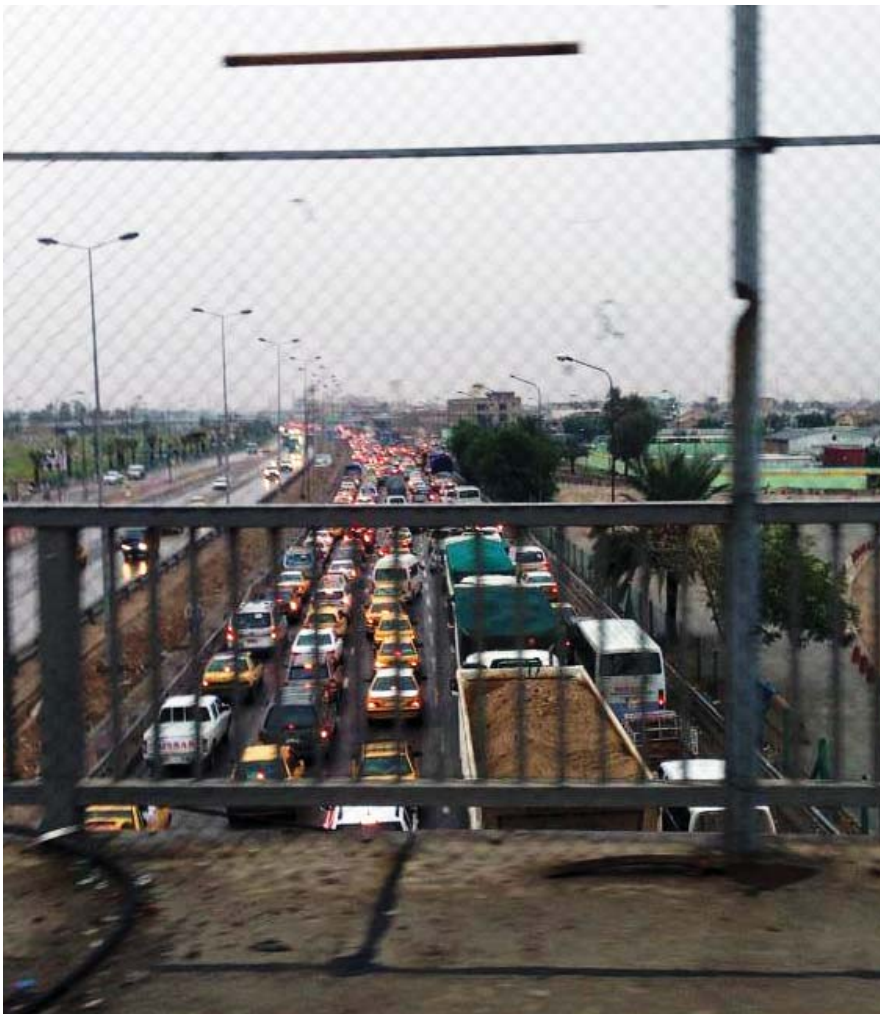
Shnaishel is currently working to add new features and expand the app, but he does face some challenges which are, of course, specific to Baghdad. For example, the city has poor GPS location services, slow internet provision, and low subscription to data plans on mobile phones. He hopes to find ways to circumvent these challenges by altering the app so that it uses less bandwidth or is even available offline. Furthermore, he is looking to expand GoPhast through complementary services such as PhastTaxi, which would

allow users to request taxis and further ease mobility for Baghdadis. (S. Shnaishel, personal communication, March 28, 2014)

Contribution to Baghdad

Of the three cases studied, GoPhast most directly addresses the urban environment and the challenges within it that have resulted from conflict. Its strategy is also the most short-term, as it seeks to provide immediate relief to Baghdad's residents from the city's troubled streets. However, GoPhast does have long term effects. First, it has successfully created a network

through which people indirectly communicate, help each other, and benefit from other people's contributions regardless of ethno-sectarian identity; this sort of structure supports attitudes of sharing and connection in the face of the universal challenge of mobility. Second, it raises awareness about Baghdad's troubled traffic conditions and will inevitably point to the most affected streets and intersections over time, thereby creating a valuable record of the city's infrastructural deficiencies.



Baghdad's standstill traffic.
Image source: GoPhast Facebook page

CASE STUDIES / SUCCESSES & LIMITATIONS

All three of the initiatives studied successfully bring people together and engage them around common goals and interests. Together, they represent a strong support system for their demographic which transcends urban and social division and also fills gaps in education and infrastructure. They all also fill needs for Baghdadis. The initiatives each act as a venue for young Baghdadis to participate meaningfully on a shared platform despite the barriers in governance which prevent them from directly participating in official redevelopment policies. They also all contribute more or less directly to their city's urban environment. Fikra Space and Sada particularly fill gaps in education and aspire to also create better and more successful employment for their members. Furthermore, by creating physical communities, they are providing the "social and spatial inclusion" as well as "unrestricted flows" (Davis, 2011, p. 231), specifically of information and communication, that will help enable members to gain a sense of citizenship. GoPhast, on the other hand, is working to more directly address Baghdad's urban environment. In doing so, the app is literally attempting to ease restricted traffic flows.

However, it is clear that these initiatives are really successful just for that young, educated demographic which has been identified. They do not necessarily seek to address division along other lines besides ethno-sectarian conflict. For example, Fikra Space is often dominated by young men and the group does not

actively seek to bridge the gap in female interest or participation in hackerspace projects. Therefore, they address both the urban and economic impacts of conflict, but not necessarily the significant impacts on women despite the parallels between the initiatives created by women's groups and those created for young Baghdadis. Furthermore, all three primarily depend on educated, middle to upper-middle class Baghdadis who have access to internet and social media. GoPhast especially excludes those without internet access or internet literacy simply by the nature of the platform. In GoPhast's case, however, Shnaishel is actively trying to address this gap and make the app useful to those with limited internet access.

Stepping back to consider the community-based initiatives' origins and missions in the context of conflict raises an interesting similarity - they were attracted to Baghdad and created there because it is a city in conflict. This poses questions in terms of their limitations as well. Since they began from and were intended for this context, can they and how will they continue if Baghdad becomes more stable? At what point, if at all, should they consider partnering with governmental planners and policy-makers? Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth examining whether such initiatives could have existed under Saddam's regime and, thus, how vulnerable they are to changes in both city and national level politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Replicability & Scalability

Community-based initiatives are models for what is needed in Baghdad for redevelopment. They share at least four characteristics which enable them to help Baghdad's residents deal with urban challenges and contribute to the city: they depend on participants, encourage a high level of engagement, share resources and knowledge, and are driven by youth and optimism. Therefore, it is desirable to first, strategize for their sustainability and second, to replicate and/or scale them up where possible. Strategies should also consider and plan for the increasingly volatile urban environment they exist within. Planning can take on those explorations and analysis which are beyond the scope and/or capabilities of the community-based initiatives, including planning for future volatility, understanding the universe of initiatives and stakeholders, and measuring benefits to participants. Such support by planners can help existing initiatives to grow through and new initiatives to embark upon better charted pathways for strength and sustainability of membership and networks.

Based on the case studies, the best strategy for a self-sustaining initiative is to create a culture of shared resources and knowledge. Sada's example, while successful, shows the potential fragility of a network that depends on distant mentors, grant funding, and the central connection of the founder. The initiative is thus strategizing to ensure that the community of

artists which has been created around Sada can continue the goal of education and support for emerging arts practices. Sahakian has identified the enabling of student artists to contribute to and guide programming for the initiative as well as become mentors themselves as key to sustaining Sada. As a result of the nature of its structure, Fikra Space has achieved a very strong example of sustainability through sharing; the Space does not require funding to function. GoPhast cannot succeed without and is also driven by the contributions of the crowd, which gives it some strength in numbers.

For a communal type of community-based initiative like Fikra Space, both replication and scaling may be easy given the horizontality and city-wide reach of its network. The current leaders of the Space have expressed ambitions to both grow and establish the current headquarters as the central space within a network of spaces throughout Baghdad and Iraq (Fikra Space leaders, personal communication, March 27, 2014). Ghalib, on the other hand, has a slightly different hope that Fikra Space will not grow centrally but rather replicate itself in order to maintain smaller budgets and, thus, independence from significant funding needs (B. Ghalib, personal communication, February 17, 2014). However, the priority should be to always strengthen the network and connections between members to maintain the mission. It would seem that, while seriously keeping Ghalib's concern for independence in mind, a center is necessary for

the success of a Fikra Space network not only at each location but across all of the locations to maximize the benefits of participation.

In the case of the curated type of community-based initiative like Sada, the network structure is more vertical and is thus more difficult to replicate. Its success depends on specific connections between mentors, the founder, and students as well as funding for specific programming. However, scalability is desirable and feasible to reach more artists throughout Iraq and to involve more artists from around the world. Achieving this depends on spreading word about the accomplishments and growth of current participants. A model can be developed based on their experiences and programming should be revised according to necessary improvements and new partnerships. Furthermore, as the first student artist participants gain experience and their practices take hold, there is great potential for them to develop their own relationships within Baghdad as mentors to more emerging artists. In this way, the local network can become self-sustaining.

The entrepreneurial and crowd-sourced model of community-based initiative has significant potential to both replicate and scale up. Replication will depend mostly on the provision of startup capital. Although Shnaishel was willing to take on GoPhast as a side project, putting in his own time and funds, the lack of capital is a barrier for most people. Scaling up will mean reaching more people who can contribute to the initiative in

RECOMMENDATIONS

order to make it more informative and useful. A simple way to do so would be to invest more time and energy into advertising the tool, although Shnaishel seems to have done a very good job spreading the word through social media. It is more important, therefore, to consider the infrastructural barriers to growth, especially the reliability of internet and mobile data access. These barriers can only be overcome to a limited extent until they are addressed by policy makers and developers, which does not seem likely. Could crowdsourcing be used to create an infrastructure by the people?

Initiative Leader/Founder

As someone who is the leader of or looking to start a community-based initiative, the goal should be to focus on participant engagement by maintaining flexibility and evolving according to participants' needs. In order to prioritize participant engagement, funding sources and their related interests should be considered. Furthermore, scale and management of the initiative should be structured such that the network is or could be self-sustaining, especially where there are fragile connections such as those which exist only online or which depend on outside mentors or professionals. It will also be crucial for initiative leaders to develop more of a self-consciousness, especially regarding the initiative's relationship to other key players in Baghdad, including politicians, private firms, and other non-governmental organizations. This can be done both by taking a

stance toward Baghdad and the social, political, and economic environments within which they exist, or even by establishing a non-stance, through the mission statement based on an evaluation of the initiative's activities and trajectory thus far. If an explicit goal for social responsibility can be established, then it will be more likely to be realized and to have an impact on the redevelopment of Baghdad. Sada is a good example of such a self-conscious, socially responsible mandate with outcomes that fill those explicit goals.

Investor/Mentor

A potential investor or mentor should take on a role similar to that which GEMSI played in catalyzing the development of Fikra Space. The goal should be to identify and enable leaders and projects that already exist within the city or the target community. This is beneficial for two reasons. First, it will allow for the flexibility and prioritization of the community's needs. Second, it will build off of resources, knowledge, and even networks which have already begun to form,

thus strengthening the initiative. Furthermore, as is evident through GoPhast's challenges in particular, the provision of or access to startup capital and other funding may be crucial to really get initiatives off the ground.

City Official/Consultant

The critical issue at the Municipality level is the lack of engagement with community-based initiatives or even with residents of Baghdad in general. The goals from the perspective of those within city government should therefore be to recognize the activities and importance of community-based initiatives and the legitimacy of their voices. Furthermore, the City has a unique ability to support the functions of these initiatives by strengthening the infrastructure that makes their work possible, including internet access and urban mobility. Finally, the organizational models of the cases studied show that independence is important to them; thus, the government would ideally recognize and support initiatives without exerting influence by maintaining political distance.



Baghdad's famous Firdos Square.
Image source: Getty Images

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

As these initiatives are relatively new in Baghdad and their focus has been on building networks, many questions come up for a very uncertain future. The central issues to be explored is whether these initiatives have any measurable outcomes which benefit their participants. The limitations to the research conducted to understand community-based initiatives in Baghdad are based on the researcher's inability to visit Baghdad due to security concerns. As a result, research and interviews had to be conducted long-distance, primarily via email and/or communication through social media.

However, there were considerations for a more robust methodology regarding this topic through the implementation of cognitive mapping. In a 2013 study in Jerusalem, mental mapping was used to analyze eighteen women's perceptions of territory and security and, thus, to provide "a new methodological approach for investigating segregation in cities" (Raanan & Shoval, 2013, p. 28). The study found, within their sample, a strong relationship between perceived territorial boundaries and actual spatial activity (Raanan & Shoval, 2013, p. 38). Using the case study in Jerusalem as an example, it would greatly supplement this research to have participants of various community-based initiatives participate in a cognitive mapping study for Baghdad. The product could illuminate the perceptions that initiative members have of their city and whether their participation in those initiative

networks has any impact on the way they perceive and/or interact with Baghdad.

Furthermore, it would be important to study the community-based initiatives over time by tracking membership through surveys and the maintenance of comprehensive databases describing participants demographically as well as in terms of their social and economic well-being. For example, such tracking could answer questions including whether participants in an initiative like Fikra Space are more likely within their age group and socioeconomic status to have employment or to achieve higher education than their counterparts who are not members of comparable initiatives.

If such an impact can be established and the networks successfully grow over time, then it will become more important for these initiatives to establish themselves as significant contributors to and voices in the city. Whether their mission is political or not, surely the political system will take notice of such groups and their networks. What is then to be the relationship between community-based initiatives and the political system they exist under? Furthermore, as recent events have shown an increase in violence in Baghdad and the potential for a renewed civil war, will the initiatives be able to continue to operate? An analysis of the political structures and levels of influence in Baghdad is required in order to find the space within which community-based initiatives can

operate, whether that can continue to be in a capacity completely separated from the municipality or that it must be through some sort of relationship with the government.

The initiatives' limitations should also be further understood and contextualized within the wider universe of non-governmental groups and services which Baghdadis have access to. The most important question to answer here is whether it is desirable for community-based initiatives which target young educated adults to try to remedy their shortcomings. What is their role in those terms? Are there others who fill the gap by targeting populations of different age groups or economic class, for example, and what does or should the network look like between different initiatives?

CONCLUSIONS

Planning is crucial in tackling further research in order to identify, better understand, and support community-based initiatives by giving them the tools to know their needs for development, growth, and further impact on Baghdad. Planning's role is thus to illuminate the keys to the success, strength, and sustainability of community-based initiatives and their networks. In the next step, planning's role is to enable initiatives to use the benefits they produce to then contribute back to the development of Baghdad. The diversity of the initiatives' programming can translate to economic diversification, which may lead to a stronger economy as well as more and better employment opportunities for youth. The initiative networks are also instrumental in increasing members' sense of sovereignty and citizenship in their city, thus establishing positive identities and attitudes toward Baghdad and its challenges. Community-based initiatives represent optimism amongst Baghdadis for a deeper, more sustainable security built from within their own communities; if such groups can be active and collaborative in Baghdad, then there is hope for the city.



*Baghdad's beloved Freedom Monument, designed by artist Iraqi Jawad Saleem.
Image source: aliraqi.org*

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