

# Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

International Experience Award

Jessica Jiang : April, 2015



## Research Topic: Examining the cross-national transfer of planning knowledge from Toronto to Amman

In 2006, the Jordanian capital city of Amman appointed an external team of Toronto-based, Canadian planners to collaborate with the local planning authority on a new Amman Master Plan (AMP). The City was in dire need of an updated strategy for regulating population growth as its population was expected to triple over the next 20 years. The resulting Amman Master Plan 2025 won two prestigious awards, including the 2010 Canadian Institute of Planners Award of Excellence.

Collaboration and knowledge transfer between Jordanian and Canadian planners was not without its own set of challenges. Promoting urban intensification and mixed-use developments are second nature to Canadian planners, but it was a foreign concept in Jordan.

Through my research, I wanted to understand how consensus for the AMP was achieved and how the melting pot of planning principles has influenced and continues to influence Amman's urban form.

My primary research objective was to determine how the core Canadian planning principles of intensification and mixed-use development can be assimilated into a different cultural context that may not necessarily prioritize the same values. My methodology comprised of three components: academic research on the theory of cross-national knowledge transfer, fieldwork in Amman, and interviews with Toronto and Amman based planners who collaborated on the AMP.

For the fieldwork component, I performed street audits on main street segments slated for intensification under the *Corridor Intensification Strategy* section of the AMP (Zahran St., King Abdullah II St., and Queen Rania St.). Additional sites that were examined included new mixed-use developments outlined in the *Tall Buildings Strategy* section of the plan.

In addition, I was also afforded the opportunity to interview planners from Toronto and Amman who collaborated on the AMP. We discussed their experience of working on the project, biggest challenges, and what was learned through the cultural exchange and professional collaboration.

The combination of interviews, fieldwork and research gave me insight into novel interpretations and implementations of Canadian planning principles, which can be applied in Canada and abroad.

## Research Findings:

### Local Challenges:

From my interview with the Amman planner, I learned that there is an urgent need to revise the Amman Master Plan due to the influx of refugees as a result of the Syrian Crisis. These refugees will need places to live and adequate service provisions. There is also a need to think about critical social dimensions in planning for a multicultural city. Currently, there is a lot of cultural segregation within Jordan, with many locals losing their jobs due to cheaper refugee labour. Ample work still needs to be done to mitigate the situation.

### Planning Challenges:

There are several key challenges that hinder the implementation of the AMP 2025 such as the hilly topography, land ownership negotiations and cultural sensitivities. In Amman, collaboration between agencies are difficult; the water utilities and schools operate independent of the municipality, making it difficult to integrate them into planning decisions. Similarly, religious sites are typically donated by the public and governed by an independent body so the City has no jurisdiction over these areas. In addition, locals like to keep residential areas and commercial areas separate and are opposed to integrating mixed-use developments into their neighbourhoods.

### Cross-cultural transfer of planning knowledge:

Both the Toronto and Amman planner spoke positively about their experience collaborating on the AMP. The Amman planner spoke about the discussions that occurred and highlighted that the Toronto planners did not try to impose Canadian principles onto them, but rather held brainstorming sessions with locals and various government departments to come up with solutions. The Jordanian planner commented that the Canadian planners were not isolated people and commended them for walking around the city, talking to people, and immersing themselves into Amman's urban fabric.

