Overview: The following note contextualizes and provides a summary of the presentations and discussions that took place during the fifth Rencontre Valmer held by the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) at the Villa Valmer in Marseille on April 4-5 2013¹. It outlines the key findings and takeaways to be drawn from this event. The full conference program as well as some PowerPoint presentations can be viewed at http://cmimarseille.org

Background

Better understanding urban issues: a key challenge for promoting sustainable development and democratic governance in the MENA region. The Arab Spring uprisings were generated and anchored in Arab cities. As transitions in the MENA region are underway, the urban agenda is paramount both to answer the call for greater civic participation and to provide the populations access to basic services. The context has also opened channels for claims against the urban policies which have prevailed over recent decades. In a context of political crisis, the decentralization of power has become a key objective of policy-makers who are seeking to build new ways of strengthening existing institutions and local associations. Urban governance and the urban making in the Arab World are thus the subject of considerable analytic scrutiny, which can prove particularly helpful to inform policy-making in the rapidly evolving context of the Arab Spring. The last two years have seen numerous comprehensive scientific events whilst contributing to the rise in published analytic work focused on better understanding the opportunities and challenges confronting cities in the MENA region. The last Rencontre Valmer provided a space to review the results of this work and open a discussion with different stakeholders actively involved in the ongoing shaping of “the Transforming Arab City”, in order to determine what impact the Arab Spring had both on urban analysis and on urban policies.

With the presence of Inger Andersen, Vice President of the World Bank for the MENA region, the fifth Rencontre Valmer brought together about 70 participants, among whom researchers and experts from both rims of the Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia), city decision makers (Mayors from Lebanon and Jordan), as well as donor representatives working on urban programs (AFD, GIZ, JICA, UNDP, WB). The Rencontre aimed at enhancing the understanding of urban challenges after the Arab Spring, by confronting experts and practitioners’ views in a cross-cutting approach, and give a direction to future operational activities and more generally to urban policies.

Building new networks of knowledge to promote innovative development. Since its creation in 2009, the CMI has put urban development at the core of its activities. True to its mission to build knowledge networks in order to promote the rise of networks of innovative development practice, the CMI has consistently brought together various stakeholders from both sides of the Mediterranean involved in urban development (be they local elected representatives, actors from

¹ The first Rencontre Valmer on the economic and social implications of the Arab Spring was organized on March 13, 2012. A second Rencontre on “Transforming Arab Economies: Traveling the Knowledge and Innovation Road” was held on October 18, 2012. It was followed by a third one on “Employment and Social Protection in the MENA region: Paving the way for a new social contract” (November 27, 2012) and a fourth one on “Integrated Economies through the lens of the Golden Growth Report” (December 11-12, 2012).
the private sector, NGO representatives, experts, etc.). The launch of MENA Urbanization Knowledge Platform (UKP), a community of practice of senior decision-makers and other stakeholders who influence urban development in MENA, is illustrative of this ongoing effort. Officially initiated in September 2012, the community interacts through periodic workshops focused on specific topics of interest, an electronic platform, and other activities that enable members of this group to learn, collaborate, and exchange. They interact with one another, with similar communities of practice in other regions, and a range of global practitioners and experts. As a new step towards enhancing this network approach aiming at sharing but also building knowledge, the last Rencontre Valmer has provided a platform for dialogue with (and among) social scientists specialized in urban issues and successfully provided a space for confronting analytical and operational knowledge on Arab cities.

The two-half-day conference consisted of (1) Presenting a state of the art of current analytic work on urban issues since the Arab Spring in the Southern Mediterranean, with a focus on urbanization processes and local urban governance; (2) Discussing with regional counterparts the stakes and challenges that the Arab cities are facing; (3) Comparing and confronting analytic work as well as the practical knowledge of policymakers with donors’ operational activities, in order to highlight what lessons CMI and international organizations can learn from these different approaches.

The Rencontre was organized around four sessions: held on April 4, session 1 and session 2 focused on political and social movements in Arab cities, as well as on issues of urban governance. The third session organized on April 5 allowed for several donors (namely UNDP, JICA, AFD and the World Bank) to present their main programs and their renewed approach to urban development in the MENA region, fine-tuned according to the current context. The Rencontre also comprised a dinner on April 4 which witnessed the participation of Inger Andersen as well as Sigrid Kaag (Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant Administrator and Director, Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy, UNDP New York). Both high-rank officials gave speeches on the new challenges as well as the new development opportunities in the region. As for the last session, it initiated a discussion on land issues as well as on social and territorial inclusion within MENA cities. This document provides summaries of the presentations given at the Rencontre. The discussions of the 4 sessions (including the inputs of the discussants) are gathered under a single section in order to avoid repetitions (as some issues were approached in several sessions or closely echoed other themes addressed in other sessions) and to propose a synthetic overview of our debates.

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2 In partnership with the World Bank and the Arab Urban Development Institute.
3 A conference on local municipal finance was recently held in Rabat (www.urbanknowledge.org/MENA).
4 The electronic platform can be accessed through the official MENA Urbanization Knowledge Platform webpage: http://cmimarseille.org/ukp-rabat.php
5 Agnes Deboulet (Professor of Sociology at Université Paris 8) and Amin Allal (PhD candidate at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques of Aix-en-Provence), were discussants of the first session. Madani Safar Zitoun (Professor of Sociology at the University of Algiers) and Mohamed Al-Shahed (PhD candidate at New York University), Founder of the electronic magazine Cairoobserver), were discussants of the second session. As for the last session, it was discussed by Abdelaziz Adidi (Director of the National Institute of Urban Development and Planning – INAU – in Rabat) and by Eric Verdeil (Geographer, researcher at CNRS).
5 critical pieces to the puzzle of the city: Opening the Rencontre, Inger Andersen, Vice President of the World Bank for the MENA region, highlighted five key dimensions of cities: referring to their “souls” (which only the people of each city can hold and create), their vibrancy (as they concentrate jobs and innovation), their design (inherited from the past and which transformation will be a legacy for the future generations, either contributing to choking the city to death or to releasing its creativity), their resilience (to withstand modern development, high densities, manage scarce resources, etc.) as well as their voice, she insisted on the need to better understand each of these closely intertwined characteristics in order to promote sustainable and balanced development.

Chaired by Mats Karlsson, Director of the CMI, the first session dealt with the mobilizations which have developed since 2010-2011 in the context of the Arab Spring. The speakers analyzed more particularly the potential links between these uprisings and former forms of protest, as well as their impact on urban governance.

Myriam Catusse: An Overview of the Recent Research Analyzing the Political and Social Movements of the Arab Spring.

In her presentation, Myriam Catusse came back to the rich literature developed over the past decades on social protest and collective action in the MENA region (especially in urban settings). Research shows that Arab societies have not suddenly awakened from a long sleep outside history. It rather proves they have consistently expressed their discontent through both silent bypassing of the rules and through more direct and collective resistance to authoritarian regimes. These movements appear closely linked to the transformation of cities and the urbanization process. For example, several social scientists have analyzed the “know-how” of ordinary citizens: often focalizing their research on the urban poor, they have evidenced the multiple forms of resistance to and bypassing of urban norms. These forms of resistance often accounted to survival strategies in highly unequal contexts, notably regarding the right to the city, in a region where urban planning has largely been implemented by way of derogation, where property rights relate to different and fluctuating legal regimes and where the question of refugees has often constituted (and appears now more than ever as) a central issue.

Arab cities have also consistently been the scene of more collective and open forms of protest (such as the many “riots” or events that have taken place in small and medium-sized Algerian and Moroccan cities). They have also witnessed the development of more organized social movements (such as Kifaya, the Egyptian Movement for Change or the Damascus Spring in 2000-2001, etc.), or of electoral mobilizations (notably through the rise of Islamist movements). Over the last decades, labor unrest (for example in Egypt in the textile mills of El Mahalla el Kubra or in Tunisia in the Gafsa mining basin in 2008) has also been an increasing source of

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6 Researcher at CNRS/IREMAM.
protest, while movements of unemployed graduates\textsuperscript{9} have developed in a context of declining government jobs.

If the Arab Spring has confirmed the importance of studying the above-mentioned movements on the ground and the need to analyze them in their specific contexts, it has also revealed new lines of research to investigate in order to better understand the transformations of urban governance. As Myriam Catusse recalled, political parties have not been leading actors of the uprisings, yet they have been at the core of the redefinition of urban governance since 2011. Until now, little research has been conducted on the municipal experience for example of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt or on the sociology of the Ennahda Party in Tunisia, whereas better understanding these organizations will be key to analyze the development of urban governance in the Arab World.

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Ali Bensaad\textsuperscript{10}. An Analysis of the Libyan Case: Cities at the Core of the Revolution

As highlighted by Ali Bensaad, the Libyan uprising could misleadingly appear as a caricatural revenge of tribes over a modern and urban way of life. However, Libya is the most urbanized North African country (86% of the population was living in urban areas in 2004, as opposed to 2/3 of the population in 1975) and cities have been major places of social change: the speaker recalled that the development of urban sprawl in the country has largely questioned the principle of community gathering and has participated to the mixing of the population. The fact that Libyan cities have consistently witnessed social and political contest (such as the development of squatting movements in Tripoli before 2011, or that of the mothers of missing political opponents in Benghazi) illustrates the inability of a wealthy state to support urban transformations despite its financial resources. It also illustrates the strong connection between urbanization and social/political protest, as well as the defiance of authoritarian regimes toward urban societies (see the synthesis of discussions for further details).

The speaker thus showed how the Gaddafi regime had endeavored to neutralize urban societies through the promotion of the tribal system, which was used as an exclusive framework to negotiate with the population (for example regarding land policies, designed according to grazing land, or regarding planning, with the Great Man-made River Project which encouraged the revival of Saharan cities). In that regard, the fact that Misrata, the industrial capital of the country, witnessed the most violent fights is not incidental.

Box 1. Revolutions, riots, protests: a series of concepts to describe evolving processes\textsuperscript{11}

Several participants (including the speakers themselves) insisted on the diversity of terms used to refer to the current protests in the MENA region (“revolution”, “transition”, “uprisings”, “Arab Spring”, etc.). They insisted on the change in the vocabulary used by social scientists to describe unrest: in the 1980s, studies tended to classify as “riots” the mobilizations which developed at the time in urban settings in several countries south of the Mediterranean. This term is illustrative of a quite mechanical vision of protests, which does replace these movements in their social and historical contexts. As highlighted by Myriam Catusse, the disappearance of the term reflects the will of social scientists to analyze the collective identities at stake in these mobilizations and to distance themselves from the assumption that mobs only behave irrationally, because they have no collective consciousness. The increasing use of the phrase “social movements”, which tends to

\textsuperscript{9}See for example the work of Montserrat Emperador on Morocco or Karine Tourné on Egypt.

\textsuperscript{10}Associate Professor at the Université d’Aix-Marseille/ Researcher at IREMAM.

\textsuperscript{11}This question of vocabulary was repeatedly debated during the discussions: we are presenting directly in this section the major points addressed as they will allow the reader to get a better sense of the definitions suggested by the different participants to this Rencontre.
replace that of “civil society” in sociological and historical research, also illustrates a rising interest for understanding the multiple internal logics (be they social, political, economic, etc.) of these movements and of their stakeholders (whereas the term “civil society” had been primarily used to analyze the relations between non-state actors and public governments). As for the variety of terms used to refer to the “Arab Spring”, it illustrates the variety of situations at stake in the different countries (with for example little comparison possible between the rather sporadic and pacific protests in Morocco and the war situation in Syria). It also reflects the complexity of describing processes whose outcome remains unknown. For Ali Bennasr however, as long as a regime has been toppled, it is possible to talk about “revolution”, even if this change does not result in the advent of democracy in the short term (as it often takes decades for a sustainable and open political system to be created after a revolution).

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Eric Gobe12. An Analysis of Three Moments/Locations of the Tunisian Mobilizations

The presentation concentrated on three different moments and three different locations of the Tunisian mobilizations. Eric Gobe recalled that the uprisings had originated in the urban centers of the poorest regions of the country, and that regional inequalities had been paramount in the outbreak of the first demonstrations of 2010-2011 (with slogans demanding social justice and the right to work). The same can be noticed about a former wave of protest which had developed in 2008 in the mining basin of Gafsa in Southern Tunisia: in this “lagging region”, the movement had not involved workers of the Compagnie des Phosphates, but rather a population economically marginalized, which was striving to get access to formal labor market. The Tunisian revolution thus originated in small and medium cities like Redeyef and is symptomatic of a sense of relative frustration, notably among youth increasingly holding university degrees but whose degrees have little value on the labor market (notably due to a clientelist redistribution of the scarce resource represented by public jobs).

In the second part of his presentation, Eric Gobe focused on the role Tunisian lawyers played in encouraging and sometimes organizing the demonstrations. Stressing on the massive rise in the number of lawyers (and mostly young lawyers) registered over the last decades13, the speaker evoked the conflicting links the Ben Ali regime had maintained with a profession perceived as potentially threatening, which had been denied most of their claims (and especially their economic demands)14. Thanks to the strong territorial network of the Courthouses of First Instance and to the numerical importance of Tunisian lawyers, the latter became visible and influent stakeholders, heading mobilizations since December 2010 up to January 14, 2011 from the urban centers of central Tunisia to the Sahel and the capital.

Eric Gobe then briefly analyzed a third moment of uprising which broke in Siliana (120 km southwest of Tunis) last November following an altercation between a member of the Governor team and an official of one of the major unions in the country. The demonstrations were violently suppressed. According to the speaker, their development illustrates the need for greater decentralization in the country. For Eric Gobe, the demonstrators’ call for the departure of the Governor (a civil servant appointed by the temporary Government) shows a profound lack of legitimacy of the political and administrative system. The Governor has been in the former regime a very centralized and authoritarian figure and the fact that he is now accused of not being able to implement efficient regional policies shows the call for change in the relations between

12 Researcher at CNRS / Centre Jacques Berque (Rabat) / IREMAM.
13 There were 10 lawyers in Sidi Bouzid in 1990 as opposed to 90 in 2010.
14 For references of his research on Tunisian lawyers, see http://www.cjb.ma/32-recherche/33-equipe/276-eric-gobe.html
the central state and local governments, in the definition of their respective powers, in territorial/administrative divisions, etc. The ability to develop pro-equity policies in the lagging regions with the participation of the population and of their local representatives appears as crucial.


Based on an anthropological approach, this collective book (presented during the Rencontre by Amin Allal15), shows how Arab uprisings are embedded in local histories of political and urban protest. The contributions highlight the important legacy of previous mobilizations, revealing for example that current cyber-activists in Tunisia and Egypt are often the children of former political opponents, or how katibas in Libya have been organized around local bonds of solidarity. The history of local protest can notably explain why Taiz in Yemen (a student city neglected by the policies conceived in Sanaa) or Gafsa in Tunisia (where mobilizations for job creations had developed since 2008) have been at the forefront of the political protest. Interestingly, the book also shows that the current uprising movements seem to overcome some of the categories which were presented as central for the understanding of previous movements of resistance: the divide between the formal and the informal city has not constituted a major factor of mobilization during the Arab uprisings (whereas the urban poor were considered as major resisting actors to the urban norms imposed by the authoritarian regimes).

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Kareem Ibrahim16. Egypt’s Urban Future: Between ‘Cairo 2050’ and ‘Cairo 2013’

For Kareem Ibrahim, Egypt was influenced prior to the revolution by two urban visions: (1) a bottom-up approach encouraged by international donors and mainly implemented through participatory upgrading of informal areas and (2) a top-down approach illustrative of the Cairo 2050 project17. Two years after the revolution, and as social demands remain unfulfilled, local initiatives and mobilization on the ground are still vivid. Yet the Government has not changed its urban planning paradigm: big projects are still considered as the only solution to urban issues even though they cannot answer people’s urging needs. While resources at the local level remain very weak, governmental plans are adopted without consultation/participation at the local level. As for development agencies, Kareem Ibrahim considers they have little understanding of the logics and balance of power at stake at the local level and do not always get governmental support for their actions. Despite the vibrant activity of civil society, the new and various initiatives taken remain rather fragmented and have not impacted national policies so far.

Created in 2009 by urban practitioners and social activists, Takween is an urban development company aiming to support and complement efforts to tackle urban challenges, with the conviction that “it is good to have visions for ‘Cairo 2050’, but it is essential to think of what people need in ‘Cairo 2012’”. Takween has developed several projects to promote participatory urban planning and/or upgrading. For example, TADAMUN initiative includes the identification of local best practices to provide communities and decision makers with innovative tools and alternatives to current policies/practices (to pave streets, provide residents with filtered water, regularize tenure, etc.).

15 PhD student at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques of Aix-en-Provence.
16 Co-founder of Takween Integrated Community Development: http://www.takween-eg.com/
17 Cairo Vision 2050 is a document created by the former Egyptian administration to prioritize urban development projects in the Greater Cairo Metropolitan Area. It was criticized notably for focusing on a market-driven and investor-led growth model, promoting a luxurious and very modern image for the capital which was considered rather exclusive by many practitioners and representatives of the civil society.
April 4, 2013 – Session 2
04:45 PM – 06:30 PM: THE TRANSFORMING ARAB CITY: SYNTHESIS OF THE LAST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIA IN THE MENA REGION

Chaired by Nader Ghazal, Mayor of Tripoli, Lebanon, the session aimed to point at the main areas of research explored by specialists of urban issues over the last few years. The two speakers presented the results of two international symposiums recently organized around urban governance in the MENA region.

Pierre-Arnaud Barthel18. “Revolts and Transitions in the Arab World: Toward a New Urban Agenda?”

As a co-organizer of the Symposium held by the CEDEJ19 in Cairo in November 2011 (“Révoltes et transitions dans le monde arabe: vers un nouvel agenda urbain?”), Pierre-Arnaud Barthel presented the main findings of the conference. He shed light on the ability of former authoritarian regimes to own and use key messages pertaining to urban development pilot projects, responding to recent international criteria of sustainable and participative approaches as well as strategic urban planning. If these projects, implemented by the State or by donors, had sometimes a positive impact on population lives, they were not politically relayed at the local level and remained isolated.

Stressing on the urban roots of the Arab uprisings, Pierre-Arnaud Barthel also insisted on the disconnection witnessed between political and urban change in the context of the Arab Spring. Bringing new leaders on the stage, the Arab spring has not led to the definition of new urban agendas so far: despite the emergence of new yet scattered projects promoting a participatory approach involving local populations, and despite the fact that political parties at the helm of central governments are willing to distance themselves from former regimes’ legacy, their urban policies do not diverge much from these implemented by their predecessors. In Egypt for example, the Government led by the Muslim Brothers keep on carrying out new towns and social housing programs in the desert without putting into place sustainable solutions in terms of public transportation or water distribution.

Nevertheless, according to the speaker, this long term perspective could be embodied by large-scale projects such as the Cairo Vision 2050, which has been highly criticized for having made the issue of urban inequality and bridging the urban divide a second priority (by focusing on a market-driven growth model), but which offers a large range of plans allowing to triangulate between projects, public policies, and their spatial implementation (this last dimension being often missing in traditional urban development projects), thus laying the ground for necessary new reflections on urban project management (maîtrise d’ouvrage urbaine)20. Pierre-Arnaud Barthel concluded his presentation by underscoring the following challenges that MENA cities are faced with: (i) challenges for linking up urban programs/policies with proposals that have emerged from the collective mobilizations and NGOs; (ii) challenges of the reinforcement of local authorities capacities; (iii) challenges of the urban stakeholders’ training, whom missions have to be redefined according to the transforming Arab city.

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18 Professor of Geography and Urbanism, University of Paris-Est.
19 Centre d’études et de documentation économiques, juridiques et sociales.
20 For more details on the analysis of the Cairo Vision 2050 by Pierre-Arnaud Barthel, see “The new metropolitan strategy “Cairo 2050”: whose vision?”, in UN Habitat, 2011, Cairo - a City in Transition Cities and Citizens Series (Series title).
Aude Signoles. “Cities, Actors, and Power in the Arab and Muslim World”.

Sharing the main findings of the Symposium organized by the GREMMO and the Institut d’Etudes Politiques of Lyon in October 2012 in Lyon (“Villes, acteurs et pouvoirs dans le monde arabe et musulman”), Aude Signoles came back to the social effects of “authoritarian urbanism” over the last decades. Leading to the fabric of dual cities, this “authoritarian urbanism” has been characterized by large-scale planning projects and meanwhile informal settlements expansion (which are far from being socially homogeneous). These urbanization trends have contributed to segmenting social relations within cities, for example through the development of new suburbs mostly dedicated to re-housing slum-dwellers in areas often located far away from their former place of residence). The same urbanization trends have also contributed to segmenting social relations within the same neighborhoods, as populations with very different incomes are increasingly living side by side, notably in the suburbs. These new forms of cohabitation appear potentially destabilizing, as they might generate frustration among poorest population.

In terms of urban governance, the speaker pointed at the weak results of the decentralization reforms orchestrated by central governments in the MENA region over the last three decades. The autonomy of municipal authorities has mostly remained part of political rhetoric and local elected representatives have been excluded from the definition of large urban projects in many countries. Likewise, they have not been involved in urban services delegation to the private sector (for example in the West Bank). These decentralized structures thus lack power and legitimacy, which makes the issue of accountability in front of citizens very problematic.

The speaker finally outlined four emerging research questions which remain to be explored:

- Analyze the current debates and reflections on the ongoing decentralization process in a context where political elites (be they national or local) as well as the population focus more on reorganization of the central government.
- Understand to what extent municipalities play their role as mediators between the State and local populations; and better analyze the role played by the local stakeholders who are currently at the center of urban politics. Agreeing with the analysis of Myriam Catusse, Aude Signoles underlined the strong lack of data concerning the municipal experience of the political parties who now appear at the core of national but also local politics.
- Comprehend the challenge of sustaining and institutionalizing the new participatory approaches and practices which have emerged these last two years in order to anchor the democratic culture that came out from the uprisings.
- Analyze the increasingly formalized demands for the “right to the city” and the development of “urban” civil disobedience through more collective actions (see for example the boycott on electricity bills in the West Bank).

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21 Associate Professor in Political Science at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques of Aix-en-Provence.
22 Groupe de recherches et d’études sur la Méditerranée et le Moyen-Orient.
April 5, 2013 – Session 3
09:00 AM – 11:00 AM: View on Urban Practitioners and Donors: Toward New Approaches?

Chaired by Professor Peter Gotsch, this session gathered donors collaborating with the CMI. They presented their main projects regarding urban development in the MENA region, showing how the Arab Spring allowed them to adjust and fine-tune their activities in order to better respond to the priorities and needs which have emerged over the last two years. The program leaders identified several common objectives (see below for the list of speakers/programs and for the links to the PPT presentations): they all insisted on the importance to involve the populations from the conception phase of projects and on the new participatory perspectives opened by the uprisings.

The programs presented also aim to empower local governments in order to help them play a crucial part in urban development, notably through the setting up of networks of knowledge sharing: for example, the CoMun program launched by the GIZ in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, aims at promoting local democracy through reinforcing dialogue between cities in the three countries. Although decentralization reforms had consistently been advocated by international donors prior to the Arab spring, the current context provides with new channels for action: whereas the Tunisian Government was unwilling for the GIZ to provide municipalities with technical assistance, the ministry of Interior has asked the GIZ to develop projects in 12 cities in order to bring citizens closer to municipalities after the revolution. The need to promote urban development at the city level also goes through the setting up of new tools of strategic planning, not only at the scale of capital cities but also at that of medium and small cities which are essential to the economy and the balance of the region. Conducted by the World Bank, the program Cities for a New Generation focuses on three pilot cities: Sfax, Marrakech and Saïda and aims at assessing and strengthening municipal human resources.

In order to promote integrated, inclusive and sustainable development at all levels, these bottom-up approaches have to be combined with top-down processes. Donors have been encouraging structural reforms at the central level and pushing the agenda of multilevel governance. For that matter, the ART Global Initiative (Articulation of Territorial and Thematic Networks of Cooperation for Human Development) led by UNDP aims at better identifying the territories’ needs and priorities through the coordination, harmonization and alignment of development efforts of multiple actors at the sub-national level (regional, municipal and local).

List of Speakers/Program Leaders:
Ms. Mai Linh Cam (AFD)
Mr. Meinolf Spiekermann (GIZ)
Mr. Koenuma Akihiko (JICA)
Mr. Johannes Krassnitzer (UNDP)
Mr. Andrea Zanon (World Bank)
Mr. François Boulanger (World Bank)

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23 Professor for International Urban Development at the Polytechnic University of Frankfurt Main.
Chaired by Ibrahim Khries, Deputy City Manager of the Municipality of Amman, Jordan, the last session focused on the rising land competition at stake between an increased number of stakeholders (state-actors; large holding companies with public funding but private status, like Al Omrane or CDG in Morocco; private developers; sometimes political parties like Hezbollah in Beirut, etc.) in the MENA region. Analyzing different cases in the region, the three speakers showed how land competition participates into shaping the urban fabric of the Arab cities, with the development of prestigious urban projects on valuable land and the persistence of informal settlements often excluded from cities. The CMI considers land a central issue in the MENA region and the CDC-led program has conducted two studies in Tunisia and in Lebanon on the topic (to be developed in additional MENA countries).

Valérie Clerc, “Public Mediation in MENA Cities: Land Competition and Access to Housing”

The speaker presented the main findings of a collective and comparative research project she coordinated at IFPO in Damascus (2009-2011). Investigating the impact on the making of MENA cities of rising private or foreign investment (particularly coming from the Gulf) in urban projects, the research team focused on the rise of high-end real estate development and the concomitant increase in informal housing (more adapted to the means of more disadvantaged categories of the population). The project aimed at looking at areas (mainly located in the inner-city) subject to potential land competition for the implementation of large and prestigious urban projects occupied by informal settlements. It also aimed at analyzing the intermediation role of central and local governments between the different stakeholders. The team showed that several similar processes were at stake in the 8 countries studied. Despite the new political context, the processes identified remain quite unchanged, even though Valérie Clerc insisted on the potential evolution of policies, including under the pressure of citizen claims and urban practitioners’ lobbying.

• **The transformation of city boundaries**: as informal settlements previously located at the city outskirts have become more central through rapid urban expansion, they have represented new opportunities for developers, who have tried to “conquer” these new frontiers in the city by evicting their inhabitants and/or re-housing them in distant suburbs (be it in Damascus, Istanbul or Casablanca). The strong increase in land prices also endangers the heritage of medinas in some cities.

• **Social housing, a new profitable market for private developers**: private mass housing targeting low and middle-income categories has significantly developed in the MENA region with the support of public authorities, through fiscal measures (Morocco) or public loan agreements (Lebanon). These policies of social housing, closely linked to the development of high-end urban projects, largely account for the development of affordable housing supply, while also enhancing urban sprawling.

25 Architect and urban planner, researcher at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD).
26 Institut français du Proche-Orient (Damascus).
• **The different forms of public mediation to organize land competition**: public authorities can contribute to organize land competition through the design of strategic planning or through facilitating agreements between private interests and social claims. Yet this collective research also sheds light on the contradictions of public policies, with for example the transformation of programs of urban upgrading into rehousing programs (leading to the destruction and rebuilding of housing), such as in Damascus.

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**Ms. Mona Fawaz**

Analyzing the impact of neo-liberal reforms on Lebanese urban planning, Mona Fawaz focused in her presentation on the **rising role played by private developers not only in the (re)construction of Beirut, but also in the regulation of its built environment**. Analyzing the recently adopted Green Building Regulation, she pointed out at the influence of real estate developers over its definition, which, she argued, led to more profitable rules for the private sector (as the modest changes operated in terms of architectural requirements allowed to build more built-on surfaces). A second example gives a good illustration of the influence of Lebanese developers over the built environment: by pooling up land (destroying and rebuilding properties) in peri-urban areas where rents were still regulated by an old land control law, they managed to solve an issue to which political stakeholders had no solution, thus freeing the rent market in the last parts of Beirut where rents were still regulated. Also highlighting the rising importance of other non state actors in urban development, Mona Fawaz recalled the central role played by Hezbollah in the reconstruction of Haret-Hreik, a neighborhood located in the southern suburbs of Beirut. She concluded her presentation raising the tension between the sense of common good supposedly at the core of urban planning and the market-driven (as well as political) interests which have increasingly characterized its practice over the last decades.

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**Myriam Ababsa**

Myriam Ababsa presented the book she recently co-edited (with Baudoin Dupret and Eric Denis) on **Popular Housing and Urban Land Tenure in the Middle East** (American University in Cairo Press, 2012). Aiming to highlight the continuum in the consolidation, building after building, of the popular neighborhoods of MENA cities, this collective work (privileging a sociological approach) shows how inhabitants produce their legality in practice to ensure the security of tenure, through the payment of taxes or fines which are used as means to warrant a right; through the use of seals, a finance ministry’s official forms; engineer’s documents; notary documents; evidence required by the Cadastre Department; or the use of ‘customary’ contracts (very widespread in Jordan and Syria. The book also focuses on how land-titling policies are conceived and how they can sometimes be instrumented by the governments (for example using the argument of seismic risk) following speculative interests.

27 Associate Professor in Urban Studies and Planning at the Architecture and Design Department of the American University of Beirut, Lebanon.
29 For further details, see for example “Hezbollah as urban planner? Questions to and from planning theory”, *Planning Theory*, 8, 2009.
30 Researcher at Institut Francais du Proche Orient (IFPO), Jordan.
Underlying this approach focusing on day-to-day mechanisms making up urban phenomena, was the will to break with research exclusively analyzing changing urban environments in terms of social contradictions and profound inequalities. Following research for example by Diane Singerman\textsuperscript{31}, Agnès Deboulet and Isabelle Berry-Chikhaoui\textsuperscript{32} or Asef Bayat\textsuperscript{33}, the team focused on the precise description of interactions, routines, and ordinary practices in order to shed light on the way in which ‘bits and pieces’ of cities, neighborhoods, or broader urban formations appear, are reproduced, balance each other, evolve, and transform: in the context of the daily practices and legal documents negotiated by inhabitants, the texts show a crossing of institutionalized borders, which are in turn blurred and re-made with the cooperation of state agents.

\textsuperscript{31} Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo, Princeton University Press, 1996.
\textsuperscript{32} Op. cit.
\textsuperscript{33} Op. cit.
SYNTHESIS OF DISCUSSIONS

The discussions allowed to recall how in rapidly urbanizing contexts, cities had often been considered by authoritarian regimes of the MENA region as a potential political threat long prior to the outbreak of the Arab uprisings. However, the persistence of authoritarian forms of urban planning and of highly centralized policies did not systematically lead to the absence of “local scenes of mobilizations”. As put by Aude Signoles, it rather led to the absence of clear and comprehensive strategies of urban development, as well as to important differences in the management of urban issues due to clientelist logics or corruption practices (which participated to the development of a feeling of unfairness and a sense of grievance among the population). Moreover, the discussions reminded that “authoritarian urbanism” went hand in hand with market-driven urban planning, mostly led by land prices (the latter having increased dramatically over the last decades). Here again, it appears that urban development in the MENA region has been characterized over the last two decades by a lack of clear political strategy, and a succession of one-off operations.

Throughout the debates, participants expressed their contradictory understanding of the ongoing situation in MENA cities, due to the coexistence of conflicting processes in the context of the Arab spring. On the one hand, specific examples were discussed, which illustrate the significant yet isolated changes at stake in the local making and management of urban areas. On the other hand, and at a wider scale, business as usual seems to prevail and the urban agendas of MENA cities remain quite unchanged, as the same top-down programs are being implemented (which have not proved efficient over the last decades). Pointing at the lack of integrated and strategic urban planning/vision in the MENA region, participants insisted on the importance to empower local governments, as well as on the need to better link the innovative initiatives initiated by civil society with decision/policy making in order to strengthen democracy, which might take several years or decades to prevail.

The Rencontre also allowed to identify several avenues for research on MENA cities, already mentioned above (sociology of political parties and municipal governments; study of territorial inequalities; extent and impact of decentralization reforms; reaching of compromises between different stakeholders to preserve the common good in the making of the urban space, etc.). As a conclusion of the debates, a last challenge was raised: the need to think (and implement) development in an integrated way not only at the city level, but also at the national level (and at that of the whole region). Better understanding the dynamics of small and medium-sized cities and their relationships with bigger cities, as well as the links between urban development and agricultural economy indeed appear as central issues for the future of the MENA region.

Closing the Rencontre, Inger Andersen, the Vice President of the World Bank for the MENA region, proposed a three-point conclusion: (1) True to the belief that “when the State is in a state of disarray, local matters more”, she recalled that change often happens at the local level, where the need to deliver basic services to the population forces city managers to find alternative and innovative solutions to daily challenges. (2) In order to encourage local empowerment and provide local governments with the necessary resources to implement their (new) missions, there is an urgent need for progressive yet concrete reforms (such as fiscal delegation, etc.). (3) Finally, Inder Andersen emphasized that strengthening the third tier of government (where interaction with the population are the most important), especially in countries with strong centrifugal forces (such as Iraq or Yemen) rather than the second tier (very important yet often appointed), constitutes a crucial objective. She concluded the Rencontre by praising the courage of the people in the MENA region and their determination to change things, which have been a source of inspiration for all.