

A HOUSING PROGRAM FOR DAMASCUS, SYRIA

AN EVALUATION OF THE CURRENT SITUATION
WITH RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEET PRESENT
AND FUTURE NEEDS

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Thabet Taher Zakaria

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ABSTRACT

A HOUSING PROGRAM FOR DAMASCUS, SYRIA

By Thabet Taher Zakaria

One of the most important problems facing many countries of the world is the shortage of healthful housing. Housing problems have originated from deeply rooted factors interrelated with the whole structure of communities. Despite its heritage and ancient origins, Syria is facing a serious number of housing problems and deficiencies in its urban development. This same situation is found to be serious in most nations of the world, especially those with an ancient history and an underdeveloped economy. In contrast with relatively new cities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ancient cities have lagged behind others in their urbanization. Most of the functions of ancient cities are obsolete today, as they were designed to serve certain requirements relevant to the needs and desires of unique peoples of a time long past. Accepting the premise that cities exist to satisfy human needs, there must be continual readjustment in physical patterns and facilities to the dynamics of social characteristics. Thus, the physical form of a city, which includes land uses, a circulation system, and other private and public facilities, has to be functioning effectively all the time in order to meet the requirements of people connected with their advances in technology. In old cities like Damascus, the adjustment to the new concepts of urban development and advances in technology requires a double effort since a major part of the old culture has to be changed to conform with new ways of life and new needs

that, in turn, require a different physical patterns making up the city. The achievement of balance between the new and the old is not only difficult, but also costly in terms of adjusting and reconditioning the physical structure.

This thesis study presents the housing problems of Damascus in a comprehensive framework and it attempts to evaluate the causes and roots of these problems so that feasible and adequate recommendations can be developed. In order to achieve the ultimate goal of housing in the city, a systematic analysis of each segment related to housing development has to be understood and evaluated. Stress is given to the applied features of the concepts and theories of housing in conjunction with applied theories of urban development rather than emphasizing the conceptual and theoretical nature of housing. The methodology utilized spells out the initial definition of housing problems, analyzes and synthesizes the findings, and drafts general solutions. Provisions for very specific decision-making procedures regarding alternate solutions for housing problems is not attempted since the scope of the study is merely to develop a housing program encompassing the basic and significant features of housing and other relevant functions of urban development.

The significant historical, geographical, and survival aspects of Damascus are examined, including the major and some detailed social and economic features of the Damascene; the major legal and administrative provisions of housing and other related regulations of urban development are traced; and the quantitative and qualitative measures of the housing stock of the city and its environs are tabulated and evaluated.

The housing quality in the City ranges in extreme contrast from the luxurious villas to slums unfit for human habitation. Damascus, also, is in severe need of additional housing; it is estimated that a minimum of 7,800 dwelling units should be added annually in the following 11 years.

This thesis includes a series of recommendations, that could be offered to various persons involved in the housing industry, whether private or public, such as:

- Provision of a census of housing, and new legislative and administrative laws to guide the use and reuse of land;
- Preparation, adaption, and carrying out of a comprehensive master plan for the City and its environs;
- Establishment of many private non-profit housing organizations;
- Establishment of a national housing bank to grant loans at low interest rates;
- Provision of mass production in housing materials;
- Encouragement of housing designers to stress the function of housing rather than its architectural appearance alone;
- Establishment of planning and social institutions to produce enough planners and social workers in order to educate the citizens and help them understand what they have missed;
- Establishment of national housing research center.

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By

Thabet Taher Zakaria

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INTRODUCTION

Shelter is commonly acknowledged as a principal need of man, ranking equally with food and clothing. In the evolution of man's attempt to shape his living environment, housing has been, in all cultures, one of the most dominant components of development and re-development. As more recent cultures of the world have become more systematic and efficient in structuring living environment through the process of comprehensive community and regional planning, housing has become a major economic activity in almost every nation, consuming a major share of all expenditures and generating a significant share of personal and community income, especially in those nations experiencing substantial increases in population concomitant with extensive social and economic changes.

Advances in technology and business management have made possible substantial improvements in the adequacy of housing. Central plumbing and heating, food preservation and preparation, electricity, air conditioning, etc., together with revolutionary new equipment and materials have made possible a considerable increase in the standard of housing in most nations; but, at the same time, have contributed significantly to the constantly rising cost of housing. The character and adequacy of the housing inventory of a nation has become an index of the standard of living and the cultural level and the rate of development of a nation.

As a native of Syria, the author has become increasingly concerned with the shortcomings of the housing situation in that country and with the adequacy and quality of the whole environment in Syrian urban areas.

In major cities like Damascus, the number, kinds, distribution, and quality of housing are of fundamental significance to the overall rate of national social and economic development. The author has been most eager to examine the housing situation and needs in a representative Syrian city in order to develop a basis of knowledge for drafting workable programs that may, hopefully, be implemented over the coming years.

Thus, study of Damascus housing attempts to accomplish the following objectives:

To provide the author with a comprehensive understanding of the housing policies, programs, accomplishments, laws, physical conditions, and other related social and economic features of housing development in his country and specifically in the city of Damascus;

To review and understand the various ways and means adopted in other nations to develop healthful and adequate housing for their populations, and, consequently, better overall living environments; and

To utilize all possible advantages and benefits from the faculty and resources of the School of Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture at Michigan State University in terms of advice, guidance experience, and data regarding an applied planning problem which is of great interest and importance to the author.

Study of housing development in Damascus while resident in the United States is admittedly ambitious, but the desire to achieve the above objectives provided over-riding encouragement to undertake such work. The author had to face many difficulties in obtaining the required data for the body of this report. Data on housing for Damascus

is not only unavailable in this country, but also basic information required for an adequate description, analysis, and evaluation of problems has not been prepared yet in a systematically tabulated manner in Syria. Therefore, it was necessary to collect the required data from quite a number of statistical abstracts, books, reports, surveys and other materials. It was also necessary to send many letters to different governmental agencies and friends in Damascus requesting basic information; some of this information was helpful, however, much of it was not. Sometimes the author had to derive and tabulate percentages, numbers, and other similar procedures which resulted in a double effort.

This thesis is intended to accomplish an adequate presentation and description, analysis and evaluation and recommendations for the housing development and redevelopment in Damascus. It is a comprehensive framework describing in general and specific terms the present housing situation in the City, and how housing should function in the future. It deals with housing problems in relation to other urban components, whether physical, social, economic, or political. The study considers basically the general more than the particular. It is an overall image of the total residential scene in the city of Damascus which has a special history, particularly the social and economic character, interesting housing characteristics, and an especially promising prosperous future. Some of the above factors have resulted in an urban scene with heterogeneous social and economic features, and a special physical form of development worthy of study.

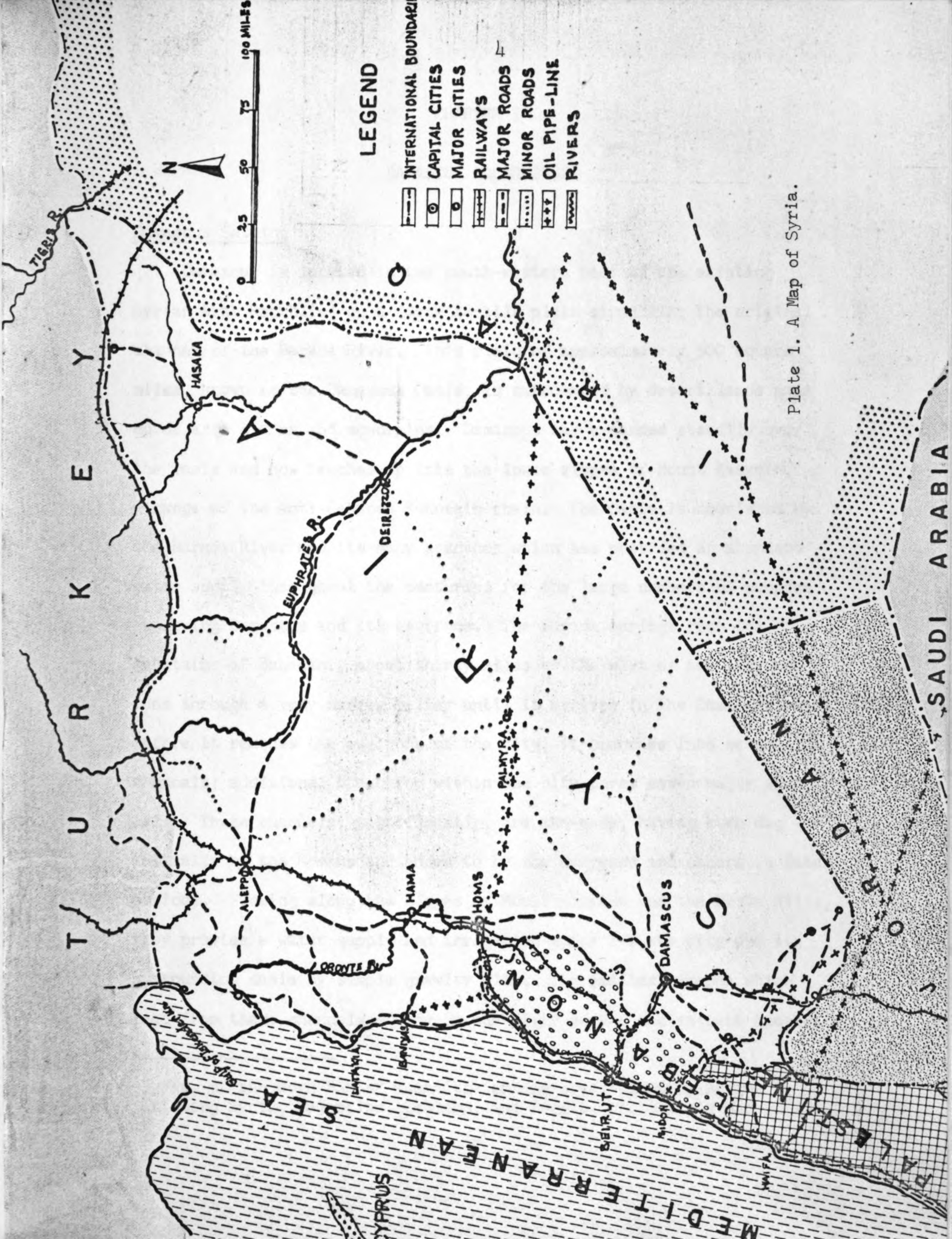


Plate 1. A Map of Syria.

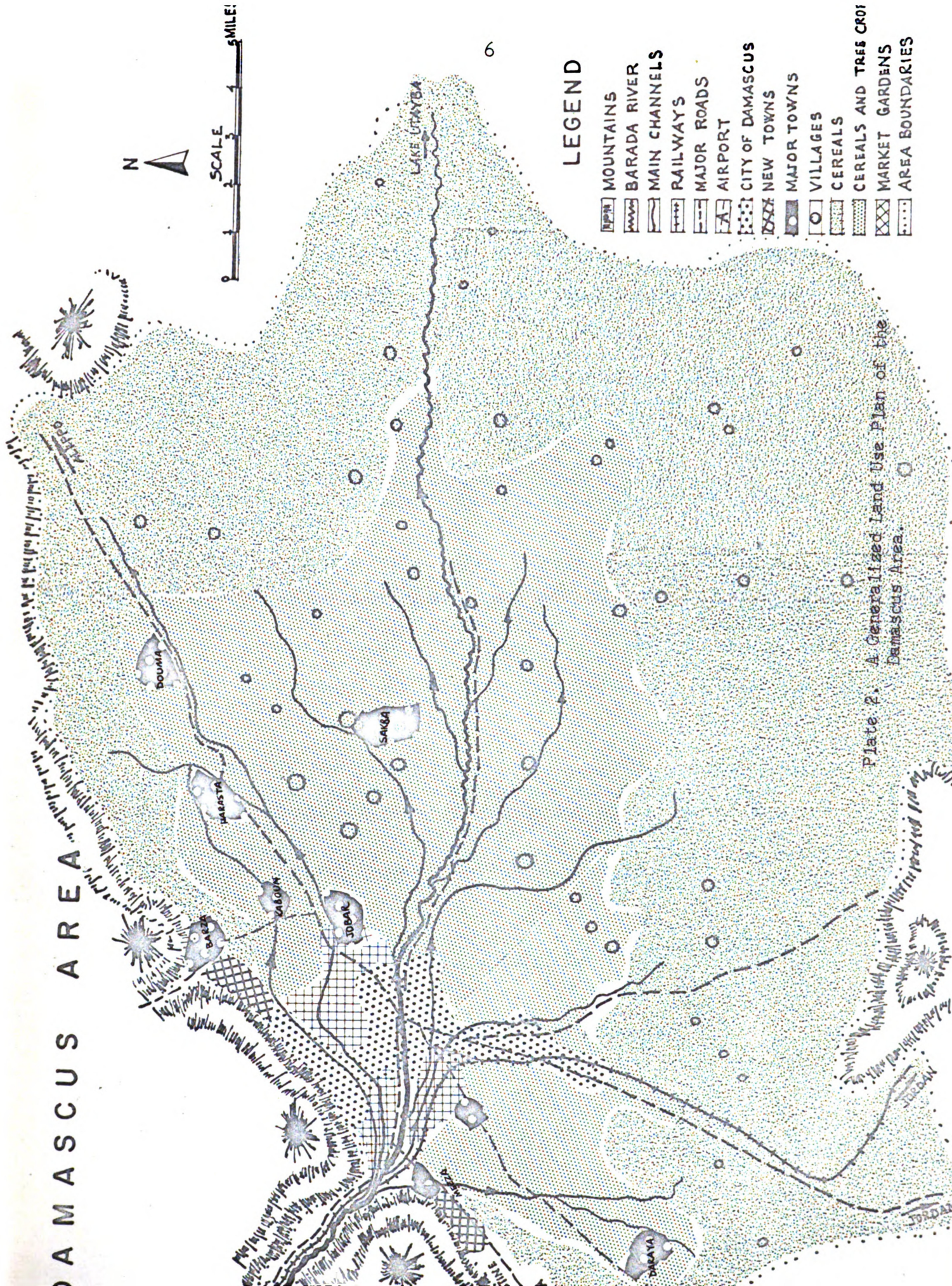
CHAPTER I

DAMASCUS BACKGROUND

Damascus Setting

Damascus is located in the south-western part of the existing Syrian Arab Republic¹ on a large fertile plain straddling the original channel of the Barada River. This plain of approximately 500 square miles, known as the Damascus Oasis, is surrounded by desert lands made up of arid plains and mountains. Damascus has expanded steadily over the Oasis and now reaches up into the lower slopes of Mount Kasyuin, a range of the Anti-Lebanon Mountain chain. The Oasis is nourished by the Barada River and its many branches which has provided an abundant water supply throughout the centuries for the large numbers of peoples occupying Damascus and its environs. The Barada springs from the mountains of Zabadani, about thirty miles to the west of the city and runs through a very narrow valley until it arrives in the Damascus area. Before it reaches the environs of the city, it branches into several channels; additional branching within the city forms seven major channels. These channels, significantly, are man-made, having been dug initially by the Romans and added to by the Umayyads and others in later periods. Flowing along the slopes of Mount Kasyiun and the Mezza Hills, they provide a water supply and irrigation water for the city and its surrounding oasis by simple gravity flow. The smaller streams which lead from these channels of the Barada River served the ancient houses,

¹Syria, or the word "Sham" meant the entire area encompassing the existing Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan before World War I.



baths, mosques, churches, and the many gardens and orchards in the city and outside its limits to the east, south, southwest, and northeast sides. These numerous secondary channels form a vast network for irrigation of the fertile soil of the Damascus Oasis which extend southward from the concentrated urban settlement to the arid areas at the edges of the Syrian Desert. Robin Feddin describes the Damascus entrance from the west side saying:

Where the road from Beyrouth to Damascus strays across the desert-like eastern slopes of the Anti-Lebanon mountains, and the landscape is at its barest - a wilderness of stone and shale, a sun-baked earth - a slip of water hurrying between the rocks makes almost miraculous appearance . . . It is necessary to insist on the Barada, since not only does it make possible the existence of the town, but contributes perhaps more than anything else to its particular atmosphere.¹

The Damascus fertile oasis, known as Ghuta, is an excellent land for agricultural purposes and cultivation of orchards and garden markets, vineyards, olives, most kinds of fruit and nuts, vegetables, sugar beets, cereals, and other crops. The Ghuta has been famous through the ages for its

Orchards of fruit trees (olives, apricots, figs, pomegranates, pistachios, and almonds) are intermingled with fields of wheat, barley, and maize, and groves of poplar and walnut; seen from a vantage point (as from the northern suburb of Salihyah, on the slope of Mount Kasyun), the white minarets of the city rising above the mass of verdure, leaves an ineffaceable impression.²

¹Robin Fedden, Syria: An Historical Appreciation; Robert Hale Limited, London 1955, p. 13.

²Encyclopedia Britannica 1960: Damascus, Vol. 7, p. 22.

Climatic Conditions

The climate of Damascus and the surrounding area is relatively dry and can be classified as predominately a desert climate. The excess of water that comes mainly from the Barada River and its branches has a great effect upon the degree of temperature and humidity in the area. The average altitude of Damascus is 2,362 feet above sea level. The average mean temperature ranges from 45°F in January to 82°F in August. It seldom falls below 25°F or rises above 100°F. Because the city lies in the rain shadow of the mountains of Lebanon, the rainfall and snow precipitation is very little. It ranges from 4 inches to 10 inches depending, to a great extent, upon the fluctuation and waves of high and low pressure areas which come, sometimes, from Siberia and North-eastern Europe. The average mean monthly precipitation ranges from 0 inches in the summer to 1.7 inches in the winter. Snow is rare and only falls a few days throughout the winter. In 1959, for example, it snowed only ten days and in 1960 and 1961 there was no snow at all.

The following table shows that there are only four months in the year which could be considered as rainy months, and the rest may be classified as dry.

Table I: Average of Thirteen Years of Temperature and Precipitation in Damascus

Months	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	Year
Temperature in Fahrenheit	45	48	54	62	70	76	80	82	76	68	57	48	64
Precipitation in Inches	1.7	1.7	0.3	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.4	1.6	1.6	8.6

Source: Air Ministry, Meteorological Office, Tables of Temperature, Relative Humidity and precipitation for the world, Part V Asia. London, H. M. Stationary Office 1958. Monthly temperature derived from average of daily maximum and minimum temperatures.

Brief History

Damascus is reputed to be the oldest city still in existence on the surface of the earth, having been built or created before the thirtieth century B.C. (3000 B.C.).¹ It has had many historical periods, such as the Aramaic, Greek, Roman, Arabic, Turkish, French, and the recent period of independence, but the very early history of Damascus is not well known. In the Roman period, the city had a grid-iron plan which was like or similar to old Greek towns. The main features of the Roman plan of the city was the "Straight Street" east to west, with great temples, colonnades, and propylaea.

Damascus had its greatest glory and pride in the period of the Umayyads, because it was the capital of their Islmaic Caliphate for about a hundred years, from the middle of the seventh to the middle of the eighth centuries (661 - 750 A.D.). The Umayyads Caliphate occupied most of the countries of the Ancient World, extending from southern France (Boitier) to the western frontiers of China, including Espania, North Africa, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkestan, Afghanestan, Pakistan, India, and, of course, the Arabian peninsula. Robin Feddin says:

"The coming of Islam maintained and increased the commercial and intellectual activity of the old Roman colony and gave the town a special position and a special history, together with an architecture worthy of these."²

After the period of the Umayyads, the city had been neglected

¹Homer Hoyt, "The Function of the Ancient and Modern City", Land Economics, August 1962, Vol. 38, No. 3, p. 246.

²R. Feddin, op. cit., p. 15.

because of the removal of the Islamic Caliphate to Baghdad by the Abbasids. The Abbasids aimed to destroy Damascus because it was the capital of their enemies, the Umayyads. Unfortunately, not too much has been left from the Umayyads culture and their magnificent architectural developments, except for the great mosque of the Umayyads which is considered a rare masterpiece throughout the world.

The Abbasid Synasty was

a period of anarchy and unrest, which resulted in the formation of cliques and the development of guild life. The city ceased to be a single whole, governed by public authorities responsible for the management of the community's assets: It was split up into autonomous districts, like diminutive, and often rival, cities, each with its own independent organization, mosque, hammam (baths), suqs (a bazaar), surrounding walls and gates, and own chief (sheikh) commanding a sort of police battalion.¹

During the period of Saladin and the Ayyubids in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Damascus began to grow again and to have its own famous palaces, mosques, hospitals, fountains, public baths, public libraries, and schools. Many of them are still in existence despite the invasion of Tamerlane's holocaust who fired and destroyed the city in the fourteenth century. The city was very beautiful in this period and almost an ideal place in which to live and work. "The geographer Yaquit, of the thirteenth century visited all of the four spots reputed as the most beautiful on earth and found Damascus to be the first among them; he sums up by writing, 'nothing attributed by way of description to the heavenly paradise is not found in Damascus.'"²

¹Unesco: Syria: Problem of Preservation and Presentation of Sites and Monuments, p. 13.

²Geo. B. Cressey, Crossroads Land and Life in Southwest Asia, J. B. Lippencott Co., Chicago 1960, p. 442.

DAMASCUS IN 1050 A.D.

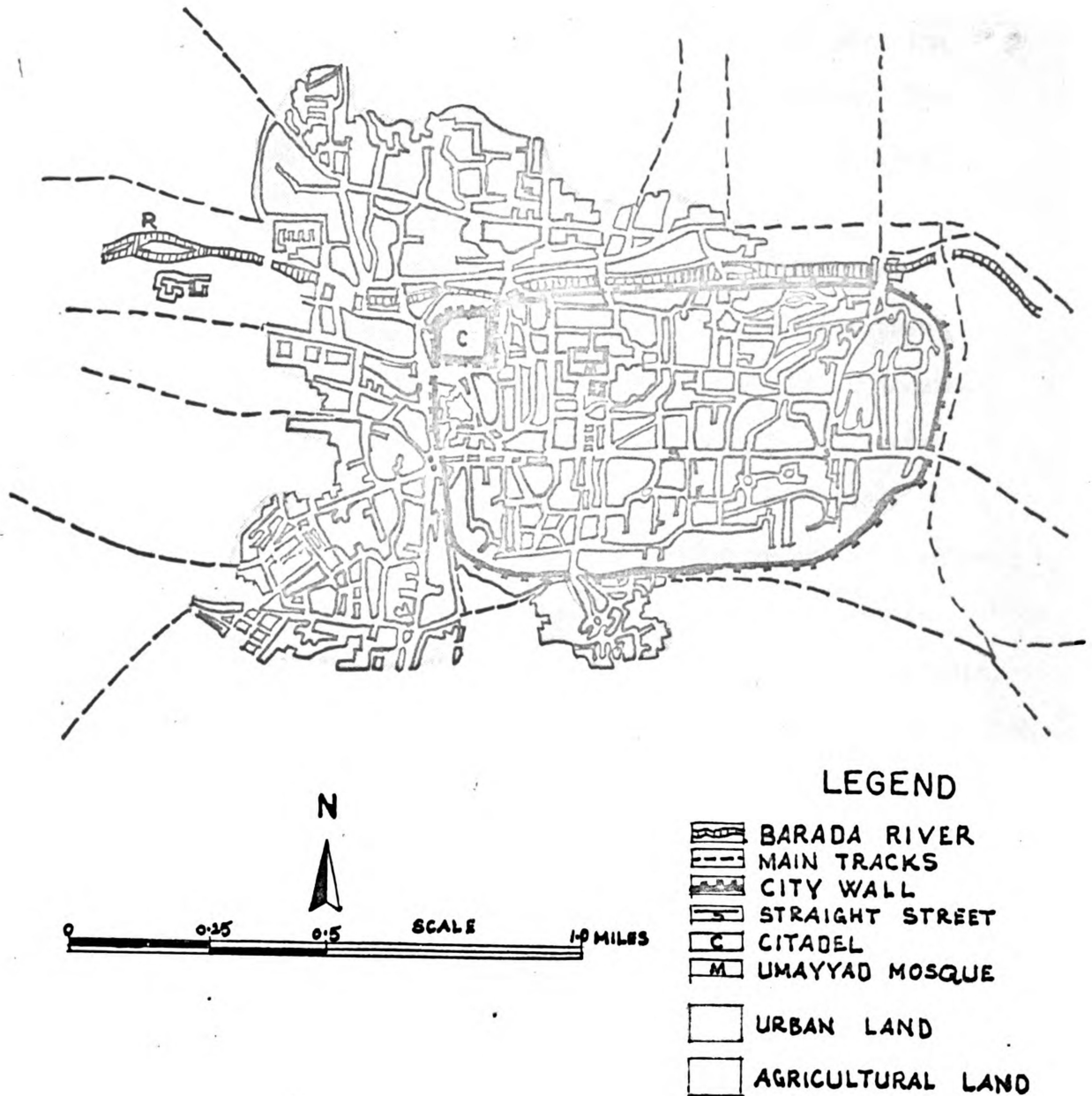


Plate 3. A Plan of Damascus in the Eleventh Century.

In the Mamluke period after Tamerlane's invasion, Damascus did not have sufficient motivation to grow, primarily because the Mamluke capital was moved to Cairo.

The Turks occupied Damascus, as well as Syria, in the sixteenth century and stayed until the end of World War I (1517-1918) when the Arabs and the English troops drove them out of all Arab states. The Turks built some beautiful and famous palaces and mosques which are still in existence.

After two years of independence (1918-1920), the French came to the city. Under the French mandate, Damascus had little improvement and growth, because it was always the center of struggle and demonstration against their rule. Most of the French governors or representatives in Damascus were ruthless and adopted the policy of "rule with an iron fist." Their first governor, General Henri Gourand, when entering the city after the Maysalun Battle in 1920, immediately went to the tomb of Saladin¹ and said "Saladin, nous somme retournee," ("Saladin, we have returned."). During the French Mandate (1920-1945), the city was always a center of trouble with violent demonstrations against the French because the Arabs had been promised their independence after World War I by both France and Great Britain. The Arabs fought against the Turks during World War I with the British and the French armed forces in order to get the promised independence; but at the same time, France and Great Britain held a secret meeting and decided to divide Syria into two parts. The French part included the existing Syrian and Lebanese Republics, and the British part included Palestine and Jordan.

¹Saladin was the Ayyubids hero of Damascus who, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, succeeded in repulsing the European invading troupes from the Holy Land and Syria in those wars called the Cross Wars (Crusade).

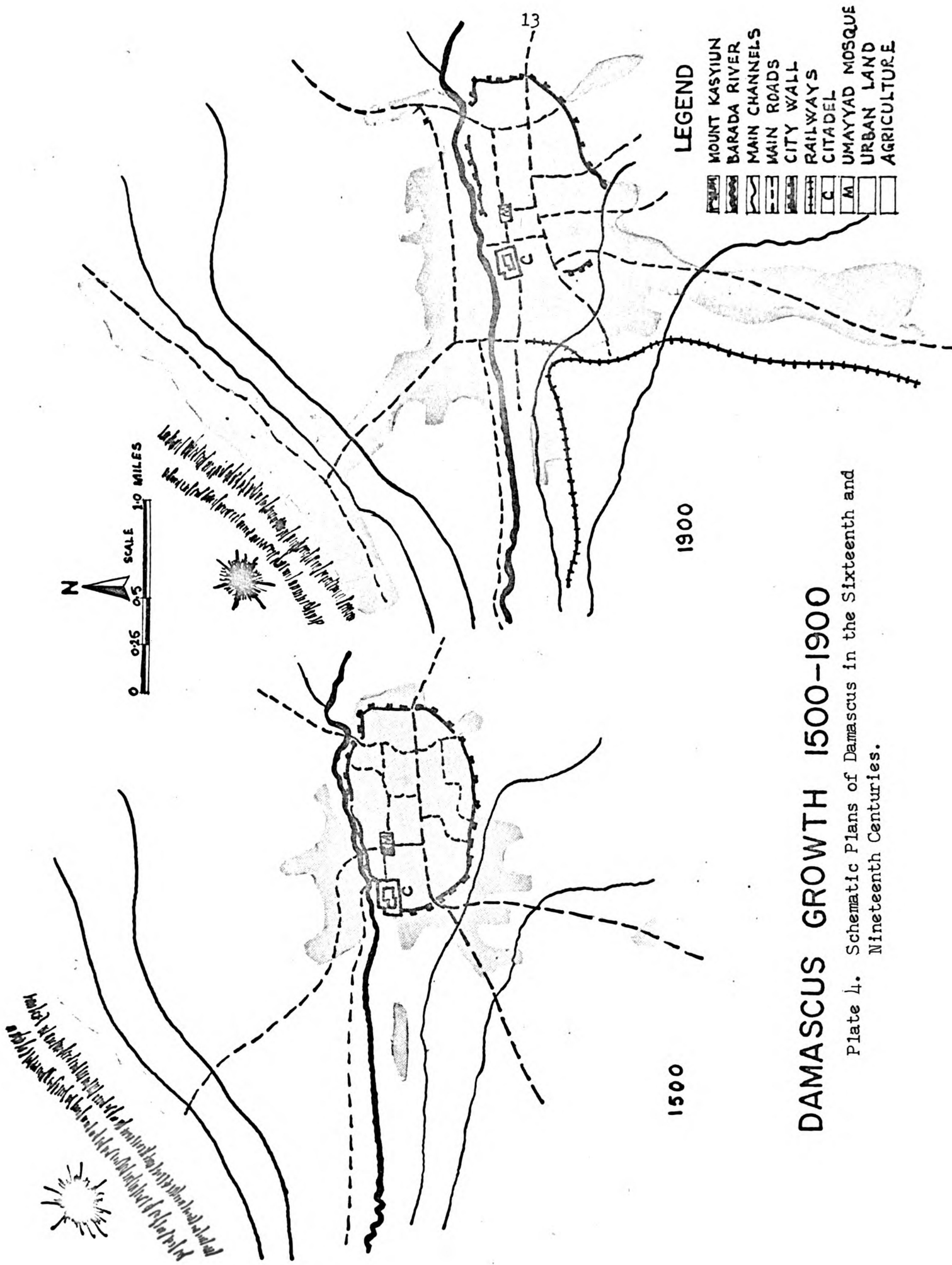


Plate 4. Schematic Plans of Damascus in the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.

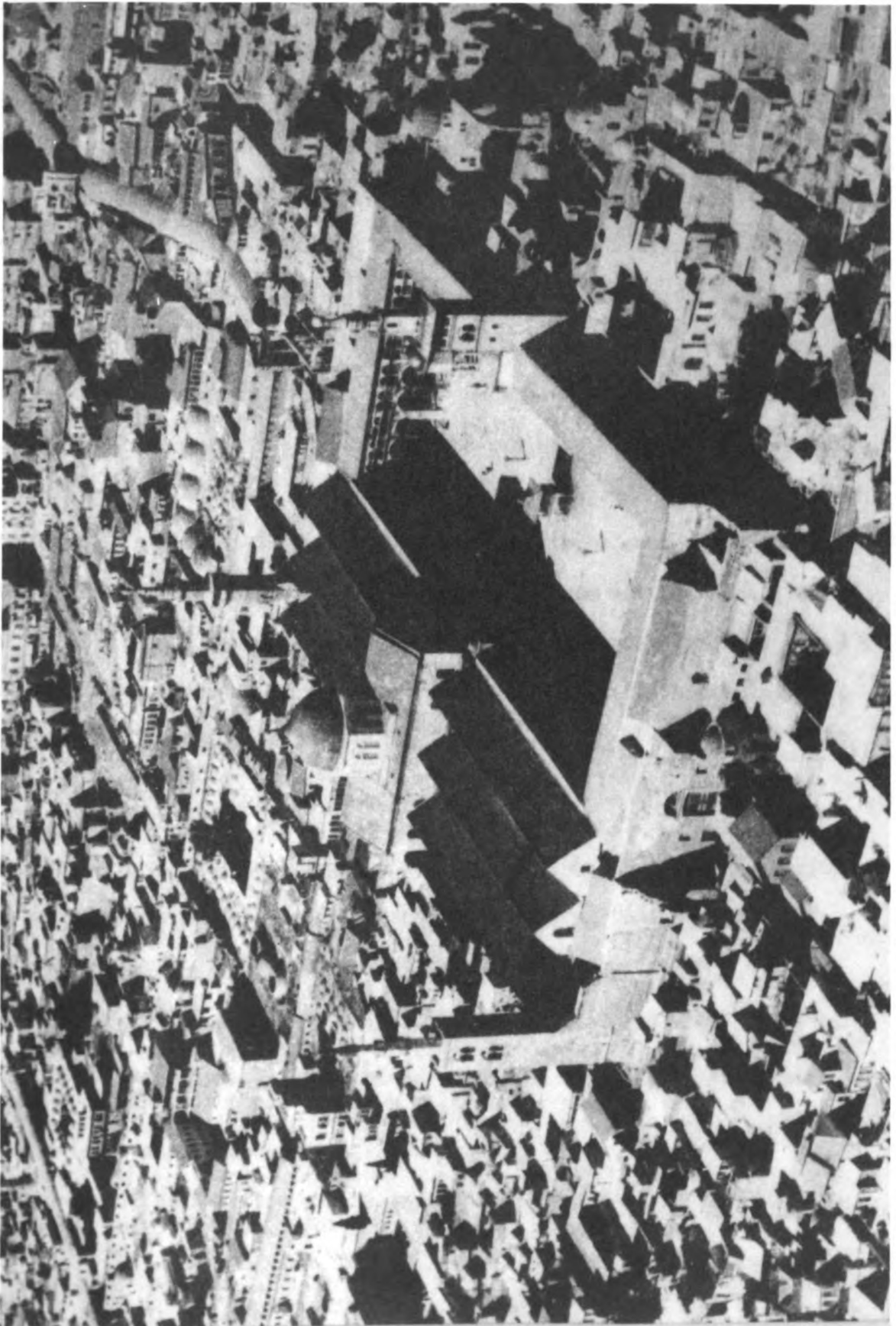
As a result of this hostility toward the French, Damascus, in 1925, was the center of the first aerial and ground bombardment; the second bombardment followed in 1927 when the French completely destroyed an old neighborhood called Midan. The third one came in 1945, the year of independence.

From 1945 up to the present date, Syria has been ruled by unstable and short-term governments. Just after its independence, Syria had its first democratic parliamentary government; as it was a new experience, the system was weak and suffered many major problems, especially the crisis of 1948 in Palestine, when Syria, as well as the other Arab states, declared war against the Zionists in Palestine. The creation of Israel in 1948 was the greatest danger that hurt not only Syria, but also all the other Arab states because it is located in the heart of their land. The fear of Zionist expansion and invasion to areas surrounding Israel has required steadily strengthening the armed forces in Syria. These military forces inevitably became involved in politics. The first "coup d' etat" was started in 1949 by Colonel Husni Al-Zaim; this has since continued to occur quite often up to and beyond the formation of the first United Arab Republic established between Syria and Egypt in February 1958. In 1961, Syria broke away from the United Arab Republic and declared its independence from it. In 1963, another "coup d' etat" occurred in Syria and Iraq, and the three countries of Syria, Egypt, and Iraq agreed to form another union different from what it was in 1958. The new United Arab Republic represents a nucleus which may include all the Arab states in the future.

Table 2 summarizes the general historical development of Damascus.

Table 2: Historical Development of Damascus: 3,000 B.C. - 1963 A.D.

Periods	Dates
Caucasian and Semitic Cultures	3000 - 2000 B.C.
Aramaens and others	2000 - 1000 B.C.
Persian rule and others	1000 - 312 B.C.
Seleucid Empire and others	312 - 64 B.C.
Roman Rule	64 B.C. - 330 A.D.
Byzantine Empire	330 - 636 A.D.
Arab Empire under Caliphs (Mecca)	636 - 661 A.D.
Umayyads Caliphate (Damascus)	661 - 750 A.D.
Abbasids Caliphate (Baghdad)	750 - 1100 A.D.
Saladin, Ayyubids, and others	1100 - 1193 A.D.
Tamerlane, Mameluke and many others	1193 - 1517 A.D.
Ottoman Rule (Turkish)	1517 - 1918 A.D.
First independence under King Faisal (Hashimiate Kingdom of Syria)	1918 - 1920 A.D.
French Mandate	1920 - 1945 A.D.
Independent Syrian Government	1945 - 1958 A.D.
First United Arab Republic between Syria and Egypt	1958 - 1961 A.D.
Syrian Government (broke from UAR)	1961 - 1963 A.D.
Proposed New United Arab Republic between Syria, Egypt, and Iraq	1963 -



Mixed land use pattern, where the Umayyads Mosque (dominating the scene), covered shopping streets (Sugs), Khans, shrines and libraries (under domed roofs) and dwelling units are indiscriminately intermixed.

This old sector in Damascus represents an unhealthy urban environment. Redevelopment is critically needed.

Physical Patterns

The physical pattern of Damascus today clearly reflects the impact of the various kinds of cultures it experienced throughout its ages; its physical features indicate a mixture of developments that a student of city planning could see and distinguish very easily. This pattern appears in the very old Roman walls and arches of triumph, ancient Christian churches and monuments, old Muslem mosques, cathedrals, shrines, palaces, medieval patterns of mosques, libraries, schools, khans,¹ sug,² and homes; modern neighborhoods and ultra modern houses and villas are expanding to the northern and western sides of the old city. The new pattern of modern European style of residential, commercial, and industrial (though the latter is limited in quantity) makes an extreme contrast compared to the old sections of the city. Modern buildings are near the slums of the nineteenth century; new shopping facilities are along old sug; and narrow, congested alleys and streets in contrast to modern roads and wide boulevards.

Survival of the City

Homer Hoyt relates the existence and survival of the ancient city to the economic potential of its area in providing food, water supply, and walls to protect it from invaders; it is also the central stronghold of the nation, a capital city, and a seat of religious authority.³

¹The Khan (market place) was a place where the travelers and merchants came to sell their goods and live at the same time.

²A sug is a central business street.

³Homer Hoyt "The Function of the Ancient and Modern City", Land Economics, Vol. 38, No. 3, August, 1962, pp. 241-247.

In specific terms related to the city of Damascus, P. S. Cellart et al say:

"Damascus owes its existence and development mainly to its geographic position, water supplies, and gardens. The different periods of its growth which are bound up with its political history, industries and trade, are reflected in the layout of the various sections of the town, in the architecture of its houses, monuments, and streets."¹

As mentioned before, the major factors of growth and survival of Damascus may have a strong relationship to the social, economic, physical, and political activities of the City. These factors may be summed up in the following points which are of great interest and significance:

1. It is located in an area which has fertile soils and a sufficient water supply for domestic consumption and for irrigation of agricultural crops. It is also near mountains, a source of stone, in the past for building walls to protect itself from invasion, and to facilitate the building of its houses, temples, churches, mosques, and other structures.
2. It has been a center and a terminal point of communication of people and goods in all directions, from Iraq to Lebanon, and from Asia Minor to the Arabian peninsula. The physical form of the city indicates very clearly the effect of transportation in its south-north and east-west direction of growth.
3. Being a great center for political and governmental activities, it has served as a capital city for conquering nations, expanding

¹P. S. Cellart, A. Hak, and Dillon, "Syria" Problem of Preservation and Presentation of Sites and Monuments. Unesco 1953, p. 13.

readily in response to pressures for growth and shrinking when its importance declined.

4. It has been a great center for religious activities since the Roman, Christian, and Islamic periods. It was, for centuries the focal point for the practice and administration of particular religious beliefs and for the instruction of practitioners. Damascus was a central point in particular for the Muslims of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Turkestan and other countries to group themselves to leave for Mecca in the season of pilgrimage each year.
5. The city has had a good economic base, mainly from its trade, industry, and agriculture.
6. People have liked the city and found it an interesting place in which to live because of its climatic conditions, natural sights, and prestige in addition to the above factors.

Summary

The Damascus setting and its other geographical features have been the reasons behind most of its historical development through the centuries. Being an old City, Damascus' physical pattern reflects the various cultures and indicates the diversity and contact between the old and the new. The mixture of cultures represented in the City, such as the Aramaean, Roman, Byzantine, and Arabian, resulted in a very interesting texture of physical development patterns. The survival of the city has been due to certain factors such as its location and geographic features, its social and political importance, and many others.

The recent history of Damascus after World War I, shows the tremendous movement toward the awakening of the people of all Arab states

to rid themselves of colonization and imperialism. To have a United Arab State extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Sea, has been the prime goal and the most important objective behind this renaissance period.

In the following chapter, some general and detailed social and economic factors are discussed and evaluated in order to obtain a clear picture of their social characteristics in terms of the size of the families and households, marriage and divorces, ethnic and religious groups, family interrelationships, and other social determinents. Also, an effort is made to concentrate on some critical factors contributing to the problems of housing, such as the Palestinian refugees, migration from rural areas to the city, and many other factors.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS RELATED TO HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Social Characteristics

Damascenes, like all the other inhabitants of Middle-Eastern cities, are a combination of the characteristics of many different groups, religions, occupations, backgrounds, and social and economic classes. In this chapter, it is not intended to discuss and evaluate all the social and economic problems of Damascenes; but to trace the major characteristics of population, family structure, income, and the social status of the Damascene family, so as to have a clear picture or image of the people and their economic activities, that affect and contribute to housing programs.

Population

Despite its rich heritage and ancient origins, Syria, today is a relatively underdeveloped nation. Population growth since 1940 has been quite small. Table 3 indicates the actual growth with estimates of future expected growth as prepared by various governmental agencies.

As indicated, the average percentage of increase from 1950 to 1961 was around 3.9 percent per year, except some years which had a sudden natural increase in population growth. However, this population is distributed unevenly with major concentrations in six urban centers and arable areas. The average density is relatively low compared to other countries in the Middle East; it was, for example, about 27 persons per square kilometer in 1961.

Table 3: The Population of Syria: 1940 - 1982

Year	Number of Persons Cumulative Totals	Increase ¹ Number of Persons	Increase per Year ¹ (Percent)
1940	2,597,000	--	--
1945	2,926,000	329,000	--
1950	3,215,000	289,000	--
1951	3,329,235	114,235	3.5
1952	3,433,626	104,391	3.2
1953	3,655,903	222,277	6.5
1954	3,806,973	151,070	4.1
1955	3,914,625	107,652	2.8
1956	4,025,165	110,540	2.8
1957	4,144,980	119,815	3.0
1958	4,420,587	275,607	6.6
1959	4,656,688	236,101	5.3
1960	4,839,237	182,549	3.9
1961	4,972,316	133,079	2.8
1964	5,450,000	478,000	3.3
1968	6,058,000	608,000	2.9
1972	6,954,000	896,000	3.7
1976	7,983,000	1,029,000	3.6
1982	9,486,000	1,503,000	4.7

¹Derived by the author.

Sources: Statistical Abstract, UAR. Syria Region 1958 and 1961.
UAR Year Book, 1960. Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs:
Five Year Plan 1960 - 1964, Damascus 1959.

In comparison to national population growth, the City of Damascus trebled in population between 1935 and 1961 while the Nation's population approximately doubled; and the urbanized area represents about 37 percent of the total urbanized area in the country. The gross density in the Damascus metropolitan area was about 52 persons per square kilometer in 1961, compared to 1,182 persons per square kilometer in the city and its environs.

Table 4: The Population of the City of Damascus: 1935 - 1961

Year	No. of Persons (Cumulative Total)	No. of Births	No. of Deaths	No. of In-Migr.	No. of Persons ¹ Net Increase	Increase Per Year (Percent)
1935	163,912	-	-	-	-	-
1954	395,124	15,231	4,589	-	-	-
1955	408,774	16,667	4,159	1,142	13,650	3.4
1956	423,832	18,559	4,651	1,150	15,058	3.6
1957	439,795	19,097	4,750	1,616	15,963	3.7
1958	545,603	18,417	4,843	1,234	14,808	3.3
1959	475,399	19,265	4,350	5,881	20,796	4.5
1960	491,398	24,412	4,821	3,592	15,999	3.3
1961	507,503	22,879	4,584			

¹ Derived by the author.

Source: Statistical Abstract of Syria, 1958 and 1961 and UAR Yearbook, 1960.

The percentage of net increase in the Damascus population from 1954 to 1961 ranged from 3.3 percent to 4.5 percent with an average mean of 3.6 percent of the total population which is about the same average rate as the Nation as a whole. It is important to mention

that the figures of "In-Migration" do not include the Palestinian refugees who came to Damascus in 1948. Data on the refugees is always recorded separately from the native Syrians as they are considered guest brethren who were forced to leave their Palestine homeland during the war between the Arab States and the Zionists. The major portion of increase was due to natural increase; the in-migration component of increase was almost negligible ranging from 0.25 to 1.2 percent; but the trends may be towards a higher percentage of in-migrants because of the following reasons:

- a. The opportunities for remunerative employment in industrial and commercial establishments for rural villagers in the Damascus region and also in other urban regions, combined with the need for skilled and non-skilled workers in the many kinds of employment;
- b. The increase and enlargement of the central government offices and the need for white collar employees;
- c. The availability of many public technical schools and the University of Damascus;
- d. The lack of mobility contrasted with the U.S.A. and Europe which renders it impossible for outlying suburban dwellers to commute to their work;
- e. Damascus maintains a modern cultural atmosphere for the highly educated classes, and also possesses the traditional social climate attractive to the many other social and income groups.

Palestinian Refugees

As a result of the Zionist - Arab war, vast numbers of Palestinian Arabs were displaced from their homes, occupations, and country in 1948. About 75 percent of the total number taking refuge in Syria live in Damascus, either in the City, or in the surrounding villages within the metropolitan area. Their impact upon Damascus has been quite serious, not only aggravating the problem of housing, but also on the entire range of social and economic activities. Unemployment problems were created by inundating the city with workers willing to work at lower wages and salaries than the Damascenes. Rents for houses and apartments jumped to very high rates, especially in the middle and lower class levels. The following table shows that the increase of refugees was greater than that of Damascenes for the same periods.

Table 5: Palestinian Refugees in the Damascus Region: 1954 - 1961.

Year	No. of Persons (Cumulative Total)	Net Increase ¹ (No. Persons)	Increase Per Year (Percent)
1954	68,320	-	-
1955	71,482	3,162	4.6
1956	75,433	3,951	5.5
1957	79,136	3,703	4.9
1958	82,435	3,799	4.8
1959	87,435	4,393	5.3
1960	91,475	4,147	4.8
1961	95,492	4,017	4.4

¹Derived by the author.

Source: Statistical Abstract, UAR. Syrian Region 1960 and 1961.

Size of Family

The mean size of a Damascene family¹ was 5.0 persons in 1957, which is large compared to the 3.5 persons average for American families. Family size in Damascus has been decreasing because of the advances in education and rapid social changes which inevitably develop an inverse relationship. The size of the Damascene family does not differ greatly in comparison with those of other Middle-Eastern urban centers. Unfortunately, there are no data concerning the size of Damascene families at the present time; however, it is common to find a considerable number of families which have five to six children. There is a direct relationship between the size of Damascene families, poverty, and social customs. In 1957, for example, there were 90,000 families in the City of which 57 percent were considered to be of the low income class. Approximately 65 percent of these low income families consisted of more than five persons. The size of the typical Syrian family in the City is largely due to the social and economic characteristics of the Damascenes. A majority of Damascene families not only include father, mother and children, as it is known in the West, but also frequently include grandparents, and married sons with their dependents.

Table 6: Size of Families in Large Syrian Cities: 1959.

Family Size No. of Persons	2-3	4-6	7-8	9	More than 9
Percentage of Total Population	17.0	36.0	25.0	9.2	11.7

Source: Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs: The Five Year Plan, Damascus 1959.

¹The percentage of dwelling units with 1 person was estimated as 1.1 percent of the total dwelling units.

These data show that 45.9 percent of the total families contained more than 7 persons in the family. The size of the average Damascene family, however, has been tending to decrease annually, because of the increase of housing stock and other social trends, as it will be discussed in Chapter IV. However, the median size of Damascene families was 6.1 persons in 1959 compared to 3.3 persons in the United States in 1955.¹

Marriage

Most of the Damascenes prefer to marry as early as possible, especially among the middle and low income classes, and generally among most of the less educated persons. Men prefer to marry girls who are 5 years, or even more, younger than themselves. However, Syrian law, now, fixes minimum marriage ages as 18 for men and 17 for women.

Many of the residents of the old neighborhoods, and even in a few of the new sections in the city still prefer to marry relatives of the same family. As a result of this habit, there are many families which have the same last name living in particular sections of the city, especially in old sections, forming a large family group descended from one forefather.

Muslems, according to the Koranic Law, may marry more than one woman, but only under restrictive circumstances and conditions, e.g., when there is no other logical alternative to solve the family problem except by marriage. These restrictions have caused this custom to decline and it is very rarely used today.

¹U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports "Household and Family Characteristics", Series P-20 No. 67, 1956.

Table 7: Marriages in Damascus: 1953 - 1961

Year	Marriages	Increase Per Year ¹ (Percent)
1953	4,794	-
1954	5,137	7.1
1955	5,736	11.6
1956	5,534	-3.5
1957	5,503	-0.5
1958	6,159	11.9
1961	5,627	-9.1

Source: Statistical Abstract, UAR. Syria
1958 and 1961.

It is evident, that formation of new families is a critical problem which contributes to the housing needs. It is estimated that about 8,600 new families would be formed in 1964; of which 95 percent, or 8,170 new couples will be in need of dwelling units, assuming that only 5 percent may live with their parents, since this custom is declining.

Religion

There are three major religious groups in Damascus namely, Muslims, Christians, and Hebrews. Islam (Muslims) is the predominant religion in Syria, comprising about 86 percent of the total population. In 1935, for example, about 84.5 percent of the total population was Muslim, and in 1958 the percentage was 86.5.

Most of the Damascene Christians live in a special quarter called Kassa and Bab-Touma which are located in the east side of the city. The Jews live in another section located in the southern side called Haret

Al-Yahoud. Since the Syrian independence in 1945, there has been a great tendency among both Muslems and Christians to live in the same neighborhood, especially in new housing developments in the western and northern sections of the city.

Table 8: Religion in Damascus

Year	Total Population	Muslems	Christians	Hebrews
1935	193,912	163,912	20,000	10,000
1958	454,603	392,603	50,000	12,000

Source: J. Tower, Oasis of Damascus, and Statistical Abstract UAR. Syria 1958.

National Groups

Syria, like most other nations, is populated by peoples of many national strains. Damascus has many residents of nationalities original to other countries. The expression of original national characteristics vary in strength; but in Damascus the Kurds (of Moslem religion) and the Armenians (of Christian religion) are the two most conspicuous national groups. Most of these peoples came to Damascus just before and after the period of Turkish rule. National cohesiveness of these groups is expressed through their tendency to group themselves in particular sections of the city. The Kurds live in the northern section of the City while the Armenians live in the eastern part. The majority of the Kurds and Armenians of Damascus have integrated with the Arabs, and have almost forgotten their origin. There is another national group called Sharkas who came from Caucasia; their number is quite small and their religion is Islam. In the planning of future housing there would be no important consideration for this factor.

Family Interrelationships

The majority of Damascene families are still oriental in the sense of family ties and traditional behavior. The first striking characteristic is the strong ties between the members of the family, and the strong respect for parents by children. The father is usually the strong leader and master of his family. After the father, the mother, or the oldest son becomes responsible for the family; this responsibility includes many activities such as: Education of sons and daughters, feeding and lodging them until they marry, advising them; and in extreme cases telling them what they should study, or what type of work they should do. In some old neighborhoods and among the illiterate people, the leader, or the master of the family has great influence upon the marriage of his sons and daughters, sometimes forcing them to marry particular persons. The housewife spends most of the time at home, looking after her family. Few married women work outside the home; this takes into account such occupations and professions as teachers, nurses, and secretaries. Marroe Berger describes the relationship between the husband and wife saying:

The relationship between man and wife, especially in public, is somewhat more formal than in the West. The division of functions between them is more precise and less often ignored. The Arab husband has fewer tasks in the home itself. In public, the wife must maintain about the same respectful distance from the head of the family as the children are expected to maintain.¹

The Damascene family forms a single cohesive unit, cooperating and sharing the output which comes from the work of the father, mother, and children; this phenomenon of behavior sometimes creates frustration and conflict between the children and the parents because most of the sons

¹M. Berger, The Arab World Today, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1962, pp. 132-133.

and daughters have realized that they should gradually depend upon themselves before they embark upon the outside world.

Family interrelationships are very significant to housing development and needs. It may result in two factors with respect to planning for future housing in Damascus. One is that the size of a dwelling unit should be larger than existing, and, secondly, the number of dwelling units should be less than the number of families.

Economic Characteristics

✓✓ Economic Base of Damascus

This study does not attempt to analyze the whole range of economic characteristics of the people and of the City in specific terms; but it does attempt to evaluate the major functions and characteristics of the Damascene economic structure and how it influences housing needs. In general terms, the major portion of the Damascus economic base depends upon trade. Industry contributes a minor portion, though it is increasing at a very rapid rate. The lack of current statistical data renders it difficult to break down the employees in each category of the labor force. However, trade and commercial activities include all types of commercial establishments, whether wholesale or retail. Almost all stores in Damascus are still in operation as small individual establishments, except for a small number of retailing companies ("chain stores"). Shopping centers have not been established in Damascus yet. The old "sugs" are still in operation, especially the famous Sug Al-Hamedeya which consists of rows of shops which sell almost anything for which the customer might ask. In the last fifteen years, wholesale establishments and business offices have moved from the old sections to the newer

developments seeking wider streets and larger lots at lower costs.

Damascus is a major center of national and international trade. Most of the export and import agents in Syria are usually from Damascus although they frequently live in other Syrian cities, especially in Latakia which is the port city of Syria. The principal industries of the city and its environs are limited in number and include the following products and processes:

- Textile industries such as spinning and weaving, knitted garments, underwear, socks and stockings, textile dyeing, printing and finishing;
- Vegetable and fruit canning and preserving;
- Sugar refining (one plant only);
- Soap;
- Cement (one plant);
- Glass (one plant);
- Tanning and leather dressing;
- Shoes and boots industry
- Matches;
- Tobacco; and
- Grain milling.

According to the estimate of official departments the number of industrial workers in 1960 was about 39,000 while about 100,000 were engaged in trade and services.

Damascus is the location for additional activities which create special demands for housing and which contribute considerably to the overall housing problems. The following are particular examples:

- a. The University of Damascus, which has been increasing at a tremendous rate in the last ten years. The University does not provide residence facilities or dormitories to lodge its students. The following table indicates that about a 1,300 per cent increase in number of students occurred between 1945 - 1946 and 1960 - 1961.

Table 9: Students of the University of Damascus

Year	No. of Students Enrolled	Increase ¹ No. of Students
1945-46	1,058	-
1952-53	2,598	1,540
1957-58	7,892	5,294
1959-60	10,220	2,328
1960-61	13,785	3,565

¹Derived by the author.

Sources: UAR Year Book 1960
I.B.R.D., The Economic Development of Syria,
John Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1954.
Statistical Abstract of 1961, Syria.

- b. As the capital of Syria, Damascus houses the central government, which has a great effect upon the city, because almost all of the employees of the central government live in the city itself. Another important factor related to this position is the necessity of providing respectable residences for the foreign diplomatic missions to Syria, whether, ambassadors or consulates.
- c. The Damascus International Fair which has been held annually since 1954, during the month of September, is another factor.

It has been estimated that over 1.5 million persons visit the fair annually. The visitors are not only Damascenes, but also come from other countries, especially the surrounding Arab states. The Fair has had a great impact, not only on the economic activities of Damascenes, but also upon its social and cultural atmosphere.

Income Distribution

Table 10 indicates the average income in Syria from 1957 to 1960. It was estimated in 1959 by the national five year planners that the national income would increase at 4.5 percent annually until 1964.

Table 10: Average Annual Income Per Capita in Syria: 1957 - 1964
\$1 = 3.60 Syrian Pounds (L.S.)

Year	Income	Increase in L.S.	Percent Increase
1957	L.S. 612 (\$170)	-	-
1958	L.S. 540 (\$150)	-72 ¹	-11.7
1959	L.S. 612 (\$170)	72	+13.3
1960	L.S. 655 (\$182)	43	+ 7.0
1964	L.S. 803 (\$226)	148 ²	+22.5

¹This drop in income was due to the shortage of rain in that year. Syria is, predominantly, an agricultural country dependent, to a great deal, upon dry farming, producing mainly cereals and cotton.

²Estimated: The Five Year Plan 1960 - 1964.

Source: UAR Year Book, Syrian Region 1960.

In general terms, the major portion of the Damascene population falls within middle and lower income classes; about 60 percent of the total population of the City is currently classified as low income.

In Damascus, there has been no precise income study, except in 1957 when the Technical Department of the municipality did an income survey which indicated that the average income in Damascus was higher than that of the country as a whole. (See Table 11). It indicated also that about 42 percent of the total families could not afford to buy a house without outside aid either in the form of government subsidies or personal individual assistance.

Table 11: Average Annual Income Per Family in Damascus: 1957
\$1 = 3.6 L.S.

Income Bracket	Percent of Total Population	Number of Families
Below L.S. 900 (\$250)	10	9,000
L.S. 900-3,000 (\$250-835)	48	43,200
L.S. 3,000-5,000 (\$835-1,390)	30	27,000
L.S. 5,000-10,000 (\$1,390-2,780)	10	9,000
Over 10,000 (\$2,780)	2	1,800
Total	100	90,000

Source: Municipality of Damascus, 1957.

Assuming that the average size of the family was approximately 5 persons in 1957, from Table 11 the following table can be derived which indicates the average income per capita in that year. The average income per capita in Damascus for 1957 as derived, was approximately \$220 or about L.S. 800 per year, which is too low for providing adequate level for the necessities of life.

Table 12: Average Annual Income Per Capita in Damascus: 1957.
\$1 = 3.6 L.S.

Income Bracket	Percent of Total Population	Number of Persons
Below L.S. 180 (\$50)	10	44,000
L.S. 180-600 (\$50-170)	48	211,000
L.S. 600-1,000 (\$170-280)	30	132,000
L.S. 1,000-2,000 (\$280-560)	10	44,000
Over 2,000 (\$560)	2	8,800
Total	100	439,800

Expenditure Distribution

In 1957, the Syrian Bureau of the Census conducted a survey to determine the monthly expenditures of the Damascene families.¹ The results of this study presented useful indices for each major and minor item needed and consumed by different samples of the Damascenes in terms of their social and economic status, their occupations, and their particular neighborhood whether in old or modern sections. The monthly expenditure per capita for all goods and services ranged from L.S. 56.29 to L.S. 180.48 in the old and new neighborhoods respectively. In terms of class of occupation, on the other hand, it ranged from L.S. 60.30 to L.S. 163.31 for those employed in transportation and agriculture respectively. (See Tables 13 and 14.)

The expenditure on rent ranged from L.S. 7.88, or 13 percent of total expenditures, in old neighborhoods to L.S. 41.87, or about 23 percent in sound, new residential development. In terms of occupations,

¹Bureau of the Census, A Study of the Family Expenditure in the City of Damascus, Damascus 1957.

Table 13: Monthly Expenditure Per Capita in Damascus In Syrian Pounds: 1957
 \$1 = 3.6 L.S.
 (Arranged According to Neighborhood)

	Food	Drinks and Cig.	Cloth.	Rent	Utili- ties	Furni- ture	Appli- ances	House Services	Personal Exp.	Health	Trans- port.	Amuse- ments	Others	Total
Midan	21.74	1.11	5.16	11.15	2.84	1.01	1.89	1.25	1.38	2.84	1.18	1.77	2.97	56.29
Sheikh and Akrad	24.58	1.26	6.93	7.88	2.84	1.47	0.66	1.22	1.75	2.17	1.24	2.24	2.66	56.90
Bab-Touma	27.18	2.06	8.22	8.84	3.14	0.96	1.26	2.23	2.24	2.62	1.65	2.33	3.18	65.90
Sarouja	29.14	1.79	9.98	10.47	2.91	1.32	1.76	1.73	2.40	1.80	1.19	2.82	5.04	72.35
Salyhia	29.79	2.20	9.95	13.71	2.72	1.69	1.22	2.25	1.33	2.68	1.70	2.09	3.56	74.89
Baghdad	31.78	2.49	11.67	16.23	3.30	1.97	2.80	2.92	2.96	2.07	1.93	3.32	5.75	89.13
Rawda	48.57	4.09	21.37	41.87	5.32	7.53	2.83	6.33	2.71	2.28	8.17	5.89	22.47	180.48
Mean of Damascus	27.38	1.79	8.62	12.92	3.04	1.65	1.72	2.01	1.87	2.46	1.77	2.45	4.62	72.30

Source: Bureau of the Census, Damascus, 1957

Notes: The first three neighborhoods namely, Midan, Sheikh, and Bab-Touma represent old neighborhoods except for a few areas of new buildings. Sarouja and Salyhia represent better housing conditions. The Baghdad area represents contemporary stable residential development. The Rawda section represents an area of ultra-modern buildings and villas.

It was found that expenditures ranged from 16.1 to 28.0 percent of total expenditures by workers in personal services and construction respectively, and from 17.4 to 22.8 percent by industrial and agricultural workers respectively.

Table 14: Monthly Total Expenditures Per Capita for all Expenditures and for Rent for all Classes of Occupation: 1957 - \$1 = 3.6 L.S.

Class of Occupation	Total Expenditure in L.S.	Expenditure for Rent	
		In L.S.	Percent of Total Expenditure
Agricultural	163.31	37.47	22.8
Industrial	65.81	11.47	17.4
Governmental	92.85	15.15	16.3
Financial	116.30	20.50	17.5
Services	83.40	16.62	20.0
Personal Services	72.12	11.66	16.1
Transport	60.30	12.42	20.6
Builders	85.38	23.99	28.0
Commercial	72.70	14.08	19.3
Others	110.04	27.72	25.2

Source: Bureau of the Census, Damascus, 1957.

Three major points should be mentioned here: The first one is that the agricultural people spent the highest figure, because most of them were landowners in the Damascus region or in other places, but living in the city. The second point is that the builders, whose income is low, spent 28.0 percent of their total expenditure on rent which might be explained by the fact that the builders preferred to

live in decent houses despite the low rate expenditure for this class. The third point, which is the most important, is that the average total expenditure per capita was higher than the income of the majority of the Damascene families. The average size of the Damascene family was 5 persons and the mean monthly expenditures for all goods and services was L.S. 72.30. Therefore, the average expenditure per family, per year was $72.3 \times 5 \times 12 = \text{L.S. } 4,338$ (\$1,200), while the average annual income per family in the same year was L.S. 4,000 (\$1,100). This fact may indicate that a considerable number of families were in debt.

Social and Economic Change

Like active people of some underdeveloped countries, the Damascenes have shown, to a great extent, positive social and economic changes. In specific terms, there has been a change in the level and type of education, status of women, communication, social organization, and social structure. These changes have occurred mainly because of new educational programs. For example, economic changes have developed through great emphasis on industrialization by private corporations and the National Government, because it has been realized that, without industry, the city and also the country will fail to develop economically. Emphasis on social welfare programs has been increasing in the last decade for the purpose of improving the economic welfare of the majority of people, especially the lower income group. New national laws have provided social security, limits on the number of work hours, and the minimum wages for different kinds of workers and employees. Land reform laws have stated the maximum acreage that the individual

may own. This new socialistic regime has intended to introduce a better and modern concept of bureaucratic structure, to nationalize basic industry and business, to emphasize equal social opportunities and freedom of thought, and to encourage those political parties that support the socialistic programs and policies.

The impact of these new directions and also the influence of Western culture have closed appreciably the gap between the upper and lower classes. Communication has made it possible for the Damascenes to know and adapt many of the social activities of the Western World. The family relationships of strong ties are loosening. Most of the oriental habits and customs are declining; for instance, the majority of the Muslem women until recently covered their faces with the veil. In 1950, George Haddad commented on this habit by saying:

"Veil that covers completely the whole figure is still carried either by a particularly conservative class of people, or by the ignorant masses in the cities; among the educated middle and upper class, it is either totally removed, or else symbolically represented by a scarf to protect the hair or by a thin veil on the face or the hair."¹

The new educational system, whether private or public, has provided a great impact upon the way of life and thinking and upon the behavior of the people in general; also, the rapid development of radio, television, movies, press, and other mass communication media have, and are creating a different generation with a changed way of life.

¹G. Haddad, Fifty Years of Modern Syria and Lebanon, Beirut, Lebanon, 1950, pp. 197-198.

Summary

Damascus is a major urban center in Syria, which represents about 37 percent of the total urbanized area of the country. The population of Damascus has been increasing at a considerable rate in the last twenty years. Many reasons have made it possible for the City to expand and develop; such as, the greater opportunities for jobs, the availability of technical schools, the University of Damascus, the central government, and the availability of a cultural atmosphere for those who seek fine arts, sciences, and the like. In addition to these factors substantial natural population increase of the Damascenes and the problem of Palestinian refugees are major factors which have caused shortages of housing.

The size of a Damascene family is very large. About 45.9 percent of the total families consisted of more than 7 persons families in 1959. There is no distinction between the number of families and the number of households since about 99 percent of the Damascene households are families. It is very important to note that there is commonly no conscious distinction between individuals with respect to their origin, religion, and other social determinants as it is found in other cities.

Although they are declining, strong ties and respect between the members of the Damascene family are still significant, indicating that the traditional Islamic culture is the predominant.

Damascus has been famous through the ages for the fine products of industries and trade. Today, the economic base of the city depends primarily upon national and international trade and secondarily, upon industry, although the latter is expanding at a considerable rate at the

present time. The income of the average Damascene family is higher than those of Syria as a whole; but average family expenditures are also rising. Positive social and economic changes are taking place which are achieving an improved social and economic structure. The National Government has been responsible for the major portion of achievements in better community structure.

Social and economic characteristics of any group of people can only work within the framework of the laws and the administrative structure of government. As the logical concomitant to the discussion of this section, the legal and administrative features of government in Syria and Damascus, as they affect housing development and redevelopment, should now be examined.

CHAPTER III

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FEATURES RELATED TO HOUSING

General

Syria is divided administratively into 12 provinces, which are called Muhafazas, according to geographical, economic, and social considerations. This pattern of subdivision represents, to a great extent, the concept of theoretical regions. Each province (Muhafaza) is divided into many counties (Quada); in turn, each county is divided into quite a number of townships (Nahia); the township (Nahia) contains many villages under its administration. The village is considered the smallest unit in the structure of administration.

The largest city of the province is the seat of central and local governments in the (Muhafaza), and the same concept holds true in relation to counties (Quada) and townships (Nahia). Each city or village has its own local council or commission which has, in actuality, limited legislative and administrative power and authority. Chief administrative officers of all the various kinds of administrative subdivisions are appointed by the minister of interior. With few exceptions, the chief administrative officer of a village is responsible to the chief administrative officer of a township, (Nahia) he in turn being responsible to the chief administrative officer of a county (Quada); the latter is then responsible to the chief administrative officer of the province (Muhafaza), who is responsible to the Minister of the Interior.

The City of Damascus has a special consideration in the structure

of the administrative function of government because it is the capital of the country. It has two chief administrative officers (Muhafezs); the first one is in charge of the city and the other administers the province of Damascus.

The chief administrative officer (Muhafez) of the City of Damascus has considerable authority, as all the municipal affairs must be approved by him, though he lost some of this power after the formulation of the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, as some of the municipal affairs must be either approved by or referred to the Minister.

Syrian Law Regulating the Urbanization of Cities

The first modern law of regulation of the urbanization of Syrian cities was passed in 1933 by the president of the Syrian Republic after the approval of Parliament, as a substitute for the old Ottoman building law established in 1880. By 1961, this law of 1933 has been amended 18 times. The major objectives of this law are to improve and to modernize regulation of urban growth and redevelopment of Syrian cities, so as to achieve more satisfactory social and physical environments.

The main provisions of the 1933 law are as follows:¹

1. Urban development and redevelopment do not depend upon the wealth of municipalities, because there is no need for monies to pay promptly for the acquisition of any land or property of the project concerned. For instance, any Syrian municipality can legally subdivide any vacant land or redevelop any slum section without obligation to remunerate the owners, first, before any action of planning or redevelopment,

¹Mamdouh El-Zerekly, "Towards United Arab Law for the Urbanization of Cities, Villages, and Rural Areas," A paper presented at the eighth conference of the Arab engineers in Cairo, U.A.R. May, 1963.

except in a few cases covered by other laws. This action must, however, be approved by the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs. Thus, land for public use such as streets, parks, schools, mosques, churches --- etc., may be theoretically and legally, taken free for any new subdivision or redevelopment project.

2. This law of 1933 seems to be extremely socialistic in its provisions, goals, and objectives. Article 4, for example, states that:
 "All properties inside the limits of the delineated area, whether developed or not, shall be considered as one ownership belonging to the original owners. Each owner shall have his share according to what had been estimated for his property in terms of monies."¹
3. Municipalities shall be responsible, according to this law, for the provision of planning and design for any section, and also for the master plans of their areas, especially in the occurrence of disasters, so as to allow the owners to redevelop their property promptly.²

Local Housing Laws

There are no national housing laws in Syria except for public housing. The City of Damascus, like all Syrian cities, has building regulations, which combine what is known as zoning regulations, subdivision regulations, and housing codes together in one general regulation. The following sections are the component parts of this general regulation.

¹Administrative Law Number 387, Damascus 1957.

²Syrian Law Regulating the Urbanization of Cities, January 1933.

Housing Permits

Building permits are granted, or given by the chief administrative officer (Muhafez) after passing through the usual governmental routing, (or red tape), especially through the Technical Department. Article (3) of the building regulations specified the prerequisites for offering building permits, which must be considered before issuing or giving a permit but after paying the permit fee, and all other municipal taxes or fees, if any, on the lot. These regulations require:¹

- a. Assurance of clear title by the appellant;
- b. Assurance of "application of yards;"
- c. Assurance of engineering standards and specifications of the structure proposed;
- d. Assurance that the health and convenience requirements will be met; and
- e. The physical form and the visual appearance of the structure must be acceptable.

Subdivision Regulation

Article 64 of the building regulations requires that any project of construction or expansion of a group of housing or a subdivision shall be approved by the chief administrative officer (Muhafez) of the city. This article specifies the procedures of application and requirements for such a project as follows:

- a. A general plat plan of scale, at least, 1:5000 showing the relationship between the new streets and the existing public roads;

¹The Building Regulation of the City of Damascus, as amended, Municipal Order No. 97, Feb. 18, 1948.

- b. A plan showing the land which will be benefitted from the new streets,¹ also showing property lines, monuments, names of the owners, level of land and contour lines, and existing buildings and vacant land; this plan shall be to 1:500 scale showing street sites, depths, widths, and property lines, yards, utility services and their connection with the mains; and
- c. Longitudinal and cross-sectional maps for the streets.

The philosophy of approval of new subdivisions is based upon the general welfare, health, functional circulation, visual quality or physical appearance, safety, and conformance with the master plan and other urban codes of the city.

Zoning Regulation

Under the title "yards" of the building regulations, the city is divided into 9 zones whose boundaries have been specified by other municipal orders. These zones are:

- Zone A, Residential, designated for building palaces;
- Zone B, Residential, designated for first class dwelling units;
- Zone C, Residential, designated for second class dwelling units;
- Zone D, Residential, designated for third class dwelling units;
- Zone E, Residential, designated for old neighborhoods, and laboring class sections;
- Zone F, Commercial, designated for commercial buildings;
- Zone G, Industrial, designated for industries, not harmful to health;
- Zone H, Industrial, designated for industries harmful to health; and
- Zone I, Orchards and market gardens (agricultural zone)²

¹This is a very important section, because it is related to the "betterment tax" of the city.

²Ibid, Article 69.

Each of the above zones has certain characteristics and requirements as will be appraised and analyzed in the next chapter. However, it seems, at first glance, that these zones are basically intended to emphasize scenic and architectural control of the structure of the building rather than to consider multiple features of the environment. The second significant point is that there is no requirement for detailed studies of the uses, especially for the commercial and industrial zones. For instance, Article 75 of the said regulations states that¹: "This zone shall be designated for commercial buildings, with permission for light industrial establishment using not more than 10 horse power on condition that this power shall be generated by electrical engine, and it shall not be harmful, or cause of nuisance to neighbors or to be an obstruction to traffic, or to be poor in design and contribute unsightly appearance." In such a regulation, there is no explanation of the nature and use of the commercial activities and their classifications. The same holds true in regulation of industrial zones which are regulated in very broad terms; there are many ways in which these terms may be explained.

The third point, in such zoning regulations, is the clear economic segregation which causes social conflict and frustration, and may result in an unbalanced community.

Public Housing Law

The public housing concept came into existence in 1953 when the central government began to build dwelling units for low and middle income groups. Not very many public dwelling units were built until

¹Ibid., Article 75, section 1.

1959 when the Syrian municipalities began a great movement in this field as a result of the encouragement of the National Government.

Eligibility

Article 3 specifies the eligibility of a person to own a house, or, in most cases an apartment, in a public housing project:¹

- a. To have United Arab Republic citizenship, or to be considered a citizen according to governmental law;
- b. The applicant must have registered his name in the municipality corporate limits, at least, two years previously;
- c. The applicant's annual income shall not exceed six thousand Syrian Pounds, L.S. 6,000 (\$1,660); and
- d. The applicant shall not be an owner of any dwelling unit, neither his wife nor his children and family who are legally considered to be looked after by him.

Value

The municipality rates the value of dwelling units of a given project in terms of their value in Syrian Pounds. This value is calculated or estimated according to the following factors:²

- a. The construction expenses, or cost, of the actual dwelling or apartment unit;
- b. The dwelling unit shares in the expenses of the acquisition of the land and construction of streets, curbs, sidewalks, and sewers. At times, the municipality can allocate a fixed price for each lot, in such cases the fixed price is assigned to each unit.

¹Executive Order No. 30, as amended, Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, Damascus 1961.

²Ibid., Article 5.

- c. The administrative expenses, on condition that they shall not exceed five percent of the total cost of a dwelling unit;
- d. The municipality could spend some of its monies to reduce the cost of the public housing, but this action shall be approved by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs; and
- e. The municipality can, and usually does, form a special committee to estimate the price of each house according to its characteristics, on condition that this price shall not exceed the sum of the above elements of estimation (a, b, c, d).

Distribution and Priorities

An applicant for a public housing unit is permitted to select three different possible designs that are appropriate to his annual income. After all applications are recorded, a special committee shall be formed immediately by the head (manager) of the municipality.¹ The responsibility of this committee is to classify the applications according to the desires of the applicants. When competition or desire of a particular dwelling unit occurs between two or more applicants of the same general qualification and characteristics, the following priorities are followed:²

- a. The occupants, or the owners of the dwelling units to be demolished for the public housing project area;
- b. The last occupants whether owner or tenant, of any demolished dwelling unit located inside the corporate limits of the city;
- c. The owners of any demolished dwelling unit, whether of complete

¹Ibid., Article 7.

²Ibid., Articles 8 and 9.

or partial demolition; the preference must be based on the more recent demolition;

- d. The persons who have received a municipal order, or decision, that their homes will be demolished after one year from the date of selling public dwelling units;
- e. The owners of any land for housing projects; and
- f. Low income persons.

When two or more persons of the same economic class, with the same qualifications, which are almost identical, to whom none of the above six priorities would apply, priority is determined by the following criteria:¹

- a. Who pays most in advance;
- b. Who has a lower income; and
- c. Who has a larger family.

The final distribution of public housing is accomplished after:²

- a. The publishing of the first decision of the special committee; any person has the right to reject, or oppose the decision and the judgement of the committee within 15 days;
- b. The same special committee must study aforesaid oppositions or claims, and send them with its recommendations to the municipal commissions; and
- c. The municipal commission approves the final distribution and refers it to the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs.

In some urgent cases, public housing may be distributed without following the final distribution procedures as stated above in article 10, but

¹Ibid., Article 9.

²Ibid., Article 10.

this action must be approved by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs.

Payment

The applicant should pay, in advance, 10 percent of the value of the house as an assurance to the municipality that he will be still willing and intends to buy the house.¹ He must pay the remaining 90 percent of the price within a period of not more than 10 years, on condition that his annual payment shall neither be more than twenty five percent (25 percent) nor less than twenty percent (20 percent) of his annual income.

Appraisal and Analysis

It is obvious, that it is intended in the above discussion to trace and emphasize the general philosophy and concept of public housing, as it is applied in Syrian cities; but there are two points of great importance which cause social and political conflict and administrative problems:

- a. The conflict between the concept of public housing which aims primarily to help low income groups, and some restrictive and segregative aspects of this law, such as the giving of priority to a person who pays more. (See page 51) Therefore, in the application of this law, the person who can pay more has a greater chance of owning a house or an apartment in a public housing project; and
- b. The omission of the claims, rejections, or objections by individuals in some urgent cases, (as it is stated in Article 10)

¹Ibid., Article 6.

by-passes the procedure of final distribution. This process produces inequitable determinations for some people; and does not protect equal individual rights.

New Town Laws

The City of NEW DAMASCUS was the result of the adoption of a new policy by the central government in 1953, which has aimed, basically, at providing housing for low income groups. The justification of this governmental interference was based upon the fact that the problems of housing had reached a serious stage, whereby many social, economic, and physical problems were created. Purely private efforts have not been adequate or effective in handling housing needs, because they have been directed to the ultimate and persistent goal of making profits only. Private efforts for the most part have concentrated upon building palaces and villas for the residences of high income classes, because it has been obviously a more profitable and successful business venture than involving themselves in building dwelling units for low income classes. This, of course, was not the only reason for the problems of housing, but there were many others such as, the rise of land costs to inflated levels, especially in the immediate surrounding areas of the city which are considered to be a green belt of orchards and gardens. Therefore, the New City is located on a wide arid plain and on the slopes of the Mezza Hills, about 4 miles south-west from the old City of Damascus. The laws of the City of New Damascus are an excellent example of this sort of housing law.¹ The following selected features of these laws are offered as representative illustrations.

¹This new city may be classified as a suburban bedroom community.

Land Acquisition and Distribution

According to Syrian Law, no private land may be taken for general public welfare, safety, public health, prosperity, comfort or convenience, and amenities unless such action is approved by the President of the Republic. In 1953, a new presidential law¹ was created for the acquisition of the private land in the Mezza area for the purpose of constructing public housing. Since that time, quite a number of public and private developments have been achieved. In 1959, another executive order classified land acquired for new urban development into the following categories:²

- a. Land to be build for the residence of low income groups by the Municipality of Damascus;³
- b. Land to be sold to any person, according to the municipal laws;
- c. Land to be preserved for public services;
- d. Land to be sold at the price or the cost of acquisition and provision of public services to the following persons in accordance with their priority.
 1. Original owners of the land;
 2. Occupants of houses demolished or to be demolished in Damascus;

¹Presidential Law Number 1460, 1953, Syrian Republic.

²Order No. 1066, Article 1, Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, Damascus, July 21, 1959.

³The whole Mezza area including the NEW CITY has been annexed to the City of Damascus. The problem of annexation is not important in Syria, because local politics weighs little compared to national politics.

3. Professional institutes, workers unions, cooperative committees, and private agencies, which must be accepted by the Housing Administration of Damascus, as non-profit organizations whose objectives and policies are in harmony with the Housing Administration policy;
4. Low income groups; and
5. Others.¹

Zoning

The area of the City of New Damascus encompasses about 347 hectares (857 acres) and is divided into use districts,² of the following areas:

- 114 Hectares for dwelling lots;
- 54 Hectares for public parks (local parks); and
- 166 Hectares of steep land left for the purpose of forestation.

The building regulations of the New City divides the area of the city into the following:³

- a. Villa Zone (single family dwelling units);
- b. Double villa Zone (double family dwelling units);
- c. Attached villa Zone (row dwelling units);
- d. Multiple apartment Zone (multiple dwelling units); and
- e. Public services Zone (include shcools, parks, civic center --- etc.).

¹There is no explanation of this word in the Law.

²Housing Administration, Municipality of Damascus, 1959.

³Building Regulation of the City of New Damascus at Mezza, Municipality of Damascus, Housing Administration, 1960.

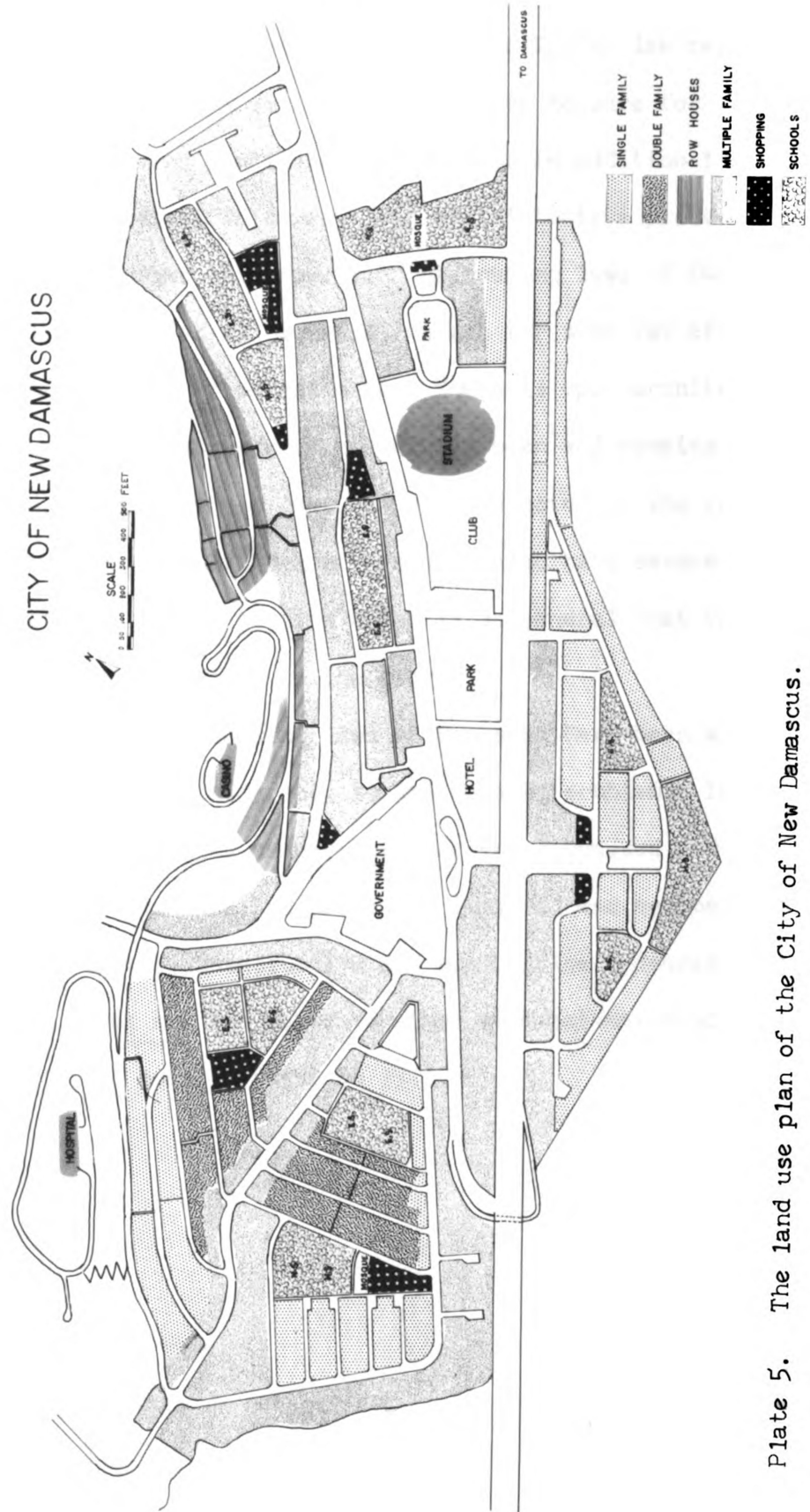


Plate 5. The land use plan of the City of New Damascus.

Summary

Although it has been amended many times, the Syrian law regulating the urbanization of cities is still an ineffective measure for the development of a healthy and functional environment in addition to its specifications which result in a very long administrative procedure causing delay in the urban development. The housing laws of Damascus and Syria may be classified as backward, except for some few efficient and effective regulations of recent date. Emphasis upon architectural, or "visual" character of structures has always been and remains the most effective element of these laws, as will be noted in the following chapter. The building regulations of Damascus also have severe limitations, especially the zoning section which is so general that very little has been explained of the zones in the city.

In general terms, the housing laws of Damascus have been a serious deterrent which contribute adversely to the housing problem. In the next chapter detailed housing characteristics are discussed and analyzed. These characteristics include the principal physical and economic aspects of dwelling units. Quantitative and qualitative measures of the Damascus housing stock are evaluated together with estimates of the minimum annual and total housing needs to 1975.

CHAPTER IV

HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

It should be understood that the term, housing characteristics, is a very broad and general term, as it includes many elements and components, some of which have been already discussed under the previous chapters, such as income and expenditure of families, size of families, habits, customs, and other social determinants.

This chapter is intended to discuss and evaluate the physical aspects and conditions of housing in the City, and also to deal with the quantitative figures of the housing stock for both the present and future, taking into consideration the past trends in housing development.

With the absence of a housing census, it is a difficult task to analyze housing characteristics thoroughly, but in cases like that of Damascus, certain selected housing characteristics may be studied to trace the major elements and critical matters of the housing problems. Most of the data used in the following tabulations are taken from several sources such as surveys and statistical abstracts which are not reliably comparable and do not provide sufficiently adequate and reliable information on housing because the data were collected for other purposes and functions.

The Housing Situation

Number of Dwelling Units

Before discussing the number of the dwelling units in Damascus, it is necessary to define a dwelling unit in Damascus terms. A dwelling unit is a group of rooms, or one room, occupied or intended for the

occupancy of one family. The family may be composed of a married couple with or without children. A dwelling unit may be occupied by a family and in addition, their relatives, such as grandparents, or a son and his wife with or without children. Also, a dwelling unit may be occupied by other groups of persons living together, or by one person living alone. School dormitories, hotels, large pensions (boarding houses) and other units similar to these uses are not considered to be dwelling units.

In accordance with the above definition, there were 81,014 dwelling units in Damascus in 1956, while the population was 423,832 inhabitants.¹ This figure includes all the houses within the city boundaries, whether they were occupied by farmers, professional persons, workers, etc. Probably about 3 - 4 percent of the total number of dwelling units in 1956 were occupied by farmers who lived in the orchards and market gardens within the city boundaries.

By 1960, there were 89,589 dwelling units, of which 2,486 were built by the municipality of Damascus from appropriated funds provided by both the central and local governments.²

Rate of Construction

After World War II, housing construction was progressing at a tremendous rate because of the considerable increase of income and prosperity of the country. The housing supply continued to increase as a result

¹Bureau of the Census: Estimation of the National Income in Syria, Rent Sector. U.A.R., Syrian Region, 1960.

²Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs: Public Housing in the Syrian Region - Face to Face with Housing Problem. Damascus, 1960.

of satisfying housing needs for young couples who have intended to discard the traditional way of living with their parents. Another important factor has been the great profit realized from the housing market by builders. Almost all dwelling units had been built by private enterprise until 1953 when the Central Government began to build a limited number of public housing units in Syrian cities.

"Aside from a few houses built for civil servants, all the construction has been private and it has taken place without the help of mortgage financing institutions. In terms of value, probably over 80 percent of the new housing has been of the Western or European type which is too costly for the vast majority of the people."¹

Official statistics indicate that 14,160 dwelling units were built from 1951 to 1960. From 1956 to 1960 about 10,486 dwelling units were built, of which 2,486 were constructed by the Municipality of Damascus for Damascenes.² The average annual rate from 1956 to 1961 was about 2,250 dwelling units, or about 2.7 percent of the total number of families, while the average annual rate of population increase was about 3.7 percent. This indicates the shortage of housing units which was always a serious problem in the city.

Housing Age and Physical Conditions

Probably, Damascus is one of the few cities in the Middle East which has many old dwelling units whose age is more than a hundred years. Some of these old houses are still in good condition structurally and are adequate for habitation. Most of these old homes were built with

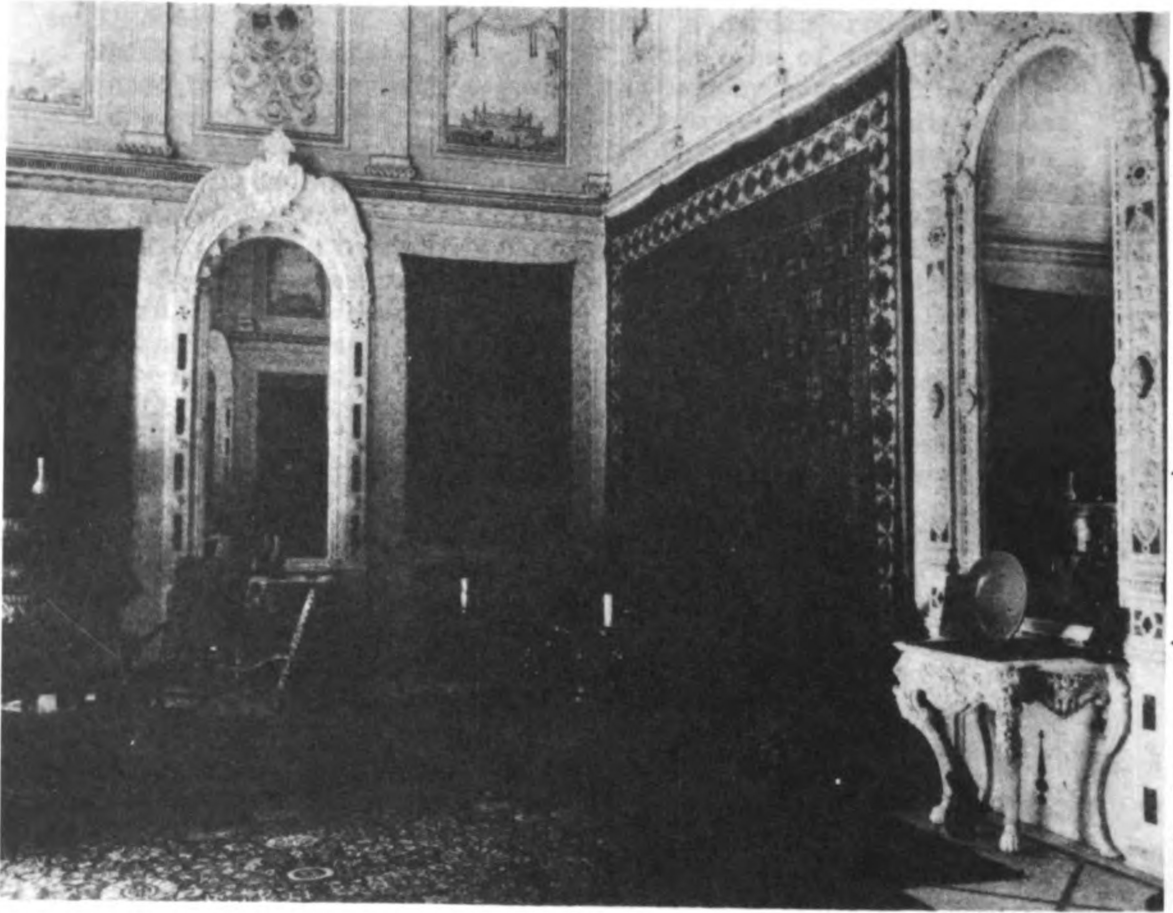
¹The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; The Economic Development of Syria, John Hopkins Press 1955, p. 169.

²Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, Op. Cit., and Statistical Abstract of Syria 1961.

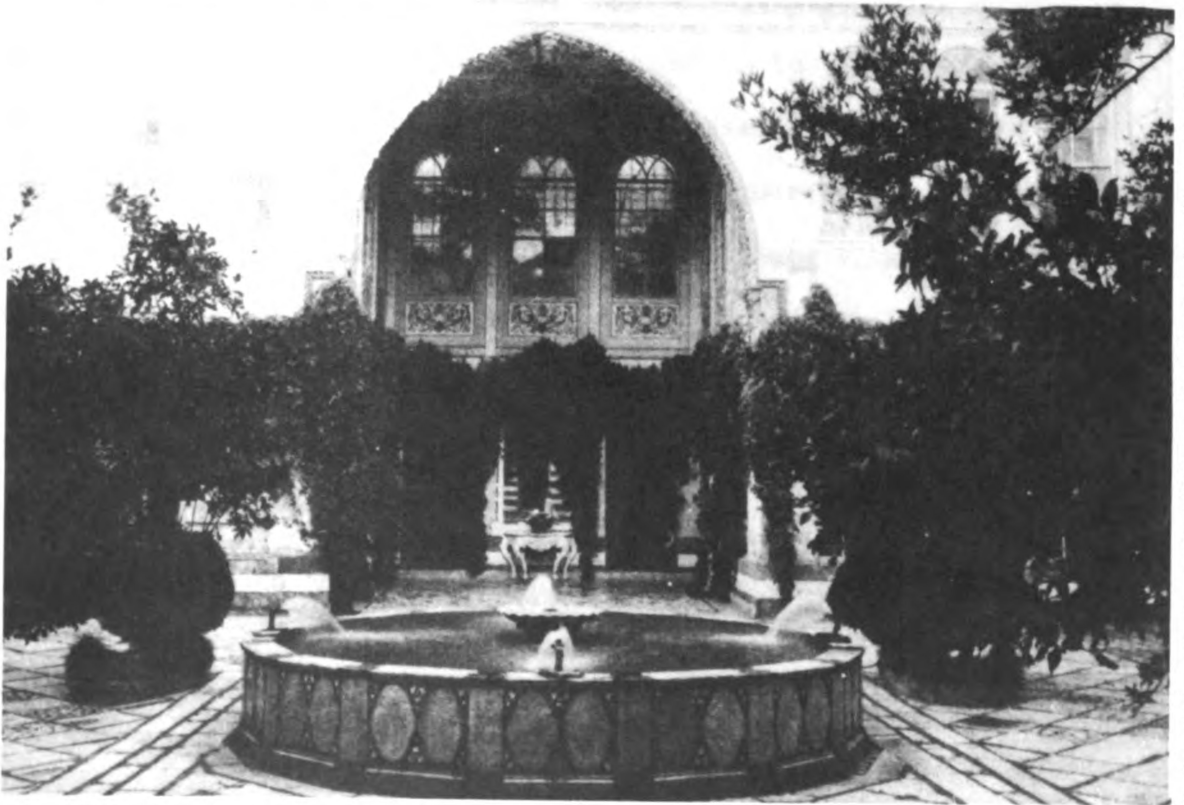
stone walls and timbered roofs. The design concept of these homes expresses the way of life and the influence of Islamic culture, as illustrated by the following descriptions of a house interior arrangement:

- a. The house should have a separate section for a sitting room which may be used as a guest room, and guest bedroom, or rooms depending on the economic status of the family. This section was always located in the front section of the house;
- b. A corridor from the main door, or the major entrance of the house leads to a large courtyard whose salient features is a high "Iwan", or "Diwan" opposite the guest section; the "Diwan" usually had two or more rooms on its sides, and it was used as a place for the activities of the wife and her visitors (usually other women and relatives from both sexes). The roof and the walls of the "Diwan" and guest rooms are painted employing Arabic decoration in beautiful geometric and organic forms and shapes;
- c. A series of rooms adjacent to the courtyard used as sleeping, dining, kitchen, storage, and bathrooms; and
- d. Running water in small open channels, and fountains in the center of the courtyard were almost essential in the house. Planting and landscaping the courtyard were also very important.

This type of house was developed to satisfy the needs and requirements of the residents of an earlier generation which might be related very much to the social factors. More than a century ago, an Englishman visited Damascus and saw its houses. His impressions and description concerning these homes are very significant in giving a picture of how the people lived and what kinds of houses they had. He says:



A sitting room (guest room). Notice the Arabic ornaments and decoration on the walls and the traditional Damascene furniture.



A large courtyard with a fountain in the center and a high "Diwan" between the rooms.

One of many old houses in Damascus showing the Islamic architecture and design concept of interior of dwelling units.

from a dull street, by a low and unpretending portal . . . the small outer court, whence I passed into a garden, round three sides of which the apartments ranged. A little lake of crystal water lay enclosed by a marble bank and overshadowed by beautiful weeping willows. Little fountains leaped and sparkled in all directions, and shook their loosened silver in the sun. At one end of this court, or garden, was a lofty alcove, with a ceiling covered in gold and crimson fretwork. The walls were ornamented with arabesques, and a wide divan ran round the three sides of the apartment, which opened on the garden and its fountains. Next to this alcove was a beautiful drawing-room with marble floor and arabesque roof, and carved niches and softened lighting falling on delicately painted walls. In the middle of the room was an alabaster basin, into which water fell from four fantastic little fountains.¹

Of course, not all the old houses of Damascus fit this description, because most of these have been declining since the 1920's due to changes in site conditions and local environment. Many of them were built on narrow curved streets which does not permit the circulation of motor vehicles.

Before World War II, the municipality of Damascus developed sound building regulations which were adapted from European regulations, especially French codes and standards. Approximately 90 to 95 percent of the total new housing units were built according to these regulations; but the rest of the new housing stock was hurriedly developed and constructed illegally in some sectors immediately outside the city boundaries. Almost 100 percent of the occupants of these illegal and sub-standard houses are classified as low to very low income groups. They were forced to construct in this manner simply because they could not afford to build their homes according to the standards of the City building regulations.

In addition to the above, most of the deteriorated and dilapidated dwelling units constructed before the building regulations are occupied

¹R. Fedden, Op. Cit., p. 24.

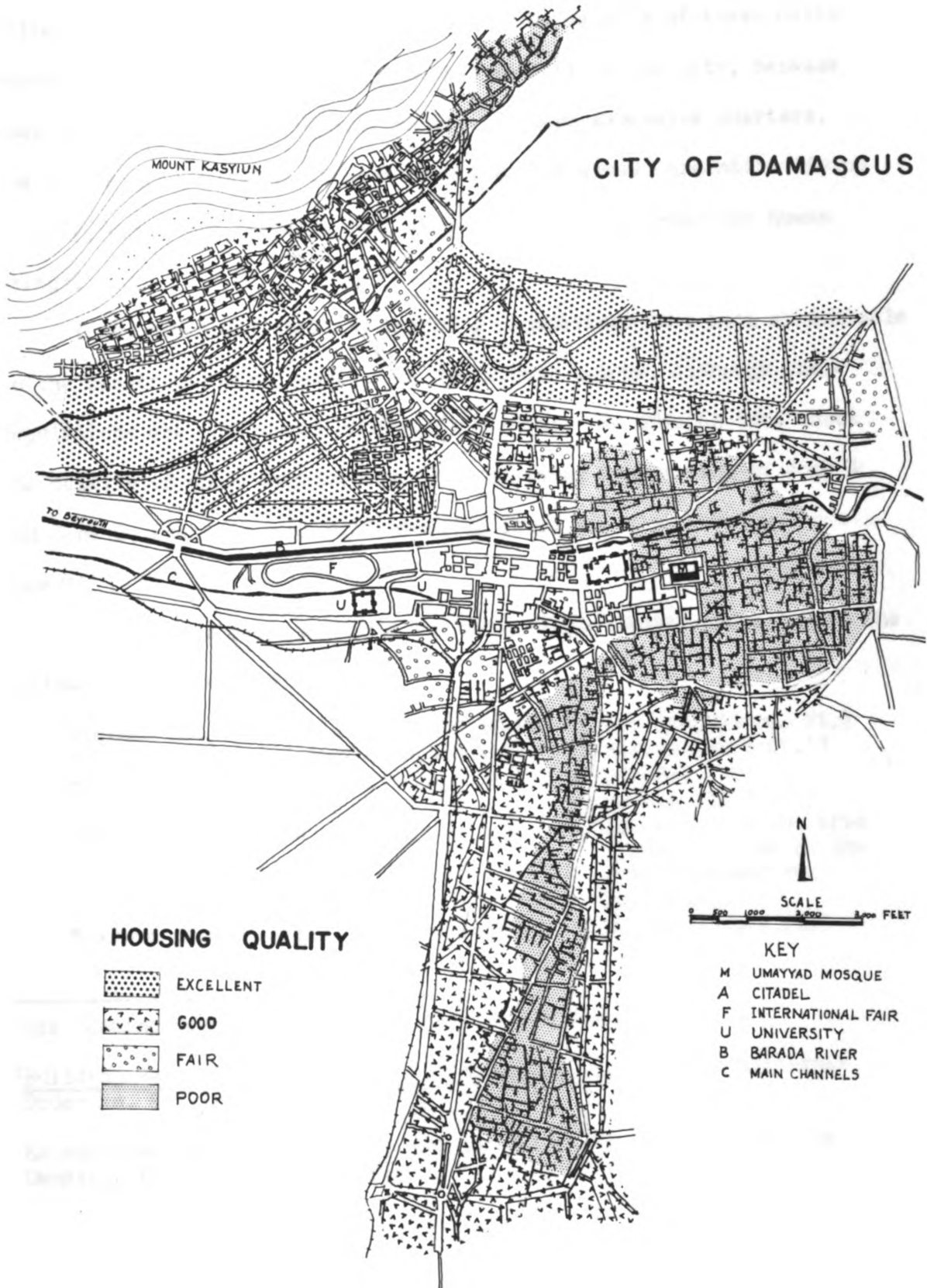


Plate 6. The present housing quality in Damascus.

by the low income groups. Their houses came to them mainly through the filtering-down process. The former owners or tenants of these units moved to the new and modern residential sectors of the city, because they have been able financially to live in more expensive quarters. Low income groups unable to move from the slum areas, are still living in ugly, unsightly, crowded quarters, unsuitable as homes for human beings.

It was mentioned that the building regulations have been an obstacle to the construction of housing for low income groups, although these regulations are considered relatively minimal. To give an idea about the details of these regulations, the following regulations of Zone A and Zone D, and also some other housing codes are listed below.¹

Zone (A)

This zone is designated for building single family palaces with the following requirements:²

Minimum Lot Area	1,500 square meters (16,120 sq. ft.)
Minimum Widths and depths of all yards	10 meters (32.8 ft.) ³
Maximum lot coverage	20 percent
Maximum height	10 meters (32.8 ft.)
Maximum garage area	5 percent of a lot area minus the area of the structure and its balconies
Maximum garage height	2.8 meters (9.2 ft.)

¹See 'Zoning Regulation' Chapter III of this thesis.

²Building Regulation of the City of Damascus as Amended. Municipal Order No. 97, 1948. Article 70.

³Except some special cases approved by the Technical Department of Damascus (Building Department).

Zone (D)

Designated for third class dwelling units. This zone is designated for building housing units only:¹

Minimum lot area	250 square meters (2,695 sq.ft.)
Maximum lot coverage	66 percent
Maximum height	10 meters (32.8 sq. ft.)

Article 17² specifies some general standards related to the materials of construction, and design aspects and applied to all dwelling units in the city, such as:

"No lumber or dried mud blocks shall be used, as materials for construction within the city boundaries, except under severe hardship and similar permissible conditions."

"The minimum size of any room³ shall not be less than 20 square meters and 16 square meters in Zone A and Zone D respectively, provided, however, two rooms of 12 square meters and 9 square meters each, may be permitted at Zone A and Zone D respectively on conditions that the dwelling unit shall not be less than 5 rooms. Only one small room of the said size (12 and 9 sq. m) may be permitted in any dwelling unit in both zones."

"The kitchen room⁴ shall not be less than 12 square meters (129 sq. ft.), and the bathroom shall not be less than 5 square meters (54 sq. ft.) in both Zone A and Zone D."⁵

¹Ibid., Article 73.

²Ibid.

³Room means any room in a house such as a sleeping room sitting room, dining room . . . etc., except kitchen and bath rooms.

⁴Usually, the kitchen room is designed to be separated from the sitting room.

⁵Building Regulation Op. Cit., Article 92.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss each item of the building regulations, but the main concern is that a report by the Technical Department of the Municipality of Damascus in 1957 indicates, without being based on factual surveys that about 50 percent of the housing units in Damascus were substandard. However, this percentage may be the case if the building standards described in the preceeding was actually applied as minimum standards for appraising the quality of housing.

Density and Crowding

In 1961, the gross density in the Damascus region was about 5 persons per acre, and the average density in the urbanized area was around 110 persons per acre.¹ Density, in urbanized Damascus, ranged from 15 persons per acre in new subdivisions to 200 persons per acre in the old sectors. While this latter density is relatively less than is found at the cores of some European cities, 200 persons per acre in the old sectors of Damascus appears quite crowded, since few structures exceed 2 or 3 stories in height (Horizontally overcrowded). Most of these old sections were constructed in those dark generations before 1933². The dwelling units consist of one or two stories and, for the most part lack any yards. They are in need of outer open spaces, adequate streets, other community facilities. Usually, each dwelling unit has its own patio, but streets and other neighborhood facilities are quite obsolete. Some of these houses, especially those occupied by the very low income group, were built with dried mud and/or brick

¹Bureau of the Census, Ministry of Planning: Statistical Abstracts of Syria 1961.

²See Chapter III, Syrian Law of Urbanization of Cities.

with wooden roofs. The fire disasters of the city occur mostly in these areas.

Although most of the dwelling units in the city have more than three bedrooms, overcrowding in the house is a persistent problem because of the shortage of supply of new dwelling units on one hand, and the large size of families on the other.

Cost of Dwelling Units

The average cost of a dwelling unit has risen at an inflationary rate, probably three or four times since 1940. Today, an average apartment of European type in an average neighborhood with two bedrooms, sitting room, dining room, kitchen and bath room, costs about L.S. 15,000 (\$4,100) compared to L.S. 4,000 (\$1,100) in 1940. This means that the average skilled industrial worker or commercial worker has to expend the equivalent of his yearly gross wage, which is about L.S. 2,500, for at least six years, or 312 weeks, in order to be able to purchase a house, compared to 154.2 weeks of work by the average industrial worker in the United States in 1955.¹

Rent has also risen, especially after the independence of Syria in 1945. The supply of housing units has never been equal to the need. Thus, the cost of a house in the city has been constantly rising. The range in cost is extremely significant, the extreme extending from several hundred thousands to a few thousands of Syrian pounds depending on the location of the house, its material of construction, its environment. . . etc.

¹Myles Boylan. "The Present Situation of Housing in the United States" Mimeo. paper, Michigan State University, 1961.

Housing Needs

In estimating the housing needs for Damascus, a severe problem appears regarding the Palestinian refugees. The refugee problem, as mentioned in Chapter II, reflects additional quantitative considerations which must be calculated. The prevailing attitude is that these refugees are temporary residents and foreign guests who desire to return to their home land some day. However, in the estimation of housing needs, their needs must also be considered, and durable, adequate temporary housing units must be furnished for them.

Criteria for Estimation of Housing Needs

The criteria used for estimating housing needs are based primarily on the following:

- a. Total population, number of families who are and will be occupying the dwelling units.
- b. Future need is dependent upon the total needs of all families minus the existing supply of housing units which are considered to be of adequate quality at the present time, and therefore, will be acceptable for habitation by 1975. This is according to minimum standards which provide and promote a healthy and safe environment.
- c. Slum clearance, conversion, vacancies, conservation, market situation and many other physical, economic, and social factors are considered in the determination of housing needs based on factual data, and also upon the author's background and his experience.

Assumptions

In estimating the future housing needs, the following major assumptions are considered:

- a. No international or local wars will take place during the period assumed.
- b. No major economic depression.
- c. No severe epidemic will occur.
- d. No natural disaster will occur.
- e. The social trend of changing the traditional way of life will continue.
- f. Approximate technological changes will be adapted for housing improvements.

Family Formations 1954 - 1975

Table 15 indicates the total population, number of families and dwelling units per year from 1954 to 1961, and projections to 1975, per year and for five year periods.

Additional Dwelling Units Required

About 15,864 dwelling units were built from 1954 to 1960 by both the Damascenes and the Palestinian refugees. Most of these new dwelling units were soundly constructed according to modern and adequate standards of appearance and features, and should, therefore, be adequate by the year 1975.

It is assumed that about 20 percent of the rest of the housing stock in 1960 is substandard today, giving a total of about 17,300 of such dwelling units which should be replaced as soon as possible.

Table 15: Population, Families and Dwelling Units in Damascus: 1954-1975.

Year	Total Population	Total Families	Total Dwelling Units
<u>Damascenes</u>			
1954	395,124*	79,900	76,554
1955	408,774*	82,600	78,098
1956	423,832*	85,500	81,014
1957	439,795*	90,000 **	83,210
1958	454,603*	92,900	84,768
1959	475,399*	95,800	86,916
1960	491,398*	98,900	89,590
1961	507,503*	101,800	93,080
1962	520,600	104,500	96,100
1963	537,500	108,500	100,500
1964	556,500	113,500	107,500
1965	578,000	120,300	114,300
1970	679,000	144,200	140,200
1975	796,000	173,000	170,000
<u>Palestinian Refugees</u>			
1954	47,100	9,800	8,200
1955	50,300	10,100	8,400
1956	52,200	10,500	8,800
1957	55,500	11,100	9,500
1958	58,100	11,600	10,000
1959	60,200	12,100	10,400
1960	62,400	12,650	10,900
1961	65,300	12,990	11,500
1962	67,850	13,250	12,100
1963	70,200	13,900	12,700
1964	73,100	14,500	13,400
1965	77,000	15,400	14,100
1970	90,500	18,400	16,600
1975	108,000	22,500	21,000

* Statistical Abstracts: U.A.R. Syrian Region, 1960 - 1961.

** Estimated by the Municipality of Damascus in 1957. As it is shown, the figure had been rounded off by the Municipal Agency.

*** Bureau of the Census, Ministry of Planning: Estimation of the National Income of the Syrian Region - Rent Sector. U.A.R. Syrian Region 1960.

x Projected by the author.

y Estimated by the author on the basis that the average size of the family will be as follows:

Table 15 (cont.)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Damascenes</u>	<u>Palestinian</u>
1965	4.8	5.0
1970	4.7	4.9
1975	4.6	4.8

z Two major factors have been considered in the projection of dwelling units.

1st The economic factor which means that the number of dwelling units will continue to lag behind the number of families.

2nd The social factor which indicates the strong relationship and ties between the members of the family and their children after being married.

Thus, by 1975, the number of dwelling units will be less than the number of families.

m Derived by the author from many sources such as building permits, percentage of Palestinian refugees living in the City, marriages, . . . etc.

Thus, the minimum number of dwelling units needed by 1975 from Table 15 is:

Damascenes	170,000 dwelling units
Palestinian	21,000 dwelling units
Total	191,000 dwelling units

In 1960, the total number dwelling units was:¹

Damascenes	89,590 dwelling units
Palestinian	12,650 dwelling units
Total	102,240 dwelling units.

¹1960 is chosen because of the availability of data.

In old sections of the city, there are a considerable number of houses which could be converted into duplex units as most of them are of a very large size, and could be relatively adequate for the residence of two families. This conversion process would also be supported by the increasing trends toward smaller sized families, and also by it being more economical to alter and change the available existing housing for the needs of most families rather than construct new dwellings. However, it is reasonable to assume that only about 5 percent of the old, existing dwelling units will be converted into duplexes, or about 4,320 dwelling units.

In regard to the rate of vacancy, the number of dwelling units which will be vacant may be much less than is found in other countries. In the United States, for example, the vacancy rate is estimated to be from 4 to 5 percent.¹ For the purpose of minimizing the housing needs, it may be reasonable to estimate that about two percent of the total dwelling units will be vacant in Damascus by 1975. This would be approximately 3,500 dwelling units.

The following table summarizes the amount of dwelling units needed by 1975. As is shown in Table 16, a minimum of 7,800 dwelling units must be added per year in order to provide a sufficient amount of adequate and durable housing for both the Damascenes and Palestinian refugees living in Damascus.

Social and Economic Distribution of Housing and Investment Required

Based upon family income, percentage of income groups, social structure of the Damascenes' families, and the adopted policy of the

¹See, for example, Glenn Beyer, Housing: A Factual Analysis, The Macmillan Company: New York, 1958, p. 73.

Table 16: Total Additional Dwelling Units Needed in Damascus: 1964-1975.

Total dwelling units needed by 1975	191,000 DUs
Existing dwelling units in 1960	102,240 DUs
Total dwelling units needed from 1964 - 1975	88,760 DUs
Conversion 1964 - 1975	4,320 DUs
New dwelling units added from 1960 - 1963	11,540 DUs ¹
Sub-total	72,900 DUs
Slum clearance 1964 - 1975	17,300 DUs ²
Vacancy allowance	3,500 DUs
Total needs 1964 - 1975	93,700 DUs
Average needs per year 1964 - 1975	7,800 DUs

¹This figure is assumed according to an estimate of the Municipality of Damascus which indicates that from 3,400 to 3,800 dwelling units have been added each year during the period of 1960 - 1963 by both private and public sectors.

²Actually, this figure seems to be rather high compared to what was actually estimated by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs in the Five Year Plan - Housing Sector 1960 - 1964. It was estimated that about 600 dwelling units would be cleared each year. But the figure of the Ministry was based on political and economic reality and not on what must be done towards slums as a minimum requirement.

government, housing economic and social distribution and investment may be approached by the following method to provide sufficient and adequate housing for the people in the future.

First, as it may be feasible to assume that the income per capita will rise steadily as it had been planned by the Ministry of Planning and other governmental agencies in Syria. Along the same line of the Five Year Plan 1960 - 1964, the distribution of income groups may be changing by 1975 to the following figures:¹

Table 17: Average Annual Income of the Family and Distribution of Needed Dwelling Units in Damascus: 1964 - 1975. *

Income Class	Income Brackets	Percent of Total Households	Number of DUs per yr.
Very low	Below L.S. 900 (\$250)	5	390
Low	L.S. 900-3,000 (\$250-835)	38	1,964
Middle	L.S. 3,000-5,000 (\$835-1,390)	40	3,120
High middle	L.S. 5,000-10,000 (\$1,390-2,780)	12	936
High	Over L.S. 10,000 (over \$2,780)	5	390
Total		100	7,800

Second, the total cost of dwelling units needed may be calculated in a way similar to the method used by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs. The Ministry has estimated the investment for housing needs according to four income categories. This projection of the Ministry was adopted in the Five Year Plan 1960 - 1964 for all large Syrian cities, including Damascus. The cost distribution of the Five Year Plan was as follows:

¹See Table 11 for comparison.

Table 18: Cost Distribution of the Five Year Plan - Housing Sector:
1960 - 1964

Income class	Percent of Total Housing	Average Area per D.U. in Sq. meters	Cost per sq. meter in L.S.
Low (Low cost housing)	10	76 ¹	65-80
Middle (Popular housing)	50	76 ¹	80-90
Middle (Good housing)	35	112 ¹	120
High (Excellent housing)	5	120 ¹	150
Total	100		

Source: Summary of the Five Year Plan 1960 - 1964. Ministry of
Municipal and Rural Affairs, U.A.R. Syrian Region 1959.

Considering the basis utilized by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs mentioned in the Five Year Plan, it may be reasonable to estimate the total cost required for housing construction according to the cost of each housing category. The cost of a dwelling unit is dependent, mainly upon its size, its location, and its materials of construction. The table below indicates the required capital needed for housing development each year.

Table 19: Total Investment Needed for Housing Per Year in Damascus:
1964 - 1975.

Income Classes ²	Percent of Total Households	D.U.s needed per year	Size of a D.U. in Sq. meters	Cost per square meter	Total Cost per year in thousands L.S.
Very low	5	390	76	70	2,072
Low	38	2,964	76	85	19,125
Middle	40	3,120	100 ³	100 ³	31,200
High middle	12	936	112	120	12,540
High	5	390	120	150	7,005
Total	100	7,800			71,942

¹Chosen as an average size of the dwelling units of each category according to the type of dwelling unit, whether they are one or more bedroom dwelling units.

²See Table 17 for income brackets.

³Assumed as an average cost and size of a typical dwelling unit for a middle income family.

Thus, a minimum of L.S. 72 million is needed per year for housing production to satisfy the housing needs, and the total capital per 12 years from 1964 - 1975 is about L.S. 863 millions.

Third. The labor needed may be also developed according to the estimates of the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs which states that the labor portion of the total cost of housing development is 34.2 percent of the total cost.¹ Since the wages of labor are increasing steadily, it would be realistic to assume that about 36 percent of the total cost of housing will be required for wages in the next 12 years, or about L.S. 25.8 million. The average wage per day of a skilled and non-skilled worker in housing construction is approximately L.S. 10 and L.S. 4.5 respectively. The number of work days per year is about 310. The number of workers needed according to the above facts and figures is 11,300 workers per year.

Fourth. It is very important to estimate how many millions of Syrian Pounds should be allocated for importing the major materials needed for building construction such as steel, lumber, sanitary and electrical equipment. The causal factor is that Syria is not self-sufficient in the production of such materials.

The Five Year Plan - Housing Sector indicates that about 30 percent of the total cost of the buildings must be reserved in foreign currency to import steel, paints, lumber . . . distributed as follows:

Lumber	34%
Steel	34
Paints	5
Sanitary equipment	21
Electrical equipment	6
Total	<u>100%</u>

¹Estimation of the National Income in the Syrian Region - Building Sector. U.A.R. Syrian Region 1959.

Based upon the preceeding percentages, the capital needed in foreign currency is L.S. 21.6 millions per year distributed as shown below:

Steel	$0.34 \times 21.6 =$	LS 7.35 millions
Lumber	$0.34 \times 21.6 =$	LS 7.35 "
Paints	$0.05 \times 21.6 =$	LS 1.07 "
Sanitary equipment	$0.21 \times 21.6 =$	LS 4.55 "
Electrical equipment	$0.06 \times 21.6 =$	LS 1.28 "
Total		LS 21.60 millions

Fifth. The national government has adopted a policy in its Five Year Plan 1960 - 1964 to participate in the housing field in order to provide adequate dwelling units for the low and middle income groups. The national government participates indirectly in the housing industry through the municipal governments by lending or granting funds to municipalities. The local governments participate directly in the production of housing units. The municipal involvement takes place in two major ways:

- a. To subdivide the land into lots and sell them to individuals after the provision of all services such as streets, drinking water, sewer system . . . etc.
- b. To construct the building structures and sell them to individuals after being provided with all public facilities and utilities.

The function or the purpose of the local and national governments is to grant special loans for the acquisition of land and all other costs involved in the housing industry. There is no intention on the part of the governments to receive any revenue or interest from public capital as a result of their involvement in housing production. The eligibility for individuals to purchase a lot or a dwelling unit from

the government has already been mentioned in Chapter III. However, it is the policy of the national and municipal government that they must participate in housing production as stated in the Five Year Plan.

Approximately 30 percent of the needed dwelling units for the very low income group.

Approximately 40 percent of the needed dwelling units for the low income group.

Approximately 40 percent of the number of dwelling units needed for middle income group.

Based on the above percentages and, also, on the present trend of government role in the housing field, the following table indicates public and private investments in the housing development per year and for the whole period 1964 - 1975.

Table 20: Public and Private Investments in Housing Industry: 1964-1975

Type of Housing	Public Investment Thousands of L.S.		Private Investment Thousands of L.S.	
	per year	Total 1964-75	per year	Total 1964-75
Very low income group	828.8	9,900	1,240	14,850
Low income group	7,650	91,700	11,475	137,500
Middle income group	12,480	149,500	18,720	224,500
High middle income group	--	--	12,540	150,500
High income group	--	--	7,005	83,950
Total	20,959	251,100	50,980	611,300

Sixth. The previous quantitative analysis and distribution of housing needs was based primarily upon the income of families, since the income factor is the most important component that affects the housing development in Damascus. Consequently, it has been intended in the projection of housing needs to stress and search for any possible alternative

Table 21: Summary of Housing Needs for Damascus 1964 - 1975

Class of Income Groups	Very low	Low	Middle	High Middle	High	Total
Income Brackets of Families in L.S.	below 900	900-3,000	3,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	over 10,000	--
Percentage of Total Families	5%	38%	40%	12%	5%	100%
Dwelling Units Needed Per Year	390	2,964	3,120	936	390	7,800
Total	4,680	35,618	37,440	11,282	4,680	93,700
Average area of a Dwelling Unit in sq. m.	76	76	100	112	120	--
Average Area of Dwelling Units needed in hectare per year	2.96	22.5	31.2	10.45	4.67	71.78
Total	35.58	270.0	375.4	124.5	56.04	860.16
Minimum Cost of Dwelling Units						
Needed in Thousand L.S. per sq.m	0.070	0.085	0.100	0.120	0.150	
Per Dwelling Unit	4.620	6.460	10.000	13.440	18.000	
Per Year	2,072	19,125	31,200	12,540	7,005	71,942
Total	24,900	229,500	374,000	150,500	84,000	862,900
Public Investment in Millions of L.S. per yr.	0.829	7.650	12.480	--	--	20,959
Total	9.900	91.700	149.500	--	--	251.100
Private Investment in Millions of L.S. per yr.	1.240	11.475	18.720	12.540	7.005	50.980
Total	14.850	137.500	224.500	150.500	83.950	611.300
Foreign Capital Needed in Millions of L.S. per yr.	1.070	8.250	8.620	2.590	1.070	21.600
Total	12.850	98.980	103.450	31.500	12.850	259.630
Labor required per year (number of workers)						
Total						11,300
						135,600
Wages of Labor in Millions of L.S. per year						2.15
Total of Labor in Millions of L.S.						25.80

which might minimize the number of needed dwelling units.

The area of a typical dwelling unit considered for future housing is the minimum average size required for the structure itself, and does not include the areas for yards, streets, local public facilities . . . etc.

The estimated cost of dwelling units excludes the cost of the provision of public facilities outside the dwelling lots.

It should also be remembered that these quantitative figures are flexible and must be reviewed and revised annually, and must not be taken as a rigid framework applicable to the whole period of projection (1962 - 1975).

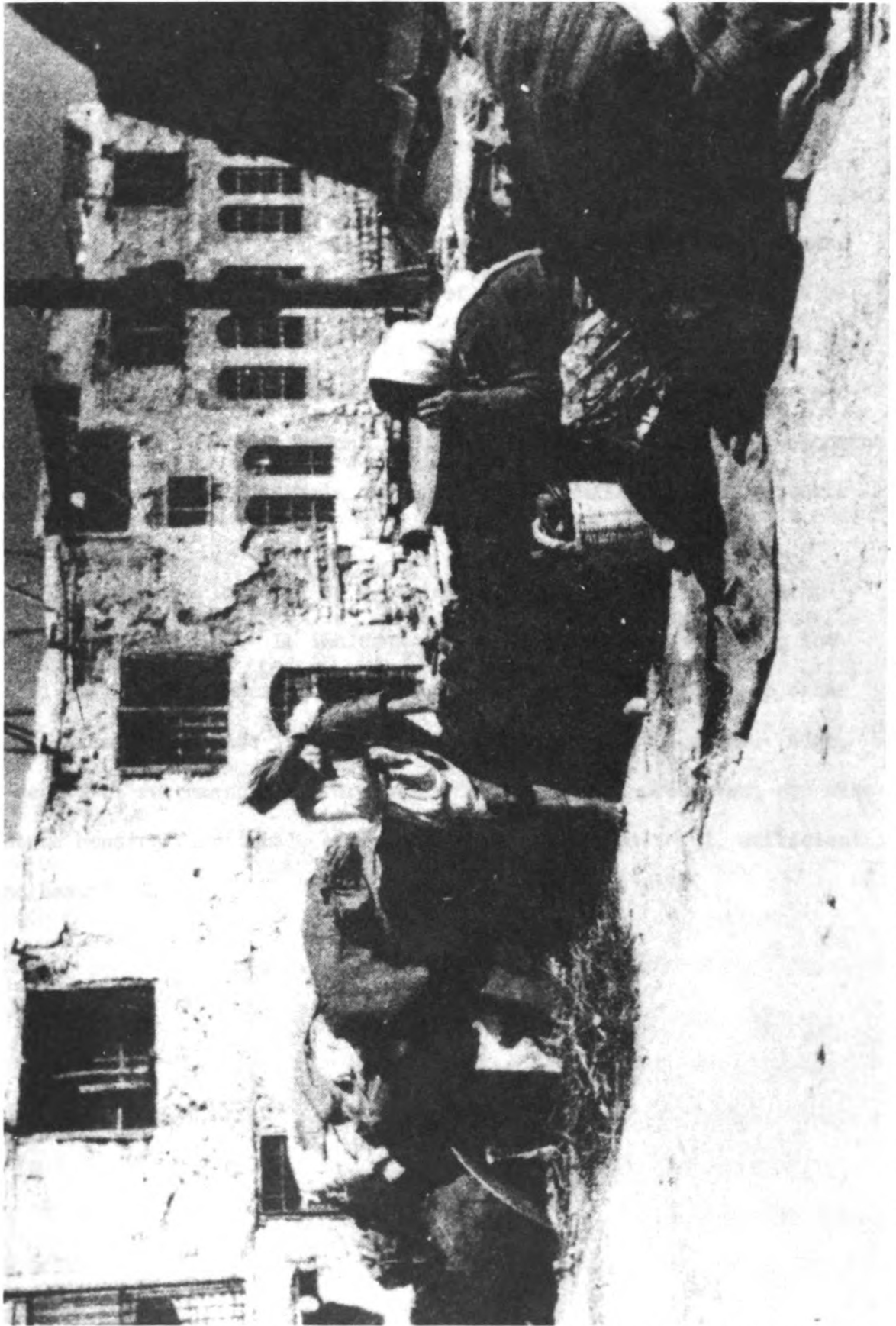
Table 21 summarizes the total housing needs and their cost distributed among the various income groups.

Summary

The housing quality in Damascus ranges in extreme contrast from the luxurious villas and palaces to slums unfit for human habitation. Although the density of residential areas is relatively low, a severe horizontal overcrowding occurs, especially in the old sections and central sectors of the city.

The City is in severe need of additional housing. It has been found that the number of dwelling units is much less than the number of families. In 1962 for example, it was estimated that the amount of dwelling units was about 8,400 less than the number of families.

The rate of construction of dwelling units has lagged behind the housing needs. In 1961, the total number of dwelling units built by both public and private enterprises was 2,358, while the need was about



Representative housing for Palestinian refugees. Only one of the may burdens of misery imposed on these people.

The tragedy of the-Palestinian refugees is unprecedented in history, resulting, as it did, in the uprooting of a whole people from their homeland in which they lived for thousands of years.

7,000. The cost of an average dwelling unit has risen to three or four times what it was 20 years ago. Because of economic limitations, the majority of the population cannot afford to own or rent a decent house, especially in the newer residential areas.

The public and private involvement in the housing industry has been practiced at a slower rate than it should be to satisfy minimum needs. It has been estimated that a minimum of 7,800 dwelling units should be added each year from 1964 to 1975, and around 1,440 dilapidated and deteriorated dwelling units must be cleared annually during the same period. At least L.S. 72 millions should be invested in housing development per year from 1964 to 1975 in order to provide sufficient and adequate housing.

The next chapter will be a review and evaluation of the housing problems of the city. It includes a general framework indicating the total image of the housing situation in the city with respect to other significant inseparate interrelationships of urban development. Also, a series of recommendations are presented that, if implemented, can make future housing functional, efficient, convenient, healthful, sufficient and beautiful.

CHAPTER V

REVIEW, EVALUATION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is intended to be a general review and evaluation of the most significant problems of housing in Damascus. It is intended also to be a framework including recommended ways and means to help solve housing problems. The methodology and philosophy suggested in the proposed goals and objectives are based primarily upon the previous discussion and analysis of the housing situation in the past and present time, and also on the trend of the political, social, economic, and physical factors contributing to the rate of housing development.

In searching for recommended solutions, the author has investigated the various means and methods used and adopted in other nations such as, the United States of America, United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, India and many others.

Compared to other component areas of knowledge, the literature on housing is still in an incipient stage although the necessity for housing is of utmost importance to human well-being. Generally speaking, housing problems in Damascus may be classified under four categories; namely, political, social, economic, and physical. It must be understood that the term 'housing' is just a component of a large open system related to the above factors. This larger system is the process generally called urban planning. The vast complexity and the critical interrelationships between the sub-elements of the housing component, and also between the housing element and other elements within the urban planning system are examined in order to understand the roots of the housing situation and its needs.

Political and Legal Measures Related to the Housing ProblemsReview and Evaluation

The housing laws of Syria and of Damascus may be classified, except for some individual, modern articles provided, as inadequate regulations. Despite all the efforts to improve the provisions of these laws by successive amendments and other modifications, urban planning and housing laws are still in need of considerable change as they are limited in scope, and are ineffective as measures to provide an essential healthful environment.

The recent policy of the National Government has shown a good example of developing the Five Year Plan, 1960 - 1964. Among its many provisions a program for meeting housing needs and providing financing required to carry it out. The routing and red tape in the housing law procedure are very complex and have resulted in serious delay of many residential projects. A distinct advantage of the building regulations of Damascus is in the combining of most of the urban development laws within one set of regulations; but these regulations have not been effective means for providing the necessary modern legal instruments for the development of an adequate living environment. In examining the zoning regulations, it is clear that land use districts in Damascus were defined without much consideration for interrelationship of the many different land uses. The emphasis on architectural aspects of structure has been the principal criterion behind the philosophy of the provisions in the building regulations. These aspects consider the appearance of structures and emphasize the concept of 'city beautiful'. The public housing laws are good measures for carrying out the policy

of the government which emphasizes the socialistic-democratic system of government. However, these laws have some disadvantages and shortcomings. One is the brief period allowed for payment in the purchase of a dwelling unit in a public housing development. The law specifies that 90 percent of the price, or the market value, of a public development shall be paid within 10 years. Secondly, the stated maximum annual income of the applicant is too high (L.S. 6,000). Because there has been great competition among the citizens to purchase public dwelling units, the two lowest income groups¹ have been excluded from acquisition of a considerable share of the public housing. About 80 percent of the total number of families in Damascus receive less than (L.S. 6,000) annually.

In effect, then, public housing provisions serve needs of the middle income families quite well while the low income families continue to be inadequately housed. The creation of the Ministries of Planning and Municipal and Rural Affairs in 1958 was a successful step towards specialization and coordination of the whole process of urban development which includes, of course, housing development. But the public involvement in the housing field, whether it is accomplished by the national or municipal governments, is still on a very small scale.

Although public housing production has shown some progress and improvement in recent years, it still is far short of the stages accomplished by such other countries as the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Denmark. The allowable participation of the National and municipal governments is still very limited in the scope of Syrian operations.

¹See Table 21 for class of income group.

Because the investment in the housing industry is relatively non-productive in comparison to agricultural and industrial enterprises, housing continues to rate as a lower priority concern in the policy of the National government. The National government has been, therefore, emphasizing the development of natural resources and other broader economic features in order to raise the national standard of living. This policy has been followed since 1959 when the National government developed the first adequate economic plan.

Recommendations

In a country like Syria, there is no doubt that the raising of the national standard of living is the first priority, but housing programs should have been given a larger share of the national budget than it has been. Since the national and municipal governments play a completely coordinated role for the provision of housing laws and building regulations, they have the authority to provide the necessary effective housing legislation. The National government must develop a continuing comprehensive study of the economic, social, and physical aspects of housing so that decisions affecting housing policy will be more adequate. A regular census of housing is a most important program which should be administered by the Ministry of Planning with the help of its several departments, especially the Bureau of the Census. The National government should encourage and assist financially the establishment of private associations as producers of dwelling units in partnership with the National and local government. It has been noted that this means has been most significant in the progress achieved by many European countries.

New legislative concepts should be passed to create a central housing bank supported by the National government. This bank should have enough capital to lend to private builders, at low interest rates, especially to non-profit organizations. It also should encourage the establishment of saving and loan associations, and to advocate the existing insurance companies, social welfare institutions, pension funds in housing development. Encouragement for the development of non-profit institutions may be accomplished by many ways and forms such as:

- a. Granting of special long term loans at low-interest rates;
- b. Helping them in the preparation of site development plans;
- c. Reducing or eliminating the property tax in residential areas for a specific period of time in order to increase the rate of building; and
- d. Reducing the tax on materials of construction to lessen the cost of structures of residential buildings.

The National government should provide by some means, according to its financial capacity, a law permitting the proposed central housing bank to guarantee mortgages on the houses built for very low and low income groups, in order to eliminate the investor's risk on the one hand, and attract private funds to be invested in the low and medium cost dwelling units on the other.

The National Government should encourage the Municipality of Damascus to study and adopt legal means to reduce speculation in land so as to assure a relatively stable housing market. The municipal government of Damascus should prepare, with the help of the National government, comprehensive city and regional plans. These plans must be based

not only on purely physical phase or urban development as it has been used, but must also consider and emphasize the evolving social and economic characteristics of the whole urban area.

The achievement of a high level of housing production should be the prime objective in the housing policy of all levels of government, not only in Damascus, but also in other Syrian cities. This objective should not be in conflict with, but as complementary to, other national policies and objectives such as economic development and education.

The concept of governmental participation in the housing field has been showing successful accomplishment in many nations. The basic purpose of the governmental participation is to increase the number of adequate dwelling units supplied for the population and to reduce individuals' expenditure for housing. In Sweden, for example, the government has been successful in providing the major part of the housing stock in the country. In the postwar period, the Swedish government had to take into account the following major factors in its housing policy:

- a. The long-range housing program;
- b. The need for solving the housing shortage;
- c. The relative pressures of new building demands of various cities, towns, and rural districts;
- d. The relationship of residential building to other conjunctional developments;
- e. The availability of building material;
- f. The availability of man power; and
- g. Town planning, hygienic and other regulations.¹

¹Leonard Silk, Sweden Plans for Better Housing, Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 1948, p. 74.

The Swedish government has also been playing the major role in the housing industry. It has controlled the housing credit market through its system of building loans and housing subsidies.

In the United States of America, which is considered to be basically a capitalistic country, the Federal government has also been playing a considerable role in the housing field. The American Housing Act of 1949 and its amendments up through 1961, for example, specifies the policy of the American national government which has been followed since then. This policy is summarized in the following points:

- a. Private enterprise shall be encouraged to serve as large a part of the total need as it can;
- b. Governmental assistance shall be utilized where feasible to enable private enterprise to serve more of the total need;
- c. Appropriate local public bodies shall be encouraged and assisted to undertake positive programs of encouraging and assisting the development of well-planned, integrated residential neighborhoods, the development and redevelopment of communities, and the production, at lower cost, of housing of sound standards of design, construction, livability and size for adequate family life;
- d. Governmental assistance to eliminate substandard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas, to facilitate community development and redevelopment, and to provide adequate housing for urban and rural non-farm families with income so low that they are not being decently housed in new and existing housing, shall be extended to those localities which estimates their own needs and demonstrate that these needs are not being met through reliance solely upon private enterprise, and without such aid;
- e. Governmental assistance for decent, safe, and sanitary farm dwelling and related facilities shall be extended where the farm owner demonstrates that he lacks sufficient resources to provide such housing on his own account and is unable to secure necessary credit for such housing from other sources on terms and conditions which he could reasonably be expected to fulfill.¹

It can be argued that there is no logical objection if the Syrian government adopts, after appropriate changes to suit the Syrian conditions, the housing policies adopted in Western socialistic-democratic

¹Housing and Home Finance Agency, Housing Act of 1949 as Amended Through June 30, 1961, Section 2 "Declaration of National Housing Policy." Washington, D.C.

countries such as Sweden, Denmark and the United Kingdom and the United States. The adoption of such housing policies and programs must be based on the social characteristics and financial capacities of the Syrian people.

Social and Economic Factors as Related to Housing Problems in Damascus

Review and Evaluation

As noted, the level of national income in Syria is very low compared to most Western nations, despite many efforts to raise it by great emphasis on the development of new agricultural projects and many industrial plants; the rate of increase of individual income is yet quite low. The Syrian economy still depends primarily upon agriculture. Unfortunately, most of the agricultural fields are still dry farms dependent upon rainfall.

The government has succeeded in raising the national income by encouraging modern mechanized farming and also by encouragement of industrial corporations to expand and operate with minimum restrictions. The major industries have been concentrating in large urban areas, because of the availability of workers, utilities, facilities, and other factors.

Although the average annual income of the Damascene family is higher than that of Syrian families in other cities, it is still less than L.S. 4,500 (\$1,300) per year. About 65 percent of the total population of Damascus cannot afford to own a house without depending on some other funds in addition to their regular income. The expenditure on rent, or its equivalent, has reached a high rate of 20 to 30 percent of the total annual income of the family.

The problem of the Palestinian refugees has been one of the most serious in the Damascus area. It has had a great impact upon the social and economic status of the Damascenes. These refugees have created an unemployment situation in addition to a sudden rise in property values and rents of residential areas.

The size of the Damascene family and household is quite large, because of the traditional atmosphere and other social and economic determinants. The problem of indoor overcrowding has become very serious. Poverty, in addition to the strong relationships and ties between the members of the family, has resulted in about 40 percent of the total number of dwelling units having more than 7 persons per dwelling unit. Thus, the most serious problem related to housing production is that of economics. Increased cost of land, labor, and materials of construction have resulted in steady rises in the cost of housing. The need for an adequate supply of minimal quality dwelling units has been a continuous problem despite a considerable number of new dwelling units added in the past decade.

In 1955, the Technical Department of the Municipality of Damascus stated the housing problems in the city as a consequence of the three factors of land, construction, and financing. It was stated further that the root of the housing problems had been that the supply of dwelling units consistently failed to keep up with demand . . . let alone need.¹ This situation continues to be true at the present time. The local government has recognized this problem, and has been trying to increase the production of dwelling units; but it has succeeded only

¹Saubhy Kahala, (Head of the Technical Department) "Practical Solutions for Housing Problems in Syria," A lecture delivered at the Club of Commerce, Damascus, 1955.



Damascus has shown a substantial expansion in residential development since 1942, especially on the slopes of Mount Kasyun and on the agricultural lands in the western and northern sides of the old city.

partially, although it has extensive legal powers, especially in the national law governing Syrian urban development. The government has tried to solve the problem of high land cost in the old city and its boundaries by planning and subdividing the low cost, arid lands in the outer environs of Damascus. These arid areas have been chosen for construction of two large residential neighborhoods (New Towns) which will eventually house about 75 thousand people, but approximately 12,500 persons have been housed in these areas by 1960. (See number of dwelling units, Chapter IV)

Today, the housing industry in Damascus is financed primarily through individuals; secondly, by private builders who procure loans at high interest rates from commercial banks; and, thirdly, public housing financed by funds allocated in the national and municipal annual budgets.

Recommendations

It has been suggested earlier that the creation of a central housing bank and other private financial institutions such as loan and saving associations, non-profit organizations, etc . . would be a reasonable solution for the financial problems. These private financial institutions should be insured by the national government.

In the Western countries, the housing industry is financed primarily by lending institutions, while in Syria it is financed mainly by individuals. It is an accepted observation that the capital can be best used by keeping it flowing in business interactions. In the United States of America, for example, the housing industry is financed primarily by private lending institutions. In 1960 the major classes of mortgage lenders were as follows:

Table 22: Major Classes of Mortgage Lenders in the United States in 1960

Institution	Amount in Billion \$	Percent of Total* Money Loaned
Saving and Loan Associations	58.9	36.7
Life Insurance Companies	28.9	18.1
Mutual Saving Banks	24.4	15.2
Commercial Banks	20.5	12.6
Federal Agencies	7.9	4.9
Individual and Others	20.0	12.5
Total	160.6	100.0

*Derived by the author.

Source: Housing and Home Finance Agency, Housing Statistics, March 1961, Table A-49, pp. 58-59.

As it is indicated from the above table, the lending institutions account for 83 percent of the total money loaned which means that a very small share (12.5%) of housing finance was accomplished by individuals.

In Sweden, which has a system of government similar to Syria, the National government plays the major role in the provision of appropriate capital needed for housing development. The Swedish government provides first and second mortgage loans through two major kinds of financial institutions which have been founded on the initiative of the State and are capitalized by it. The first one, the 'City Mortgage Bank', has many branches throughout the country through which it grants loans not only on residential development, but also on commercial building in urban areas. The bank obtains its capital for housing loans by the sale of lands in the open market. The second is the 'Housing Credit Institution' which issues mortgage loans principally on larger residential buildings.

The Swedish government has been participating, to a great extent, in the housing industry by providing far-reaching, effective urban development laws and also by supporting and guaranteeing appropriate funds for housing development. The government also can directly provide funds for residential building.¹

These examples show the wide range of direct provision of appropriate loans, supplementary loans, and housing subsidies for the construction of dwelling units by the Swedish government. In fact, not only governmental participation in the housing industry exists in Sweden, but also in Denmark, West Germany, and others. The National and municipal governments in Syria could equally well provide at least 60 percent of total housing development for lower and middle income-groups. Considering the class of income groups of Damascus which were discussed before, the proposed central housing bank should contribute to the financing of approximately 83 percent of all urban residential buildings in the city and its environs.

Design and Production of Housing

Review and Evaluation

In Chapter IV, it has been shown that the rate of construction in residential areas has lagged behind the need for housing. It is estimated that a minimum of 7,800 dwelling units must be constructed annually while the average number of dwelling units actually being built by both private and public sectors has ranged from 3,300 to 4,000 per year. Most of the new dwelling units were built in the new subdivisions while old sections of the city which contain the most

¹Leonard Silk, Op. cit., pp. 84-85.

substandard and dilapidated houses were left without effective redevelopment measures. The slums in Damascus are found not only in the old city, but also exist in some new sectors, particularly around the outer boundaries of the city. The slums of these fringe areas have developed as a result of many deeply-rooted problems:

- The uncontrolled settlement of the majority of the Palestinian refugees in these areas which has resulted in severe overcrowding;
- The dwelling units in these areas were built illegally and not according to the building regulations of the municipality; and
- The lack or the limitation of legal measures for the control of development.

As stated earlier, the building regulations of Damascus stress mainly the physical appearance and interior of structures rather than recognizing other functions of urban development which comprise the total living environment.

Like most old cities in the world, the problem of an extreme gap and sharp contrast between the luxurious villas and palaces of the high income groups and the ugly slums of the majority of residents has persisted despite all efforts to narrow it. Although some modern mechanized methods of building construction have been introduced, about 80 to 85 percent of new housing units are still constructed with little use of mechanical processes. This problem has resulted mainly in slow development and rise in cost of dwelling units. In recent years there has been some individual efforts to adopt mass production for some component parts of houses, but these efforts have been limited to the production of windows, doors, and some materials of construction, like tiles.



Ultra-modern villas with elaborately-groomed sites and attractive appearance.



Crowded and mixed pattern showing a mosque, stores, a hotel, and apartments facing the original channel of the Barada river.

The contrast between old and new residential areas is fascinating in Damascus. Modern beautiful villas have been expanding around the old city especially in the northern and western sides.

However, the production of elements of the structural skeleton of the house, such as pre-cast or pre-stressed reinforced concrete beams, columns, and slabs has never been accomplished. The elementary methods of construction have contributed a great deal to the rise of housing costs due to the rise in labor cost.

Recommendations

It is obvious that the production of sound and inexpensive housing is dependent, to a great extent, upon the methods and materials of construction. Syrian builders and engineers must understand and adopt new techniques and means of rapid construction from other developed countries, especially those of European countries. It should be remembered that the achievement of reductions in construction costs depends, at least on the development of standardized structural elements, adoption of some mass production processes, the elimination of obsolete and non-functional materials, and the incorporation of adequate health, safety, functional and structural provisions in building regulations to balance the present stress on architectural form.

The design must primarily provide efficient and functional housing rather than stressing the architecture quality and the appearance of the structures. This does not mean that the architectural aspects are to be neglected. However, a dwelling need only be simple, harmonious, and convenient in design. The basic principles of healthful, functional, and convenient housing may be best stated as they were outlined by the National Committee on the Hygiene of Housing of the American Public Health Association. These housing principles¹ should be applied in

¹American Public Health Association: Basic Principles of Healthful Housing. A.P.H.A., Inc. Second Edition, New York 1950.

designing dwelling units for all classes of people in any country:

a. Fundamental physiological needs such as:

The maintenance of a thermal environment which will avoid undue heat loss from the human body;
 The maintenance of a thermal environment which will permit adequate heat loss for the human body;
 The provision of an atmosphere of reasonable chemical purity;
 The provision of a daylight illumination and avoidance of undue daylight glare;
 The provision for admission of direct sunlight;
 The provision of adequate artificial illumination and avoidance of glare;
 The protection against excessive noise;
 The provision of adequate space for exercise and for the play of children;

b. Fundamental psychological needs such as:

The provision of adequate privacy for the individuals;
 The provision of opportunities for normal family life;
 The provision of facilities which make possible the performance of the tasks of the household without undue physical and mental fatigue;
 The provision of facilities for maintenance of cleanliness of the dwelling and of the person;
 The provision of possibilities for esthetic satisfaction in the home and its surroundings;
 The concordance with prevailing social standards of the local community;

c. Protection against contagion such as:

The provision of a water supply of safe, sanitary quality, available to the dwelling;
 The protection of water supply system against pollution within the dwelling;
 The provision of toilet facilities of such a character as to minimize the danger of transmitting disease;
 The protection against sewage contamination of the interior surfaces of the dwelling;
 The avoidance of unsanitary conditions in the vicinity of the dwelling;
 The exclusion from the dwelling of vermin which may play a part in the transmission of disease;
 The provision of facilities for keeping drink and food undecomposed;
 The provision of sufficient space in sleeping rooms to minimize the danger of contact infections;

d. Protection against accidents such as:

The erection of the dwelling units with such materials and methods of construction as to minimize danger of accidents due to collapse of any part of the structure.
 The control of conditions likely to cause fires or to promote their spread;

The provision of adequate facilities for escape in case of fire;
The protection against danger of electrical shocks and burns;
The protection against gas poisoning;
The protection against falls and other mechanical injuries in the home; and
The protection of the neighborhood against the hazards of automobiles.

It has been mentioned earlier in the review and evaluation of the physical pattern of the Damascus residential areas that all the efforts in housing production have been concentrated on new building construction on new land immediately outside the old boundaries of the city. The renewal of obsolete and deteriorated areas and structures has been virtually ignored, due, perhaps to the demand for new structures by a burgeoning population, the lack of maturity by public officials in sensing social needs, the influence of special interests, and of course, the inability of government to work through the tangle of legal, economic, and social factors involved with urban renewal. Urban renewal processes must go hand in hand with the development of the city. The new concepts of urban renewal activities used by other nations have been emphasizing a comprehensive approach to deal not only with the structures of a particular area to be renewed, but with the total related environment as well. Any program for the elimination of substandard housing should incorporate the following points:

- a. The formulation of a comprehensive renewal plan of long-range concepts. This plan must include land use, streets, public facilities and utilities, and financial and legal sections which include successful ways and means of finance and control of such blighted and slum areas;
- b. The provision of adequate sanitary dwelling units for the people who will be displaced by such urban renewal activities. These displaced people should be given first priority to live temporarily or permanently in the new residential areas developed by

the municipality.

- c. The provision and adoption of adequate minimum standards based on health, safety and convenience. The principles of the A.P.H.A. cited in the foregoing for healthful housing must be taken into consideration.
- d. The establishment of an adequate agency within the Technical Department of Damascus to be responsible for this task of administration and technical study.
- e. The identification and rating of the blighted areas according to the degree of deterioration must be based on actual surveys. This rating should be classified in accordance with the standards adopted in order to indicate the areas which should be cleared, rehabilitated, or conserved. Action should be initiated in terms of established priorities of the various areas to be redeveloped or improved.

The Need for Research Programs in Housing and Urban Development

The inadequate consideration given to the housing and urban development has resulted in low quality of a major part of the Damascus urban scene, especially within the old city. The need for research in housing and urban development is a great necessity at the present time. The author recommends as the first priority, the creation and establishment of a department of city and regional planning at the University of Damascus in order to produce enough planners, not only to satisfy the need for the City of Damascus, but also for Syrian and other Arab cities in the Middle East. A housing research center must also be established

at the national level, which would be responsible for the whole range of housing research and for conducting an experimental building station near the City of Damascus.

Such a research center must be so organized as to allow the coordination of the various urban research activities of other centers such as those of the ministries of public works, municipal and rural affairs, planning, and others.

Burnham Kelly has outlined the coordination activities of a similar central research organization in the following points:¹

- a. Keeping in touch with research projects under way in various laboratories and organizations;
- b. Determining trends in dwelling construction and the areas that appear to be most in need of research and development;
- c. Encouraging appropriate groups to undertake research and development in the promising and in the neglected areas;
- d. Providing or obtaining financial support for research in areas deemed important in providing optimum shelter at minimum cost, but of such nature that industrial and association laboratories might not find it appropriate to undertake, and which other research organizations might not otherwise have the funds to support.
- e. Giving the widest possible publicity to the results of research of all kinds, whether or not directly supported by the agency.

The housing aspects appearing to be most in need of research in Damascus have already been mentioned in the previous chapters. Each

¹Burnham Kelly and Associates: Design and the Production of Houses. McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York 1959, p. 248.

sub-title of this thesis may be used as a heading for a comprehensive housing study. The following major subjects are recommended as being most in need of detailed housing study, not only for the City of Damascus, but also may be adopted for other Syrian cities. It should be noted that these subjects are closely interrelated and must be so studied:¹

The Urban Environment

Under this major heading, there are many subjects to be investigated and analyzed, such as:

- a. Regional planning and programming including land uses; natural resource problems such as water supply and flood and pollution control; circulation system such as highways, railroads, airports, and open spaces; human resources including population distribution and major educational and other social places. These regional features should be worked out at a broad level so that an adequate framework for urban development would be initiated.
- b. Housing and city planning research which includes many subjects. The most needed for Damascus are:
 - A study of population distribution and its effect upon the cost of governmental services and tax rates;
 - A study of the land pattern and its values in relation to the cost of improvement and buildings in residential areas;
 - A study of zoning and subdivision regulations as related to open space and use of land;

¹Some of these subjects are taken after being modified from: Housing Objectives and Programs, Edited by John M. Gris and James Ford, Washington, D.C., 1932, pp. 253-291.

- A study of housing regulations and building codes in residential areas; and
 - A study of the 'New Towns' and their impact and consequences upon the housing situation.
- c. Blighted areas and slum clearance which include the various methods to be used for the determination and classification of such areas into many types for clearance and conservation, and the study of purchase and compensation to the owners and cost of these activities to the tax payers. The replanning of the site and the relocation of displaced people could also be a subject of detailed research of reconditioning.
 - d. Public utilities for houses including the ways and means for determining the optimum development of utilities.

Housing Finance and Economic Factors

This major subject includes the means and sources of housing finance, and also the housing market. The following subjects are among the most needed for Damascus:

- a. A study of the annual investments and expenditures on housing by Damascene families and the factors affecting such investments and expenditures;
- b. A study of the cost of different types of dwelling units such as single and double family dwelling units, and multiple family apartments;
- c. A comprehensive study of the methods of assessments and the taxation on residential properties;

- d. A study of the home ownership and the leasing problem which is very serious in Damascus;
- e. A study of governmental participation and its appropriate role in the housing field; and
- f. A study of the production of materials of construction and the economic possibilities for construction and development of new plants to satisfy the national need for the materials of construction which are presently imported.

The Appearance and Function of Housing

This includes detailed architectural and engineering studies.

Among the most needed for Damascus are:

- a. A study of interior and exterior design of housing including size, arrangement, number of rooms, etc.... as related to the need of Damascene families of all income and social groups; and
- b. A study of the necessary required utilities and facilities related to the climatic and other physical conditions so that healthful and convenient housing is produced;
- c. A study investigating the more effective building groupings and neighborhood patterns to achieve optimum livability, economies, and maintenance.

The Structural Aspects of Housing

Under this major heading on housing research, the following subjects would be most significant for Damascus:

- a. A study investigating the possible ways and means of the production of inexpensive, but sound materials of housing construction to be used for providing dwelling units for the low

and middle income groups as a substitution for the expensive materials currently used such as stone, marble, reinforced concrete etc.

- b. A study of the possibility of reconditioning, remodeling, and modernizing the old dwelling units with relation to cost, function, appearance, safety, and health; and
- c. A study of the present methods of building construction and the possibility of introducing less costly and more rapid ways of housing construction.

Summary of the Recommendations

To achieve healthful, sufficient, convenient, safe, beautiful and functional housing for the population of Damascus is the ultimate goal and the prime objective of housing development and redevelopment. The following suggestions are considered to be the most appropriate ways and means to achieve optimum goals and objectives for Damascus housing. They are set up to be general and broad in scope and are seriously in need for both the present and the future.

1. Provision of a census of housing which should be prepared to include not only the quantitative and qualitative features of dwelling units, but also other significant socio-economic aspects and characteristics of dwellers;
2. Provision of new legislative and administrative laws to guide the:
 - a. Use of land.
 - b. Reuse of land.
 - c. Misuse of land.
3. Enactment of special legislation to:

- a. Prevent the abuse of land.
- b. Reduce speculation in land.
4. Encouragement of the present policy of the national and municipal governments to decentralize and distribute residential areas in the arid areas around Damascus and to prevent further residential development in the productive orchard and other agricultural areas;
5. Preparation, adoption, and carrying out of a comprehensive master plan for the city and its environs which must include and show the proposed distribution and location of housing, business, industry, recreation, and other private and public categories of land uses;
6. Encouragement and establishment of many private non-profit organizations such as: Cooperatives, worker unions, building societies, etc. to participate in the housing production;
7. Establishment of a national housing bank to grant special long term loans at low interest rates and guarantee mortgages on dwelling units of low and middle income groups;
8. Eliminating or reducing property taxes on new residential areas for a specific period of time, especially on those owned by low and middle income groups;
9. Encouragement of the reduction of costs of dwelling units on condition that these units would be of sound standards of design, construction and livability for adequate family life;
10. Provision of a building experimental station near Damascus to be responsible for the development of sound and lower cost materials of construction;

11. Encouragement of the use of modern machinery and equipment in housing production and urban development, and also the use of standardized dimensions and methods of mass production;
12. Encouragement of the designer of housing units to stress the function of housing rather than its architectural appearance alone.
13. Effective plans and programs should be provided for clearing slum areas and for maintaining the present housing inventory in adequate condition.
14. Provision and training of social workers to educate the citizens and help them understand the housing problems so that adequate citizen's support and participation would be achieved;
15. Creation of a school of urban planning and landscape architecture at the University of Damascus; and
16. Creation of a national housing research center under the supervision and guidance of the Ministry of Planning.

EPILOGUE

Like few ancient, underdeveloped, but active countries, Syria has come a long way in the past few years. This great movement began when the Syrian people woke up after a long sleep period during the Ottoman rule for almost four centuries (1517-1918). At the turn of the nineteenth century, a few scholars realized that modern ways and means must be introduced in the country in order to follow the advanced nations. Since development of nations takes quite a long time, Syria, today is emerging into the twentieth century with many problems of great magnitude brought from the past compounded by emergent problems of the times. Among its Herculean tasks of self-government are those of economic, self-determination, social mobility, education, etc. An indispensable concomitant to development is the process of urbanism. Urbanism has continued to imply a balance between human and natural forces for achieving a dynamic and a satisfying living environment. And, certainly, housing is a most critical component of such an environment. The recent approaches of housing programming and development emphasize the treatment of housing on a comprehensive basis within the total environment and not as an isolated item. Certainly, these approaches are in most need for a city like Damascus whose housing problems are originated from deeply rooted factors of diverse nature. Thus, the achievement of housing objectives in the city of Damascus requires a great effort including, generally, the improvement of the social, economic, and physical features of the urban scene.

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