



Issue 44, Year 7th , Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية: العدد 44: شتاء 2010

## Urbanisation in Arab Maghreb Region: An Overview

Dr. Omar Elbendak

Department of Sociology  
University of Alfateh, Tripoli –Libya  
[omarehamed@hotmail.com](mailto:omarehamed@hotmail.com)

### Abstract

The article illustrates comprehensive outlook on the case of urbanisation in Arab Maghreb Region. This situation is going to be explored from an urban studies perspective. The transform in the cities from traditional culture to urban culture is the result of changes in different fields. The march of urban transformation in Arab Maghreb Region has been accompanied by steady improvement of quality of life.

### Introduction

The phenomenon of urbanisation is under way now under the influence of development and modernisation, which have been transformed from more traditional to more urbanised during a few decades as a result of many factors such as increased economic activity. The growth of cities has led to a demand for more analysis. So, urban people can be seen in all parts of the cities. The urbanisation accelerated development in economic sectors and has improved the services, such as education, health, administration, scientific research, social services and production institutes like factories and firms. Also the transformation generated many disadvantages within the cities especially after the impact of global culture. There has been recent social phenomenon occurring in line with development and urbanisation.



مجلة علوم إنسانية [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010 - Jan. - Year 7th , Issue 44

## **Urbanisation in Arab Maghreb Region**

### **Overview of the history**

Societies in North Africa have a long history dating back thousands of years, which is a part of Arabic history. During this long history, there has been much life experience in the area. The region has also experienced different stages in areas such as work, the economy, politics and different social relations. So, the characteristics of Arab Maghreb society are similar when looking from geographical, demographical and economical angles. The process of social change which happened in this area destroyed the appearance and patterns of daily activity with regards work and living practices and transport. The sea coasts of Arab Maghreb Region have had urban settlements for many centuries such as Scandria, Tripoli, Tunis, Fas and Morocsh, etc. Some cities have regressed in terms of life circumstances (Attir, 1995:24).

History studies refer to European researchers such as Kouber who visited Libyan cities in the mid 1800s, who visited these cities in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and who saw signs of what used to be cities but which were then deserted. The population had migrated many centuries ago. Examples of such cities are Cartage in Tunisia, and Libda in Libya. Some cities keep the main features and extend beyond the old city borders, for example, Tripoli in Libya. During the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a rise in new industrial cities in Arab Maghreb Region, such as, Albrega and Raslanouf in Libya, Hassimasud in Algeria. The main cities that extended came to incorporate new cities within their boundaries. An example of this is the way in which Tripoli incorporated Kaser bingasheer, which became parts of city. Since the first appearance of cities in Arab Maghreb Region, a large proportion of the population has lived within the cities and this has not decreased. Attir says that the rate is between 10 and 20 percent of the total population and the situation continued until the Second World War (Attir, 1995:24).

The circumstances of Arab Maghreb Region changed during the colonial era. Colonialism had different phases and coexisted with foreign governing forces. After the Second War, the colonial forces began to withdraw and countries of Arab Maghreb Region got independence, and



مجلة علوم إنسانية [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010 - Jan. - Year 7th , Issue 44  
joined treaties and agreements allowing existing military elements (Attir, 1995: 25).

Governments of Arab Maghreb Region established national power aspects in different phases. The programmes of development focused on repairing and caring for capital cities. The main cities got investment from the colonising countries and made amendments and additions to the buildings, infrastructure and services. The main beneficiaries of this investment were the western colonies of Arab Maghreb Region. After independence, the main cities in Arab Maghreb Region became capital cities, such as Tunisia and Rebad. These cities got investment in buildings and different institutions, companies, hotels, transport, theatres, and embassies (Attir, 1995: 25.26).

Sad Aldin Ibrahim refers to Arab Maghreb society by saying that this area shows traditional stability. A high birth rate and a high death rate mean that the rate of growth was slight. This was due to wars and natural disasters. Sad Aldin Ibrahim said that a dramatic change happened in this region when it joined a link with colonialism and western societies. He assumes that communication with western societies benefited from modern facilities in different fields such as health, cleanliness, and nutrition, which were as a result of a decrease in the rate of death especially in children. The rate of birth has stayed at the same level (Ibrahim, 1979:18). He gained evidence for this from data in Algeria. These countries communicated with the west during the colonial expansion of North Africa. History reports refer to the original population in Algeria and Libya as decreasing during the period of colonialism. European colonialism, especially French and Italian, described Arabic people as a group that does not deserve modern facilities. The population of the cities increased because of the growing western presence within them. Tripoli, which represents old Arabic cities, passed through various stages. It stayed behind high walls for many centuries and so its size could not increase (Attir, 1995: 28-29).

Many cities in Arab Maghreb Region became centres for markets and also for the slave trade in Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania during the colonial era. Evidence of the impact of the slave trade on urbanisation patterns is scarce and contradictory. Algiers was the largest slave port following the appointment of a Turkish governor in 1520. In 1830, the French



Issue 44, Year 7th , Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010  
invaded Algeria followed by Tunisia, Mauritania and Morocco. However, the European presence was generally confined to defence and trading in coastal settlements and there was little penetration inland (Unu.edu 2003), into sub-urban pattern.

“The colonial system thus organised African societies so that they produced exports that provided only minimal returns to local labour. It restructured peasant agriculture, introduced a new administrative system, and changed the pattern of urbanisation” (Unu.edu 2003).

After the colonisation period a system of education was introduced in all of Arab Maghreb Region. Consequently, Arab Maghreb society cities developed not as industrial centres, but to facilitate the extraction of commodities and the politico-administrative system on which they depended. Many coastal settlements that were already engaged in international trade expanded. Tunisia is an important example of this in Arab Maghreb Region. Some countries in Arab Maghreb Region fulfilled their functions as administrative and commercial centres. Colonisation established these urban centres and left infrastructural footprints, which can be seen in things like the architecture of the cities. Transport infrastructure, especially railways, was developed to connect the ports to their hinterlands. In some parts of Africa, earlier urban systems had decayed and new colonial settlements were established and port cities thrived at the expense of inland settlements. Cities in Arab Maghreb Region were typical of a new pattern of urban settlement that had been established by these colonial relationships. Parts of Africa where local economies were linked to the outside world grew and urbanisation in these areas was considerably influenced by the European models. These patterns of development were common during the colonial era (Unu.edu:2003).

The independence of Arab Maghreb countries as nation states is a relatively recent occurrence, mostly taking place in the 1950s. All were ruled by European countries for a considerable period of time; the longest colonial rule being in Algeria. During their rule, the Ottoman Turks, the French, and Italians imposed their own legal systems and forms of government upon the indigenous systems of social organisation. They also linked the urban-



مجلة علوم إنسانية [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010 - Jan. - Year 7th , Issue 44  
agricultural policy pursued in the colonized countries to their own home policies in order to serve their primary interests (El-Ghonemy 1993:455).

The achievement of political independence in African countries has not however, occurred overnight. It is rather the end- product of very complex economic, social, and political processes that have been at work over many years.

The past has left its mark on African cities, which have histories dating back thousands of years into the pre-colonial times. The mosque and the marketplace served as centres of urban life. The mosque has its own characteristic style of architecture built of adobe in desert hues, the horizontal lines of massed flat-roofed houses broken only by the slender round towers of the mosques (Curtin et al 1995:509). The mosques played the most significant role in the mobilization and organisation of popular opposition in Arab societies.

### **The case of urbanisation**

The process of urbanisation is a major aspect of change in Arab Maghreb Region where pre-urban cities and new urban settlements have developed over the past decades. Several cities rapidly became regional centres or international nodes responding to economic and political pressures. Poorly planned urbanisation causes land cover changes, which can lead to deeper social, economic, and environmental changes (Weber and Puissant 2003: 341). Pre-colonial cities of Arab Maghreb Region sometimes reached considerable size.

Arab Maghreb Region is the most urbanised sub- region in Africa and urban growth in Arab Maghreb society is partially the result of rural-urban migration, but natural urban growth and reclassification account for more than 70 per cent of urban development (World Bank 1995). This migration trend can be attributed to the greater opportunities, in terms of education and employment that are to be found in cities. Table (4) reflects the big change in population size within Arab Maghreb societies.

The significance of urban areas in northern Africa is long-standing and well-established urban centres such as Casablanca, Tunisia and Tripoli which continue to thrive and have retained their character despite various economic,



Issue 44, Year 7th , Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010

social, cultural and political changes. However, urban agglomerations and mega-cities are important features of recent urbanisation trends, as well as heavy industrialisation. In this section, I should say that urbanisation as a phenomenon has characteristics, which differ from one urban area to another.

In general, the rate of urbanisation of the Muslim population of Maghreb Region has been quite spectacular during the post-independence period. Arab Maghreb Region is changing very rapidly and the cities are experiencing high population growth combined with urban problems. Many of these problems stem from the speed with which the city has grown, and the majority of people residing in the region are concentrated in the coastal area along the Atlantic and the Mediterranean seas.

### **Population and change**

The total Arab Maghreb Region population was 140 million in 1990, but by the year 2000, it had increased to over 220 million. The population of all the five countries grew faster than in previous years due to the notable progress achieved in reducing death rates. This is important as income and health improved between 1960 and 1988 resulting in increased population from 20 million to nearly 60 million with most of the population living in urban centres, especially in Libya (El-Ghonemy 1993:446).

In general, Africa still is one of the world's least urbanised regions. In 1960, at the time when most of Europe's colonial powers were present in Africa, the colonisers lived in cities. There were not more than 33 million European people amidst more than 220 million inhabitants of the vast rural areas (Aiid.org 2003). Between 1960 and 1980, Africa's population exploded, with an average annual growth of 3.2 per cent. The rural population increased from 220 million to 370 million, but the urban population more than tripled, from 33 million to 110 million. Almost a quarter of the African population lived in cities in 1980.

Tunisia had become the most urbanised country of the continent (52 % of its people living in cities), while Algeria and Morocco had an urban population of at least 40%. By the 1970s, the population of Africa began to grow more rapidly than that of Latin America and the Caribbean. Reports show that the population of sub-Saharan Africa increased by an annual rate of 2.9 per cent

Issue 44, Year 7th, Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم إنسانية السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010

between 1975 and 1990, and the increase diminished only very marginally to 2.8 per cent between 1990 and 2000 the fastest rate of growth of any of the world's regions during this period. It was within the period of 1975 to 2000, that it surpassed all other newly industrialising and developing regions, except the Arab world. However, there was little relationship between the size and degree of urbanisation (Palgrave.com 2003). Between 1980 and 2000, population growth slowed down somewhat (to 2.5% per annum) but the urban explosion continued, with annual increases of the urban population close to 5%. Africa's urban population almost tripled during the last twenty years to 300 million people (Aiid.org 2003). The population of the Arab world increased dramatically by a rate of 2.43 per cent per annum between 1975 and 1990, but declined marginally to 2.54 per cent per annum between 1990 and 2000. The level of urbanisation also rose substantially during the last quarter of the twentieth century, and in proportionate terms, exceeded that of both sub-Saharan Africa and most of Asia.

**Table (2) Total population from 1950 to 2000**

| Count or territo  | 1960       | 1970       | 1980       | 1990        | 1995        | 2000        |
|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Algeria</b>    | 10,197,000 | 13,623,000 | 18,577,000 | 24,864,000  | 28,047,000  | 31,200,000  |
| <b>Libya</b>      | 1,350,000  | 1,933,000  | 3,068,000  | 3,964,000   | 4,934,000   | 6,400,000   |
| <b>Moroc</b>      | 11,672,000 | 15,081,000 | 19,390,000 | 24,016,000  | 26,588,000  | 29,600,000  |
| <b>Tunisia</b>    | 4,067,000  | 4,975,000  | 6,316,000  | 8,007,000   | 8,992,000   | 9,700,000   |
| <b>Mauritania</b> | 1,212,000  | 2,571,000  | 5,304,000  | 6,004,000   | 6,732,000   | 7,661,000   |
| <b>Total</b>      | 54,457,000 | 70,797,000 | 93,675,000 | 119,247,000 | 133,359,000 | 153,661,000 |

**Source:** United Nations, World Bank 1995 and other references.

\*Compiled by Author

**Table (3) urban population from 1950 to 2000**

| Country territory | 1960       | 1970      | 1980       | 1990              | 1995              | 2000               |
|-------------------|------------|-----------|------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Algeria</b>    | 3, 186,000 | 4,772,000 | 7, 380,000 | 11, 301,000       | 13, 305,000       | 28,021,000         |
| <b>Libya</b>      | 358,000    | 862,000   | 1,903,000  | 3,146,000         | 3,882,000         | 5,115,450          |
| <b>Morocco</b>    | 3,163,000  | 4,948,000 | 7,593,000  | 10,854,000        | 13,118,000        | 19,704,000         |
| <b>Tunisia</b>    | 1,227,000  | 1,814,000 | 2,881,000  | 4,240,000         | 4,957,000         | 5,305,000          |
| <b>Mauritania</b> | =====      | =====     | =====      | 2,902,000         | 4,166,000         | 5,110,000          |
| <b>Total</b>      | =====      | =====     | =====      | <b>55,257,000</b> | <b>64,982,000</b> | <b>102,339,400</b> |

**Source:** United Nations, World Bank 1995 and other references.

\*Compiled by Author

The quantitative and qualitative distribution of population in Arab Maghreb Region and coastal regions is of considerable importance from a development point of view. This phenomenon pushed up the level of urbanisation in Arab Maghreb Region, the level of economic development as well as the state of the environment. Urbanisation has a weighty effect on both the world and the standard of living. It is both a significant cause and effect of modern life. Most scholars agree that once the total population reaches or surpasses 10,000 inhabitants, it is considered an urban population as calculated according to the demographic sources available in each country. As an example of the data, Tables 2 and 3 give the total population and the urban population for countries in Arab Maghreb Region during the period from 1950 to 2000. In lower Libya the 1950 urban population was about 193 times bigger than that of 45 years earlier-a rural increase of 3,000,882. The same trend was seen in other Arabic countries. The urbanisation rates of the Arab countries were almost equal, even higher than that of Europe.

For analytical and comparative purposes, we can classify African countries according to their degree of urbanisation as follows:

- 1- Low urbanisation (0- 34%).
- 2- Medium urbanisation (35 – 73%).



Issue 44, Year 7th, Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010

3- High urbanisation (more than 74%).

If we apply this measure to the actual urbanisation in Arab Maghreb Region in 2005, we find:

- a- Low urbanisation not found in any country.
- b- Medium urbanisation in Algeria (60%), Tunisia (60%), Morocco (51%), and Mauritan (49%).
- c- High urbanisation in Libya (88%).

In Africa there are nine countries with more than 15% of the population living in the largest city. In two cases; Libya and Congo, the figure is over 30% (Cohen 2004: 29).

**Table (4) urbanisation rates of countries in North Africa (as percentage)**

| Country         | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Algeria</b>  | 18   | 31   | 35   | 40   | 54   | 47   | 60   |
| <b>Libya</b>    | 20   | 26   | 45   | 62   | 78   | 79   | 88   |
| <b>Morocco</b>  | 24   | 27   | 33   | 39   | 45   | 49   | 51   |
| <b>Tunisia</b>  | 26   | 30   | 36   | 47   | 53   | 55   | 60   |
| <b>Mauritan</b> | 2    | 6    | -    | 29   | 40   | 46   | 49   |

**Source:** United Nations, World Bank 1995 and other references.

\*Compiled by Author

Table (4) indicates that the majority of the population in Arab Maghreb Region are living in urban areas. Table (4) also shows that there has been a rapid population growth, particularly in the last two decades. There are great differences between North African countries.

The importance of the towns in social change has not gone unobserved amongst students of African affairs. Thus Hodgkin, a political scientist, has commented that it is above all in these new urban societies that the



Issue 44, Year 7th , Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010

characteristic institutions and ideas of Arab Maghreb Region or Arab Nationalism were born and grew to maturity. Social anthropologists have made the most detailed studies of urbanisation and urbanism in Africa to date. Yet, as our knowledge of African urbanism accumulates, it also becomes clear that such formulations may do less than justice to the complexity of the phenomena and can lead to an obscuring of certain important problems calling for analysis.

Processes of urbanisation in modern Africa, such as industrialisation, modernisation, urbanisation and the growth of settler communities, all have to be kept analytically distinct if we are to make valid generalisations. Every African is assumed to be “detrified” as soon as he leaves his tribal land. (The term “urbanisation” itself is complex for how can we decide whether one African or one population is more urbanised than another?) It is of course true that the man who comes to town finds himself involved in different kinds of social groupings from those which exist in the village. Life in rural communities seems to involve a process of movement and change; its essence is that life in rural communities creates the possibility of discontinuity with some pre-existing set of conditions. This may be contrasted with urbanism, which is the way of life in the towns themselves (Epstein 1967:275-276).

One of the first scholars who wrote about urbanisation in Arab Maghreb Region was Ibin Khuldun, he could not have guessed what proportion of the population of the Magherb countries and Libya were urban dwellers before 1900, but one tenth may be a fair estimate. Figures of 8-9% have been suggested for Morocco in 1900 and Tunisia in 1880 and 16% for Algeria in 1886, while urban life was probably least developed in Libya (Dwyer 1974:79). The study refers to urban and suburban international figures. In Morocco, there are 117 declared urban centres, some of which have a population of less than 5000, yet are fulfilling urban functions including tourism. Algeria defines urban centres as those with a population of at least 10 to 12 thousand inhabitants. Tunisia uses a similar definition. The latest Libyan census of 1964, however, is unique in failing to recognise urban agglomerations at all, but the presence of oil supports urban growth revolution. The oil towns of Hassi Messauoud in Algeria or Maras Elbrega in Libya are obvious examples.



مجلة علوم انسانية [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010 - Jan. , Year 7th , Issue 44

Using 10,000 as a suitable threshold for urban population, the level of urbanisation in North Africa varies from one country to another country. It is highest in Libya (88%) and Algeria (60%) and lowest in Mauritania (49%) as shown in table (4). The population of all countries is growing and the world's cities are growing by 1 million people each week. Today less than half of the world's people live in urban areas, but by 2025 more than two-thirds of us will be urban dwellers. Much of this urban growth and its most serious consequences will occur in developing countries (Brockerhaff 1996:1).

Dwyer argues that in Arab Maghreb Region urbanisation of different countries is remarkable even though the degree of urbanisation is lower than in the rest of the Arab world and the Middle East, but higher than in tropical Africa and southern Asia. Before 1900, Arab Maghreb towns were not only smaller but fewer than today. Nevertheless, Algiers and Tripoli were still moderate size towns of 20,000-30,000 people. More remarkable than the actual level of urbanisation in Morocco and Libya is the rate of urban growth, which has shown almost unchecked acceleration through the twentieth century. During this period as a whole, Libya shows the most rapid rate of expansion, largely as a result of an exceptional increase in the urban population. The writer found that, in Algeria the rate of increase has been slower than in Libya and Morocco. However, between 800,000- 900,000 non-Muslim town dwellers have moved to cities through emigration since 1954(Dwyer 1974:68).

Mauritania, unlike the other Maghreb countries, is experiencing a relatively moderate population growth (2.08% per year) because of a continuing high death rate. Town dwellers represent about 32% of the population, in spite of factors (lack of rainfall and forced population migrations after the conflict with Senegal in April 1989) that have accentuated the movement towards urbanisation. However, during the last 20 years the development of iron deposits has led to amenities for new centres, a trend towards the sedentarisation of nomads, and the tertiarisation of the economy. This has contributed to the considerable growth of the towns, especially Nouakchott.

The appearance of new types of population mobility during the 1980s in the Arab countries is linked to the transformation of the relations between town



Issue 44, Year 7th , Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010  
and country. In the 1960s, faced with the rural exodus, the big urban centres such as Casablanca, Tunis, Algiers, etc., offered the possibility of integration to the migrants, however this is no longer the case since the end of the 1970s. In fact, these urban centres find it difficult to absorb the increasing flow of migrants and a slowing down of emigration towards the big urban centres can be observed.

At the same time, small and medium-sized towns have created significant spatial zones of influence that largely polarize the burgeoning inter-urban migrations. For 20 years, various strategies have been worked out in this way in the rural zones: particular migrations, migrations abroad, development of intermediary towns as well as new agglomerates. One can equally emphasize the important role of States in the development of these poles, both new and old, as result of their efforts towards decentralisation, mainly through the bias of descending migrations of state employees.

In Mauritania, during the colonial period, social structure had come to reflect the impact of French administrative preferences. Individuals, families, and dominant clans attempted to use their privileged status. Independence was granted in 1960, Mauritanian society changed faster than it had during the colonial period. This era saw the beginnings of urbanisation, the founding of a permanent capital, the establishment of national organisations such as trade unions, and the expansion of education facilities. This led to social improvements in different ways. The economic development has altered traditional social organisation, particularly among groups near centres of modernisation. Rapid urbanisation has accelerated these changes. However, Mauritania was transformed from a nomadic society to an urban society a few years ago, but the characteristics of nomadic society still on the society especially in social matters. It is clear that the experience of urbanisation in Mauritania was different from other parts of Arab Maghreb Region due to poverty, low income and the fact that society is not stable in light of some of the political development.

There is also a socio-economic difference between the inhabitants cities as wages are lower in Rabat than in Tripoli. The Population in Tripoli increased but to a lesser extent. For instance it is believed that one third of the



Issue 44, Year 7th , Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010

population of Tripoli were Jews, however, there is no dear evidence to prove this. Italy conquered Libya in 1911 and that was followed by urban growth. In 1964 200,000 Libyan people migrated into Libyan cities and as a result the urban population increased by 92 %. They subsequently impacted on the social formation of Libyan cities. During that time more than 100,000 Italians and Jews departed, many before 1951. However, non-Muslims still constitute about one tenth of the urban population in Libyan cities. Table (3) shows that for each period between 1950 and 2000 the population of Libya increased much more rapidly than most Arab Maghreb countries. Although Tripoli compares better than Tunisia in attaining a stabilised population growth; of over 6 million Libyans, 2 million live in the city of Tripoli. In 1959, 80% of Algeria's urban population was European. 1962 to 1964 saw the departure of 600,000 Europeans from Algerian towns, while simultaneously 800,000 Algerian people moved from the countryside into the cities.

In general, most countries in Africa are still mostly rural with low urbanisation rates but Libya has a high rate of urbanisation. The country with the strongest growth in urbanisation rate between 1950 and 2000 is Libya, which had 88% in absolute terms. On the other hand, from 1990 to 2000 the urbanisation rate stagnated, even regressed, in the northern countries and, more generally, in all the countries already strongly urbanised. The spectacular growth in cities in Libya has been linked to a deep change in the economy brought about by income from oil. The size of the Libyan population was 5 million in 1995 as a result of the economic boom (Blue Plan Papers 2001:13). It is now estimated to be over 5.600 million. Urbanisation has increased strongly since 1950. It went from less than 20% in 1950 to over 88%. This increase is very high: in Libya, there was an increase of 34% from 1975 to 1995 (Planbleu.org 2003).

During the period (1950-2000), there was a substantial increase in the population in urban centres far in excess of the growth rate for Libya as a whole. This increase, however, has been confined to the largest cities of the country such as Tripoli and Benghazi. In general, Libyan society has seen growth in different fields especially in urban populations. Levels can be measured and compared from one country to another. Libya has a high level of urbanisation because its programme for economic, social and political



مجلة علوم إنسانية [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010 , Jan. - 7th Year, Issue 44

development has been successfully implemented thus encouraging the influx of foreign multinational companies and other businesses to invest and ultimately leading to improved income and a higher standard of living for citizens. In Libya, during the past, people were poor and uneducated and the acquisition of formal training was limited to the few who had access to Italian institutions of education.

In 1995 there were no countries which were clearly under-urbanised. The last rates recorded in Morocco were 45%. In Morocco, as in other developing countries, rapid urbanisation has caused housing shortages, a lack of urban services, and environmental problems. The rate of urbanisation is different from one society to another. This study will now focus on the specific case of urbanisation in Tripoli, which represents Libyan society.

In the past, Libya and Algeria had a similar urban structure, but recently anthropological studies have demonstrated a slight difference in their spatial organisation. Most notable among these differences are the spatial representation of indigenous cultural and social organisations. Specifically in the colonial system communities portrayed these differences in spatial taxonomies and systems of classification (Attir 1995:25).

### **Modern aspects of urbanisation**

In the first half of the nineteenth century, a surprisingly high proportion of town dwellers were non-Muslim. The European's consciousness of Arab Maghreb Region is much older than his/her awareness of other cultures, and early impressions could not help but be coloured by the historical oppositions between Christianity and Islam (Fernea and Malarkey, 1975:184). The transformation of the cultural and ethnic composition of Arab Maghreb towns in the course of a few years has far-reaching consequence, particularly in Algeria- less so in Libya (Dwyer 1974:72).

Arab Maghreb Region is an amalgam of five countries having broad similarities and significant structural variations. Apart from being ruled by Europeans for a considerable period of time, African migrant workers to Western Europe come primarily from Arab Maghreb Region and from West Africa (Garenne 2003:14). The obvious common feature is cultural: the Arabic language, the Islamic religion and many shared customs. The region



Issue 44, Year 7th, Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010

comprises countries with different economic structures: a predominately agricultural low-income economy (Mauritania), balanced middle-income economies (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia) and an oil based high-income economy (Libya) (El-Ghonemy 1993:445).

African people further from the main routes of invasion and urbanisation did not have time to learn western culture sufficiently for effective adaptation before the intensity of capitalist penetration broke upon them. They were left in a pathological condition; their own rich culture decayed and became incoherent, no longer capable of securing harmony among them (Southall 1998:290).

Urban development was largely confined to developed countries before the middle of the last century but has spread to developing countries since then. Both outcomes are seen as interdependent consequences of the growth and geographical extension of capitalism, which is in keeping with the merits of the interdependency theory. Recent urbanisation in Africa and Asia are localised responses to the new global economic order. In Africa, there are enormous variations, since in some areas there are vulnerable civilisations and high levels of urbanisation (Abu-Luchod and Hay 1979:5). Most countries in Africa have not become heavily industrialised. African cities have grown due to the influx of manufacturing and service jobs from developed economies, and the immigration of workers displaced by agricultural adjustment.

The urban planning profession seeks genuine improvements in the quality of life, which are very necessary for societies experiencing rapid change. There is a need to develop a planning and urban theory supported by suitable development controls which will generate and regulate an urban environment more suited to offer residents comfort at all levels. After the discovery of petroleum a development programme was set up which led to an improvement in the standard of living. My research has shown that programmes of modernisation in Libya brought about many benefits, both at personal and societal levels. It brought about the construction of new western-style buildings. This indicates an acceptance of western culture. There are certain elements particular to Arabic culture, just as there are elements that are particular to western culture. This is due to inter-culturalism within the



مجلة علوم انسانية [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010 - Jan. , Year 7th , Issue 44

society in different fields such as education, business, etc. Indeed, rapid urbanisation in North Africa has also given rise to significant environmental and social problems and is characterised by increasing urban poverty, the emergence of informal settlements and slums and a shortage in basic urban services (Grida.no2002). More than one third of the urban population now live in substandard housing.

Another great urban development is the use of computers for administration in Libya today. Improvement in the use of modern technology for communication has also improved the economy in Libya. Most young and old, male and female citizens and foreigners have become proficient in the use of modern means of communications, which are inexpensive and available in Libyan cities. In fact, most Arab Maghreb Region, and specifically Libyan, administrative staff and diplomats enjoy computer and internet access to perform their various activities in the city. Computers are available in internet centres, embassies, airline offices, hotels, coffee shops, shopping plazas and other places. Business and the economy have improved in the city and the entire country for both the government and the individual because there is a friendly relationship between Libya and other countries, especially African countries. There is a great opportunity for the Libyan government, private establishments and individuals to form good business relationships with other Africans because foreigners are allowed to come into Libya for investment. The Libyan government also permit their citizens to go out of the country to other African countries to do business, support, and encourage them through funds and loans to invest in other African countries. Business relationships between Libyans and other Africans have had an impact on Libyan citizens' understanding of other African cultures as well as the global culture (Blak 1984:267-293).

Urbanisation comes in different forms and the major meaning is confusing here for it could be seen in the light of the term "Coca Cola culture". The term can refer to the trans-nationalisation, rationalisation and global organisation of production in an array of manufacturing industries and categories of services, such as finance and telecommunications together with high profile advertising. Until recently, the use of European models and actors in world-wide advertising promoted images of western sophistication



Issue 44, Year 7th , Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010

creating a desire for such lifestyles. In less fortunate regions like Africa there is a gradual resentment of European economic superiority. This has led to the assertion of indigenous values and roles and to the increasing use of indigenous models and actors thus enhancing the integration of different world cultures which ultimately has led to a generally acceptable world standard that is all inclusive (Unu.edu 2002).

Major African cities host the headquarters of international organisation of various types. This provides another good indication of the strength of insertion into global networks of contacts, communications and information (Unu.edu 2002). In general, African cities are faced with many problems emanating from their past development with influences of colonisation as well as unprecedented urbanisation and population growth (Adebayo 2002:351). In the cities of the modern world the incomes are unequal and inhabitants are differentiated and ranked. People live in neighbourhoods which reflect and reinforce these inequalities of income and status. In pre modern cities rich and poor often lived in close proximity, sometimes at different levels of the same dwelling (Byrne 2001: 105).

The system of Libyan culture has been changed by many factors such as the political and economic systems. Many people from rural areas moved to the cities such as Tripoli, to work and maintained their kinship ties while in search of work and at their work place. Further urbanisation is likely to create better employment opportunities and living standards (Wos.heanet.ie 2002)

Africa's peoples and cultures have been subject to dramatic external interventions and influences which have enmeshed them firmly within the emerging world system. The successive conquests, colonisation and associated cultural imperialism of Arab and European, Islam and Christianity, the abduction of literally millions of Africans by the slave trade, and more recently the fast modernisation and spread of the capitalist manner of consumption have all transformed and internationalised cultures, concepts, and commodities. This increasingly powerful process of convergence has captured the popular imagination to the extent that 'globalisation' is as much a subject of media interest as of academic enquiry (Unu.edu 2002).

Now more than earlier, foreigners have influenced the character and social structure of African culture. International European culture has affected



مجلة علوم انسانية [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010 - Issue 44, Year 7th, Jan.

Africans cities. In Libyan cities, many citizens have become familiar with communities from abroad. Because other African people have migrated to Libyan cities through various means of transportation, the citizens of the country now find it easier to communicate with foreign people and to understand the cultures of other African people. Foreigners also find it easy to communicate with citizens in the city because the native citizen can also speak and understand other African and European languages. This has had an impact on the citizens in the city and has led to a development of a sense of unity with other Africans. Many citizens in the city travel to other European countries to learn and know more about European cultures.

In Arab Maghreb Region, there is one dominant language but with different colloquial usage. However, there are many similarities in culture. Traditional rulers are highly respected, especially in rural society but they have little impact on urban society except in some social occasions such as weddings and funerals or celebrations on religious occasions. People everywhere have dresses for social occasions; however, Libyan people still observe traditional dress, especially the oldest people in urban or rural areas. Younger people do not follow the dress code. At weddings, for example, they wear European costumes. There are traditional rules, duties and obligations among the system of communities, the system of culture creating and maintaining harmony and order in the community. The cultural heritage has an influence on many occasions such as participating in marriage or funeral ceremonies. These are some of the duties expected from all people.

Most studies refer to urban people as being less fertile than rural people and this is widely observed and discussed in the field of fertility. It has often been suggested that urbanisation is closely connected with a decline in fertility. In general, Arabic families are larger among rural than urban populations and modern large cities have provided a particularly favourable environment for the development of attitudes that motivate family planning. The process of urbanisation in developing countries has not been completely similar to the corresponding process in the currently developed countries (Abdel Hakim, Abdel Hamid, 1982:6). Statistics show that the population of urban Libya is on the increase, and that all Arabic cities are growing more in population, especially the North African cities. However, the concept of



مجلة علوم إنسانية [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010 - Issue 44, Year 7th, Jan.

Islam in Libya rejects modern family planning and this might be contributing factor to the relatively high rate of fertility. Other factors are the higher standard of living and return migration from other Arabic countries. With the urban way of life, the significance of typing of cities becomes crucial in modern time. In addition, urban characteristics are different from one city to another city according to size and type of social organization but in general the researcher has seen a similarity of patterns of life in the cities.

The climate and culture also influence the style of houses in Arab Maghreb cities, such that provision is made for adequate heat exchange by building with red bricks which tend to lose heat during the day and retain warmth at night. They also have a central quadrangular space which allows direct viewing of the sky. This exists together with modern western style and multi-storey buildings. The current style and planning is different from past styles. For example, Tripoli has many styles of houses because several schools of architecture exist. In the past most houses in Tripoli city had their own private courtyard, whether large or small, on to which they faced (Culverwell 1980:266).

## **Conclusion**

This article explores the situation of urbanisation in Arab Maghreb Region. Arab Maghreb Region consists of five countries with similarities and structural variations as well as being governed by Europeans for a while. African migrant workers in Western Europe were primarily from North and West Africa who on returning home imported their newly acquired foreign culture and lifestyle.

Rapid urban transformation in Arab Maghreb Region has also given rise to significant environmental and social problems and is characterised by increasing urban poverty, an emergence of informal settlements and slums and a shortage in basic urban services. Rapid modernisation and the spread of the capitalist manner of consumption have all transformed and internationalised culture, concepts and commodities. Urbanisation was confined to developed countries before the mid twentieth century, but has since spread to developing countries due to growth and the geographical extension of capitalism.



مجلة علوم انسانية [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010 - Jan. , Year 7th , Issue 44

Between 1950 and 2000, urbanisation has increased in various African countries with Libya having the highest rate from 20% to 88%. Urbanisation has further increased in Libya because of its programme for economic, social, and country development that entices foreign multinationals and immigrants to its urban centres. This has led to the acquisition of improved lifestyles and economic power for the individual and society. With 5,000 as a minimum size of an urban population, the level of urbanisation in Arab Maghreb Region varies from country to country; the highest in Libya (88%) and Algeria (60%) and lowest in Mauritania (51%). It can be argued that in Arab Maghreb Region the urbanisation of different countries is remarkable and although the degree of urbanisation is lower than the rest of the Arab world and Middle East, it is higher than in tropical Africa and Asia. All African cities have an urban history prior to the pre-colonial era exemplified in their architectural type, which is influenced by their climate and culture, such that allowance is made for adequate heat exchange. The growth in the urban population is due to factors such as availability of services, growth in numbers of young people and an increase of economic immigrants. Urbanisation is a rather complex term, as it can be applied at different scales. It is related to changes in the environment and people. So, the local system becomes similar to many cities after globalisation. The cities have been influenced by modernisation and development. With the urban way of life, the significance of typing of cities becomes crucial in modern time. In addition urban characteristics are different from one city to another city according to size and type of social organization but in general the researcher has seen a similarity of patterns of life in the cities. Arab Maghreb Region cities are different now from the past.

In the cities of the modern world the incomes are unequal and inhabitants are differentiated and ranked. People live in neighbourhoods which reflect and reinforce these in inequalities of income and status. In pre modern cities rich and poor often lived in close proximity, sometimes at different levels of the same dwelling (Byrne 2001: 105).



Issue 44, Year 7th , Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية: السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010

## References

- (1) Abdel Hakim, M. S., and Abdel Hamid, W., **Aspects of urbanisation in Egypt**, Centre for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies, university of Durham, England, 1982.
- (2) Abu-Luchod, J., and Hay, R, JR, **Third World Urbanisation**, Methuen-New York, London 1979.
- (3) Adebayo, A., **Viewpoint**, School of Architecture, Planning and Housing, South Africa 2002.
- (4) Aiid.org.website, [www.aiid.org/publ\\_dietz\\_1.htm](http://www.aiid.org/publ_dietz_1.htm) 2003.
- (5) Attir, M. O., **Trends Urbanisation in Arabic Society**, Arabic Institution of Publication & Invention, 1995.
- (6) Blak, G., **Developing Diplomatic Communication Models and Strategies for Africa: Some key issues**, Journal of Black Studies, Volume 14, Issue 3, Mar. 1984, 267-293.
- (7) Blue Plan Papers, **Urbanisation in the Mediterranean Region from 1950 to 1995**, Blue Plan- October 2001.
- (8) Bockerhaff, M., **"City Summit" to Address Global Urbanisation**, Population to day March 1996.
- (9) Byrne, D., **Understanding the Urban**, Palgrave New York 2001.
- (10) Cohen E., **The Sociology of Tourism: Approaches, Issues, and findings**, Annual Review of Sociology, Volume 10, 1984, 373-392.
- (11) Cohen, B., **Urban Growth in Developing Countries: A Review of Current Trends and a Caution Regarding Existing Forecasts**, National Research Council, Washington USA world Development, Vol. 32, No.1, 2004, 23-51.
- (12) Culverwell, G., **The History of the City**, Scolar Press, London 1980.
- (13) Curtin, P., et al, **African History**, Longman London and New York 1995.
- (14) Dwyer, D. J., **The City in the Third World**, Macmillan, London, 1974.
- (15) El-Ghonemy, M., **Food Security and Rural Development in North Africa**, Middle Eastern Studies 1993.
- (16) Epstein, A.L. **Urbanisation and Social Change in Africa**, Current Anthropology, Volume 8, Issue 4, Oct. 1967, 275-295.
- (17) Fernea, R A., and Malarkey, J., **Anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa: A Critical Assessment**, Annual Review of Anthropology, Volume 4, 1975.
- (18) Garenne, M., **Conference on African Migration in Comparative Perspective**, Johannesburg, South Africa, June 2003.
- (19) Grida.no, [www.grida.no/aeo/207.htm](http://www.grida.no/aeo/207.htm) 2002.
- (20) Ibrahim, S., **Over-Urbanisation and Under-urbanisation: The case of the Arab World**, International Journal of Middle East studies, Vol.6, 1975.
- (21) Ibrahim, S., Present Arabic cities and Future, Arabic Journal, No. 10, 1979.
- (22) Planbleu, [www.planbleu.org](http://www.planbleu.org) 2003.



- Issue 44, Year 7th , Jan. - 2010 [WWW.ULUM.NL](http://WWW.ULUM.NL) مجلة علوم انسانية السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010
- (23) Prb.org.website, [www.prb.org/Content/Navigation/MEN/PRB/Educators/Human\\_P2003](http://www.prb.org/Content/Navigation/MEN/PRB/Educators/Human_P2003).
- (24) Southall, A., **The City in Time and Space**, Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- (25) Weber, C., Puissant, A., **Urbanisation Pressure and Modelling of Urban Growth: example of the Tunis Metropolitan Area**, Remote Sensing of Environment 86, 2003, 341-352.
- (26) Wos. Heanet, [www.heanet.ie/CIW.EGI2002](http://www.heanet.ie/CIW.EGI2002).