

Public Outdoor Spaces in Hashemi Shamali

A report briefing main findings of the fieldwork that took place in Hashemi Shamali during the summer 2019 as part of the researcher's PhD fieldwork, and offers recommendations to CRP in its role as a community centre, specifically on how to enhance and facilitate refugees' everyday experiences in their neighbourhood, to maximise the use of local outdoor spaces as a social resource to them, and with some additional guidance on their future roof garden. The findings are listed to show the following: The perception of POS by refugees, usage patterns in these spaces, benefits and barriers encountered in their outdoor experiences.



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December, 2019

REFUGEES & OUTDOOR SPACES IN HASHEMI SHAMALI

This research studied Syrian and Iraqi refugees' perceptions of local public outdoor spaces (POS) seeking to understand their everyday experiences of their neighbourhood, with a particular focus on social encounters in these spaces. The research took an ethnographic approach, with the researcher 'hanging out' with refugees from different age groups, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and gender. There were 10 participants. As such, the findings are not comprehensive and should not be generalised. However, they do give a deeper insight into this topic, and in doing so highlight some connections with other themes of refugee integration and with other neighbourhoods within Amman.

1. HOW DO REFUGEES LIVING IN HASHEMI SHAMALI PERCEIVE PUBLIC OUTDOOR SPACE (POS)?

- Participating refugees talk about 'public outdoor space' as free space that can be accessed easily, is walking distance from home, and is a place where they feel equal and not guests.
- Outdoor spaces that participating refugees use range from urban spaces to transitory neighbourhood spaces such as sidewalks and stairs, and include semi-private spaces such as their domestic gardens, balconies, and shared roofs. The major urban space used was the Hashemi Souq. Other spaces were; Bab Al Wad and Prince Hashim parks, NGO's outdoor areas such as CRP's courtyard and ZEIND outdoor facilities, Abu Jassar football pitch, the neighbourhood outdoor communal areas (Al Hara) and the connected network of sidewalks, alleyways and stairs.
- Participating refugees perceived POS differently based on different factors such as their culture, history, individual life situations, age, and the extent to which they perceived that the POS was different from that in their home country. For example, Syrian refugees discussed Syria as greener than Jordan, with better weather and more parks, while Iraqi refugees perceive Amman as comparatively greener and with better weather than Iraq.

2. WHAT DO THEY LIKE TO DO OUTDOORS?

- Participating refugees undertake many different activities outdoors, including grocery shopping, walking their children to school, or attending classes at the local community centres.
- Outdoor activities are often limited to the neighbourhood of Hashemi, and they move in the city rarely for reasons like immigration applications, visiting relatives, or a planned trip or picnic that happens once a year.
- Outdoor activities that are recreational rather than functional usually take place evening times in summer and at midday in winter. These activities increase on the weekends and festival times like Eid and Ramadan.
- There is a strong social focus to many of the activities that take place in the public realm. Many participants enjoy sitting and observing passers-by in the souq, consuming food like nuts and fruits (mostly brought from home), also hanging out in the forecourts of local community centres before or after classes, playing cards while sitting on the sidewalks, enjoying shisha on the sidewalks of the souq, or going to nearby restaurants for hot meals like shawerma, fruit cocktails and ice cream.

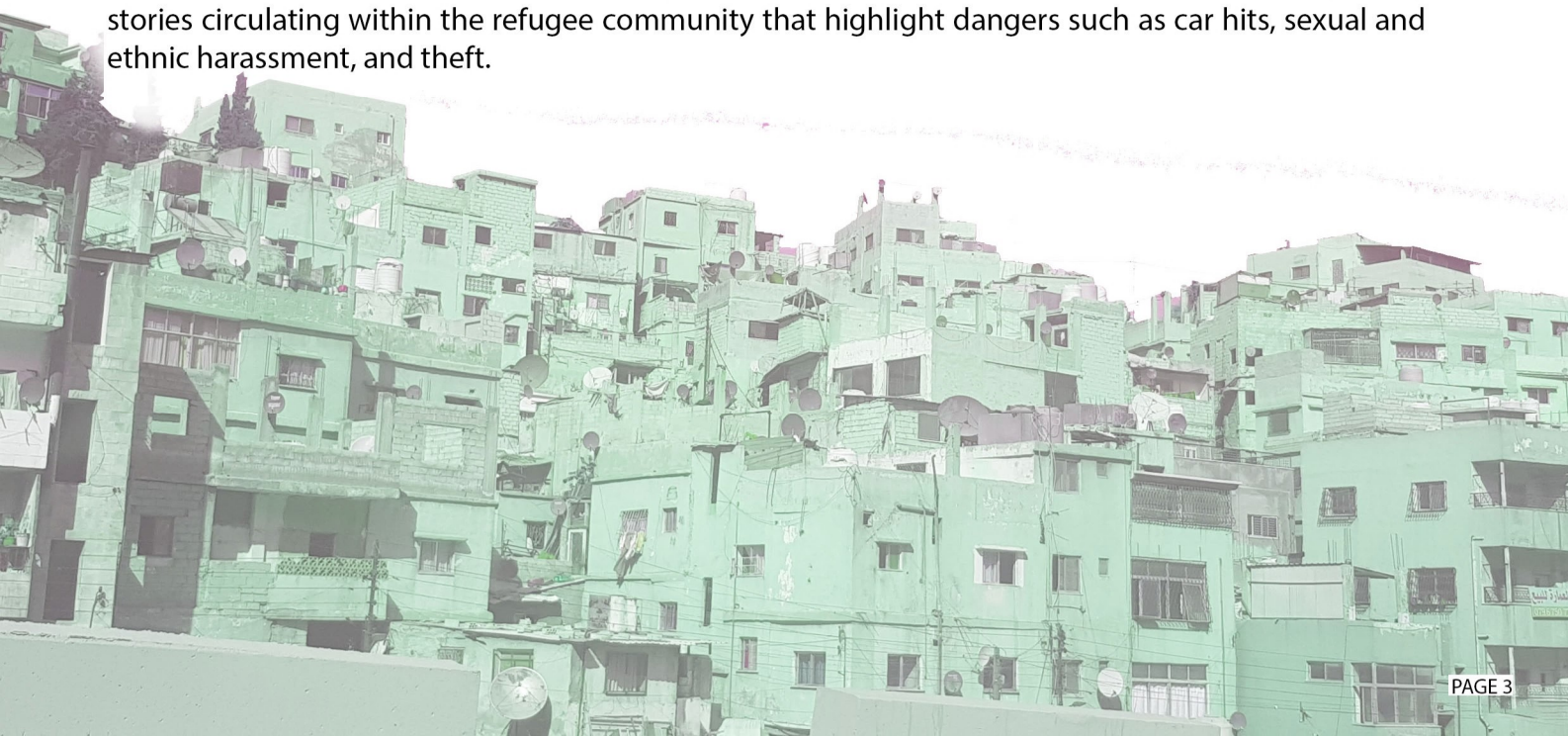
- Participating refugee families (mostly Syrian refugees) plan group picnics in nearby parks every couple of months or during Eid.
- Participating refugee men generally congregate outside mosques after Friday prayers. Participating refugee women tend to spend time outdoors alone during the daytime, and with family or friendship groups in the evening.
- Unlike Jordanian children, outdoor activities for participating refugee children almost entirely took place with direct parental supervision. They are always accompanied when playing at the parks, bike riding at the souq, or flying kites.

3. WHAT VALUE IS GIVEN TO OUTDOOR SPACES?

- For participating refugees spending time outdoors helps in stress and trauma relief. Outdoor neighbourhood spaces provide a free-of-charge experience where it is possible to spend time with your family, to socialise with friends and meet new people.
- Participants also discussed how they discovered many new things about the Jordanian culture like new types of street foods, and outdoor wedding ceremonies.
- Outdoor places are valued as places for play and exercise, and seen as locations where one is considered equal, not a guest or a burden on anyone. Also, these places facilitate encountering the locals, exchanging greeting gestures, conversations, and sometimes fights.
- Some of the outdoor spaces are of high importance and considered special to them, these are often spaces that remind them of places in their home country.
- Being mobile around the city is not always easy (see following section) but when participants did venture beyond the Hashemi locality it gave them a sense of discovery and a sense of empowerment.

4. WHAT DID THE PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFY AS OBSTACLES AND PROBLEMS FOR THEM SPENDING TIME OUTSIDE?

- Participants experienced some parks are unwelcoming. Sometimes this was due to dis-satisfaction with the design quality and facilities, but was also sometimes related to uncomfortable encounters with municipal staff.
- Some participants did not want to visit places of leisure, such as parks, as it felt incompatible with their state of deep grief.
- While many NGOs facilitate outdoor activities, but funding and capacity issues mean that these activities not are not regular and have long waiting lists. It is difficult for refugees to book on them, and when they enjoy specific activities it is hard them to repeat them. Information is also a problem; many participants didn't know about free events like summer camps or community classes held in the neighbourhood municipal parks. They are not aware of advertisements on social media, and they miss the information signs inside the park because they are not frequent visitors.
- Participants described their struggles of moving around the neighbourhood and the city in general. Some have health issues or previous injuries that prevent them from walking easily. Travelling outside Hashemi requires insider knowledge about the vague networks and systems of bus and service (minibus), or about the walking shortcuts common to local people.
- Adding to the physical immobility, is a lack of social confidence for exploration due to being vulnerable and depressed. This can also be coupled with a belief that they have no future in this country, so lack the motivation to explore.
- Some participating women and teenage girls are not allowed to go outside as much as they want, as they need permission from a male family member (husband, father, or brother).
- There are also implicit conflicts between different refugee groups underpinned in part by the experience of unequal funding and permission of work according to nationality.
- Poverty limits the ability to go out and about. Parents worried about whether they can afford snacks or using toilets if they make longer trips to parks.
- Some of the refugee participants feared outdoor public spaces and avoided specific spaces. This was because they faced hostile behaviour in public before, or because they were influenced by many stories circulating within the refugee community that highlight dangers such as car hits, sexual and ethnic harassment, and theft.



5. HOW CAN THE CRP HELP IN ENHANCING THEIR EXPERIENCES OUTDOORS?

The participating refugees discussed how influential and powerful CRP's role is in their lives, as CRP supports them in facing many challenges, and offers remarkable opportunities to help and heal. The findings of this research prompted a number of proposed recommendations that CRP might be interested in to enhance refugee's outdoor experiences in Hashemi. The general recommendations were supplemented with guidance for the future potential roof garden at CRP community centre in Hashemi. The general recommendations was developed based on the schemes of curated sociability displayed on Rishbeth et al. (2019) article called Participation and wellbeing in urban greenspace : 'curating sociability' for refugees and asylum seekers. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.07.014>

• ENCOURAGING AUTONOMY:

Plan more outdoor opportunities which start from a known base such as CRP'S courtyard. These can lead onto picnics at the nearby outdoor spaces and walks within the neighborhood, and later introducing trips to other recreational spaces in the wider city. Group facilitated outdoor classes, walks, sessions, or sport activities may include transportation, snacks, and some guiding directions to the area and safety hacks. These opportunities will help introduce these spaces for refugees who would not have initially had the inclination or confidence to access these spaces, build familiarity about what is on offer and how to get there for future visits on their own.

• PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES AND GRANTING REFUGEES THE PRIVILEGE OF CHOICE:

It is important to acknowledge the budget constraints of CRP, which mean a limited ability to provide outdoor classes accommodating everyone, and long waiting lists for classes like skateboarding or football. However, CRP may consider signposting refugees to alternative venues that promote outdoor opportunities: the municipal parks and their free clubs and events, and also events run by other NGOs. To support this may require more communication with the municipality and the neighboring NGO's, and considering advertising of a variety of events run by different parties. This could go some way to resolving issues of capacity, while giving refugees more options to choose from and the chance to continue with preferred classes. In the long term this can help plant seeds of collaboration that can facilitate mutual understandings of aims, and can lead to a diverse plan of activities which can expand the benefits for local residents including refugees.

• ENHANCING SKILLS IN MOBILITY:

Initiate a regular workshop, which can be run by local volunteers in Hashemi, aiming to introduce lay knowledge about the neighborhood, walking shortcuts, personal skills and tips on how to use the bus, and best routes of service. Over time, one outcome of this might be to co-produce an accessible (ideally adaptable) map that provides helpful information to refugees and newcomers.



• **LINKING OUTDOOR SPACES WITH THERAPEUTIC PROGRAMS AND CLASSES:**

Refugees wellbeing is one of the priorities of CRP. Spending time outdoors as an enjoyable experience has therapeutic benefits: chances for respite and relaxation, increased social connections and growing confidence. This can be particularly important for refugees living with depression, so supporting to access a wider range of open spaces could feasibly be included as part of wellbeing support programs. This can help build attachment to their new local area of living and can be part of the way to support integration.

• **IMPROVING WOMEN’S ACCESS TO PUBLIC OPEN SPACES:**

Many female refugees have very limited opportunities outdoors, either due to the demands of caring for their children, or fear from sexual harassment or issues of general safety. CRP may facilitate or promote female-only outdoor activities with simultaneous activities. It’s important that these include snacks for children. CRP should also consider how they can support access for women who cannot participate unless accompanied by a family member. This has implications for capacity including for transportation. However, addressing these issues is essential for building trust and having gender inclusive programs. Alternatively, CRP could provide ideas and encouragement to support free activities for women and their children in their domestic outdoors (balconies, gardens, roofs). This may mean loaning basic equipment as a starting point, and find ways of sharing ideas such as a gardening club to discuss cheap ways of keeping small gardens in these spaces.

• **UTILIZING FREE TIMES AND FREE SPACES:**

Public space may provide a useful resource for supporting refugees with higher education degrees, vocational skills or lifetime hobbies, but who are currently unemployed, often long term due to legal constraints. People in this situation can feel unproductive, and that their knowledge and skills which are not valued. CRP can help them establish their own peer learning groups or community clubs, potentially providing support with facilitation. Public spaces of various types can be appropriated as free venues for these activities, or CRP could offer their courtyard at specific times of the week to be booked. Ideally low-level funding could be allocated to such activities to help build self-worth.

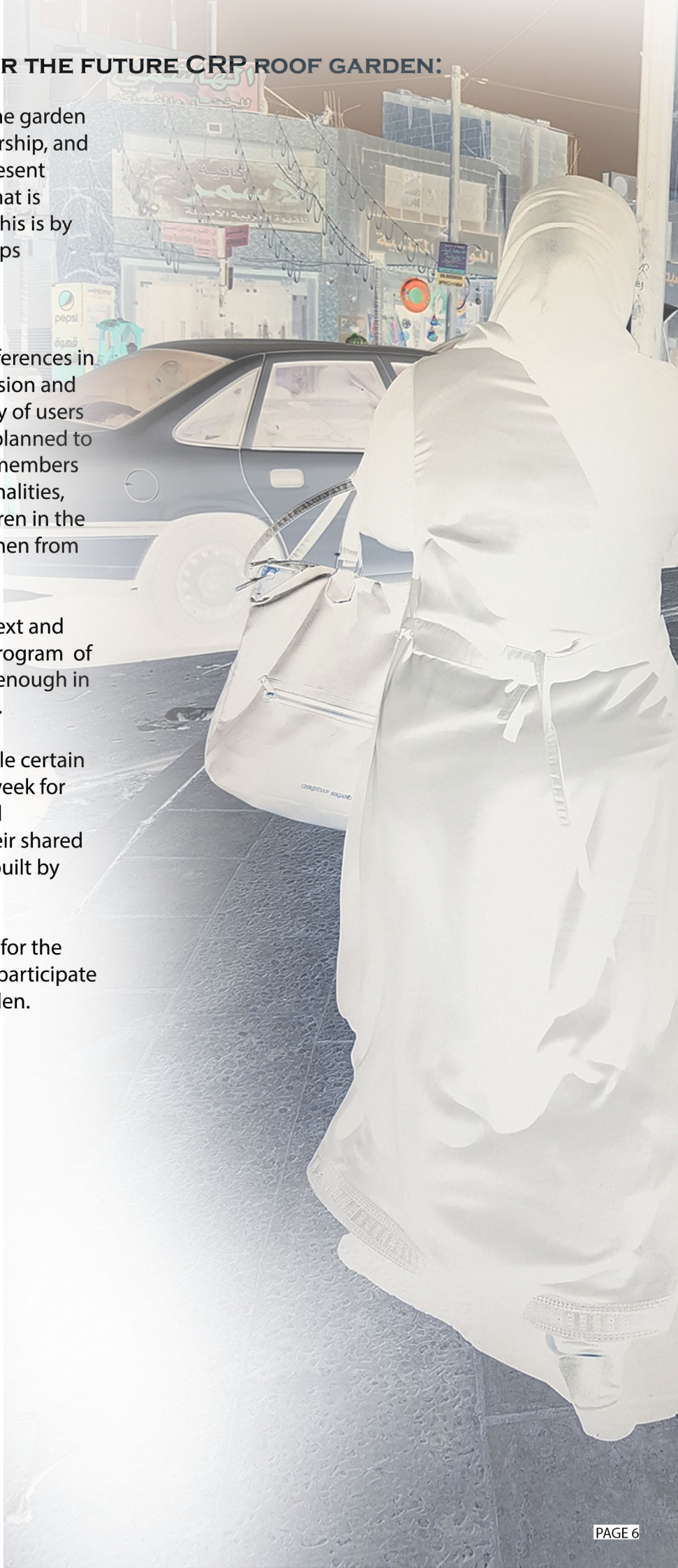
• **DEALING WITH ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND SEGREGATION:**

As outlined earlier, some participants have had negative experiences of using public open space in Amman. There is not simple solution to this and it is unlikely that these issues will ever be fully resolved. However, CRP could hold classes for both refugees and host community members that help acknowledge these problems and offer skills for tackling them: e.g. managing disputes and conflicts, negotiating differences and similarities, sharing personal life stories and resisting ascribed stereotyping. There are good precedents from many countries that facilitating outdoor group activities like football or gardening with mixed multi-ethnic participants can be a useful way to support collaboration and mutual understanding, and can have an incremental influence on creating friendships and meaningful relationships. Furthermore, the visibility of these activities taking place in an outdoor location can be very beneficial to normalise the fact that people from different ethnic groups can get along together.



6. SUGGESTED GUIDANCE FOR THE FUTURE CRP ROOF GARDEN:

- Including refugees in the design of the garden will help in facilitating a sense of ownership, and giving them a rare opportunity to represent themselves spatially and contribute what is important to them. One way of doing this is by running a series of interactive workshops reflecting the design stages.
- The design process should start with understanding the potential users' preferences in such a garden. Asking them for their vision and their hobbies and habits. The inclusivity of users starts at this stage when activities are planned to cater for employees, host community members and refugees who have different nationalities, considering the inclusion of their children in the process, and hearing the voices of women from all age groups.
- Design should bear in mind the context and climate of Hashemi Shamali, and the program of the designed space should be flexible enough in catering diverse CRP outdoor activities.
- Design a garden that can be accessible certain hours of the day, or some days of the week for the nearby community of refugees and Jordanians, aiming for it to become their shared owned space where relationships are built by time.
- Consider offering paid opportunities for the refugees who have vocational skills to participate in building and implementing the garden.



'We want it shaded with seating areas'
Amjad

'Fenced and safe for our children'
Khulood

'They should make it a gathering space with board games and activities
for my age, not a slide or a seesaw!'
14 years old Yaman.

'I would really like to hear the sound of water and birds'
Maram

'We want to see flowers and more of green colors,'
Buthaina

'Let them give us gardening classes and maybe seedlings to take home'
Ibtissam

'It can be a magnificent Shami* Courtyard'
Raya,*Shami refers to Sham which is Damascus, , Syria

'I can give them ideas on how to make it like an old Syrian Hara'
Amer

'An artificial waterfall would be nice'
Akram

'A large tree and a bench with a turkish cup of coffee is enough'
Hanan

'They can plant some mint, sage, there, maybe fruit trees, a grapevine to make dolma*'
Ibtissam, *Dolma : a famous Iraqi meal



THE VOICE OF THE PARTICIPANTS



The researcher is very thankful to The University of Sheffield
and CRP for facilitating this field work.

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