

# OIL MONEY/ DAMASCUS



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# WHERE DOES THE OIL MONEY GO?

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THE MIDDLE EAST STUDIO  
Wintersemester 2009

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WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:  
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# WHERE DOES THE OIL MONEY GO?

## INTRODUCTION

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THE 9/11 SHIFT OF INVESTMENT  
LOCALIZING OUR FIELDS OF RESEARCH  
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EMAAR

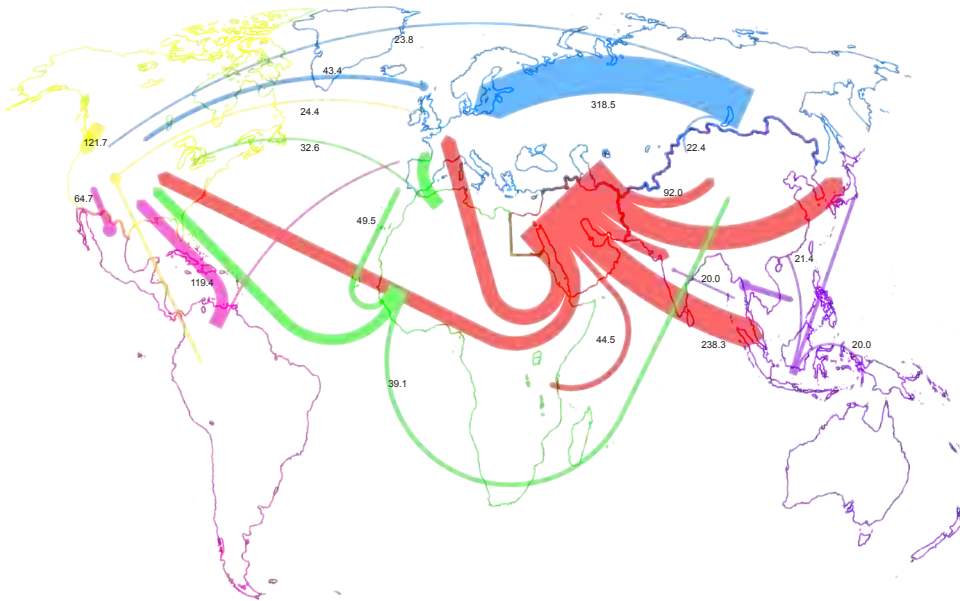
## SUMMARY



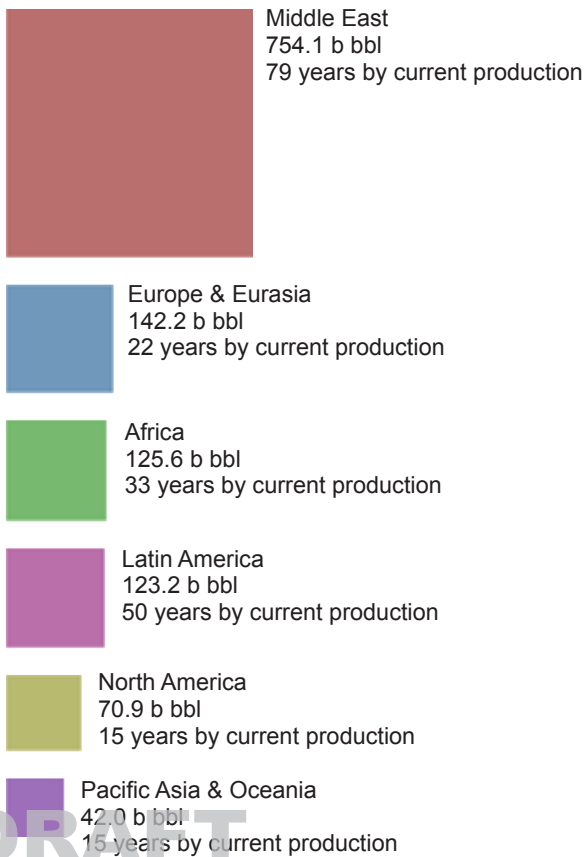
# INTRODUCTION

# LOCALIZING THE OIL

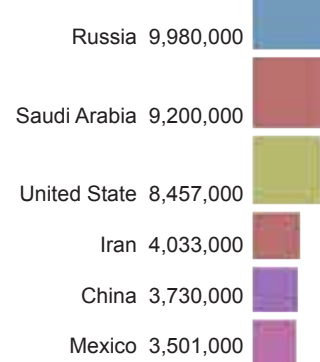
Major oil trade movements 2008 (million tonnes)



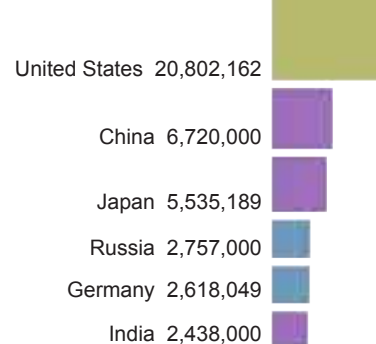
Proven reserves at end of 2008 & Reserves-to-production ratios



Top oil-producing nations barrels per day 2005



Top oil-consuming nations barrels per day 2005







# PETROL AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The run for oil initiated at the beginning of the last century. Access to petrol resources was a considerable factor in world war 2 strategy. The Middle eastern oil possessing countries started a large scale oil exploitation with help of international companies, mostly US-American. Aramco, the arabian american fuel company, now state owned by saudi arabia, now is one of the richest companies worldwide. The economic boom of the second half 20ieth century with the flourishing car industry, along with the widespread choice of oil as a main source for heating led to the huge success of the black gold. Today's technological and economical progress would have been unthinkable without Naphta-based products as source of energy and polymeres in every imaginable form and function.

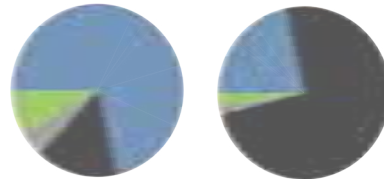
Lebanon, not in possession of any considerable oil reserves, had at this starting development, with its existing banking sector by its mediterranean trading heritage a considerable share of this profit, canalising the oil money and sending it over the world. A position with which it's neighbour Syria couldn't compete.

This development resulted in a shift in the Middle East towards an export oriented economy, heavily depending on oil. Countries of the fertile crescent which do not find large oil reserves (like Syria and Lebanon), now find themselves economically overpowered by the newly rich Gulf states.

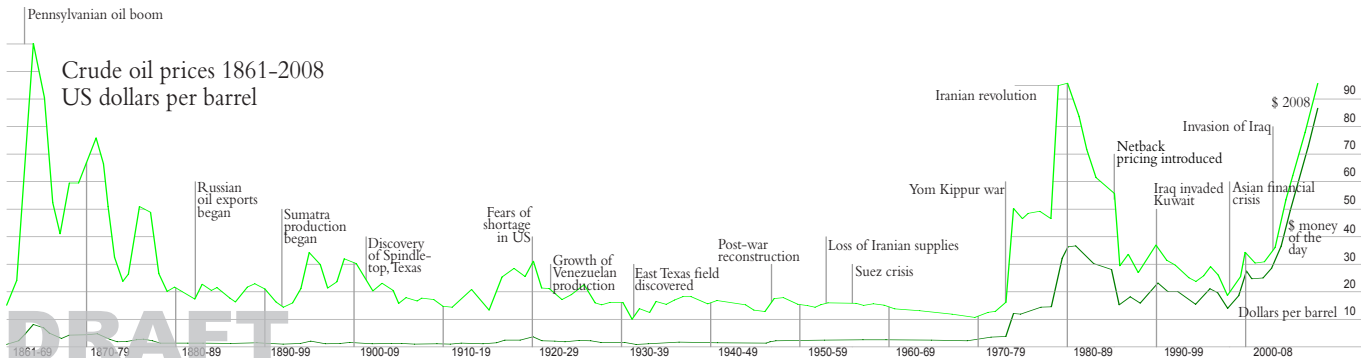
Export shares 2008

World

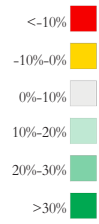
Middle East



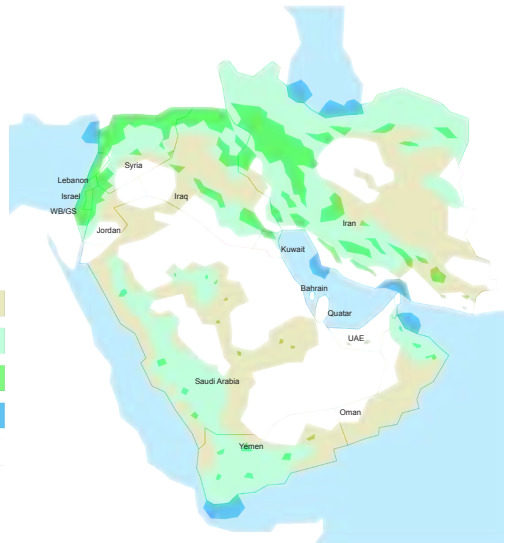
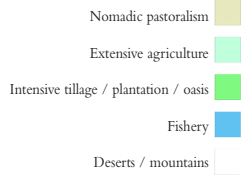
- Agricultural products
- Mining products
- Fuels
- Manufactures



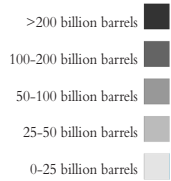
### Difference Export to import in % of national GDP



### Agricultural structure



### Proven oil reserves 2008



# THE 9/11 SHIFT OF INVESTMENT

The 9/11 attacks draws a line between the US- Saudi friendship. Some of the terrorists being of Saudi nationality, the shock in the western world turns into a negative attitude towards Saudis and people from the middle east in general. The US being one of the major markets for oil earned Gulf money investment and second residencies now sees Gulf money make a turnover and investing less in the slowly but steadily growing western economy, prioritising growth markets in the middle east, same for tourism.

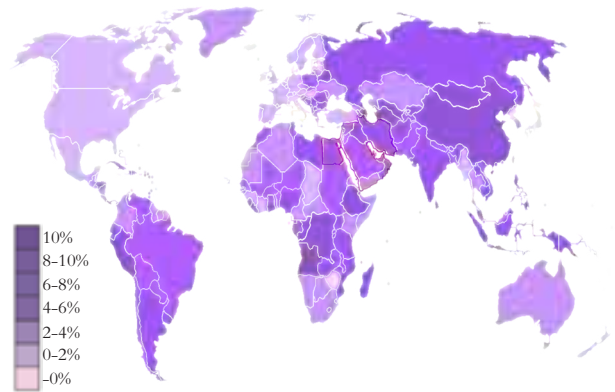
The steep rise of the oil price from 2000 to 2008 makes this a very considerable amount of money flowing into the middle eastern economies. But it is not for making profit only that oil money flows into the Middle East. Making allies and upkeep of good relationships is an important factor and the oil investments the tool for this foreign relations policy.



Investment pattern before 9/11



Investment pattern after 9/11



GDP growth rate 2008  
source: cia.gov



# LOCALIZING OUR FIELDS OF RESEARCH



Syrian Arab Republic

Lebanon

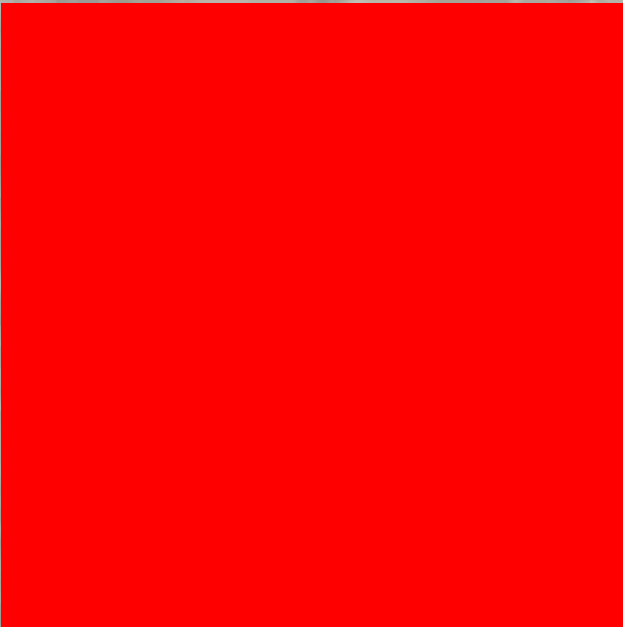


Beirut



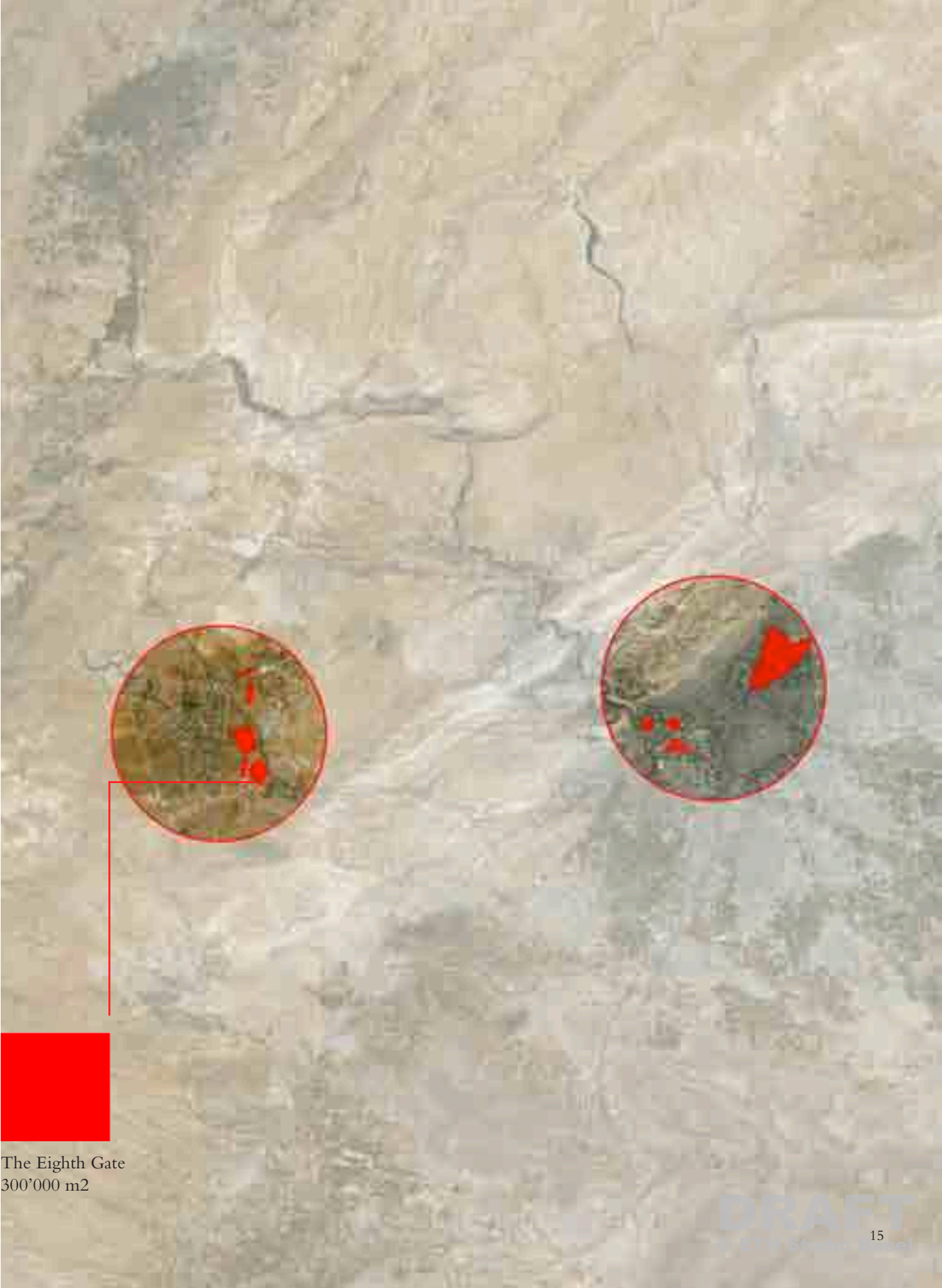
Damascus

# THE SITES OF INVESTIGATION



The BCD  
4'690'000 m2





The Eighth Gate  
300'000 m2

# CONTEXT SYRIA

Syria is a country of great culture and of rich history. Settled between Africa, Asia and Europe, it witnessed many wars and occupancies, saw cultures rise and fall. Damascus, the country's overwhelming capital, is arguably the world's oldest constantly inhabited city. Syria's current boundaries are only drawn since French mandate, a result of the partition of the Middle East between the British Empire and France, Syria previously comprised the entire region of the Levant.

Nowadays it is a middle-income developing country, its economy based on agriculture, industry and energy. The national GDP is about 95 billion \$ in 2008 with a 2.4% growth and 4'900 \$ GDP per capita.

A parliamentary republic since the end of the French mandate, the country's dominant is the Ba'ath party since 63, a pan-arabist, Arab nationalist and socialist movement founded in the forties in Damascus. It is since 63 that the country is under emergency law, undermining civil rights and making it effectively an authoritarian regime.

The oil boom in the Gulf states demanded quick and solid infrastructure in order to successfully exploit the valuable subsurface treasures. Kuwait in the late sixties didn't have more than 600'000 inhabitants and was in need of foreign workers and know-how and since making money was difficult in socialist Syria, some took the chance to try abroad (the worldwide Syrian diaspora is estimated to be around 18 million people).

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 destabilised the region and made expatriots return to their countries. Some with a fortune in their pocket, now looking for opportunities at home.

Conveniently, Hafez al-Assad, the president since 1970, started de-emphasising socialism in the nineties and focused on pan-arabism. The collapse of the USSR, which saw Syria as an ally during the Cold War, might have favoured a tendential opening of the national economy.

1991's investment law n°10 enabled investments without paying taxes on businesses during 5-7 years, which resulted in mostly short term oriented economic activities.

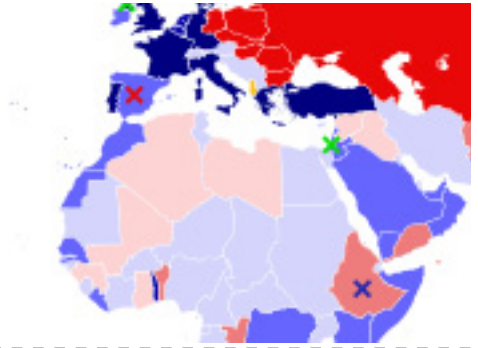
In 2000, Hafez al-Assad dies and is followed shortly after by his second son Bashar al-Assad.

First-born Basil al-Assad was originally destined to become president but died in a car accident in 1994. Bashar studied medicine in Syria and London but could not finish his training at the Western Eye Hospital in London due to his brother's unexpected decease. He is married to Asma al-Assad (born Asma Fawaz al-Akhras) a London-born Sunni Muslim (Bashar being Alawi hence Shia), who studied at King's College London and previously pursued a career in investment banking. Strongly engaged in the country's social and economic development, she stands out being much more involved in Syria's politics than previous First Ladies.

2005 Rafik Hariri, ex-Lebanese prime minister and leading figure in Lebanon's after war rebuilding process is assassinated in Beirut, resulting in a difficult aftermath. Many accusing Syria to have contrived the assault, the following protests lead to a withdrawal of the Syrian Armed Forces and influence from Lebanon, which was installed in 1976 in order to curtail ongoing civil war horrors on demand of the Lebanese Government.



Iraqi invasion of Kuwait 1990



Collapse of Syria's partner Soviet Union 1991

1991: investment law n° 10



President Hafez al-Assad dies 2000

2001: legalization of foreign investments



9/11 2001 Attacks



President Bashar al-Assad assumes presidency 2000

around 2005: Iniciation of large oil money projects



2005 Hariri killing

End of Syria's military presence in Lebanon 1976-2005

# TOURISM

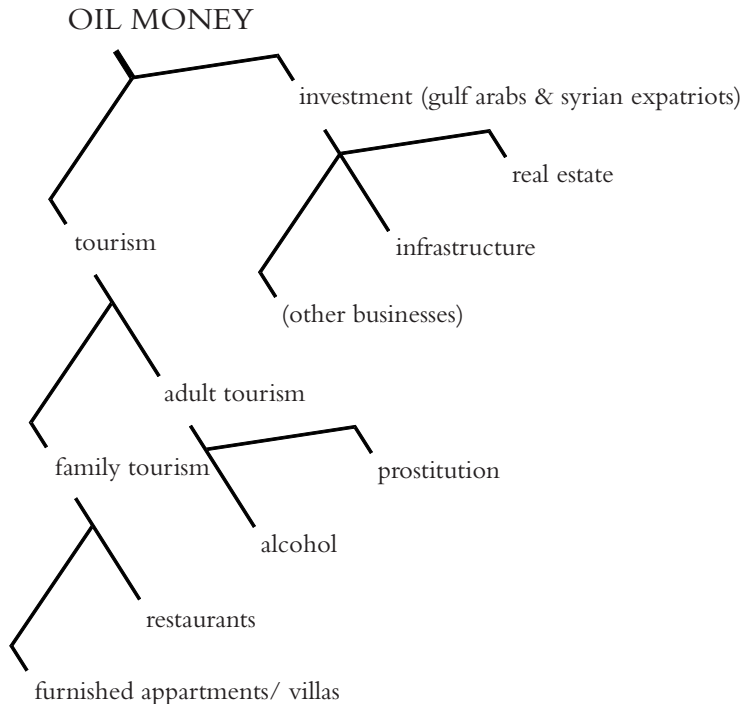
In the hot arab summer, a lot of saudis, quataris, emiratis and kuwaitis seek the cooler climates up north. It has traditionally been more in Lebanon than in Syria where they felt safe to go, but the civil war in Lebanon and the uprising violence 2005 and the Hizbollah-Israel war make Damascus more and more a serious competitor for Gulf tourists.

It is not the superrich tourist with three dozens of family members and a servant entourage, shopping diamonds by the pound one encounters in Damascus. Of a Gulf middle class background, they still possess a lot of disposable money compared to the damacene locals, but might not be as 'classy' as their counterparts in London, Paris or Geneva.

Some damacene people moan "they think they can buy anything here and they treat our women like prostitutes."

Prostitution and consume of alcoholic beverages are a flourishing branch of gulf tourism. The more easy going morale compared to i.e. Saudi Arabia's very strict fundamentalism brings a lot of young men to the Oasis city.

A contrary development can be observed when tourists come with their families: the stricter habits demand special comparted furbishments of gastronomy businesses in order to allow the present female tourists to unveil themselves which they will not do in a mixed sex damacene café. Generally, possibly because of the latent 'anti-gulfism' of parts of the damascene population, the tourists stay not in but around the city, where they find their corresponding infrastructure.





Syrian 'Las Vegas' strip, nightclubs north of Damascus



"Villa for rent with arabian seating and garden"

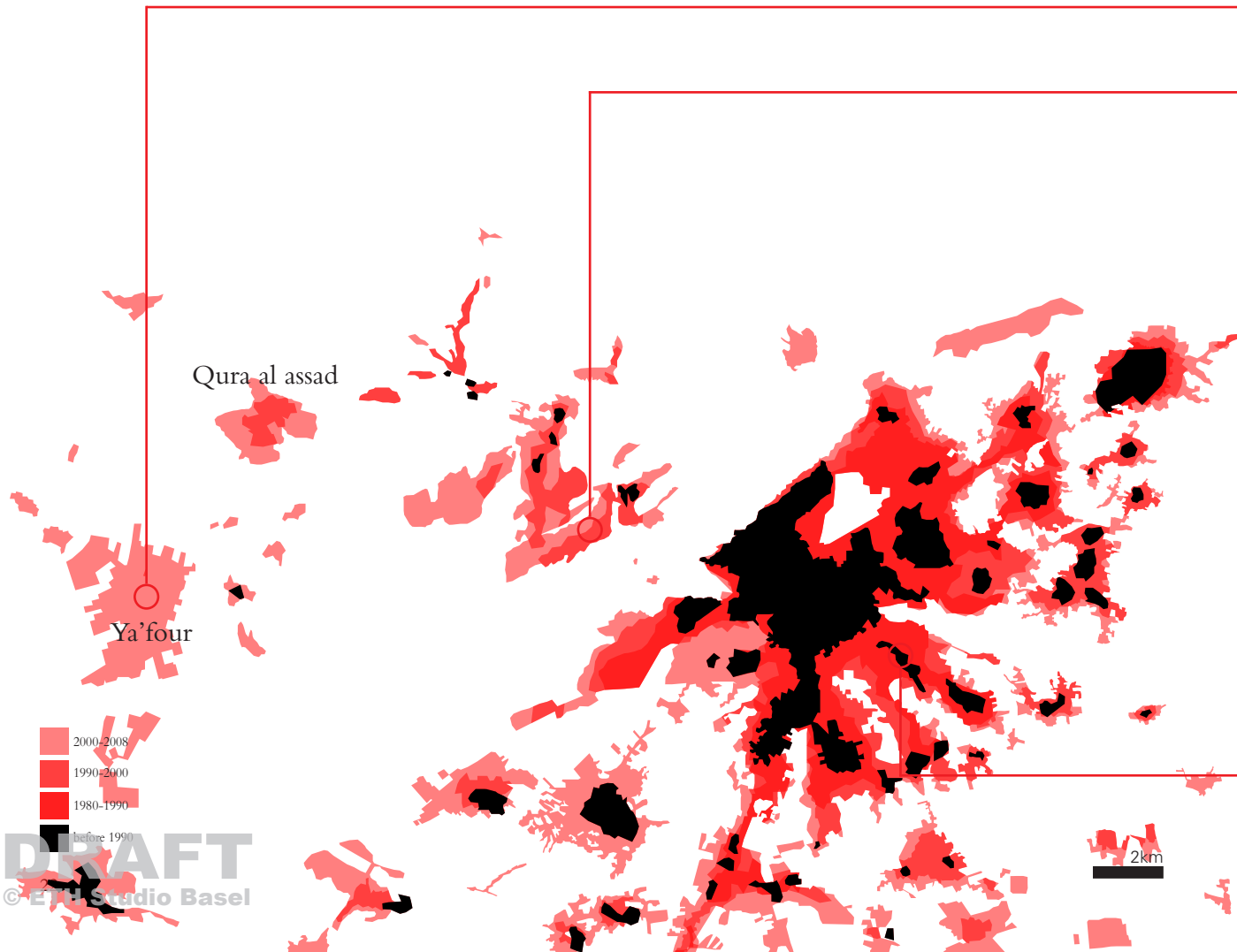


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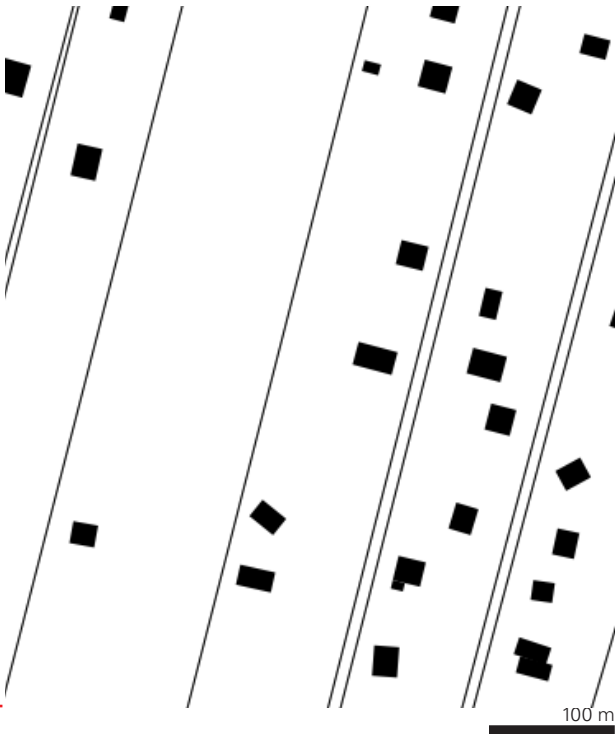
# OIL MONEY PROJECTS DAMASCUS

# CITY DEVELOPMENT

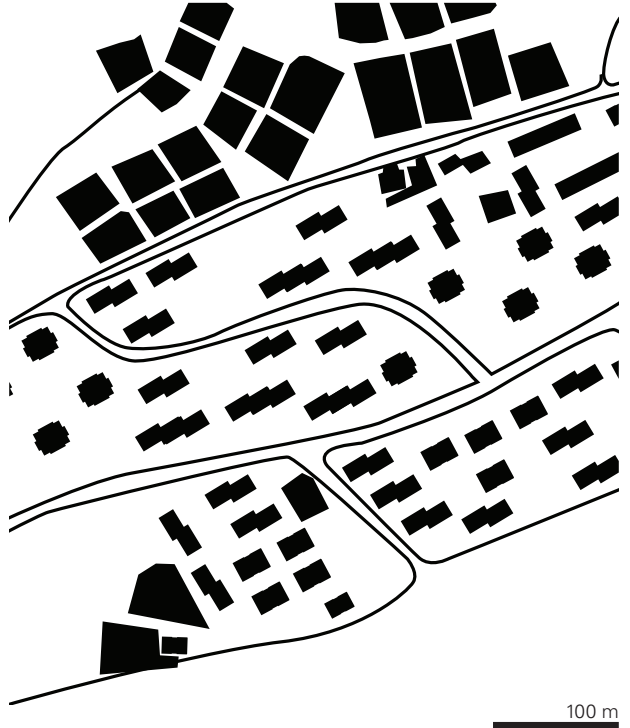
During the last decades, Damascus' outlines grew considerably. The tendency of inhabitants moving out of the city center and into the periphery as well as a movement of country people into the capital are besides immigration important factors of this development. One can observe a graduation in the density of construction, giving a clue to the differences in socioeconomic classes. Very dense extensions into the orchards south-east are in a strong contrast to the upper middle class neighbourhoods uphill like Dummar or Qura al Assad. A very recent development can be observed in Ya'four, where very generous and expensive villas emerged, most of which are arguably secondary residences for gulf tourists.







Villa Neighbourhood in Yafour



Dummar



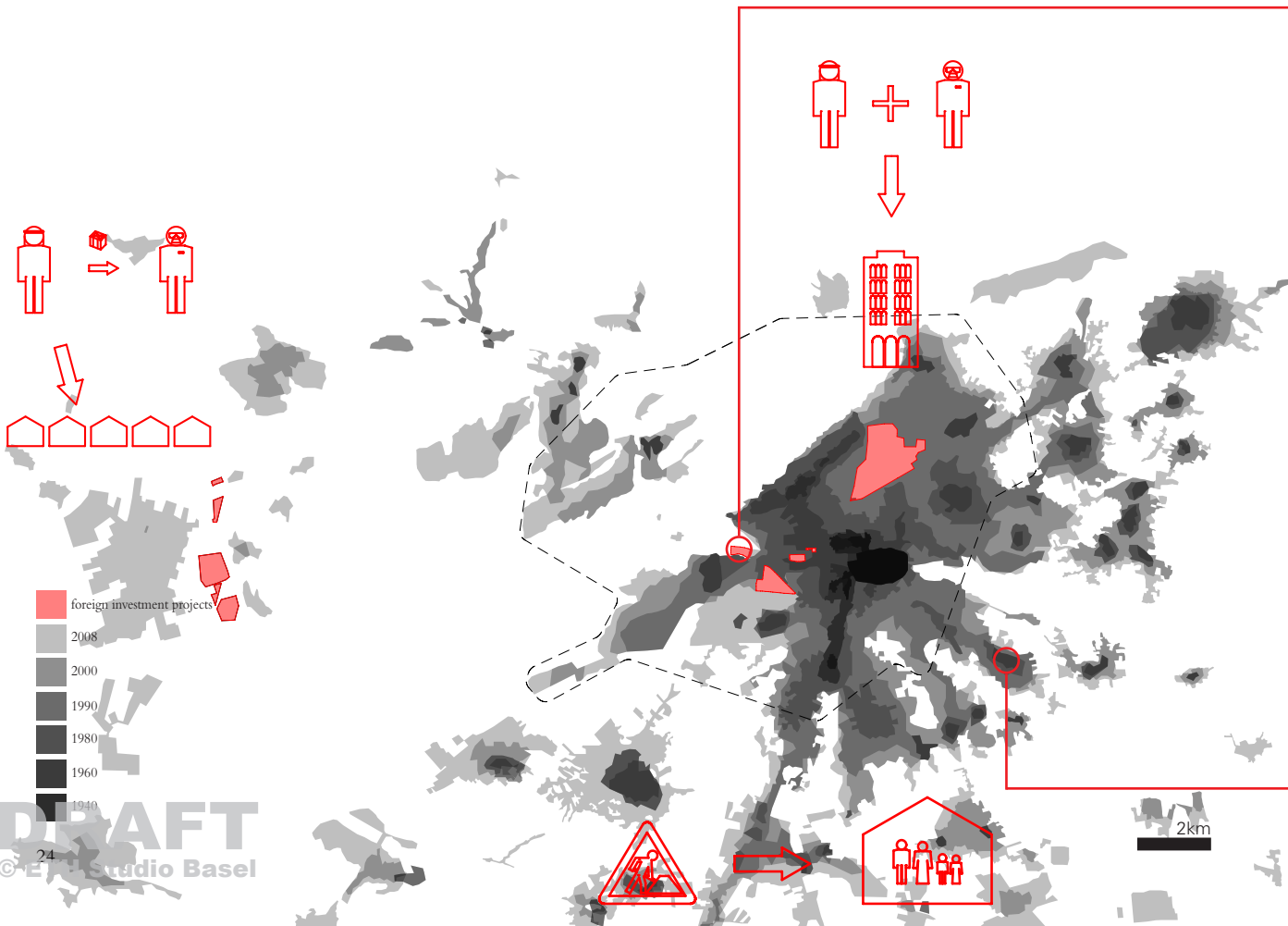
Dwiel'a

# LOOPHOLES

In order to avoid the very slow syrian bureaucracy (permits can take 2-3 years to be given) and to build in areas where the zoning wouldnt allow one to, there are some ways to fasten up the process. For smaller building ventures like a multi family dwelling, quick constructing and the prompt inhabitation makes it by law impossible for the government to order a destruction of it (as observed in Jaramana by F. Fahmi and P. Jaeger).

Bigger enterprises like the Kuwaiti-financed Kiwan hotel projects in the Tishreen park can only be realised by a public-private-partnership, so the project is somehow justified by the public hand.

Projects situated outside the governance of Damascus city, the Rif, encounter another situation again. No zoning prevails, so developers buy large pieces of land (as observed in Ya'four) and try by generous donations to the concerned ministries to get the undertaking to be tolerated.





Kiwan commercial & hotel complex

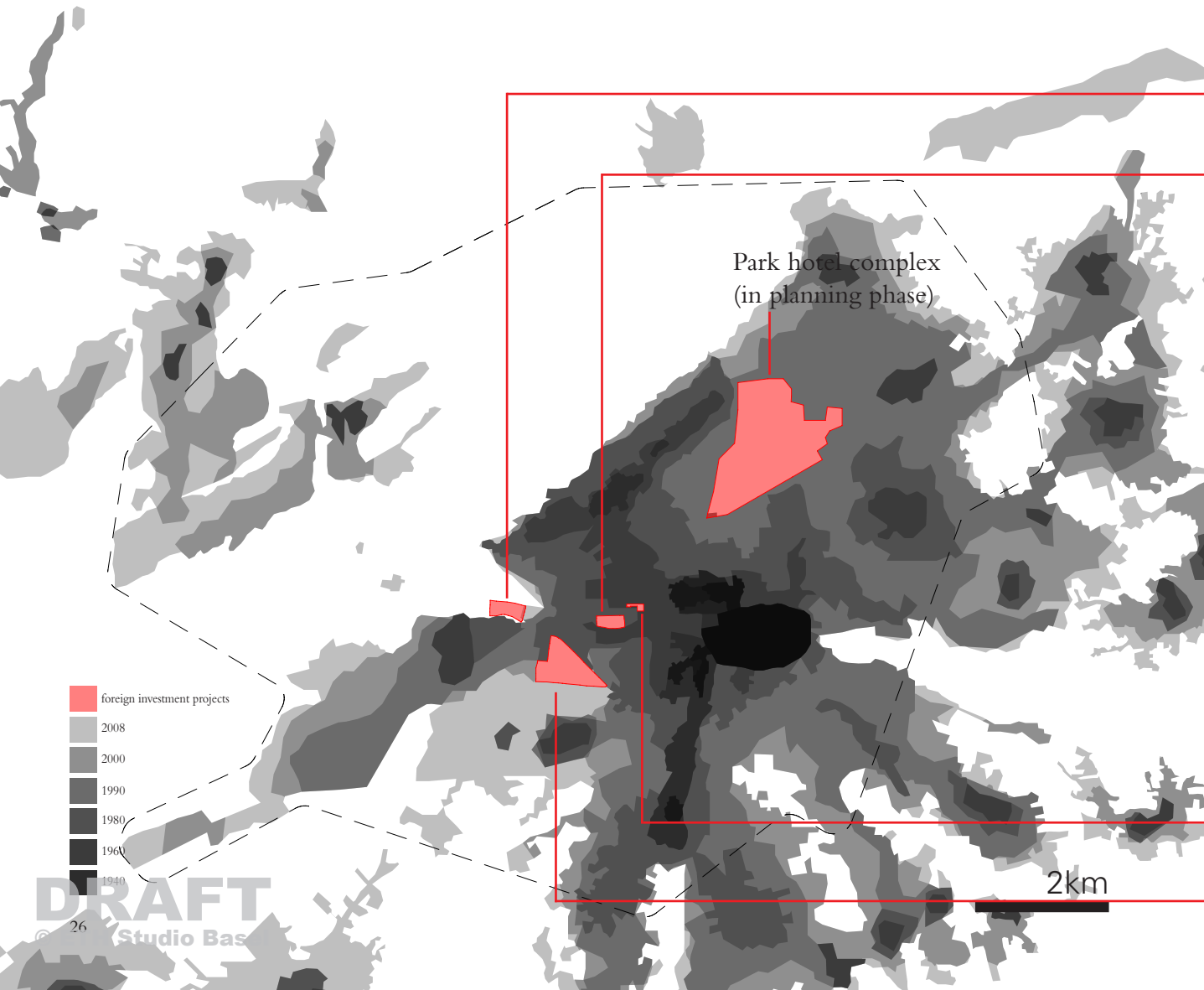


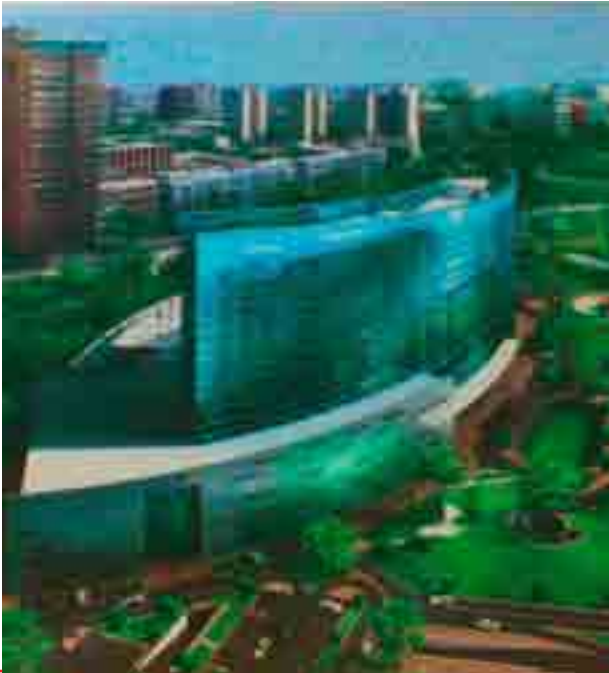
Jaramana housing constructions

# OIL MONEY OPERATIONS IN THE CITY

The inner city operations we could identify at the moment are except for the Four Seasons hotel all in planning or construction phase. In general their program responds to Syria's opening economy and the installation of large scale commercial or business centers and tourist facilities. The hotel projects propose a tailor made environment for international, mostly gulf tourists and business travellers.

The lack of free building space results in a extension into the last greenspaces of inner city Damascus (Kiwan, park hotel projects) or a replacement of the current inhabiting population or businesses.





Kiwan hotel & commercial center  
in construction



The Massar Rose  
theme park for children  
in construction



The Four Seasons hotel & shopping gallery  
completed 2005



High-end commercial & business center  
in planning phase, current shops & businesses  
have to be evicted first

# THE FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

With the government as a partner (35% shareholder for offering building site), Al Waleed Bin Talal (65% of shares) could realise a beacon project for Damascus, a hotel tailor made for gulf people on business and a Beirut-like windowshopping district.

The Hariri killing 2005 gives the project an initial boost, as Lebanon is considered dangerous again.

Controversial is the building's proximity to the avenue, not respecting the setback like other buildings aligned to it, as well as its considerable height, denominated by critical damascene observers as a symbol of gulfian arrogance

Completed in 2005 it holds 300 rooms, 5 restaurants, 3 meeting halls, a health club and a swimming pool.

Contractor was the Fouad Takla Company, Damascus, Developer the Kuwaiti Khoufafi group. The cost was about 42 million USD.

Both contractor and developer were given 10% of shares as a payment in order to ensure its impeccable quality, governmental partner was the ministry of tourism.





One of the 5 restaurants



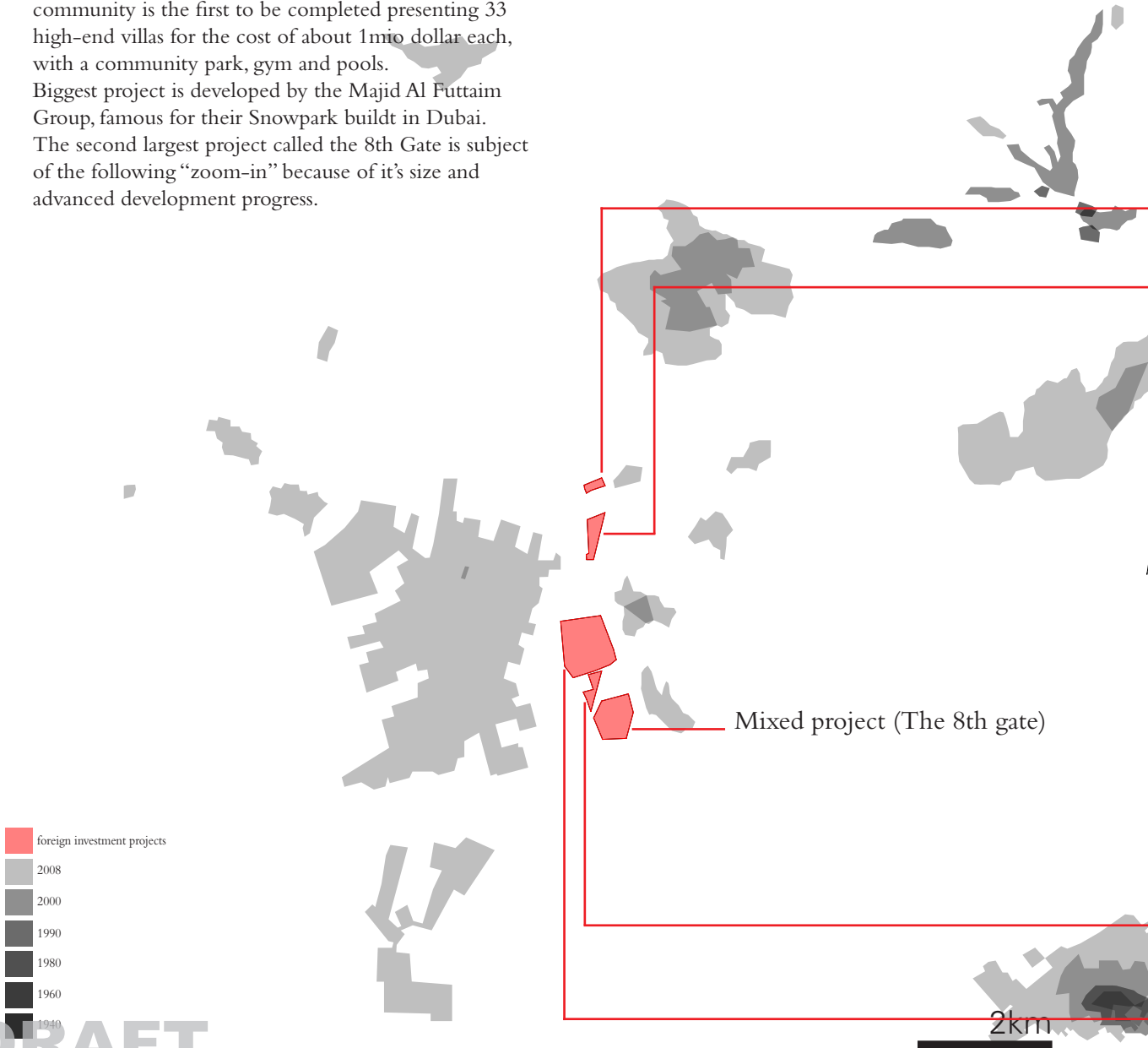
A suite as shown on the Four Seasons website



The shopping arcades

# VENTURES IN YA'FOUR

10 car minutes outside Damascus, a number of projects are initiated. Left on the map of those new projects the light grey big surface built with mentioned villas. Common for the new developments are the mostly gated housing communities as well as installations of several big malls, trying to make Ya'four a pericenter of a different lifestyle. The Saudi Bin Ladin group's gated community is the first to be completed presenting 33 high-end villas for the cost of about 1mio dollar each, with a community park, gym and pools. Biggest project is developed by the Majid Al Futtaim Group, famous for their Snowpark built in Dubai. The second largest project called the 8th Gate is subject of the following "zoom-in" because of its size and advanced development progress.







Gated community housing project completed



Gated community housing project in construction



Gated community mixed project in construction



Mixed program, big mall in cooperation with Carrefour planned construction not started yet







البوابة الثامنة  
بمشرف

# THE EIGHTH GATE

“The city has captivated the hearts and minds of historians and romantics for centuries; allow the next chapter of Damascus’ evolution to unfold and enchant you.”

from the Emaar website

# ADJACENCIES



Qura al Assad



Road to the Lebanese border,  
20' by car



Recent Ya'four villa district



Ya'four village



Military housing projects



Road to Damascus, 10' by car



Army camp



The Qatari Prince's  
holiday residence



Army tank exercise range



Qura al Assad



Military housing projects



Ya'four village



Army camp



Recent Ya'four villa district



Army tank exercise range



Military housing projects next to site



View down from near the Qatari prince's holiday residence on Qatana





The eighth gate construction site



Qatari prince's holiday residence

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

MIXED USE: FURNISHED APARTMENTS, COMMERCIAL AND RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

## PROJECT STATUS IN PROGRESS

## DESIGNER

DPA, SINGAPORE

ARCHITECTS AND CONSULTING ENGINEERS (ACE)

## OWNER/CLIENT

EMAAR AND IGO

## DEVELOPER

EMAAR

## CONSULTANT

CONSER CONSULTING ENGINEERS

## CONTRACTORS

SAUDI BIN LADIN GROUP

ACC ARABTEC

KYHYAT

MILITARY HOUSING ESTABLISHMENT

## SURFACE

300'000 M2

## COST

500 MILLION USD





Office building about to be completed



View down the main entering corridor onto the neighbouring military housing



# MASTERPLAN





# PROGRAM





Commercial surfaces:  
red: hotel towers and the mall,  
yellow: build to suit (groundfloors)



Housing:  
red: waterfront furnished apartments  
yellow: build to suit (upper floors)



Office:  
red: 8 office blocks, financial district and tower  
yellow: build to suit (upper floors)



Public buildings:  
Power supply and water purification (upper left)  
next to mosque, beneath is the sales center



Stockmarket:  
a gift to the Syrian Government, not present in  
previous masterplans (see previous page)



# PHASING



Phase 1:  
Sales center completed, 8 office blocks in construction



Phase 2:  
Stockmarket (actual situation somewhere between 1 & 2)



Phase 3:  
Power supply (diesel generators) and water purification, financial district



Phase 4:  
Waterfront district (housing)



Phase 5:  
Piazza with hotel, business tower and mall, build to suit area



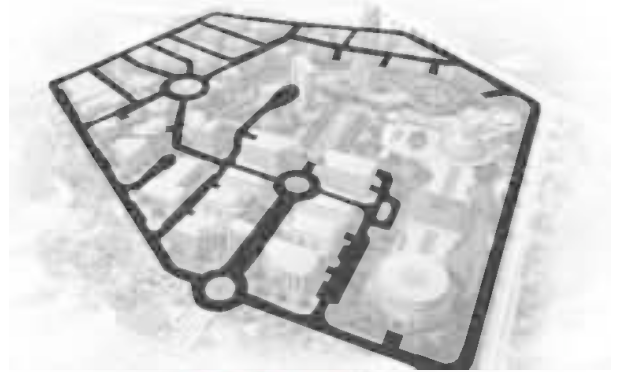
URBAN STRUCTURE



Water embellishments:  
Decorative fountains and a perpetual canal



Car circulation:  
Entirely private access to the subsurface garages



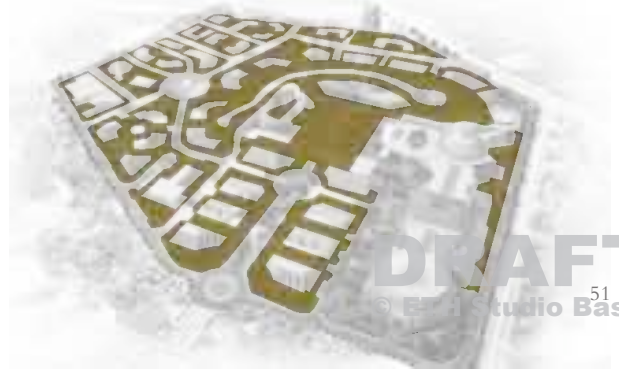
Built surface:  
Footprint of all constructions to be built



Green area:  
In the present masterplan mostly a result of the negative space produced by the mall



Pedestrian areas:  
Containing the central Piazza and lots of space for possible cafés



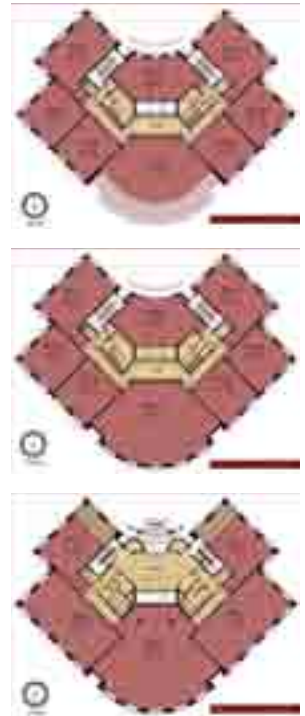
# OFFICES

Probably the most important element of the 8th gate project are the proposed office surfaces of 93'000 m<sup>2</sup>. These surfaces are needed in Syria's shift towards a social market economy in order to create a base from which to access the "huge unexplored investment opportunities in the fields of industry, agriculture, tourism, development, transport and services".

The reasons for investing in Syria are among others the "fast return on investment due to high profit percentages due to weak competition and increase of demand; the political and economical stability; privileges, exemptions and special facilitations for the investing projects; tax exemptions for investments" (emaar.com). The focus group is clearly international businesses, which were previously not very present in Syria.

## "Key Features

- Two storey underground car parking
- Independent electrical source
- Centralised heating and cooling system
- Easy access and egress through the modern integrated road network"





# HOUSING

“The Eighth Gate (...)pioneers the concept of integrated living; where residents live, work and spend their leisure time within the same self sustained master planned community.”

“Luxurious premium and mid level residential accommodation will breathe new life into the city, attracting young families and professionals to establish their homes within The Eighth Gate’s residential suburbs. Global companies will welcome the superior infrastructure of the business zone, creating a busy and productive commercial hub.”

“Careful attention to detail means that luxurious two and four bedroom serviced apartments are equipped with the highest specifications and interior finishes. Apartment sizes vary from 127 to 204 square metres and feature family oriented layouts designed with comfort and privacy in mind. Each apartment has its own private balconies, affording spectacular panoramic views overlooking landscaped gardens and across the entire community.”

“Key Features:

- Central air conditioning
- Fitted kitchens equipped with cooker, refrigerator and washing machine
- Audio and video intercom
- Central satellite TV
- Car parking -
- CCTV surveillance camera and 24 hour monitoring”  
(emaar.com)

The two towers with elliptical groundfloors next to the piazza are the hotel of the complex. By their size and prominent position it emphasizes the short-termness of a stay at the 8th Gate. Residents of the apartments probably won’t grow old neither inside the complex, but are part of the 21 century’s nomads, the expats, changing countries depending on the changing financial climates.







# COMMERCE

By its size of a 95'000 square meters, the 8th Gate's mall will be the first of its kind and claims to be the largest of the Levant. It is the scene for social interaction for the "self sufficient" working & living community, as well as an introduction to a new lifestyle for Syria.

Shops as found in hip Beirut and Dubai, international luxury brands as well as "an impressive foodcourt", cinemas and entertainment to meet the demands of the international expatriots living in the 8th Gate and attracting the Syrian new urban class, which doesn't have to take the hassle of crossing the border anymore.

The perspective by Emaar shows how they come together in this magical oasis: women in veil, in sexy miniskirts and in smart business-dresses, businessmen, dedicated family fathers and children of all age all gather for the "joy of shopping".



"A unique proposition, The Waterfront at The Eighth Gate will be Syria's premium shopping and leisure attraction, and a destination in its own right."  
emaar.com





Holistically designed, mall architecture incorporates a domed glass ceiling to capture natural daylight, giving a distinct sense of elevated space. Gently accented by ambient lighting, expansive walkways feature wide shop fronts located on multiple levels giving clear lines of sight. Drawing inspiration from traditional souqs (markets), The Eighth Gate brings the best international learning in mall design to create a truly uplifting shopping experience.

# H2O & ELECTRICITY

“Emaar ushered in a strategic shift in the aesthetics of property development. From environmentally friendly architectural elements to offering whatever amenities a resident would dream of, Emaar built homes with passion and delivered it with sincerity.”

In order to assure the promises made to future residents, Emaar won't trust the government for supplying its buildings with the electricity needed. The project features a thermal power plant, making it independent of Syria's electrical system and binding it to the gulf's core business field. This is very important when the project's legal status isn't clear yet in order to start building and provide alone and then see if the government approval can be obtained.

Water is an important element of style throughout the community, of its branding in relation to the oasis-city history of Damascus and as a repeating hallmark of Emaar's miraculous developments in dry surroundings. But the river is quite far away and so the scenic canal goes on a circular flow and has only to be realimented to match evaporation losses.



“We built lush green living environments in what was earlier a vast expanse of the desert. We built lakes and swimming pools, we built parks and gardens, we built homes that overlook the sea, we built marinas, we built golf courses and polo grounds and we welcomed people into their new homes.” [emaar.com](http://emaar.com)





# STOCKMARKET

The witness of something in the previously planned public-private-partnership gone wrong is the stockmarket, newly introduced to the masterplan and executed as quickly as possible. Some of the construction phases are put on hold and possibly the stockmarket, which presents itself as another gift by Emaar to the Syrian government, might be a effort in order to get further steps legalised quickly.

The stockmarket is the only construction on the site designed by syrian architects. The rest of the complex is all developed, designed and consulted by foreign enterprises.

A strong local partner is indispensable in order to get things done without having to go through a 2-3 years delay due to bureaucracy for getting permits or even to bypass the law without breaking it.

Military land for example mostly can't be sold to a private investor. Borrowed from private owners for impotant national issues it has to be returned if it ceases its public role. But if the ministry acts as a partner in a venture by a build-operate-transfer, the investor only operates the building for a determined time and it then is returned to the government. The ownership-structure is not altered throughout the process.



The stockmarket as presented on the Emaar website.





## 8TH GATE & HISTORICISM

“Damascus is best known for its legendary city wall which surrounds the heart of the ancient old city, proudly and protectively enclosing its ward. Seven distinctive magnificent gates, each named after the areas extending beyond its boundary are highly symbolic, representing an integral part of everyday life to inhabitants of the city. Having embraced many civilisations over the years, individually and collectively, the gates are icons of Syria’s identity.”

“The Eighth Gate pays homage to the city’s ancient roots, building upon its history of architectural style through ornately decorated buildings influenced by traditional Islamic design. As its name signifies, The Eighth Gate will be a symbolic and pioneering achievement that harmoniously unites modern living with the heritage of yesteryear.”

“The Eighth Gate proudly and holistically continues the evolution of Damascus. It is a community in which every carefully considered element references the past from a contemporary perspective, blending the best modern innovations with time honoured traditions.”  
emaar.com

Emaar very eloquently explains why the 8th Gate should be seen a very intergral and natural extension of old Damascus.

It is maybe not as simple as that. In its history Damascus has seen a lot of transormations; adding, overlaying and reshaping its image. Most outside the city walls and some inside, some better and some worse.

Emaar’s claim to continue the history of Damascus is a given fact by its mere existence. The reasoning on the other hand is most questionable to my understanding. A gate is the key element in order to access an intramuros, the transition between in and out. Calling it the “8th” places it in a context equal to first to 7th, all giving entry to the same buildt entity, which it is not. A gate it would be indeed, being located on the main road to beirut, a new kind of gate not for penetrating a man-buildt defense but as a symbol for a man build device to cross natural obstacles. The planned actual gate though is placed on the entry of the complex, not even integrated in a architecturally shaped gated community boundary and therefore lacking any functional role besides being the icon of the project.





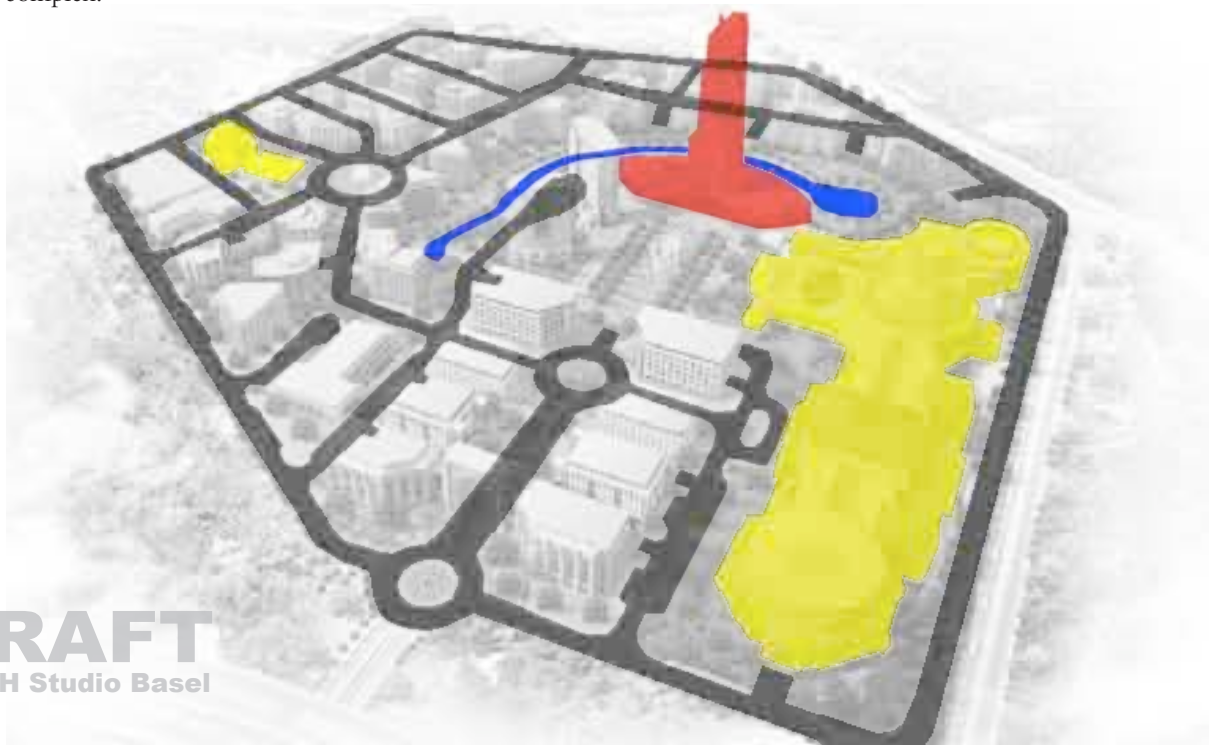


# PASTICHE

Emaar tries to convince the reader of its brochure on the 8th Gate of the traditional Damascene architecture of the complex. One finds a gate, fountains and arches everywhere. But the gate has no function, the fountains are an element of urbanistic embellishment and not of domestic use and the arched openings and typologies do not resemble the ones found in Damascus.

But we find a so-called piazza which isn't a real piazza by its loosely constructed circumference, we find a "islamicised" replica (at least on the image) of milan's covered shopping arcades, a river like venice and paris combined, a gate more like the Arc de Triomphe and an étoile-like roundabout. Buildings are mostly blocks not courtyardhouses, even if on the oldest masterplan on the right there is a tendency to community courtyards. A business tower and a big mall as seen in the US and exported to Dubai.

"a bit mediterranean, a bit oriental, not modern but not historic, something in between" says the Emaar salesperson about the featured style. The highly praised continuation of the Damascene tradition remains an element of the salesbrochure and maybe of furniture if the future inhabitants dare to go shopping outside the complex.





# GULF MODEL

Even if Emaar stresses the influence on the project being Damascene, the real model to the 8th Gate may lie a bit further southeast, in the United Arab Emirates, where Emaar was founded and is about to finish the tallest building in the world. The amount of capital to be administered, invested, branches of industry to be explored and numbers of consumers for big international companies to be found might be smaller but it is the same paradigma anyway. The success of Emaar is largely thanks to the real estate bubble between 2005-2008.

The land prices after the ignition and publication of Emaar's project in Ya'four rose dramatically, allegedly from 20 dollars to 400 per m<sup>2</sup> on near grounds and a five times rise in the valley in general, making it almost impossible for Syrians who earn their money inside the country to buy land.

The desired clients of the project are international companies and their employees with the mall as the center of their social life. The showing of wealth and splendour in the 8th Gate is new to Syria, where class distinction was a more delicately treated matter.

Along go problems similar to Dubai. The infrastructure is very unsustainable, buildings designed only to please a maximum of possible customers and not adapted to the countries climatical or social climate.



The Dubai Mall by Emaar



# EMAAR

Emaar is a Dubai based public joint stock companies and one of the largest real estate companies worldwide. Founded in 1997, it made most of it's money in the real estate bubble from 05-08. It's revenue is about 17.5 billion Dollars and it's ownership includes the Dubai government as well as some of the most powerful individuals in the country.

Emaar has been accused several times for insider trading and labor issues.

Emaar's recent plans are to develop about 150 malls in the Middle East, North Africa and the Indian subcontinent. The company tries to diversify into education, healthcare, finance, hospitality and retail. Those strategies might be difficult though because of the rough effect of the financial crisis on Emaar and the collapse of the real estate bubble.

Chairman of Emaar is Mohamed Ali Alabbar who graduated in 1981 from Seattle University in finance and business administration. He is also director of the Dubai Department of Economic Development and member of the Dubai Executive Council (a government branch for growth initiatives in Dubai) and chairman of the UAE Golf Association. With Armani he started to set up a chain of 30 luxury hotels. Arabian Business magazine listed him number 6 of top 50 influential arabs in 2006.



Emaar's field of activity





“Imagine the spectacular scene through your window –  
the overwhelming sight of the most sacred place in the world.  
Your heart overflows with humility.”  
Emaar project for Mecca





Premium Lifestyle, Al Khobar Lakes, Saudi Arabia







Waterfront apartments, Jordan



Downtown Bourj Dubai, UAE



# SUMMARY



The marketing of the 8th Gate tries to convince the consumer of how damascene the project is, listing a number of features which are copied or interpreted in a Disneyworld like manner and appear to be authentic only to the most superficial observer. The concept is taking the nice and shiny bits from Syria's history and mixing it up with time-tested selling styles from all over the world and top notch infrastructure. The images of the salesbrochure are mostly computer-generated 3d perspectives and no floorplans, focusing on clients aware of the representative/ lifestyle element of living. The result is a generic city.

The problem with this lies in the different nature of the building site in Ya'four to the conditions found in oasis-city Damascus, which allegedly are the inspiration to the project. By ignoring this and forcing a fake damacene image onto the project found in a dry, suburban, satellite-city context, a series of big efforts have to be undertaken to crate this make-believe.

The 8th Gate is a community tailor made for international companies in order to access the Syrian opening economy. People living inside the complex can live, work, entertain and supply themselves inside the complex making it unnecessary to go outside. Luxurious and exclusive, which naturally means some people are not included and welcome to the site. This can be secured by gating a community. Linked with the more representative and "show-off" lifestyle, the big socio-economic differences to average Syrians and unprobability of integration of the fast moving expats add to the tensions between rich and poor and the necessity and convenience of gated communities.

Emaar is emblematic as a company for such development. The "Mc Donalds of real estate" names it's projects sustainable and the design local, historical, modern, carefully considered and whatnot, but the words are only words with no correspondance in execution. But after all they are a now international company seeking to maximise profits, which is no crime (except for insider trading of shares and other special conditions) and it would be the governments duty of assuring a well thought-trough urban and suburban strategy as well as guidelines for architectural style and sustainable technologies.

Overall, the oil money projects in Damascus create a touristic and business infrastructure in rivalry with Beirut. Along with the tourists and expats coming to the country new commences, businesses and a new lifestyle comes into the country:

Climatized complexes with malls and shops selling luxury goods for the stylish urban class, big cars and houses, vast greenspaces and swimmingpools to represent one's wealth and image. This lifestyle of abundance is in contrast to the oasis city, with a limited supply in a hostile surrounding.

Projects like the 8th Gate surely bring foreign investments into the country but the question is how much of a stimulus this is to local economy as almost all involved companies are foreign and once finished probably only the maids and security personnel will be syrian. The shorting of business space in Damascus is not resolved by those transformations, as local businesses can't afford those surfaces.

The imported offer imports the demand with it.

The constant presence of the state a semi-disguised partner in those undertakings shows how the access to power is still the same. The president has a very hard task modernising the country and in this progress of transformation legal loopholes can easily be used by opportunistic authorities. The restrictions still existing to publicly express one's opinion make space for public dissent almost unexistent and leave the Damascene mutedly watch the construction of huge projects on the last green surfaces of the inner city..

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