



International Seminar of the CURE

“Post-war Aleppo: Urban Reconstruction between Hopes and Challenges”

The international seminar and workshop titled “Post-war Aleppo: Urban Reconstruction between Hopes and Challenges” was organized by the Center for (Post)-Crises Urban Reconstruction (CURE) at Istanbul Technical University and hosted at the Taşkışla Campus. The event brought together academics, researchers, planners, architects, and graduate students to critically examine the reconstruction of Aleppo in the aftermath of war, focusing on the complex relationship between urban recovery, heritage preservation, governance, and regional development.

As an international seminar of CURE, the event aimed to create a multidisciplinary platform for discussing post-crisis urban reconstruction through the case of Aleppo, one of the most historically significant yet heavily devastated cities in the region. The seminar emphasized the importance of integrating urban planning, heritage conservation, social sustainability, and regional development into post-war reconstruction strategies. It also highlighted the role of academic institutions in facilitating critical dialogue and knowledge exchange on reconstruction policies and practices in conflict-affected cities.



34 participants attended the seminar given by two keynote speakers Prof. Salah Haj Ismail and Prof. Hala Malandi (University of Aleppo, Syria) and Prof. Dr. Salah Haj Ismail (Yildirim Beyazıt University, Türkiye) followed by the workshop.

The participants reflected a highly interdisciplinary and international profile, including architects, urban and regional planners, researchers specialized in post-crisis reconstruction, and experts in architectural history and conservation. Participants ranged from undergraduate students to PhD researchers and graduates from several institutions, including Beykent University, Istanbul Technical University, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, KU Leuven, Yıldız Technical University, and Marmara University. The diversity of participants contributed to rich discussions on reconstruction methodologies, governance challenges, and the future of post-war cities in the Middle East.

In his presentation, Prof. Salah Haj Ismail traced the historical evolution of Aleppo through successive periods of urban transformation shaped by political change, conflict, and natural disasters. He emphasized that Aleppo has historically undergone cycles of destruction and reconstruction, having been rebuilt fourteen times due to wars and earthquakes. This historical perspective framed the current reconstruction debate not as an isolated post-war challenge, but as part of a longer continuum of urban resilience and adaptation.

The presentation examined the multi-layered crisis of the city prior to the recent conflict, including the uneven spatial development of Aleppo particularly the socio-spatial divide between the eastern and western parts of the city. The eastern districts were characterized by extensive informal settlements and lower levels of infrastructure and investment. According to the discussion, these patterns were partly rooted in historical planning decisions dating back to the Ottoman period, when caravan routes arriving from the east were intentionally kept outside the historic urban core. Later, during the period of the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon, new urban interventions introduced broad street networks primarily designed for military control and colonial administration. While one major axis was completed, another proposed intervention was halted due to local resistance because it would have required the demolition of significant historic fabric within the old city.

A central theme of the seminar was the relationship between urban planning and political power. Prof. Haj Ismail argued that rapid rural migration into Aleppo was deliberately encouraged by the former regime in order to reshape social and demographic structures within the city. As a result, long-term urban planning strategies and comprehensive master plans were marginalized. The last major master plan prior to the conflict dated back to 1974, while by 2004 nearly 60 percent of the city had been classified as informal or slum areas. Significantly, the development plan prepared in 2004 continues to remain officially in force despite the profound physical and demographic transformations caused by the war.

The seminar also highlighted the complexity of land tenure and property rights in post-war reconstruction. Many legally owned properties were reportedly confiscated under the previous regime, creating significant challenges for future redevelopment and return processes. Particular attention was given to the large number of waqf properties in Aleppo - approximately 20,000 in total, including around 13,000 within the historic old city. The discussion underscored the importance of developing legal and institutional mechanisms capable of addressing overlapping claims, heritage protection, and equitable reconstruction.



Special emphasis was placed on the historic urban fabric of Aleppo as a foundation for recovery. The old city contains one of the world's largest covered markets, extending nearly 12 kilometers, alongside a dense concentration of religious, commercial, and residential heritage sites. Since 2000, the area has been administered through a dedicated municipality for the old city. Haj Ismail stressed that cultural heritage should not be treated merely as a conservation issue, but rather as a strategic driver for social sustainability, economic revitalization, and the reconstruction of collective identity in the post-war period. In this context, heritage-led reconstruction was presented as a mechanism for rebuilding social cohesion and restoring the relationship between communities and urban space, emphasizing the role of people themselves as owners and protectors of the heritage learning its lessons the wider reconstruction of the whole city.

As a result of the multi-layered crisis Aleppo faced before the conflict, Haj Ismail insisted to consider the last destruction as an opportunity for a better planned construction of the future of the city rather than a reconstruction brings back many of the pre conflict issues and problems that were already complex to be solved.

In her presentation, Prof. Hala Malandi focused on future development scenarios for the Aleppo Governorate and the need for an integrated and holistic regional planning framework. She emphasized that reconstruction efforts must move beyond isolated urban interventions toward comprehensive territorial planning capable of addressing environmental, infrastructural, and socio-economic challenges simultaneously. Her proposed vision included the establishment of an integrated ring-road system designed to improve mobility, regional connectivity, and decentralized development.

Prof. Malandi explained that the Aleppo Governorate covers approximately 18,500 km² - nearly 10 percent of Syria's territory- while the city itself is composed of 125 neighborhoods with highly uneven levels of development and war damage. The proposed planning framework was structured around three principal strategies: environmental protection, strengthening regional connectivity, and decentralization of urban functions and services. She argued that balancing urban and rural development is essential to reducing pressure on the urban core, mitigating future informal expansion, and enhancing long-term regional resilience.

Overall, the seminar demonstrated how the reconstruction of Aleppo cannot be understood solely as a technical or architectural task, but rather as a multidimensional political, social, economic, and cultural process. Discussions throughout the event emphasized that post-war recovery requires integrated planning approaches that address governance, heritage, housing, infrastructure, displacement, and social justice simultaneously. By bringing together international scholars and practitioners, the CURE International seminar created an important platform for critical reflection on the future of Aleppo and the broader challenges of post-conflict urban reconstruction in the region.

Second part of the event was focused on workshop to address lessons and messages delivered by the two seminars, to emphasis priorities and challenges to be further elaborated.

The workshop sessions brought together participants from diverse academic and professional backgrounds to discuss practical and future-oriented strategies for the reconstruction and



long-term recovery of Aleppo. The discussions emphasized the importance of integrated, community-oriented, and sustainable recovery processes that address both physical reconstruction and social rehabilitation, while also strengthening regional development, governance, cultural heritage, and long-term urban resilience.

During the Workshop session experts from academia and practice have been discussing with student current situation.



