

Integrating the Islamic Worldview into the Planning of Neighbourhoods

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Abstract: This paper aims to highlight the importance of integrating the Islamic worldview into the aspects of planning, in general, and into the planning of neighbourhoods, in particular. In this paper I shall examine, firstly, the pertinence of the Islamic worldview to the notion of planning neighbourhoods. There we will see that such an enterprise was an integral part of Islamic urbanism from the era of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) till the waning of Islamic civilization. As such, no successful establishment of contemporary Islamic urbanism without integrating the same with the Islamic worldview can ever be possible. Next, the following principles will be discussed: (i) the Islamic idea of the settlement, (ii) Islam on creating buildings, (iii) peaceful co-existence with the environment, and (iv) Islam on human dignity and fraternity among its members. Discussion on each of the mentioned principles will be followed by briefly analyzing their implications for the planning of neighbourhoods. Some suggestions as to how to make the notion of integrating the Islamic worldview into the idea of planning appear relevant and appealing to the Muslims of today will also be presented. While writing the paper, I have tried as much as possible to draw on the most relevant sources that deal with the theme at hand, the most important of which, certainly, are the Holy Qur'an and the authentic compilations of the Prophet Muhammad's words and actions.

Keywords: Islam, Muslims, The Islamic worldview, Planning, Neighbourhood

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the notion of integrating the Islamic worldview into the planning of neighbourhoods. The nature of the paper is a conceptual and philosophical rather than an empirical one. Hence, some of the paper's conclusions

and suggestions appear to be prescriptive and with no clear focus. The paper does not intend to produce a concrete formula for the integration of Islamic worldview into the planning of neighbourhoods. Nor does it aim to present the solutions for the existing problems of the Muslims with regard to residential planning. Rather, the paper aims to increase awareness, both of the professionals and general public, as to the significance of the subject in question. Thus, the most vital aspects of the theme were dwelled on and from an ideological point of

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view. The paper neither overlooked nor downgraded the importance of such pressing issues as the definition and chief characteristics of neighbourhoods in history and at present, socio-cultural and economic influences on the development of Islamic neighbourhoods, and the role of the professionals and other relevant parties in the housing industry within the current context. These and similar issues were simply out of focus in the paper.

There is virtually no study conducted on the subject of integrating the Islamic worldview into the planning of neighbourhoods. Thus, the objective of this paper is to partly fill up a significant academic gap and to spur the interest of both the professionals and Muslim scholars on such an important subject matter. There are certainly studies that treat the subject of Muslim neighbourhoods but only from certain limited cultural, social or built environment perspectives. It is almost impossible to find a study that treats the matter from a broader spiritual perspective, integrating the same with and thus adding a new dimension to the rest of social, cultural and built environment perspectives. This research is an attempt towards exactly that direction.

THE PERTINENCE OF THE WORLDVIEW TO PLANNING AND URBANIZATION

People are both the creators and demolishers of every civilizational accomplishment. They too are the only beneficiaries of civilizational valuable upshots. Similarly, people are the creators and inhabitants of cities. If a city is well-ordered, clean, efficient, corruption-free, balanced, safe, free from stress and nuisance, it is all due to the right conduct, attitudes and mindset of its inhabitants. The same is also reflected when a city's amenities are adequate and accessible, when its environment is conducive towards social interaction and coherence, when it conserves material and energy resources, and when it prevents ecological disruption. The good virtues of a city's inhabitants must have been modelled in accordance with a sound worldview that regulates their relationship with fellow community members, nature (space) and God. All the policies and schemes originated and implemented in this kind of city are merely an expression of the city's upbeat total atmosphere that has been avidly generated and then made pervasive over every department of living.

However, if the opposite is the case, that is to say, if the conditions in a city are awful and detrimental to living, who is to be blamed? The demeanor, attitudes and mindset of the city dwellers – everyone in the socio-political hierarchy – as well as certain policies and their enforcement, are as a rule pointed at as the causes of the trouble. This may be partly true and acceptable, yet a majority of the root causes would definitely be related to the snags in the people's commitment to an adopted worldview (philosophy and vision of life and truth), provided the worldview itself is free of them and other imperfections.

Deviating from an established worldview, or abandoning it completely, has always produced a chain reaction in everything that people do. It follows that all the phenomena witnessed in a community and its urban and rural settlements, irrespective of whether they are good or bad, are reflective of the nature and strength of people's association with a vision and philosophy of life and truth (worldview) on whose principles the community had been established and had been surviving for years. The stronger and healthier the relationship between people and the philosophy of their community (their settlements) the more is it likely that they (their community) will keep moving ahead longer, and vice versa. Therefore, understanding fully all the aspects of the problems that beset a city,

linking the symptoms with their root causes, before embarking on a healing process, shall always be vital.

As far as Islam is concerned, neighbourhoods serve as the incubators of constructive ideas and schemes that are epitomized in the characters and conducts of the people. Hence, both the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunnah* paid so much attention to the notion of neighbours – their rights and responsibilities, as well as to the roles and significance of housing, mosques, roads and public spaces which make up neighbourhoods (Hakim, 1988). Of these, the house institution, together with the mosque, occupies the most important position. Central to the quintessence of all the components of a neighbourhood is certainly the comprehensive and enduring worldview of Islam.

While developing the city-state of Madinah, the Prophet (pbuh) and the first generation of Muslims demonstrated in a powerful and practical fashion the Islamic view of the subject at hand (Spahic, 2004). Neighbourhoods, it could be deduced, account for a microcosm of Islamic culture and civilization in that individuals and families bred and nurtured therein constitute the fundamental units of the Islamic community (*ummah*). Neighbourhoods have a potential to take up the role of an educational and training centre able to produce, in concert with other societal establishments with the house institution in the forefront, individuals capable of

transforming the whole communities they belong to. From their houses and neighbourhoods, while interacting with the outside world at different levels and in different capacities, the same persons would contribute, somehow or other, their decent share to making this earth a better place for living. By the same token, if misconstrued and their role perverted, neighbourhoods have a potential to become a breeding ground for virtually every social disease, which if left unchecked could one day paralyze entire communities and drag them to the bottommost.

THE ISLAMIC IDEA OF THE SETTLEMENT

When the name Madinah (the City) was given to the Yathrib area following the Hijrah, such was not done at the dictates of chance. It was a deliberate move reflective of the developments within the young Islamic community headed by the Prophet (pbuh). Indeed, the advent of the new Islamic worldview and those who had already exemplified it in their thoughts, words and deeds to the Yathrib area implied the advent of a whole bunch of new concepts and philosophies. Of them was the idea of the settlement.

In addition to being relatively that which the settlements is and would always be thought of, the settlement in Islam, more importantly, stands for the ground

for the people's interaction with Allah the Creator and Lord, space, the environment and, of course, with themselves at various levels, given that the settlement is a scene where they live, work, play, learn, worship, rise and fall. The outcome of these and other activities which the people engage themselves in settlements, especially urban ones, is what we call cultures and civilizations but which vary by reason of the principles and values on which they rest, as well as by reason of the objectives intended to be thereby achieved. Hence, it was very much suitable for the name of the prototype Islamic city, i.e. Madinah, to be derived from the word *tamaddun*, which denotes civilization.

One of the derivations of the word Madinah (the City) is the Arabic verb *dana* ('Abd al-'Aziz, 1992) as well, which means to obey, to submit (to), to owe allegiance (to). From there is the word *din* which means religion, faith. Thus, the city in Islam is dubbed Madinah so as to signify the Islamic pivotal precept that man is a vicegerent on earth and has not been created except to abide by and absolutely submit to the will of the Lord of the universe.

It follows that every Islamic city and, indeed, any form of the Islamic settlement is a hub of worship (serving). Worship (*'ibadah*) in Islam is a wide concept encompassing each and every action of man, irrespective of its nature and the level where it might be undertaken, on sole

condition that God is intended to be pleased thereby and the divine norms pertinently conformed to. In such cities, Allah – be He exalted – is the only absolute authority and His words of guidance remain a source from which virtually everything as to managing this terrestrial life originates. Accordingly, the job of those who are entrusted to administer such cities and settlements and rule over their populace would not exceed the perimeter of what is right and the most efficient implementation of what has been already prescribed, in order to preserve the religion, self, psychological and intellectual strength, progeny and wealth of their subjects. In other words, their task would be but ensuring the masses their general wellbeing by finding a feasible and effective *modus operandi* of putting into operation the set of infinite standards and values (Ibn Taymiyah, 1992).

The Implications of the Islamic Idea of the Settlement for Planning Neighbourhoods

The implications of the Islamic idea of the settlement for planning neighbourhoods are rather ideological. Of them is that the planners and users of Islamic neighbourhoods perceive the latter as both the fields and means for the implementation of Allah's commands. Creating decent houses and neighbourhoods thus stands for a societal duty the neglecting of which, partly or totally, accounts for a

wrongdoing. This is so because possessing a decent house which will be surrounded by a decent neighbourhood could be seen as falling within the necessary minimum the lack of which may cause one not to be able to rise to the requirements of the vicegerency task for which people have been created. When we say this we have in mind an Islamic dictum according to which if an obligation (*wajib*) cannot be performed without something, the latter then becomes an obligation (*wajib*) itself.

Moreover, neighbourhoods with all their facilities assist people in discharging the diverse worship activities of theirs. In Islam, the notion of worship is a universal one encompassing every action of men (Qur'an, 51:56). Having said this, the process of creating excellent neighbourhoods can be transformed into an act of worship as well.

Thus, planning and creating neighbourhoods is a very serious task. It is about giving people some of their fundamental rights, executing a religious obligation, and contributing to an appropriate, or otherwise, implementation of the message of Islam. The corollary of all this is that the Muslim planners, and all the other professionals in the field of built environment at large, must enhance considerably their knowledge of Islam – its *Shari'ah* and worldview. This may appear as a daunting task to many, however, needless to say that it is incumbent upon every Muslim – male and female – to know the rulings

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of Islam pertaining to the obligations and teachings they have to adhere to in their life.

While Islamizing the notion of neighbourhoods in both theory and practice, Muslim planners can draw on their own familiarity with the rulings of Islam, provided the same is adequate. Otherwise, trustworthy religious scholars, who are both qualified and broad-minded, should be consulted and engaged as many times as needed. It goes without saying that here unremitting inter and cross-professional studies and research activities appear to be inevitable. This is bound to lead gradually to narrowing down the glaring gap separating the religious scholars and their fields of interest from the secular ones and their own fields of interest. This way, every scholar will become aware as to his/her role in society and his/her obligations toward society, nature and God. Certainly, the religious scholars will have to widen their interests and concerns, becoming what they are actually always meant to be – the guardians of societies. But to secure that accolade they ought to reevaluate themselves and their undertakings, striving to be a more practical, approachable, people-friendly, and less dogmatic and idealistic lot. Whereas the secular scholars will have to think of Islamizing their knowledge, wherever there is a conflict of interests and as much as possible, realigning their scientific goals and aspirations with the goals and aspirations of the Muslim community to which they belong.

ISLAM ON CREATING BUILDINGS

Humans are not the only creatures that build. Many a creature that we classify low down the hierarchy of the animal kingdom, such as bees and ants, build elaborate structures. However, it has been suggested that it is awareness and imagination that single out humans as superior to other animals in architectural output (Michael and Colin, 1994). While the rest of creation act on the environment instinctively with no reasoning or training – as preordained by Allah, the Creator of the universe – man does the same willingly and at his own discretion. Since his actions are preceded with thinking and rationalizing, man clearly demonstrates through acts of building – and through every other engagement of his, indeed – his philosophy of, and outlook on, life and the reality. Relationship between the two, i.e. one's outlook on life and the disposition of his acts, including building, is causal, the former always being the cause of the latter. No sooner does a paradigm shift occur in one's worldview, no matter how (in)significant, than a corresponding change accordingly ensues in the very essence and character of one's performances, thus revealing and immortalizing one's actual relationship with his self, with his peers, with other creatures and, of course, with his Creator and Lord.

Erecting buildings in Islam rests within the category of permissibility (*ibahah*). It remains as such, so long as

something does not come about causing it to infringe some of the divinely-prescribed norms, hence renders it either recommended against (*makruh*) or prohibited (*haram*). However, if observing the objectives of the *Shari'ah* – i.e. preservation of religion, self, mental strength, progeny and wealth – is meant foremost to be thus realized, the whole matter then turns highly praiseworthy and so correspondingly rewarding. In other words, erecting buildings becomes part of one's worship (*'ibadah*) whereby one duly discharges some of the duties entrusted to him as a vicegerent on earth.

On coming to this world and on becoming a member of an intricate macro web comprising different worlds and life forms, man needed not long to understand that building as an art accounted for one of the necessary requirements for man's cultural and civilization growth, if not for his bare survival. According to the Islamic *tawhidic* worldview, constructed buildings are meant not only to meet some of the necessary requirements in relation to man's existence on earth, but also to facilitate, foster and stimulate his ceaseless *'ibadah* (worship) practices entrusted to him by his Lord, thus helping him to elevate his status to a dignity above other creation and honorably live up to his reputation as the steward of creation. As a result, the form, plan and function of the buildings created by the Muslims are normally inspired by Islam. They epitomize the Islamic fundamental teachings and experiences. Given

that such buildings symbolize a physical locus of their daily individual, family and social activities, the Islamic built environment assists greatly in making Allah's righteous servants' lives all one sweet song of praise to Him. Hence, it goes without saying that central to the Islamic view of building is the function of the constructed edifices; size, along with the overall physical appearance, is inferior and matters only when it comes into complete conformity with the aforementioned criterion.

In many of his words and deeds, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) epitomized this pragmatic but ground-breaking Islamic approach to the subject of building. The Prophet (pbuh) was an active builder and also a planner, so to speak, especially during the early years of Islam's existence in Madinah (Hakim, 1988).

However, one must not be so obsessed with the matter of building that some of the vices most commonly committed in building, such as wasting, exercising and promoting haughtiness, mutual envy and rivalry in building, may possibly be committed, even moderately. People ought to observe moderation, their limitations, personal and societal needs, and of course the utility of whatever they erect. Via its status, function and maintenance, the built environment is to be an asset to the community rather than a liability.

Building is but one of the noble means by which the noblest goals are attained; it is an instrument, a carrier of the spiritual, not a goal itself. People are not to build more than what they really need for the reason that every building activity will be harmful to its executor on the Day of Judgement, unless carried out due to a real necessity, i.e. to meet a need, as proclaimed by the Prophet (pbuh) (Sunan Abi Dawud, Hadith no. 4559).

The Implications of the Islamic View of Creating Buildings for Planning Neighbourhoods

The implications of the Islamic concept of building as an enterprise for planning neighbourhoods are also rather ideological. Once people absorb the Islamic idea of erecting buildings – and such ought to be of the foremost objectives of Muslim built environment education – their interaction with and the usage of them will be proper. Neighbourhoods will then be seen as more than houses. Neighbourhoods will be seen as an entrusted environment where a group of God's vicegerents is bidden to accomplish a major portion of their vicegerency mission. Neighbourhoods with all their aspects will thus be seen as both a ground and channel for the said accomplishment. Little wonder that having been equipped with this awareness, people will spontaneously hasten to care for their surroundings, maintain them and actively participate

in any new initiative aimed at making their neighbourhoods better places for living. The well-being of neighbourhoods will be seen as people's own well-being. The failure of neighbourhoods will be seen as people's own failure.

Since genuine interest for caring for neighbourhoods will prevail, new initiatives and proposals will be coming from more than a few persons. Everyone will feel that he/she is an active member of an undertaking that has enormous cultural, civilizational and ideological proportions. Everyone's participation in preserving the interests of neighbourhoods will be both solicited and ensured. Everyone will try to become an asset to the righteous schemes. Being a complete liability will appear as an oddity, offensiveness and even a spiritual failing. People will naturally shun such a prospect. Satisfying solely personal interests will not be the only obsession of people; satisfying the interests of neighbourhoods and neighbours, and society at large, will be as important as the former.

In neighbourhoods that have been perceived, planned and designed on the basis of the Islamic worldview and teachings, people will see themselves as servants rather than masters, as creation rather than creators. Almighty Allah will always be acknowledged as the only Creator, Lord and Sustainer. People will easily realize that not only do they own nothing but also that they

remain forever short of enjoying a power of bringing into being anything without making use of the available raw materials and elements created for them in nature. They will know that creating *ex nihilo* (from absolute nothingness), as a sign of genuine richness, sovereignty and might, is the right and power of God alone. It will be upheld that everything that man invents, conceives, concocts and creates is possible only thanks to the unbounded bounties and munificence from God which man only discovers, manages, processes, uses and reuses in different ways most convenient and efficient for him. The upshots of man's myriad civilizational pursuits on earth are never really his own possession and, as such, by no means could be solely utilized for returning the debt of creation and existence to God.

Because of this, neighbourhoods will never be seen as the space appropriated exclusively for men. Nor will they be seen as a real creation of men. Rather, the appropriated spaces for neighbourhoods and neighbourhoods themselves will be viewed as a spiritual loan to men, so as soon as men return to their Creator nobody but they alone will be held accountable for what they did to the loan, how they handled it, and what they managed to achieve with it. Neighbourhoods are avenues for expressing and realizing a higher order of things and ideas. Hence, being prudent, modest and grateful when dealing with God's gifts that grace existence, as well as

when dealing with one's own accomplishments, are of the virtues most appreciated in men. The opposite, however, is of the vices most detested in men. Islamic neighbourhoods are planned and designed in such ways that no vice is encouraged or promoted in any way. Conversely, all types of virtues – individual, family and societal, are thus intended to be upheld and advanced.

What matters, after all, is the substance that Islamic neighbourhoods are always to entail. The outward appearances are an inferior matter. Certainly, this applies not only to Islamic neighbourhoods but also to the whole of Islamic built environment. Hence, it was not by a chance that Muslim scholars while disagreeing on the exact definition, size and boundaries of the Islamic neighbourhood never disagreed on its significance and functions (Sarkawi and Abdullah, 2007). While the former can fluctuate and somewhat be a subjective judgement, subject to a number of indigenous factors and conditions, the latter is to remain as permanent and infinite as the values and teachings that it epitomizes. It goes without saying, therefore, that Muslim planners while trying to revitalize the concept of the Islamic neighbourhood today must bear in mind that what they must strive to re-establish first and foremost is the essence that made the Islamic neighbourhood such a fascinating, dynamic and relevant phenomenon, as both a concept and sensory reality. Once restored, the essence of the Islamic neighbourhood

is to be framed or contained in a physical form that will be dictated, by and large, by contemporary planning means and methods, modern technological advancements and the exigencies of different climates, geographies and cultures.

PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) under the aegis of revelation propagated that man is a steward of creation, or manager of earth, created but to worship his Creator by means of his words, actions and thoughts. Man is to submit totally to the divine universal will and plan. The environment is part of God's creation too. Its role is two-fold – to worship its Creator (in ways suitable to it) and to be of service to man, so that man can smoothly and undeterred carry out his honorable task of managing earth.

The environment holds enormous potential and diversified resources meant only for the vicegerent of earth (Qur'an, 2:21–22; 14:32–34). They are to be seen as facilities that if rightly used facilitate every facet of people's fleeting stay on earth. The environment is further to be seen by men as an "ally" or a "partner" so to speak, in the execution of their earthly mission. After all, in order to create any segment of the built environment, men borrows diverse natural ingredients, such as space, water, clay, timber,

stone and other minerals, placing the newly created or built element back into the existing natural contexts. Actually, the built environment is in so many ways the natural environment which has been processed, used and reused, manipulated, and the like. Man himself is part of the universal natural setting.

According to a number of divine instructions, natural diversity and the forces of nature are to be the focus of man's exhaustive scientific and contemplative attention. Diversity in humans – skin colors, languages, attitudes and cultures – are to preoccupy the cognitive faculties of men as well, trying thus to uncover a link between it and the natural diversity. In all the natural phenomena, a great deal of wisdom lies and waits to be unearthed.

According to the Islamic worldview, man's rights over the environment are rights of sustainable use based on moderation, balance and conservation. The rights of the environment over man, on the other hand, are that it be safe from every misuse, mistreatment and destruction. Greed, extravagance and waste are considered a tyranny against nature and a transgression of those rights (Abd al-Hamid, 1997).

Islam teaches that all things have been created with purpose and in proportion and measure, both

qualitatively and quantitatively (Qur'an, 54:49). Nature's resources and forces are gifts granted by God to man. The gift, however, is not transfer of title. Man is permitted to use the gift for the given purpose, but the owner is and always remains Almighty God. The gift must be returned to the Creator at our death or retirement, improved and increased through our production. At the very least, it must be returned intact, as it was when received (Al-Faruqi, 1995).

At the same time, however, the natural environment is a field for man's vicegerency mission. It is right there, while interacting with different aspects of the environment, that people clearly demonstrate how strong, or how deficient, their relationship with God is. So significant is man's relationship with the environment in Islam that in some instances such relationship is able to take precedence over other deeds of man, placing him then on the highest or dragging him to the lowest. This is so because one of the fundamental Islamic principles that govern one's relations with men and nature is that which is highlighted in an emphatic declaration of the Prophet (pbuh): "There is no inflicting or returning of harm" (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith no. 2331).

Furthermore, the environment stands for a source of man's spiritual enlightenment too (Nasr, 1997), provided his treatment of it is apt, in that the environment in its totality is

an expression of God's oneness, mercy and omnipotence (Qur'an, 3:190–191). By the power of reason and insight that has been given to him to subdue the forces of nature, man will at the same time be able to penetrate through and grasp properly its countless mysteries and phenomena. Consequently, this will lead to a considerable enhancement of his physical well-being, as well as to expediting the process of his spiritual advancement.

The Implications of the Islamic Idea of the Environment for Planning Neighbourhoods

The implications of the Islamic concept of the environment for planning neighbourhoods are both ideological and practical. The natural environment is to be seen as a partner in achieving human goals, rather than the object of human selfish exploitation efforts and greedy aspirations. While planning and designing neighbourhoods, the gifts and forces of nature are to be seen as blessings which ought to be capitalized on so that neighbourhoods emerge as safe, beautiful, effective, clean and conducive to people's diverse engagements. While drawing on environment's riches so that people's lives are supported, neighbourhoods' planners, designers as well as their final users are to reciprocate nature's goodness by maintaining it clean, by aiming at sustainable residential planning and building, by observing humility and restraint while using nature's resources, and by never forsaking the Creator and

Sustainer of both nature and men. In short, these are nature's basic rights over men. Thus, peaceful and sustainable coexistence with nature will feature prominently in a neighbourhood that derives its philosophy, mission, vision and objectives from the worldview outlined in revelation.

Realizing a peaceful coexistence with the environment within the ambits of neighbourhoods starts the moment neighbourhoods are perceived as both concepts and sensory realities by their planners and designers. As planners and designers move to any of the concrete stages of bringing neighbourhoods into existence, likewise the pressure to achieve peaceful and sustainable coexistence with nature becomes proportionately greater. Neighbourhoods' planners and designers must pay utmost attention to the subject of neighbourhoods going well with the environment, geography and culture of an area where a new neighbourhood will be created and planted. When planning and designing each and every private or communal building, as well as every component of the built environment, the Muslim planner, designer, architect and structural engineer must, first and foremost, be concerned about how the end result of their efforts will fare when juxtaposed with the existing universal setting in terms of both function and outward appearance – will it go well with it, or will it appear as if something of a misfit, oddity, or even offensiveness. Here too some inter and cross-

professional studies and research activities will be inevitable taking into account the complexity of the issues involved (Akbar, 1988).

The natural environment is simultaneously an obstruction and help, and neighbourhoods' planners seek both to invite its aid and to drive back its attacks. If rightly conceived and seriously pondered, the placement, plan and form of neighbourhoods in relation to their sites with arrangement of their axes and spaces may well be turned into a device for controlling natural light, ventilation, and even heating and cooling (Fathy, 1986).

However, if the specific requirements of a climate, geography, culture and technology are not met then a new neighbourhood comes into view rather like an alien element if one critically looked at it against the backdrop of its surroundings. The situation becomes even worse if a neighbourhood's plan and design are "parachuted" from one context to another which is totally different from the former. Verily, little genuine comfort is such a neighbourhood able to generate to its users whose character has nothing or, at best, has very little in common with the plan, design and character of the neighbourhood (Hakim, 2003). Such a neighbourhood can appear even as a comical thing to an insightful observer. "Parachuting" a neighbourhood plan and design from one context to the other different one is like asking a person to move from one

place to another which has different climate, geography and culture, without allowing him to get prepared for all the necessary acclimatization and adjustment processes that await him. Surely, the person will suffer greatly should he insist on changing nothing. He will get much attention from the locals but for all the wrong reasons. Seldom can anyone survive under the circumstances.

ISLAM ON HUMAN DIGNITY AND FRATERNITY AMONG ITS MEMBERS

Islam teaches that man is a vicegerent on earth entrusted with the honorable task of inhabiting it in accordance with the divine guidance given to him. This terrestrial life serves to man as a platform for either elevating his status over that of angels, should he abide by the divinely prescribed rules and regulations, or for debasing his self lower than the rank of animals, should he turn away from Truth and dazed and lost wander aimlessly amid the innumerable and awesome wonders of creation (Qur'an, 2:30–33).

Man is created as a social being endowed with free will, passion and emotions, which could either lead him to the highest or drag him to the lowest. Humanity is but a big family with one origin, mission and purpose. People have been divided into nations and tribes only to know each other, learn from each other, and cooperate at various

scales in righteousness and piety – not that they may loathe each other and conspire against each other (Qur'an, 49:13). They are to explore the universe and within the framework rendered by revelation make their existence convenient, comfortable and meaningful, hence create virtuous cultures and civilizations. However, no sooner does this universal equilibrium become impaired and vitiated than man's relationship with God, his peers and the whole of the environment starts to degenerate.

How much Islam is concerned about preserving human dignity demonstrates the list of the objectives that the Islamic *Shari'ah* strives to achieve and uphold. The objectives of *Shari'ah* aim to preserve and sustain: (i) religion, (ii) self, (iii) intellect, (iv) descendents, and (v) wealth and resources. Hence, every religious injunction has been tailored in such a way as to enhance the well-being of man and his surroundings. In the same vein, nothing has been forbidden except those things which are capable of harming man, directly or indirectly, or can impede his spiritual, cultural and civilizational headway. Vices that defy this outlook on life are abhorrent most to Islam and its worldview. No cultural tradition or civilizational enterprise is to contravene this core principle of Islam.

Islam with its unique *tawhidic* worldview champions that Muslims are brothers to each other and their similitude is like a wall whose bricks enforce and rely on each other.

They are like a solid cemented structure held together in unity and strength, each part contributing strength in its own way. The Muslims are furthermore related to each other in such a way that if one of them (a part of an organic and formidable formation called the *Ummah*) is troubled by a problem of whatever kind, the rest of the body parts will remain disturbed and restless until the matter became fairly solved (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith no. 5552).

The Implications of the Islamic Concept of Human Dignity and Muslim Fraternity for Planning Neighbourhoods

The implications of the Islamic concept of human dignity and fraternity among its members for planning neighbourhoods are also both ideological and practical. While creating neighbourhoods, which stand for a field of people's execution of a major portion of Islamic precepts, aiming at preserving and advancing the well-being of people who live there will be of paramount importance. Neighbourhoods are meant for people and so it is only logical that in a neighbourhood one expects that one's all basic needs are satisfactorily met. One cannot expect the people to contribute fully to society and to sacrifice for the sake of society's well-being if people's own fundamental needs are not satisfied. Certainly, safe, clean, wholesome and conducive neighbourhoods constitute one of those

basic needs and rights (Al-Hathloul, 2002). Of such rights is also providing basic facilities in neighbourhoods, making them operational and accessible, so that people's contributions to the progression of society are made possible. If this is not the case, however, and neighbourhoods are created just for the sake of having them, or in a haphazard manner without paying proper attention to the basic needs of those who will occupy them, then neighbourhoods thus created are bound to defeat the purpose of the whole exercise of residential planning. Neighbourhoods, completely or partially, can then become a liability to society.

It goes without saying, therefore, that neighbourhoods which have been inspired by the Islamic worldview and sets of Islamic normative teachings and values cannot be unsafe, susceptible to crimes and vices, dirty, unhygienic, inconvenient, etc. For an instance, how can a neighbourhood where Muslims live be unclean and unhygienic when Islam views cleanliness, be it the cleanliness of the body, dwelling places, courtyards, streets, markets, rivers and the whole surroundings, as a branch of Faith (*iman*)? (Sahih Muslim, Hadith no. 328). A branch of Faith is also removing that which might be injurious from the path (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith no. 56).

As a result of Islam's categorical stance on justice, righteousness, equality, unity and brotherhood among

Muslims, neighbourhoods by no means and under no circumstances should promote discrimination, prejudice, wrongdoing, double standards, disunity, conflict, etc. among their members. As a manifestation of Islam's care to preserve its followers' highest standard of dignity and decency, privacy protection occupied a very high place in the hierarchy of Islamic norms. In Islam, deliberate invasion of one's privacy by whatever means and degree is deemed a serious offence with far-reaching consequences.

According to Sayyid Qutb (1982), there are many types of *awrah* (restricted and classified areas or aspects of the body, a thing or a condition). The *awrah* of the body is just one of them. There is an *awrah* in food, clothes, furniture, etc. Virtually, every human activity at certain times and under certain conditions contain some sides which people do not like to be freely exposed to the public eye. There is also an *awrah* in human emotions and the conditions of the soul. People certainly do not like themselves and things related to them to be seen by others unless they are clean, beautified, orderly and "prepared" for the public interest (Qutb, 1982).

So therefore, people's houses, which are main components in neighbourhoods, must be planned and designed in such a way as to function as a safe heaven and places of rest and quiet (Qur'an, 16:80). In them,

human mind and soul are to take refuge from all the hazards and anxieties that may beset men, not only from outside the house realm but also, symbolically rather, from any angle or direction of this terrestrial world. In short, houses must be made homes. If not, some people may end up homeless, even though they possess houses.

Surely, the philosophy and concepts that underlie the existence of neighbourhoods must be compatible with the philosophy and foremost values and standards of the Islamic message which the persons living in neighbourhoods strive to exemplify. Properly planned and designed neighbourhoods help their occupants in realizing their earthly mission, whereas improperly planned and designed ones hinder such an enterprise. On account of this reality, an Islamic neighbourhood could be defined as one whose plan, design, form and function are inspired primarily by Islam, are permeated with the Islamic spirit, and stand for the embodiment of Islamic principles and values. Such a neighbourhood facilitates, fosters and stimulates men's ceaseless '*ibadah* (worship) activities entrusted to them by their Creator and Lord. Central to the standards by which a neighbourhood may be categorized as Islamic are the holiness and purity of its philosophy, vision and utility, accompanied by convenience, efficiency, cleanliness, security, sustainability, and anything else that Islam reckons as indispensable for living a decent and accountable life. The overall physical appearance is

therefore inferior and matters only when it comes into complete conformity with the said criterion.

CONCLUSION

It is a high time that the initiative of integrating the Islamic worldview into the planning of neighbourhoods takes off in the Muslim world. However, such a scheme ought to constitute but a segment of a broad Islamization project aimed at bringing about a total harmonization between the education systems of the Muslims and the teachings of Islam. It is not only that planning neighbourhoods should be targeted but also the whole of the planning professions. The process of integration will yield best results if it were embarked on gradually, after people have become convinced of its relevance and urgency.

In universities and colleges where students undertake planning programmes, an in-depth course on the Islamic worldview can be taught. The course can be taught either independently or as part of the syllabus of other relevant courses. However, this step can become effective only if students are constantly urged to incorporate what they have learned in the classroom into their practical work in studios and laboratories. Furthermore, intensive workshops, seminars and trainings can be periodically organized mainly for those who are

actively involved in planning. It is essential indeed that people realize that by creating a neighbourhood, a framework for the lives of a group of people is created. Thus, the two, i.e. the framework with its character and services and the exigencies of people's lives, must be compatible. It is only then that people's welfare will be ensured, and that neighbourhoods will become more than just houses.

Certainly, there is much to be done in relation to successfully integrating the Islamic worldview and Islamic laws into the planning of neighbourhoods. The roles and contributions of every relevant party – the government, professional bodies, educational institutions, NGOs and the general public – are to be, firstly, clearly spelled out and, secondly, strongly encouraged and facilitated so that they are effectively put into operation. Hence, one of the main objectives of this paper is not to provide a concrete *modus operandi* for the integration, but to try to elevate the level of people's awareness towards the importance of the theme in question. It is thus recommended that further both conceptual and empirical research on a number of issues pertinent to the subject of integrating the Islamic worldview into the planning of neighbourhoods be conducted. Research must be multidisciplinary in nature with the most appropriate and advanced methodologies adopted. It must involve not only academics but also professionals, practitioners and policy makers. Some of the

important subjects that could be explored are as follows: the Islamic worldview – its origins, scope and relevance; the relationship between spirituality and the planning of neighbourhoods in Islam; conceptualizing and applying the idea of the Islamic neighbourhood in contemporary contexts (with case studies from different Islamic regions); the challenges of integrating Islamic teachings into the planning and functions of Muslim neighbourhoods; learning from the successful Muslim neighbourhoods' planning paradigms in the past.

As a final point, it is the nature of Islam that provides humanity with basic rules of morality and guidelines of proper conduct in those spheres of life which are not related to prescribed ritual worship, such as the spheres of building and planning, for example. Upon such general principles and guidelines people can establish systems, regulations, views and attitudes in order to comprehend and regulate their worldly life in accordance with their time, region and needs. Since every age has its own problems and challenges, the solutions and perceptions deduced from the fundamental principles and permanent values of life have got to be to some extent different. Their substance, however, due to the uniformity and consistency of the divinely given foundation and sources from which they stem, will always be the same. Islam is based on essential human nature, which is constant and not subject to change according to time and space. It is the outward

forms which change while the fundamental principles, the basic values and the essential human nature together with man's basic needs remain unchanged.

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