

Assembling Environmental Sustainability in Refugee Camps through Refugees' Home-making Practices

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Abstract Much of the existing research on sustainability in refugee camps often examines the concept through the lens of institutional change that overlooks the potential of refugees' actions and initiatives as crucial in achieving sustainability. In this work, I aim to broaden the scope of the drivers of sustainability, within this context, by incorporating the active participation of refugees themselves. More specifically, I seek to explore the extent to which refugees' home-making practices, aimed at securing their livelihoods, promote environmental sustainability. In this study, I focus on two kinds of home-making practices: dwelling adaptations and home economics practices. In examining the survival strategies of marginalized populations, the concept of Environmentalism of the Poor (EOP) (Guha, 2002; Nixon, 2011) is of particular relevance. EOP investigates how the poor tend to adopt more sustainable practices out of necessity, as a means of struggling to survive. Refugees, despite not necessarily being poor, often lack certain social and economic privileges/rights held by non-refugee citizens. Drawing on Environmentalism of the Poor (EOP) and assemblage theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; De Landa, 2006; McFarlane, 2009; Dovey, 2010), this article aims to explore a bottom-up perspective on sustainable practices, while acknowledging their inherently political nature. Through empirical analysis of three Palestinian camps in Jordan, Al-Husn, Baqa'a, and Talbiyeh, this study examines the flows and networks of contestation and collaboration within and beyond the camps' boundaries. The research argues that refugees' survival home-making practices, conceptualized as assemblages, play a pivotal role in promoting environmental sustainability in the camp. To investigate these practices, I employ a methodology that incorporates archival and empirical research. This includes methods of site visits, direct observation, interviews with camp residents and officials, and handmade graphic journaling.