



Shaping the City that Decreases Overweight and Obesity through Healthy Built Environment

* PhD candidate. **MARIA A. EL HELOU¹**

¹Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece

E Mail: maelhelou@arch.auth.gr

ARTICLE INFO:

Article history:

Received 08 February 2018

Accepted 05 June 2018

Available online 15 September 2018

Keywords:

Sustainable planning;
Urban planning;
Green mobility;
Physical activity;
Mental health;
Obesity;

This work is licensed under a
[Creative Commons Attribution
- NonCommercial - NoDerivs 4.0.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)
"CC-BY-NC-ND"

ABSTRACT

Cities are being built based on the concepts of the comfortable, easy, and fast for the inhabitants. However, what is being constructed is promoting physical inactivity, and people are finding that what was being considered as convenient for daily life is, in fact, harmful to their physical health. The life of a city relies on the activity of the inhabitants who are the breathing engine of the built environment. Hence, the balance between physical activity and mental activity (e.g., office work) should be maintained because the more people are physically healthy, the more they are productive and the more the city experiences economic growth which all leads to satisfaction and happiness among the city's inhabitants. Therefore, a city that facilitates the reach to physical activity helps its inhabitants to overcome many physical health issues such as overweight and obesity, the causes of many physical complications that can affect mental health over time. This study points to the many components of a city that beats overweight issues and especially obesity. One of this healing city's aspects is the presence of green spaces and the green mobility that typically promotes walking and cycling instead of driving cars. Moreover, this city could foster the healing of prolonged stress and overall mental health related to human inactivity. Its analysis is based on in-depth interviews and results of previous empirical research in urban planning, psychology, and neuroarchitecture regarding people's perception of the visual environment they live in. The case study is the city of Beirut: in-depth interviews were conducted with a representative sample of Beirutis (people whose families come from the Beirut city and who were born in this city and are still living in it). These interviews helped measure these participants' satisfaction with the physical activities and social life that is accessible for all the inhabitants through inclusive urban planning (such as clean open spaces, parks, sidewalks, free or inexpensive public spaces, facilities for green transportation, etc.). The results of the interviews analysis were supported with past data demonstrating the increasing obesity issues in Lebanon and previous data in urban and psychological studies that expound the way the brain processes the urban spaces that increase satisfaction and the urban areas that the city should be offering to its inhabitants for positive health outcomes. The results uncovered the cycle of physical health, mental health, and social contacts which altogether affect the soul of a city where the aim is first and foremost the right to a healthy lifestyle.

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY URBAN AFFAIRS (2019), 3(2), 16-27.

[Doi:10.25034/ijcua.2018.4697](https://doi.org/10.25034/ijcua.2018.4697)

www.ijcua.com

Copyright © 2018 Journal Of Contemporary Urban Affairs. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Hove (as cited in [Mudedde, 2011](#)), noted:

The city is totally human. The steps in an apartment building are for human feet, the door knobs afford human hands, the bed is for a human back ..., the window is there for you,

*Corresponding Author:

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece

E Mail: maelhelou@arch.auth.gr