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Tracing Walkability Through Disruption Assemblages in Aleppo's (Post-)Conflict Historic Core

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Abstract

War disrupts the symbiotic interplay between bodies and built environments, unravelling familiar routines and destabilizing urban life. Walking, thus, becomes a precarious tiptoeing through danger and continual re-routing, a spatial practice of survival and resistance, asserting presence and agency amid violence. Consequently, urbicidal practices and persistent insecurities reconfigure walkability, undermining patterns of normality and a collective sense of safety. Yet, post-conflict reconstruction, particularly in historic cores, rarely considers former or newly formed footpaths, further misaligning future project agendas with context-specific recovery needs. This article develops the "disruption assemblages" approach, a conceptual framework that captures the dynamic interplay of material, temporal, and human elements in conflict-ridden contexts, to examine war's impact on walkability. Using Aleppo's historic core as a case study, it highlights the inseparable connection between the urban fabric's sensory-spatial characteristics and its social-temporal layering of familiarity and generational presence. Qualitative methods—including historical analysis, sensory ethnography, and walking as a research tool—reveal how Aleppo's historic core has metamorphosed into a landscape of complex survival practices, danger-evasion tactics, and everyday resistance. These findings illuminate the contested spatio-temporality and lived experiences of reclaiming rights to and within urban space, demonstrating how walkability is deterritorialized and reterritorialized in war-torn landscapes and during sporadic (post-)conflict reconstruction. Ultimately, this article argues for re-centring walkability in (post-)conflict healing and proposes the "attract a foot" approach, emphasizing the imperative of re-enabling walking as a sociable and human-centred recovery strategy.

Keywords

Aleppo; assemblages; disruption; post-conflict; reconstruction; urbicide; walkability

1. Introduction

In *Domicide* (2023), the Syrian scholar Ammar Azzouz weaves memory and testimonies to trace the remnants of his war-torn hometown, Homs, where the destruction of homes marked the collapse of an entire way of living. Walking through what remains, Azzouz captures the echoes of Rania, one of his interlocutors, and her footsteps in her effort to find her home:

> Rania, the single mother, walks between the ruins and sings whilst searching for her home. It is the hope and the dream that she will eventually be able to return home. The road to her home was blocked by debris, so she had to take another route. "There is no home," she weeps suddenly, pointing to a pile of rubble where her home once was. She stands in front of a collapsed building, determined to climb onto the ruins, weeping, pointing at her home, at her neighbourhood. The hopes of being able to return home are all gone. She squats on the ruins, weeping, and then stands up, saying, "Oh God, Oh God." (Azzouz, 2023, p. 65)

Rania's pain echoed that of many other returnees, even amid the long-awaited and unexpected new dawn: the fall of the Assad regime on December 8, 2024, after more than 13 years of conflict and opposition. While return-home journeys were prominently featured across various news platforms, they occurred against a backdrop of destruction that underscored a persistent and difficult-to-ignore reality: Neighbourhoods once teeming with life were now reduced to unrecognizable skeletal ruins, and homes that had sheltered generations had now turned into rubble-strewn wastelands. Rania's return journey, like those of millions of others, is a confrontation with loss—a reckoning with the heavy weight of displacement, violent conflict, and fractured dreams. These journeys are thus Janus-faced: a victorious steadfastness and inheritance of shattered homeland, absent of not only bricks and mortar of life-sustaining structures but the very everyday fabric of society. Once silenced as inescapable and perilous survival endeavours, their footsteps echo today amid ruins and map topographies of grief and defiance—a pilgrimage from and to a home that no longer exists yet persists as an anchor to return.

The evolved nature of modern warfare, where densely populated urban centres become primary stages of conflict, inflicts deliberate and far-reaching consequences on the physical and social fabrics of cities (Azzouz, 2023; Dainese & Staničić, 2022; Munawar & Symonds, 2022). In many (post-)war zones, from Syrian cities to Palestinian Gaza, Sudanese Khartoum, and Ukrainian Mariupol and Bakhmut, millions flee on foot to escape relentless shelling while infrastructure collapses under the weight of catastrophic conflicts and perpetuated violence. Whether planned or collateral, prolonged violence and continuous assaults crack the socio-material assemblages (McFarlane, 2011) that constitute the foundations facilitating urban life. Everyday patterns are disrupted by material, temporal, and human elements: (sandbag) barriers, checkpoints, sniper stations controlled spatio-temporally by opposing groups, and temporal restrictions that condition access. The full or partial destruction and inaccessibility of everyday life-sustaining services, and the weaponization of public spaces, streets, and rooftops put social interactions on spatio-temporal hold. Dwellers confront insecurities, abrupt losses of families and friends, bombing, shelling, and public executions. The "shock and awe" (Stanley, 2017) encroaches into everydayness, slowly recalibrating a new normalcy in prolonged conflict.

While urban scholars, planners, and designers have advocated walkability as a way to heal and safeguard urban and ecological life, it often falls short when applied to war-ridden cities. Conflict elements and scars

create an environment where walking, once a taken-for-granted embodied aspect of everyday urban life (Bryant et al., 2016; Careri, 2017; Gros, 2014), transforms into an unavoidable practice tied to temporary survival. It becomes essential for fleeing and seeking refuge, evading danger within death traps shaped by distorted material conditions, social relationships, and altered temporalities that disrupt dwellers' life-worlds. The case of Aleppo (Syria) is yet another example of how "walking" is stripped of its broader meanings and reduced to its most basic function: a mode of mobility. Aleppo's historic core, where walkability once played a foundational role in shaping the urban fabric and facilitating socio-economic and cultural exchanges preserved across generations, now exists in recent war memories as a perilous act of survival—a desperate trek to escape and evade snipers and bombshells. The disruption of walkability in such contexts remains largely uncharted in discourses tying urban and post-war early recovery and reconstructions, with vast knowledge gaps demanding urgent attention. This article aims to address these gaps and argues for the urgent need to research how meaningful walking experiences can be restored.

To anchor our argument, this article first builds on Dovey and Pafka's (2020) framework of walkability as "a set of capacities embedded in urban morphologies" through the interplay of key elements of the broader urban DMA (density, mix, and access), which they describe as "the heart of what makes great cities tick." It then employs the assemblage approach (DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) in analysing walkability metamorphosis, which is particularly powerful for understanding and underpinning the temporal and prolonged disruptions that occur both during and after active warfare. This article aims to understand how walkability is redefined and experienced in the context of violent (post-)conflict dynamics. It seeks to explore how urban spaces embody memories and aspirations, asserting that recognizing walking as a vital component is essential to understanding how conflict-affected communities and spaces endure, heal, and rebuild. By re-centring the voices of former and current dwellers, we advocate for the development of strategies that enhance walkability and foster a sense of belonging in war-torn landscapes.

To support this argument, this article proceeds in five sections. First, it reframes walkability as it emerges in various urban-related disciplines to underpin how urbicidal and conflict-related disruptions transform walkability as experienced and practised. Second, it presents the research methods employed for this analysis, including the authors' positionalities, sources, and fieldwork. Third, it examines walkability and disruptions in Aleppo's historic core by reviewing historical and empirical evidence, highlighting how walkability's metamorphosis evoked danger-evasion tactics amidst crises and reconstruction attempts, and altered prior sensory experiences. Fourth, we reflect by conceptualizing how disruption assemblages distort and alter walking practices. Finally, the article emphasizes the importance of recognizing walkability as a critical lens for developing policies and strategies that re-centre walkability in post-conflict healing and human-centred reconstruction processes.

2. Walkability and Conflict Disruptions

2.1. Walkability as Complex Interplay of Embodied Encounters, Memory Lanes, and Claims to the City

Walkability is a dynamic and evolving concept, with a multidisciplinary nature resisting a fixed definition, and continuously reshaped as researchers engage with its spatial, social, and temporal dimensions. At the heart of contemporary urban discourse, walkability connects urban design to pressing global concerns—public health, climate change, economic vitality, and social equity. Emerging from the symbiosis between bodies

and their material surroundings, walkability flourishes when city dwellers' needs—such as comfort, safety, connectivity, and visual engagement—converge during walking experiences (Delavar et al., 2025). Walking, therefore, transcends mobility. The act of "going for a walk," a mundane phrase that many of us use, surpasses a functional necessity, becoming a way to engage with, reflect upon, and appreciate one's surroundings—a form of social activity, contemplation, artistic expression, and even political action (Bornioli et al., 2018; Middleton, 2021; Rybråten et al., 2019; Solnit, 2014). Everyday encounters on foot intertwine walking with the very essence of urban experience: the interactions of passers-by "rubbing shoulders" (Blokland, 2020), lingering in a place, and street exchanges that imbue spaces with meanings that constitute familiarities and sense of place (Bornioli et al., 2018; Gatrell, 2013; Witte, 2023).

Enhancing and promoting walkability, therefore, became a foundational remedy for urban issues linked to violence, poverty, and criminality and a driver for reinstating safety, public trust, collective and individual well-being, as well as quality, attractiveness, vitality, and vibrancy of public spaces and urban life (Abdulla et al., 2017; Cysek-Pawlak & Pabich, 2021). Urban revitalization and recovery projects in cities around the world, such as Medellín (Colombia), Seoul (South Korea), Milan (Italy), Tripoli (Libya), among others, have proven how walkability is foundational to reclaiming space and places rights at eye level, by bringing (back) safety, and weaving (back) together diverse social practices, place attachments, and lived experiences (Bornioli et al., 2018; Gatrell, 2013). Moreover, many urban heritage preservation and reconstruction policies incorporate reclaiming historic cores for walking. Efforts to recover urban qualities eroded by modernization have gained urgency, where walkability becomes the apparatus to reverse the lingering effects of car-centric planning and sprawling infrastructure (Lo, 2009).

However, while some urban revitalization projects embrace walkability as a means of social and spatial reconnection, much of the current "car-free" activism remain focused primarily on the material infrastructure that enables walking—treating walkability merely as a mode of transit between point A to point B. Such technocratic approaches often overlook the micropolitics and social textures of pedestrian life—the everyday interactions that shape complex and subtle power relations in movements' rhythms and tempos through space. Middleton (2021) captures this interplay as the "pedestrian politics of (non)encounters," shedding light on "what actually happens between A and B as people move on foot" (Middleton, 2010, p. 591). Such oversight becomes evident when considering walkability in areas associated with (war) violence. Here, the disconnection between urban design principles and the lived realities of conflict-ridden spaces underscores a critical gap in our ability to foster healing and reconstruction.

2.2. Conflict Disruptions and the Inescapable Practice of Walking

A wealth of scholarly research and terms has clearly demonstrated the far-reaching and long-lasting consequences of war violence on urban fabrics and existing modes of inhabitation. Terms such as "domicide" (Azzouz, 2023; Porteous & Smith, 2001), "urbicide" (Abujidi, 2014; Coward, 2009; Graham, 2003), and "spaciocide" (Huss & Altehe, 2024), among others, serve to theoretically frame how violence alters habitats' systems and life-worlds instilled within them. The -cide suffix is used to explain the voids created in these systems by describing a state of intentional acts when urbicidal violence deliberately strives to kill, discipline, or deny the city to its inhabitants by targeting and then reordering the socio-material urban assemblage (Graham, 2008). Examples of urbicide enacted fully or partially are still present in human living memories and can be traced across the globe, from Dresden (1945, Germany) and Hiroshima (1945, Japan) to Quang Tri

(1968, Vietnam), Sarajevo (1993, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Aleppo (2014, Syria), Kharkiv (2023, Ukraine), and Gaza (2025, Palestine).

Satellite images and photos clearly document the acute physical deformation into uninhabitable rubble and stones. Nonetheless, urban landscapes in conflict or post-conflict contexts are not simply a static setting but a dynamic network of interacting elements, where multi-layered violence and conflict remnants slowly grow in the gaps of ruptured life-worlds of those who survived. During active conflicts, processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that compete to (re)assert dominance often materialize, paralysing movement and disrupting the everyday rhythms of urban life with anxieties and insecurities. Azzouz (2023) captures these processes vividly:

> Tanks enter neighbourhoods, snipers occupy buildings, and fighting groups knock down walls across shops and homes…dividing lines emerge to control people's mobility and separate communities from one another. Public spaces become contested territories over who has the right to access them….Conflict infrastructure like walls, fences, buffer zones, cement blocks, and checkpoints emerge within the built environment to segregate communities….As a result, different ways of living emerge, as if different cities exist within the same city, reshaping spaces through these divisions and fostering fear and suspicion among communities. (p. 8)

By violent processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, conflict infrastructures and actors not only fragment cities spatially; they also disrupt and alter temporalities of presence through movement restrictions and curfews, tainting sensory experiences with terror and uncertainties. Ristic's (2018) work on Sarajevo also illuminates how opposing groups weaponized the city's topography and urban morphology. Through strategic siege lines, lethal vantage points and asymmetric visibility, snipers reterritorialized dominance over movement, depriving residents of their most fundamental rights and freedoms and deterritorialized once-vibrant public areas into perilous zones. This violent distortion, subversion, and weaponization ultimately recast public space into a *landscape of fear*, escalating aggression, fracturing daily life, and deepening social divisions that persisted into postwar times (Ristic, 2018).

In conflict-ridden geographies, violence recalibrates the spatio-temporal rhythms of movement, which are "trapped in a complex and dynamic feedback-based relation with the forces operating within it" (Weizman, 2006, p. 8). Acute and prolonged disruptions, distortions, and destructions caused by urbicide significantly deform how walkability is experienced by different groups and force a reconfiguration of what constitutes the walkable, but also when. Daylight hours, typically associated with active confrontation, become fraught with danger due to the constant visibility of exchanging fire threats. Night hours, on the other hand, coincide with bombing and shelling, curfews and restrictions on movement.

Nonetheless, war not only "deprives people of their regular everyday routines and their basic rights to the city and its services" but also "liberates possibilities for new spatial organizational patterns beyond the limits imposed by any authority" (Kittana & De Meulder, 2019). Spatial knowledge of safe routes becomes, therefore, a fundamental danger-evasion tactic of survival, deepening the reliance on informal networks for spatio-temporal recognition of when to move and when to stay. These tactics coincide with spatially reconfigured elements of underground tunnels and basements as safe havens. What further dictates these danger-evasion tactics' patterns and tempos is attending to daily needs, forcing residents to adapt to

irregular and unpredictable schedules of availability. The case of Sarajevo provides, again, a stark example of how the 1992–1996 siege altered city dwellers' walkability patterns:

> Threats and attacks brought forth new uses of public spaces and new ways of moving through them. Sarajevans learned to complete tasks…as quickly as possible. The practice of walking through the city was replaced by running over bridges, through squares, and across crossroads, since the widest intersections…were often the most exposed to the gaze of the enemy and were therefore continually attacked….Bridges that once connected people, communities, and neighbourhoods now exposed Sarajevans to the gaze of the sniper. (Mandić, 2019, p. 89)

Walkability, therefore, is no longer just about streets and sidewalks but about creatively utilizing any available space for safe and strategic footpaths temporally deterritorialized and reterritorialized to minimize exposure to danger with hurried dashes across open areas (Pilav, 2012; see Figures 1a and 1b). Kittana and De Meulder (2019) underscore similar spatio-temporal complexities and reconfigurations in Palestinian Nablus (see Figure 1c). They map how the coexistence of two conflicting spatial matrixes of control and *sumoud* (steadfastness) manifests spatially and temporally as forms of attack and rescue routes without directly intersecting.

Figure 1. Disrupted walkability during conflict: (a) Detail of Sarajevo Survival Map 1992–1996; (b) "Protected pedestrian paths during the war," photograph by Miguel Ruiz; (c) a rescue path in Nablus's historic core, indicated in blue. Sources: (a) FAMA Collection (1996); (b) Pilav (2015); (c) Kittana and De Meulder (2019).

2.3. Post-War Walkability

War-wounded cities do rise from the rubble, yet they rarely heal from such disruptions unscarred. Between distortion and triggers, healing processes linger in assemblages of war remnants. Traces of the past and spatio-material voids of loss and displacement impede residents' ability to familiarize themselves with and reclaim a sense of place and normalcy (Czarnecki & Chodorowski, 2021; Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). In post-war contexts, the erosion of walkability is frequently treated as collateral damage sidelined by violence and a safekeeping measure reshaping urban realities. Post-war reconstruction of Beirut's historic district in the early 2000s created what Nagel (2002) terms a "forgetful landscape," neglecting the war-induced disruptions of the original socio-spatial fabric. The mirage of contemporary luxury, a pedestrian-friendly urban centre that appears at once vibrant and disconnected from (post-)war realities, ultimately rendered many inhabitants "out of place" (Azzouz, 2023).

In conditions of civil conflicts, damages root deeper and differ proportionally based on the power dynamics between opposing parties on the ground, resulting in fragmented and divided cities with severely separated communities. Whether conflict infrastructures disappear or not, instability, insecurity, and mistrust often persist long after the formal end of hostilities, hindering healing, delaying reconstruction and recovery efforts, and even reinforcing ruptures. In post-war Sarajevo, Ristic (2015) highlights how "intangible borders" ingrained in residents' minds amplify how mental barriers of division endure despite urban spaces' apparent permeability. The deformation of what walkability once allowed of everyday familiarization practices fostering urban bonds further deepens (imposed) social fragmentation. While many physical barricades decayed, "bottom-up instruments of spatial micro-politics of division" of intervened street names, colours, and scripts serve as territorializing mechanisms, solidifying identities while rendering others invisible (Ristic, 2015). The Peace Wall in Belfast (Northern Ireland) and the Bridge on the River Ibar in Mitrovica (Kosovo) serve as examples of how conflict-related assemblages symbolically reinforce the post-war division between communities (Bátora et al., 2021; Boal, 2002) and how face-to-face street encounters are spatially demarcated and reconfigured. With prolonged separation, everyday familiarities become spatially enclaved, where unmatched war experiences and narratives remain uncommunicated and slowly erode any possibility of future healing.

3. Note on Assemblage Approach, Case Study, Positionalities, and Research Methods

This article situates walkability as a critical multi-dimensional lens to examine how urbicidal practices and conflict infrastructures disrupt and violate everyday "rights to encounter" (Middleton, 2021) that sustain the humanity of city dwellers as social beings who walk (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). It builds on the assemblage approach developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and DeLanda (2006), which reconceptualizes reality as a fluid constellation of human and non-human actors, discourses, and materialities, perpetually in flux through processes of deterritorialization (disintegration of established orders) and reterritorialization (reconfiguration into new formations), which provides a potent lens for examining the non-linear, contested trajectories of cities—particularly those navigating the aftermath of violence. Therefore, the assemblage approach serves to examine how walkability metamorphosizes in conflict-ridden cities, offering a fertile analytical framework for understanding how heterogeneous elements—materialities, temporalities, socio-cultural practices, human contested agencies, and conflict legacies—trigger processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization to produce (or inhibit) walkable spaces.

Our case study is Aleppo's historic core, one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited urban centres and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985. Trapped in a prolonged crisis, Aleppo and its (contemporary) history highlight walkability's profound role in generationally co-constructing its historic core and how violent (post-)conflict dynamics have altered how walkability is practised and perceived. The selection of this case is by no means an accident. Both authors are displaced Syrians carrying personal histories and attachments with Aleppo, yet they have different previous engagements with walking the site. The researchers' positionality provided a critical reflexive dialogue, as each author had different inherent knowledge about the case study. Moreover, the article draws on various primary and secondary resources (maps, reports, literature, images) underpinning an analysis of pre-, during, and post-conflict walkability disruptions and metamorphosis. This data collection began in the context of a collaboration with young Syrian architects during a joint project by Brandenburg University of Technology (BTU) in Cottbus and the American University of Beirut in November 2021 (BTU, n.d.). This experience allowed for the initial mapping

of the young Syrian architects' lived experiences and memories embedded within Aleppo's historic core (see Salahieh et al., 2024, for insights derived from this collaboration). Empirically grounding the analysis, researchers employed a sensory ethnographic approach, centring "walking the site" as a fundamental research tool for its "productive ways to address broader questions surrounding power, scale, mobility, embodiment, and knowledge production" (Mason et al., 2023, p. 1). Exploratory slow walks in 2021–2022, involving firsthand encounters with the material and sensory transformations brought by conflict, illuminated insights into how conflict alters ordinary movements through a city and how individuals attempt to re-establish normalcy. Immersing the body in the fieldwork enabled encounters that evolved into informal hangouts, which provided valuable insights into the living experiences within contested spatio-temporality of pre-, during, and post-conflict realities.

In addition, building on previous research (dataset M, interviews collected by Asaaed, 2023, and by Salahieh et al., 2024) and ongoing investigation (dataset D, comprising follow-up interviews conducted remotely between 2024–2025), 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted on-site (2022) and online (2022–2025) with current and former Aleppo dwellers, spanning diverse ages, genders, and ethnic and religious backgrounds. Interviewees were selected through a snowball sampling approach, building trust amid an atmosphere of fear and scepticism. For anonymity protection, each interviewee was assigned a unique number and coded initials (M and D), indicating the dataset they belonged to and the timeframe of the interviews. These conversations revealed how the conflict reshaped daily embodied experiences, altering physical and emotional landscapes of safety, familiarity, and change.

4. Walkability in the Historic Core of Aleppo Between Past and Present

4.1. Pre-War Conditions

The city of Aleppo, once an active commercial node on the Silk Road, imprinted by morphological characteristics of historic Arab-Islamic cities, has survived and flourished as an urban centre for centuries. Its historic core's interconnected layout, crafted over generations, was not an incidental feature but a structured mechanism, balancing density, ethnic and religious diversity, and socio-economic activities. This arrangement is evident in the distribution of key landmarks, such as the Citadel, the Great Umayyad Mosque, the Medina Souq, and the Al-Jdeideh quarter, among others, serving as public hubs of socio-cultural and economic significance for the entire city. What constituted thresholds of access and modes of social interactions are the spatio-temporal rights to use and occupy, based on organizational socio-spatial-governance hierarchies materialized in series of doors, walls, and gates from the housing unit to the city as a whole (see Akbar, 1988). Distinct neighbourhoods, each with its own local markets and gathering spaces, developed specialized and homogeneous economic foundations intertwined with generationally maintained shared professions such as milling, lime production, brick making, dyeing, tanning, coppersmithing, and blacksmithing. The souqs (marketplaces), and khans (caravanserais or commercial inns) within these areas were named directly after these dominant professions (Akbar, 1988). British historian Mansel (2016) describes the breadth of these souqs:

> By 1600, there were fifty-three khans and fifty-six souqs in Aleppo, stretching over twelve kilometers. The souqs of the rope-makers, saddlers, tanners, and spice-merchants formed a labyrinth of commerce where even a blind man could navigate by scent alone. (Mansel, 2016, p. 132)

Such concentration of high-skilled craftsmanship in adjacent spaces led to the emergence of souqs from producer to consumer and necessitated the enhancement of on-foot accessibility. These markets grew under Ottoman rule (1516–1918), leveraging opportunities afforded by international trade (Watenpaugh, 2004). This growth necessitated an environment that enabled complex negotiations to unfold, supported sustained trade exchanges, continuous commercial activity, and extended stays. Therefore, accommodating these needs meant enhancing spatial organization through walkable souq markets, the presence and visibility of specific mosques, caravanserais, and endowment structures from the pedestrian level (Watenpaugh, 2004):

> The integration of caravanserais within the market ensured that traders, pilgrims, and travellers could move through the city on foot, reinforcing Aleppo's identity as a walkable, merchant-driven metropolis. (Eldem et al., 2005, p. 75)

These structures and urban elements facilitated the deliberate distribution and density of commercial activities and goods throughout the urban fabric (Starkey, 2012). Walkability, thus, was not only woven into the city's socio-spatial fabric but was essential for it to be continuously inhabited and vivid.

Between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries, Aleppo's historic core witnessed two major challenges: successive migratory waves into the city and the introduction of modern infrastructure and planning. These changes led to new "modern" neighbourhoods emerging on the historic core's edges, with efforts to connect them to its centre. Moreover, emphasizing automobile traffic and modern urban approaches resulted in the destruction of parts of the historic core to make way for avenues and modern high-rise buildings (Lafi, 2017). These transformations disrupted "the traditional urban and social structures" (Starkey, 2012) with subsequent economic implications for trade within the historic core. However, by the 1970s, the prevailing modernist destructive master plans provoked Syrian architects and conservationists to take action to value the historic core as a national heritage (Lafi, 2017; Starkey, 2012). Their advocacy and pursuit led to the 1985 UNESCO recognition, which in turn spawned the 1998 Development Plan. This plan provided a flexible framework for revitalizing the historic core, mainly aimed at enhancing living conditions while preserving its fabric beyond monument restoration. Nonetheless, unfulfilled promises, gentrification, overlooked urban decay, and traffic congestion in the historic core (Zeido, 2023) led to the 1998 Development Plan's reformulation into a structured framework by the 2000s. By advancing revitalization, management, and conservation while promoting car-free walkability, several targeted areas, such as the Al-Jdeideh quarter, a home for various historic religious monuments, evolved into vibrant hubs encompassing a diverse range of tourist, cultural, and socio-economic walkable activities (Salahieh et al., 2024).

4.2. The Battle of Aleppo (2012–2016)

The revitalization flourishment ended as instabilities arising in 2011 reached Aleppo in 2012, to become a war that lasted for four years. The historic core, viewed as a symbolic territory over which control was bitterly fought, became a battlefield, resulting in significant destruction of its fabric. During the "Battle of Aleppo" years, urbicidal practices and acute violence ripped apart the intricate urban fabric, leaving substantial voids in the historic landmarks and everyday spaces. Satellite imagery reveals how entire commercial districts were flattened, leaving gaps in the once-cohesive pedestrian network (Kurgan, 2017). The historic core was left

in ruins: Around 30% destroyed and 60% severely damaged ("UNESCO reports on extensive damage," 2017; see Figure 2).

Between 2012–2016, conflict lines divided Aleppo into two parts: the eastern side, including the historic core, controlled by armed opposition forces, and the western side, controlled by Assad's troops. Conflict lines were in constant flux, continuously deterritorializing and reterritorializing the historic core through a conflict infrastructure of dense networks of imposed barricades and checkpoints that subverted everyday elements (such as public buses and curtains) into markers dividing the zones of control of each side:

> Walking became a nightmare. We avoided main roads because of the shelling, taking back alleys instead. Some days, stepping outside just to fetch water or bread felt like an adventure. Once, we had to reach my grandfather's house near Bab al-Nasr. We encountered a security checkpoint [and then heard] a sudden explosion nearby. The ground was covered in rubble, and the wailing of ambulance sirens never stopped. It felt as if the city itself was weeping. (Interview, 2025, D3)

Conflict infrastructure was interlaced with the (often concealed) presence of human actors, including snipers, opposing troops, and militia groups, whose movements and tactics dramatically deterritorialized and

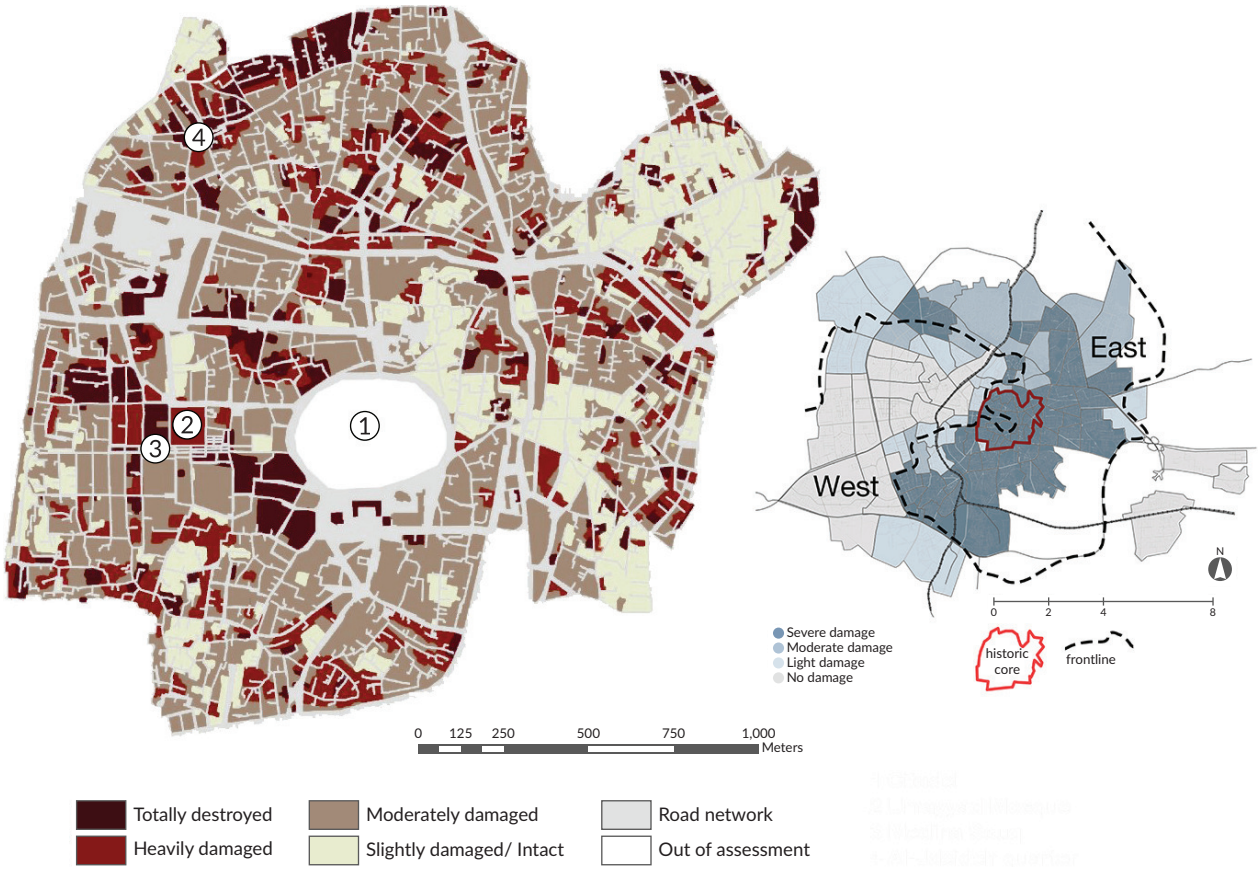

Figure 2. Severe conflict damage in Aleppo's historic core due to frontline positioning: (left) Damage assessment map of Aleppo's historic core (1- Citadel; 2- Umayyad Mosque; 3- Medina Souq; 4- AlJdeideh); (right) Map of Aleppo's dividing frontline crossing through the historic core during peak conflict. Sources: (left) Affaki (2021); (right) adapted from UrbAN-S (2019).

sabotaged the urban fabric. Traces of holes in various sizes, once crafted for shooting or troop mobility, still mark walls of historic buildings. Furthermore, unpredictable periods of assault and halt ranging from temporal restrictions, curfews, and the final siege enforced significant spatio-temporal disruptions of everyday normalcy. The long periods of inaccessibility to the historic core caused severe discontinuities. For example, the Al-Jdeideh quarter was at the front line during armed confrontations, and the massive destruction of religious monuments forced an extended period of spiritual discontinuity (Salahieh et al., 2024). Similarly, the inaccessibility to the Medina Souqs and subsequent destruction led merchants and shops to "temporally" relocate outside the historic core (Knudsen & Tobin, 2024), which was not just an economic catastrophe (Bishara, 2022) but a rupture in the city's pedestrian and social life. These discontinuities and ruptures not only immobilized the deeply embedded socio-cultural and economic practices maintained over generations but also inflicted lasting scars on the collective meanings and memories (Affaki, 2021; Munawar & Symonds, 2022), once slowly crafted and spatially anchored.

Like Nablus and Sarajevo, navigating Aleppo's historic core necessitated danger-evasion tactics, which in turn required careful mental mapping and tuning a heightened sense to the unpredictability of threat. These tactics recognized spatio-temporal disruptions—identifying which streets and areas to avoid—and produced reconfigured routes to safer, necessary destinations. Neighbourhoods had their own community patrols to instil protection and safety. While their presence guided residents, it equally reminded their necessity to guard. Destruction remnants, empty structures, and mounds of rubble became material compositions that served intermittently as safe footpaths and escape routes within the distorted familiarities. These tactics, therefore, became foundational for the reterritorialization of "pockets of survival" within the deterritorialized urban fabric and gave "a reassuring (illusion) of a vital non-passive state of [war-affected] society" (Dayoub, 2015, p. 79).

By the end of 2016, Assad's troops carried out an intense military offensive that ended with them taking control of the city and its old core, celebrated as a "victory against terrorism" ("'We waited for this day for five years,'" 2016). The estimated human loss was a death toll of 31,000, hundreds of thousands forcibly displaced, and others suffering dire living situations.

4.3. Stagnant Restoration

Despite the severe damage from the conflict, the urban layout of Aleppo's historic core, with its main paths connecting the city gates to the central monuments and the Citadel, as well as its quarter and neighbourhood structures, remains largely intact (Nagler et al., 2019). To architectural experts, the dramatic destruction of significant architecture is met with the optimism of the standing walls and preserved foundations and ground plans. The severely burnt vaults of the Souq, the entirely collapsed historic houses, schools, baths, and public buildings will require careful architectural reconstruction (Nagler et al., 2019). Signs of reconstruction efforts started to emerge in the historic core in 2017. Most streets and alleys have been cleared of rubble, allowing pedestrian and automobile movements to resume through the historic core (see Figure 3).

Nonetheless, the decision of where and what to revitalize reflects political statements of both private (international and local) actors and the Assad government's allusion to a "post-conflict" phase and a restored sense of normalcy. Disparities of revitalizing efforts are evident in the reconstruction of the city's iconic landmarks and religious and commercial centres, such as the renowned Medina Souqs. The Al-Jdeideh

Figure 3. Walkability (re)activation in Aleppo's historic core in 2017: (a) Families navigating between rubble; (b) a young couple taking a walk near the Citadel; (c) military men raising the flag to signal victory in front of the Citadel; (d) stacked buses as background shields while people repopulate the streets once again. Source: "Halep'in doğusu 'harap'" (2017).

quarter, for instance, has witnessed a complete reconstruction of all its cathedrals and churches, yet the revival of walkability has remained limited and mostly confined to its eastern edge. Furthermore, Al-Hatab Square—once a massive crater bordered by partially collapsed structures due to years of war—was levelled and refurbished in 2022. Its restoration served Assad's victory narrative by facilitating space for pop-up activities, yet they only marked the temporal activation of life that stopped along the torn buildings' edges. The sporadic nature of these physical reconstruction efforts re-enables walkability, which once moulded the city's fabric, albeit in a fragmented manner (see Figure 4):

> Walking through the city now feels like visiting an abandoned museum. Some places have been rebuilt, but the soul of the city has changed. The markets have lost their crowds, and some shops have closed forever. Even the scent of roasted coffee doesn't feel the same anymore. (Interview, 2025, D3)

Though these emblematic spaces have been physically rebuilt and opened to the public once more, they now stand devoid of the vibrant urban life and activity that once animated them. Various obstacles hinder the possibilities of returning, reconstructing, and reviving the former familiar urban life, i.e., constant looting, economic degradation, severely damaged infrastructure, lack of private funds, the negligence of the Assad government, and the lengthy bureaucratic procedures of conservation policies (Asaaed, 2023; Mahfouz, 2021; Sabri et al., 2023). Therefore, the stark disconnection between restoration ambitions, post-war realities, and the absence of human presence highlights how physical reconstruction alone cannot recapture the intricate, symbiotic interplay between the urban environment, present urgent needs, and the lived experiences of the city's inhabitants.

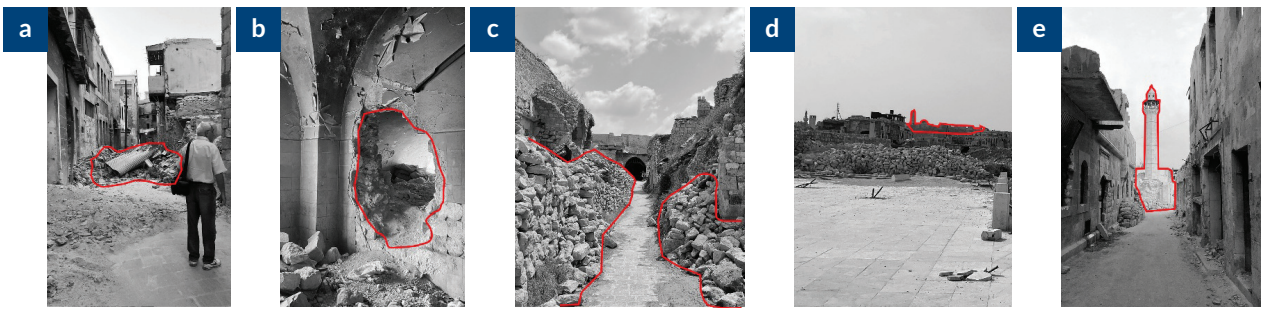

Figure 4. (Post-)conflict material disruptions of walkability in the historic core of Aleppo in 2022: (a) Inaccessibility due to rubble; (b) traces of militia violence; (c) mounds of rubble; (d) voids of collapsed buildings forming new vistas; (e) uneven and prioritized reconstructions.

5. Between Rubble and Stones: Walkability in the Remnants of Conflict

Navigating the everyday within (post-)war remnants carries its heavy weight. While much conflict infrastructure and many opposing groups (partially) disappear, their latent effects continue to tweak mobility patterns. Spatio-temporal and socio-economic dynamics are in constant flux, adapting to the slow reawakening and recovery of (pre-)war everyday landscapes. Such adaptions enable on-foot navigation between post-war changes (re-)establishing and expanding (former) pockets of survival:

> Nothing improved after the war….Life kept getting worse—economically, socially, in terms of healthcare….The only difference is that the shelling stopped, but people even started wishing for the war to return because at least back then, they could afford to live. (Interview, 2025, D4)

Post-war realities and economic hardship have impacted people and places unequally. The severe economic crisis—exacerbated by international sanctions, restrictions, and geopolitical instabilities—has hindered the basic recovery of infrastructure, particularly systems reliant on scarce electricity and fuel. What were once affordable mobility means, such as (micro)buses and taxis, have become increasingly inaccessible due to skyrocketing prices, high demand, overcrowding, and insufficient supply. These scarce transport options now operate within damaged route networks, further complicating movement across the city's remnants. Consequently, walking becomes inescapable, dictated by physical barriers of rubble and debris, persistent insecurities, and limited access to the scarce everyday services of grocery stores, schools, and medical services. As a result, spatial proximity, safety, and economic affordability condition the everyday decisions and (on-foot) navigation:

> Walking isn't a luxury anymore, especially when you are forced to walk daily for transportation purposes. It becomes exhausting to walk. If it's really nice weather in the evening, it gets you excited to go for a walk around your neighbourhood where it's safe and close. (Interview, 2024, D2)

Beyond the visible challenges of navigating the historic core during the day, another layer of spatial inequality emerges at night. Most streets are poorly lit or entirely dark, creating a sense of insecurity that discourages people lingering or moving freely after dark. In effect, the absence of lighting serves as a silent cue to leave the area, reinforcing exclusion and limiting nighttime social life. Certain cultural monuments are conspicuously well-lit, reinforcing their "importance" in stark contrast to barely lit public streets (see Figure 5). The contrast in illumination reveals economic disparities: Shops that remain open and can afford electricity stand out, while others are left in darkness. In some areas, the absence of lighting conditions creates a more precarious, necessity-driven pattern of walking, particularly for those who must attend to early morning work responsibilities. Therefore, the distribution of lighting in the historic core is not just a matter of infrastructure—it reflects reterritorialized deeper inequalities and power structures within the city:

> In 2019, my friend told me to go together to Al-Jdeideh to buy wool for knitting like we used to do. We took a cab to Telal Street; it was as lively as before. As we walked further into the quarter, the walls turned black. I started getting scared. I wanted to get out. I asked my friend, "Where are you going? Why did you bring me here!" Then we found the alley leading to Souq El Souf [the wool market]. It wasn't as destroyed as the rest of the area. It wasn't as dark and scary. But all the shops were closed. Only one man had his place open, but all his stuff was in boxes. We didn't buy anything; we left quickly. (Interview, 2024, D1)

Urban sensory experiences, once integral to the collective memory of walking and imbuing the historic core with familiarity, have been irrevocably distorted by (post-)conflict disruptions. Interviewees recalled both pleasant and unpleasant sensory memories. While some streets in the historic core are now physically walkable, the loss of local figures and the consequent defamiliarization are underscored by the absence of sensory cues. For instance, in the Al-Jdeideh quarter, the smell of the hot fava beans from Abou Abdo—which once guided and lured passers-by—has been replaced by the scent of polished stones and dust from rubble. Neither "the rhythmic chants of merchants selling baby-finger-size cucumbers, red tomatoes, mint of lust, and green salad" (Interview, 2022, M1) nor "the smell of lemon trees and the sounds of birds and the noise of air conditioning" (Interview, 2022, M2), which once signalled vibrant street life, can now be found. Meanwhile, the sounds emanating from private reconstruction efforts and children playing on the renovated square attest to a sense of inevitable return to everydayness as the city awaits full recovery (see Figure 5):

> Life [in the historic core] was vibrant, full of movement and beauty. The narrow streets were steeped in history, and the markets—like Souq al-Attarin and Souq al-Saboun—were filled with the scents of laurel, thyme, and spices. I worked in a fabric shop with my father, near Souq al-Atmeh. I used to walk toward the Umayyad Mosque and through historic core of Aleppo….My favourite path was from Bab al-Faraj to Souq al-Manadhra, passing by the copper shops where artisans crafted masterpieces using traditional techniques….Some corners still feel familiar, like parts of the citadel, but for the most part, it feels like history itself has been wounded here. I miss the bustling voices of merchants, the aroma of incense in Khan al-Wazir…and the "Sheikh Najib" café, where we used to listen to the stories of the elderly. (Interview, 2025, D3)

The conflict's embedded consequences in Aleppo's historic core have not only deterritorialized its physical and sensory landscape but also disrupted generationally interwoven socio-cultural networks that once underpinned everyday life. The enduring physical remnants of pre-war structures serve as powerful mnemonic triggers, evoking vivid recollections of the past and a deep longing for the familiar. As a result, walking in the historic core now elicits profound feelings of nostalgia and disorientation as residents who remained grapple to confront the reality that places they once knew can never be entirely recaptured. Voids left behind by the absence of (multi-generational) dwellers, coupled with the prolonged periods of inaccessibility to the historic core, have radically altered socio-urban dynamics and perpetuated long-term disruptions to spatially embedded social networks. Prolonged economic discontinuity and long-family-line merchants' displacements have further eroded familiarities and embodied practices that once constituted and shaped walkability patterns. This erosion, tied to voids of generational presence, has engendered a sense of estrangement tied to the loss of both comfort and safety provided by traditional "eyes on the street." This estrangement has been exacerbated by the new (displaced) occupants who have filled vacant and (partially) inhabitable structures. According to interviews, unlike former dwellers, these new occupants lack the socio-cultural knowledge and social norms of Aleppian society that were once ingrained spatially in the historic core (Salahieh et al., 2024). Consequently, these prolonged disruptions—marked by unfamiliar faces and altered activities—further deepen a profound sense of irrevocable loss.

Figure 5. (Post-)conflict sensory walkability in the historic core of Aleppo in 2022: (a) Breadsticks bakery reactivating sensory urban life amidst the heavily destroyed Al-Jdeideh quarter; (b) newly reconstructed souq empty of life; (c) children playing on a newly renovated square in Al-Jdeideh; (d) streets at night lit only by moving cars; (e) selected night lights illuminating monuments; (f) urban life between ruins, selectively reconstructed, and resilient residents in Al-Jdeideh.

6. Re-Centring Walkability's Significance in Conflict-Ridden Cities

The experiences of walkability in conflict-ridden cities and their post-war realities are inherently intertwined with the material, temporal, and human elements that constitute and shape them. In conflict-ridden cities, pre-war everyday normalcy is continuously distorted and reconfigured by urbicidal practices, pervasive threats, remnants of violence, and contested human agencies. Consequently, walking—often taken for granted—becomes an inescapable survival practice shaped by danger-evasion tactics. Similar to Nablus and Sarajevo, the case of Aleppo's historic core, which remains in ruins today, underscores how the walkability experiences that once (re)shaped its urban fabric and the life-worlds embedded within it remain significant in reclaiming human agency, as well as the right to memory and life, amidst disruptions and alterations conditioned by armed conflict and its aftermath. To re-centre walkability's significance in conflict-ridden cities, this article identifies two dimensions: first, what disrupts and alters walkability, conceptualized as disruption assemblages, and second, the policies and strategies through which post-war reconstruction efforts can acknowledge, address, and mitigate these disruptions.

6.1. Disruption Assemblages

Disruption assemblages refer to the intertwined configurations of material, temporal, and human elements that emerge in conflict or post-conflict contexts and disrupt urban lives within them. These assemblages capture how everyday practices—such as walking through a city—are transformed into acts of survival within landscapes marked by disruption. The use of assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) in analysing armed conflicts and violent wars has been instrumental in understanding and underpinning the temporal and prolonged disruptions that occur both during and after active warfare (Ristic, 2018). In conflict settings, conflict infrastructure and destruction remnants are not isolated entities; rather, they interact with temporal disruptions and are actively mediated by human agency and adaptive behaviours. This interlaced

network of elements creates a fluid, emergent assemblage in which urban spaces are constantly deterritorialized and reterritorialized, both during active hostilities and in the protracted aftermath of conflict. While some elements of these assemblages survive and scar, others vanish, leaving disruptive traces that remain. These elements are as follows.

6.1.1. Materially Disruptive Elements

Materially disruptive elements encompass the spatial emergence and persistence of a network of conflict infrastructure, destruction remnants, and scattered (incomplete) reconstruction projects. In active assaults, these elements deterritorialize and reterritorialize thresholds of accessibility and zones of control. They include improvised temporary dividers (barricades, checkpoints, walls, sandbags, tanks), repurposed everyday elements (buses, curtains, doors, furniture), and shattered remnants of collapsing buildings, debris, and inaccessible roads. These elements signal (partially) unsafe zones, which, in turn, permits the reconfiguration of footpaths, shields, and survival pockets in times of active assault. Beyond these barriers, the urban fabric itself becomes a disruptive tool as military actions subvert and weaponize space. Open areas and major routes are targeted to instil fear, while walls are breached and repurposed, reshaping access and security. After the active conflict ends, while some of these materialities decay, others survive and endure, leaving visible scars that hinder human presence, deepen a sense of insecurity, and trigger traumatic memories of loss and death.

6.1.2. Temporally Disruptive Elements

Temporal disruptions are closely tied to the material ones and underpin various inaccessibility durations: a few hours, a whole night, or even longer periods of days and months. These elements include assault-halt temporalities (on-the-ground confrontation, shelling, airstrikes) and temporal restrictions of movement (curfews, sieges, surveillance). These disruptions also reintroduce a new rhythm of everyday activities, not only in terms of duration within a geographical scope but also tempos of (de-)acceleration of how fast they should be executed. Walking becomes a survival practice of danger-evasion tactics (de-)activated by the altered materialities and human presence. For instance, in a sniper-controlled area, walking transforms into running in exposed spaces, hiding behind walls or cars, and quietly walking within rubble. Temporal disruptions have prolonged, paralysing impacts on essential services, economic activities, and everyday social interactions, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and instability.

6.1.3. Human Disruptive Elements

Both material and temporal disruptions are enacted and mediated through the presence and absence of contested human agency. The human element involves troops, snipers, security groups, community surveillance and protection units, dwellers, neighbourhood figures, and displaced groups. The (concealed) presence of opposing armed actors creates an atmosphere of heightened tension, a constant threat of violence and insecurity and a deepened sense of unfamiliarity, while the voluntary presence of some civilian units reinstates a sense of temporal safety within survival pockets. Absence, on the other hand, signals an imminent danger, where the voids created by displacement and death evacuate spaces from their social control and vibrancy, converting spaces into (un)predictable death traps and landscapes of loss.

6.2. "Attracting a Foot" as a Post-War Reconstruction Strategy

Drawing on assemblage theory's emphasis on the complex interplay between the material manifestations, temporal layering, and contested human agency, re-anchoring walkability within post-conflict reconstruction strategies requires a shift in perspective: moving beyond Western-centric discourses of "car-free" zones to cultivate a holistic, human-centric layered approach. This approach challenges experts to view walkability not as a technical endeavour but as a living assemblage—one that evolves through the interplay of memory, materiality, and collective action. Walking, therefore, allows the mapping of how disruption assemblages continue to influence urban spaces after active hostilities cease, which can, in turn, inform the development of context-sensitive strategies that address these disruptions through both post-war early recovery and reconstruction strategies:

> Maybe one day, Aleppo will shine like a jewel again…but the road is long. Aleppo is not just stone; it is the memory of those who lived in it. Every step in its streets was a story…and now, we are trying to write a new chapter. (Interview, 2025, D3)

In the Aleppien dialect, numerous proverbs interconnect concepts of movement, social familiarity, cultural rituals, and economic prosperity, all of which originate from historical circumstances that have ensured their persistence. In the context of reconstituting walkability to revitalize lived urban spaces in post-war reconstruction, three proverbs are particularly salient: "attracting a foot," "movement is a blessing," and "let their feet drive them." These expressions exemplify a sustained practice of on-foot mobility that is believed, through repetition, to foster trust-based social relationships and to secure a prolonged, spatially anchored continuity within the community. These proverbs, as they resonate in contemporary Aleppo, encapsulate a multifaceted ethos of post-war revitalization, calling for a re-anchoring of individuals within spaces and memories that meld the past, present, and future. In response, we propose an "attracting a foot" approach—one that re-centres walkability as a critical lens for early recovery and reconstruction strategies in post-conflict contexts. This critical lens not only foregrounds the tangible act of walking as a means of reclaiming and reimagining urban life but also underscores the importance of acknowledging conflict legacies and reconnecting communities to their historical and spatial narratives.

Historic urban cores, like in Aleppo, are material palimpsests of layered temporalities and sociabilities, where historically crafted urban fabrics, war scars, and post-war reconstruction efforts interlace. Everyday life, prolonged human presence, and community-led interventions that (re)emerge within Aleppo's historic core are evident signs of urgent needs, latent opportunities, and an inescapable yearning to return, which are foundational to triggering a co-production calling for renewed collective confidence in public life. Therefore, these signs necessitate policies that embrace emergent interactions, where "movement is a blessing," to collaboratively work with former dwellers and new occupants' assemblies in mapping (new) safe routes, forgotten alleyways, and damaged pathways. This mapping of what remained not only resists universalist templates and allows repairs of physical connectivity but also embraces contextual fluidity that evolves with contemporary needs and social material dynamics. Interventions may include participatory mapping, (digital) memories crowdsourced from displaced dwellers, removing debris, repairing cobblestones, and installing context-sensitive lighting. By engaging with local narratives, oral histories, and everyday footpaths that emerged amid conflict, policymakers can "attract a foot" and ensure that walkability interventions align with community realities rather than reproduce systemic exclusions.

Furthermore, incorporating similar policies of repurposing the scarred landscapes beyond the participatory socio-material repair is essential to engage reflexively with loss, trauma, and steadfastness, and foster critical dialogue between erasure and reconstruction. Such interventions deterritorialize trauma by repurposing its material remnants while reterritorializing renewed meanings of resilience. As the interviews revealed, walking scarred landscapes enables survival, lingering to the past, anchoring in the present, acknowledging and confronting loss and difference, and aspiring for a better future, all essential for sustained recovery. Walking the scars also "attracts a foot." It necessitates policies focused on developing and designating memorial corridors and time-stacked pedestrian circuits that bridge the scars, memorialize trauma, and integrate remembrances into daily foot pathways. Interventions may include exposing excavated war remnants (e.g., bullet casings, hidden bunkers) along pedestrian routes, installing signage in specific styles and materials, and incorporating lighting, and soundscapes. Such methods of contorting the past ensure that these lived traces do not remain marginalized.

Moreover, in conflict-ridden cities, where long-standing and cumulative conflict disruptions slowly ingrain the living collective memory, healing requires more than physical restoration and urban life (re)activation. At times of acute crisis, footpaths transform; they become vital arteries for basic survival, scarred by traumatic events, forging ephemeral socio-urban dynamics that endure well after the conflict subsides. By respecting and discussing the footprints of conflict, policymakers can foster reconciliation that intertwines material rebuilding with the slower, more fragile process of social and psychological recovery. When articulated through "let their feet drive them" and with a focus on slowness—on careful observation, community participation, and iterative design—walkability becomes a vehicle for reasserting human connections, acknowledging painful histories, and ultimately charting more inclusive, resilient futures.

7. Conclusion

This article has examined how conflict disrupts and transforms walkability in urban environments, using Aleppo's historic core as a critical case study. Through the lens of assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), we have demonstrated how disruption assemblages—comprising material, temporal, and human elements—fundamentally alter the practice and perception of walking in conflict-ridden cities. The analysis reveals that walkability in conflict zones metamorphoses from a taken-for-granted aspect of urban practices into complex survival practices and danger-evasion tactics, at the same time in constant negotiation with disruption assemblages, thus serving as a form of resistance and place-making in post-conflict contexts.

The case of Aleppo's historic core illustrates how war not only destroys physical infrastructure but also disrupts and ruptures the intricate socio-economic fabric and temporal rhythms that once defined and moulded urban life. The findings highlight that while physical reconstruction efforts may restore buildings and clear rubble, they often fail to address the full complexity of walkability disruptions to social networks, sensory experiences, and collective memories that once made walking meaningful. The sporadic nature of reconstruction efforts, coupled with economic hardship and displacement, has created a disconnected landscape where walking becomes an inescapable necessity rather than a choice, further perpetuating a sense of loss, inequalities, and communal distrust. The recent political change in Syria, marked by the fall of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024, has introduced a new wave of hope, caution, and uncertainty. During

this transitional phase, time is needed to reassess prevailing conditions and develop a strategic vision with robust policy recommendations for the city's reconstruction.

Our research contributes to both theoretical and practical understanding of post-conflict urban recovery. Theoretically, it advances the concept of disruption assemblages as a framework for analysing how violence, through processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, scars urban fabrics, distorts accessibility, and ruptures life-worlds. Moreover, this research argues for a paradigm shift in post-conflict recovery and reconstruction efforts. Approaches to walkability must incorporate situated perspectives in a conflict-affected context. Practically, it advocates for an "attracting a foot" approach to reconstruction strategies that re-centres walkability as a critical lens for understanding and fostering recovery and post-conflict healing. This approach goes beyond the physical restoration and walkability metrics and involves re-centring the focus on the newly emerged survival patterns and re-weaving the human connections and sensory experiences within urban spaces. Further, it emphasizes the need for policies that engage with emergent community interventions and collective memories, acknowledge conflict legacies and trauma, and support the slow re-weaving of social bonds through walking practices.

By re-centring walkability in post-war recovery and reconstruction processes, urban planners and architects can engage in more contextual needs-based healing processes within war-torn realities. As cities worldwide face increasing challenges, the lessons learned from studying walkability in extreme conditions can inform broader urban planning strategies, promoting more liveable and sustainable urban futures. Future research should explore how these insights might be applied to other conflict-affected cities, examining variations in how walkability disruptions manifest across different cultural and spatial contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of walking practices during post-conflict recovery could provide valuable insights for urban planning and reconstruction policies. Ultimately, this article argues that successful post-conflict reconstruction must move beyond physical restoration to address the complex assemblages of disruption that continue to shape how people navigate and inhabit war-wounded cities.

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Conflict of Interests

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