

# How Middle East cities can meet the sustainability challenge

Fri, 2019-12-13 23:28

DUBAI: As the cities of today grow into those of the future, they will encounter daunting sustainability challenges.

Arguably, the most significant factor that all urban centers will have to take into account is climate change.

With temperatures projected to rise, new infrastructure and operational challenges will have to be tackled by city authorities.

“We need to manage our greenhouse gas emissions while managing our economy,” said Fahed Al-Hammadi, director of climate change at the UAE’s Ministry of Climate Change.

“We must understand future trends in the region and how we will be affected in different sectors. We must engage with the private sector because we can’t work as a government alone,” he added.

## **FASTFACT**

**95**

Percentage of its lifetime a car in the US is parked on average.

“We need to attract more ‘green’ investors, and ensure that the capacity of renewable energy we’re transitioning to can cope with the transformation.”

Speaking at a recent summit in Dubai on emerging technologies, Al-Hammadi visualized cities of the future contributing to a reduction in emissions – transportation currently contributes a third of total emissions – and thus helping governments achieve their emission-reduction targets.



Senseable City Lab at MIT collects data on car movement to improve urban transport. (Supplied)

Cities' sustainability will prove a major challenge in the Middle East, a region with a growing population and diminishing water resources.

"Climate change is happening and there are future challenges, but it's very important, with the structure we have in modern cities, to have an understanding of the impacts and the changes we're going to experience," Al-Hammadi said.

One tool that is becoming increasingly important for urban authorities planning for future challenges is data.

Carlo Ratti, director of Senseable City Lab at MIT, said that reliable data is essential for a better understanding of the cities we live in.

He is working on collecting data from the movement of cars to understand transport patterns in a city and how it can be improved.

With the average number of car sensors today ranging from 2,000 to 3,000, Ratti told the EmTech MENA conference that the "ambient sensing platform" can be scaled up to include taxis and used for monitoring a city's "structural health" (bridges and other infrastructure). Pilot projects are currently being conducted in collaboration with Uber in Singapore, he said.

"You can radically change the way we move in a city," Ratti added. "In the US today, a car is parked on average 95 percent of the time. It uses valuable space in our cities as well. But a self-driving system can change that."

Ratti offered the example of the 1.37 million parking spots in Singapore, 70

percent of which can be cut with autonomous cars.

His work encompasses traffic lights as well, whereby cars will be able to detect intersections, removing the need for such lights.

Meanwhile, in Amsterdam self-driving boats that can be used as floating platforms for temporary bridges are being deployed to configure the city in an increasingly dynamic way.



Self-driving boats are used as temporary bridges in Amsterdam, Netherlands.  
(Supplied)

“The beauty of technology isn’t about creating new needs. It’s about doing things in a different and better way,” Ratti said.

Experts have jumped to cities’ defense by trying to make them more resilient as they face the twin onslaughts of overpopulation (55 percent of the planet’s 7.4 billion people live in urban areas) and climate change (rising sea levels due to global warming threaten to wipe out many coastal cities).

The health sector will need an overhaul to cater for the evolving needs of the cities of the future.

A pioneer in this area is BioBot, a US biotech company that measures the concentration of drugs that are excreted in urine and collected in sewerage systems.

“We measure opioids in sewage to estimate consumption in cities, counties and states,” says BioBot’s website. “We map this data, empowering communities to tackle the opioid epidemic in real time.”

By mapping a city's wastewater network and studying the demographic information associated with that data, more effective public-health policies can be created, said Newsha Ghaeli, the company's co-founder and president.

"A human health crisis affecting communities, such as measles, polio, obesity or diabetes, is only heard about when the crisis turns into a catastrophe," Ghaeli said.

"But it doesn't have to be this way. We imagine a city where every person can contribute to a database about our health and we're building it, based on a concept called wastewater epidemiology."

For instance, human urine is an important pathological sample, and so can be regarded as a rich source of information embedded in city sewers.

"You need a lot of different disciplines and industries working together to make sense of this data, like engineers, chemists, biologists, public health, urban planners, water and sewers, elected officials, data scientists and public works," Ghaeli said. "So we're the first company in the world to commercialize data from sewage."

Hardware units are installed inside manholes, hanging a few feet above the sewer flow, with tubes that capture bacteria and study the chemical profile. BioBot's team of scientists then looks at the human bacteria, viruses and chemicals.

"There's so much we can learn from wastewater," Ghaeli said. "We chose to tackle, first, the opioid epidemic, which is the leading cause of accidental death of Americans under 50."

However, recent studies have shown that less than 1 percent of those who suffer from opioid use disorder are dying.

"So it doesn't matter how you slice or dice the data, we just don't have the information," Ghaeli said. "What's clear is that we're measuring the wrong thing, so we are now measuring 30 different drugs and looking at emerging trends in drugs."

The first town to test the system was Cary in North Carolina, where overdoses decreased by 40 percent last year for the first time in half a decade, Ghaeli said.



Pavegen's tech captures energy from pedestrian footsteps to power street lighting. (Supplied)

During a six-month pilot program, BioBot was also able to create a heat map to pinpoint areas where overdoses were concentrated.

Despite such technological breakthroughs, and the fact that an estimated 33 percent of the world's energy is now derived from renewable sources, many of the world's most densely populated cities are ailing.

"Cities have been built for machines – cars and planes – and some have forgotten about the people," said Laurence Kemball-Cook, CEO of Pavegen.

The technology company has developed paving slabs to convert energy from citizens' footsteps into "energy, data and rewards."

He said: "I'm on a mission to try to make our cities greener. There is a big challenge in urban areas."

To achieve his goal, Kemball-Cook turned to kinetic energy, capturing the energy from pedestrians' footsteps to power streetlights.

So far, the kinetic-energy system has been used in Nigeria, London, Abu Dhabi Airport, Thailand and Birmingham, as well as on a running track in Hong Kong.

"We're excited about the vision of the future city," he said, adding that he hopes to take Pavegen's technology to Expo 2020 in Dubai and Neom in Saudi Arabia.

"The potential of using human power in our cities is huge. The technology in a city has to work with the people," Kemball-Cook said.

"A city isn't just about finding a new energy solution, it has to be about wellness, smart (practices), fun, sustainable and connecting into the Internet of Things data layout," he added.



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Global renewable power capacity to rise by 50% in five years  
Al-Jouf: Saudi Arabia's food basket and renewable energy hub

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## [Appointment of a new Lebanese PM rests on upcoming 48 hours of re-consultation](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-12-13 23:48

BEIRUT: The Free Patriotic Movement's (FPM) latest decision not to participate in the next Lebanese government has created new difficulties in resolving the political crisis.

Sources close to the President Michel Aoun told Arab News that he considered

his country in need of “a techno-political government,” but that: “The appointment of the prime minister does not need the consensus that was lost with the FPM’s boycott, but it is needed when forming the government.

“The parliamentary consultations will be held as planned, while parliamentary blocs are reviewing their decisions in light of the FPM’s withdrawal. Extensive communication is taking place between them to reach a decision in the next 48 hours.”

It is likely that the head of the caretaker government, Saad Hariri, will be reappointed as prime minister of the new government in light of the insistence of the highest Sunni authority.

Hariri is determined to form a government of experts capable of dealing with the difficult economic and financial situations the country is witnessing.

Hariri resigned on Oct. 29 following widespread protests against the government and political class.

The announcement of the International Support Group for Lebanon, from Paris last Wednesday, gave the Lebanese authorities a last and limited chance to achieve the necessary economic reforms and form a government that takes into consideration the demands of the protesters.

## **FASTFACT**

It is likely that Saad Hariri will be reappointed as prime minister of the new government in light of the insistence of the highest Sunni authority.

A source close to the interim prime minister said: “Hariri’s position regarding the next government is clear. It is focused on forming a government distant from the traditional quotas logic and capable of addressing the fears of the protesters and the economic threats facing the country.”

“The formation of the government is a right limited to the president and the prime minister.”

Former constitutional judge Khaled Kabbani told Arab News: “The formation situation is very foggy. Everyone is overwhelmed and things are changing rapidly.

“The formation of the government is under a lot of pressure and the latest announcement of the International Support Group for Lebanon reflects that. It wants a government that wins the trust of the protesters. We have to wait and see if it will play a role in resolving the crisis.”

Protestors had considered the latest FPM decision a win for their cause, while activists on social media confirmed that they would continue their movement against the political class, and would shift focus to tax disobedience.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's Hezbollah said on Friday that the country's next government must bring all sides together so that it can tackle the country's worst economic crisis in decades.

The leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, said his Iran-backed movement insists on its ally the FPM – Lebanon's largest Christian political bloc – taking part in the Cabinet.

In a televised speech, Nasrallah also said he hoped a new prime minister would be designated on Monday, but added that even so, forming a new Cabinet would not be easy.



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Lebanese PM Hariri to speak amid rumors of resignation  
Pompeo says US stands with Lebanese people as Hezbollah chief warns of delay in forming government

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## [What next after Turkey's former PM](#)



# Launches new party?

Sat, 2019-12-14 01:37

ANKARA: Turkey's former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu held the long-awaited publicity meeting for his new political party, the Future Party (Gelecek Partisi) on Dec. 13 in Ankara, a day after he registered it with the Turkish Interior Ministry.

The press conference was broadcast with English and Arabic simultaneous translations.

Davutoglu has previously attached high importance to ties between Turkey and the Arab world, and has repeatedly called for a reengagement with major Arab countries.

The party is expected to erode support for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, diminishing his grip on the Turkish Parliament.

Gelecek Partisi is the first breakaway party from the AKP, which will be followed by a second, formed by Erdogan's ex-economy tsar, Ali Babacan, with his technocrat and liberal team expected to launch in the first week of January.

## **Disgruntled voters**

Paul T. Levin, director of the Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies, said Davutoglu may well have some success in siphoning disgruntled AKP voters away from Erdogan with Babacan.

Davutoglu, once a close ally of Erdogan, gave many references in his address to the bad political management of Turkey. He underlined his support for freedom of religion and belief, liberty, equality, the fight against nepotism and corruption, transparency in party financing, the rule of law, and the return to the parliamentary system.

"Today we establish the party by saying: The future belongs to our people, the future belongs to Turkey," he said.

According to Levin, unlike the clique that now rules the AKP, Davutoglu does not have the reputation of being mired in corruption and nepotism.

"He has strong Islamist credentials and his outspoken criticisms of the AKP's authoritarian turn may entice some religious conservatives dissatisfied by the AKP to switch in protest," he told Arab News.

The council of the party's founders, which has 155 members, symbolizes different segments of Turkish society, with hijab-wearing women, Christians, Kurds, Alevites and others all represented.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The new party is expected to erode support for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).
- Davutoglu, 60, resigned from the AKP in September, saying Erdogan's party was unable to solve Turkey's immediate problems.

It is the first time in Turkish history that Turkish citizens with Greek, Armenian and Assyrian roots have taken part in a founders' council. Several associations of Roma, Caucasus and Arab-origin communities were also present.

Ayhan Sefer Ustun, former head of the parliamentary Human Rights Commission, is one of the 18 former deputies from Erdogan's AKP who initiated the party.

### Future Party

He said they launched Future Party because the AKP drifted from its core principles like liberty, pluralism, and participative democracy.

"Our party is a new breath into Turkish politics. The participation of so many members to the council shows that there is a need for such a political move. It is an alternative for the voters," he told Arab News.

The Future Party has the support of wealthy businesspeople and civil society representatives as well as academics.

Davutoglu, 60, resigned from the AKP in September, saying Erdogan's party was unable to solve Turkey's immediate problems because each intra-party criticism was labeled as "treason."

His rebellion within the AKP was mainly triggered by the party's critical losses in nationwide local elections in March, especially in Istanbul and Ankara, as well as other normally safe areas.

Levin said Davutoglu lacked the broad popularity of his rival, though, which could hinder him.

The next elections in Turkey are set for 2023, but there is a growing expectation for a snap election next year.

According to Turkish law, a political party is eligible to stand if it completes the establishment of local branches in at least half of the cities throughout the country, and holds its general congress six months before elections.

"Would Davutoglu be able to climb above the single digits in the polls? It would greatly surprise me and most other observers. Granted, the next election is scheduled for 2023, and that is exactly three lifetimes in Turkish politics, so never say never," Levin said.

On the day of the party's launch, the newly established nationalist Good

Party's leader, Meral Aksener, announced that it would support the Future Party with deputies to help make it into Parliament at the next election.

It is almost certain that the new breakaway parties will enter an alliance with relatively established political parties to overcome the 10 percent electoral threshold.



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Former PM calls for overhaul of Turkey in challenge to ErdoganErdogan's former allies to challenge AKP's rule in Turkey

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## [Pompeo says US stands with Lebanese people as Hezbollah chief warns of delay in forming government](#)

Author:

AFP

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1576269530283212000

Fri, 2019-12-13 19:34

BEIRUT: US Secretary Mike Pompeo said on Friday that the US supported the Lebanese people in their fight against government corruption and terrorist threats.

Pompeo took to Twitter on Friday, where he posted: We stand with the people of #Lebanon to fight against corruption and terrorism. Today we designated two prominent Lebanese businessmen whose illicit financial activity supports Hizballah. We will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to counter the threat Hizballah poses.

We stand with the people of [#Lebanon](#) to fight against corruption and terrorism. Today we designated two prominent Lebanese businessmen whose illicit financial activity supports Hizballah. We will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to counter the threat Hizballah poses.

– Secretary Pompeo (@SecPompeo) [December 13, 2019](#)

On Friday, the US Treasury Department imposed new sanctions against two alleged Hezbollah money launderers and financiers, including a diamond trader who collected art.

It accused Lebanon-based Nazem Said Ahmad, whose art collection includes works by Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol, and his companies of helping to launder large sums of money for the group.

“Ahmad, who has a vast art collection, is one of Hezbollah’s top donors, generating funds through his longstanding ties to the ‘blood diamond’ trade,” it said.

A second man based in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Saleh Assi, was sanctioned for laundering money through Ahmad’s diamond business and supporting another alleged financier already under sanctions.

Pompeo’s comments came as the head of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, warned that the formation of a new cabinet desperately needed to redress a tumbling economy could take time.

Lebanon has been swept by unprecedented nationwide protests since October 17, demanding the complete overhaul of a political class deemed inept and corrupt.

The government stepped down on October 29, but bitterly divided political parties have failed to agree on a new premier ever since.

Hezbollah chief Nasrallah spoke ahead of parliamentary consultations to nominate a new prime minister on Monday.

"The consultations are supposed to take place on Monday and we hope that whoever receives most votes will be designated to form a government," he said in a televised address.

"But the formation will be no easy feat," he warned.

In a multi-confessional country often in political deadlock, the name of the new prime minister is frequently picked before symbolic parliamentary consultations.

"Until now the parliamentary blocs have not agreed on a name" for the new premier, Nasrallah said.

He said it was likely each bloc would "name who it wanted without any prior agreements."

The protesters have demanded a government made up solely of experts not affiliated to the country's traditional political parties, but analysts have warned this could be a tall order.

Nasrallah said he would support a "government of national partnership," and one with "the widest possible representation" that did not exclude any of the major parties.

He said it could be headed by outgoing premier Saad Hariri or someone the outgoing premier designated.

The names of various potential candidates have been circulated in recent weeks, but the Sunni Muslim establishment on Sunday threw their support behind Hariri returning.

The international community has urged for swift cabinet formation to implement key economic reforms and unlock international aid.

The World Bank estimates a third of Lebanese live in poverty and this could rise to half.

It has projected a recession of at least 0.2 percent for 2019.

A sworn enemy of neighboring Israel, Hezbollah is the only faction not to have disarmed after Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war.

The United States considers Hezbollah a "terrorist" organization, but the movement is also a key political player with ministers in the outgoing government and seats in parliament.

The United States has targeted the Shiite party with tough sanctions, ramped up under the administration of President Donald Trump.

Nasrallah lambasted comments by US officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who Wednesday said the Lebanese were aware of the "risk" of Hezbollah being in their country.

Nasrallah suggested the United States might be “blackmailing” the Lebanese, and only offering to help in a time of economic crisis if they first dealt with that “danger.”

He alleged the US had been unable to neutralize the movement despite actions including “sanctions.”



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Lebanon protesters defiant despite Hezbollah attack  
Hezbollah says its ‘arm won’t be twisted’ as Lebanon crisis deepens

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## [New Algerian president faces tough challenge](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-12-14 01:10

ALGIERS: Algeria's new president faces the country's biggest political crisis in decades, a hostile economic climate and attacks on his legitimacy after winning an election with low turnout opposed by a massive protest movement.

Abdelmadjid Tebboune, 74, beat the other four candidates – all also former senior officials – to win the race outright with 58 percent of the vote, ensuring there will be no second round.

The authorities hope the election of a new leader will end months of turmoil following the toppling of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, whose 20-year-rule was brought to an end in April when the army pulled its support after mass demonstrations.

But protesters have dismissed the entire election as a ploy by Algeria's shadowy, military-backed authorities to quell the months-long uprising and restore the old political order.

As housing minister, Tebboune was responsible for building the tallest mosque in the world, a project the government pushed as a national symbol, and for expanding the state's generous program of low-cost homes with a million new apartments.

Officials say 40 percent of voters took part in the poll, enough to demonstrate the legitimacy of the exercise.

But protesters and their sympathizers who boycotted the election could dispute Tebboune's mandate. And, as the protest movement has no clear leadership, it is not clear how Tebboune could negotiate a widely accepted path forward.

Aside from the months-long political crisis, he will also face Algeria's most difficult economic situation in decades, with declining energy revenues and bitter cuts to state spending.

Energy exports, the source of 95 percent of state revenue, fell 12.5 percent this year. The government has burned through more than half its foreign reserves since energy prices began dropping in 2014, and has approved a 9 percent cut in public spending next year, while keeping politically sensitive subsidies untouched.

It has also approved new investment rules to allow foreign companies to own majority shares in "nonstrategic sectors," and to make it easier for international oil firms to work with state energy giant Sonatrach.

Tebboune was viewed as a technocrat during his years as a Cabinet minister under Bouteflika. He served as premier in 2017 before being pushed out after less than three months when he fell out with influential business tycoons in the president's coterie, many of whom are now in prison on corruption charges.

### **Separate from politics**

Like the other candidates, Tebboune has tried to harness the protest movement

as a source of support for reform while rejecting its overriding message that the entire ruling elite should go and that the military should quit politics.

He has used the circumstances of his brief premiership in 2017 to polish his credentials as a man of integrity who stood up to Bouteflika. He vowed during the campaign to “separate money from politics.”

However, his own son was also arrested in the purge that followed Bouteflika’s fall and is now also awaiting trial accused of graft. Tebboune supporters said his son’s plight proved his independence from the military-backed authorities.



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Algeria declares former PM Tebboune winner of presidential election  
Violence, protests mar Algeria’s disputed presidential elections