








City profile

Erbil

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Abstract

Erbil (Hawler in Kurdish), is the capital and the largest city of Iraqi Kurdistan. Having been continuously inhabited for about 6000 years, the city has recently been regarded by UNESCO World Heritage as one of the world's oldest urban settlements. The city is witnessing remarkable urban growth and rapid spatial expansion compounded by a dramatic increase in population due to emigration from the countryside and rural areas over the last three decades. Following the changing geopolitical landscape of post-war Iraq, urban changes and socio-political transformation are largely driven by Erbil's growing autonomous status as the capital of northern region of Kurdistan since 2003. This paper explores the layers of historical, spatial and social developments of the contemporary urban context of Kurdistan in general and of Erbil in particular as a reflection of the changing status of the city, as well as the polarization of Iraq and the emergence of neoliberal urbanism. The tension between the global and modern from one side and traditional and authentic from another is ever present and evident in everyday challenges in the planning of the city. In large part, Erbil's built fabric embodies the dichotomy of identity and contests between its past and future, in which the present remains a transition between two disconnected realities.