

# The future of cities is not smart, but village-like

November 25, 2018 9:00 am



Image: TAKREEM

Smart cities are all the rage now. Saudi is moving forward with a \$500 billion smart megacity. Dubai and Abu Dhabi are gearing up to make the full ‘smart’ transformation.

Yet, one man thinks the future of cities is not smart, but rural in its community structure.

Lebanese-American businessman Emile Haddad’s words stem from his fond memories in a different era, those in pre-war Beirut in the 60s and 70s.

“I think I lived in the smart city, and that was Ras Beirut when I was growing up – that was a smart city,” he told *AMEinfo*.

**Smart cities focus on technology, not people**

*AMEinfo* spoke to Haddad at this year's TAKREEM Award Ceremony, which celebrates Arab individuals for their exceptional contributions to Arab society.

Haddad, a visionary real estate developer and businessman who has built the largest sports complex in the United States, received the Corporate Leadership Award for his philanthropic contributions to society. His focus with real estate has always been on communities and people.

“You know what, smart cities have been used and abused because everybody looks at it as a technology,” he said.

Indeed, when talk of smart cities makes it to the news, the majority of focus is put on the technological and scientific breakthroughs that these cities will bring, and there is nothing necessarily wrong with that. What Haddad is referring to is basically that people and human relationships often take a backseat to the gleam of the glassy high-rises that often follow talk of smart, futuristic cities. We are living in an era where we are more connected than ever digitally, but our interpersonal relationships have suffered for it.

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### **Village-like communities will return**



Image: TAKREEM

Now, Haddad believes that the overall progress of our interpersonal relations globally and locally will shift back.

“In many ways, we’re gonna go back to the old town way of living, where relationships were important,” he said.

He believes we will head to a hybridized version of village lifestyle, at least in terms of relationships.

“The way people are going to coexist – the way people are going to interact going forward – is in a way that we can’t even think of right now. I think [we’ll go back to] the community as we used to know it before the Industrial Revolution, where [life was based around] village [communities]. The whole concept of 9-5, that’ll be gone.”

“The village [in the future] could be a group of people who have a community, but they live all over the world,” he illustrated. What actually gets them together as a community is not necessarily physical, but common things [such as ideals or interests].”

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### **Greatness from small beginnings**



Image: Five Point Holdings

Currently, Haddad presides as Chairman, CEO and President at US-based Five Point Holdings LLC, a developer of large mixed-use, master-planned communities in California. According to Haddad, Five Point is building three brand new cities with a sustained “focus on the social fabric.”

“I’m building Olympic venues, building cancer centers, amphitheaters that can house 12,000 people, and homes,” he stated.

Yet, Haddad had to endure a difficult journey to make it this far. 32 year ago, Haddad left war-torn Lebanon and traveled to America to his younger brother with his parents, aunt and fiancé with not much to speak of.

“You go to a place where you don’t know anybody, you don’t have money, you don’t know where to start – it’s not easy,” he said.

“The only people we knew were the nucleus of the family, and that gave me a lot of support. I would come at midnight and know that everybody is waiting for me and we all had each other. That was probably the most important thing that kept me going, because there was nobody else I knew.”

In his opinion, he made it this far because he had “parents who had the foresight to tell me all the time that I might wake up one day and everything that we had might be gone, and the only thing that people can take from me is what I store in my head and what I store in my heart.”

“What I mean by that is not education – it’s everything that I remember and grew up with,” he explained. “Honestly, when you go to a place where you have nothing and you know nobody and you start from scratch with a lot of people who are depending on you, you don’t have a choice. When people ask me, ‘What was your drive?’ I say ‘Well, my drive was simple. I had no choice. If I didn’t succeed, the people I loved the most would be on the street.’

“So, you know, you wake up at 4 o’clock in the morning, start, and come back at midnight and start again. I didn’t have the luxury to get into all the gossip and what ifs. [What] I tell my kids all the time is that we’re not entitled to anything. We’re only entitled to what we bring to the table every day.”

Now, years later, the hardship and perseverance have paid off, with Haddad becoming a successful and celebrated figure both in the US and in the Middle East.

“If I were to name one thing I would attribute my success to – it would be courage, because you have to try and fail and have the courage to keep on trying, otherwise you will never be able to know your real potential,” Haddad revealed.

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