landscape of conflicts
Urban development in the Palestine region

Planning under occupation (Coon 1992) and volatile conditions are framing spatial development in Palestine. Four million people are living in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, mainly in the urban areas. Spatial and Urban Planning should be used as means to deliver human rights – not deny them, was stated by Jon Clos (2015), executive director of UN-Habitat. Can urban planning and design contribute to a considerate spatial development in an occupied country in a conflict region? **BY MARTINA VAN LIEROP, KATHARINA GUGERELL & STEFAN NETSCH**

Challenging Future of Palestine

The urban regions of Jerusalem, Hebron and norther Gaza have urbanisation levels higher than 83 % (PCBS 2015a). Almost 75 % of the population live in urban areas though the built up area is with less than 10 % rather limited (PCBS 2015b; 2007). This results in high population densities with on average in Palestine 778 persons/km², up to 5.000 persons/km² in Gaza City (ibid.), and in some urban areas even more than 8.700 persons/km² comparable to London and Bangkok. Gaza and the West Bank face high housing demands, and consequently informal housing. However, the numbers indicate significant densification as well as a trend towards sprawl. The cities and residential neighbourhoods lack public (green) spaces and the few available ones are heavily used. As public transport is insufficient or lacking, car-oriented transport congests the cities while a lack of sidewalks makes it difficult to include slow traffic modes.

Metropolitan Gaza

Two mill. people live in the 41 km long Gaza Strip which has an urbanised area with two centres: Gaza City in the North, and Khan Younis in the South. Due to external control, Gaza is a secluded island with heavily restricted access including trade or the possibility for Palestinians to leave. After the conflicts in recent years, the region faces massive challenges concerning rebuilding, food insecurity, provision of clean water and energy, and job provision (PAPP / UNDP 2008). Though zoning policy preserved the former spaces of the airport and the railway track from Istanbul to Cairo, space is a scarce commodity leading to high real estate prices, speculation and increased urgency on development questions. To illustrate the presented issue: the minimum income to be able to finance a housing unit for Palestinian family associations averages 1.450 $ for good quality housing (Razeq 2015). This is contrasted with a 40 % poverty rate, the highest employment rate in the world, with the highest employment in the age group of 15 to 29 years of > 60 %. 70 % of the working cohort is in the private sector earning on average 174 $ / month. The conflict in 2014 accounts for 12.000 damaged houses and net damage of 4.4 bill. $ (World Bank 2015).

Metropolitan Region Central West Bank

The situation of the West Bank is less captive than in Gaza but nonetheless difficult. In Central West Bank, the cities of Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem form an urban region in with complementary cities in it: Jerusalem is the symbolic capital of Palestine, though Ramallah is the de facto administrative capitol, while Bethlehem is one of the most important cultural and touristic centres next to Jerusalem. Although one urban region the policy space for its urban development is limited. The Oslo II accords, divided the West Bank in 3 divisions with varying freedom and governmental rights: in areas A (major cities) and B (built up area around those cities) the

Cars and individual transport are congesting the cities of the West Bank

Ramallah Down Town

Gaza Street Life: Removal of damaged houses

Palestinian Authority (PA) has jurisdiction on civil matters, and only Area A, the urban cores, is under the full jurisdiction of the PA. The remaining > 60 % are Area C (mainly rural areas around Israeli settlements) and therefore under full Israeli control (UN-Habitat 2015). While the PA has to provide all necessary social services, the Israeli administration controls the provision and allocation of land, infrastructure provisions or issuing of building permits. Between 2010 and 2014, only 1,5 % of Palestinian building permits (UN OCHA oPt 2015) and until now only three local zoning plans were approved (Hague 2016) resulting in informal settlements and building activities that are under permanent threat of demolition. On the other hand, between 2002 and 2010 15.000 residential units for Israeli settlers were built in Area C that are illegal under international law (UN OCHA oPt 2009). Obtrusive Israeli settlement and infrastructure developments result in

increased territorial fragmentation and mobility impediments. About 500 roadblocks, gates and check points (UN OCHA oPt 2014) not only increase commuting times but also even make it uncertain if you even reach the anticipated destination.

The enforced territorial fragmentation hampers its spatial and economic development (UN OCHA oPt 2009). Restricted access and demolished infrastructure to limited resources (land, water, energy, food etc.) are aggravating the tensed situation. High political uncertainty, volatile conditions, arbitrariness and speculation are the framework conditions, even for planning in Areas A and B where the legal and financial power is with the PA. The complex conditions are offering only limited intervention space. The Oslo II division allows direct action in the urban areas A and B. While medium-term strategic planning should provide a roadmap for an overall urban development, short-term small and micro scale solutions directly influence the quality of life of urban dwellers. Long term, regional and trans-regional spatial development allows a joint visioning process on a higher scale (like the National Spatial Plan) in order

to develop, prepare and test spatial and institutional designs for the post occupation area.

Short term, small-scale, temporary and participatory urban interventions

The quality of life for urban residents, in particular women, children and elderly people, can already be improved by micro- and small-scale interventions by making streets and public spaces safer for pedestrians and greener for urban street life. A complete streets network links neighbourhoods with social services like schools and community centres, public transport hubs, and public green spaces for slow traffic modes like cycling and walking. People will use the network for their daily activities and recreation, which encourages in such a way community development and the identity of urban areas. Moreover, the network can support a green infrastructure, which can drop air and noise pollution, and provide room for improved storm water management (Ahern, Cilliers & Niemelä 2014).

The relatively flat landscape and the short distances make Gaza ideal for a bicycle network that support a low-energy transport model, which could be implemented despite energy scarcity. Such a network could be made by transforming the old preserved rail alignment into a 40-km bike lane connecting Gaza City and Khan Younis. In addition, the bike lane can be developed into a green recreational spine by adding pocket parks and playgrounds along the route.

Complete street networks and green infrastructure give space to pedestrians and cyclists and room for daily activities promoting in such way an active lifestyle and keeping people active (Gehl 2010). Green spaces for recreation and play are in high demand, and current spaces are under high user pressure. In the Gaza and the

Ramallah-Jerusalem-Bethlehem agglomeration, space is limited. Yet, in Gaza development is focused on rebuilding housing while in the West Bank, opportunities are limited due the restrictive issuing of building permits in Area C, and vivid construction works in the city centres in the confined Area A. Administration and politicians complain about limited options to improve the recreational capacity of the public realm due to private landownership. Active land policies for steering the real estate sector, including redistributions measures and building regulations (i. e. alignments) are poorly developed or generally lacking (see also Razeq 2015; Abdullah & Dodeen 2015); basic and easy to implement and enforce measures can be the starting point for a better provision of public (green) spaces that are urgently needed in dense cities in Mediterranean Climate. Another opportunity for municipalities to support neighbourhood activities and activate land for public uses that do not interfere with property rights or the devaluation of property is temporary use. Ramallah, but also Gaza City, has plenty of empty plots in the inner city but also residential areas are streaked with overgrown lots.

Place-making projects in Area C (Ibrahim 2015) are local best practise examples how community based development and design can be organised. Local communities and planners, supported by UN-Habitat, developed in a series of participatory design workshops where the entire community is meeting to discuss local matters, explore joint and different interests, and develop small-scale interventions based on local experience, day-to-day live, interests and needs. Also in the villages the need for public

Infrastructure Strategy for the Metropolitan Region of Jerusalem (Sébastien Goethals & Martina van Lierop)

Integrated Vision for Metropolitan Gaza (Martina van Lierop)

spaces to gather and meet and the improvement of the existing public realm (safe transport of kids to the kindergarten/transportation costs, outdoor recreational space, missing sidewalks, lacking meeting spaces especially for women) were a joint characteristic of all workshops

into a fuzzy endeavour. The first National Spatial Plan is currently under development, focussing on spatial development, resource planning for economic development (i. e. underdeveloped agriculture/food security; NROPA 2013) and mobility.

> The case of West Bank and Gaza (...) illustrates the power dimension of planning, where planning and design issues are actively used to exercise supreme power – to control people, livelihoods and their resources.

The limitations and harsh restrictions in daily activities and the limitations of the freedom of movement explain the strongly

(ibid.). The implementation and building was locally tendered and carried out by local companies to keep the added value within the communities.
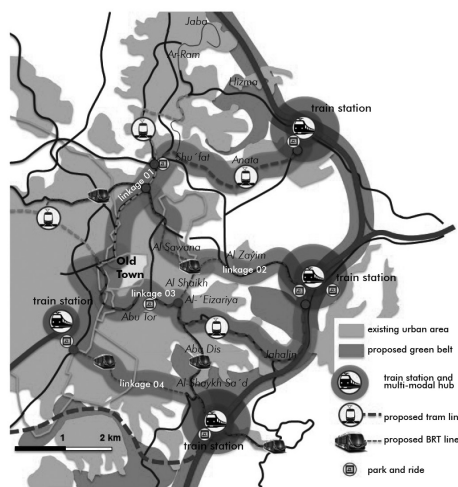
Regional and trans-regional spatial visioning for the post occupation time

The complex geo-political situation of the region turns long term visioning and strategic planning

developed focus on mobility and transport in development questions. The occupation and fragmentation of the territory then results into considerations if, for a post occupation area, 2 or 3 international airports (Gugerell et al. 2015; Cramer et al. 2016) are required for a country (6.220 km²) a bit smaller than the province of Salzburg (7.154 km²) or 2,5 times the size of Luxembourg – and

within 90 minutes distance to Amman and Tel Aviv. Raising the question if the Palestinian citizens would profit more from a regional railway system as the backbone for multimodal transport system, resulted in lively discussions among planning practitioners and ministry representatives. This rail system can provide a direct, reliable and efficient connection within Palestinian metropolitan regions and between Palestinian cities from Nablus in the North, to Hebron in the South and re-esta-

Waterfront of Gaza City

View towards Ramallah. Separation measures and obtrusive Israeli settlement activities are increasingly fragmenting the Palestinian territory

blish historic railway connections to Cairo, and Beirut, plug into the existing network with Israel and establish new connections like Amman. To illustrate the before mentioned: in Gaza, the railway line together with a new express-way, are building a transit corridor connecting the port in Gaza, Gaza City and Khan Younis with the West Bank, Cairo, and Haifa. The current buffer zone on the Eastern border provides enough space to

accommodate the flows – and was already emptied by the IDF. The two train stations could be multi-modal transit hubs and encourage the usage of public mobility. A flexible bus system could connect these hubs with the entire metro-politan area, and the city centres. The connections from the transit hubs to the city centres create de-velopment axes to steer the urban expansion of the cities in an East-West direction, and help to create green buffer zones for nature and agriculture between the major ur-ban centres. By planning business and industrial areas in proximity of the corridor, the corridor sup-ports the economic development by providing excellent access.

Does long-term strategic visioning make sense?

Joint visioning provides the oppor-tunity to create a joint narrative and to develop possible future pathways and testing different options and scenarios. The process of developing a national strategy and strategic visioning can be considered as a disruptive practise that is contrasting the current dominant ones. Even though the political framework does not allow an implementation yet, joint visioning is to a certain degree also path creating. It is a common ground for experimenting for new spatial and urban agendas while identifying institutional gaps and building capacity. In the debate, also the strong symbolic narratives surfaced: the discussion around the importance of airports for a sustainable, functioning mobility system is streaked by the symbo-lic meaning of an International Airport Palestine, even though it would be very likely operated by international investors.

Grand Design vs. Small is Beautiful

In the current situation, small and micro scale improvements seem to be the more viable options to increase the liveability and the

day-to-day living conditions in the neighbourhoods and the villages. Especially Area A and B provide the opportunity for short-term interventions to ease the urban situation. However, even though small and micro scale interven-tions are the most promising, in the perception of city officials, ad-ministration and politicians about their importance and urgency they rank close to zero. That perception is on the one hand owed to the strong focus on the national scale – first to fix all spatial problems on the national scale and in a later stage look at neighbourhoods, even though the national scale is almost completely out of reach for now. On the other hand, for many officials the small-scale solutions lack the "grand gesture" and are waved aside as "cosmetic measu-res".

Collaboration and Integration is key

The co-production processes illus-trated that spatial and institutional design is organised in thematic silos and that links not only bet-ween different policies but also in the policy design process are rather poorly developed.

Decreasing institutional rivalries and increasing cooperation and coordination between municipa-lities, administration and depart-ments is key for future develop-ments on all spatial scales (KNDP 2013). The severe rebuild challen-ge in Gaza, for instance, offers the possibility for a completely new zoning plan, which integrates the needs and interests of different sectors. Yet, this also requires coor-dination on the scale of the whole Gaza region.

Planning as Politics

Urban processes are 'wicked problems' that neither can be fully understood, nor can the future development be clearly predicted. However, planning and design are often considered as distraction from more substantial questions

and issues surfacing along the conflict and the occupation. The case of West Bank and Gaza shows, that planning has a direct and very intensive impact on livelihoods of the Palestinian people. It also illustrates the power dimension of planning, where planning and design issues are actively used to exercise supreme power – to control people, livelihoods and their resources (Coon 1992; Chomsky & Pappe 2011; ibid. 2015; Harvey 2013). For Palestine, the "right-to-plan" is an essential concern because it not only affects its future development prospects but is also a manifestation of nationhood. ⊙

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content & keywords

4 *million people are living in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, mainly in urban areas. The enforced territorial fragmentation hampers the overall Palestinian spatial and economic development (UN OCHA oPt 2009). Restricted access and demolished infrastructure, scarce resources (especially land, water, energy and food), volatile geo-political conditions, arbitrariness, speculation, non-existing institutions and high uncertainty are the framework for planning in a country under occupation.*
Palestine, conflict and post conflict planning, strategic planning, West Bank, Gaza