

Territorial joint planning vs. disintegration. The case of Palestine: constructing institutions from territory

Introduction

Why this subject has been chosen?

Territories, human settlements and cities of Israel and Palestine are directly influenced by their political conflict and by the geopolitical situation of the World. The two peoples specifically are part of a much wider scale scenario including the Middle East and Europe with their cultures and history and – more difficult – including the aspiration and search for democracy in a globalized World.

This situation makes interesting to investigate how the knowledge of cities, human settlements and territories, in which those settlements are located, can go deeply inside their problems, whose nature – we know – is substantially political or better geopolitical. And we are just ‘planners’!

Can the knowledge of the Israeli and Palestinian territory and societies in their specific meaning give suggestions to help to recompose the actual state of disintegration, in that suffering Mediterranean land?

In Palestine, as is dramatically known, for many years there is a conflict between Israeli and Palestinian - affecting also neighbouring countries - for a contended territory, whose centrality and instrumentality have a role becoming more and more determinant.

On this territory acts disaggregating forces (religiously oriented) that hit the two opposed societies, negative forces that doesn't allow them to reach a balanced economic and social development and in particular hits the Palestinian society in untold suffering.

It is useful to recall that the Israeli - ignoring the UN resolution n. 181/1947 concerning a Palestine partition planⁱ in two territories for the construction of two states – start the realisation of their plans. These plans were aimed to the Jews colonisation, with the military occupation, the destruction of many Palestinian villages and the expulsion of the Palestinian inhabitants from their lands. They were also the inauspicious birth of the so-called refugee campsⁱⁱ inside and outside the Palestine.

This is the concrete beginning of the construction of the Israeli State, proclaimed by the Zionist movement in the 1948, on the 78% of the Palestinian territory. This was the effect of the end of the British mandate.

Since than the Israeli-Palestinian events became very complicated and the problem of the lands and ‘sites’, of the space and boundaries – that are the centre of interest of this analysis - undergo many and complex transformations, result of dramatic, in many cases tragic, conflicts just briefly recalled in a noteⁱⁱⁱ.

The Israeli separation wall

In the last few years the Israeli government unilaterally decided to build a Wall of separation between Israeli and the Palestinian territories, whose lay-out cuts deep into the Palestinian territory of the West Bank, disaggregating its integrity, borders and population inhabitants.

This wall that is separating the Palestinians from their cultivated land and farms consists of several linear sections, part of them made of concrete and part by barbed wires with annex other sophisticate equipments that make the wall ‘intelligent’.

The fear of the Palestinians is that this wall can predetermine the future of the border between the territory of Israel and that of the Palestinians.

In the strategy of disintegration the wall is instrumental, considering that many Israeli settlements are inside the West Bank territory and the two peoples with their settlements are living very close. So now the very recent evolution of the disintegration strategy is to try to separate the two peoples settlements. But how?

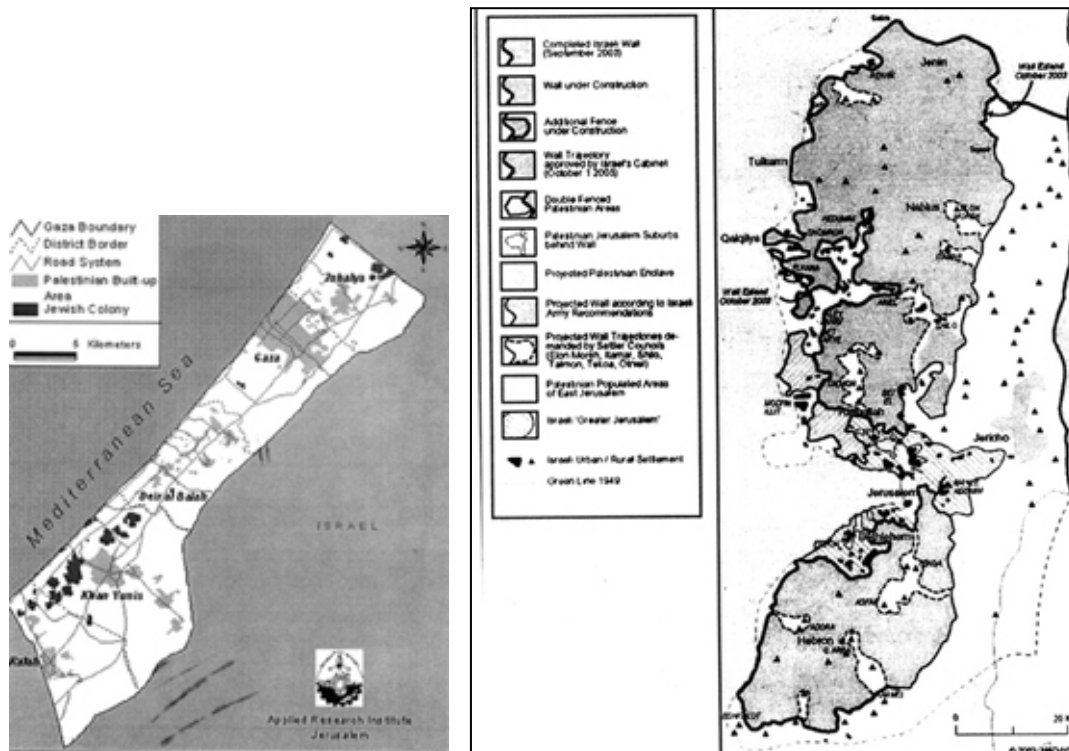


Fig. 1 On the left: The Gaza Strip (by Applied Research Institute Jerusalem).
On the right: Israel's Separation Wall, completed and projected sections

Israeli government has declared that its objective is to withdrawal from the West Bank the Israeli inhabitants which will have to converge in to settlement blocks close to existing centres: Ma'ale Adummin (East Jerusalem), Etzion and Ariel, consolidating them. The position of these centres in the West Bank territory will divide it in three separated parts incommunicable.

About the physical consistence of the wall many things have been told and written^{iv} so that it would be certainly repetitive the description of this complex work, so it is just enough to recall that, in the section in which the wall is made of concrete, its height is an average of 8 metres and is provided with control towers, protection areas land of variable width (30 – 100 metres) at the base of the wall and electrified nets, trenches, canals, pathways, electronic equipment, security patrolling.

If many things are known about the separation wall, what is unknown generally is the irreversible damage that this structure is doing to the inhabitants and in general to the Palestinian society. So it is important to recall and underline the effects that the construction of the wall has produced on the territory and on the Palestinian inhabitants and society.

Among the first are the measures that restrict the free movement of Palestinians and the relative negative impact, social relation and human rights and the annexation of the Palestinian land. The wall construction affects all the aspects of the human life, the deterioration of the population health for lack of medical supply and medicines due to the increasing poverty of the people. Students and teachers have difficulty of access to educational services,

The physical setting of the wall has having many immediate implications, among which the following:

- *de facto* annexation of Palestinian land creates a growing obstacle to the creation of a Palestinian state;
- the change *de facto* of the tracing of the Green Line border 1967, leaves much Palestinian farmland on the Israeli side of the wall;
- great difficulties for workers and their families to reach work place;
- many Palestinian villages end up in a no-man land between the wall and the Armistice line.

A detailed list of the damages produced by the wall can be found in the quoted specific publication^v.

It is possible to conclude that the wall represents a new phase of the territorial strategies of Israel. Certainly the separation wall, with its physical presence, has made a great mortgage to a joint planning perspective.

Order for Palestinian “Territories”

The problem of the urban-territorial order of the so-called Palestinian ‘Territories’ – West Bank and Gaza Strip – can be faced in several ways that can be synthesised as follows:

- traditional approach to the institutional planning
- experimental approach to physical planning mainly technical
- approach to territories in which are present political contrasts and illegal processes of territorial transformation
- imaginative approach supported by will to cooperate

Traditional approach

The first way of approach, the traditional one, concerns the several administrative levels. The most direct reference to this approach is the European experience of the post-war period, in its evolution that goes from the reconstruction of the European cities and territories destroyed by the war in the years 40, to the European construction political, social, and economical. The EU, in structuring the new Europe, intended to shape a wide territorial framework based on the infrastructural system of the big transportation networks, connecting the urban areas and metropolises, the airlines hubs, the great naturalistic spaces...until the realization (implementation) of some joint planning between neighbouring states experience, as is the case of the communitarian initiative INTERREG aimed to stimulate the planning between states sharing frontier^{vi}.

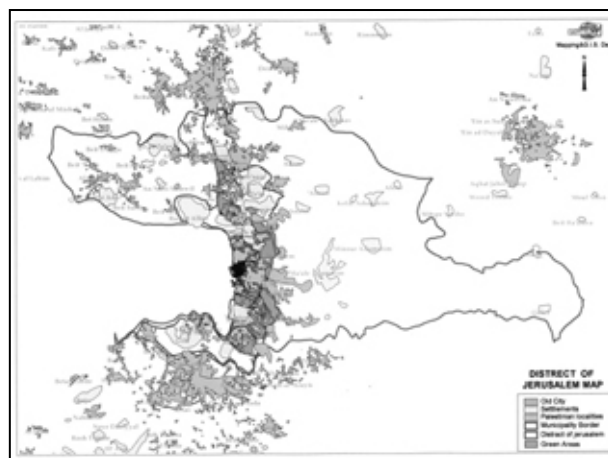


Fig. 2 Map of Jerusalem District (by Mapping & GIS Dept.)

So we can say that the planning levels are the “traditional”, institutional ones: the State, the Regions, the Provinces, the large urbanised areas and metropolises, the Municipalities. The planning powers, foreseen by the democratic constitutions of the European states, are established by ordinary laws of the State and the Regions and by the regulatory powers of the Municipalities. The European Union with the participation of the Member States elaborate the comprehensive planning process of the European space for our time.

The way followed by Palestine has been quite different from the mentioned model experienced by European states, because completely different have been their histories and cultures and consequently their “weltanshaung” facing problems and solutions.

Leaving the past and coming to the last century just passed, it is possible to see and understand that Palestinians - moving from a geopolitical and historical situation rather dramatic (the collapse of the Ottoman Empire) – were subjected at the imposition of plans, rules and laws established by foreigner authorities: Turkish during the Ottoman Empire, British during the international ‘mandate’, Jordan and Israeli after the Israeli occupation.

It is possible to conclude, on this, that Palestine has not had the opportunity to develop an independent planning system. During the war periods the Palestine had a modest management of its settlements, cities and refugee camps, using foreigner laws and regulation concerning, some of them the construction of housing and villages, other concerning the land property, others the construction of roads and so on.

Of course in the Palestinian “Territories” the environment protection problem has been and, more so today, is completely ignored. In the “Territories” the Israeli army with their war in act and the heavy pressure on the local population have used and are using every means and action to hit the Palestinians, their culture, their poor economy: eradicating olive trees, excavating trenches, multiplying the check points, demolishing houses and building illegally new settlements on the hills surrounding Jerusalem, Ramallah... Building the incredible wall.

“More recently the Palestinian Authority has taken the initiative to establish its independent national planning institutes through the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Planning...”^{vii}. But this important initiative is facing difficulties of various kind, first political, social and economic mainly deriving from the uneven persistent conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian.

There is now a draft law that foresees a structure of planning based on three levels of elaboration: the High Planning Council, the District Commissions and the Local Councils. But many obstacles are in the way of this draft law, concerning the private land ownership and great need of funding. But, most important, is to promote the



Jerusalem area: views of the Separation Wall, watching towers and check points

Palestinian Public involvement in planning: a starting process of empowerment and of community participation.

Actually the Palestine's intelligentsia as effect of the international adoption of the Habitat Agenda – is elaborating a model for planning concerning the rethinking of the abstract philosophy of the formal public sector, described as follows: “*This mode (...) builds on the philosophy of the participation and the empowerment and tries to develop certain strategies that can lead to improve the life-conditions in Palestinian cities, refugee-camps and village areas*”^{viii}.

The fundamental instruments of this model, the Community Centres, based on voluntary work, is trying to call the Palestinian communities at a reorganisation and at the assumption of responsibility of the physical development of their territory.

Experimental approach

The approach defined “experimental” is mainly technical and also scientifically oriented. Its aim is to experiment *in loco* some hypothesis of space organisation in the Palestinian “Territories”. It has poor and indirect reference to the institutional levels of planning and to political expectations; in the contrary the experimental approach has a predominant reference to the physical aspect of the territory to be planned.

Here is the case of the singular (excellent) international Workshop, a laboratory experiment, of sceneries of peace for a co-ordination project of the two long term plans: “Israel 2020” and “Palestine 2015”, a project based on a strong, shared will to overcome the hostilities between involved parties^{ix}.

The protagonist of such unusual (non governmental) professional experience are two groups of planners, one of Israeli and one of Palestinians, in collaboration with Dutch planners and other international experts entrusted by the Dutch Government for a technical cooperation with the two groups of planners.

This experience consists in a solid Workshop that – a part from the present political context – has the scope of elaborating a project that proposes a method of planning based on the analysis of the economy, the society, the way of life, the social reports of the settled inhabitants in those territories, starting from deep inside consideration of the physical Palestinian territory. This exercise *in vitro* is made with reference to the two long term plans of Israeli and Palestine that have been at the base of the Workshop dialogue aimed at coordinating objectives, methods, priorities, in a comparative way with the long term Dutch national Plan 2030.

The result of the international non-governmental professional dialogue developed in the Workshop is synthesised in a diagram and by a series of schemes that represent and propose the scenarios emerged from the co-operative Workshop and expressed through a series of interesting free-hand sketch-maps.

In conclusion the promoters and the participants to the workshop choose to privilege the knowledge aspect (point of view) of the human settlements and of the territory in the wide sense, being fully aware that the politics is determinant also in planning land use and a sustainable territorial organization.

Practically they wanted to know the suggestion that the physical consistence of the West Bank (settlements, territory and its potentialities) can give to a joint inexistent process of development.

Approach to the real “Territories”

A way completely different from the previous one is that tentative of an impossible institutional planning of the Palestinian Authority, inside the hard strategic planning implemented and still doing it unilaterally by the Israeli government in the West Bank, Jerusalem (specially in East Jerusalem) and Gaza Strip.

Why impossible?

In order to enter in the third way of approach to planning, that puts right at the centre of the planning problem the contrast – the too long conflict between Israeli and Palestine, conflict which is not an hypothesis but a real concrete, dramatic fact – is interesting and useful recall briefly, also in this case, the international-original experience of a cognitive project named: “Geographies of Contrast/Grenzgeografien”. Its objective is to bring to light the urban reality of Jerusalem (and its Palestinian inhabitants) as modelled in the years by the uneven conflict between Israeli and Palestinians^x.

The cognitive project “Geography of Contrast” has put at its focal point the city of Jerusalem, which means the “place” of Palestine for which the dispute is the stronger and bitter and the political conflict dramatically uneven.

The organisers of the international project say: “(...) *in the case of conflict city like Jerusalem (...) there were three main element involved, safety, access and the degree to which the research theme was of interest (...). The conflict has divided the city into a Palestinian zone (restricted to East Jerusalem although this area is also filled with illegal Israeli settlements) and Israeli zone (mainly in West Jerusalem). The two zones share only a few interaction points (...) and the main constant here is fear, a glass wall dividing Jerusalem into East and West and preventing both Palestinian and Israeli from crossing to the “other side” without thinking of the consequences*”^{xi}.

Many others are the things that came out from the research among which the one that stroke more the Palestinians was “(...) *the influence of the Israeli policy of the “centres of life” initiated in the 1996. This policy demands proof that that Palestinians work and live in Jerusalem. Failing to prove this would lead to loosing the Jerusalem ID and with it the right to enter Jerusalem freely without a permit*”^{xii}

On this interesting experience of research on the field it is possible to conclude that the recent construction of the wall that wraps Jerusalem is one of the most dangerous aspect of the Israeli territorial strategy^{xiii}.

The result of this international experience has been important for the prominence that it gave to the situation of Jerusalem as contended city between the two peoples.

Nevertheless the greater problems directly concerning the Palestinian territory – rather (better) emerging from this upset territory – are the occupation and appropriation, by Israeli, of the Palestinian lands and inland waters. The instrument through which this strategic goal is persecuted is the construction of the wall that makes the recent phases of the conflict more severe.

Imaginative approach

The mode of the “Territories” approach to planning – indicated as: “imaginative and supported by will to cooperate” – can be very short. No communication between the two opposed contending, no space for any construction together and for joint planning. Instead: arbitrary, illegal transformation of “places”, of Palestinians way of life and their traditions, eradication of the symbolic olive trees, waters appropriation/expropriation and so on.

Two logical categories have been introduced to define this mode of approach: one is ‘creative’ (a positive imagination), the other is ‘ethical’ (a will to live, to build together). But how to apply these categories to the invention and construction of a separation wall?

Is it possible, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, to re-imagine a new separation wall in the Mediterranean area between two peoples contending a territory?

The Israeli wall is not imaginative, in the creative meaning, but is a preventive, illegal, violent act that doesn’t consent any kind of (democratic) planning.

And what about the ‘cooperative will’? This is a political process that lies outside this paper pertinence and interest.

Conclusions

In the most recent Israeli decision regarding the territorial strategies, it is impossible to find any specific suggestion or future perspective of joint planning for the "Territories".

The corner stone of these strategies is certainly the separation wall that – as we have seen – made the West Bank's spatial problems more complicate for everybody but especially for Palestinians. Living became impossible in the "Territories" and the Palestinians expulsion seems to be the final objective of the territorial strategy.

Gaza city, a heap of ruins, given back to Palestinians last year, is in these days (July 2006) re-occupied by Israeli and transformed in the battlefield for the Israeli monstrous tanks.

The West Bank with 'its' checkpoints and 'its' wall is becoming more and more a concentration camp in which is impossible to live.

Jerusalem, the international city to be, is a closed city surrounded by the new wall and by the Israeli urban expansions all around. All the religious representatives are present in the city, silent.

Also the 'institutional' Europe is incredibly silent. No solution seems to be at the horizon.

Many observers start to think that the end of the conflict can be found in the solution of the demographic problem that means to maximize the number of Israeli and to minimize that of the Palestinians. In that vision the most effective tool to reach this objective is the land confiscation and the endeavour to expel the Palestinians making their life impossible in their land.

Notes

ⁱ The British government give up to the 'Mandate' and transmits to the UN the Palestine political question. With the Resolution n. 181 of 29 Nov. 1947 the UN presents a partition plan of the Palestine territory that is divided: 3/5 to Jewish and 2/5 to Palestinians.

ⁱⁱ The Plan Dalet is a military operation concerning expropriations of land, and village's destruction executed in two months: April and May 1948.

ⁱⁱⁱ With the declaration of birth of the State of Israel it starts the attacks against the Palestinian culture rooted in its land. Three million of Palestinian is forced to leave their houses and villages and to concentrate in determined places: the so-called refugee camps, that still today, consolidated and transformed in to slams, are surviving.

The Jordan government decides to unify the two territories of Cisjordan and Transjordan (1958) and to allow the Jordan nationality to all the refugees expelled from Palestine. Egypt and Syria give life to the Arab United Republic, that gives to Gaza a special status.

In the 1964 is founded the Organisation for the Liberation of the Palestine (OLP) that at its first council asks for the institution of a democratic state. Only ten years later the OLP obtains from the general Assembly of the United Nations to be recognised as the only legal representative of the Palestinian People.

In the 1967 Israel decides to enter in the war and to occupy the Cisjordan, Gaza, the Arab sector of Jerusalem (annexed to its territories in the 1968), the Golan heights (Syria) and the peninsula of Sinai (Egypt). From the war Israel come out with about the 50% more of the territory assigned to the Palestinian by the UN.

The Security Council votes the resolution n. 242 / 1968 that foresees the Israeli's withdrawal from all the territories occupied in the 1967.

In the 1973 the Security Council approves the resolution n. 338 that reaffirms the necessity to apply the resolution n. 242/ 1968 and to open the negotiations.

For a detailed extended historical source see: Massoulié François (1997) *Les conflits du Proche Orient*, Italian edition: *I conflitti del Medio Oriente*, Firenze, Giunti Gruppo Editoriale.

^{iv} See: The Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network, PENGON (2003) *Stop the Wall in Palestine Facts Testimonies, Analysis and Call to Action*

^v Ibidem

^{vi} The reference is to two European experiences: the TriRhena plans the spaces of three countries (France, Germany and Switzerland); and the reunification of the cities of Gorliz (Germany) and Zgorzelec (Poland).

^{vii} See: Amro Jamal, Qasem Shaden, Abu Safich Rana, al Kalili Suha (2005) "Public participation in the Palestinian Planning Process", *urbanistica pvs* n. 41, Dec.

^{viii} Marei Khairi (2006) "Community Reorganisation and Empowerment. An Alternative Model to Physical Change, *urbanistica pvs* n. 42/43, Aug.

^{ix} See: *Coordinating "Israel 2020" and "Palestine 2015"*. An inaugurating Workshop dedicated to the coordination of the Israeli and Palestinian long-term plans", Feb. 2000, Ma'ale Hochamisha

^x See: *Cities of Collision*, International Conference, Jerusalem, Nov. 2004 This trilateral initiative was lead by the Berlin University of Arts, the International Peace and Cooperation Center, East Jerusalem, and the Betzalel University, West Jerusalem.

^{xi} Abu Ghazaleh Rana (2005) "East Jerusalem. An International Territorial Experience", *urbanistica pvs* n, 41, Dec.

^{xii} Ibidem

^{xiii} See the booklet Abdelrazek A., Tafakji K. (2004) *Breaking the siege denying the natural growth of Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem* by the Mapping and G.I.S. Dept. of the Arab Studies Society, Jerusalem. The G.I.S. Dept. is elaborating a research on the property of the land in East Jerusalem based on the Jordan Cadastre