

# How Strategic is the Strategic Sectorial Development Plan for Jerusalem?

## A Review of the “Strategic Sectorial Development Plan for Jerusalem (2018–2022)”

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### **Editor’s Note:**

Excerpts of the “Strategic Sectorial Development Plan for Jerusalem: Resilience, Empowerment, Development, Independence (2018–2022)” are published on page 79.

“Jerusalem does not need another plan to be placed on the shelf”; “Jerusalem needs action”; “We have enough studies on Jerusalem, we need implementable projects”; “What we need is a political leadership in Jerusalem.”

These were some of the reactions when four years ago I conducted more than thirty interviews in Jerusalem as part of a research project I was hoping to develop with the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS). There is undoubtedly a lot of skepticism among Palestinians in Jerusalem whenever they hear of another Palestinian plan for the city. The plans developed to date largely remained ink on paper and failed miserably in countering Israel’s heavy colonial machine that works every single day to turn its image of Jerusalem into reality.

The latest Palestinian plan for East Jerusalem was recently developed by the Jerusalem Unit of the Office of the President, in partnership with al-Quds University, and financed by the Islamic Development Bank. Entitled the “Strategic Sectorial Development Plan for Jerusalem: Resilience, Empowerment, Development, Independence (2018–2022)” [hereafter SSDP (2018–22)], the plan aims at ensuring that East Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Palestine by planning the development for fifteen sectors in the city. This article presents a critical overview of the plan, after establishing the “development limbo” in Jerusalem, characterized by socio-economic deterioration, a Palestinian leadership and institutional vacuum, and the ever-intensifying Israeli efforts to Judaize the city. Only time will tell if the SSDP (2018–22) will have the same fate as previous plans. But for Palestinians in Jerusalem – who face dire circumstances and require urgent support – already there are serious questions as to the plan’s ability to produce meaningful changes: namely, its lack

of clarity on timelines and processes for implementation, dependence on donor funding, and framing within a discredited structure introduced by the Oslo accords.

## **Context and Policy Framework in Jerusalem**

### *East Jerusalem in a “Development Limbo”<sup>1</sup>*

Despite Jordan’s policy of one-sided development between 1948 and 1967,<sup>2</sup> which concentrated economic growth and investment in the East Bank, East Jerusalem maintained a distinctive character. The tourism sector was the main driver of the economy, with a steady flow of Muslim and Christian visitors to the city. The concentration of tourism and other related services in East Jerusalem helped increase the standards of living and reduce unemployment.<sup>3</sup> However, following Israel’s occupation and illegal annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, the city was cut off from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories and integrated into the Israeli economy in a partial and distorted way. Since then, East Jerusalem has become increasingly dependent on the Israeli economy, and as Israeli Judaization efforts intensified in the past decade, East Jerusalem has been placed in a “development limbo.”

In 2016, 75 percent of Palestinians in Jerusalem, and 81 percent of Palestinian children, were living below the Israeli poverty line. By contrast, only 29 percent of Jews in Jerusalem and 38 percent of Jewish children were living below the poverty line in the same year.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Palestinian women in Jerusalem have a very low participation rate in the labor market (at 22 percent in 2016), compared with 80 percent for Jewish women in Jerusalem and 84 percent for Palestinian men in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Socio-economic conditions in Jerusalem are also characterized by: a weakened business and trade sector; disintegration of local markets; a stagnant investment environment, except for the investment boom that took place between 2008–2012; de-industrialization; loss of productive capacity of the economy; a constrained tourism sector; a depleted education sector; discrimination in service provision; housing deficiency; a lack of financial and human resources; and drug issues.

Meanwhile, it seems that East Jerusalem’s economy is heading toward further integration into the Israeli economy,<sup>6</sup> as indicated by: the overdependency of Palestinians on the Israeli economy, especially its labor market, as a major source of income;<sup>7</sup> dependency on the Israeli health system and educational funds from Israeli authorities; development of economic and commercial relations between East and West Jerusalem; and the recent controversial attempt by some Palestinians from East Jerusalem to participate in the 2018 municipal elections in Jerusalem.

### *Leadership and Institutional Vacuum*

Since the death of Faisal Husseini and the closure of the Orient House (the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Jerusalem) in 2001, Palestinians in East

Jerusalem have been enduring a leadership and institutional vacuum that has left them without meaningful political power. While a number of official entities were established to represent and serve Jerusalem,<sup>8</sup> they either play a limited role on the ground or are completely inactive. Poor coordination and conflicts among these bodies have also hampered Jerusalem's representation on the national, regional, and international level. This condition is reflected in the inability of the national movement in Jerusalem to mobilize people to confront Israeli Judaization policies, giving rise to unorganized, individual acts against the occupation.

The leadership vacuum is compounded by an institutional vacuum, as Israel has expelled Palestinian institutions to undermine political activism. Since 2001, Israeli authorities have closed at least thirty-two Palestinian institutions and NGOs in Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> As a result, local neighborhood committees emerged and village councils were activated in different neighborhoods of East Jerusalem to follow up with the municipality regarding provision of social services.

Within this context, regional and international players have expanded their role in East Jerusalem. For example, both Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have provided financial assistance to Palestinian merchants in Jerusalem. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development have also been working on several projects in different sectors in Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> However, regional and international interventions in Jerusalem remain modest, scattered, and short-term in view of Palestinian needs and the lack of public and private Palestinian funding.

### *Palestinian Plans: Words without Action?*

Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1993, several "development" plans have been crafted for East Jerusalem. However, a main weakness of most of these plans lies in the lack of an operational mechanism and available funding to implement them.

The first comprehensive strategic plan for Jerusalem was introduced in 1999 by Faisal Husseini and the Arab Studies Society. It was followed by another plan, published by the Welfare Association in 2002, to revive the Old City of Jerusalem. This plan aimed at preserving the architectural heritage in the Old City, developing infrastructure and services, and promoting economic development to improve living conditions of the population. One year later, the Arab Studies Society conducted a multisector review for East Jerusalem. The proposals in this review, mainly project-oriented, were updated and turned into a strategic multisector development plan for East Jerusalem in 2006. Focused on short-term projects and dependent on donor funding, the implementation of the plan was halted with the suspension of funds.

In 2007, the Jerusalem Unit at the Office of the President was established as a technical body to provide needed information and studies on East Jerusalem and to prepare development plans for the city. Accordingly, in 2010, the Jerusalem Unit published the "Strategic Multi-Sector Development Plan for East Jerusalem" (SMDP),<sup>11</sup> upon which the new SSDP (2018–22) is based. However, the SMDP lacked an executive arm and adequate funding, and was thus not implemented, leading to the apathy of many Palestinians in Jerusalem toward the usefulness of developing plans.

### *Making the Colonial “Dream of Jerusalem” a Reality*

In contrast to Palestinian planning, one of the strengths of the Israeli planning system is rooted in the availability of funds and the presence of specific bodies to manage and ensure their top-down implementation. These bodies include the government, the National Planning and Building Board, the Regional Planning and Building Commission, the Local Planning and Building Commission, and the city engineer.

Israeli plans for Jerusalem are grounded in the colonial image of Jerusalem. As Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu once noted: “The Zionist vision is the vision of Jerusalem. It could be called ‘the dream of Jerusalem’.”<sup>12</sup> This dream is built on the Judaization of Jerusalem, which is at the heart of Israel’s multitude of plans for the city. These plans aim to expand Jewish demographic, political, territorial, and economic domination over Jerusalem, while further dispossessing Palestinians.<sup>13</sup>

Of these plans, the 2000 Master Plan has a clear articulation of the Israeli government’s long-term goals in Jerusalem. It was the first comprehensive master plan for both East and West Jerusalem since 1967 and addresses a number of areas, including urban planning, tourism, economy, education, environment, transportation, archaeology, culture, and art. The private sector also initiates plans for Jerusalem, such as the Jerusalem 5800 plan, which aims to build Jerusalem as a global destination for tourists and students.

More recently, the Israeli government developed a plan that specifically targets East Jerusalem. Entitled the “Leading Change Program,” the plan aims to invest NIS 2 billion (around \$560 million) in East Jerusalem over the next five years. The stated objective of the plan is to bridge the gap between the eastern and western parts of the city by focusing on three main areas: education, infrastructure, and female employment.<sup>14</sup> In the area of education, one of Israel’s aims is to promote Hebrew education and urge Palestinian schools to use the Israeli curriculum. In other words, Israel is using investment in education, and “development” more generally, as a political tool to subsume Palestinians into Israeli institutions, thus thwarting Palestinian resistance to the Israeli colonial project and tightening Israeli control over Jerusalem.

It is against this background that the SSDP (2018–22) was developed.

### **The “Strategic Sectorial Development Plan for Jerusalem (2018–2022)”**

Like the SMPD, the SSDP (2018–22) focuses on areas of Jerusalem within the separation wall, and thereby under the control of Israeli authorities. These areas include: the Old City, Shaykh Jarrah, Wadi al-Jawz, Shu‘fat, and Bayt Hanina. Areas outside the wall, such as Abu Dis, al-‘Ayzariya, and al-Ram, and which are administratively managed by the Palestinian Authority, are excluded from the plan. In line with the PA’s national policy agenda (2017–22), the primary objective of the plan is to ensure that “East Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the State of Palestine” (p. 15). More specifically, the plan aims to: enhance the resilience and living conditions of Palestinians in East Jerusalem; preserve the identity and rights of Palestinians in the city; protect Palestinian institutions and

expand their participation in society; stimulate economic growth while ensuring people's participation in and benefit from any gains from growth; and strengthen links between Jerusalem and its Palestinian environs. The plan covers fifteen sectors, organized in three groups:

1. Social protection and development (comprising education; culture and cultural heritage; social welfare; youth; health; and citizenship, civil peace, and rule of law);
2. Economic development (including economy and industry; housing; tourism; and agriculture); and
3. "Cross-sectorial sectors" (comprising environment; urban planning and local government; and three sectors not part of the SMDP – namely gender; information and advocacy; and information technology and communications).

Compared to the SMDP (2010), the SSDP (2018–22) is more specific and detailed. It identifies different targets for each sector and for each target specifies: modes of intervention; stakeholders; an estimated annual and five-year cost; and a number of indicators to ensure monitoring, follow-up, and assessment of the effect of deliverables. For example, the plan for the housing sector includes three main targets: developing a special fund to support housing sector development; improving the conditions of buildings, especially in the Old City; and meeting urgent housing needs by building new housing units. However, while several modes of intervention are identified for each target, many of them are vague. For example, modes of intervention for the three targets of the housing sector include: "Support and assist institutions that develop housing sector; support renovation and rehabilitation projects of residential buildings inside and outside and old city; assist institutions that renovate and rehabilitate buildings for housing purposes, and provide them with necessary support; find ways to reduce building costs, especially in terms of infrastructure." It is unclear what kind of "support" will be provided and how.

### *Ensuring Local Participation and Implementation*

Given the growing apathy of Palestinians in Jerusalem toward Palestinian plans, there is a clear attempt in the SSDP (2018–22) to focus on local buy-in, implementation, and regular follow-up – at least on paper. One of the plan's assets is that it seeks to ensure local participation by involving stakeholders from the government, civil society, private sector, local and village councils, and popular committees, in addition to the Arab and international community. However, while local participation is crucial to ensure local ownership of development projects, it could be a double-edged sword. Effective local participation requires high levels of coordination among the different stakeholders to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure strong planning and implementation. Local participation thus requires institutions to train staff and build their capacity, without which Palestinian planning agencies could experience a further erosion of trust.

As of now, sector committees have been established for the three sector groups, consisting of “development experts” (p. 6) and planning stakeholders from the public sector, civil society, and other entities. However, the role of these committees and the extent to which they were involved in drafting and developing the plan is unclear.<sup>15</sup>

Local participation is crucial, too, in one of the other significant and much-needed aspects of the plan: improving data availability. The plan lists as one of its objectives to “conduct sample surveys for levels of poverty in different areas in East Jerusalem” (p. 47). It also aims at collecting data on housing needs and on Israeli urban planning, building licenses, and so forth. Given the lack of research and reliable data on East Jerusalem, data collection and knowledge production on the political, socio-economic, and cultural reality in Jerusalem is of utmost importance, especially for advocacy purposes. However, the plan does not explain how it seeks to overcome the obstacles usually faced by institutions when collecting data on East Jerusalem, especially people’s fear of sharing information.

A number of questions regarding implementation and follow-up, which are under the responsibility of the Jerusalem Unit, also remain unanswered. For example, the plan states that a geoinformatics platform will be established and will constitute the backbone of the plan. According to the plan, the platform consists of an integrated system and

is based on the evaluation of projects and their respective output against development indicators which the projects intend to realise, and their relation with the strategic plan’s indicators. Once established, the platform will help determine medium and long term development targets, help document operations, experience and knowledge, and provide feedback for regular updates and revisions of the plan (p. 154).

However, it is unclear how such a platform would work and whether it will provide an effective mechanism for monitoring and implementation.

Moreover, while the plan has several targets and modes of intervention for each sector, it does not have a timeline that sets milestones over the five-year period and indicates when each target is to be achieved. Such a timeline is of utmost importance to set priorities, ensure implementation and regular follow-up and assessment, and hold accountable those responsible for implementation. Furthermore, while Palestinian Authority ministries constitute a major part of the stakeholders for the implementation of the different targets, the plan does not explain how it aims to overcome Israeli restrictions on the involvement of any Palestinian Authority body in East Jerusalem, given Israel’s plan to ensure its complete sovereignty over the eastern and western part of the city.

As of now, the plan explains that four main committees were established for different purposes: policy making; guidance and consultation; coordination among the different partners (to meet at least once a month); and implementation and follow-up (to meet regularly). However, since the plan lacks any information on the decision-making process in these committees, their effectiveness is uncertain.

### *Dependency on External Funding*

One of the main weaknesses of the plan is its dependency on donor aid for implementation. The total cost of the plan over five years is \$425 million, to be raised from external sources as well as available Palestinian sources. Given the paucity of Palestinian financial resources, exacerbated by the recent decline in donor aid to the occupied Palestinian territories and the U.S. administration's decision to defund UNRWA and East Jerusalem hospitals, it is questionable if adequate funds could be raised and if donor countries would commit to their pledges.

This uncertainty becomes more critical when one takes into account the amount of money Israel is investing in East Jerusalem. The Leading Change Program, mentioned above, allocates around \$125 million to the education sector, in order to urge Palestinian schools to use the Israeli curriculum, among other objectives.<sup>16</sup> This is more than 2.5 times the amount allocated by the SSDP (2018–22) for the education sector. The urgency for Palestinian investment in the education sector in East Jerusalem to counter Israel's attempts to Israelize the education system and occupy Palestinian minds (and not only their lands) is echoed in Richard Shaull's note in the foreword to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

. . . education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.<sup>17</sup>

### *Which Political Framework?*

The SSDP (2018–22) falls within the larger political framework of the Oslo accords and the two-state solution, espoused by the Palestinian Authority since its establishment. However, the past twenty-five years have shown that the “promise” of Oslo has largely been a myth.<sup>18</sup> The stated objectives of achieving peace and Palestinian independence and statehood were in stark contrast with Israel's actions – entrenching its colonial domination over Palestinians while preventing the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. Indeed, the basic elements for building a state have been thwarted by Israel's policies of enclavization of space (through the system of movement restrictions, the expansion of illegal settlements, and the administrative division of the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C), which have fragmented the West Bank and cut it off from the Gaza Strip.<sup>19</sup>

The post-Oslo period has thus shown that the main goal of the so-called peace process is not to achieve “peace” but to maintain the “process” that allows Israel to buy more time and create more facts on the ground. U.S. president Donald Trump's recent moves – recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital; moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem; defunding UNRWA and East Jerusalem hospitals; and closing the Palestine Liberation Organization offices in Washington, DC – are another reminder of the collapse of the myth of Oslo, undermining even the pretense of a peace process.

The future does not look bright. A recent poll by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* showed that 56 percent of Jewish Israelis believe that Jews are a chosen people, and three out of four right-wingers believe that Israel has a divine deed for its land.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in Jerusalem, 85 percent of Jewish residents are religious, which means that the majority of Jews in Jerusalem are in the right wing and thus believe that their right to Israel stems from God. More surprisingly, the poll showed that “the younger the Jew, the more likely he or she is to be more religious, observant, conservative, and willing to impose his or her beliefs on others.”<sup>21</sup> Hence, the next generation in Israel appears more likely to entrench Israel’s colonization.

Given all of the above, the PA’s clinging to the Oslo framework only gives Israel more time to impose its colonial project. There is thus an urgent need to think and work within a different framework, on the local, national, regional, and international level. One possible path, increasingly called for by scholars and activists, is to redefine our struggle as an anti-colonial struggle, thus moving beyond a state-building project. However, what this struggle concretely means, what it would entail, especially regarding the status of Jerusalem, and how it might be led – all these questions will hopefully be answered by a new Palestinian leadership with a new vision and project.

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#### Endnotes

- 1 UNCTAD, *The Palestinian Economy in East Jerusalem, Enduring Annexation, Isolation and Disintegration* (Geneva: UNCTAD, 2013), online at [unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationWebflyer.aspx?publicationid=537](http://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationWebflyer.aspx?publicationid=537) (accessed 25 October 2018).
- 2 After 1948, the West Bank was under Jordanian jurisdiction, until the Israeli occupation in 1967.
- 3 UNCTAD, *Palestinian Economy*, 2013.
- 4 Michal Korach and Maya Choshen, *Jerusalem: Facts and Trends* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 2018), online at [en.jerusalemresearch.org.il/?cmd=publication.7&act=read&id=654#.W-MuxHpKhTY](http://en.jerusalemresearch.org.il/?cmd=publication.7&act=read&id=654#.W-MuxHpKhTY) (accessed 25 October 2018).
- 5 Korach and Choshen, *Jerusalem: Facts and Trends*.
- 6 Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute and United Nations Development Programme, *Local Economic Development for the State of Palestine: Economic mapping of East Jerusalem* (Ramallah, 2017), online at [www.mas.ps/files/server/UNDP/Summary%20-%20East%20JerusalemEN.pdf](http://www.mas.ps/files/server/UNDP/Summary%20-%20East%20JerusalemEN.pdf) (accessed 25 October 2018).
- 7 According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, wages and salaries from the Israeli labor market constitute the largest source of income for the residents of East Jerusalem (54.2 percent), followed by allocations from the National Insurance Institute of Israel (21.3 percent), salaries from the private sector (13.1 percent), and family business (6 percent). *Jerusalem Statistical Yearbook* (PCBS, 2016), online at [www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2206.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2206.pdf) (accessed 25 October 2018).
- 8 These entities include: the High Committee for

- Jerusalem Affairs (al-Lajna al-'uliya li-shu'un al-Quds); the Palestine Liberation Organization's Department of Jerusalem Affairs (Da'irat shu'un al-Quds); the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs (Wizarat shu'un al-Quds); the Palestinian Authority's Jerusalem Governorate (Muhafadhat al-Quds); the Popular National Conference for Jerusalem (al-Mu'tamar al-watani al-sha'bi lil-Quds); and the Jerusalem Municipality (Amanat al-Quds).
- 9 The Civic Coalition for Defending the Palestinians' Rights in Jerusalem, "Israel Orders Jerusalem Office of Palestinian Health Union Closed for One Year," 10 May 2015, online at [plateforme-palestine.org/IMG/doc/pr\\_-\\_ngo\\_closure\\_in\\_jerusalem\\_final\\_hwc.doc](http://plateforme-palestine.org/IMG/doc/pr_-_ngo_closure_in_jerusalem_final_hwc.doc) (accessed 3 November 2018).
  - 10 In 2015, the UNDP launched its "Productivity and Urban Renewal Program in East Jerusalem," which aims at enhancing the steadfastness of Palestinians through the urban revival of the main Salah al-Din and Sultan Sulayman streets, and through the promotion of private sector investment, especially in the tourism and commercial sectors.
  - 11 Online at [www.scribd.com/document/50425401/Multi-Sector-2010](http://www.scribd.com/document/50425401/Multi-Sector-2010) (accessed 25 October 2018).
  - 12 "The Dream of Jerusalem," speech by Israeli prime minister Netanyahu at the Jerusalem conference, 17 February 2010, online at [www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Speeches/Pages/speechjeru170210.aspx](http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Speeches/Pages/speechjeru170210.aspx) (accessed 25 October 2018).
  - 13 Three plans (2000/2020 Master Plan; Marom Plan; and "Jerusalem 2050") were examined in: Nur Arafeh, "Which Jerusalem? Israel's Little-Known Master Plans," *al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network*, 31 May 2016, online at [al-shabaka.org/briefs/jerusalem-israels-little-known-master-plans/](http://al-shabaka.org/briefs/jerusalem-israels-little-known-master-plans/) (accessed 22 October 2018); and Nur Arafeh, Maha Samman, and Raja Khalidi, "Roundtable: Israel's Colonial Projection and Future Plans for Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 68 (Winter 2016): 76–89.
  - 14 Nir Hasson, "Israel Promises 'Revolution' for East Jerusalem Schools. Palestinians Say It's 'Brainwashing'," *Haaretz*, 29 August 2018, online at [www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-critics-five-year-plan-for-e-j-lem-focuses-on-israelization-1.6429472](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-critics-five-year-plan-for-e-j-lem-focuses-on-israelization-1.6429472) (accessed 25 October 2018).
  - 15 For example, the author of this article is listed as a member of the committee for the economic sector, despite having attended one workshop (lasting two to three hours) which reached no conclusions as a team.
  - 16 Hasson, "Israel Promises."
  - 17 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 34.
  - 18 Adam Hanieh, "The Oslo Illusion," *Jacobin*, 21 April 2013, online at [www.jacobinmag.com/2013/04/the-oslo-illusion/](http://www.jacobinmag.com/2013/04/the-oslo-illusion/) (accessed 25 October 2018).
  - 19 "Enclavization of space" is defined as an "instrument of spatial expansion and control," used by Israel to fulfill its geopolitical vision of "territorial aggrandizement." Ghazi-Walid Falah, "The Geopolitics of 'Enclavisation' and the Demise of the Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 8 (2005): 1341–72.
  - 20 Chemi Shalev, "Haaretz Poll: For Rosh Hashanah, a Picture of Israel's Muddled Jewish Soul," *Haaretz*, 9 September 2018, online at [www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-for-rosh-hashanah-a-picture-of-israel-s-muddled-jewish-soul-1.6462847](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-for-rosh-hashanah-a-picture-of-israel-s-muddled-jewish-soul-1.6462847) (accessed 25 October 2018).
  - 21 Shalev, "Haaretz Poll."