



ABU TOR

ABSTRACT



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**The Arab Neighborhoods in East Jerusalem
Infrastructure Research and Evaluation**

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Ya'ara Issar | Jerusalem, 2017

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**THE ARAB NEIGHBORHOODS IN EAST JERUSALEM
INFRASTRUCTURE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION**

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This abstract is part of a series of research papers prepared by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research about the Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. The purpose of this study is to sketch a social profile, as well as a profile of the infrastructure in the neighborhoods in a variety of areas, so as to promote active, knowledge-based steps, toward the improvement of the quality of life of the Arab residents of East Jerusalem. Beyond describing the current situation, this study attempts to identify mechanisms of growth and development that will help to advance the socio-economic position of the neighborhoods and villages. We believe that research that integrates practice with policy recommendations is the basis for the correction of social and political injustices, in an attempt to create a high-functioning city that is concerned with the wellbeing of all of its inhabitants. The research methods include field work, in-depth interviews, consultation of data bases belonging to the local authorities and research institutes, and round table discussions in which participants include representatives from the neighborhoods, the municipality, and civil society.

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH ABOUT THE ABU TOR NEIGHBORHOOD:

Abu Tor is a neighborhood to the south of the Ben Hinnom Valley [also known as Gehenna] and to the east of Hebron Road. One part of the neighborhood is home to about 13,000 Arabs, and there are approximately 2,000 Jews living in the other part. As a mixed neighborhood, Abu Tor is a kind of microcosm or mirror image that depicts the differences in religion, nationalism, and political identity between the Jews and the Arabs who live in Jerusalem. The two parts of the neighborhood are separate from each other in every way: socially, with respect to community activity, and economically. Each part has its own educational, welfare, and transportation systems, and the physical infrastructures, commerce, and services are also separate. The resulting gaps between residents of the two parts of the neighborhood, sometimes between those who live on the same street [there is one street in Abu Tor that is part Jewish and part Arab] create a severe sense of deprivation among the Arab residents that in some cases leads to violence.

SEVERAL CENTRAL PROBLEMS AROSE DURING THE SURVEY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD



Planning and Construction Abu Tor is surrounded on all sides by either built-up areas or national and municipal parks, within which construction is not permitted. The low percentage of construction approved for residential structures has been used up. There is an urgent need for the preparation of a new and updated master plan, which will allow for construction that will meet the needs created by the natural increase in the local population. It is also recommended that an agreement be reached between the municipality and the residents with respect to freezing the illegal construction on the one hand, and on the other hand fining people for building without a permit.



Roads, Sidewalks, and Parking There are many dead-end streets in the neighborhood which are in poor condition and unpaved, and lack drainage systems, safety features, and lighting. The inner parts of the neighborhood are characterized by dense construction, staircases, and narrow passages and alleyways. All these put an incredible strain on A-Thuri Road, the only paved road in the neighborhood, which cannot handle the traffic and parking problems that subsequently arise. It is suggested that the roads in the heart of the neighborhood be developed in accordance with accepted municipal standards, and that designated parking areas be organized, while at the same time dual and integrated use is made of existing empty lots.



Schools Three of the four municipal schools in the neighborhood are located in rented buildings, which are not suitable for the purpose. There is no high school in Abu Tor, so that students are sent to schools in other Arab neighborhoods, which leads to higher rates of school dropouts, especially among the girls. The solution to the problem of the lack of space for additional schools may be found on the outskirts of the neighborhood, where a large area adjacent to the current construction boundaries could be designated for the construction of a high school. At the same time, action should be taken to allocate funds to appropriate land for the construction of schools.



Unrecognized Neighborhood – Wadi Yasul A 'secondary' neighborhood, Wadi Yasul was built on land described in the municipal plans as open landscape area of the Jerusalem Forest. For years, the municipality did not enforce the planning and construction laws, and did not demolish the houses there. Residents of the neighborhood lack the most basic infrastructures and the road system is comprised of dirt tracks. It is recommended that the houses of Wadi Yasul be upgraded in the framework of a new master plan.



Plumbing, and Sewage Numerous homes are not connected to the Gihon water utility company, which is the municipal water network in Jerusalem, and many others are connected to the water system illegally. Those who are not connected have septic pits. A drainage system based on the free flow of water to lower levels was built in the neighborhood. In the past these areas were empty, but now they are crowded with the ad hoc drainage 'system,' which leads to flooding. It is recommended that all the houses be connected to the Gihon network and that a new drainage system be operated.



Sanitation Due to the lack of paved roads and the large number of narrow alleyways, there is insufficient garbage collection in the streets of the neighborhood. The trash receptacles are too few and too small to contain the garbage. In order to meet the appropriate sanitation standards for a residential neighborhood it is recommended that many more trash receptacles be added, that trash collection take place more frequently, and that more sanitation workers, including street-sweepers, be employed in the neighborhood.



Open Spaces and a Lack of Public Parks/Gardens The crowded neighborhood lacks open spaces where parks could be created, while on the other hand it is surrounded by open landscape areas that limit its development. And yet, these are not exploited for the benefit of the public, there are no gardens planted in these areas, and they are not developed as public parks with facilities and park equipment. There was one playground in the neighborhood, but it

was destroyed by the residents in 2014 and has not been repaired since. It is recommended that high quality, open public spaces be developed as community gardens/parks in the green areas that surround the neighborhood, and that these initiatives should be undertaken in cooperation with local residents, to ensure that they will be safeguarded and will endure over time.



Culture and Leisure Other than the Community Council that is attempting to establish its activities in the community, there is no infrastructure for leisure, sport, or culture. Infrastructures for these should be developed and institutionalized and accompanying budgets should be allocated for social and educational activities.



Poverty, Violence, and Drugs The neighborhood is characterized by residents from a low socio-economic background (cluster 4 out of 20 according to the National Bureau of Statistics). The poverty and social problems lead to severe violence in the family and increased drug use. The residents and the police are currently aware of 13 active 'drug stations.' It is recommended that the police, in cooperation with the Municipal Welfare Department, take immediate action to eradicate the phenomenon.



Severe Sense of Alienation from the Municipality, Which Is Perceived as Part of the Israeli Establishment All of the information above concerning the problems of the neighborhood engenders deep frustration among the Arab residents and total alienation from the Israeli entity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMERCE AND EMPLOYMENT - IDENTIFICATION OF GROWTH ENGINES



Development of a Commercial District A-Thuri Street, known as 'The Street of the Shops,' which is the main road and the business and commercial center of the neighborhood, is tightly packed and crowded. Changing the traffic arrangements and making it a one-way street will enable its tremendous commercial potential to be realized.



Commercial Development on the Seam Line The uniqueness of the Arab neighborhood of Abu Tor is in its pairing with the Jewish neighborhood. Inherent in this proximity are opportunities for economic development. The creation of a market or commercial complex on the shared seam line could serve both the Jewish and the Arab residents and be a meeting point with a commercial aspect.



Development of Tourism The Abu Tor neighborhood has especially spectacular views as it looks out on Mt. Zion, the Old City, and the Ben Hinnom Valley. Therefore, basic infrastructures should be set in place there.



Women's Cooperative The possibility of setting up a women's crafts cooperative should be examined, through which the women of the neighborhood might come together and sell their handiwork for profit.