



# SILWAN

ABSTRACT



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

## SILWAN

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THE ARAB NEIGHBORHOODS IN EAST JERUSALEM  
INFRASTRUCTURE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

# SILWAN

AHMAD ASMAR

# ABSTRACT

This study is part of a series of studies on Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, conducted by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research. The aim of the studies is to produce a profile of the society and infrastructures of the city's Arab neighborhoods in a range of areas, in order to promote informed, proactive efforts to improve the quality of life for East Jerusalem's residents. In addition to describing the situation, the studies are aimed at identifying mechanisms for growth and development that will improve the socioeconomic conditions of these neighborhoods and villages. We believe that research combining practice with policy recommendations provides a basis for rectifying social and political injustices, with a view to creating a properly functioning city for all its residents. Our research methods include fieldwork, in-depth interviews with residents, the use of official authorities' and research institutes' databases, and roundtables with the participation of neighborhood, municipality, and civil society representatives.

## MAIN FINDINGS

Silwan, located south of the Temple Mount, has a population of approximately 20,000 residents, 500 of whom are Jewish. The neighborhood, which is part of the city's Historic Basin, has historical and archaeological importance.

The City of David (Wadi Hilweh) was the nucleus from which ancient Jerusalem grew. The necropolis of Jerusalem during the First Temple era constituted the foundation on which the village of Silwan was built, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Thus, the importance of the neighborhood's tourist potential should not be underestimated. At the same time, Silwan is a poor, crowded neighborhood lacking in physical infrastructures and public institutions. Moreover, there is tension between the efforts to develop tourism around the City of David – among other means by developing the Kedem Compound (a large visitors' and commercial center) and implementing plans for a cable car – and the dire situation of the neighborhood and its infrastructures. The neighborhood lacks a unified leadership, and the community center established in 2015 to serve the neighborhoods of Abu Tor, Silwan, and Ras al-'Amud is barely

functional because the residents associate it with the municipality and refuse to work with it. Cultural activities are coordinated by local Arab non-profit associations. In addition, the Jerusalem Walls National Park (adjacent to the walls of the Old City) includes large tracts of land from Silwan, which makes it difficult to pursue planning and construction in the neighborhood, where many homes are built without permits or regulated planning.

## THE MAIN PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD



**Planning and construction** The Jerusalem Walls National Park covers a major portion of the neighborhood's land and prevents significant, widespread construction. Except for limited-scale plans, a large portion of the neighborhood's homes were built without permits. The development plans for the King's Garden area, in the Qidron Valley, include the demolition of 88 buildings constructed without a permit. In recent years residents and the municipality have engaged in talks aimed at reaching an arrangement that would include evacuating most of the homes. To date, however, because of conflicting interests among the residents as well as difficulties in negotiating with the authorities, no agreement has been reached. In addition, dozens of homes were built within the boundaries of the Jewish cemetery Sambuski along the slopes of Mount Zion, which likewise is part of the National Park, and their construction cannot be expanded.

**We recommend that the built-up areas be excluded from the declared boundaries of the National Park, and that urban renewal plans be formulated for those areas where it is possible.**



**Roads, sidewalks, and parking** Silwan developed as a village, spontaneously and without systematic planning. As a result, its roads are narrow and unsuited to private or public transportation, and they do not accommodate sidewalks or parking places. The steep topography makes it impossible to connect the roads other than by stairway passages.

**We recommend that maintenance work be carried out on the neighborhood's main roads, that inner roadswill be paved as pedestrian streets, and that the stairway passages be**

renovated and turned into promenades.



**Schools** Most of the neighborhood's children attend school in Ras al-'Amud which is adjacent to Silwan. Silwan itself has only three schools.

**We recommend using the public plot of land located in Al-Bustan neighborhood to build a school that would also house a community center.**



**Water, sewage, and drainage** The neighborhood is subject to flooding because of its steep topography. Its sewage system needs repair.

**We recommend that urgent action be taken to lay the foundation for a drainage system, which would be constructed when works are carried out for the renovation and re-layering of streets and stairway passages.**



**Sanitation** Street cleaning and garbage removal generally take place only along the neighborhood's main street. Side streets do not have the benefit of proper cleaning and garbage removal.

**We recommend that the municipality purchase all-terrain vehicles and take all possible measures to improve garbage removal and street cleaning in the neighborhood.**



**Lack of public facilities and institutions** The entire neighborhood has only one soccer field and one playground that were built by the Israeli authorities. It lacks additional playgrounds and sports fields, a Community Administration, a post office, a bank, commerce, coffee shops, and parking in commercial zones.

**We recommend that a process of urban renewal be instituted along the main street, which would include commercial activity and parking places. In addition, we recommend designating open spaces in the Jerusalem Walls National Park that would serve as leisure and recreation areas for the residents.**



**Community center and leadership** The neighborhood's community center is barely active. Residents refuse to cooperate with it. Instead, the role of the community center is filled by various non-profit associations, such as the Silwan Club among others. The neighborhood does not have any leadership that is recognized by the authorities and residents, which makes it difficult to implement plans or initiatives in cooperation with the residents.

**We recommend taking measures to unite parents' committees with the Committee for the Defense of Silwan's Lands, and create a united leadership that can promote projects in the neighborhood. In addition, we recommend investing in the construction of a new community center in Al-Bustan neighborhood and providing it with a suitable budget.**



**Jewish settlement** The eviction of Arab families from houses formerly owned or possessed by Jews and the transfer of these houses to Jewish associations (such as Elad and Ateret Cohanim) have been a source of tension. Although it is difficult to prevent the purchase of homes or their transfer from custodianship to Jewish associations, a responsible government must consider the long-term repercussions of evicting Arab residents and allowing Jewish residents to move into the heart of the neighborhood.

**A policy is needed to address Jewish settlement and its impact on the fabric of the neighborhood. The evacuation of houses can be carried out with more sensitivity and consideration.**



**Archaeology, tourism, and development** The neighborhood's historical, archaeological, and panoramic assets are a potential source for tourism. Currently the main beneficiary of tourist development is the association Elad, which operates the City of David National Park in cooperation with the Nature and Parks Authority and oversees the archaeological sites in the area. Likewise, the planned cable car – to be built between the First Train Station Compound in Emek Refa'im and the Kedem Compound – has sparked public controversy and could have very adverse effects for the neighborhood's residents as well as its preservation and panorama.

**We recommend that the archaeological excavations underway in the area be carried out with sensitivity to the cultural and historical assets valued by all the neighborhood's residents and with the utmost caution, so as to prevent adverse effects to the residents' cultural assets and fabric of life. We believe that the development of the Kedem Compound – like other projects in the neighborhood – should have been undertaken cooperatively with neighborhood representatives in the hope that they too could benefit from local development and tourism, and that the need for the cable car should be reassessed.**