



THE OLD CITY

ABSTRACT



The Arab Neighborhoods in East Jerusalem Infrastructure Research and Evaluation

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Abstract

This study is part of a series on East Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods conducted by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research. The aim of these studies is to outline a social profile and infrastructure analysis of these neighborhoods in order to promote dynamic knowledge-based interventions to improve the quality of life for East Jerusalem's Arab residents. More than merely descriptive, these studies are an attempt to identify growth and development mechanisms for improving the socio-economic status of its residents.

The current study surveys the current status of Jerusalem's Old City – all four quarters – and presents policy recommendations. The methods employed in this study include fieldwork, interviews, data analysis from research institutes and authorities and round-table discussions with neighborhood representatives, the Municipality and the civilian population.

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Summary

Jerusalem is the Old City, and the Old City is Jerusalem. The city has religious significance to billions of believers worldwide, with a history and cultural heritage going back thousands of years. First settled 6,000 years ago, this pilgrimage site is the core of Israel's tourism industry today, and the eyes of the world are upon it. Jerusalem has also come to symbolize a conflict between peoples and religions. All of these require special attention by Israeli government authorities and the Jerusalem Municipality.

The Old City of Jerusalem is less than one km² in area (870,000 m² including the Temple Mount, which measures 144,000 m²), is home to 35,000 residents (27,000 Muslims, 5,000

Christians, and 3,000 Jews) with a high housing density (75 people per 1,000 m² in about 6,200 apartments). About 10 million visitors enter its walls each year, including 4 million foreign tourists, who flock to it on days of pilgrimage and throughout the peak tourist season (July-December).

About half of the Old City's land is under private or public Arab ownership. Another 30% is owned by churches, with the remaining 20% under public Jewish ownership.

The Old City's 23 schools have 11,000 pupils, some from neighborhoods outside its walls. Additionally, 340 public institutions within the walls bring in a steady stream of commuters.

The Old City is divided into four quarters – Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Armenian – each with its own unique character (the Christian Quarter includes a Muslim population as well).

The walled city has undergone a lengthy restoration process sponsored by the State of Israel, but is still fraught with challenges that must be addressed.

The main problems in the Old City

A. Policy, administration and enactment

During the study, we came to learn that the State of Israel has no set policy in place for the Old City's administration and development directions. Moreover, there is no governing entity charged with coordinating the efforts of the different authorities that operate there.

The existing administration and enactment policy is focused on two goals:

1. Beautifying the Old City Historic Basin, most notably the tourist routes. During the years 2006-2024, the Israeli government is to invest 1.168 billion shekels in the Historic Basin, primarily on infrastructure and tourist routes, and less on the residential areas within the walls;
2. Preventing hostile elements (the Palestinian Authority, Turkish nonprofits, Hamas) from gaining a foothold in the Old City.

Another key issue is the absence of a community administration within the walls. Such administrations exist for all of Jerusalem's other neighborhoods. The Burj Al-Luqluq Palestinian nonprofit active in the Muslim Quarter (viewed by Israeli authorities as a hostile organization) provides some of the services the Jerusalem Municipality is meant to provide via a community administration and community center.

The relationship between the authorities and the Arab locals living in the Old City is one of suspicion and mistrust. The authorities have boycotted Burj Al-Luqluq for fear that it subscribes to the Palestinian Authority's agenda. Within the Old City's Arab community there are a number of merchants and business owners who serve as agents of communication, but there is no recognized leadership beyond political activists and Waqf officials, whose efforts are focused on issues surrounding the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Recommendations

We recommend that government eschelons, in partnership with the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israeli Police, hold discussions on directions for redevelopment in the Old City. Policies should be set for the desired amount of tourist traffic, the city's branding (Jewish or universal), investment priorities for public funds (tourist routes only or residential areas as well), and the need for a new tourism police unit for the Old City.

We also recommend establishing a strong community administration with three branches – one for the Muslim Quarter, one for the Jewish Quarter, and one for the Christian and Armenian Quarters – and earmarking adequate funds for diverse cultural activity.

B. Planning, construction, and physical infrastructure

The Jerusalem Municipality has many urban planning initiatives for the Old City and the surrounding area, but these are often delayed due to political sensitivities. The Old City locals have a hard time obtaining construction permits, and the familiar pattern of illegal construction is found there as well. The residential buildings in the Muslim Quarter and in parts of the Christian quarter are in poor condition, as is the underground infrastructure. The materials used for building maintenance have deteriorated, leaving severe mold and dampness. Some structures are at risk of collapse. Rooftop antennas and satellite dishes cause visually blight on the landscape. Infrastructure has been laid insufficiently deep

due to various Antiquities Law limitations, causing sewage to seep into the drainage system. Overhead power and telephone cables hanging from exterior walls of houses and fences cause visual blight and pose a safety hazard. Storefronts and building façades on sidestreets are in dire need of renovation and renewal. Additionally, there are no open spaces within the Old City for leisure, sports, and playgrounds. Sanitation issues must be addressed as well (local trash consolidation rooms, and frequency of garbage collection and street sweeping).

Recommendations

We recommend establishing a planning and oversight unit exclusive to the Old City. The unit should be staffed by Arabic speakers who would involve the locals in the planning processes. The unit should coordinate its efforts with the Antiquities Authority and other authorities, with responsibilities including the following: carrying out a detailed survey of houses and infrastructure, supervising construction, infrastructure maintenance and coordination, guiding residents on planning and construction laws, and mediating between the local community and Israeli authorities.

We also recommend allocating sufficient resources for rehabilitation of the residential areas in the Muslim and Christian Quarters and preservation of relevant structures and sites. We suggest treating building façades and making improvements in sewage, water, power, telecom, and street lighting. We further recommend utilizing empty spaces by cultivating gardens, including on rooftops.

C. Transportation, pedestrian traffic, and parking

The already overcrowded Old City is flooded with visitors, and its narrow streets cannot contain the traffic volume. Parking space is also a problem. Congestion on the main routes impedes pedestrian traffic during peak holiday and tourist seasons. Currently there are no plans to develop alternative routes or divert visitor traffic to other tourist routes.

There exists a logistical plan to restrict vehicle entry into the Old City (except for a parking lot for residents of the Jewish Quarter, parking spaces for the heads of the Christian Quarter churches, the Waqf parking lot for Muslim Quarter residents, and the Armenian Quarter parking lot located in front of the Armenian Patriarchate). A long-term plan exists to integrate new means of transportation into the area, such as a light rail and heavy rail.

There are also plans for new parking lots near the Old City gates (outside the walls), and an underground parking lot near the Zion Gate/Jewish Quarter. All of these plans have been delayed due to an array of objections and sensitivities.

Recommendations

We recommend accepting the Jerusalem Transportation Masterplan recommendation to restrict vehicle access into the Old City and add more parking lots outside the walls. We also recommend adding more pedestrian routes to regulate tourist traffic during peak times and holidays.

D. Education

There are 23 schools and 11,000 schoolchildren in the Old City, some of whom are not local residents. This does not include Yeshivas and Kolllels which also draw in a large number of students daily. Most Arab schools in the Old City do not meet required standards, both in terms of classroom size and in terms of available facilities and schoolyard areas. All of the Old City's Arab schools follow the Palestinian curriculum, including schools funded and supervised by the Jerusalem Municipality.

Recommendations

We recommend reducing the number of schools and educational facilities, including Yeshivas, within the Old City walls, primarily for students who do not reside locally. Suitable new schools should be built outside the walls. We also recommend addressing the issue of the curriculum in the schools funded by the Education Department of the Jerusalem Municipality, and finding a means within the legal framework to supervise private schools and schools not under the department's supervision.

E. Tensions and problems with the Christian churches and their leaders

Due to political sensitivities, relations between the Israeli government and the churches are partial and unstable. The purchase of property in the Christian Quarter by Ateret

Cohanim and the Jerusalem Municipality's attempts to collect municipal taxes from the churches have exacerbated the tension between the authorities and the Old City church leaders. There is currently no single high-ranking point of contact within the government responsible for relations with the churches; responsibility for the churches is divided among different municipal officials, the police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Religious Services. None of these has a full picture of the situation in the Old City. The Christians are also subject to ongoing harassment by Jewish youths who deride clergymen and disrupt Christian processions. The great number of festivals and events not coordinated with the community also harm their quality of life, primarily in the Christian Quarter.

Recommendations

The government authorities, the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israeli Police should strengthen their relationship with the heads of the Old City churches and work to coordinate with them, including those who are less than enthusiastic about collaborating with the Israeli authorities. We suggest a high-ranking government representative as a single point of contact for churches. We urge the Israeli Police to increase its efforts to prevent violence towards clergymen – particularly during Christian processions.

F. Tourism and economic development

The Israeli government has allocated funds for business development through the Jerusalem Municipality, the Jerusalem Development Authority and East Jerusalem Development Ltd. Some of these funds are for business loans for merchants to upgrade their shops and to keep them open in the evenings. An earlier attempt to keep the Old City open into the evening and early nighttime hours was unsuccessful, despite the potential economical benefit for locals and merchants. Not enough has been done to make the Old City more attractive in the evenings. Most evening activities currently available are festivals targeted towards visitors, not locals, whose lives are often disrupted by these events. Many shops have closed because the merchants have been unable to adapt their merchandise to the market's changing needs. With no marketing skills, the merchants are struggling to survive, and the high municipal taxes are disproportionate to their revenue. Tour guides direct tourists to specific businesses and do not allow enough free time to choose where to shop and dine in the Old City. Some uncertified guides use voice amplifiers that disturb

the locals. The pilgrim guest houses inside the walls are not marketed to the general public, so tourists do not stay there.

Recommendations

We recommend helping the churches market their guest houses; prohibiting guides from using voice amplifiers; supervising guides and instructing them to allow tourists to choose where they dine and shop; marketing the Old City's dining experience; opening additional security checkpoints for tourists at the Temple Mount and marketing it as a tourist destination; encouraging tourists to visit the Old City in the evenings; creating a tourism database to be used for policymaking and for tracking and monitoring tourist traffic through the Old City and the surrounding areas.

Summary

The Israeli government, the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israel Police have done much for the Old City in the past decade. Their efforts have stabilized the area and made it safer and have resolved various issues inside the walls. However, the actions taken so far have been intended primarily for tourism development and have failed to prioritize the needs of the local residents. The Old City is in need of a government-dictated policy; an authority to coordinate among the executing agencies; a very high-ranking official to act as a single point of contact for the heads of Old Jerusalem's churches; a community administration to provide social and cultural services; a separate urban planning and construction unit to address construction-related issues; implementation of solutions for parking and transportation; regulation of tourism routes and religious processions; a reduction in the number of educational facilities within the walls; and economic and tourism development for the Old City and the entire Historic Basin.