Jerusalem. a view of the old city

HISTORICAL CENTRES AND PALESTINIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY

Ali Shaban Abdelhamid and Eman M. Amad

This paper investigates related issues pertinent to conservation and protection of cultural heritage of historic centers in Palestine. Historic centers are of significance to Palestinian cultural heritage, however transformation of their traditional urban fabrics and loss of their inherent qualities due to several problems threaten them. This paper investigates threats and dangers to the traditional built environment. It focuses on challenges facing conservation of historic centers in Palestine and investigates protection and revitalization of the old cores. The main objective is to explore the means to sustain an important part of Palestinian cultural heritage, preserve the identity and character of Palestinian cities, and ensure that the future development in Palestine will not compromise the urban and architectural qualities of the cultural heritage of historic centers.

Historic centers of Palestinian cities are formed of dense and compact urban fabrics. Their structure and form manifest the characteristic features of Arab-Islamic cities. As intact fabrics with streets, alleys, buildings and public spaces, historic centers are of value and significance to Palestinian cultural heritage. Historic cores are composed of several entities, each of which is a neighborhood or a quarter. The urban tissue of the Islamic city has inherently natural urban divisions (Kostof, S. 1992); the greater part of the city is formed of quarters, composed of private houses and their access routes (Morris, A. E. J. 1993), however within one quarter a network of secondary streets are connected with several cul-de-sacs, which in turn give access to individual houses (Hakim, B. S. 1986). A track from the bazaar, the primary commercial street, with its animated and bustling nature leading to the quieter, residential quarters, reveals the hierarchical relationship between the public and the semi-private spaces within the traditional city (Hugh, M., Roberts, P. 1979).

Historic cores often include buildings of national and international heritage significance. However, the value of historic centers lies in the wholeness of their intact urban morphology formed of buildings, streets and open spaces. During the last century, Palestinian cities witnessed new developments and expansions beyond their traditional boundaries. Today, historic cores form centers around or adjacent to, modern new cities have grown organically or by deliberate design. The new rapid urban developments threaten to marginalize the cultural heritage of Palestinian cities. Historic cores represent historical links with the past and manifest the cultural traditions which have developed meaning and character to societies (Steinberg, F. 1996). This paper discusses threats and dangers to the historic centers, analyzes different challenges and obstacles that face conservation in Palestine, and gives some suggestions for conservation of

Centri storici e Identità culturale della Palestina

L'articolo tratta la tematica generale della tutela e conservazione dell'eredità culturale dei centri storici della Palestina investiti e minacciati dalle trasformazioni che, per vari motivi, colpiscono la struttura e la qualità del tessuto urbano.

Tra questi motivi: l'alto valore dei suoli e la mancanza di leggi di protezione; la pressione esercitata sugli antichi tessuti urbani dalle nuove aree commerciali; la crescente pressione dell'accessibilità veicolare in contrasto con le strade pedonali del tessuto storico, l'introduzione di nuovi materiali e nuove forme che minacciano il carattere dell'ambiente urbano tradizionale e, non ultimo l'abuso sistematico e le distruzioni portati dagli attacchi militari israeliani.

L'articolo focalizza la sfida che deve affrontare la conservazione dei centri storici. L'aspetto più grave di essa è la politica di Israele contro il mantenimento dell'identità culturale Palestinese. Vi è inoltre la mancanza di risorse per affrontare un progetto comprensivo di conservazione che tuttavia il popolo non ritiene essere una priorità principale e che, in nome del progresso e della moderniz-

historic cores.

Dangers and Threats to the Historic Centers

Historic centers in Palestine are threatened to lose their inherent qualities due to enormous threats and dangers. Historic cores are largely threatened by poor living conditions, dilapidation and decay, neglect and lack of appreciation by citizens. The historic centers had lost their original residents for poor occupants and village migrants as a result of socio-cultural changes, which occurred in Palestine during the last century. Aggravated poor economic and social conditions of old towns could result in social segregation which will devalue the historic nuclei and pave the way for their conversion into urban slum areas (Bianca, S. 2000).

Historic centers are subjected to large threats manifested in transformation of their urban fabrics due to changes in the historic cores themselves as well as development of the areas surrounding them. Location of old cores in the heart of cities, surrounded by new commercial areas, has put the historic urban fabrics under tremendous economic pressure to be transformed into commercial uses (Fethi, I. 1996). It has also put the historic core under increasing pressure for vehicular accessibility, which creates complications for the narrow pedestrian streets of the historic fabrics.

Furthermore, development in commercial activities threatens to change the nature of diversity of uses that compose the traditional urban fabric of the old town. However, the diversity of use, which the traditional fabrics have in their structures, contributes to a large extent to the determination of the urban character of old cores. Basically, cultural heritage is best sustained where there is the maximum number of compatible uses, especially a vibrant resident population (Giddings, B. 2000).

The rapid and dynamic growth of the modern city centers, adjacent to the historic cores, along with the high value of land and the absence of protecting laws, threaten old buildings of the historic cores by demolition. Furthermore, new massive scale commercial developments in the new city centers create pressures on the historic cores and threaten to marginalize their cultural heritage and change the character, image and identity of the traditional urban environments. New and old buildings contrast in terms of form, size, shape, style, building materials, color, decoration and details.

Historic cores are also threatened due to changes that have been introduced within the traditional fabrics by new urban infills and new additions to old buildings that do not integrate properly with the traditional urban environment. The use of new forms and shapes and the introduction of new building materials threaten to change the character of the traditional urban environment of historic centers.

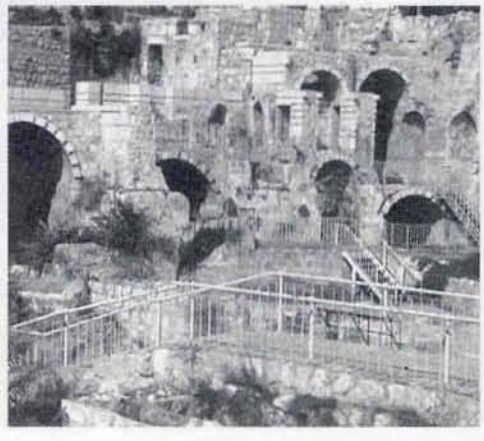
A major threat to historic centers in Palestine has resulted from the systematic abuse during the long years of Israeli occupation since 1967. However, the biggest devastation took place during the past five years. Historic cores were subjected to a huge destruction as a result of frequent and continuous attacks by the Israeli army (Al-Dabbeek, E. 2003). .

Challenges Facing Conservation of Historic Centers in Palestine

Conservation in Palestine is facing various challenges and obstacles (Fethi, I. 1997; Touqan, S. 1997; Yousof, M. A. 1997), however the most serious challenge is the Israeli policy towards the destruction of the Palestinians cultural heritage. Other obstacles are manifested in the lack of financial resources to undertake comprehensive conservation projects and the fact that conservation in Palestine is not considered a top priority neither by people, who are struggling to feed and provide shelter for their families, nor by the Palestinian Authority, which still depends on donations from rich countries and is struggling to maintain the basic infrastructure needed to provide health care and to create jobs.

Conservation in Palestine is seen by the public as being the responsibility of the municipalities. But these municipalities as well as the NGOs and local bodies at present are only responsible for safeguarding monuments. This attitude, which does not encourage public investment in conservation and repair work, has eventually led to the public neglect of cultural heritage. On the other hand, conservation in Palestine is facing problems stemming from the lack of efficient urban design and unmonitored, uncontrolled development in the historic quarters. This have heavily overshadowed the heritage of Palestine's glorious past, eventually, many historic structures, such as hammams, soap factories, khans and palaces, in these historic cores have been destroyed in the name of progress and modernization.

Other obstacles are related to the shortage of qualified staff and specialists in conservation. The field has benefited only in a very limited way from investment in education and training pro-



Jerusalem, stratifications of different periods in the atchaeological area close to the eastern part of the city wall

zazione, lascia che importanti edifici storici quali hammams, palaces, khans, vengano abbattuti.

L'obiettivo principale è quello di esplorare i mezzi necessari a sostenere una parte importante dell'eredità culturale, preservare l'identità ed il carattere della città palestinese e assicurare che il futuro sviluppo in Palestina non comprometta la qualità dell'architettura e del disegno urbano che costituiscono aspetti materiali fondamentali dell'eredità culturale.

Parte importante dell'articolo è dedicata alla tematica della tutela e conservazione dei nuclei urbani storici, sui quali vengono riportate riflessioni di vari autori.

L'articolo postula sensibilità negli interventi sui nuclei storici per non comprometterne l'identità e nel contempo garantire il benessere economico. Inoltre la conservazione del carattere dei nuclei urbani contribuisce a mantenerne viva l'identità, così come leggi e regolamenti dovrebbero essere introdotti per controllare la qualità dei cambiamenti nell'ambiente storico. A tal fine aree di transizione dovrebbero garantire il passaggio e l'integrazione tra il nucleo storico e le nuove strutture che vengono realizzate nell'intorno. Inoltre la protezione e la rivitalizzazione dei nuclei storici presuppone il mantenimento della diversità degli usi delle costruzioni sostenendo il carattere del tessuto storico. E' inoltre essenziale cercare di assicurare, nel processo di riabilitazione, un'effettiva partecipazione dei residenti poveri dei nuclei storici e di mantenere nel centro storico la comunità dei residenti di basso reddito di fronte al crescere dei valori del suolo.

Vari altri argomenti vengono trattati dall'articolo qui solo sintetizzato.

Conclude l'articolo che l'instabilità politica è di forte impedimento, in Palestina, alla conservazione ed allo sviluppo dell'ambiente storico, mentre lo sviluppo del turismo potrebbe fortemente contribuire al consolidamento ed alla conservazione dei centri storici. A condizione che le misure, le azioni e le soluzioni ai problemi di conservazione, crescano e maturino naturalmente all'interno e non vengano importate dall'esterno.

Il buon governo può aiutare le città a preservare la loro eredità culturale dove leggi e regolamenti consentano di controllare il loro svilup-

grams. Not until late1980s did a few Palestinians started to specialize in conservation. Yet there is still no specialized organization or institute concerned with developing conservation techniques and methods. There is an obvious lack of political will and, as a result the commitment of finance to develop conservation through education and training, as well as by allocating money for regular maintenance and repair is missing.

The absence of any form of legislative framework for the protection and preservation of Palestinian built cultural heritage is a major issue. Also, the problem of ownership pattern represents another challenge to conservation of historic cores. The ownership of old buildings in an inherited property often belongs to a great number of individuals with the same kinship. It is rare that such property is a settled matter, entitled to one person. The multiple claims of several individuals to one property have a major impact on conservation policies.

The absence or weakness of public awareness towards the significance of conservation of cultural heritage in general and architectural heritage in particular is a serious problem. Most people, from an economic point of view, would prefer to demolish old buildings and build new ones without caring about historical and cultural values attached to traditional buildings.

Social challenges or problems are facing conservation of historic centers populated by poor residents. Poor people and migrants from rural areas, living in very poor conditions and in places that are regarded by many as primitive, are not expected to express their desire to remain in old houses, care about repairing them or express any interest in conserving them.

Conservation of the Cultural Heritage of Historic Cores

It is vital that the urban form of historic centers be preserved against changes; interventions need to consider the complex character of historic cores, and to look at the whole network of social, economic and physical interrelations found in traditional environments. Change within the historic environment needs to be managed sensitively to ensure retention and protection of cultural heritage in a way which does not compromise its integrity, while guaranteeing its economic well being (Greed, C., Roberts, M. 1998). Interventions must combine both conservation and development concerns in an integral manner (Bianca, S. 1996). Interventions should consider sustainable development of the historic core, thus not sacrifice what future generations will value for the sake of short-term gains. This commitment has particular relevance to the preservation of the historic environment, which is by nature, irreplaceable (Lichfield, N. 1996).

Efforts should be directed towards preserving the character and cultural identity of the historic core, which greatly contribute to giving the city its own identity and cultural significance. Laws and regulations should be introduced to control

Ramallah, the entrance of the Al-buri Centre, recently restored by the Palestinian Youth Union (2003)

construction and change inside the historic environment. New buildings should fit sensitively into the unique combination that enhances the visual qualities of the old areas (Banejee, T. & Southworth, M. 1991). Serageldin, I. 1996 argued that the relationship between old and new manifests itself at multiple levels: urban townscape, scale, texture, architectural language and dialogue between past, present and future.

New developments in new city centers should not be allowed to dominate the urban environment of cities. Therefore, regulations should control the development of areas surrounding the historic cores; transition areas around historic cores will have to be designed in such a way as to provide functional integration, while ensuring physical differentiation. Sensitive planning and adjustment of the modern city centers are required to make them compatible with the adjacent historic sites (Bianca, S. 1996). Every historic area and its surroundings should be considered in their totality as a coherent whole (Jokilehto, J. 1996). Laws and regulations should be implemented on the transition or surrounding areas with an intention to preserve the character, identity and image of place of the historic core (Bianca, S. 2000).

Conservation of historic centers should deal with how to preserve the urban pattern of historic areas in the face of necessary upgrading and land use changes, and how to adapt the historic quality of the mixed-use environment to modern conditions (Steinberg, F. 1996). Protecting and revitalizing historic cores involves maintaining the diversity of use and sustaining the urban character of the historic fabric. This necessitates preserving the residential use and enhancing the quality of life for citizens of historic centers (Feilden, B.M. 1996). However, it is essential to find ways to ensure an effective participation of poor residents of old cores in the rehabilitation process and to maintain the community of low-income residents in the face of changing land values (Steinberg, F. 1996).

Conservation of old centers must include an increase in investment, and a revitalization of the economic structure of historic cores (Serageldin, I. 1996). An identified value of many histori-

po e di preservare il loro carattere urbano e con esso la loro identità culturale.

Dr. Ali Shab Abdelhamid. An-Najah University, Nablus, Palestine. Center for Urban & Regional Planning, Director

Dr. Eman M. Amad. An-Najah University, Nablus, Palestine

REFERENCES

Al-Dabbeek, J., Amad, E., Assi, E. (2003): " Post- Disaster Assessment for the City of Nablus", in Threatened Cities: Arab City and Future Challenges, The third Architectural Conference organized by Jordan Engineering Association, October 6-10, pp. 3-17.

Banejee, T. & Southworth, M. (eds.) (1991): City Sense and City Design; writings and Projects of Kevin Lynch, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England.

Bianca, S. (2000): Urban Form in the Arab World; Past and Present, Thames and Hudson, UK.

Bianca, S. (1996): The Historic cities Support Program, in GHOSH, S. (ed.), Architectural and Urban Conservation, Centre for Built Environment, India, pp.80-85.

Feilden, B. M. (1996): "Management of World Heritage Cities", in GHOSH, S. (ed.), Architectural and Urban Conservation, Center for Built Environment, India, pp. 62-68.

Fethi, I. (1997): "The Role of Architectural Heritage and Urban Reconstruction Palestine", in A. B. Zahlan (ed.), The reconstruction of Palestine: Urban and Rural Development, Kegan Paul International, London, New York, pp.392-404.

Fethi, I. (1996): "Conservation in the Islamic World: Current Practices and Critical Lessons", in Ghosh, S. (ed.), Architectural and Urban Conservation, Center for Built Environment, India, pp.25-33.

Giddings, B. (2000): "Sustaining the Cultural Heritage of City Center Buildings in Northern Europe", Proceedings of the Cities and Sustainability International Conference, Sri Lanka.

Greed, C. & Roberts, M. (eds.) (1998): Introducing Urban Design:

cal towns and quarters is their economic yield through tourism (Lemaire, R. 1996). Historic centers can have major potentials, which can be tapped to attract tourists. However, this option could only be considered at the time of peace and political stability. Tourism can make an important contribution to economic development of historic sites as well as for Palestinian cities. Needless to say that through tourism heritage can become a resource that can play an important role in community continuity, renewal, and development. Cultural heritage can serve as a tourism attraction, while tourism can lead to financial support for management of this heritage; revenues from appropriate tourism should be able to finance the restoration and maintenance of historic areas (Lindberg, K. 1999). The challenge is in managing the future growth of the industry so as to minimize its negative impacts on the environment and local communities whilst maximizing the benefits it brings in terms of jobs, support for local culture and industry, and development of traditional craft skills.

In order to ensure participation of local communities in conservation and protection of historic cores, awareness should be raised among local residents towards the significance of cultural heritage that gives Palestinian cities their cultural identity and contributes to ensure cultural continuity in the built environment. Therefore, people should be educated of different values associated with the cultural heritage of their cities On the other hand, they should be aware of the dangers that threaten the old cores and they should be informed of their responsibility in protecting the heritage of their cities. Although governmental support and assistance are essential, community involvement and local support are important to ensure sustainability in the revitalization of historic environments. The support that local communities could give to rehabilitation and development plans is very important and their participation in issues related to the urban environments of their cities is essential.

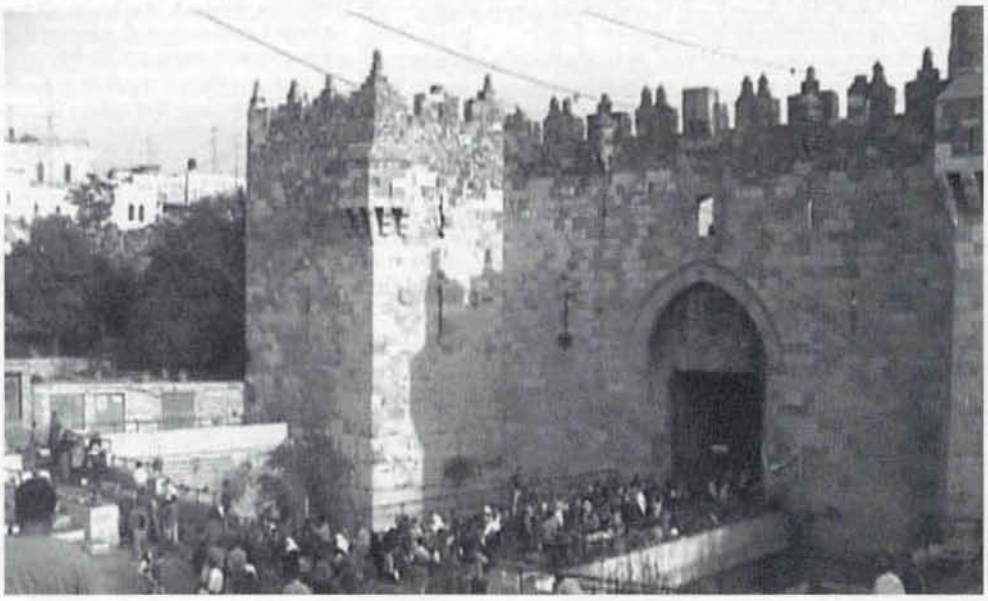
Conclusions

Occupation is a major obstacle in the face of development of the historic environments in Palestine. Political instability hinders investments in conservation or in development. Although tourism could be a major potential for development of the historic core, security and stability are essential requirements for tourism to flourish.

For the purpose of conservation and protection of historic cores, each city should look inside itself to search for the opportunities inherent in its historic urban structure. Each city needs to evaluate the available resources and to discover and tap hidden potentials of its historic site (Bianca, S. 1996). Solutions for problems, interventions, measures and actions need to grow naturally from within and not be imported from outside.

Interventions in historic cores must combine both conservation and development concerns in an integrated manner. The exclusive emphasis on physical conservation of artifacts may turn historic cores into museum- like shells. The revitalization process should protect the essential physical features of historic areas and buildings while ensuring their social and economic viability, as well as their long-term sustainability.

Good management can assist cities to preserve their cultural heritage, whereas laws and regulation can help controlling their development and contribute to preservation of their urban character and protection of their cultural identity. Cities should be allowed to develop and grow without sacrificing the irreplaceable cultural heritage and without losing its character and cultural identity.



Jerusalem, the Damascus Gate

Interventions and Responses, Longman, UK.

Hakim, B.S. (1986): Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles, KPI Limited London, and Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, London and New York.

Hugh, M. & Roberts, P. (1979): An Urban Profile of the Middle East, Croom Helm, London

Jokilehto, J. (1996): "The Impact of Policy on Historic Conservation", in Ghosh, S. (ed.), Architectural and Urban Conservation, Center for Built Environment, India, pp.10-16.

Kostof, S. (1992): The City Assembled, Thames and Hudson, London.

Lemaire, R. (1996): "Why Do We Preserve Historic Towns", in Ghosh, S. (ed.), Architectural and Urban Conservation, Center for Built Environment, India, pp.56-61.

Lichfield, N. (1996): Community Impact Evaluation, UCL press, London.

Lindberg, K. (1999): Sustainable tourism and cultural heritage: a review of development assistance and its potential to promote sustainability, World Bank.

Morris, A.E.J. (1994): History of Urban Form, Longman Scientific & Technical, England.

Serageldin, I. (1996): "Revitalizing Historic Cities: Towards a Public-Private Partnership", in Ghosh, S. (ed.), Architectural and Urban Conservation, Center for Built Environment, India, pp.69- 79.

Steinberg, F. (1996): "Housing Conservation: Approach to Housing Renewal and Rehabilitation", in Ghosh, S. (ed.), Architectural and Urban Conservation, Center for Built Environment, India, pp.51-54.

Touqan, S. (1997): "Options for Urban Development in Palestine", in A.B. Zahlan. (Ed.), The reconstruction of Palestine: Urban and Rural Development, Kegan Paul International, London, New York, pp. 471-487.

Yousof, M.A. (1997): "Conservation of Cultural Heritage: A Community Approach", in A.B. Zahlan (ed.) The reconstruction of Palestine: Urban and Rural Development, Kegan Paul International, London, New York, pp.488-499.

Per gentile concessione del Mapping and G.I.S. Dept. della Arab Studies Society pubblichiamo l'introduzione, del Dr. Adnan Abdelrazek, al fascicolo "*Breaking the siege denying the natural growth of Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem* ". (A. Abdelrazek e K. Tafakji) i cui contenuti riguardano il presente numero di "urbanistica pvs"

For the kind concession of the Mapping and G.I.S. Dept. of the Arab Studies Society, we can publish the Dr. Adnan Abodelrazek's foreword of the booklet "Breaking the siege denying the natural growth of Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem" (A. Abdelraze and K. Tafakji), whose contents concern the present issue of urbanistica pvs"

The negative impact of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and Gaza strip on the Palestinian population of these areas has not been limited to their national tragedy, but has, since June 1967, affected every single dimension of their life. In many ways the Israeli occupation of the rest of Palestine has been characterized by colonial and expansionist policies and practices. Since the first days of the occupation, the Palestinian people of these territories, their lands, their water and natural resources, their social and demographic characteristics, and their various life dimensions have been subjected to Israeli abuse and oppression. Some of the more known Israeli measures in this direction have been the confiscation of major parts of the Palestinian lands, the spread of Jewish settlements all over the West Bank and the Gaza strip, controlling and abusing the water and other natural resources, building up roads serving Jewish settlers, subjecting the Palestinian economy and labor force to Israeli benefits, imposing on the people and their istitutions military rules and practices of Iron Fist, massively imprisoning and detaining people, and practically subjecting the entire Palestinian population to apartheid system politically as well as economically.

A special case of Israeli occupation is East Jerusalem and the surrounding localities. Only three weeks after the 1967 war, East Jerusalem together with lands of and from 28 West Bank localities were annexed to Israel. The illegal annexation of these areas was intended to enlarge and consolidate the Israeli grip on Jerusalem and turn in to the capital of Jewish people, denying others political and historical rights. The Palestinian people of the annexed areas (recently closed to 240,000 persons) have been subjected to full Israeli administrative and legal control, separating them from their West Bank families, socioeconomic activities, and political life. The annexation of East Jerusalem and the other West Bank localities to "greater" Jerusalem has subjected the "new" lands to Israeli full control but left their Palestinian inhabitants outside the Israeli system of citizenship. In other words the lands are Israelized while the inhabitants are considered as residents but not citizens.

One of the major dimensions of Israeli scheme concerning the annexed areas has been the build up of Jewish settlement and the influx of Jewish settlers to these areas, driving to maximize the Jewish population of Jerusalem and to minimize the number of its Arab [Palestinian] inhabitants. In order to reach this goal, the Israeli authorities have been using administrative and military measures including confiscation and re-classifying of lands, which meant to prevent the construction of Palestinian houses and the dwellings in the enlarged municipal boundaries. The Israeli limitation of Palestinian use of their own lands has crippled the ability of the Arab neighborhoods and localities to develop and expand on their own living areas. The imposed limitations and constrains on construction of Arab houses have reached a critical and dangerous point which call for serious and immediate intervention.

Since its inception in 1980 under the leadership of the late Faisal Husseini, Amir al Quds, the Arab Studies Society and later on the Orient House were making efforts to minimize the suffering of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem and to maximize the services provided to strengthening their steadfastness in their land and city. Among the efforts which were made was to enable the Palestinian residents to build their houses on their land without being subjected to house demolition and other punitive measures such as the payments of high fines and legal expenses. These efforts included a legal and political struggle against confiscation of land, providing technical and legal assistance to acquire construction permits, and providing legal assistance for protecting residents against the demolition of their houses.....

This booklet provides a background and factual presentation of the urgent need to increase the effort, on behalf of and together with the Palestinian resident of Jerusalem, for enlarging the available lands for constructing Arab houses through re-zoning and the use of technical and legal means.