Urban Development and Planning in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Impacts on Urban Form

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

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Summary

Urban development and planning practice and experience in Palestine which stemmed back to mid 19th Century had passed through various changes and developments in terms of characteristics, policies, principles, and management. In addition, the urban planning system in Palestine seems to be unique in its composition and context. This uniqueness is related to the fact that planning practice was controlled and experienced by external forces (or foreigners) and not by native bodies (the Palestinians themselves). This, of course, is due to the long period of mandate and occupation for the Palestinian land by several nations.

The current interim and temporary stage that the Palestinian society in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) (West Bank and Gaza Strip) passes through, particularly after signing the Oslo Agreement in 1994 and the followed Israeli partial withdraws from the OPT, despite the continuous land confiscation for building Israeli settlements and by-pass roads as well as the reoccupation of most of the Palestinian cities and villages since the beginning of Alaqsa Intifata (second uprising) in 2000, and the resulted destruction of houses and infrastructure besides the construction of the Separation Wall along the West Bank have imposed a new situation and put various challenges in front of the Palestinian planning institutions (specially on the local level) and prevented the possibility of providing and implementing the attained physical planning.

The limited available land, the rapidly growing population of Palestine, the misuse of urban development, and the decisions of policy makers and all planning issues associated with the political situation and the long period of occupation with its policies and implications played a major role in the formulation of urban form, in addition to the spread of uncontrolled urban developments in the cities, and to the diffusion of urban sprawls within the landscapes and around the cities.

This paper will focus on analyzing the development and changes in urban form of Palestinian cities and towns as well as the determination of the major factors and impacts that affected urban morphology and urban form.

Background

The Palestinian Territories (PT), including West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS), covers an total area of 6,209 km^2 (5844 km^2 in the West Bank and 365 km^2 in Gaza Strip) (see Figure 1). Palestine has a large and rapidly growing population. As of early 2006, there were approximately 4 million people living in the PT (2.5 million in WB and 1.5 in GS) located 579 settlements (cities, towns, villages, hamlets and refugee camps) (see Table 1 and Figure 2). This population is growing rapidly: Fertility rates of Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza are among the highest in the world, 5.6 and 6.9 children per woman of child-bearing age, respectively. By 2015, the population will be over 5 million. Assuming an influx of perhaps 600,000 returnees, the total population of the West Bank and Gaza could reach nearly 6.6 million by 2020.

Figure 1: Figure of Palestinian Territories (West Bank & Gaza Strip)

Table 1: Distribution of Settlements in PT according to Population Size

Population Size	No. of Settlements		
	West Bank	**Gaza Strip**	**Total**
٧٠.٠٠٠+	٣	٤	7
٧٠.٠٠٠ – ٥٠.٠٠٠	-	٢	2
٥٠.٠٠٠ – ٢٠.٠٠٠	١٣	٢	15
٢٠.٠٠٠ – ١٠.٠٠٠	٢٤	٣	27
١٠.٠٠٠ – ٥.٠٠٠	٥٩	٦	65
٥.٠٠٠ – ٢.٠٠٠	١٣٥	٨	143
٢.٠٠٠ – ١.٠٠٠	٩٢	٣	95
Less than ١.٠٠٠	١٩٢	٤	196
Refugee Camps	20	9	29
Total	**538**	**41**	**579**

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), Population Estimates, 2006.

The total capacity of a nation's land and resources to support its population is referred to as "carrying capacity." Palestine's carrying capacity is stretched to the limit. It is one of the most densely populated places in the Arab world at 547 persons per square kilometer. If Gaza is taken separately, it has a population density of 3,457 per square kilometer (9,200 people per square mile), one of the highest in the world. The physical infrastructure is grossly inadequate, particularly for water, electricity, and sewerage. The demands on Palestine's limited land area for agriculture, infrastructure, economic activity, and housing are growing. But it is with housing that the problems are most pressing. Currently, there are 6.4 residents on average per housing unit in the West Bank and Gaza, a very large number by developed country standards. If Palestine's population rises from 3.7 million to nearly 6 million over the next ten years, and if current housing densities are to remain stable, 320,000 new housing units will have to be constructed during this period.

Figure 2: Distribution of Palestinian Regions and Cities

Urban Planning Experience in Palestine:

Urban planning practice and experience in Palestine which stemmed back to mid 19th Century had passed through various changes and developments in terms of characteristics, policies, principles, and management. In addition, the urban planning system in Palestine seems to be unique in its composition and context. This uniqueness is related to the fact that planning practice was controlled and experienced by external forces (or foreigners) and not by native bodies (the Palestinians themselves). This, of course, is due to the long period of mandate and occupation for the Palestinian land by several nations.

The Ottoman Period (1850-1917):

The legislation for urban planning in Palestine started towards the end of the Ottoman era with the promulgation of the Provincial Municipalities Law of 1877. Under this law 22 municipal councils were established. These existed in the major towns and larger villages. Mayors were appointed by the government and elections rarely took place. The rural districts established under the Vilayet Law of 1864 were supposed to have a council, but very few were in fact established. However, many district heads and head of villages (mukhtars) were local Arabs appointed by the government (Fruchtman, 1986 and Khamaisi, 1997).

Land ownership and tenure, and restrictions on land use, were an essential factor in the development of Palestine, which constituted a significant factor in understanding the evolution of urban and rural planning. Under the Ottoman Land Code, the land of Palestine was classified under five main categories (Fruchtman, 1986):

- Cultivated land, termed “Miri”, in which the State had the ultimate ownership.
- Uncultivated land, termed “Mewat”, was owned and possessed by the State.
- Land in public use such as roads or common pastures, termed “Metruka”.
- Land dedicated to the Islamic religions charitable trust, termed “Waqf”.
- Privately owned land, termed “Mulk”.

It should be emphasized that private land was rare, except in the existing urban areas. Most of the land was publicly owned and, in practice, inhabited and tilled by tenants holding long or short leases. A system of building permits for towns was set up as well as rules for the appropriation of land for building roads and for regional development. Planning under the Ottomans stressed the Physical aspects: roads and buildings, particularly in the towns, disregarding the economic and social aspects (Fruchtman, 1986).

The British Mandatory Period (1917-1948):

With the arrival of British troops in Jerusalem, the British issued a military proclamation on 9/12/1917 prohibiting building in an area covering 75 meters all around Jerusalem. Any construction within the walls was also prohibited in order to preserve the character of the city. In the course of the first two years of British occupation, structural plans were set up for the towns of Jaffa and Jerusalem. The British occupying authorities were preparing new legislation for town planning based on the British experience during the first decade of the twentieth century when the term 'town planning' first appeared in 1906 (Gordon, 1974; Khamaisi, 1997).

Town planning was established as a system in Britain in 1909 to plan space and areas to solve urban, environmental and social problems created by the industrial revolution and the structural changes in British society. The British carried town planning to the territories under their Mandate, such as India, Nigeria, Malaysia as well as Palestine (McCoulrey, 1988; Home, 1993).

When British Military rule became civilian in 1912, town-planning laws were adopted, but they were to be implemented only in towns. Building plans and space planning were established for the Palestinian towns of Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Nablus, Bir Al-Sabe', Gaza and others. Comparatively, construction plans, building permits and roads were organized at both the local and central organizational levels (Home, 1993; Khamaisi, 1997).

The office of the planning consultant (headed by architect Henry Kendal between 1935 and 1948) prepared and approved regional and local plans. The plans were established on the basis of imported concepts orchestrated by the town planning consultant, i.e. concepts developed in an industrial society like Britain. The British Mandate in Palestine transposed and implemented them through its control over space and the issuing of building permits, because Palestinian society was mostly an agricultural and village society, developing at a relatively slow pace, functioning on the basis of rural concepts stemming from their own values and customs. This limited the effect of regional planning on the villages, with the exception of roads. As for the towns, local plans were prepared and approved; the were implemented through municipal authorities which became local organizing committees, responsible for issuing permits, for planning and control as well as for space development within the area of the town (Khamaisi, 1994 and 1997).

When the British Mandatory came to an end in 1948, Palestine was divided and Israel was created in one part of it. The other part, the West Bank, was annexed to Jordan, while Gaza was placed under Egyptian administration. As for the planning process, the structural plans established under the Mandate remained in force. During the Jordanian Mandate, law No. 31 of 1955, which was not much different from the 1936 order, was adopted for town and village planning and construction. Subsequently, law No. 79 of 1966 was adopted entrusting the Kingdom of Jordan with full planning authority for the West Bank. The British system remained in force in Gaza (Khamaisi, 1994 and 1997).

The Jordanian Period (1948-1967):

The Jordanian authorities did nothing to amend the planning system established by the British Mandate. They only devised structural plans for some towns and supervised construction. They did not prepared plans for the villages, expect in a few cases such as El Taiba, near Ramallah. The Jordanian structural plans for some of the towns in the West Bank disregarded demographic development and needs as well as the future economic and social requirements of the population. They were established along the same lines as under the British Mandate and further restricted urban development in the towns. They also failed to assign sufficient land for public buildings and economic activities, thus limiting economic and industrial developments in the towns. Moreover, the planned network of roads disregarded future needs and the increasing number of vehicles, thereby encouraging a network of roads incompatible with the needs of the population. This has resulted in the traffic crises plaguing Palestinian town centers today, despite their relatively small size and the relatively low standard of living (Al-Gerbawy and Abdulhadi, 1990; Khamaisi, 1997).

The Jordanian period brought no noticeable development in the field of planning and construction, perhaps due to the limited development of Palestinian society as a result of the massive emigration of Palestinians from villages and towns. Moreover, the development of the East Bank of Jordan was the priority rather than the West Bank. Awareness of the importance of planning was poor, among both the public and the authorities. The State did not develop any regional plans, or structural provincial plans. As a result, the plans that was established under the British Mandate remained operational, a fact exploited by the Israeli authorities after occupation, when deciding building permits (Khamaisi, 1994 and 1997).

The Israeli Period (1967-1994):

At the time of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, most villages and many towns lacked approved structural plans. Moreover, the Israeli occupation came one year after the approval of the amended Jordanian law No. 79 of 1966. No institutionalized planning authorities with long traditions existed, and this meant that the Palestinian Territories were 'uncovered' regarding town planning. Consequently, it was easy for the Israeli authorities to amend the relevant laws and regulations to serve their interests, taking advantage of the legal and central changes in the Jordanian law to gain a free hand in controlling land use and in granting building permits to Palestinians (Abdulhadi, 1990; Khamaisi, 1994 and 1997).

Until 1971, the process of granting building permits continued in accordance with Jordanian laws and the plans established by the British Mandate. Perhaps the Israeli decision-markers did not expect the occupation to last, hence their limited interference with the legal basis and mechanisms for planning. The Israeli authorities concentrated on security aspects and control of building processes through the army. The big change came in 1971 with the issuing of military order No. 418 which established the basis for the planning authorities under Israeli occupation. This order came to be known as the *Decree concerning the Organization of towns, Villages and buildings in the West Bank.* The decree abolished the district level of planning and building, transferring authority to a Supreme Planning Council established for each part of Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza). The comprehensive powers granted by the Jordanian law to the minister passed to the hands of what was called the "responsible", who was appointed by the military leader of the area. The same military order also dissolved the planning committees in village council, later establishing six regional and village committees in the West Bank and two in Gaza (Khamaisi, 1994 and 1997).

This total control transformed the law in force into an efficient mechanism to restrict Palestinian urban growth, limiting construction by refusing building permits and by reducing the land earmarked for industrial and economic projects, thereby depriving both towns and villages a functioning economy. Planning became a tool for the military government to prevent the expansion of construction by Palestinians; instead, it allowed them to set aside vast areas of land for Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza and to annex these areas (Coon, 1992; Khamaisi, 1994 and 1997).

What increased the negative effect of such planning is the fact that the Israeli occupation authorities used the Mandate's structural plans and the Jordanian system in a selective manner, concomitant with Israeli interests (Khamaisi, 1994 and 1997):

The area commander appoints the members of the council in contravention to the Jordanian law of 1966 which has remained in force despite the occupation and which was recognized by "military order No. 418" in Articles 1 and 5 regarding the authority of local organizing committees in the municipalities. In this way, the planning institutions were set up to suit Israeli interests. The composition of the Council and its subsidiary committees made it a pliant tool and a mean to implement Israeli policy aiming at dominating the Palestinian Territories (PT), restricting Palestinian urban expansion and development and increasing the dependency of the Palestinian economy on Israeli. Palestinians were prevented from participating in decisions concerning the development of their own spaces (Al-Gerbawy and Abdulhadi 1990; Khamaisi 1990; Coon 1992).

In construct, the door was wide open for developing; planning and guiding Jewish settlements in the PT. Settlements were even sometimes exempted from the need to obtain a building permit or to prepare a structural project, since the *responsible* in charge, by virtue of military order No.418, was entitled to grant such a dispensation. It became very difficult and costly for Palestinians to obtain a building permit; the process went through many stages and required authorization from several institutions and departments (Antiquities, the Custodian of Absentee Property, the Military Governor, the information committee, taxation authorities, internal review officials, and others). The difficulty in obtaining building permits led some Palestinians to build without them and, in many such cases, the building was later pulled down. This difficulty also forced other Palestinians to forego having a house altogether (Khamaisi 1990, Coon 1992).

Among the reasons that contributed to the limitation of building permits was the absence of local structural plans for Palestinian towns and villages. The legal basis used for the granting of permits centered on the regional planning regulations set up during the Mandate, which were not in keeping with the needs of the Palestinians even by the 1940s (when the need for development and construction was far less), let alone the 1970s. The absence of structural plans for some cities, and the lack of allowance for urban expansion in others, gave the organizing authorities, dominated by Jews, a practical means of withholding permits on the pretext that there were no structural plans to allow for the granting of permits to build houses, roads or schools. Yet the Palestinian population was increasing and so was their need for housing, services, economic activities and infrastructure, but planning and building permits were used technically to prevent the fulfillment of these essential needs (Khamaisi 1990; Coon 1992).

The Palestinian Authority Period (Since 1994):

With the formation of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 as a result of Oslo Peace Agreement, the planning responsibilities as well as other civilian issues and services were transferred to the related Palestinian ministries and institutions. The planning responsibilities and duties were mainly divided between the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) and the Ministry of Local Government (MOLG).

MOPIC's focus on development of relevant internal and external physical planning systems include the Directorate for Urban and Rural Planning (DURP) as a centralized unit responsible for physical planning. The physical planning activities at MOPIC concentrated on development of land and land use on regional (West Bank and Gaza) and national levels (MOPIC, 1998a).

In order to find acceptable solutions to overall and often multi-disciplinary planning problems of several governorates and regions, MOPIC considered it essential to provide a regional plan for co-ordination of future urban and rural development as well as the implementation of large-scale projects. Due to the current status of the environmental situation, MOPIC saw it necessary to address the integration of future physical development and natural resources protection within the framework of a land use development plan (MOPIC, 1998a).

During (1994-1998), MOPIC has prepared two regional plans for the West Bank and Gaza with the pre-1967 borders. These plans represented the basis for the *National Policies for Physical Development*. Both plans assumed a considerable number of returnees and a relatively high natural population growth and are based on an additional population of around 2 million by 2010. The two plans provide a basis for further planning within sectors as well as planning on regional (governorate) and local levels. The are delimited for development in these plans should be regarded as sufficient for the time frame of 10-15 years, and major development should not be permitted outside the specified planning area for that period (MOPIC, 1998b).

In order to harmonizing the existing planning system between the West Bank and Gaza and modernize the already implemented Jordan Planning Law of 1966, as well as facilitating the formation of a new state, A draft proposal of a new "*Plan and Building Act*", has developed in cooperation between MOPIC and MOLG. This Act is focusing on the following issues (MOPIC, 1998b):

- Developing a planning structure based on three main levels: National Plan, District (Regional) Plan and Local Level Plans, and corresponding administrative levels.
- The Ministerial Cabinet is at the top of the administrative levels and responsible for the National Physical Plan conducted by MOPIC.
- National guidelines and regulations are introduced as instruments for the central government to state specific objectives for physical planning in order to secure national interests as well as avoiding obstructions and delays.

- Environmental Impact Assessments are introduced in order to maintain sustainable development for future generations and preserve both natural resources and cultural heritage of the nation.
- Ensure public participation in the planning process and representation in the planning administration.

Comparatively, MOLG took the responsibility of planning at the local level (municipalities and villages) within the areas under the Palestine Authority control (namely Zone A and Zone B). Meanwhile, MOLG should also be responsible for planning at the regional level as stated by the Jordanian law of 1966, which is still implemented, and the newly proposed (not officially approved) Palestinian Building and Planning Law of 1996. However, MOLG did not operate this responsibility, which interfered and intersected with the work and responsibility of MOPIC at the national level. Within MOLG, the Department of Physical Planning and Development is responsible for all planning issues in terms of preparation of structural plans, control and monitoring of planning and building works undertaken by the municipal and village councils (more than 540 councils) as well as the works and activities of the different local government directorates (11 directorates) at the governorate (regional) level.

The experience of MOLG in the preparation of structural plans for local communities (municipalities and villages) was not so successful. The reasons for this are related mostly to the lack of qualified and skilled staff, particularly in urban planning issues. Furthermore, neither the municipalities (in large cities) nor the private sector (engineering offices and consultant firms) have this qualified staff, and the number of the firms and offices that have some qualified persons is very limited (only 2-3 offices or firms) in the West Bank and Gaza. This, as a result, would emphasize the need for an academic undergraduate program offering urban and regional planning degree. Also, there is a need for qualification of staff through specialized training programs.

The planning apparatus or administration in the Palestinian Authority (PA), as stated by the Jordanian Law of 1966, consisted of three levels:

- Higher Planning Council (HPC)
- Regional Planning Committees (governorates level)
- Local Planning Committees (municipal and village councils)

Development of Palestinian Cities: Impacts on Urban Form

The Palestinian land is a composite of numerous elements reflecting an environment of great ecology, culture, history and religious values. Moreover, it has a big diversity in its topography and landscape within a very small area. In the last ten years – and before the second Intifada (uprising) has erupted, there was a short period of economic recovery and growth, which was clearly reflected in the Palestinian cities that experienced a phase of development and expansion. In this transitional period the Palestinian cities have rapidly expanded, and in the physical terms they extended to the surrounding agricultural lands and natural landscapes. Bulks of land annexed are developed for the residential purposes, which simply involves a process of land purchase and subsequent subdivision into housing lots by profit driven developers who are often not sensitive to ecological necessities and urban qualities.

Such uncontrolled city expansions obviously put stress on urban services, besides the loss of agricultural land, natural vegetation and hydrological systems. Fragmentation and weakening of the local traditional communities also take place in these areas due to immigration of new settlers. Consequently, these areas plunge into a state of flux, transition into social, economic and physical conflicts.

The urban form and expansion of the Palestinian cities is being affected by a number of factors, which could be summarized as follows:

(1) Political Factors:

These factors are mostly related with the changing and uncertain political conditions in the Palestinian Territories due to the long and continuous period of Israeli occupation since 1967. The resulted political decisions and orders after the signing of the Oslo Peace Agreement in 1994 have classified the control over land into three categories (see Figure 3):

- Area (A) where the Palestinians have a political and security control as well as the responsibility for planning and development issues in such areas.
- Area (B) where the Palestinian have only the responsibility of planning and development but not for political and security issues that are controlled by the Israelis.
- Area (C) where the Palestinians neither have a political and security control nor having the responsibility for planning and development issues in such areas.

Such classification of land has resulted in the fragmentation and the limitation of urban expansion of most Palestinian cities adjacent to areas of category (C), where the Palestinian do not have any planning authority or even they are forbidden, through military orders, to build in this area. Therefore, we are likely to observe irregular urban forms or even fragmented forms especially when the land devoted for future development is very limited, as it is the case in many cities and towns of which their master plans will cover all the areas or land of categories A and B by 2015 or 2020 since the nearby land is of category C.

Moreover, the building of several Israeli colonies within the West Bank and in Gaza Strip before 2005, adjacent to Palestinian settlements had also impacted the development and expansion of these Palestinian settlements. The allocation of Israeli colonies nearby the Palestinian settlements puts restrictions and impacts on the expansion of these settlements as well as extracting their lands for the expansion of the colonies (see Figure 4).

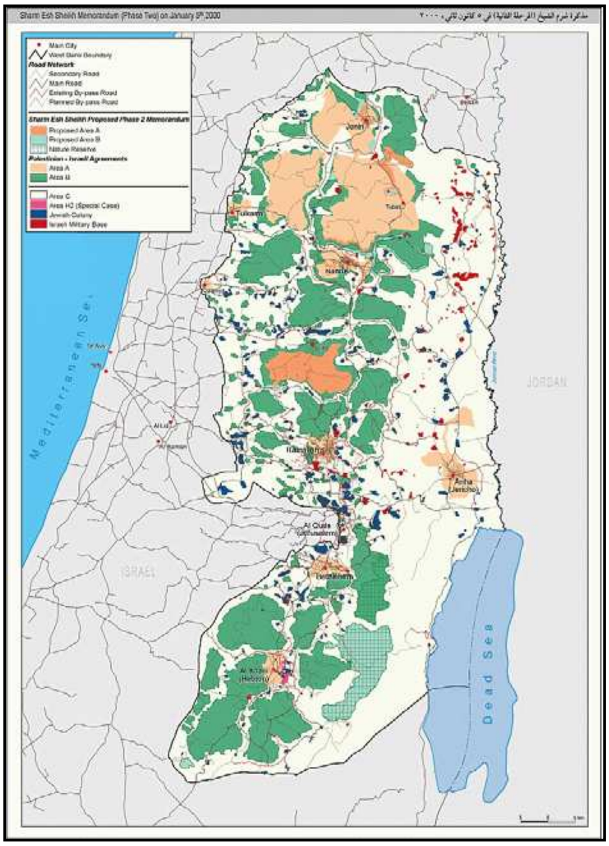

Figure 3: Classification of Land according to Oslo Agreement

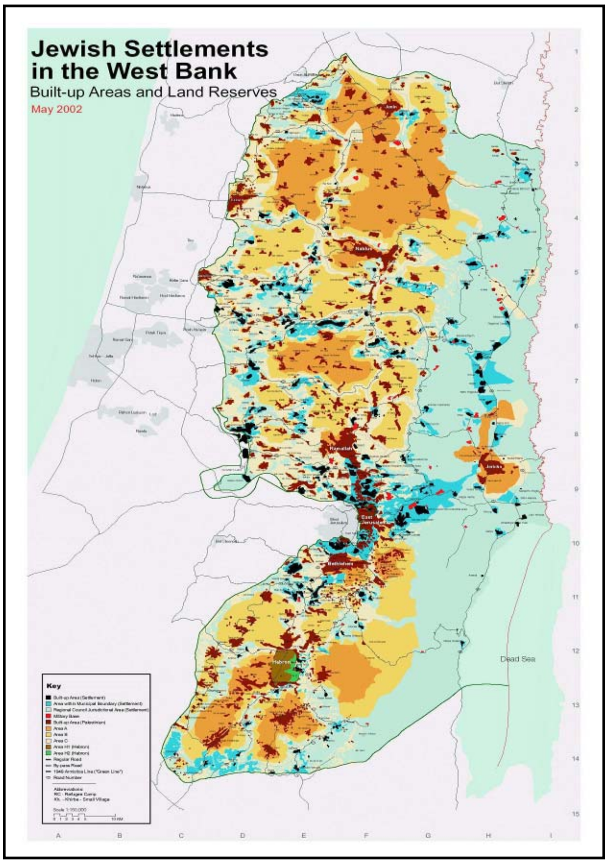

Figure 4: Distribution of Israeli Settlements in the West Bank

Photo 1: Impact of Israeli Settlements on Urban Expansion

Furthermore, after the beginning of the second Intifada (uprising) in 2000 and the resulted new political situation, through which the Israelis reoccupied all the Palestinian cities and towns, including these located in areas A and B, and took the decision of constructing the separation wall along the green line between the West Bank and has also affected the development of Palestinian cities, where large portions of their land (mostly land devoted for future expansion in addition to agricultural land) were extracted for the purpose of constructing the wall (see Figures 5, 6 and 7, Photo 1). This wall will extract an area of 1328 Km^2, around %23.4 of the total area of West Bank. Also, in later phases another wall will be constructed in the eastern side; extracting an area of 1237 Km^2 (%21.9 of West Bank).

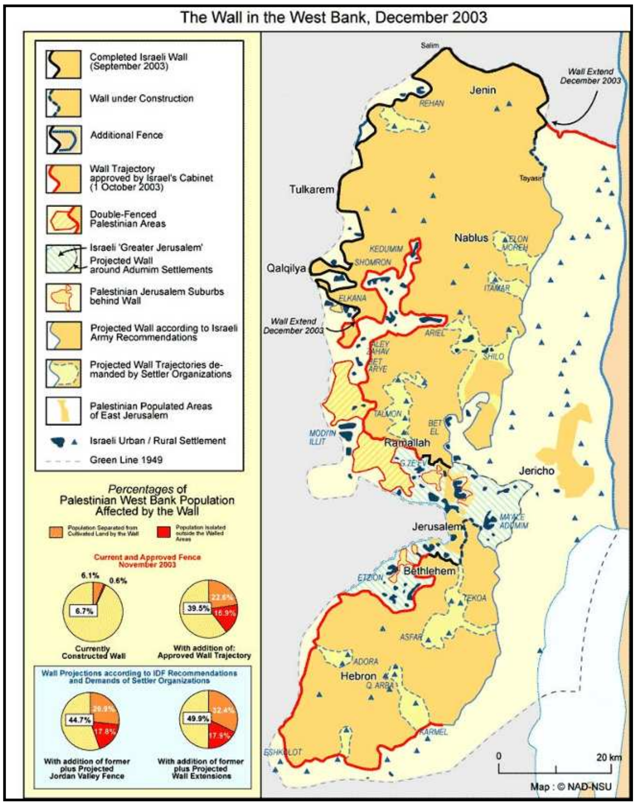

Figure 5: Separation Wall in the West Bank

Photo 2: Impact of the Separation Wall on Urban Expansion

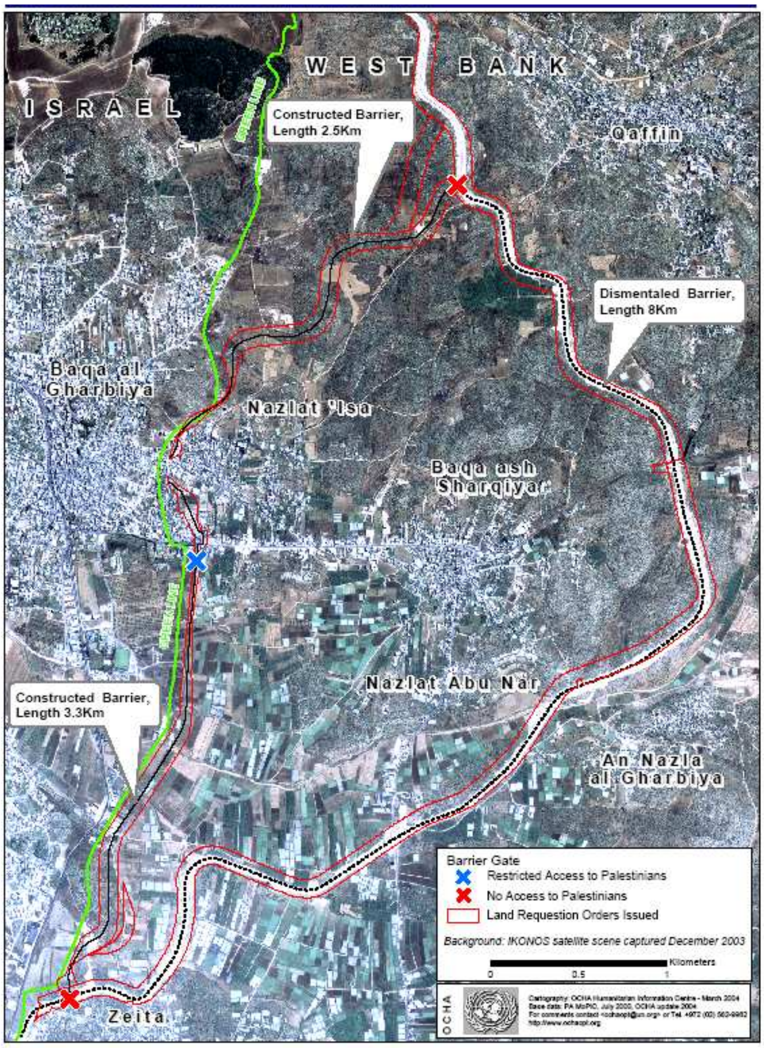

Figure 6: Impact of the Separation Wall on Urban Expansion

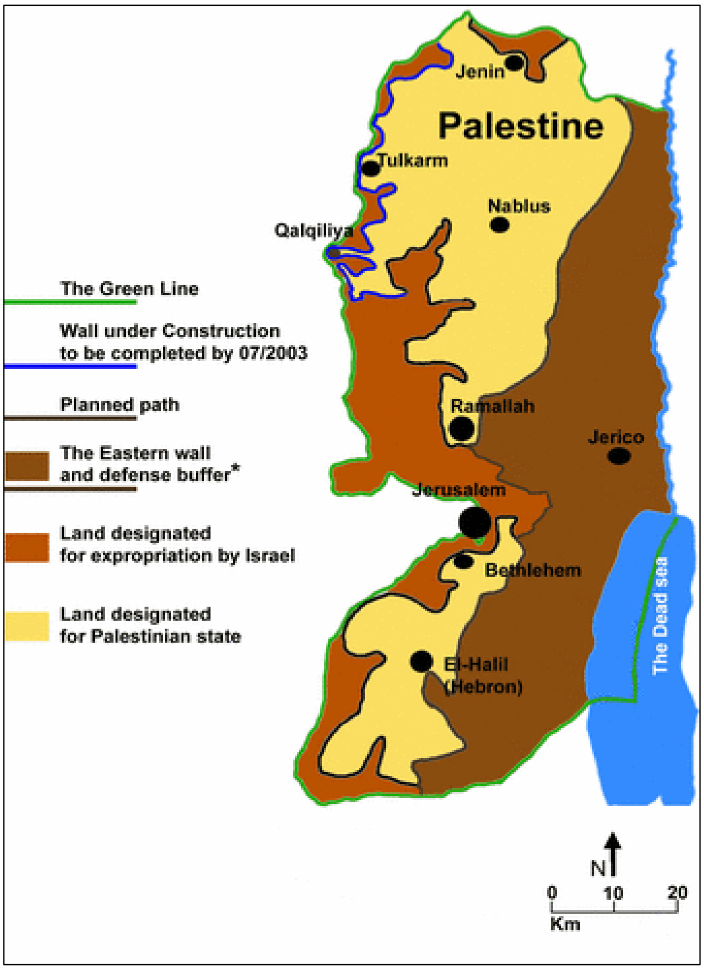

Figure 7: Israeli Restrictions on Palestinian Land

(2) Historical Factors (Previous or Past Experiences)

These factors include the previous or past planning experiences in the Palestinian Territories in terms of the successive different administrations (Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Israeli) with their different laws and regulations that were issued mostly for the benefit of these authorities and the impose of their power or control over land. In addition, these various administration have affected the current building and planning Palestinian system, so that the existing laws, regulations, and orders characterizing the legal planning system in the Palestine looks like a mixture or composition of different previous laws and orders, including:

- British Mandate laws between 1918-1948.
- Jordanian laws in the West Bank between 1948-1967.
- Egyptian administration and orders in Gaza between 1948-1967.
- Israeli military orders for the West Bank and Gaza since 1967.
- Orders issued by the Palestinian Authority since 1994.
- The Palestinian-Israeli Agreements since 1994.

According to the Israeli-Palestinian Agreements all legislation and military orders existing prior to the advent of the Palestinian Authority (PA) will remain in force unless otherwise revoked by a joint Israeli-Palestinian legal committee, thus giving Israel a vote over revocation of military orders. Most previous laws and military orders remain applicable in the West Bank and Gaza. Furthermore, any new legislation to be promulgated by the PA must be approved by the Israelis. So far no new legislation has been approved through this procedure.

Each of these laws and orders has its own regulations and specifications in dealing with the classification of land uses, building densities and heights, roads width, etc. This in turn reflected in the shape or form of development and expansion of cities whether it is spread form (when vertical development is restricted) or compact form (when vertical development is allowed).

(3) Geographic or Location Factors:

These factors are normally referred to the geographic features that the settlements have. This will directly impact the expansion of these settlements and their resulted form. Therefore, we can easily observe various urban forms of Palestinian cities; linear, radial, concentric, and tree-shape forms.

(4) Institutional or Administrative Factors:

These are linked with the capacities and capabilities of the Palestinian institutions (governmental, NGOs, private) involved in the physical planning process. Most of these institutions are lacking the needed capacities and experiences to manage, control, and monitor the rapidly ongoing development and expansion of Palestinian cities.

The experience of MOLG in the preparation of master plans for local communities (municipalities and villages) was not so successful. The reasons for this are related mostly to the lack of qualified and skilled staff, particularly in urban planning issues. Furthermore, neither the municipalities (in large cities) nor the private sector (engineering offices and consultant firms) have this qualified staff, and the number of the firms and offices that have some qualified persons is very limited (only 4-5 offices or firms) in the West Bank and Gaza. This could be clearly noticed through the very small number of settlements that had approved master plans. Out of the existing 540 settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, only around 100 settlements have master plans that adopt and guide their development and expansion. As a result of the absence of these master plans we are likely to see irregular or fragmented urban forms particularly when people are allowed to build everywhere without any control from the municipalities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The limited available land, the rapidly growing population of Palestine, the misuse of urban development, and the decisions of policy makers and all planning issues associated with the changing and unstable political situation in the country played a major role in deteriorating the landscapes, cultural and historical sites, natural resources and environment, in addition to the spread of uncontrolled urban developments in the cities, and to the diffusion of urban sprawls within the landscapes and around the cities as well as impacting the urban form.

In order to limit and solve this deterioration and fragmented or uncontrolled urban development (urban form), the following recommendations could be mentioned:

- improving and upgrading the capacities (staff and equipment) of the Palestinian ministries and governmental institutions involved in planning issues;
- reviewing and amending the existing planning laws and regulations, and having one comprehensive legislation.
- enhancing public awareness and participation in physical planning towards respecting the building and planning laws and regulations;
- increasing and expanding the role of the NGOs and private sector in the planning process;

- developing and enhancing the coordination among the various actors and stakeholders in the planning process;
- investigating the possibility and viability of orienting future developments toward sustainability through a sustainable land-use planning through developing applicable instruments, criteria, policies and strategies;
- taking into consideration the economical, cultural, social, environmental, administrative and legislative dimensions of physical development within a general and comprehensive framework,

Finally, it should be emphasized that the political stability in the country is the most significant issue in achieving any progress or success in controlling or managing the development and expansion of the Palestinian cities and therefore having the proper urban form as well as adopting the sustainable land use planning.

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