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PRESERVATION, REUSE AND DEVELOPMENT FOR THE DIFFUSED HERITAGE IN PALESTINE THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROJECT

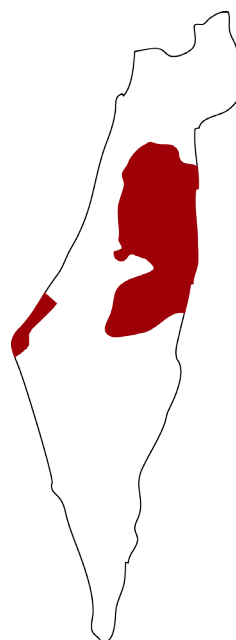
Palestine

Studente:

Francesca Gardino

Tutor:

Mariacristina Giambruno

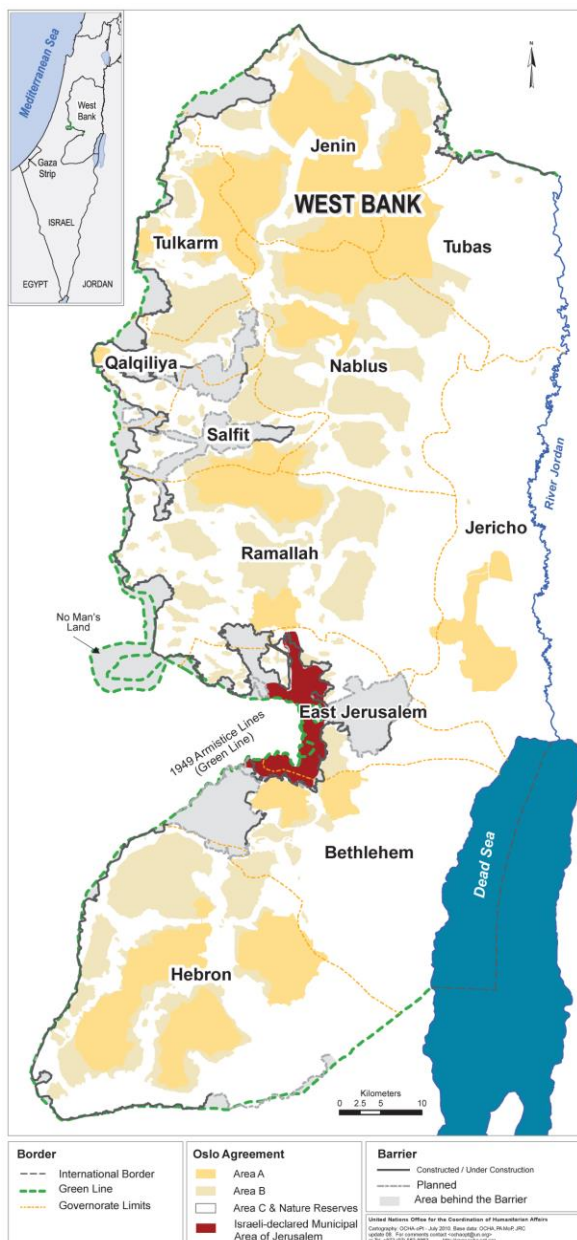


PRESERVATION, REUSE AND DEVELOPMENT FOR THE DIFFUSED HERITAGE IN PALESTINE THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROJECT

The project focuses on the Palestinian district of Tulkarm, and in particular on the urban historic cores of Tulkarm and 'Anabta, considered as the key points from which it is developed a wider process for the enhancement of their cultural landscape, also through a sustainable tourism trail.

Background and context

Due to its geographical location, Palestine has always been subject to important historical, political, social and cultural phenomena, at the point that it may be considered as the fulcrum of the historical events of the Mediterranean area. Therefore Palestinian territory is loaded with symbolic and religious meanings, and owns an inestimable cultural and artistic heritage, that is threatened by the enduring conflict with Israel: a spatial struggle driven by contrasting historical, religious and ethnic reasons.



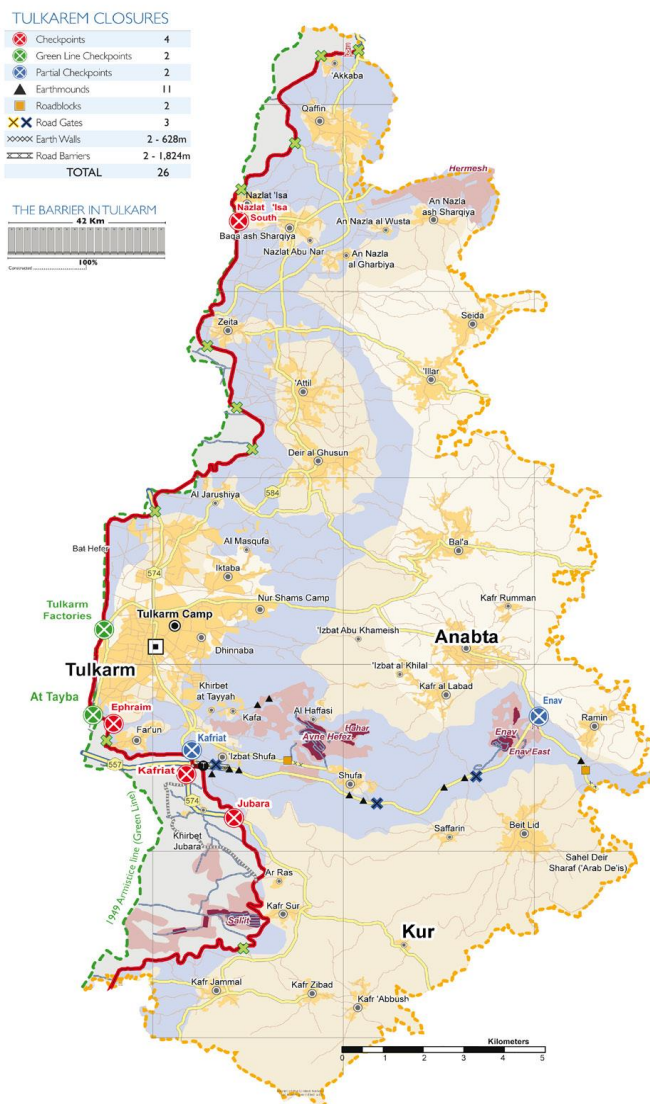
The current division between Palestinian Territories (West Bank, and the Gaza Strip) and the State of Israel comes from the Oslo II Accord, signed in 1995; thus, the present reality of the West Bank is the result of many processes aimed at controlling and reconfiguring the land.

On the base of the Oslo Agreements, Palestinian Territories were divided in area A, B and C, with different legal status. Area A includes the main cities of the West Bank (Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Gerico, Hebron), while area B is constituted by about 440 Palestinian villages and their surroundings; the Palestinian National Authority detains civil and security control of area A, and shares with Israel the responsibility for the security of area B.

Area C, which constitutes more than the 60% of the entire West Bank, is basically controlled by Israel which has authority over law enforcement, and controls building and planning. Here, about 150000 Palestinians live in a fragmented and segregated territory: according to UN OCHA, in 2013 Israeli settlers in area C were 325000, partly resident in the 135 consolidated colonies, and partly in the 100 most recent outposts.

Map showing the territory of the West Bank, following the Oslo II Accords (from UN OCHA Opt, 2010)

So, almost the 40% of the whole West Bank is occupied by Israel's infrastructures¹, included settlements and roads that connect them, and the Separation barrier along its border. This geopolitical situation generates a series of difficulties and a negative socio economic impact on the Palestinian population, which suffers physical and bureaucratic restrictions, threats to liberty and security, and has undermined livelihoods and access to services. Moreover, archaeological and architectural heritage is at the core of the territorial conflict²: it plays a fundamental role in legitimating Israel's occupation of the West Bank, since it is assigned a profound significance to the almost imperceptible Israelite landscape. At the same time, the upper layer of the ground (the Arab-Islamic one) it is ignored and neglected. Yet tangible cultural heritage constitutes a positive resource for all the Palestinians, since it reaffirms their ancestral presence, can strengthen their bond with the place, their memory and identity.



In Tulkarem district, Riwaq (the main Palestinian NGO dealing with heritage and architecture) identified the cities of Tulkarem, 'Anabta and Kur among the 50 major Palestinian historic centres, with more than 900 historic buildings in need for protection³. In addition, the quality of the natural and rural environment is high: a great number of small, old rural towns, surrounded by olive trees and vines constitute a cultural landscape not yet known nor enhanced. In fact, being located in the north-western part of the West Bank, Tulkarem district is quite far from the hot points of the conflict; despite this, it is so far untouched by the Palestinian touristic routes, which are focused mainly on biblical sites.

Tulkarem district (UN OCHA Opt, December 2011)

¹ UN OCHA, "The humanitarian impact on Palestinians of Israeli settlements and other infrastructure in the West Bank", July 2007

² See for example Maja Gori, "The Stones of Contention: The Role of Archaeological Heritage in Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", in *Archaeologies, Journal of the World Archaeological Congress*, 2013

³ Suad Amiry, Farhat Muhawi, "A Policy document. Cultural Heritage: a tool for development. The Rehabilitation of Historic Centers and Buildings in the occupied Palestinian Territories." Riwaq, Center for Architectural Conservation, april 2008

Methods and objectives of the project

This work starts from some previous researches and experiences, and in particular from the results of a partnership among the Polytechnic of Milan (Italy) and An-Najah University of Nablus (Palestine), between 1997 and 2000. The aim was to foster research and studies on the theme of historical cores and diffused heritage in Palestine, while promoting a specific project for the conservation and reuse for the historic core of the city of Tulkarm⁴. The mentioned studies and research support the approach and the methodology of this project and its main purpose, which is to protect and enhance Palestinian cultural and architectural heritage while triggering a series of positive transformations. This includes socio-economic development and strategies for facing the depopulation and degradation of historical urban cores, for example sustainable tourism. More in detail, the aim is: first, to repopulate and reuse abandoned and neglected historic cores, improving the quality of life and services for their inhabitants, while assuring the protection of historic buildings; second, to involve the population in the process, through a participatory approach; third, to enhance the entire area through a sustainable touristic trail connected with the Palestinian existing routes; and finally, to create job during the architectural recovery phase and in the long-term, involving the local community in the supporting of the touristic route.

To sustain the feasibility of the project, some stakeholders and partners have been individuated at the governmental and local scale. At the institutional level, the main reference is the MOTA (Minister of Tourism and Antiquities), which is responsible for the dissemination of information and for the logistic of touristic itineraries in Palestine. The involvement of MOLG (Minister of Local Government) is also desirable for what concerns urban planning and the management of architectural heritage, together with Riwaq⁵. Some associations, NGO and organizations related with sustainable tourism have also been identified, for example PIRT (Palestinian Initiative for Responsible Tourism) and AGT (Alternative Tourism Group Palestine).



Area of intervention

⁴ Annapaola Canevari, Mariacristina Giamb Bruno, Ahmed Abu Al Haija, "Recupero e conservazione in Palestina. Programma di cooperazione tra Politecnico di Milano e Università Nazionale An-Najah, Palestina. Progetto di conservazione e recupero del centro storico di Tulkarm", 1998-1999

⁵ Among Palestinian non-governmental organizations, Riwaq (Born in Ramallah in 1991) can be considered as the main promoter of heritage-connected cultural activities, and the first institution capable to conceive a global project for the preservation and enhancing of Palestinian architectural heritage

Strategy and actions

Therefore, the project consists of two phases. The first one includes the participation of the local authorities (e.g. municipalities) and of some partner institutions (e.g. Riwaq) in order to define the specific area of intervention and start the restoration and conservation projects inside the historic cores. The buildings will be selected according to some defined criteria -for example their architectonical/historical value- among the abandoned or neglected ones, which constitute the 40% of the whole historic cores⁶. Those activities will be developed with Palestinian technicians and workers, also in order to transfer the know-how and to create job and development. The idea is to give value to the minor and diffused heritage, even to the rural one, which represents the spontaneous and genuine culture of the communities, and their traditional relationship with the surrounding environment.

In the second phase the local community (and in particular the identified target groups, such as underprivileged families, women and unemployed young people) will be involved in the creation of facilities for the sustainable touristic trail along the cities of Tulkarm, 'Anabta and the village of Kur. Among the expected activities there will be language courses for young people and students, aimed at training touristic guides able to interact with foreigners. Some of the renovated buildings will finally host accommodation facilities for tourists managed by the local families, following the model of the "diffused hotel" or the *guesthouse*. The presence of visitors and guests will hopefully encourage local economy and the trade of local and typical products, giving economic benefits to the whole community.

Conclusion

The relevance of the project must be related with the particular context in which it is developed: in Palestine, heritage is related with the spontaneous desire to reaffirm the people's cultural identity and their feeling of belonging to the land. Therefore heritage has to be preserved in an active way, by the local population itself: sustainable tourism can be a mean to support the enhancement of this heritage, in order to put the cultural element at the centre of a social and economic change.



The village of 'Anabta

⁶ Suad Amiry, Farhat Muhawi, "A Policy document. Cultural Heritage: a tool for development. The Rehabilitation of Historic Centers and Buildings in the occupied Palestinian Territories." Riwaq, Center for Architectural Conservation, april 2008