



## **Settlement policy in Israel. Transforming Jerusalem's contested metropolitan landscape**

**Marco Allegra**

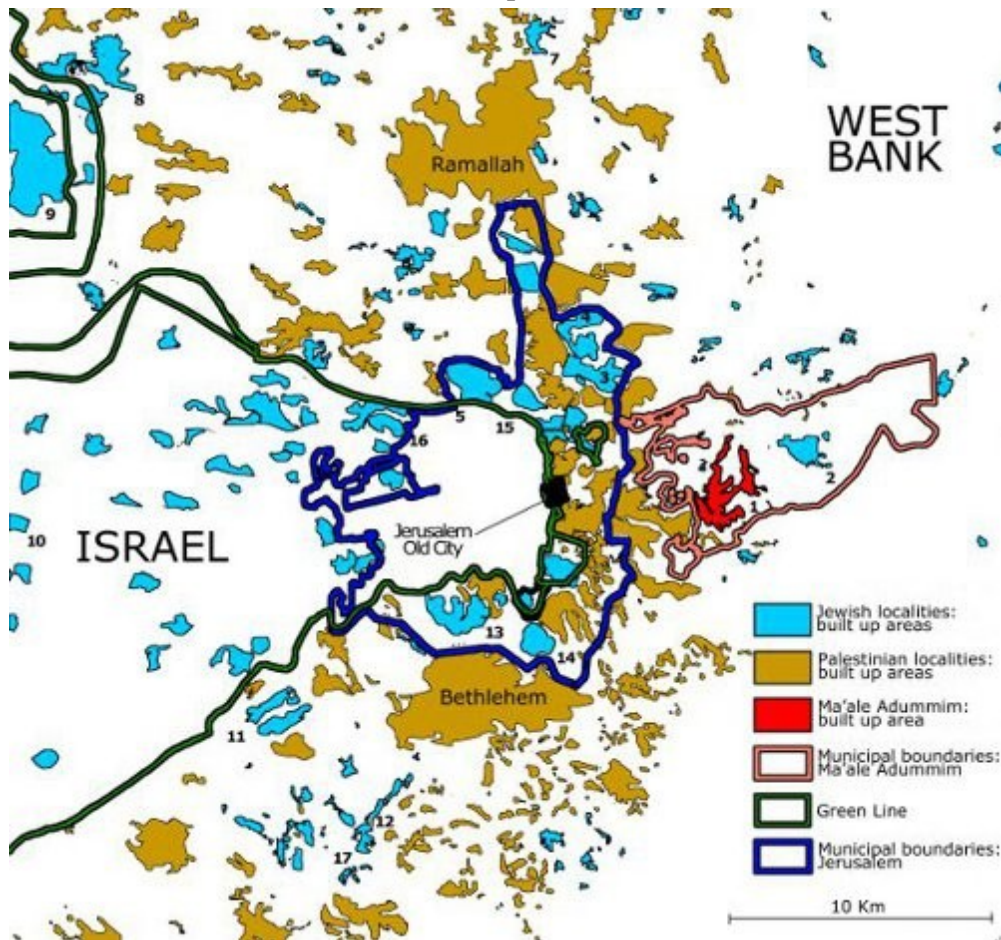
*In Jerusalem, competition for land is central to the ongoing conflict. Marco Allegra shows how ideology can be less effective than planning policy in transforming a contested territory.*

Israel's settlement policy – the settlement of tens of thousands of Israeli Jews in occupied Palestinian territory since 1967<sup>1</sup> – has transformed the material, social and symbolic space of Jerusalem, with the ultimate goal of including the eastern periphery of the city in a larger “Jewish Jerusalem”. Considering the history of one of the largest Jewish settlements in the West Bank – Ma’ale Adummim – this article aims at demonstrating how the creation of a new metropolitan space has resulted from the convergence of ideological considerations, planning policies and consumer preferences, in parallel with suburbanization trends. It shows that this “Israelization” of the metropolitan space, however successful, has not ultimately led to an Israeli victory over Jerusalem, but instead created the intricate bundle of Palestinian and Jewish territorialities that is today at the very heart of the conflict.

---

<sup>1</sup> In 1967, following the Six-Day War, the Israeli government seized the West Bank, demarcated by the “Green Line”, established in 1949, which had previously been under Jordanian rule.

**Fig. 1 – Jewish and Palestinian localities in metropolitan Jerusalem**



Key: 1. Ma'ale Adummim; 2. Mishor Adummim industrial area; 3. Pisgat Ze'ev; 4. Neve Ya'akov; 5. Ramot; 6. Giva'at Ze'ev; 7. Har Shmuel; 8. Modi'in Illit; 9. Modi'in-Reut-Maccabim; 10. Bet Shemesh; 11. Beitar Illit; 12. Efrata; 13. Gilo; 14. Har Homa; 15. Ramat Shlomo; 16. Mevasseret Zion; 17. Kfar Zion.

Source: Author's adaptation of maps produced by Lein and Weizman (2002) and Shalev (2009, p. 19).

### **Jerusalem and the “suburbanization” of Israel’s settlement policy**

There is an intimate link between territorial planning and “the logic of the modern nation-state and its constant endeavour to control the production of space within its boundaries” (Yiftachel 1998). In Jerusalem, partisan urban planning has been one of the main drives of urban and metropolitan development. As Andreas Faludi puts it, while Jerusalem lacks a proper “planning doctrine”, “what is evident, however, is a strong sense of purpose ... behind developments in East Jerusalem”, namely, “[t]he widely, if not unanimously shared political goal [of] the permanent unification of Jerusalem under Israeli rule” (Faludi 1997, p. 98). Planning in Jerusalem has therefore been described as the product of an overarching ethno-nationalist ideology favouring Jewish development and national goals over Palestinian ones (Bollens 2000; Yacobi and Yiftachel 2002).

The settlement of tens of thousands of Israeli Jews in the territories occupied in 1967 – who now number around half a million, including some 200,000 in East Jerusalem – has been a major component of this partisan territorial and demographic strategy. Academics and the media alike invariably focus on the more right-wing, hard-line, national-religious component of the population of settlers. This widespread perception overshadows the fact that these “radicals” constitute a

relatively small minority within this population. Indeed, the growth in the number of settlers has derived from suburbanization trends operating in Israeli society rather than from ideological tensions regarding the conquest of the land. In other words, the overwhelming majority of settlers are in fact “settler-consumers”, who moved to the West Bank looking for better – and cheaper – housing opportunities within commuting distance of Israel’s main metropolitan centres (Portugali 1991; Newman 1996).

A few, significant figures show the scale of this process: in 2008, out of 21 settlements with a population of more than 5,000, nine were within Jerusalem’s municipal boundary and five (Ma’ale Adummim, Giva’at Ze’ev, Efrata, Betar Illit, Modi’in Illit) were located in the main settlement blocs just outside the city limits. This means that, out of a total population of 480,000, some 310,000 settlers (B’Tselem, 2010) live in 14 settlements located within 10 kilometres of Jerusalem’s municipal boundary.

### **Where Utopias meet: the history of Ma’ale Adummim**

The Israeli settlement of Ma’ale Adummim – a community of 40,000 people, located 7 kilometres from the Old City – is a good example of how Israel’s settlement policy has developed around Jerusalem. Even more importantly, it shows how suburban settlements represented the point of convergence between two different Utopias: a more grandiose, political dream of unifying Jerusalem by strengthening Jewish territorial and demographic presence; and a more mundane “bourgeois Utopia” (Fishman 1987), a middle-class quest for villas and gardens in the suburbs of the city.



Panorama of Ma’ale Adummim © M. Allegra

## The political Utopia: Ma'ale Adummim as a territorial and demographic shield for Jewish Jerusalem

After the conquest of the West Bank in 1967, Israelis of various political orientations saw Jerusalem as a dangerous frontier because of the significant Palestinian population residing within the city and its immediate periphery.

In order to secure Jerusalem – as the capital of Israel and the most important national and religious symbol – a number of “Jewish neighbourhoods” were built within the expanded municipal borders of the city in the first decade of occupation after 1967 (Ramat Eshkol, French Hill, Neve Ya'akov, Gilo, East Talpiyyot, Ramot, etc.). In the mid-1970s, plans were put forward for the creation of more settlements outside the city boundaries; Ma'ale Adummim was among them. In 1975, the Labour government expropriated a vast amount of land on the current site of Ma'ale Adummim in order to establish an industrial area and a small “workers’ camp”, and shortly after approved a plan to build a new town of several thousand housing units. Between 1978 and 1982, the new town was built under the newly elected Likud government. It experienced steady growth in the following years: in 1987, it was already home to 11,000 residents, and was by far the largest settlement in the West Bank outside Jerusalem proper.

Since then, every Israeli government has worked to consolidate Ma'ale Adummim, even after the start of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in the context of the Oslo Process. In 1994, Yitzhak Rabin’s government extended the municipal jurisdiction of Ma'ale Adummim so that it touched Jerusalem’s city limits and attained the record size of 48 square kilometres.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, plans were put forward to further expand Ma'ale Adummim with an additional 3,000–4,000 housing units, commercial areas, hotels and so forth – the so-called E-1 plan, whose implementation has now been blocked for many years as a result of American pressures.



Housing in Ma'ale Adummim © M. Allegra

<sup>2</sup> For comparison, the surface area of Tel Aviv is approximately 52 km<sup>2</sup>.



## **The suburban Utopia: “We were looking for a nice, peaceful place near Jerusalem”**

A real-estate advertisement published in the Jerusalem Post in 1984 reads: “Outside Jerusalem – yet so near – a seven-minute ride from Jerusalem and you’ll find yourself at Ma’ale Adummim... a well-planned neighbourhood in the best location in town!” (Thorpe 1984, p. 119). Today, the Jewish Agency describes the settlement to prospective Jewish immigrants in the same vein: “[t]he diversity and services of a city, the warmth and quietness of a small town and the cleanliness and pre-planned design of suburbia” (Jewish Agency, 2010).

These two descriptions capture the suburban nature of the settlement that proved to be so appealing to a vast audience of relatively de-politicized Israelis, mostly middle-class Jerusalemite commuters, looking for good housing opportunities outside the crowded and expensive inner city. It is true, of course, that political and institutional factors did remain relevant in the process: attractive “suburban Utopias” such as Ma’ale Adummim were realized with generous financial backing from the government. Settlements did benefit – and still do – from a wide range of public incentives such as artificially low land prices, subsidies to developers and state allowances for mortgages, adding to the market-related price gap between Jerusalem and the suburbs. Although more favourable measures were applied throughout the West Bank, only suburban communities such as Ma’ale Adummim experienced steady population growth.

The success of Ma’ale Adummim ultimately lies in the fact that the settlement responded to a structural need for suburban housing. The congestion of inner-city Jerusalem and the shrinking open spaces in the traditional areas of urban expansion along the Jerusalem–Tel Aviv axis paved the way for the development of Ma’ale Adummim.



Cycle routes in Ma’ale Adummim © M. Allegra

## **Bridging the Utopias: the role of planning**

How did these two seemingly different elements – the ethno-nationalist vision of a Jewish Jerusalem, and the quiet dream of suburban gardens – converge in Ma’ale Adummim?

One answer to this question would be to underline the role of planners and planning practices. In the case of Ma'ale Adummim, planning effectively fulfilled its institutional role of mediation by linking the preferences of Israeli politicians to those of settler-consumers (at least for the Israelis, as Palestinian needs were completely left out of the planning process). In a considerable display of professional expertise, the planners involved in the Ma'ale Adummim project were able to offer a successful synthesis by bringing together ideological considerations and suburbanization trends, and therefore reconciling the preferences of different sectors of Israeli society.

The role of planning was not limited to the provision of neutral expertise, and nor did it produce neutral consequences. The description of Israeli planning in Jerusalem as a purely partisan and ideological enterprise rightly points to the asymmetric structure of the planning system. However, it is misleading to the extent that it suggests an instrumental relation between politics and planning – planners being a mere tool in the hands of politicians. The Ma'ale Adummim planning team has been an active part of the decision-making process. In their negotiations with the ministerial commission in charge of the establishment of the settlement, planners were able, for example, to change both the location – pushing it several kilometres westward, right on the outskirts of Jerusalem – and the scale of the planned town – doubling the 5,000 housing units originally tabled. These choices, based on planning arguments – and in particular the need to create a functioning urban unit – produced permanent political consequences, as they created the conditions for Ma'ale Adummim to grow quickly – and therefore determined the success of an ultimately controversial urban policy.

A second crucial element has helped to bridge the two Utopias: the preferences of Israeli planners, politicians and settler-consumers, converged around the idea that “Ma'ale Adummim is Jerusalem”. This formula can therefore be found at the same time in planning documents, political leaflets and real-estate commercials, each dimension reinforcing and legitimizing the other. For planners, Ma'ale Adummim was the appropriate response to the need for a rational expansion of Jerusalem; for politicians, the fast-growing new town represented a permanent fact on the ground, a demographic and territorial card in the political game for Jerusalem; finally, for settler-consumers, Ma'ale Adummim's qualities reproduced the basic principles of planned suburbs, and, most importantly, a pool of cheap housing at commuting distance from Jerusalem.

## **Unresolved conflict**

The suburban experience has been particularly important in differentiating the experience of Ma'ale Adummim from that of the more peripheral and politicized settlements. In many ways, this new community of Jerusalemites – along with a new self-perception of “indigeneity” – did not arise through Zionist ethos and imagery, but instead developed from Ma'ale Adummim's villas, from its shopping mall, and from its neat boulevards beautified by palms and olive trees.

We might ask if the process of suburbanization has contributed to diluting the potential for conflict in the settlement enterprise itself. The answer is no. Of course, Ma'ale Adummim residents do not harass Palestinians, nor do they deface or burn mosques, as regularly happens in other parts of the West Bank. Even during the second Intifada, the area remained remarkably quiet compared to other locations. Still, while the success of suburban settlements in redrawing the landscape of metropolitan Jerusalem has produced irreversible facts on the ground, it has not changed the fundamental variable of the conflict. More than ever, Jerusalem is a “contested” city, a segregated urban system where Palestinians and Jews will continue to live side by side for the foreseeable future.

The success of the settlement policy here has proved insufficient to produce a definitive Israeli victory in Jerusalem. Initially created as a “shield” for Jerusalem, Ma'ale Adummim is now dependent on the maintenance of its links with the inner city for its own survival. At the same time, the Palestinians see Ma'ale Adummim as harming the fabric of Palestinian Jerusalem within the

perspective of the creation of a future independent state (Al-Jazeera 2011; Benn 2011). Since no Israeli government will ever evacuate Ma'ale Adummim or accept Palestinian sovereignty over the settlement, the existence of communities such as Ma'ale Adummim have, ironically, become one of the main arguments of supporters of the so-called "one-state solution" for the creation of a single democratic state covering the whole of Israel/Palestine, and thereby the end of Israel as a Jewish state.

The case of Ma'ale Adummim therefore confirms that the success of Israel's settlement enterprise is no guarantee of an Israeli victory over Jerusalem – and instead constitutes a premise for the continuation of the conflict. More subtly, the process of redefining metropolitan geography has helped to (permanently?) close the window of opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians to realize peace through partition – the "two-state" model. Whether this will open the way for new scenarios offering a different model of conflict resolution, or bring more chaos and suffering to Israel/Palestine, only time will tell.

## Bibliography

- Al-Jazeera. 2011. "The Palestine Papers", *Al-Jazeera English*, January. URL: <http://english.aljazeera.net/palestinepapers>. Retrieved on 3 September 2012.
- B'Tselem. 2010. "Settlement population, XLS", *B'Tselem*. URL: [http://www.btselem.org/download/settlement\\_population\\_eng.xls](http://www.btselem.org/download/settlement_population_eng.xls). Retrieved on 3 September 2012.
- Benn A. 2011. "Palestine papers show true partners for Mideast peace", *Haaretz*, 25 January.
- Bollens, S. 2000. *On Narrow Ground: Urban Policy and Ethnic Conflict in Jerusalem and Belfast*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Faludi, A. 1997. "A planning doctrine for Jerusalem?", *International Planning Studies*, vol. 2 no. 1, pp. 83–102.
- Fishman, R. 1987. *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*, New York: Basic Books.
- Jewish Agency. 2010. "Ma'aleh Adumim", *Jewish Agency*.
- Lein, Y. and Weizman, E. 2002. "Land Grab. Israel's Settlement Policy in the West Bank", *B'Tselem*, May. URL: [http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200205\\_land\\_grab](http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200205_land_grab). Retrieved on 3 September 2012.
- Newman, D. 1996. "The territorial politics of exurbanization: reflections on 25 years of Jewish settlement in the West Bank", *Israel Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 61–85.
- Portugali, J. 1991. "Jewish settlement in the occupied territories: Israel's settlement structure and the Palestinians", *Political Geography Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 1 pp. 26–53.
- Shalev, N. 2009. "The hidden agenda. The establishment and expansion plans of Ma'ale Adummim and their human rights ramifications", *Bimkom*, December. URL: <http://eng.bimkom.org/Index.asp?ArticleID=142&CategoryID=125>. Retrieved on 3 September 2012.
- Thorpe, M (ed.). 1984. *Prescription for Conflict. Israel's West Bank Settlement Policy*, Washington: Foundation for Middle East Peace.
- Yacobi, H. and Yiftachel, O. 2002. "Planning a bi-national capital: should Jerusalem remain united?", *Geoforum*, no. 33, pp. 137–145.
- Yiftachel, O. 1998. "Planning and social control: exploring the 'dark side'", *Journal of Planning Literature*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 395–406.

**Marco Allegra** is a research fellow at the CIES (Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia) at the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa in Lisbon, Portugal. His main research interests include urban studies and political geography, Middle-East politics and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and comparative and transnational studies. He has published articles in journals such as *Citizenship Studies* and *Mediterranean Politics*.

**To quote this article:**

Marco Allegra, “Settlement policy in Israel. Transforming Jerusalem’s contested metropolitan landscape”, *Metropolitica*, 12 September 2012. URL: <http://www.metropolitiques.eu/Settlement-policy-in-Israel.html>.