

Envisioning Jerusalem through Media Barrios and Performance Spaces

Jerusalem 2050 Project, March 2009

Dept. of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP) and Center for International Studies (CIS), Massachusetts Institute of Technology



Digital Storytelling Workshops in East Jerusalem & West Bank

Project Vision

The *Media Barrios* initiative seeks to leverage new media and the arts as sources of urban renewal in Jerusalem, by fostering cultural expression, social cohesion, economic development, and creative activism. Our mission is to create new spaces for civic engagement through physical sites for the production of media arts, virtual online networks, and innovative discursive forums.

We focus on the development of interconnected community media/arts centers in impoverished areas of East Jerusalem and disenfranchised neighborhoods cut off from the city by the separation barrier or Wall, and the linking of these centers to other media/arts initiatives in Israel-Palestine and the Middle East region. We consider new opportunities for engagement with media and the arts in Jerusalem through workshops, trainings, and institutes, as well as through festivals, exhibits, online activities, and creative use of public spaces for performance.

In addition to strengthening and re-connecting communities in Jerusalem, we envision *Media Barrios* as potential spaces for cultural and socio-economic development. By examining case studies of urban renewal through the arts in other divided cities, such as Berlin and Belfast, we hope such *Media Barrios* can be developed to support positive change both in the city of Jerusalem and in the broader region through 2050.

Problem Context: Diminishing Cultural Production and Arts Education in East Jerusalem

Jerusalem has in recent years seen a resurgence of arts and cultural revival; however this resurgence has mainly been limited to the dominant Jewish sector of the population, mostly in the modern suburbs of West Jerusalem and in the newly created settlements. [On the other hand, cultural activity among the Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem has greatly suffered, let alone in outlying Palestinian neighborhoods disenfranchised by the construction of the Wall with the severe lack of municipal services provided to these residents by the city.](#)

In 1999, Rania Elias described the diminishing role of Jerusalem as a Palestinian cultural center:

"Not too long ago, East Jerusalem was a bustling center for all Palestinians. Since the closure imposed on the West Bank and Gaza (1993), cutting East Jerusalem from its Palestinian hinterland, the city has started to gradually lose its status as an economic, educational and cultural center for Palestinians. By night, its streets are deserted and its cultural life has all but vanished. Jerusalem's Palestinian inhabitants are either seeking better opportunities elsewhere or looking for entertainment and cultural activities in other towns in Palestine or on the booming Israeli western side."



Shu'fat refugee camp, East Jerusalem

Institutions and initiatives promoting cultural exchange and understanding among the various identities of the city are rare and not well supported. It would seem that the city's current cultural fabric lacks the infrastructure or perhaps political will to promote the distinct identities and social cohesion among neighborhoods in Jerusalem.

The problem is exacerbated from a stark dearth of investment or provision of facilities, resources and programs to support arts education in the schools primarily attended by Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. The Palestinian Human Rights Monitor reported that the conditions for arts education in predominantly Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem are quite dismal (2000).

"As many as 21 schools, 60 percent, report having absolutely no facilities for the arts. Hence, 17,615 students, 62.6 percent of the student population, receive no art, music, or drama instruction at all. Only 43 percent of the schools have libraries, and only 31 percent have computer laboratories. Of all the other facilities listed, no more than 9 schools, or 25.7 percent of all schools, have any" arts programs."

This indicates that state actors, which may not have sufficient resources or the political will to improve the conditions, will not easily address the lack of arts education in East Jerusalem. This creates opportunities for the civil sector to engage students in creative arts and culture programs, outside formal mechanisms, particularly for schools in disenfranchised neighborhoods.

Approach: Media Barrios in Kafr Aqab and Shu'fat RC

We focus on the development of interconnected *Media Barrios* established in disenfranchised neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. Through novel media/arts interventions, our approach seeks to reintegrate these neighborhoods to the cultural and socio-economic body fabric of the city, while leveraging them as bridges to the region. We initially consider development of two pilot *Media Barrios* in the Jerusalem neighborhoods of *Kafr Aqab* and *Shu'fat RC*, which uniquely share the unfortunate distinction of being cut-off socially and economically from the city by the encroaching route of the Wall today.



Key Project Goals

- Revitalization of disenfranchised neighborhoods in Jerusalem through arts and culture initiatives
- Developing participatory and locally-focused arts and education programs for youth and the community
- Leveraging new media education, production and creative enterprises to support capacity building and employment

- Supporting empowerment and socio-economic integration of disenfranchised neighborhoods with the city
- Seeking both municipal and grassroots engagement and cooperation to create thriving arts-based civic initiatives

Conceptual Framework

Leveraging new media and the arts to develop new spaces for civic engagement and urban renewal:

- **Physical space** via new production & performance sites
- **Virtual space** via interactive website & online networks
- **Discursive space** via screenings, exhibits, festivals, performances, and forums for cultural exchange

Potential Outcomes

- Cultural expression
- Economic revitalization
- Social cohesion
- Creative activism
- Regional connections



Youth in a Digital Storytelling Workshop in the Shu'fat refugee camp, Aug 2008

Components of Media Barrios

- **Partnerships** with Jerusalem Municipality, NGOs and local community to plan and develop arts district, economic incentives, and institutional support.
- **Summer New Media Institute** to train young artists/practitioners in *Media Barrios* and support educational programs with youth in the wider region.
- **Production/Performance Facilities** established in *Media Barrios*, leveraging existing infrastructure and community resources within the neighborhoods.
- **Artist-in-Residence Quarters & Studios** for artists and practitioners who live and work with the local community. Support regional and international artists/practitioners.
- **Creative Enterprise Zones** developed to encourage local businesses, design and production firms to co-locate in *Media Barrios*, with economic/infrastructure incentives.
- **Virtual Online Community** portal created to encourage interaction and co-production across the *Media Barrios*.
- **New Media Arts/Culture Festival** hosted by different *Media Barrios* each year, with performance/dissemination of artwork in the wider district/communities and region.

Strategic Plan for Implementing Media Barrios

2009

- Investigate physical sites for establishing pilot *Media Barrios* with municipal and community participation
- Establish Online Virtual Community and engage local/regional artists, educators and partners
- Develop initial urban design concepts for Media Barrios
- Participate in activities related to the *Jerusalem Arab Cultural Capital* initiative and outreach to new audiences

2010

- Initiate development of two pilot *Media Barrios* in the sites selected: *Kafr Aqab* and *Shu'fat refugee camp*
- Develop concrete urban/architecture plans and proposals; engage funding and implementation partners
- Establish *Summer New Media Institute* with educational curricula and training with local partners
- Develop working media/arts programs, educator guides, resources, staff and physical facilities
- Create evaluation metrics and dissemination mechanisms

2011

- Expand *Media Barrios* with new facilities and programs
- Evaluate ongoing progress and outcomes of pilot projects
- Create pilot public media spaces for performance

2012

- Engage with partners in 4-5 potential sites to establish new *Media Barrios* in the region
- Create regional media arts and cultural programs operating across *Media Barrios* with shared resources

We believe such a network of *Media Barrios* in the region will gradually improve arts education and cultural expression, supporting both social cohesion and economic revitalization.

References

- Rania Elias. *The Jerusalem Palestinian Festival: Fining the Cultural Vacuum: Reviewing Jerusalem's role as a Palestinian cultural center*. *The Palestine-Israel Journal*, Vol.6 No.3 1999, *Peace Economics Revisited*.
- Evan S. Weiss. *School Daze: Palestinian Education in East Jerusalem: A First-Hand Look*. *The Palestinian Human Rights Monitor*, September 2000.

MIT Jerusalem Visionary Fellows 2008-2009

Julie M. Norman, Ph.D. received her doctoral degree in International Relations from American University, with concentrations in Peace and Conflict Resolution and Human Rights, and a regional focus on the Middle East. Julie is the founder of the Contrast Project, a youth photography project in the West Bank, and a co-coordinator and media trainer with Voices Beyond Walls. Both projects aim to enable youth to use arts and media as tools for expression and advocacy. Julie is a 2009 Fellow at Dartmouth College's Dickey Center for International Understanding, and she has also held fellowships with the Jerusalem 2050 Initiative at MIT and the Palestinian American Research Council (PARC). She is also a co-producer of "This Palestinian Life," a 2009 documentary film on nonviolent resistance in Palestinian villages, and she is writing a book on popular resistance in Palestine during the second Intifada.



Nitin Sawhney, Ph.D. is a senior research scientist with Cytel, Inc., the leading provider of adaptive clinical trial design and statistical software solutions for BioPharma. Nitin was born in New Delhi, India and lived in the Middle East for over 12 years. Nitin received his Ph.D. and M.S. degrees from MIT, as well as M.S. and B.E. degrees from Georgia Tech. Nitin has conducted research on interactive video technology, open design collaboration, mobile and wearable computing, speech interfaces and auditory perception at the MIT Media Lab, Mitsubishi Electric Research, Georgia Tech's GVU Center, and Fuji-Xerox Palo-Alto Labs. Nitin's current focus is on human rights advocacy through participatory new media technologies. In 2006, he founded *Voices Beyond Walls*, a nonprofit initiative to conduct digital video and storytelling workshops with youth in refugee camps in the West Bank. He co-founded and organized the annual *Boston Palestine Film Festival* since 2007. He also established and co-curated the *Expressions of Nakba* international arts exhibition shown in Washington DC and Boston in 2008.



Raed Yacoub is a Palestinian born and raised in north-east Jerusalem. Raed's main interest is in technology, learning, and community development. Using his background in Computer Science and through his research at MIT, he has been working on projects that enable youth to develop necessary work and life skills by experimenting with creative expression using media and technology. Raed previously worked with the *Intel Computer Clubhouse* in Ramallah, the first project of its kind in the Arab Middle East. He was awarded the *Fulbright-Humphrey Fellowship* 2006/2007 at the Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies (SPURS) at MIT and the MIT Media Lab Ideas Institute Fellowship in 2005. Since 2007, Raed coordinated the *Voices Beyond Walls* project in the West Bank, partially funded through a grant by the Hoping Foundation. In 2008, Raed served as the Training Coordinator at the *National Institute for Administration- Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction* (PECDAR).



More information:

- <http://justjerusalem.org>
http://voicesbeyondwalls.org/projects/media_barrios.html