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# The Right to Vision: A New Planning Praxis for Conflict Cities

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## Abstract

Building on Henri Lefebvre's work on the role of imagination in crafting socially just urban conditions and "rights to the city," this paper asks whether new ideas and urban practices can be produced through the use of experimental visioning techniques. Using empirical evidence drawn from an ideas competition for Jerusalem, one of the world's most intractable conflict cities, the paper considers the extent to which the global call to create alternative visions for a just, peaceful, and sustainable Jerusalem resulted in new strategies considered fundamentally different from those routinely deployed in conventional planning practice, how and why.

## Keywords

planning theory, urban conflict, divided cities, Jerusalem, pragmatism, Utopia, justice, visioning

Over the past few decades, the highly abstract concept of the "right to the city," as coined by French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, has become both slogan and practical reference point for urban scholars, activists, and citizens clamoring for social justice (Harvey 2003; Holston 1995; Alexander 2002; Fainstein 2005a; Marcuse et al. 2009; Mitchell 2003). First emerging in Paris during the unrest in 1960 and as part of a call for human emancipation, this idea was conceived as a "superior form of rights: the right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit" (Lefebvre 1996, 173). Lefebvre's trumpeting of the "right to the city" was not simply a call for human emancipation and widespread social justice; it also was intended as a plea to proactively create the urban conditions that make such achievements possible. Putting a slightly different spin on it, David Harvey further proposed that the right to the city was "not merely a right of access to what the property speculators and state planners define, but an active right to make the city different, to shape it more in accord with our heart's desire, and to re-make ourselves thereby in a different image" (Harvey 2003, 939).<sup>1</sup> And yet, such vastly humanist aims cannot always be readily achieved by conventionally pragmatic planning methods. Rather, as Lefebvre (1996, 147) himself noted, any critique of "really existing" human geography or the practices of contemporary urbanism necessarily entails both imagination and the need for creative activity through information, symbolism, prophecy, and play.

It is the imaginative and prophetic aspects of Lefebvre's work (1974/1991) that are least developed in most planning theory and practice,<sup>2</sup> and for that reason the subject of this essay. The concern here is not merely why creative imagination and the symbolic, humanist, and visionary elements

of Lefebvre's writings have not been taken more seriously in efforts to build the just city. A more practical aim is to understand whether and under what conditions new ideas or novel urban practices can be produced through the use of visioning and imagination, and to assess both the possibilities and limits of visioning techniques as an alternative form of socially just planning practice. In addressing these questions, this paper focuses specifically on conflict cities—defined as locales where social, spatial, economic, ethno-national, or other forms of exclusion become so extreme that they delegitimize local authorities and/or lead to retribution or extreme exclusion of certain populations.

Any effort to conceptualize imaginative pathways to justice through a focus on highly conflicted locales may raise questions about generalizability, particularly among scholars who seek universal planning principles for guiding socially just planning action more generally. However, above and beyond acknowledging that all planning processes for equity and social justice will inevitably involve conflict, the selection of conflict cities as a point of departure is analytically purposeful. It derives from the recognition that conflict cities are the locales where "rights to the city" are most likely to be

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compromised for significant portions of the population, where the demand and desire for social justice may be most pressing, and where conventional planning practices may reinforce rather than eliminate inequality and social exclusion. Accordingly, we not only proceed under the assumption that foundational principles for enabling socially just cities can be drawn from a closer focus on highly contested locales. We also argue that because of the depth and extreme nature of urban injustice in such cities, they may actually merit their own particular planning praxis, built on imaginative rather than conventional planning techniques.

### Jerusalem as Case Study: Assumptions, Participants, Project Design, Methods

Using empirical evidence drawn from a focus on Jerusalem, one of the world's most intractable conflict cities, this article considers the extent to which an imaginative, planning-theoretic experiment called the Just Jerusalem Competition succeeded in producing novel ideas for achieving justice that might be considered fundamentally different from those generated through conventional planning practice. This experiment took the form of an international "ideas" competition built around the call for alternative strategies to enable a just, peaceful, and sustainable Jerusalem by the year 2050.<sup>3</sup> Its epistemic supposition was that all individuals should have equal access to producing what U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan has called "the marketplace of ideas" for this city.<sup>4</sup> The visioning competition was officially titled *Just Jerusalem* to signal the search for justice and to highlight the importance of focusing (just) on the city, rather than on the competing nationalist projects that limit local citizen participation in city-making<sup>5</sup> and fuel conflict in and over Jerusalem. Its focus on the year 2050 built on the assumption that an orientation toward the future might create room for proactive imagination.

Launched in January 2007, potential entrants had one year to design, develop, and submit their ideas to an open website housed at MIT, with jury deliberations beginning three months after the competition closed in early 2008.<sup>6</sup> In the interests of full disclosure, the authors of this article were directly involved in this experiment, in either a leadership capacity or as part of a Steering Committee that developed and contributed to the design of the competition.<sup>7</sup> But the project was a collective academic-based enterprise unfolding over a three-year period, relying on the active involvement of a sizable steering committee composed of more than a dozen faculty members and postdocs from Harvard and MIT. In its work, the Steering Committee engaged a wide circle of scholars, planners, and activists in Israel and Palestine, seeking input from potential critics and supporters alike.<sup>8</sup> Members of the Steering Committee held a diversity of views and approaches to planning, owing to the fact that they came from different

professional backgrounds (social and political science, architecture, history, planning) and various religious and national backgrounds (Israel, Palestine, United States, Australia), as did subsequent members of the jury.<sup>9</sup> In a further effort to limit potential bias, the jury responsible for evaluating submissions to the competition worked independently from the Steering Committee. Jury members were selected to represent a range of professional experiences and disciplinary knowledge of cities, urban studies and planning, competitions, and Jerusalem itself.<sup>10</sup>

Special efforts were made to have at least one Israeli and one Palestinian with deep familiarity of the city, based on longstanding residence. Equal attention was paid to widening the range of disciplines beyond the usual architects and urban planners to include historians, geographers, political scientists, international relations scholars, and artists. Steering Committee members likewise felt it important not just to include a few persons familiar with competitions but also those who might bring to the table other factors besides design considerations, including diplomatic skills and knowledge of the region sufficient to mediate any huge differences of opinion that might emerge in the process of judging. These criteria elicited a final list of nine jurors, of which eight of nine had either long-term experience or demonstrated personal and professional knowledge of life in Jerusalem, although among these eight two held a slightly more distant engagement with the city and the concerns of its citizens (through diplomatic and foundation work).<sup>11</sup>

To underscore its origins as an academic experiment, this project's management remained entirely within the university, with initial financial sponsorship coming from MIT Deans and Department Heads in the divisions and programs involved (School of Architecture and Planning; School of Humanities and Social Science, respectively). At later stages, external grants from the Graham Foundation and the Boston Foundation sustained the outreach activities of the project, and at the final stage financial support for implementing the competition (i.e., costs of advertising, providing fellowships for the winners, mounting a website, etc.) came from an outside donor, a graduate of MIT, who played no role in developing any aspect of the project's activities and did not even meet the Steering Committee or Jury members until after the completion of the competition.

Fully aware of the potential controversy surrounding planning practice in and for Jerusalem, serious efforts were made at every stage of the project to embrace a wide range of attitudes and opinions about local and national politics, about the role of planning, and about the possibilities and constraints associated with taking an activist, pragmatic, or more theoretical approach to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Even so, the contentious nature of the subject at hand was never far from sight, and even among the Steering Committee members from the Jerusalem region there were deep disagreements about how best to structure project aims, project language,

and the text of the competition guidelines. No decision was made lightly, explaining why it took close to three years to move from the idea of seeking new ways of establishing justice and peace in conflict cities to the competition itself.

Ultimately, all Steering Committee members agreed upon the fact that the visioning competition was intended to inspire citizens around the world to use their imaginations to craft out-of-the-box ideas that could open a dialogue about the future of the city and help break the current stalemate in traditional peace-making channels dominated by politicians and diplomats. The hope was that a visioning exercise might encourage entrants to shed self-limiting fetters of despair about the conflict's longstanding and intractable character. The steering committee did recognize that the project held the potential for implicit and even explicit bias related primarily to the question of who would be most likely to participate, particularly if knowledge of English, access to the Internet, and some familiarity with design competitions were necessary to submit visions to the website. As such, efforts were made to further confront questions of participant bias or exclusivity at every step along the way.

Even before crafting the competition guidelines, MIT held a two-day seminar in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in which 30 Israelis and Palestinians were invited from abroad, in equal numbers, to deliberate about future visions for Jerusalem and the pitfalls and possibilities inherent in this methodology.<sup>12</sup> Next, the steering committee engaged in self-study and constant dialogue through a year-long seminar at MIT, seeking to include multiple voices representing a range of views on Israel and Palestine. Later, when mounting and advertising the competition, announcements were posted on global architectural and urban planning web postings and list servers, and direct notices were sent to architecture, planning, politics, and Middle East Studies departments in the United States and Europe, as well as directly to a selected array of universities, NGOs (non-governmental organization), and research centers in the Middle East (especially Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, and Syria). In addition, ads were taken out in a variety of publications with international audiences such as *The London Review of Books*, and announcements were posted on international websites and list servers for architects, planners, and scholars of the Middle East. The objective was to cast a wide net and include a variety of voices within and outside academe as well as across the globe.

Because planning and design professionals were bound to participate in larger numbers (because they are most familiar with the methodology of competitions) and because the announcements and competition guidelines were published in English, the experiment's reach was understandably limited to more educated professionals who probably knew something about urban planning, something that undoubtedly affected the range and content of entries, and must be factored into any assessment of the competition's outcomes. In particular, language constraints produced a

large number of entries from the English-speaking parts of the world, with 32 percent of the 1,119 registered teams and 36 percent of the final submissions coming from the United States and Canada.<sup>13</sup> This also made likely the possibility that most entrants would have some degree of education, and perhaps even training in design or planning, although credentials were neither required nor requested and most of the entrants were individuals, with very few firms participating.<sup>14</sup> Together, these conditions ensured that the range of ideas generated for Jerusalem would implicitly reflect some sort of socioeconomic bias among the entrants, with English-language skills and access to technology some of the key "barriers to entry" along with other forms of privilege.

Even so, the project's developers worked under the assumption that the competition's targeted global reach might serve to counter yet another predominant bias that itself has served to limit the range and diversity of opinions and planning actions for Jerusalem: the so-called "silences" that have often surrounded debate over Jerusalem. Trepidation to speak openly often accompanies debate over hotly contested locales. Among those who do stake out a position, years of raised expectations and dashed hopes take their toll and often discourage further effort. Either way, room for maneuver is often considered to be extremely limited, particularly when those locales hold near mythical status in world-historical imagination. In the case of Jerusalem, people have come to identify the conflict as so historically ingrained, so linked to larger regional objectives or local power structures, and so irresolvable owing to passionate commitments on all sides that the preference is sometimes to avoid commentary at all. The reality of this concern was evidenced by the fact that less than 3 percent of the 1,119 registered applicants came from Israel or Palestine ( $n = 32$ ),<sup>15</sup> despite the heavy advertisement in the region.

Yet it was exactly the sense that there is limited scope for action in Jerusalem, that peace and justice efforts consistently fail, and that many aspects of the city's dynamics are assumed to be "untouchable" that the visioning methodology hoped to challenge. It did so by purposefully opening discussion about Jerusalem to all, including those with "nonexpert" or "nonlocal" opinions. In this sense, while both lack of familiarity and optimism may have been motivations for accepting the challenge, the project's organizers considered these attributes to be valuable for generating new ideas, not the least because the willingness to imagine a different future itself was an act that held the potential to counterbalance conventional views about what is or is not possible in Jerusalem. Its epistemic foundation, in short, built on the assumption that the unfettered "right to vision" might help enable new ideas that in the long run would lead to transformative and socially just urban outcomes.

The remainder of this article is devoted to assessing whether the competition's promise was achieved, in what ways, and



why or why not. We begin with a brief but closer examination of the planning-theoretic logic of visioning and how it differs from more conventional approaches. We then assess the array of ideas generated by this exercise, seeking to understand what was gained and lost by opening the competition to an international array of participants who displayed different degrees of distance from the life world and everyday experience of residents of Jerusalem. We close by self-reflecting on the limits and potential of visioning as an alternative planning praxis for producing just urban outcomes in conflict cities.

### **Why Consider an Alternative Planning Praxis for Conflict Cities? Transcending the Logic of Conventional Planning Techniques**

In the literature on planning theory and practice, we see various approaches for achieving the just city (Fainstein 2005b, 2006) or good city (Friedman 2000), ranging from a focus on ethics (Campbell and Marshall 2000) to rights (Alexander 2002), communicative dialogue (Forester 1989, 2009), insurgent action (Holston 1995; Roy 2009), inclusive multiculturalism (Sandercock 1998), and the value of sustained political struggle over unequally distributed resources (Fainstein 2000; Mirafteb 2009). Despite these differences, most scholars concerned with equity and social justice agree that the methodology of citizen participation is key because it offers venues for citizens to dialogue with other residents, exposes voices of opposition, helps equalize the power field on which urban policy decisions are made and/or directly engages citizens in actual planning processes (Davidoff 1965; Forester 1989; Harvey 1973; Healey 1997; Innes 1998; Huxley and Yiftachel 2000). Paradoxically, however, it may be precisely the embrace of citizen-centered techniques that has limited socially just planning practitioners from experimenting with other more imaginative forms of praxis. Indeed, to the extent that citizen participation is perceived to be a tangible, process-oriented, problem-solving exercise that can be used to engage socially excluded citizens and communities, most socially just planners remain unwilling to commit themselves to the more creative techniques originally identified by Lefebvre—including those built around symbolism, imagination, and play (Lefebvre 1996, 147). Because outcomes generated through such techniques might be more unpredictable and harder to justify, particularly when modest but identifiable gains can be reached through direct participatory methods like citizen participation and consensus-building techniques, they also require huge amounts of political will and social capital to mount or sustain them. Either way, such imaginative techniques are usually low on the activist agenda of justice-oriented planners or citizens. As Patsy Healey (2009, 287) says, “the planning project sometimes exists in a kind of utopian or virtual realm of what could perhaps come

to be . . . [b]ut in its form as a governance activity, it comes to earth in the complex flow of practices.”

Another reason that more imaginative and visionary approaches have not been formulated more actively is because they appear to share elective affinity with utopian theories that have been heavily criticized as totalitarian: embodying overly rigid social or spatial regimes of control and order (Harvey 2000; Tafuri 1976; Yiftachel 1998).<sup>16</sup> Susan Fainstein (2006, 2) acknowledges this when she argues that “planning is mostly characterized by modesty. Despite some exceptions, especially the advocates for the new urbanism, most planners and academic commentators argue that visionaries should not impose their views upon the public.”

This is not to say that socially just planners are uninspired by visions of a better future. Like conventional planners, they may directly engage with both visioning and future scenarios. But even so, they rarely adopt the same critical stance about time that is embodied in the more imaginative visioning exercises that Lefebvre calls for, which work backward from the future to the present, rather than vice versa. Both conventional and progressive planners who adopt scenario-building strategies not only formulate exercises with a scope of five to ten or even twenty years projecting from the present to the future. They also tend to structure such exercises on an acceptance of the institutions and given social configurations and how they might evolve differently in the future given current input. In this sense, they share the epistemology of those advocating for citizen participation techniques, whose strategies of action require mobilization of unequal social configurations in the present for the purposes of undermining that same order in the future.

Yet when conflict cities are the subject of inquiry, both citizen participation and its use for conventional scenario-building strategies will hold limited potential for changing either the present or the future, and may actually reinforce longstanding forms of inequality and injustice rather than eliminate them. In highly polarized urban situations, for example, where citizens are in conflict and where the state’s spatial, political, and economic biases against elements of the citizenry are both visually legible and formally accepted in participatory planning structures or local planning practice, these very same techniques function very differently. Governance institutions and processes are themselves likely to be provided unequally, excluding of oppositional or minority populations, and as such unaccountable to those whose aims are to change the nature of participation itself. This is particularly so when sovereignty and citizenship questions remain unresolved and large sectors of the population are excluded from formal decision-making processes. In these conditions, intractable divisions within and between citizens and the state make compromise, consensus, or negotiation contentiously difficult if not impossible, further limiting the value of citizen participation in government-led planning processes as the best route for producing a socially just city.

**Table 1.** The “Right to Vision” as a Distinctive Planning Approach

	The Right to the City (Lefebvre)	Participatory Planning	The Right to Vision
Approach to the city	Conceptual	Pragmatic; Using existing knowledge/representations	Methodological; Searching for new ways of acting/thinking
Key idea	Social critique and imaginative transformation	Participation through accessibility	Participation and critique through imaginative creation
Fostering change through	Challenging science-based knowledge and authority	Negotiation	Experimental new terminology and alternative perceptions of space and action
Community	Humanity; Focused on society as a whole	Locality; Assumes inclusivity based on location	Multiple scales and times; Assumes unbounded inclusivity

Conflict cities with long histories of violence and formal division, like Jerusalem, Belfast, or Nicosia, are even less likely to benefit from conventional planning techniques because they tend to host such high degrees of political contestation, spatial polarization, social antagonism, and “intensities of feeling” (Thrift 2004) that limit consensus within and between residents and/or the local state (Bollens 2000; Beall, Crankshaw, and Parnell 2002) about the extent of social exclusion and injustice in the planning process (Clarno 2008; Hatuka 2010; Segal and Weismann 2003; Yacobi 2006; Yacobi and Cohen 2006; Yiftachel 2006). In such conditions, a more imaginative visioning model might actually offer a more flexible time-space perspective that allows for a suspension of the self-limiting constraints of pragmatism and a challenge to top-down planning priorities associated with present political arrangements, and by so doing provide new room for maneuver in the search for the just city.

### Crafting the Just Jerusalem Competition

The Just Jerusalem Competition was crafted in order to test these hypotheses. An exercise in imaginative planning praxis built around the concept of visioning, it sought possibilities not yet known (Hillier 2008, 25). The competition’s stated aim was less about finding a single “logic” or master-planning vision for the city by the year 2050 and more a call for an array of ideas for how to make Jerusalem a place in which diverse groups might actively contest their desires without the threat of exclusion (Gunder 2005, 191). The year 2050 was not an arbitrary point in time so much as a metaphor for a future far enough from the present conflict to allow some freedom to imagine a different situation, but near enough to generate serious deliberation. Traditionally, competitions are targeted toward professional circles with an aim to achieve the “best” solutions for a well-defined problem. In this experiment, the idea was to engage a wide range of actors who might offer novel ideas that would positively affect socio-spatial trajectories more generally.

Process, in short, was as critical as outcome, and thus the competition was built around the premise that guaranteeing the “uncensored” ability to imagine alternative futures for Jerusalem was an essential component of the experiment, open to residents and nonresidents alike. That is, the “right” to vision should be a form of freedom available to all, based on principles of humanism rather than on the basis of selected or predetermined access to conventional planning structures and processes reserved for representative groups and/or emanating from established relations of power, authority, and individual or collective self-interest in a delimited spatial locale.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, the project departed from standard participatory planning practice. The underlying premises of the visioning competition were that (1) all humans—no matter their nationality or where they reside—possess visioning potential for conflict cities where residents have faced difficulties in transcending their own fights and divisions; (2) all visionaries (and their ideas) are equal, no matter their identity, ideology, location, or professional training; and (3) the greater the number and diversity of ideas, the more likely that a few will emerge around which shared consensus can be found for future action.<sup>18</sup>

With the universal invitation to vision, the expectation was that even a wide array of Jerusalemites themselves might also be able to rise above daily difficulties and search for imaginative new visions of a more just city.<sup>19</sup> Stated in planning-theoretic terms, the project sought to generate a praxis built on proactive imagination that could straddle the pragmatic and utopian elements of planning practice. As an alternative methodology for producing inventive ideas, the competition was conceived neither as a naïve invitation to dreaming nor a futile exercise in futurism but a hybrid strategy intended as a more pragmatically grounded extension of Lefebvre’s views that the city should “gather the interests of the whole society” as much as those who physically inhabit it (see Table 1).

The decision to widen the potential “planning” audience for the competition beyond Jerusalem itself—to include participants from around the globe rather than just city residents—also built on recognition of the changing nature of cities and citizenship in today’s globalized world. Transnational flows

of capital and labor make it increasingly difficult to continue to perceive of cities merely as “local” sites involving only in situ residents or officially sanctioned citizens. This state of affairs not only presupposes a new way of thinking about “rights to the city,” with the latter becoming locations in which both local and transnational citizenries struggle for recognition, rights, and identities.<sup>20</sup> It also suggests that global visioning—whether for Jerusalem, Beijing, London, or Dubai—is already a reality to a certain degree, with policy makers, architects, and planners acting globally in a variety of ways, but mainly by designing, developing, and appropriating models and experiences from cities all over the world.

Such issues also have particular relevance in the case of Jerusalem. Historically and in the present, Jerusalem has been emotionally appropriated by peoples all around the world as a symbolic and actual site, a home to their religious, spiritual, imperial, and/or national identity, thus already making Jerusalem a “global” city in imagination if not in practice. Opening the competition to a global audience served as recognition of this established history.

Of course, historical and ongoing contestations between Palestinians and Israelis (pre and post-1967) over who has the right to Jerusalem as a national capital have complicated both its global status and the sovereignty situation. The fate of the UN declaration of *corpus separatum*, which decades ago introduced a competing set of global governance and rights mandates, has been less debated than the issue of Palestinian and Israeli sovereignty. The unresolved nature of these various claims, particularly in light of the shifting boundaries of the city, have made it difficult to identify which authorities hold the legitimate right to plan for Jerusalem and on whose behalf. To the extent that competing claims within and between local, national, and diaspora populations over rights to the city remain both unresolved and the source of conflict, the invitation to global civil society was intended to restart the dialogue and planning process from a new, and less contested, vantage point. The fact that there was no clear consensus on the city’s boundaries or sovereignty status also meant that the traditionally “appropriate” relationship between clients and practitioners,<sup>21</sup> and selection of a clear physical site for targeted action, would be impractical.

These and other considerations unique to Jerusalem were thus incorporated into the competition’s guidelines. First, entrants were asked to frame their entries in the context of whatever physical or sovereignty context they considered most likely to lead to peace, justice, and sustainability (i.e., to identify Jerusalem as capital of one state, two states, or neither; and to identify the borders—or territorial reach—of the city).<sup>22</sup> They also were invited to “define their Jerusalem”—whether in symbolic, territorial, institutional, or other terms. Finally, owing to the contentious nature of the city (and the competition), and thus the importance of guaranteeing an intellectually “safe” space for imaginative deliberation, all entries were required to be anonymous, and entries could be

disqualified if a person’s name or nationality was evident in any way.

In the end, the competition was structured around five key elements: (1) its core “practice” was visioning, conceived as a method to generate out-of-the-box ideas; (2) it solicited the participatory involvement of global civil society in the visioning process, rather than just the participation of locally sanctioned, formal constituencies in Jerusalem proper—so as to bypass the thorny issue of whose boundaries for and citizenship claims on the city should or should not be recognized; (3) it sought to focus visionary attention on the future as much as the present, with the hope of “liberating” citizens and planners from the debilitating ideational constraints imposed by current power imbalances; (4) it “deconstructed” the city into its component parts, asking for separate innovations targeted at physical, civic, economic, and symbolic infrastructure, so as to avoid the impression of asking for top-down, master planning-type ideas and in recognition of the multiple urban functions, meanings, and possibilities that might contribute to a just, peaceful, or sustainable urban life; and (5) it actively sought a critical and open-ended definition of what physical (or virtual) spaces should define or constitute the scale and contours of the city to which rights were to be guaranteed, precisely to maximize the likelihood that justice concerns would unfold in universal human terms rather than in the context of partial or fragmented territorial domains.

With the above criteria, the competition drew interest from 1,150 people in eighty-five countries around the world, all of whom formally registered on the Just Jerusalem Competition website. In the end, close to 250 individuals or teams chose to submit entries to the competition. Of these, sixty were disqualified for technical reasons relating to incomplete submission or identifiable marks on entries (including names, addresses, etc.) that violated the competition’s requirement of full anonymity. If an entry had such markers, was incomplete, or failed to identify key specifications called for in the guidelines, it was disqualified and thus not evaluated. Of the more than 190 complete submissions, the competition’s independent jury selected four winners and seven honorable mentions. Criteria for selection included originality, execution, and capacity to generate new insights into the city or the processes, conditions, and relationships that might eventually lead to peace there and in the larger region.

Bearing in mind that choosing a single vision for a complex conflicted city would undermine the project’s commitment to generating ongoing dialogue about the range of possible imagined futures, jurors also were asked to identify a number of winning visions holding the potential to address multiple dimensions of urban life (physical, symbolic, civic, economic) in eclectic ways, and that could individually or together contribute to peace, prosperity, and justice. Yet even this criterion was somewhat problematic because jurors held stark differences of opinion about (1) the distinction between naïveté and imagination, (2) the “appropriate” conceptual starting points

**Table 2.** Typical Parameters Used to Classify Entries as *Pragmatic*, *Utopian*, and *Visionary*

	Pragmatic	Utopian	Visionary
Starting point	Accepts existing sociopolitical situation; works with conventional assumptions about power, space, and institutions	Avoidance of existing sociopolitical situation	Reconfiguration of existing sociopolitical situation, challenging of conventional assumptions
Suggested action framework	Local, bottom-up, a particular location for action	Static, top-down, escapist, no conflicts/paradoxes	Multiple scales and times, paradoxical
Primary focus	Tangible activities, feasible processes, implementation actors, identifiable outcomes.	Ideas, discourses	Integration of ideas-activities development, focus on new connections/networks, appropriation, temporality
Target community	Local	Universal (society broadly defined)	Unspecified but defined as encountering difference
Conception of space	Intimate, familiar, near, embodied	Abstract, virtual, hegemonic	Relational
Conception of time	Present oriented, short-term; emphasis on ideas where effects of change are evident immediately	Future oriented but abstractly; few identifiable markers for situating ideas in time or realms of the imaginable	Future oriented but concretely; identification of actions that explicitly lead to a different future

for visionary thinking, and (3) the time-space dimension of visioning—that is, how much into the future an idea could or should be situated to achieve the aims of “practical” utopianism as applied to a real city, at least enough to make a difference within a single generation, to name but a few of the many difficult issues that divided the jury.<sup>23</sup>

In negotiating this difficult terrain, jurors had some preset constraints. They were to identify no more than five winning visions, and they were to bear in mind that winners would be invited to MIT as Visiting Fellows, where they would not only fine-tune their own visions but also develop synergies among themselves as a group. These guidelines thus allowed for the possibility that further visionary ideas might emerge as a product of future collective interactions, through the juxtaposition of individual entries and dialogue over them. By conceptualizing visioning as a dynamic process of exploration involving utopian and pragmatic elements, rather than a static set of design forms, the jury was able to assess the entries using what can be described as a general “mode of orientation,” defined as the extent to which a proposed idea appeared conventional or predictable as opposed to whether it offered a nonconventional or imaginative way of thinking about the city. Accordingly, each entry was reviewed on the basis of a combination of parameters that took into account position on the conflict (acceptance, avoidance, or unwillingness to consider any changes that might disrupt the larger dynamics of power, representation, and control in and over the city), nature of proposed action (top-down and comprehensive vs. bottom-up and narrowly focused), willingness to consider multiple scales of intervention, the target community in question, and conceptions of space.<sup>24</sup>

It is with a more deliberate focus on the extent to which entries were classified as novel or conventional with respect

to these three criteria that we now turn, in order to complete an assessment of the experiment’s successes and failures.

### What the Visioning Process Produced: From Utopian to Pragmatic and in Between

Despite the competition’s larger aim of motivating imaginative new ideas that would straddle or bridge the pragmatic-utopian divide,<sup>25</sup> the empirical evidence suggests that the competition entries split relatively equally among pragmatic, utopian and visionary modes of orientation. Indeed, the *least* common was the visionary mode. Slightly more than one-third of the entries followed a more conventionally pragmatic planning approach (forty-five *pragmatic*), forming the largest category of entry. The remaining two-thirds adopted a more imaginative approach, although more competitors preferred utopian ideas with limited reference to reality (forty *utopian*) than visionary ideas that sought to connect tangible action to more imaginative concepts (thirty-six *visionary*). While not all entries could be easily classified, and some contained elements of each mode, a suggestive overview of these general modes of orientation is possible if one accepts the messy and difficult nature of the task (see Table 2).<sup>26</sup>

*Pragmatic* entries included proposals with a clear physical or institutional starting point, a preoccupation with the present not the future, and a tolerance for many of the existing defining spatial, social, and political conditions of the city. Pragmatic interventions may not always have been “shovel ready,” given the constantly fluctuating political and governance situation in Jerusalem, but they were generally presented within the realm of possibility—in no small part because they generally identified a well-specified



location for action or a given set of readily identifiable and seemingly legitimate actors and institutions responsible for implementation. Pragmatic entries most frequently concentrated on a single intervention, often linked to a single physical site, and for this reason did not always flesh out connectivity to the future or other parts of the city or region. Unlike other entries, pragmatic entries commonly identified the institutional and social actors necessary for implementation, as well as the groups of participants or beneficiaries to be targeted. In this category of entry, there were a large number of “standard” physical planning micro-improvement projects (green spaces in the old city; shared artistic or social space along the wall; modification or redesign of buffer zones between communities or contentious parts of the city) and well-established social coexistence projects (based on soap operas; creation of street art or “furniture” for messages of peace; alternative reality games; shared school curriculum).

A particularly good example in these regards is the *Peace Network* project,<sup>27</sup> which accepted the existing sociopolitical situation and worked with conventional assumptions about civil society to create new forms of connection among those identified with both sides of the conflict. Its authors proposed an eminently implementable project of building a multimedia social “peace network” of Israel and Palestine, based on virtual mapping of the homepages of a large variety of peace organizations, that would help visualize the potential and the strength of already existing peace organizations, particularly those that have already committed to cooperation. No fundamental changes in politics, governance, land use, or citizenship practices would have been necessary for this project to achieve its aims, while the project’s eminent feasibility stems from the identity of the actors: NGOs and international organizations already embedded in the existing sociopolitical situation.

In sharp contrast, those entries classified as *utopian*, and thus falling on the other end of the spectrum, imagined the urban future with a relatively blank slate, that is, where there were no real limitations, and often with little regard for the current realities of politics or historical traditions of urbanism (either generally or in Jerusalem). Most paid little attention to the actors and institutions necessary for implementing or sustaining a vision. While the end product or scenario was often very well defined in visual or narrative terms, the steps to or from the imagined ideal were typically left unarticulated. In a few cases, new entities or coalitions of actors are proposed to steward projects, but even these entries relied heavily on a miraculous reimagination of space and society, using ideas, representations, and narratives to render foreseeable the future. Most of these futurist and utopian projects floated rather abstractly in time, however, with the future imagined as different from the present more through applications of advanced technologies and

their implications for new models of social and spatial organization than through tangible changes projected for urban institutions.

In terms of terminology, utopian entries often used vocabularies of death and dying, implying an engagement with dystopia as much as utopia—probably in recognition of the dire political circumstances and ongoing violence in Jerusalem. For example, several entries described elements of the city as hovering between life and death, ailing to the point of near-expiration. While some entries went so far as to portray the city as a graveyard, literally speaking, or stuck in other similarly bleak imaginary worlds without hope, others used death as a symbolic marker of where the city might be if changes were not introduced, thus taking the same darkness of thought in a slightly more hopeful manner, and suggesting the possibility of resuscitation. Hopeful or not about the future, those who adopted the language of death saw the city’s future as a consequence of a variety of different causes, among them deliberate “urbicide.”

Granted, in some of the utopian/dystopian entries these concerns applied only to certain parts of the city, either the most religiously contested areas or those where physical or symbolic boundaries divided citizens against each other (like the wall/separation barrier or critical nodes separating East and West Jerusalem). But what made these entries different from the more pragmatic or visionary entries focused on similar physical locations was the fact that they rarely imagined the possibility of revival or reversal. The future and what it was imagined to be merely extended or played out the most nonnegotiable elements of the present: the inescapability of history, the impossibility of spatial coexistence or integration, and the deepening and reification of boundaries and divisions, as in *The Olive Tree’s Urban Resistance*, the *Hostage Host*, and to an extent, the more visionary-utopia dystopian future represented in *The New Zidonians*.<sup>28</sup>

Among the utopian entries avoiding the metaphors of death and suffering, several purposively embraced the language of life and built more hopeful visions around the concept of a “rebirth” or fundamental transformation of the city, sometimes through healing and sometimes through the creation of completely new spaces. The project *Gulf of Peace*<sup>29</sup> is an illustrative example that seeks to reconfigure current political and economic spaces in wildly ambitious ways. This project suggested a fundamental reorganization of Jerusalem and its surrounding territory by developing a new economic activity that would unite peoples, countries, and ecological protagonists from around the world behind a single objective: a Solar Water Power plant to provide fresh irrigation water and power to sustain plants, animals, humans, and industry. With the establishment of this plant, Jerusalem would extend its borders down to merge with a much larger *Gulf of Peace*, so that eventually the entire world would have “unfettered

access by sea.” Among its suggestions is a division of the West Bank along its ridge line—lands draining west cede to Israel; lands draining east, north of Jerusalem, cede to Palestine; those south to Jordan; with all three countries bordering Sacred Jerusalem and all with equal access.

This utopian project, appealing and imaginative as it may be, is far from readily implementable, and there is little clue as to where to even begin. Rather, it is proposed as a fully formed program, imagined from some free-floating vantage point without conflict or paradoxes, and without any notion of which organizations, agencies, and actors would initiate let alone implement this idea. Although potentially problematic as a “just” vision, its power, elegance, and abstractness are evident in its vast scale of action, and the grand schema it imagines is consistent with the ethos of utopian thought.

Even so, when contrasted to some of the more *visionary* proposals, or those that straddle the pragmatic–utopian divide, the limitations of the *Gulf of Peace* idea and the utopian entries more generally become clear. In general, visionary proposals were those in which contestants imagined or articulated a potential to change and transform the city—objectives that usually entailed both recognition of the current reality of the city and a representation or articulation of what it might be in the future. Offering multiple scales and times, these entries seemed to not only incorporate elements of fluidity and dynamism but also to see the city as a living body of moving people, shifting parts, changing definitions, or longer-term trajectories. They also tended to capture the imagination of the jurors (and thus predominated among the winning entries) because they acknowledged both the current reality and the promise of transcending it in some unspecified future time.

One good example is the *Media Barrios* project, a winning entry that sought to reconfigure the existing patterns of social and spatial exclusion by using new media and the arts as sources of both social connection and urban renewal in Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup> The project used new technologies to simultaneously foster cultural expression, enhance youth social cohesion, enable future economic development, and recognize creative activism among individuals and communities, thus operating across multiple scales and times. Its commitment to creating new social and physical spaces for civic engagement in a refugee camp encircled by the separation barrier, or Wall, both recognized and transcended the physical divisions between East and West Jerusalem. Its tangible goal was to create new community sites for the production of media arts, virtual online networks, and innovative discursive forums; but these activities, in turn, were seen as laying the foundation for recognition and empowerment of impoverished areas—through workshops, trainings, and institutes, as well as through festivals, exhibits, online

activities, and creative use of public spaces for performance and by linking these centers to other media/arts initiatives in Israel-Palestine and the larger Middle East region.

As such, rather than confining itself only to a localized community constituency, this proposal sought new forms of encounter to widen the circle of responsibilities and engagement over conditions in the neighborhood where the project originally emanated. Its scale of action was regional and it counted on participation and involvement of both local and nonlocal actors, whether from NGOs, international agencies, or both.

So what can we say about visionary proposals and how they differed? Analysis shows that entries seeking to break new conceptual ground or deviate from standard planning script sufficiently to be considered visionary did so by identifying new activities for intervention (sectoral point of entry), new forces for change (i.e., principal actors), and/or new territorialities (scale of action) built on a reconceptualization of social, historical, or cultural relationships in space. One such entry, *HUMMUS*, judged a winning entry for its broad reframing of Jerusalem in the context of a larger ecological region rather than the nation-state, sought to “deexceptionalize” Jerusalem by focusing attention on the urban characteristics it shared with other cities in the East Mediterranean. Its approach contrasted with many of the pragmatic entries, which tended to offer site- or neighborhood-specific projects, as well as with utopian entries whose interventions often scaled down to individual units (like walking robots) or individuals who were to lead fundamental transformation of the city.

There were other noteworthy variations and commonalities among the three modes. Private sector actors appeared frequently among pragmatic and visionary competitors, but not among utopian thinkers, possibly for obvious reasons concerning the views of capitalism, markets, and power in most utopian discourse. Surprisingly, infrastructure was a predominant concern for utopian and visionary competitors, but hardly significant for pragmatic competitors—possibly because infrastructure projects, although often seen as the bread and butter of pragmatic planning, are contingent on clear understandings of property rights and zoning, two highly conflictive issues in Jerusalem. NGOs and associations were favored actors for implementation among pragmatic and visionary entries, perhaps because the competition’s efforts to recast social justice issues in terms of the urban quotidian (rather than nationalist struggle) may have implied a bypassing of formal planning institutions associated with the state. All three modes had a good number of entries that identified international actors or institutions as well as NGOs as central to their projects, and that identified environmental issues—and somewhat less so high technology, digital media, and education—as keys to a peaceful future.

Yet pragmatic entries were much more likely to focus design interventions around specific sites in the city, often a key neighborhood or around a public space or building for cultural, religious, or reflective purposes—frequently in or around the Old City.<sup>31</sup>

By definition, the pragmatic entries also focused almost exclusively on the present and on projects that had a short-term and clearly defined time frame of action. In these and other regards, such entries adopted the current techniques, lexicon, and epistemological assumptions of conventional planning practice, focusing on problem-solving within local urban and political constraints and avoiding “revolutionary” ideas that challenged the larger organizing dynamics of society, whether spatial, political, or economic. Even so, more than three-quarters of the entries identified as pragmatic because of their self-limiting nature also failed to identify an actor or institution responsible for implementation of these conventional ideas, suggesting that even a pragmatic vision was not necessarily an implementable one. The failure to identify forces that would carry forward even a pragmatic vision may have owed to a reluctance to count on existent planning institutions in Jerusalem, given either a concern with bias or a recognition that the competition guidelines did not insist on any discussion of implementation.<sup>32</sup> But it also may have rested in a grounding or commitment to realism, which itself would limit the capacity to project practical action out into a future that remained unknown.

To be sure, several pragmatic submissions contained promising innovations to weave present-day interventions with ongoing projects stretching toward 2050, branching out of their initial modest realms of specialty to cross disciplinary boundaries, and in some cases pairing a radical new vision for participation proposed within the context of a very pragmatic understanding of current realities. But to do so, they focused less on future scenarios and more on the negotiable issues or physical locations whose transformations would establish a path to the future.<sup>33</sup> These include ideas that challenge conventional wisdom about borders and boundaries, described in entries such as *Button Up the City*, *NeighborRING*, and *Personal Infradentity*.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of scale, the visionary and utopian entries were more likely to focus on the greater municipal area and other more territorially extended spaces. This means they also were more likely to advocate a fundamental rethinking of metropolitan and regional land use, land ownership, or political jurisdiction. That is, above and beyond their more expansive treatment of time—defined as the extent to which proposals stretched into the chronological future or past—both visionary and utopian entries took a different perspective on *space*, particularly the desired scale of action, the nature of citizens relationships to land itself, and the forms and nature of physical connectivity among citizens or across territory.<sup>35</sup>

## Possibilities and Limits Associated with the “Right to Vision” in Conflict Cities

When all is said and done, the predominance of pragmatic and utopian over visionary entries should not be that surprising, given the fact that the competition structure privileged the involvement of educated personnel familiar with planning and design worlds (for reasons noted at the outset of this article). Other factors also may have explained the relatively modest number of “visionary” entries, including the amount of reflection, inspiration, or knowledge needed to develop something truly original and imaginative in planning theoretic terms,<sup>36</sup> as opposed to relying on a menu of ideas generated from standard planning practice or the latest science fiction novel. Moreover, in the case of Jerusalem to be visionary also implied a willingness to relax predominant views about the city’s current sovereignty and current planning structures and practices. Thus, it may be that the problem was neither just selection bias nor the general challenge of being visionary but the difficulties of thinking both imaginatively *and* constructively about a city where so much is at stake and where all planning action—whether pragmatic, visionary, or utopian—will undoubtedly be controversial. For all these reasons, visioning turned out to be far from an easy planning exercise.

But this is not to say that nothing was gained. If one takes a step back from evaluating the content of specific proposals, dropping the search for actionable projects or futurist solutions and asking instead whether new knowledge was generated by the visioning process, there are reasons to be optimistic. Specifically, the competition revealed a set of re-occurring meta-narratives that framed collective sentiment about the city in the form of three key themes: the city as *connected* or *fragmented*, a city whose fate depended on a *shared past* or a *shared future*, and a city whose significance rested in its *symbolic* as opposed to *material* character. Of course, not all entries fit neatly into one or the other end of these seeming dichotomies, and many adopted a combination; but as larger framing narratives, the preoccupation with space, time, and meaning in the entries constitutes a Durkheimian “social fact” that tells us a lot about how Jerusalem is seen by those who care most about it. Recognition of these views—whether as constraining or enabling peace—must be accommodated or addressed in any future planning exercise.

Of these three narratives, attention to the city’s division, or fragmentation, was most pervasive, probably for obvious reasons. Many entries began with a description of divides that produced either greater dissociation or a need for connection. Whether built on a view of real or imagined unity or division between peoples, geographies, transportation modes, or even symbolic “borderlands,” boundaries appeared prominently in many of the depictions of present-day Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup>

With this as background, some proposals sought to reinforce existent spatial divisions or distinctions as a way to keep the peace, as described in the village and settlement “which turn their back on each other” in the *Viaduct of Synchronicity* submission. For some of the competitors, in fact, Jerusalem was and would always be a “city of pieces,” an organic patchwork of semiautonomous spaces that define its past and present. Among those who took this posture, submissions typically advocated for a clearer sharpening of edges and/or a strengthening of the basis for separation.<sup>38</sup>

Other proposals, however, identified divisions as the result of an unnatural fragmentation of urban life, honing in on the political, social, or environmental dangers of division and proposing new ways to bridge, connect, or create new spaces of overlap. Several submissions also sought to transcend the fragmented/connected divide by identifying “points of convergence,” or shared spaces that would attract different groups or activities, to a single site of overlap or interaction. Sites to enhance colearning or joint training activities for Palestinians and Israelis were a common form of this idea, as were submissions that proposed shared spaces for cultural reflection and historical memory.

To the extent that the preoccupation with division and fragmentation was often framed in the context of history or culture, it frequently came attached to considerations of time and meaning. With respect to the former, a large number of the entries identified some sort of shared temporal experience among the variety of religious, political, or social groups living in the city, although there was little consensus as to whether the past was more significant than present as a foundation for sharing the future. For some, commonalities that emerged out of past differences were reinforced over time; for others, common experiences in the past laid a trajectory for contemporary or future differences. Either way, this idea of *sharing something*, whether in the past or the future, was likely to be seen as enabling some form of peaceful coexistence.

Submissions that focused primarily on a shared past and then diverged over time frequently proposed the construction of museums, cemeteries, or memorials. Conversely, submissions that focused on a shared future often articulated a common goal that all groups, regardless of their prior histories, could work toward achieving together. In identifying the basis for sharing, many such submissions highlighted the urban quotidian, recognizing the selfsame, or identical, nature of the urban experience, regardless of religion or ethnicity, or focusing on the strife associated with living in contemporary Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> There were also entries that viewed cultural or religious groups as existing alongside each other, or in parallel, without presuming either a shared past or future. Many of these submissions focused on urban conditions or territorial venues of coexistence. For example, *Station* exemplifies this idea by enacting a dramatic performance revealing the coexistence of epochs and peoples in a single setting, the old Ottoman Railway Station. The play transports its audience through the present, past, and future almost seamlessly,

emphasizing the importance of understanding and accepting both historical and contemporary differences between Israelis and Palestinians.

The discursive focus on the past or future, as well as the preoccupation with division and/or unity, could undoubtedly translate to many conflict locales, not only Jerusalem, and for precisely this reason the visioning methodology may have a future role to play in generating knowledge about conflict cities more generally. But Jerusalem, like other conflict cities, also has its specificities, and in this case they are revealed by the presence of a third meta-narrative built around the city’s symbolic meaning as a sacred historical location and metaphoric site of myriad spiritual, religious, or humanistic ideals. Recognition of the city’s sacred character—albeit often as juxtaposed against more profane elements—emerged within many of the submissions, perhaps because religion is seen as driving developments in the city even more durably than struggles over space and history.

To be sure, many entries considered Jerusalem a city with tangible urban problems awaiting thoughtful and imaginative but grounded and pragmatic interventions. Other proposals, however, embraced Jerusalem’s reputation as a key symbolic site, a city whose activities and spaces have meaning beyond the quotidian experience of housing, transportation, commerce, etc., and whose future should reflect its larger symbolic role for certain religions or all of humanity, not merely its current residents. Extracting the symbolic from the material meaning of the city’s activities and patterns was difficult for many entrants. Complicating matters, there was little agreement on whether any future symbolism should be founded in singular or multiple religious sentiments, or in more enlightenment-inspired ideals like a commitment to human rights and democracy. As such, like the other meta-narratives produced by the visioning process, those invoking the city’s symbolic character did not show consensus about the nature of future interventions—particularly about what should change and what should stay the same, on what basis, and why. But this may be precisely the point, and what makes planning for Jerusalem so challenging, so fraught with trade-offs, and outside the scope of conventional planning procedures and techniques.

As this discussion of the larger symbolic meaning of the city suggests, the visioning process did not produce any magic solutions for how to accommodate the lack of consensus on a large variety of issues. Even so, it did document the existence of several shared meta-narratives about the city, which themselves reflect the larger collective imagination and thus could have implications for future planning action. Indeed, given that discourses about a shared past or shared future emerged so consistently within the submissions, future planning exercises might make new headway by building creatively around the conceptual notion of sharing and focusing on a potentially wide array of spatial, cultural, or temporal reference points for doing so. Likewise, planners for Jerusalem and other conflict cities



could learn how to assess the planning theoretic or practical value of stressing commonalities rather than differences among residents, asking whether they provide greater or lesser room for planning action based on how these views correlate with spatial patterns, social or political allegiances, cultural repertoires, and interpretations of history. Finally, planners must learn how to see the city in both symbolic and material terms, precisely because both reference points will undoubtedly command attention in ways that will continue to complicate the planning terrain.

Recognition of the city's dual character may be the greatest challenge of all, and where the visioning exercise generated its most valuable insight. Indeed, while many submissions contained elements of symbolism and metaphor, many others remained grounded in reality, and surprisingly few sought to blend both in a single proposal in ways that could inspire both creative transformation and practical action. Of those who did, most were winning entries or honorable mentions that stood out for their innovative attempts to challenge predominant symbolic meanings or recast conventional metaphors while keeping an eye on existent realities, using both as the foundation for practical intervention.

Perhaps the best example of this, again, is the award-winning *HUMMUS* entry, which projected an entirely new regional map for Jerusalem's future, built around a novel reading of the cultural, environmental, economic, and political history of the city. Its premise was that Jerusalem is just one of many Middle East cities with a politically contested and multicultural past, making it mundane rather than exceptional. With the courage to challenge the city's exceptionalism as its defining feature, this proposal identified the roots of the city's future transformation in a set of shared geocultural and regional experiences that would lay the foundation for commercial and cultural connections and cooperation with other Middle East cities. Likewise, the winning *NewGen V* hardly mentioned the city symbolic meaning and status as capital to nation-states or home to religious movements, focusing instead on displaced or orphaned youth whose sense of self and future concerns would be built around post-Enlightenment discourses of human rights and universal inclusion rather than pre-Enlightenment or Enlightenment discourses of religious exclusivity or state sovereignty and citizenship. Old metaphorical references to religious symbolism or sovereignty were nowhere to be seen in the concrete design of a single residential community hosting Israeli and Palestinian youth, which deployed the more humanist metaphor of "home" to nurture an experiential living and learning environment intended to prepare the youth of today for a future yet to be built tomorrow.

### Concluding Remarks on a New Planning Praxis for Conflict Cities

So what can be concluded about the visioning exercise and its value for Jerusalem or other conflict cities? Did this

experiment achieve the promise of Henri Lefebvre's (1996) claim that social innovation, imagination, and even visioning—understood as a form of play—could produce new identities, activities, or images that help sustain rights to the city and more socially just planning practice? Has it offered new ground for a praxis that challenges both constrained pragmatism and unfettered utopianism while addressing both planning content and process?

Given that this was an experiment intended to generate ideas for a future still in reach, it may be impossible to arrive at uncontested answers to these questions. But one can compare the project's larger epistemological aims with the concrete results it produced. The competition sought to open new windows of understanding—from within the region and around the world—about the shared hopes, dreams, and desires of citizens who want to make Jerusalem peaceful. It sought to encourage imagination and vision, not the real politics of negotiation and political trade-offs. Finally, it proceeded under the premise that when given an opportunity to voice their desires and dreams about the city, an array of citizens—be they Muslims, Christians, or Jews, Palestinians or Israelis, residents or not—might be able to identify common ground and similar sentiments about what might make Jerusalem a vibrant, peaceful, tolerant, and democratic place. To the extent that this project did not aim to find a "solution" for Jerusalem, but rather to inspire imaginative ideas and tools which open alternative, innovative ways for discussing and eventually dealing with urban and political conflict, it did generate some positive gains.

The mounting of the competition and the mere presence of a global website for sharing the project's visionary aims provided citizens from around the world an opportunity to deepen and expand their knowledge about the social, political, and economic conditions in one of the world's most conflicted cities. The website became identified as one of the few locations where a wide range of data, maps, images, and information from a variety of government, international, NGO, and citizen sources was readily available to all, independent of nationality.

Equally important, this visioning experiment's web-based format laid the foundation for a community of global citizens to communicate with each other about peace and justice in Jerusalem, perhaps establishing the groundwork for future collective efforts there or elsewhere. It provided the "right to vision" to a wide range of interested parties, in much the same way that grassroots organizing efforts at the level of the neighborhood build on "right to the city" rhetoric to create more participatory, inclusive, and just planning practices for their cities. But in contrast to the more conventional applications of these principles, the visioning competition and its global website provided a virtual space for generating global dialogue about social just urban practice in Jerusalem. The difference is that this was a virtual community built around a visioning exercise unfolding on a global scale, not among local citizens in face-to-face contact. Still, as

with conventional planning practice, short- and long-term planning gains will depend on whether this exercise lays the organizational and social-networking groundwork for alliance building, generating legitimacy, creating influence, and forging new ideas, all of which are key components of successful planning action.

The Just Jerusalem Competition only began to scratch the surface of possible ideas that could be assessed, debated, and offered. But it also laid the foundation for fortifying democratic dialogue built on the free exchange of dissenting ideas, serving as a venue for challenging existing representations of the city, for confronting injustice, and for saying the unsayable without the constraints of censorship, whether self-imposed or otherwise. Such outcomes were possible only because the exercise mandated open dialogue built on inclusivity rather than exclusivity, understood in both human and global terms and unconstrained by social, ethnic, religious, or national boundaries. Its longer term significance will depend on how large and active the global community of visionaries becomes and whether traffic on the website will continue to produce new ideas for Jerusalem and other conflict cities. In a global marketplace of thought, visions for Jerusalem or other conflict cities will stand or fall on their own merits as they enter into wider competition with other visions; a particular vision prevails in this world only by being tested against more or less worthy ideas.

Finally, and independent of what happens with the Just Jerusalem website or the future production of novel ideas, the visioning exercise showed that innovative and imaginative techniques can produce tangible outcomes, albeit as much in the form of discursive narratives as in concrete or actionable plans. The visioning process provided a basis for extracting and identifying fundamental metanarratives of the city, particularly those conflicting and divisive metanarratives that so often lurk under the radar screen of conventional planning practice, either unspoken or unacknowledged. By making them transparent and open to all, the metanarratives that emerged from the visioning process form a new type of knowledge, built on the collective imagination. Once recognized and used in future deliberations on the city, these narratives hold the potential to frame or inspire new forms of planning action.

Lefebvre asked, “Why should the imaginary enter only outside the real instead of nurturing reality? When there is a loss of thought in and by the imaginary, it is being manipulated. The imagination is also a social fact” (Lefebvre 1996, 167). Social facts both “real” and imaginative will create the landscape of cities, conflict-ridden and elsewhere, and thus they should be a basis around which planning action unfolds. To counteract cynicism in the absence of progress, especially in conflict cities where hope is in short supply, imagination may in fact be all that is left. Susan Fainstein (2005b, 128) and John Friedmann (2000, 464) also have argued that

ideal visions can serve as an essential catalyst for change, and that conceptions such as the “Just City” or a “Good City” can serve this purpose if developed—even if not prior to a discourse of rights to the city, then parallel to it.

The problem with much of the “right to the city” discourse has been that it has remained impossibly abstract for far too long. Specific cities, however, are not nearly so abstract. They have their own histories, interpretive narratives, framings of self and others produced from within and without, and in the case of a conflict city like Jerusalem, multiple and competing metanarratives of meaning, time, space, and of course conflict. It is these narratives and framing discourses that can and must serve as the point of departure for change, laying both possibilities and limits on both present and future action, and exposing for further discussion and deliberation the complicated context in which planning practice will necessarily unfold.

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### Notes

1. Harvey (2008, 28) further suggests that “the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is . . . one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.”
2. If visionary elements do enter into the planning process, it is usually through top-down exercises in which planners and architects introduce self-created models of a preferred urban future, generally built around a tangible or readily implementable project, followed by a reactive response from citizens,

who in turn exercise their right to comment and critique. The result tends to be a well-managed if not sterile and highly unimaginative dialogue that lacks the basic qualities of visioning and sidelines fundamental societal transformation, adopting instead a commitment to pragmatic and incremental gains that tend to reproduce the power differences between those charged with the juridical authority to plan the city, on one hand, and those who are only in a position to accept, critique, or perhaps even modify such plans, on the other.

3. The competition was the culminating stage of a long-term project (started in 2004) titled *Jerusalem 2050: Visions for a Place of Peace*, developed by the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in conjunction with the Center for International Studies at MIT.
4. See *Lamont v. Postmaster General*, 381 U.S. 301 (1965) (Mitchell 2003, 47).
5. Many local planning decisions for the city of Jerusalem are made by national authorities, owing to the importance of the city to the larger conflict about national sovereignty. This not only meant that many Palestinian inhabitants were excluded from participation, but also that over certain issues many Israeli Jerusalemites also had little say over local planning priorities and practices.
6. Although some of the assessments of the project's aims come from personal knowledge, most of the information is documented on the Jerusalem 2050 website ([www.envisioningpeace.org](http://www.envisioningpeace.org)). It can be visited for more elaboration on the project, on the jury, the competition specifications, and for closer evaluation of the entries to the competition (discussed in greater detail by entry number in the paper's final section).
7. Davis is a full-time faculty member at MIT and former codirector of the project; Hatuka is an Israeli architect and a current faculty member at Tel Aviv University who, at the time of the project, was a postdoctoral fellow in residence at MIT and an active member of the Jerusalem project's Steering Committee.
8. The project director and several steering committee members visited Israel and Palestine to meet with urban planners, academics, NGOs, and others involved in Jerusalem politics and planning to solicit advice about the project and to lay the groundwork for its eventual launch.
9. The total number of steering committee members fluctuated over the course of the project, because a condition of involvement was residence at MIT, but it usually stabilized at about a dozen. For names of Steering Committee members past and present, see the project website [[envisioningpeace.org](http://envisioningpeace.org)].
10. The Steering Committee made a rank-ordered short list of potential jurors who might fill each of these slots and issued invitations until all the categories were filled. Several invited jurors declined to participate.
11. Jurors included William J. Mitchell (architect, urban theorist, and jury head), Suha Ozkan (planner), Sadako Ogata (diplomat), Meron Benvenisti (historian, geographer, and ex-deputy mayor of Jerusalem), Salim Tamari (historian, sociologist, and Director of the Institute for Jerusalem Studies, Ramallah, West Bank), Amy Dockser Marcus (journalist), Ute Meta Bauer (curator and visual artist), and Herman Hertzberger (architect/urbanist). A final jury member, Harvey Cox (theologian), withdrew a few days before the selection owing to health reasons.
12. For names of invitees and copies of presentations, visit the Jerusalem 2050 website.
13. Of the 1,119 that registered on the website, approximately 32 percent came from North America (i.e., 366 from Canada and the United States), 26 percent from Europe ( $n = 299$ ), and 21 percent from the Middle East and North Africa ( $n = 236$ ). Among those who actually submitted entries (a total of 250), 36 percent of the submissions came from North America ( $n = 88$ ), 18 percent from Europe ( $n = 69$ ), and 23 percent from the Middle East and North Africa (57 total; of which 30 came from Israel and 2 from the Occupied Territories).
14. The limited number of firms participating and the large number of individuals can be partly explained by the prizes offered. Rather than a cash prize, winners were to be given a fellowship to spend a semester at MIT to work on their entries. Thus, individuals at later stages of their career or with family and work obligations that limited their mobility may not have applied.
15. Of the thirty-two registered, thirty came from Israel and only two came from Palestine or the Occupied Territories.
16. Granted, many socially just planners recognize the structural constraints that limit the impact of citizen participation, acknowledging that such practices do not always translate into substantive inclusion (Davis 2004; Holston and Appadurai 1999; Jacobs 1998; Miraftab 2004; Roy 2006). As such, there are fundamental fissures within the socially just planning community about the overall value of citizen participation, particularly between those advocating communicative rationality and those arguing for "deep difference" (Watson 2006).
17. It is worth noting that development and use of the notion the "right to vision" developed by the authors for this paper came not merely from Lefebvre's ideals, which were acknowledged in the prior project stages, but also in reaction to the numerous e-mail attacks and personal criticisms that the project organizers received from extreme political groups who questioned the Steering Committee's motive. Specifically, many openly challenged the "right" of scholars at MIT to even discuss the future of Jerusalem, formulating it in precisely this way in formal correspondences sent to the university, steering committee members, and the blogosphere. Some even suggested that only residents (or in other correspondences, only certain states) had the right to think about Jerusalem's future. It was this real-world experience and the looming specter of censorship, built on the assumption that only a small number of anointed local and national actors and institutions should have the "right" to offer peace-producing ideas for Jerusalem that further inspired us to turn to this phraseology and conceptualization to summarize our methodology and experience.
18. This same logic also echoed the great experiment in moral philosophy constructed by John Rawls, who argued that

- principles of justice must always be established in the abstract precisely because the empirical grounding of real-world inequalities structures a set of biases in normative perception that both reflect and reproduce unequal distribution of powers.
19. Because we were interested in the project's global reach, entrants were asked to list a home country, not their city location. It was thus impossible to know who exactly lived in Jerusalem, or whether they might have in prior periods (a possibility with Jerusalemites or others from Israel or Palestine who might be studying or living abroad). What we do know is that more than 10 percent of the entrants identified themselves as coming from Israel or Palestine (listed as the occupied territories) and of these, thirty came from the former and only two from the latter. Thus even among "locals" there was some selection bias, perhaps reflecting unequal access to language and education as noted earlier.
  20. In addition, the globalization of governance institutions and human rights regimes has meant that citizens can and frequently do appeal to authorities beyond their own local and national borders. To the extent that globalization as an ideal and a practice offers opportunities to transcend traditional territorial hierarchies of governance, citizenship, and rights, these changes must be acknowledged and perhaps even accommodated in urban planning practice more generally.
  21. Neither planners nor the local state identified as the reference points for the exercise, although many submissions did contain ideas that could (and have been) presented to local authorities.
  22. In this sense, the competition not only acknowledged the contested status of Jerusalem without taking a position on its relationship to competing ethnonational claims and sovereignties. It also reversed the conventional order of causality when thinking about sustainable peace in the region, primarily by thinking about Jerusalem as an "ordinary city" (Robinson 2006) and by using everyday urban life as the point of conceptual departure for future visioning. Such a posture also built on the assumption that once the "Gordian knot" of Jerusalem could be addressed, greater scope for establishing peace between nations could emerge—rather than assuming that the resolution of the national question must always come first.
  23. To protect juror confidentiality and create an environment of open deliberation where self-censoring would not constrain open deliberation, jury sessions were closed even to project organizers and participants. Steering Committee members were only allowed to hear the final discussions of winning entries and honorable mentions in an open session after all decisions were made. No tapes were made of jury deliberations. As such, the above assessment is drawn from partial knowledge of the jury deliberative process, gleaned from open Jury-Steering Committee discussions of the final entries, from a short question-and-answer period with Steering Committee members afterwards, and from formal written statements by the jurors on the winning entries and about the competition. The latter document is available on the website address posted above.
  24. In our independent assessment of their mode of orientation we placed 121 of the 128 reviewed into "pragmatic," "visionary," and "utopian" categories. Of the seven not categorized, three entries contained too little information for classification and were excluded, while four additional entries defied classification.
  25. Scholars of planning theory have examined the origins of *utopian* planning practice, its reformulation and/or demise in the 1960s and 1970s—partly as a reaction against comprehensive planning—and the emergence and ascendance of more *pragmatic*, problem-solving type of planning praxis. To be sure, there are planning theoretical approaches that do not take one or the other of these two extremes, falling somewhere in between, as in the Habermas-inspired communicative planning practice. But few have offered a "third way" that so consciously incorporates imagination and a practice-oriented focus on the future rather than the present, as we do here. For more on the history of these planning ideas, see Friedmann (2000), Fainstein (2005b), Sanyal (2005), and Healey (2009).
  26. Clearly, when dealing with a wide array of entries coming in multiple forms (photos, fictional and documentary films, plays, short stories, urban design projects, community organizations, legal briefs, etc.) the challenges of categorization were immense. It was difficult to draw hard-and-fast lines around entries, and for that reason these categories should be understood as merely suggestive of distinctive "modes of orientation." As with all such exercises, most categorical "coherence" appeared in the extremes (clearly utopian and clearly pragmatic), with the most slippage in the middle range of entries. For these reasons, we prefer to consider these concepts along a continuum, rather than as truly discrete categories.
  27. See <http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/peacenetwork>.
  28. These assessments correspond to close readings of the entries, all of which are available for further examination (<http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/olive-trees-urban-resistence>, <http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/hostage-host>, and <http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/new-zidonians-story>).
  29. See <http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/gulf-peace>.
  30. See <http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/media-barrios>.
  31. Jerusalem's Old City is perhaps the most contested spatial site in Jerusalem, and it alone captured the attention of six of the forty-five *pragmatic* entries
  32. A failure to identify actors or institutions responsible for implementation did prevent an idea from being compelling. A good example was the *Sanctuary Nodes of Tolerance* project, which offered a plan to turn the Old City into a place of sanctuary for the world, hosting a multiplicity of religious exercises, worship, and communication; serving as a place of peace and unity; and identified as a place for celebrating humanity and the world. That is, it was to be made an international public space that is accessible to all people, built on mutual acceptance, respect, and toleration of differences—and thus free from the distortions and conflicts created by contemporary political battles, economic processes, and unjust social structures that now are evident within the Old City and elsewhere in Jerusalem.



- This proposal also envisioned the development of a new urban pattern at the outer elevations of the Old City walls, identifying it as a place for free trade, economic activity, education, service, infrastructure, resource, interaction, etc. The walls would serve as a backdrop or stage for a new way of life, also becoming a space of transition between the mundane and the sacred—that is, a bridge instead of a border (<http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/sanctuary-node-tolerance>).
33. In fact, despite the competition's focus on 2050 as the basis for constructively working back to the present, very few submissions were able to accommodate this dual challenge. While pragmatic entries focused on the present, utopian entries challenged the status quo and expanded the realm of possibilities of imagined futures without necessarily providing linkages back to the present. That is, their future orientation failed to translate into a tangible "starting point" for any practical intervention in the present. Several visionary entries sought to do both, although not always successfully, and usually by providing the beginnings of a plan for how to develop ideas about the future within the more immediate realities of the present.
  34. Available for further examination on the competition website at <http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/button-city>, <http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/neighborring>, and <http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/personal-infraidentity>.
  35. One of the more powerful *utopian* entries called *Landwalker*, which won honorable mention, took a highly novel approach to the constraints on mobility produced by the separation wall, as well as the issue of access to land in the city. Its main foci were mobile residence units with "legs," capable of straddling a wall from both sides, making it a technologically complex adaptive system capable of self-regulating and symbolically addressing the issue of mobility and land tenure—all issues that produce significant conflict in Jerusalem. The *Landwalker* not only serves as a messenger that produces new mutual associations among people and disparate sites, it evokes entirely new possibilities, symbolically and otherwise, about the meaning of land and the appropriation of space (<http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/landwalker>).
  36. One does have to wonder how much thought went into the submissions. Many appeared to be ideas developed for classes or other projects that had almost nothing to do with the city of Jerusalem, or the competition's call for ideas to enable a more just, peaceful, and sustainable future. One example is the *Structure Forming under Processing* entry. This project offered a fleeting and overly caricatured reference to war and conflict in Jerusalem used as a setup/segue for presentation of an abstract, undulating building tower reminiscent of a Frank Gehry design that could have been built anywhere. See <http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/structure-forming-under-process>.
  37. Likewise, social and psychological fractures reverberated through the justification of all ideas of connection and division, from bridges and humane borders to shared finance and television shows in their envisioning of a peaceful and just city.
  38. For example, the *Gulf of Peace* submission uses a large body of water to separate contesting peoples, while in *Back Home*, a Palestinian refugee camp within the Jerusalem metropolitan area is developed to function as an independent "social island."
  39. One such example is *Safe Design/Open City*, whose basic premise is safety and security as a right all people should have. This entry focused on the qualities of the urban fabric and provided a framework for physical improvements and interventions, built around a new concept (*Land Value Equation*), which could measure loss of property and ensure transparency in land tenancy. See <http://envisioningpeace.org/visions/safe-design-open-city>.

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