

Architecture of De-Settlement: Geopolitical Planning for an Agreement in the West Bank

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Abstract

Architecture is an act of settlement. A use of the land. The expansive settlement of the earth is now a cause for conditions of political injustice, economic inequality and environmental crisis. Therefore, we now must learn not just to how build but also how to leave. It requires a new episteme of architecture, planning, culture.

As a case study, we look at the de-settlement of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, towards an agreement with Palestine. It is part of an applied research used by key NGOs, thinktanks, policy makers and diplomats. It is based on the requirements for prosperous, sustainable nation-states. We describe de-settlement addressing: 1. growth of localities, 2. village clusters, 3. open spaces, 4. intertwined commuting regions, 5. regional growth.

Architecture must broaden its scope of responsibility to the region, the territory - a geopolitical architecture, based on the relationships between people and lands. The characteristics of architecture and land determine the characteristics of the society: continuity, width, distribution, variety - affect social and economic relations, the access to education, employment and various opportunities, which in turn affect culture, communal growth, and so on.

The act of de-settlement is a lesson in architecture critically relevant for issues such as global warming - leaving

territories for re-wilding, foresting and ecological corridors, and for economic pre-distribution of means of productions through land equality, geopolitical resolutions and more.

Together with an architecture of leaving, we can then begin formulating a new architecture of re-gathering.

Architecture of De-Settlement

Architecture is an act of settlement. A use of the land. The complete, expansive settlement of the earth is a now a cause for conditions of political injustice, economic inequality and environmental crisis. Therefore, we now must learn not just to build but also to leave. It requires a new episteme of architecture, planning, culture.

As a case study, we look at the de-settlement of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, towards a peace agreement with Palestine. It is part of an applied research is uses by key NGOs, thinktanks, policy makers and diplomats.

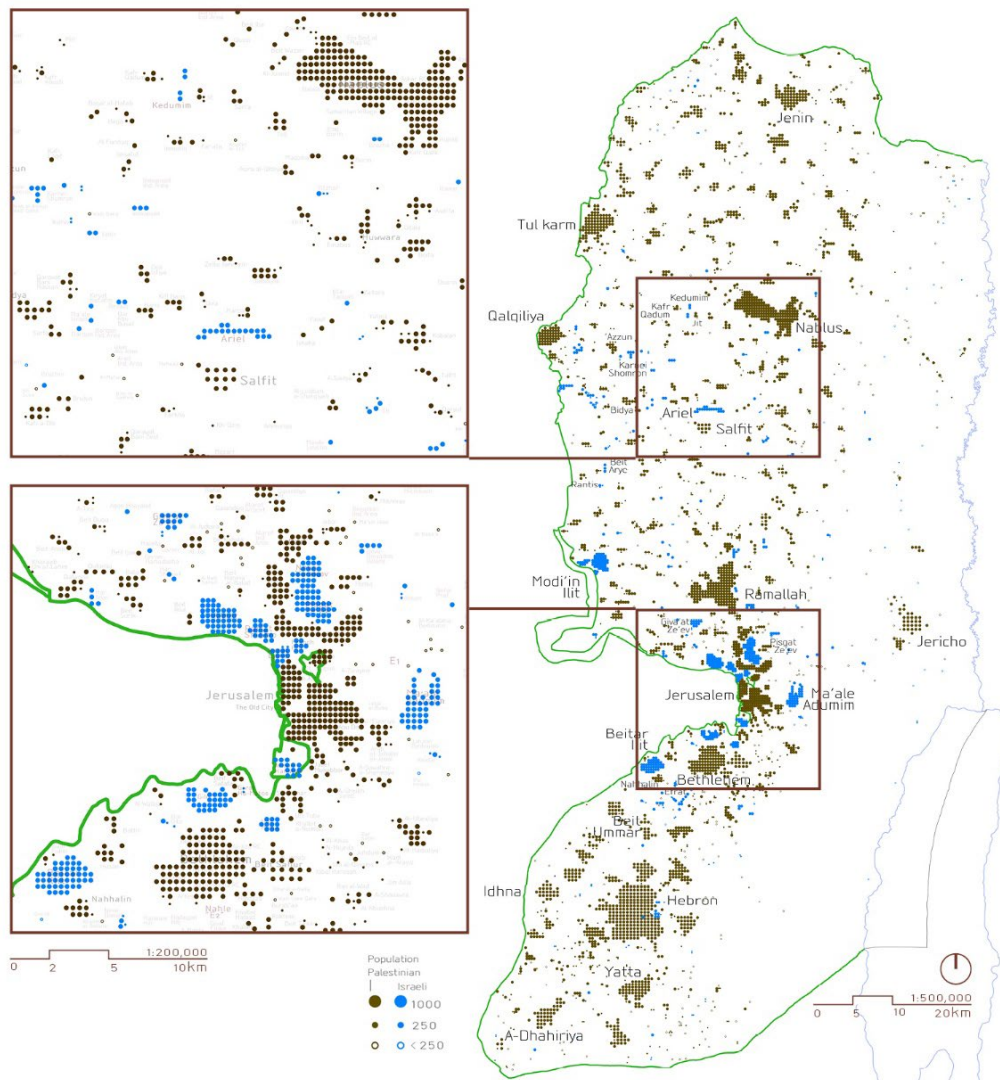
The act of de-settlement is a lesson in architecture critically relevant for global warming - such as leaving territories for re-wilding, foresting and ecological corridors, and for economic pre-distribution of means of productions through land equality, geopolitical resolutions and more.

Any solution proposed for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict includes a discussion of "settlement blocks" - the areas which Israel will annex in the West Bank. We shall highlight various considerations that need to be examined in order to formulate which localities should be evacuated - de-settled.

Two populations

Map 1 shows the population distribution in the West Bank. One can see that most of the Israeli population is concentrated around East Jerusalem and the surrounding area, in the ultra-orthodox cities of Modi'in Ilit and Beitar Illit, and with sparser distribution in settlements between Qalqiliya, Nablus and Salfit. It is around these areas that Israel proposes to delineate 'settlement blocks'. The purpose of the

blocks is to create a continuous area which includes as many Jewish residents as possible, so it can be annexed to Israel in a future agreement. This area is often also proposed as a territory where Israel can continue to build today, hence its critical influence on any future agreement.



Map 1. The distribution of two populations. shelter_expand.

The blocks and the future Palestine

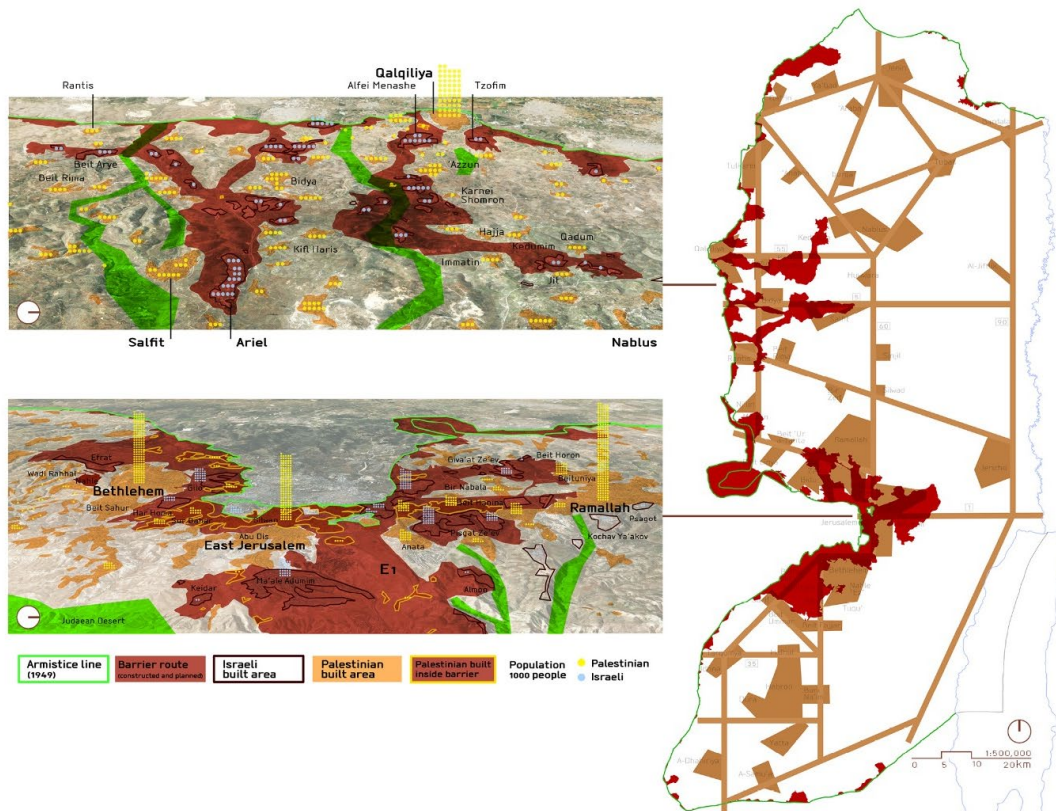
A stable, lasting and just peace agreement requires a prosperous Palestinian state, with a scope for growth and long term opportunities. Just as many cities in Israel began as small rural localities, one should not merely focus on the partial functioning of a given space today, but rather examine possible future development, in a variety of scenarios that at present cannot be predicted. Such a space is a means to and an expression of the Palestinians' right to national self-determination.

Balanced growth

Map 2-right shows the development layout required for the future Palestinian state. This is a balanced, polycentric development that is based on existing localities. The map shows

only the major cities, but in fact every city, town and village constitutes part of this type of development, which cannot concentrate around a single centre or avenue. Such developments are not only democratic, but also more efficient in the long term, and environmentally and economically viable. Moreover, they provide local growth opportunities to a variety of communities, allowing residents to reap the benefits of an agreement, thus enabling an agreement more stable and just.

However, the settlement blocks cut off the most important areas of development – along the western part of the bank, around Jerusalem and to its south – and so, prevent the balanced type of growth described above, removing any possibility for equal opportunities in the long term, and thus the prospect of a long-term, stable agreement.



Map 2. Development network and settlement blocks. shelter_expand.

The growth of cities, towns and villages

As stated, a stable and lasting peace will only be possible between two countries with equal opportunities. A simple comparison of the Palestinian GDP per capita (\$ 2,943) to that of Israelis (\$ 37,293) reveals the extent to which growth is required in Palestine.

To this end, many Palestinian localities - now cities, towns, and villages - must in the long term evolve into integrated, regional urban spaces. This type of development requires high quality, continuous space.

Most Palestinian cities and villages already conform to the standard density levels in Israel (for example, the density of an Israeli city ranges from 4,400 to 8,800 people per square kilometre. By comparison, Qalqiliya includes 10,200 people per square kilometre, while Bethlehem sees 5,500 people per square kilometre). Therefore, similarly to Israel, land reserves are required around existing Palestinian cities, towns and villages.

Map 2 show the way in which the block route is limiting the land reserves of important Palestinian localities:

- Qalqiliya is limited by the blocks of Tzofim and Alfei Menashe.
- The Ariel block cuts off Salfit's development to the north, where most of its land reserves are located (due Wadi A-Sha'ri located to its south).
- Rantis is limited by the Beit Arye block.
- The Beit Horon block, which in fact hardly includes any Israeli localities, obstructs Ramallah from the south. In some block proposals (such as Annapolis), Ramallah is also limited to its east by the Kochav Ya'akov-Psagot block.

- East Jerusalem is limited by the Ma'ale Adumim block (E1) as well as some Jerusalem suburbs.

- Bethlehem could extend to integrate with villages to its south, but this is where Givat Eitam Israeli outpost is located, which provides an extension to Efrat, and in fact begins the formation of a new block east of Gush Etzyon connecting with Tko'a and Nokdim, cutting across the West Bank in similar way to the Ma'ale Adumim block and E1.

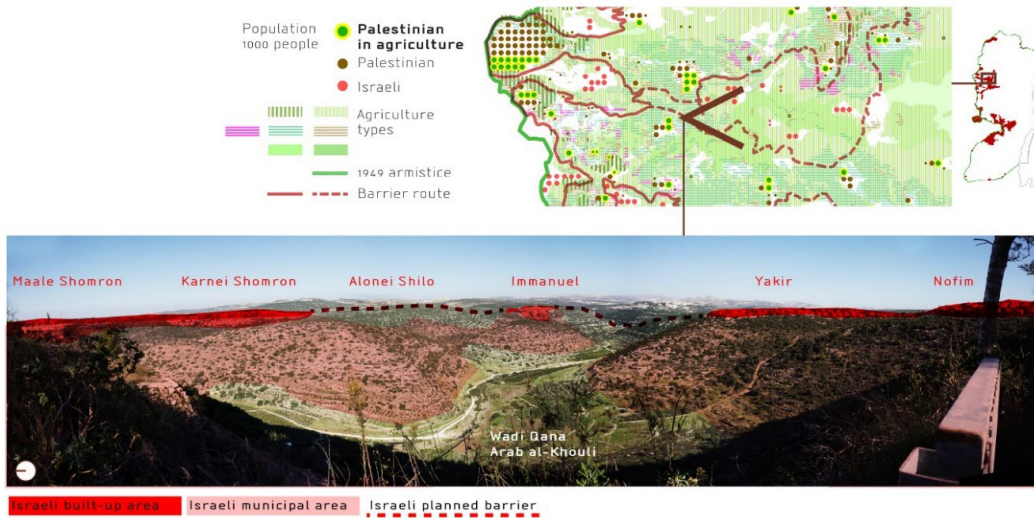
Village clusters

The usual reason for the planning of a localities block is the integration of functions. Schools, shopping centres, health clinics, business districts and open spaces are shared, similarly to a single functioning city. The settlement blocks don't necessarily function in this way. They do, however, often interfere with Palestinian village clusters.

For instance, map 2 illustrates the way in which Kedumim leaves its surrounding villages (Qadum and Jit, amongst others) small and disconnected, instead of forming a single network, such as the village and town clusters found across Israel. Correspondingly, we would expect to see the growth of an integrated regional city between Kifl Haris and Salfit, as in the Sharon area in Israel. However, the Ariel block prevents this from becoming a possibility.

Open spaces - integrated and regional urbanism and landscape.

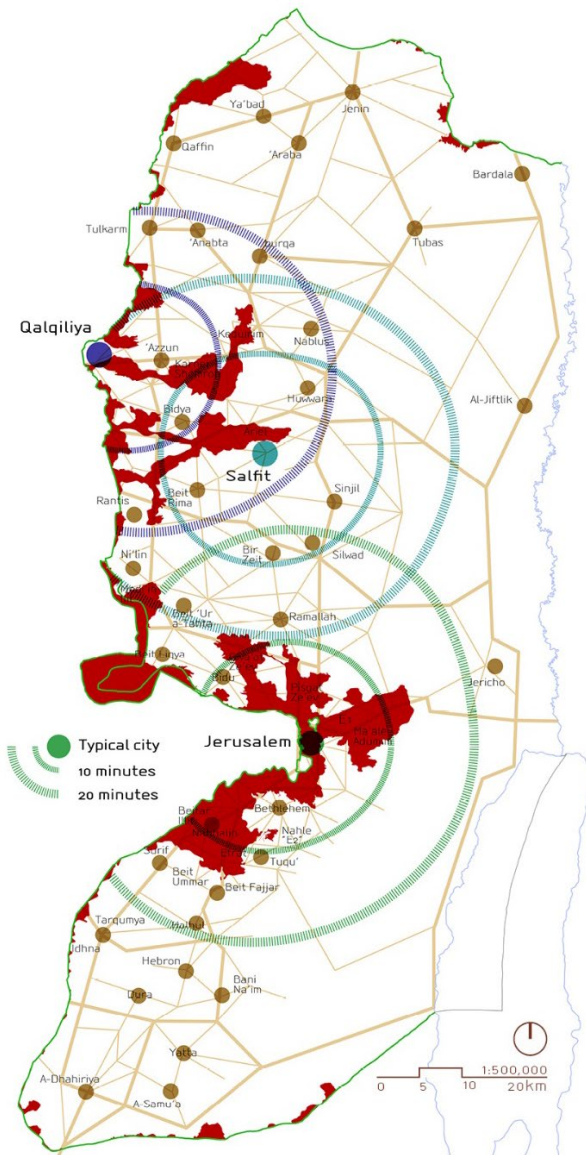
Open spaces - agriculture, and areas of ecological and landscape values - are integral to the functioning of every locality. Open spaces assimilate into village and city clusters, forming integrated and regional urbanism and landscape. As can be seen in Wadi Qana for example at map 3, the settlement block critically interferes with open spaces which are important for the future prosperity of Palestine.



Map 3. Open spaces and settlements. shelter_expense.

Transportation network

Just as roads are blocked within village clusters, so too do main highways. Palestine's transport network is based on 3 longitudinal highways. As illustrated in map 4, the western longitudinal highway connecting Palestine's most important region of future development, is interrupted by Tzofim and Alfei Menashe, and the blocks of Elkana, Beit Arye and Gush Etzyon. Latitudinal roads are cut off between Qalqiliya and Nablus (55), Qalqiliya and Salfit (5), Beit Liqya and Ramallah (443) and Jerusalem and Jericho (1). Additionally, the important highways out of the West Bank are also interrupted - Highway 1 to Jordan, and the planned western road connecting Nahhalin to Surif, leading through Tarqumya to Gaza. Where there is potential for an interwoven network of connections, the settlement blocks are limiting the long-term development of Palestine to a narrow strip along the central mountain ridge. The most significant area of future development to the west is completely blocked, both in terms of the development potential of the localities following its path, such as Qalqiliya, 'Azzun and Rantis, and in terms of the possibility of daily connections between these areas.



Map 4. Transportation network and commuting radii. shelter_expense.

Commuting radii

A state enjoying long-term prosperity through a joined region and society, cannot rely on an archipelago of isolated islands connected by narrow tunnels or bridges, as suggested in the different block proposals. A comprehensive, broad and continuous transportation network should accommodate a variety of linkages between localities, in the form of commuting radii set at different distances. The circles must merge into a single interwoven fabric. The overlapping of commuting circles forms the basis for regional development and prosperity, through access to employment, education, public services, and the transfer of ideas, and communal ties within a shared culture. For instance, a family living in Salfit may include one spouse who works in Nablus, while the other works in Ramallah, the latter working alongside a Bethlehem resident, and so on. In parallel, their child may attend an after-school club in Bidya with children from 'Azzun. Map 4 shows commuting radii around typical central cities, based on average commuting distances (such as daily work trip distances). These circles are almost entirely filled by settlement blocks.

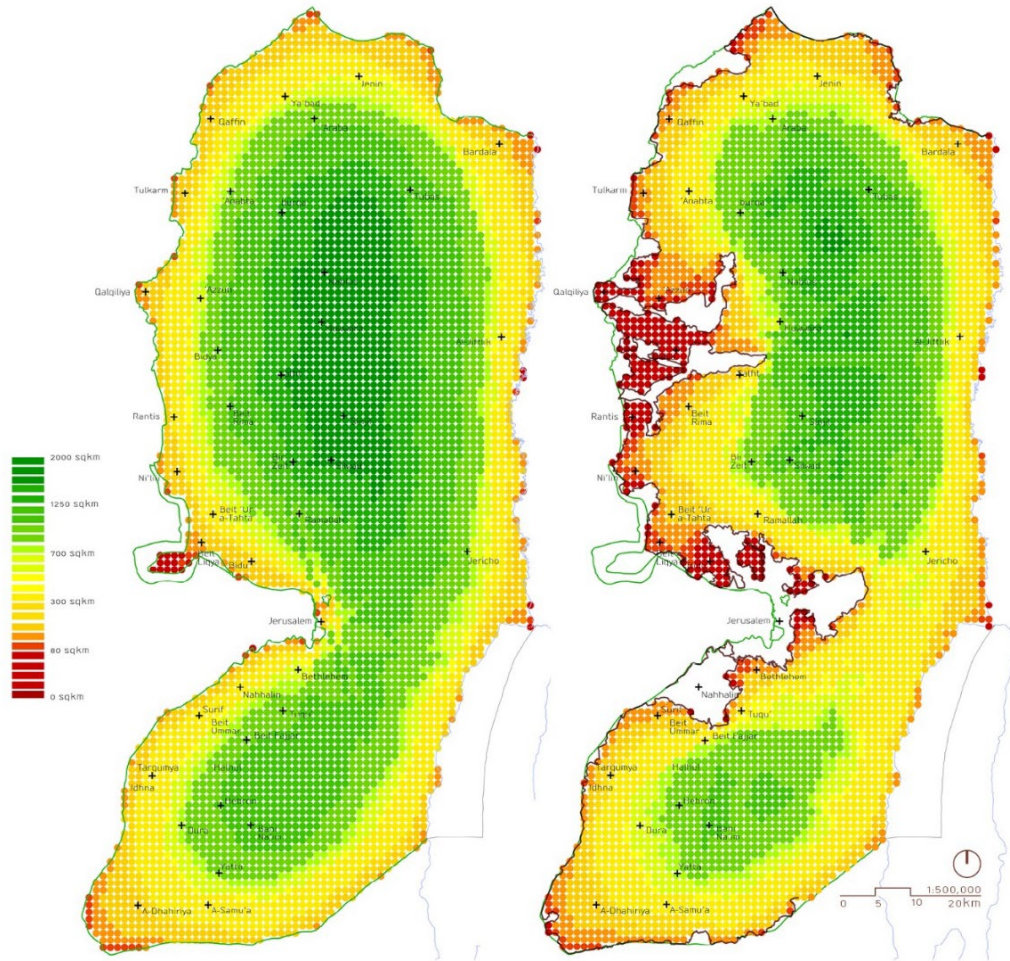
An urban space that develops continuously, with its own advantages of size and proximity between different centers, is the basis for the equitable distribution of growth and prosperity. The blocks create a break, which interrupts the urban flow even for pedestrians at the street level. As a result, many localities end up on 'the other side of the tracks', where community,

culture, and economy are interrupted and almost disjointed. They cannot take advantage of the existing centre, and the existing centre cannot enjoy the new development from which it is disconnected. This carries also environmental implications, such as waste of infrastructure and leftover open spaces.

A broad and unified area of growth

In conclusion, it is impossible to anticipate all the needs and opportunities of a state in ten, twenty, or fifty years. Sustainable, long-term prosperity, requires maximum flexibility for the future, so that opportunities can be seized, allowing for equality, diversity and balanced growth to take shape, in and amongst numerous interconnected centres and points of development. This is only possible through the provision of a broad, unified, functioning, complete area of growth. One must not only consider the necessary passages between commuting circles, but also the area between the centres in its entirety. That is, not only the narrow continuity of transportation, extensive as it may be, but the continuity of a wide, sovereign territory as a whole.

Map 5 demonstrates the way in which the blocks critically reduce this wide, unified area, preventing future growth flexibility. Instead, they create regions of internal peripheries, outlands, of localities as dead-ends. The reduced area left for these localities provides only limited development opportunities.



Map 5. Regional development - broad and unified growth area. shelter_expense.

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The characteristics of architecture and land determine the characteristics of the society: continuity, width, size, distribution, variety - affect social and economic relations, the access to education and various opportunities, different types of production and employment, which in turn affect culture, communal growth, and so on. The settlement blocks prevent the future growth area for prosperous Palestinian state, where localities can create shared development areas and communal affinities, where individuals and their communities benefit from a fair peace agreement. Therefore, perpetuating the blocks is in fact perpetuating the conflict.

An architecture of de-settlement - Consolidating the blocks

Instead of preserving the Israeli population for quantitative reasons alone, devoid of functional or value-based motivations, we should consider which Israeli localities (and respective residents) can be kept in place whilst allowing for a prosperous Palestinian state in the long-term.

According to this understanding, and the limitations and possibilities described above, it is necessary to not only redefine the scope and layout of the settlement blocks, but also their very meaning and national role.

The idea of the blocks is today perceived by many as the only possible reality: practically irreversible, a deep-rooted "fact-on-the-ground". But the blocks have no ideological basis, and rather only economic and functional weaknesses, and significant security disadvantages. The day we decide to dismantle the blocks, we shall discover, to our great surprise, that nothing lies on the other side of the wall defining them, apart from the conversations we have had amongst ourselves, and vacuous content hidden behind the empty words of a handful of politicians in the Knesset and outside of it. This is what keeps the blocks in their place today. Once a decision is made otherwise, the idea of the blocks will collapse. We will discover a reality that is certainly reversible, accompanied by much sorrow and pain, but much simpler and easier to deal with than previously thought. Most significantly: a fairer, more just reality.

An architecture of de-settlement - Requisites for agreed blocks

- Israeli and Palestinian continuity - a short, "smooth" and simple border line, without islands and "peninuslas".
- Land swaps of equal quality (based on distance to existing centres) - without interference to villages in Israel.
- No unilateral actions - therefore no building today.
- A modular approach in negotiations - based on detailed land units.
- A possibility for "internal" de-settlement - within the West Bank.
- Blocks based on actual building and infrastructure, minimising annexation of extra land.
- A border based on security considerations.
- A high quality space for Israel and Palestine for long term prosperity - rather than solutions based on quantities of population and space.
- "An architecture of spatial religion" - Promoting meaningful affinity to Israeli traditional sites in the West Bank.
- "An architecture of re-gathering" - Planning today of neighborhoods for evacuated settlements, which will maintain community affinities and local characteristics, and new connections with communities within Israel - towards a cohesive, just society.

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