

## **The Old City of Jerusalem – the conflicts of urban regeneration.**

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The Old City of Jerusalem till after the First World War, was closed each night and still contained the majority of the city's population. It was perceived by the British during the mandate period as the jewel of the Holy Land and efforts were made to conserve the quality of life, its arts and crafts. They understood the city within the image of St Augustine in *The City of God*, while the Moslem associations of Al Akza added a further dimension to the puzzle. Parallel to the plans prepared over the first decades of the twentieth century, two Jewish visionaries proposed concepts for its future – Theodore Herzl in his book *Altneuland* and Professor Boris Schatz in his book *The Rebuilt Jerusalem*. These differing historical memories and associations are a part of the conflict in conservation of the Old City

The Plan of Sharon, Brutzkus and Sharon for the Old City and Environs prepared in 1969 is the current legal document for the area. It proposed that a detailed plan should be prepared for the Old City itself, and the first stage of this plan was begun only in 1999 under the aegis of the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israel Antiquities Authority. The proposal looks at the conservation of the Old City as a World Heritage Site identifying not only the local quarters but the memories and cultural significance of the world community. It represents the ultimate site for which there are stakeholders from the past, present and future. The demographic changes in the Old City since 1967 reflect the problems of regeneration. From a population of 23,500 to 32,500 at the 1995 census the Moslem percentage of 70 remains the same while the nine percent reduction of the Christian community has been replaced with Jews. The 37 per cent growth of the Moslem community in the Old City has resulted in unacceptable physical conditions, 8 square metres per person, illegal building and many socio-economic problems associated with slum dwelling.

The first stage of the design process has identified the complex issues intra-muro and suggested an analysis based on problem identification. Three possible diverging concepts were developed: the intensive use of institutions as a base for *heritage*, the re-use of buildings for *tourism* and the strengthening of local communities giving a *living-city* approach. The considerations of top-down and bottom-up regeneration will need to be reconsidered within the socio-political context of the city. Each of the stakeholders holds a dramatically different agenda to the future of the Old City. Can the proposed plan find the common ground to exchange the *casus belli* for the *consensus*?

**Michael Turner**, currently teaches at the Department of Architecture at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design. He is coordinating the detailed plan for the Old City of Jerusalem. He has a private practice with extensive work in architecture, conservation, urbanism and planning and is consultant on international projects of UNESCO. He serves on many professional and academic bodies and is presently the chairman of the Israel World Heritage Committee.