Political Representation in Jerusalem

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Building Common Visions for the Future of Jerusalem: A Bottom-Up Approach

Executive Summary

This paper is part of the "Building Visions for the Future of Jerusalem: A Bottom-Up Approach" project, which engages Israeli and Palestinian residents of East and West Jerusalem and aims to dignify diverse voices, enhance knowledge of the complexity of Jerusalem, and contribute toward constructive public and civil society engagement regarding the future of the city. The paper focuses on the question of political representation, and it is based on discussions that took place among three groups—Palestinian, Israeli, and mixed—of Jerusalemite activists.

In Jerusalem, municipal elections are held every five years, and the voters elect a mayor and a party for the city council, which includes thirty-one members. In 1967, East Jerusalem was annexed to Israel, and since then, the Palestinians in East Jerusalem, who were granted the legal status of Israeli permeant residents, have the right to vote for the municipal council, but most of them have not used this right and have boycotted the city elections over the years. There are also neighborhood councils in some of the city's neighborhoods, aiming to give local communities self-management power.

The participants in the Palestinian group claimed that they are being neglected, that no one is responsible for them, and that there is no political leadership that represents them and takes care of them. They claimed that the Palestinian residents do not know their rights and how to demand them and that they are being discriminated against in all aspects of life. The participants in the Israeli group complained that Jerusalem's policy is designed at the national level and not according to the residents' needs at the local level. They think that the community councils are very weak and do not have the ability to impact the city's policy. The project's survey shows that during crises, the Israeli residents prefer to contact the formal and institutional leadership, while the Palestinians reach out to local informal and traditional leaders.

When they were asked about their vision for the future of the city, the joint group described a city that would serve all the residents and where all the communities would be represented. The Israeli group expressed hope for more autonomy and authority for the local communities and also more cooperation and interactions between the various groups in the city. The Palestinian participants raised ideas to empower their political representation and suggested, for example, internal Palestinian dialogue groups and advocative media campaigns regarding their rights.

Any discussions on political representation in the city need to address the "high politics" level, the political solution, and the political framework, and the local, social, and communal levels and the changes

that need to be made at each level. The vibrant civil society in Jerusalem should have an important role in the process and could be a key factor in changing the current situation and struggling for a joint and inclusive vision for the city.

About the Project

"Building Visions for the Future of Jerusalem: A Bottom-Up Approach" is a *Leonard Davis Institute* (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and *Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives* (IPCRI) collaboration funded by the European Union. The project engages residents of East and West Jerusalem, urban planners, students, women, youths, and local leaders to work together to shape the current and future reality of their neighborhoods and the city as a whole. Urban planning and formal negotiations in Jerusalem have generally ignored the voices of the residents, in particular those from marginalized and diverse communities.

This project aims to dignify diverse voices, enhance knowledge of the complexity of Jerusalem, and contribute toward constructive public and civil society engagement with respect to the future of the city. The project includes surveys of residents of Jerusalem, the mapping of local needs, community projects, and the increased efficacy of local residents of Jerusalem in shaping the future of the city. In its first stage, the project engaged residents from different Jerusalem neighborhoods in generating equitable solutions to local problems. The project provided and utilized capacity-building and participatory techniques to empower local communities and work with residents to create small interventions that would improve their reality. The community projects were decided on by the residents and included the creation of green spaces, public gardens, and libraries, as well as the beautifying of neighborhoods and any other initiatives or actions they prioritized. We believe that focusing on current inequalities while building partnerships at the neighborhood level can empower marginalized communities and answer some of their needs.

In the final stage of the project, Jerusalem residents working in thematic groups discussed wider issues of concern. Israeli, Palestinian, and mixed thematic groups gathered to talk about four main themes: 1) Youth and Education, 2) Infrastructure and Public Spaces, 3) Political Leadership and Representation, and 4) Safety and Protection. We also asked them to imagine and create new visions regarding what they wish their reality to look like. The results are a baseline for the following policy papers, which will hopefully contribute to local input toward short- and long-term solutions in Jerusalem. In the end, the participants' visual visions, the leaders' verbal visions, and the policy papers will be presented in a traveling exhibition

that will uncover some of Jerusalem's wishful future. Through this approach, we aim to engage and inspire residents, policy designers, and other activists to work on local creative initiatives, increase the knowledge of the complexities of Jerusalem, and contribute toward a negotiated solution for the city. You can see in the annex three posters which reflect the discussions among the three political representation groups (Palestinian, Israeli, and mixed group).

Background: Political Representation in Jerusalem

After the 1949 Israel-Jordan Armistice Agreement, Jerusalem was divided into two separate cities and two municipalities: the Israeli municipality on the western side of the city and the Jordanian municipality on the eastern side. After the 1967 Israeli-Arab war, East Jerusalem was annexed to Israel, and the Jordanian municipality was dissolved.[1] Since then, Palestinians in East Jerusalem, who were granted the legal status of Israeli permeant residents, have had the right to vote for the municipal council (Figure 1), but most of them have not used this right and have boycotted the city elections over the years. As a result, there has been no Palestinian member on the city council since 1967.

In 1968, Jerusalem's Deputy Mayor, Meron Benvenisti, published the "Boroughs Plan," proposing a joint umbrella council over five sub-municipalities in Jerusalem: Jewish Jerusalem, Arab Jerusalem, adjacent villages, Bethlehem, and Beit Jala. According to the plan, the Arab municipality would enjoy limited autonomy and have independent authority over issues such as education, transportation, and sanitation. The idea was rejected, but the municipality examined the idea of

Figure 1: Jerusalem City Hall

bringing more autonomy to the neighborhoods. In 1981, the Association of Neighborhood Councils (*minhal kehilati* in Hebrew) was founded. The goal was the decentralization of decision-making processes in the city

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[1] On the history of the structure of the political governance of the city, see Dumper, Michael. *The Politics of Jerusalem since 1967*. Columbia University Press, 1997, 23-52.

and more self-management power. There are thirty community centers: twenty-three of them are in Jewish neighborhoods, and seven are in Palestinian neighborhoods.

During the 1980s, Faisal Husseini became the most dominant Palestinian leader in East Jerusalem. The Orient House came to be the Palestinian political center and the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) headquarters in East Jerusalem, and it became the main address for the Palestinian residents of the city (Figure 2). As a result of the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, the political center moved to Ramallah, and after Husseini died and the Orient House was closed in 2001, a political vacuum was left in East Jerusalem.[2] During the peace negotiations, various ideas and proposals were raised for an agreement on Jerusalem, and the option of creating two capitals in the city was discussed, but eventually the parties did not reach an agreement.

The municipal elections are held every five years, and the voters need to vote twice, once for the mayor and again for the party that will participate in the city council, which includes 31 members. The last municipal election in Jerusalem took place in October 2018, and seven parties won seats on the council. Out of thirty-one council members, the ultra-Orthodox parties won fifteen seats and the right-wing block got seven seats, while the center and left block, including the largest party *Hitorerut*, received nine seats. Another important element in political and social life in Jerusalem is its lively and vibrant civil society. In 2017, there were 4,077 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Jerusalem, and 23% of the NGOs Israel were headquartered in the city.[3]

Figure 2: The Orient House: Served as the PLO headquarters in East Jerusalem

[2] See Cohen, Hillel. *The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem: Palestinian Politics and the City Since 1967*. Routledge, 2013.
[3] See Shtern, Marik et al. *Civil Society in Jerusalem - Methodical Research and Mapping*. Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 2018.

Analysis: The Main Problems

The voices of the participants in the various groups reflect the different situations and contexts concerning the political representation in the two parts of the city, but they also show some similar concerns. On the Palestinian side, one of the major issues that was raised is the lack of leadership. The Palestinian participants feel that they are being neglected and that nobody is taking care of them. They do not sense that they belong to the city municipality, and they see it as a tool of the Israeli occupation, but at the same time they also feel that they are not supported by the PLO. It is a strong feeling stemming from the idea that no one is responsible for them, no one is listening to them, and no one is working to take care of their rights and to improve their lives.

In addition, the Palestinian participants expressed the concern that there is no strong solidarity and unity among the Palestinian community in East Jerusalem. People think about themselves and about their own wellbeing, family, and work, and there is no sense of a united society. They also claimed that the people in the community do not know their rights and how to demand them. An exception to the lack of unity takes place during cases of political crisis that relate to Al-Aqsa, which mobilize and unite the community. The participants also feel physically disconnected from Palestinian society in the West Bank because of the separation wall.

The participants also complained that Israel's authorities try to obliterate Palestinian and Arab characteristics of Jerusalem and instead promote the Jewish character of the city. They feel that they are being discriminated against in all aspects of life, such as where housing, employment, and education are concerned.

On the Israeli side, the main problems and challenges that were raised were different. One of the main complaints was that policy in Jerusalem is designed at the national level, mainly by the government and not according to the needs of the residents. The participants feel that policy in the city is shaped by national and symbolic aspirations and issues of "high politics" and that it does not address and consider the daily needs of the residents in the city. As a complementary argument, participants also argued that local representation—the community councils—are very weak and not influential, even though they are supposed to represent the residents. They feel that these local councils do not have the ability to impact policy and that the residents are not part of the decision-making process. In addition, there is no transparency, and the residents hear about policy decisions only after they are already planned, decided

on, and ratified. The participants criticized the municipal leaders, arguing that the representatives do not understand the role of public servants and that the city has no long-term plan or vision.

The results of the project's survey show some of the differences between the two sides with regard to political representation (Figure 3).[4] For example, when the participants were asked which actors they would approach in order to handle a local conflict in the neighborhood, 24% of the Israelis replied that they would approach "the municipality," and 21% said "the community council," while on the Palestinian side, 23% replied that they would approach "the mukhtar/sheikh/community elderly," 18% said "local figures,"

and 16% chose "family members." This showed that in cases of local conflicts and crises, the Israelis prefer to contact the formal and institutional leadership—the municipal council or the community council—while the Palestinians reach out to local informal and traditional leaders, such as mukhtars, local figures, or family members.
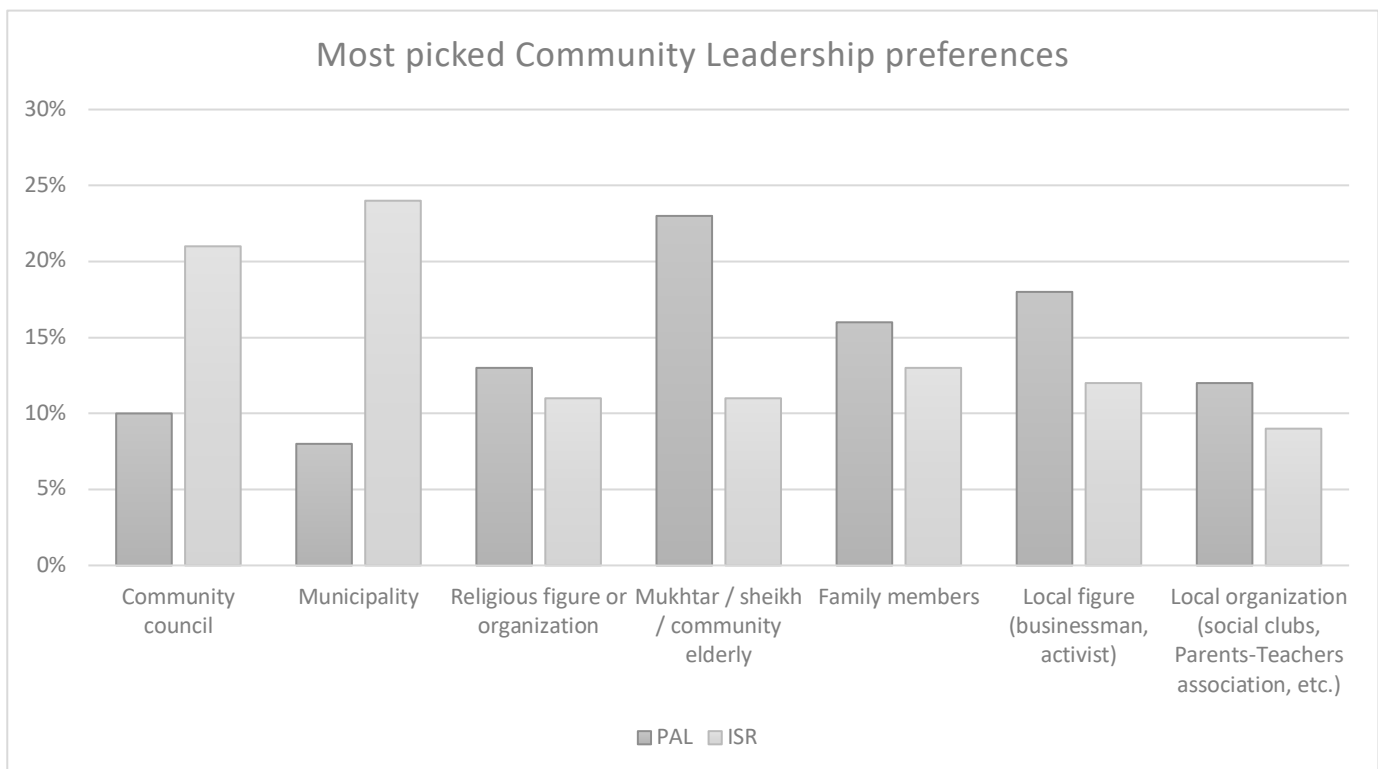

Figure 3: Residents' preferences regarding community leadership concerning local conflict resolution. Source: One City Two Realities. Jerusalem 2018 Public Opinion Survey

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[4] The public opinion survey included 612 Palestinian residents East Jerusalem and 516 Jewish residents of West Jerusalem. The Surveys were fielded, and responses were collected during January 2018. Full methodological information about the survey and results are available here: https://jerusalemvisions.huji.ac.il/book/survey-report.

It seems that on both sides there is a lack of trust and confidence in the city leadership and a sense of political weakness and helplessness in terms of the city residents. But, the asymmetrical structure between the two sides needs to be stressed in this discussion so as to underline the basic differences between the political contexts in both parts of the city. While the Jewish residents have representation on the municipal council, the Palestinians in the city have no political representation and no political institutes. Additionally, the ability of the Palestinians in East Jerusalem to politically organize and mobilize themselves and to engage in political activism is clearly restricted and limited due to the political conditions in East Jerusalem.

The Vision for the Future

On the Israeli side, the main proposal was to create a mechanism that will enable more autonomy and independence for the local communities in decision-making processes. The participants wish for less involvement of the national government and the empowerment of local community councils, by giving them more authority and power and thus making them more effective and influential institutions. But at the same time, they wish to make sure that one community will not be able to decide for other communities and force its beliefs upon others. This solution will also support and ensure diversity and guarantee the representation of all the groups in the city.

In addition to that, the city should outline a plan that will promote more cooperation and interactions between the various communities in the city and a framework of urban partnership that will bring the groups together, to work both at the political level and in daily life. Part of this should include establishing more shared spaces in the city. It was also argued that the professional level needs to be stronger and have more influence.

On the Palestinian side, the participants raised a few ideas about how to improve political representation and to make sure that their voices are heard. One idea was to promote more Palestinian to Palestinian dialogue groups in order to encourage Palestinian activism and intellectual activity that will be able to promote Palestinian voices in the city. Another option that was discussed is organizing an advocacy and media campaign that will focus on Palestinian rights and concerns in Arabic, Hebrew, and English in order to have a wide impact. The participants also agreed that the most effective way to improve the

situation of the community is to invest in the new generation and in its education, thus creating a strong base for future leadership in the long term.

The Palestinian group also debated the controversial topic of integration in Israeli institutions. Some argued that it will make the Palestinian community stronger and that they will have more opportunity to affect decision-making processes. But others objected to it. This issue also relates to the dilemma of participation in municipal elections. According to the project's survey, 59% of Palestinians in East Jerusalem support the idea of voting in the municipal elections, and only 14% object to it. However, the reality on the ground has not changed, and in the last municipal election, in 2018, only 2% of Palestinians participated. In this election, there was one Palestinian party that ran for the council: "Al-Quds Baladi" (Jerusalem, My Town in Arabic), headed by Ramadan Dabash, a community activist from the Sur Baher neighborhood.[5] Only 1.2% voted for Dabash's list, and this was insufficient to pass the minimum threshold in order to have a seat on the city council.
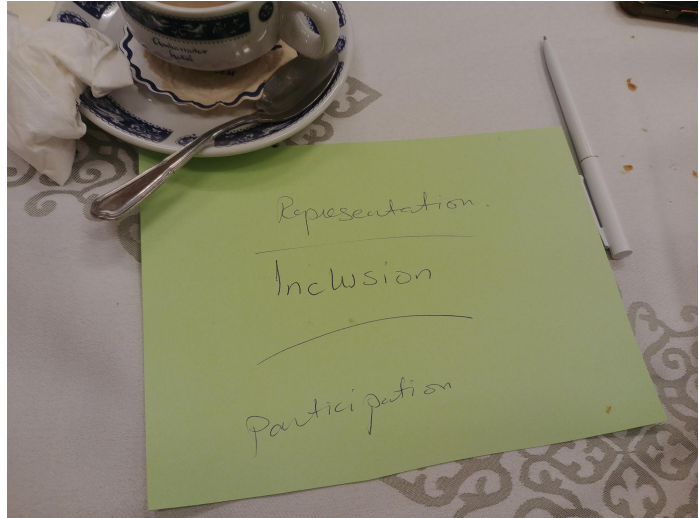
The joint Israeli-Palestinian group outlined a vision for a city that will serve all the residents, not only one group, and that will represent all the communities in Jerusalem—a vision that is based on equality, accessibility, and diversity (Figure 4). Concerning the political structure, the participants suggested a power-sharing model of decentralization—empowering the local neighborhoods' and communities' leadership and decentralizing the municipal budget. Participants also raised the option of an international city with a special international status, as was proposed in the Partition Plan of the United Nations Special Committee in 1947.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Figure 4: Representation, inclusion, and participation

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[5] See Blake, Jonathan et al. *What Might Happen if Palestinians Start Voting in Jerusalem Municipal Elections?* RAND Corporation, 2018.

The various groups and communities in Jerusalem demand a sensitive and inclusive framework that will make sure that all voices are heard and that the residents will have an impact on the decision-making and policy-making processes. The communities should have a certain level of autonomy and authority that will enable them to live their lives as they choose to live them but at the same time to focus on promoting cooperation and interaction between the groups and to create shared spaces. The participants in the project's groups indicate that in the current situation these goals are not fulfilled and that there is a huge gap between the reality and the vision in regard to political representation in the city.

Any discussion regarding political representation in Jerusalem refers to two levels: first, the level of "high politics"—the political solution and the political structure of the city, which depend on the Israeli-Palestinian political situation and negotiations—and second, the local, social, and community levels. These two levels need to be addressed, and changes need to be made to both of them. In the current political context, the Palestinian community is very weak, and it has no political representation on the city council and feels invisible and without influence. This is especially true in the neighborhoods beyond the fence. On the Jewish Israeli side, the various social and political groups have representation on the council but many feel, as was mentioned in the paper, that there should be more power at the communal level and in terms of the neighborhood councils and less influence of the politicians at the national level.

The future vision for the city needs to promise that the city will be shared and will integrate all the groups and voices into the political structure. The idea of decentralization, as raised by the Israeli and Palestinian participants, could help each group to have control and influence over their daily lives. But at the same time, there should also be a joint power-sharing federative, or a confederative, framework that will enable the groups to outline a shared vision for the city in a way that will guarantee the representation of all the groups in this process and ensure that solutions are not imposed by one group on the others.

It can be mentioned that the project's survey shows that the Palestinians in the city hope that, in a future peace agreement, there will be free access to the different parts of the city. The discussion of a future vision could also employ lessons from positive and negative experiences of other divided cities in the world, such as Berlin, Germany; Belfast, Northern Ireland; Sarajevo and Mostar, Bosnia; and Nicosia, Cyprus.

Many of the ideas and the visions that were discussed in the project's groups require a deep and fundamental change in the political structure and context. Due to this, the groups also raised possible

concrete steps that could be performed in the current context in the short term, and even without waiting for the formal governmental and municipal authorities to adopt the long-term proposed changes. This could include, for example, local activism and campaigns to advocate equality and human rights, dialogue groups, and joint projects within and between communities. The vibrant civil society in Jerusalem should have an important role in this process. It could be a key factor in changing the current situation and in the struggle for political representation for all the residents and the implementation of a joint and inclusive vision for the city.
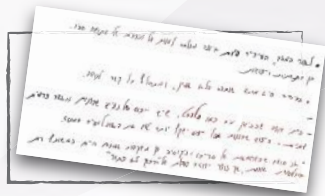
Leadership And Political Representation

בונים חזון לעתיד ירושלים: הסכמה מלמטה-למעלה

بناء رؤى لمستقبل القدس: نهج من أسفل إلى أعلى

Word cloud (top)

שקיפות · אין ייצוגיות · קהילות מוחלשות · תושבים · חוסר תקשורת · מנותק · חזון מפוצל · לא פוזל · ביורוקרטיה · אפליה · אין חזון · ללא חזון · בינוניות · **העירייה לא נגישה** · שחיתות · מדיניות נכפית מלמעלה · לא נגיש חזון · אמון · מנותק · מנותק · שקיפות · אפליה · חוסר תקשורת
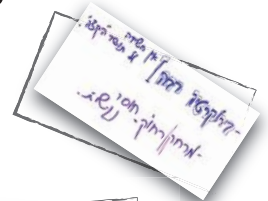
Problems

• **Lack of Communication** – no ability of the residents to impact policy or to contest it
• **Not answering the needs of the residents** - policies are designed at the national level and according to national and symbolic aspirations and not according to everyday, daily needs of the residents.
• **No transparency** – residents are time after time surprised to hear about policies and plans after they were already planned, decided , and ratified .
• **Weakness of local representation** – weakness of community councils and organizations that are supposed to represent the residents.
• **Corruption** –Municipality workers and politicians have no understanding of the role of public servant.
• **Absence of a long-term plan for the city** – The city lacks a vision.

Word cloud (bottom)
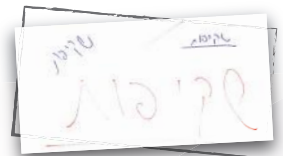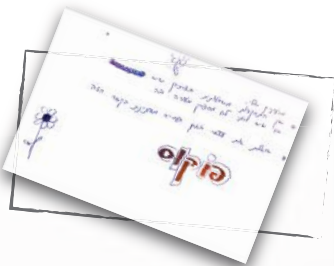
גישות השתתפותיות · חילון · סדר היום · חילון · **העצמת קהילות** · קהילות מקומיות · מיקרו קוסמוס · ביזור · מגוון · טווח ארוך · שקיפות · פחות ממשלה · מגוון · תלות בשכונה · חזון ארוך-טווח · פיקוח על מנגנוני העירייה · הצמה
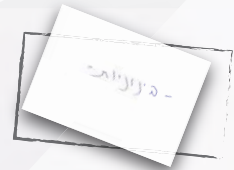
Visions

• **Empowering local community councils** – Giving more authority to the community councils in order to increase participatory mechanisms, which will eventually increase communication with the city level.
• **Secularizing the agenda**– Focusing on daily life instead of national and religious aspirations. The administrative departments need to have more control over the municipal agenda rather than religious or national pressure groups.
• **Improving Transparency** – developing concrete guidelines and transparency requirements in all departments.
• **Enhancing Diversity** – It is important to strengthen the local communities and to create mechanisms that enable some independence in decision making to impact local policies. Enhancing diversity should be the driving force behing each policy and not its battle ground. This includes sectarian representation at every level.
• **Auditing city hall** – City hall must be more effective and less corrupted.
• **Planning long**-term vision for the city - More shared spaces, more mechanisms that bring the communities together, empowerment of Youth movements. Jerusalem can become a source of inspiration for other diverse and mixed cities.

REPRESEN-TATION

Heterogenity
Gray City
Misinformation
Unwanted by the other
Helpessness
helplessness
No trust
divided cities
representation Diversity
Missing leadership
Communication
representations in different sectors
representations in different sectors
Gray - in all Levels, shops ....etc.
MISINFORMATION
Separation
InequalityReligion
InEquality

Problems
• **No trust** – Residents of Jerusalem suffer from lack of trust in their relations with the municipality and between them and members of different communities.
• **Missing leadership** – All residents said that the current leadership doesn't offer an inspiring and positive vision for the future.
• **Helplessness** – Residents feels that they can't influence their own life. They have no access to the municipality, no representatives, and no leadership.
• **Representation** – Many residents find that their voice is missing in the city's decisions making processes.
• **Heterogeneity or Diversity** – diversity in Jerusalem causes more problems than solutions. Communities find it hard to communicate with each other and act as separate stakeholders at the city council.

HETEROGENEITY

Children From all Community Sector → Leaving together One Educational system.

International City
One municipality
International Status
One council
Empower local Community Council
Power sharing
representation to each community
Consensus-Building
One city
Open city
Local municipalities
One council
International open City for Both (all) people

Open city in the Israel-Palestin local Confederation ...

Visions
• **Power Sharing** – Rethinking the city's political structure. Power should be redistributed between the different communities and neighborhoods of the city.
• **Consensus-Building** - decisions on contested issues will/should be made by a mechanism of common agreement.
• **Empower local community councils** – Give the residents more authority and more power in their hands. For example, adopt mechanism of budgets decentralization.
• **International city, international status** – Jerusalem a shared urban space will have its own special status, like in Brussels, Sarajevo and Belfast.
• **Open City** – All residents have their right to the city.

عدم الوعي تهديد وجود القدس الفردية احتلال ملكيات الاراضي غياب القيادة انعدام الموارد

Lack of leadership غياب القيادة

العمل كأفراد و غياب التشبل

تسجيل أراضي

العمليات دم جمعية

التهديد الوبوي

Problems
- **Occupation**- The Israeli occupation on Jerusalem has a major effect on the current living situation of Palestinians .
- **Lack of leadership**- there is no one organization or unit that is responsible for Palestinians in Jerusalem; no one who listens, who urges for applying the law, who advocates for their rights or tries to improve their quality of life.
- **Individualism**- this issue is related to the later. Palestinians in Jerusalem were put in a situation where each one of them is thinking onl about their own well-being, family, work and close people around them.
- **Corruption**- one of the most significant and severe issues in East Jerusalem is poverty which is a result of corruption.
- **Threatened existence**- this issue was considered to be the most severe threat to Palestinians in Jerusalem.

استقطاب موارد جديدة قيادة جديدة التركيز على التعليم مشاريع صغيرة كثيرة حملات مناصرة جيل جديد الحوار الفلسطيني الفلسطيني الاندماج مع المجتمع الاسرائيلي

إنشاء وحدات سكنية للشباب

كبح الغرائز شتى

إعادة النظر للمنهاج الدراسي من أجل جعل جيل مسؤول

الإنفتاح بالمجتمع الإسرائيلي

التطرق الرئيسي على الأجيال القادمة

Visions
- **The new coming generation** - this is the strongest and most effective means that can be used to improve the situation within the Palestinian community in Jerusalem.
- **Build small beneficial projects** - building small beneficial projects within the neighborhoods of East Jerusalem that will help improve both the economy and quality of life of the society.
- **Advocacy and Media campaigns** - pursuing/running/initiating Palestinian campaigns in English and Hebrew to pressure and advocate for the Palestinians' rights.
- **Initiatives to support the Palestinian-Palestinian dialogue** - this criterion is almost missing in the reality of Palestinians.
- **Integrate into the Israeli Society** - this option raised a controversial discussion. In the end it was agreed that in order to be as strong of a counterpart as the other, Palestinians should integrate into the Israeli institutions so that they will have the ability to affect the process decision making.