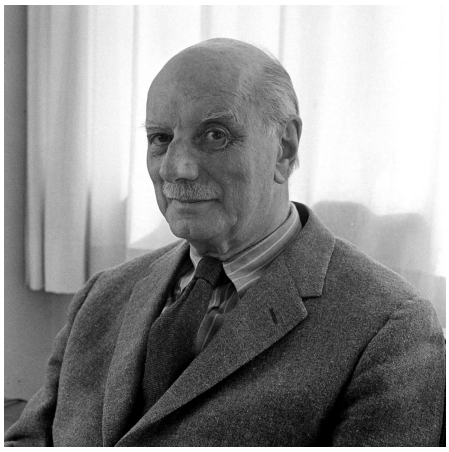
Memorandum on the Plan for Jerusalem

Decades ago Lewis Mumford argued passionately that Jerusalem should become a world city, both de-politicized and de-nationalized. His argument remains powerful and problematic.

INTRODUCTION BY ALONA NITZAN-SHIFTAN. ARCHIVAL TEXT BY LEWIS MUMFORD. DECEMBER 2018

Left behind in the digital era is a rich store of essays on design which have limited cultural presence because they are not online. In our ongoing series Future Archive, we republish significant 20th-century texts, each selected and introduced by a prominent scholar.



Lewis Mumford, Cambridge, Massachusetts, March 1974. [Associated Press]

On November 22, 1970, Lewis Mumford wrote a letter to Teddy Kollek, the mayor of Jerusalem. In this extraordinary document, which is being published here for the first time, one of America's leading urban historians makes a passionate argument about the future of the holy city.

> To fulfill its mission, Jerusalem must become, not a national capital but a world capital, whose extra-territorial status will be protected and cherished, not by this or that self-appointed military guardian, but by all the peoples of the world — peoples who are sick with longing for the peace and security that the present power structures of national states and expanding empires do not even remotely promise. To de-nationalize and depoliticize Jerusalem is, I submit, the first practical step toward preparing a long-term plan for Jerusalem's future — and the world's.

Mumford was writing at a fraught moment. Kollek had invited him to attend a meeting of the Jerusalem Committee, an international advisory group organized to guide the master planning of the city following its unilateral unification after the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967.[1] As his letter makes plain, Mumford believed the

Israeli plan to be flawed in its fundamental premises. The municipal authorities, he wrote, "have been faithfully carrying out their assigned duties in the spirit of Baron Haussmann, without realizing that it is to Isaiah they must look for guidance."

Jerusalem, view of the Temple Mount, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Dome of the Rock. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is visible, to the northwest. [Wikimedia Commons]

Mumford's memorandum was striking in its time and remains resonant — and problematic — to this day. The status of Jerusalem has long been contested. In November 1947, the United Nations passed a controversial resolution that brought an end to the British Mandate in Palestine and called for the creation of two states, one Jewish and one Arab, and also for the creation of a "special international regime" for Jerusalem.[2] The resolution triggered a bitter war between Jews and Arabs that lasted more than a year — what Israelis call the War of Independence, and Palestinians call the *Nakba*, or catastrophe. When the conflict ended, in 1949, the newly founded nations of Israel and Jordan both rejected the proposed internationalization of Jerusalem — thus establishing a political division of the city that would in turn be followed by two very different approaches to urban development. Over the next two decades the Israelis built in the western half a modern capital city with imposing new institutions including the Knesset and Hebrew University; in contrast, the Jordanians preserved the eastern half — which contains the ancient Temple Mount, Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre — as a compact sacred precinct.

It was these two strikingly different post-colonial urban entities that the Israeli master plan sought to reconcile. And as if this were not complicated enough, the plan sought also to satisfy competing camps within the Israeli leadership: on the one hand, the government ministers intent upon continuing the tradition of modernist Zionist planning in order to secure the future of Jerusalem as indivisible and Jewish; and, on the other, the charismatic mayor whose flagship project was civic beautification and the perpetuation of Jerusalem as a "sacred city of mankind."[3] Produced over several years by an interdisciplinary team of leading academics and practitioners, and made public in 1968, the master plan thus envisioned a contemporary metropolis with up-to-date infrastructure, extensive roadways, and high-rise construction. An inner city with two distinct centers, religious and civic, would be ringed to the west, north, and south with new residential districts. The Old City, the former East Jerusalem, with its many religious and historic monuments, would be preserved as a heritage zone.

To Mumford, the 1968 Jerusalem master plan exhibited the disciplinary hubris that in his view marked so much mid-century urban design thinking — the technocratic belief in

data, a valorization of quantifiable progress over immeasurable cultural and ecological values, "our analytic, over-compartmentalized, 'scientific' approach," as he puts it. Mumford is careful to emphasize that he offers his critique not as an authority on Jerusalem, which he had never visited, but rather as an "interpreter of human cultures, in particular of the City in History."

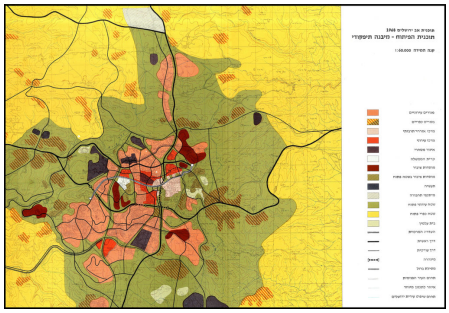
Such disclaimers aside, Mumford wrote with the assurance of someone who had long been recognized as one of America's preeminent public intellectuals and urban activists. Born in Queens, in 1895, he began his career as a magazine editor in New York after the First World War and proceeded over the next seven decades to publish countless articles and numerous books, including such formidable volumes as *Technics and Civilization*, *The Conduct of Life*, *The Culture of Cities*, and *The City in History*. He was the first architecture critic of *The New Yorker* and co-founder, with Clarence Stein, of the Regional Planning Association of America. He advocated for improved public housing and railed endlessly against suburban sprawl. He spoke out early in opposition to nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War. Along the way Mumford was awarded prize upon prize, including a Presidential Medal of Freedom and an honorary knighthood of the British Empire.

It was in some ways a quintessentially 20th-century career, not only because Mumford was a classic autodidact (a graduate of Stuyvesant High School, he took evening classes at City College of New York and left before completing his degree) but also because he brought to bear diverse intellectual traditions that spanned the century and beyond. After his death, in 1990, the historian Casey Blake captured the wide arc of his influences:

> How many others, in the late 20th century, could clear a path from Blake and Emerson to Ruskin and Morris, and then onto Bourne and Dewey and their successors in the New Left and the ecological movement, as Mumford did? ...There are few surviving voices trying to translate the prophetic and utopian languages of the 19th century into a modern radicalism.[4]

Mumford dedicated his life to studying the city. "The city, as one finds it in history," he wrote, "is the point of maximum concentration of the power and culture of a community." He was always keenly alive to the spiritual meanings of urban form, and grew increasingly ambivalent about the secularization that had accompanied the triumphs of science and technology in the modern age. "Through our skill in invention," he wrote, "we had created a highly complicated and inter-related world community whose very existence depended upon religious and moral values we permitted to lapse."[5] The crucial idea that drove all his work was, as Blake described it, "that the goal of human life should be the creation of communities in which individuals achieve personal fulfillment through participation in a common culture and a democratic civic life."[6]

Jerusalem, Independence Day parade in the Old City, May 1968. [Moshe Milner, Government Press Office, National Photo Collection, Israel]



Jerusalem master plan for 2010, Aviah Hashimshoni, et al., *1968 Jerusalem Master Plan*, volume 1. [Jerusalem Municipality]

Such were the convictions Mumford brought to his assessment of the Jerusalem master plan. As a tireless proponent of regional and ecological planning, he criticized what he saw as the reflexive assumption that growth was inevitable or desirable. The plan, he argues, "pays no attention to the many kinds of environmental destitution and pollution that every expanding metropolis must at last face, if only because the human results have become increasingly sordid and degrading." But what is most striking in the memorandum is the criticism of the plan's nationalistic objectives. Mumford did not hesitate to remind the Israelis that their vision of a unified Jerusalem was the outcome of violent "military events," and he warned against "any proposal that would make Israeli national interests the sole determining factor in carrying out the plan." He even advocated for the establishment of a new, supranational institution, a "World University, whose special task would be to offset deep-rooted national and religious particularism."

Mumford did not attend the gathering of the Jerusalem Committee in December 1970, but his memorandum was influential. "The underlying theme of criticism was expressed by an absentee, Lewis Mumford, more forcefully than by the 31 invited members present," wrote a reporter in the *New York Times*.[7] Those present members included such stellar international designers and thinkers as Buckminster Fuller, Louis Kahn, Philip Johnson, Lawrence Halprin, Isamu Noguchi, and Bruno Zevi.[8] The three-day program featured detailed presentations from the Israeli planners, themed discussions among committee members, a carefully guided walking tour of the Old City, and even a short flight so that the visitors could quickly grasp the scope of the city and its environs.

Teddy Kollek, ca. 1956. [National Photo Collection of Israel]

Teddy Kollek, Louis Kahn, and Buckminster Fuller (left to right), touring the Old City during the 1970 meeting of the Jerusalem Committee; photo by committee member Isamu Noguchi. [© The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / ARS]

Sketches of members of the Jerusalem Committee, by Lawrence Halprin. [Lawrence Halprin Collection, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania]

The Jerusalem Committee never possessed any legal authority. Its convening was in essence an act of cultural politics on the part of the city's shrewd and embattled mayor. Teddy Kollek calculated that the assembled luminaries would serve to validate the vision of a unified city, the joining of modern development and ancient heritage. As the meeting proceeded, however, it was evident that the committee was not responding as expected; it was in fact unanimous in its negative judgment. The master plan had "no vision, spirit, theme, or character," said Louis Kahn. "We were not given a clue to an aspiration. We were given a problem analysis."[9] The Dutch curator Willem Sandberg echoed this concern: "The old city has no spiritual base anymore."[10] Like Mumford, committee members objected to what they viewed as a triumph of technocratic rationalism over architectural inspiration. "The foreign critics were not wielding a scalpel on the master plan, but a guillotine," reported the *Jerusalem Post*.[11]

In hindsight, their critique can be understood not simply as the repudiation of a particular plan for a specific city. It was to some degree a symptom of the anxieties then troubling the profession, as the high modernist orthodoxies that had prevailed for decades were being swept away by an insurgent postmodernism. The mostly Western architects and planners of the committee were thus ready to be alarmed by the prospect of Jerusalem and its sacred precincts being transformed into a contemporary

metropolis; they were predisposed to favor what seemed to them the unspoiled authenticity of the ancient holy city. But the committee's negative reaction was rooted even more firmly in the belief that Jerusalem must remain a world spiritual center, and that as such the city might show the way to a better future — to a world order without nation states.

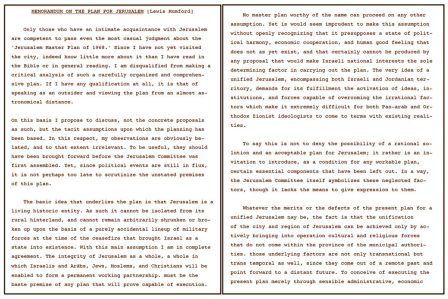
As Buckminster Fuller declared, Jerusalem lay "at the still center of the revolving forces of history" and thus ought to be "de-sovereignized."[12] It did not seem to matter that Kollek protested their hypocrisy: "You would like to drive up in big cars, but you want us in Jerusalem riding on donkeys." Nor did it seem to matter that Kollek was prepared to subtly undermine some of the modernizing impulses of his national government. In fact, he was eager to internationalize Jerusalem as a religious center for humankind. (In 1967 he had invited the United Nations to relocate to the city.) On the need to preserve the city's unique character, to protect it from the plans of the Israelis or any one nation, Mumford was especially emphatic:

> Now Jerusalem holds a special place as a holy city, not only because of its age, but because in time it became the active spiritual center of three world religions. Thus it stands for certain cosmic insights and human values that have spread throughout the planet and that now embrace, in some degree, all who consciously participate in the human adventure. This precious gift of history gives Jerusalem a status that no other sacred city, not even Mecca, Rome, Benares, or Constantinople, can claim. Despite all present divisions and antagonisms, some now more fiercely visible than ever, even within Judaism, the structure of the city, its topography, its soil, its ancient walls, its historic sites, make Jerusalem, in its presence and person, a potential source of unity.

As always Mumford is erudite and eloquent; his memorandum is a tour de force. Yet all these years later it is impossible not to register that the rhetoric is as presumptuous as it is stirring, at once admirable and appalling, liberal and paternalistic. In light of the rise of a vigorous postcolonial discourse, such phrases as "cosmic insights" and "all who consciously participate in the human adventure" now seem impossibly sweeping; as does the proposition that an internationalized Jerusalem would be "protected and cherished ... by all the peoples of the world." Such sentiments assume that all those "peoples" who were once ruled by European colonial powers would come to accept or even embrace the "human values" of their former rulers. The passionate plea to make Jerusalem a world capital also assumes that competing national interests — in 1970 these were Israel and Jordan; years later Palestine would make its claim — must relinquish their own political and cultural aspirations. The contradictions are all too clear: the writer who argued so strongly for the vital importance of community, for participation in democratic civic life, was here overlooking the efforts of particular peoples to create their own self-governed, democratic communities. The alternative capital that Mumford proposed to the Zionists, and by implication to the Palestinians as well, would have been wholly administrative — Zionism without Zion, Palestine without Al-Aqsa.

In his memorandum, Mumford confessed to "doubts and misgivings" about submitting his criticism to Teddy Kollek and the Jerusalem Committee, acknowledging that "it will shock and offend many worthy people who have been thinking and acting on quite different premises." In this matter he was indisputably correct. As the *New York Times*

put it, at the conclusion of its special report on the tumultuous and impassioned meeting in December 1970: “Further controversy is expected.”



MEMORANDUM ON THE PLAN FOR JERUSALEM (Lewis Mumford)

Only those who have an intimate acquaintance with Jerusalem are competent to pass even the most casual judgment about the "Jerusalem Master Plan of 1968." Since I have not yet visited the city, indeed know little more about it than I have read in the Bible or in general reading, I am disqualified from making a critical analysis of such a carefully organized and comprehensive plan. If I have any qualification at all, it is that of speaking as an outsider and viewing the plan from an almost astronomical distance.

On this basis I propose to discuss, not the concrete proposals as such, but the tacit assumptions upon which the planning has been based. In this respect, my observations are obviously belated, and to that extent irrelevant. To be useful, they should have been brought forward before the Jerusalem Committee was first assembled. Yet, since political events are still in flux, it is not perhaps too late to scrutinize the unstated premises of this plan.

The basic idea that underlies the plan is that Jerusalem is a living historic entity. As such it cannot be isolated from its rural hinterland, and cannot remain arbitrarily shrunken or broken up upon the basis of a purely accidental lineup of military forces at the time of the ceasefire that brought Israel as a state into existence. With this main assumption I am in complete agreement. The integrity of Jerusalem as a whole, a whole in which Israelis and Arabs, Jews, Moslems, and Christians will be enabled to form a permanent working partnership, must be the basic premise of any plan that will prove capable of execution.

No master plan worthy of the name can proceed on any other assumption. Yet it would seem imprudent to make this assumption without openly recognizing that it presupposes a state of political harmony, economic cooperation, and human good feeling that does not as yet exist, and that certainly cannot be produced by any proposal that would make Israeli national interests the sole determining factor in carrying out the plan. The very idea of a unified Jerusalem, encompassing both Israeli and Jordanian territory, demands for its fulfillment the activation of ideas, institutions, and forces

The opening pages of Mumford’s Memorandum.

Memorandum on the Plan for Jerusalem (1970)

by Lewis Mumford

Only those who have an intimate acquaintance with Jerusalem are competent to pass even the most casual judgment about the “Jerusalem Master Plan of 1968.” Since I have not yet visited the city, indeed know little more about it than I have read in the Bible or in general reading, I am disqualified from making a critical analysis of such a carefully organized and comprehensive plan. If I have any qualification at all, it is that of speaking as an outsider and viewing the plan from an almost astronomical distance.

On this basis I propose to discuss, not the concrete proposals as such, but the tacit assumptions upon which the planning has been based. In this respect, my observations are obviously belated, and to that extent irrelevant. To be useful, they should have been brought forward before the Jerusalem Committee was first assembled. Yet, since political events are still in flux, it is not perhaps too late to scrutinize the unstated premises of this plan.

The basic idea that underlies the plan is that Jerusalem is a living historic entity. As such it cannot be isolated from its rural hinterland, and cannot remain arbitrarily shrunken or broken up upon the basis of a purely accidental lineup of military forces at the time of the ceasefire that brought Israel as a state into existence. With this main assumption I am in complete agreement. The integrity of Jerusalem as a whole, a whole in which Israelis and Arabs, Jews, Moslems, and Christians will be enabled to form a permanent working partnership, must be the basic premise of any plan that will prove capable of execution.

No master plan worthy of the name can proceed on any other assumption. Yet it would seem imprudent to make this assumption without openly recognizing that it presupposes a state of political harmony, economic cooperation, and human good feeling that does not as yet exist, and that certainly cannot be produced by any proposal that would make Israeli national interests the sole determining factor in carrying out the plan. The very idea of a unified Jerusalem, encompassing both Israeli and Jordanian territory, demands for its fulfillment the activation of ideas, institutions, and forces

capable of overcoming the irrational factors which make it extremely difficult for both Pan-Arab and Orthodox Zionist ideologists to come to terms with existing realities.

To say this is not to deny the possibility of a rational solution and an acceptable plan for Jerusalem; it rather is an invitation to introduce, as a condition for any workable plan, certain essential components that have been left out. In a way, the Jerusalem Committee itself symbolizes these neglected factors, though it lacks the means to give expression to them.

Whatever the merits or the defects of the present plan for a unified Jerusalem may be, the fact is that the unification of the city and region of Jerusalem can be achieved only by actively bringing into operation cultural and religious forces that do not come within the province of the municipal authorities. Those underlying factors are not only trans-national but trans-temporal as well, since they come out of a remote past and point forward to a distant future. To conceive of executing the present plan merely through sensible administrative, economic, and town planning measures is to fail to recognize the unique character of Jerusalem itself. What is worse, such a narrow approach overlooks the possibility that this very uniqueness may make Jerusalem the center of a larger unity and comity.

On this matter I am tempted to quote the words of my old Italian friend and colleague, G.A. Borgese, with reference to the need for world government, “It is necessary, therefore It is possible!” And to that I might add, a unified Jerusalem is desirable; therefore whatever measures are needed to achieve this end are imperative. But it would be foolish, at this tense moment, to overlook the cost of such a unified plan not only in time and energy and money, nor yet merely in engineering and architectural skill. Far more than this, it will demand difficult political abnegations and munificent displays of human generosity on all sides before even the first steps in the right direction can be made. To be realistic about the execution of the present plan, then, one must admit that its seemingly hardheaded concrete proposals rest on more fragile foundations than those I shall put forward. For it is only in terms of the immediate moment, that is, the last three years, that the conditions essential to is execution even partly exist. Those conditions
unfortunately are as closely tied to military events as was the previous dismemberment of Jerusalem.

To say this is to cast no reflection upon the municipal authorities, who have been faithfully carrying out their assigned duties in the spirit of Baron Haussmann, without realizing that it is to Isaiah they must look for guidance. No blame attaches to the planning bureau for not being prepared to deal with a variety of ideological and cultural factors that must be included if the plan itself is not to be an empty formalistic exercise. In so far as the municipal authorities have closed their eyes to those conditions, they are presupposing that a miracle has already come to pass. What I am suggesting is that the real problem is first to discover by what rational preparations and efforts this miracle can be brought about.

On this matter I speak, not with the authority of a prophet, still less with that of a contemporary urbanist, but as on interpreter of human cultures, in particular of the City in History. From the very moment the city becomes visible, it is identifiable as a holy place: a center of arcane forces and human impulses that, for both good and evil, transcend mere biological existence or economic survival, and give meaning to every

phase of human life. As with all the highest manifestations of life, this religious office of the city has been subject over long periods to erosion, defacement, and corruption. What remains of the original vision, unless each fresh generation renews it, may be only its burial cave, a rock, at best an architectural shrine, which has been guarded through the centuries.

Now Jerusalem holds a special place as a holy city, not only because of its age, but because in time it became the active spiritual center of three world religions. Thus it stands for certain cosmic insights and human values that have spread throughout the planet and that now embrace, in some degree, all who consciously participate in the human adventure. This precious gift of history gives Jerusalem a status that no other sacred city, not even Mecca, Rome, Benares, or Constantinople, can claim. Despite all present divisions and antagonisms, some now more fiercely visible than ever, even within Judaism, the structure of the city, its topography, its soil, its ancient walls, its historic sites, make Jerusalem, in its presence and person, a potential source of unity.

If Jerusalem were only an administrative or commercial center, no permanent adjustment of the rival nationalistic claims which focus on this particular spot could be hoped for: even temporary compromises would be unstable, even counsels of expediency would be desperate gambles. If the present plan for Jerusalem has attracted the sympathetic attention of so many people of all faiths and philosophies as now constitute the Jerusalem Committee, it is surely because the very nature of Jerusalem transcends all narrow local and partisan interests. Instinctively, everyone realizes that if Jerusalem could be unified by acts of good will and free consent, without military or economic coercion, that spirit of unity might spread in time to the rest of the world.

Do not misunderstand me. In seeking to uncover the conditions for an acceptable plan for the future of Jerusalem, I am not presumptuously offering a “solution.” Rather I am seeking to expose the foundations upon which a durable solution may be built.

What I am suggesting is that the very nature of Jerusalem, as it has developed through the ages, has given it a special character that transcends the desperate hopes for re-establishing Zion there that helped Jewry to keep alive during the darkest moments of the Diaspora. Judaism has given Jerusalem to the whole world, and the moment has come to realize this gift must now be validated and sanctified by a plan that will set Jerusalem apart from all the other cities of Israel. To fulfill its mission, Jerusalem must become, not a national capital but a world capital, whose extra-territorial status will be protected and cherished, not by this or that self-appointed military guardian, but by all the peoples of the world — peoples who are sick with longing for the peace and security that the present power structures of national states and expanding empires do not even remotely promise. To de-nationalize and de-politicize Jerusalem is, I submit, the first practical step toward
preparing a long-term plan for Jerusalem’s future — and the world’s.

This is far from being a private subjective projection. I am conscious rather of putting in so many words and thoughts that are harbored by a great diversity of minds, who, like myself, have felt obliged to remain silent as long as the very existence of Israel was threatened, lest any critical analysis of its actual position, however sympathetic, might be misused by Israel’s enemies as a justification for their own disruptive aims. But the time for silence has gone by; for the planning of Jerusalem, if soundly conceived, offers in fact the first opportunity for making a fresh start in a new direction. Once boldly

outlined, a unified Jerusalem, if treated as an incentive to worldwide association, might become the living symbol, indeed the organizing nucleus for those far-reaching cooperations which the United Nations organization — conceived on an abstract political basis — has not yet been able to achieve.

I have put these considerations before you with many doubts and misgivings; not because my analysis rests on shaky foundations, but because I know beforehand that it will shock and offend many worthy people who have been thinking and acting on quite different premises, in terms only of the immediate situation. What has made me hesitate even more is the fear that many might hastily regard this proposal to make Jerusalem, not a predominantly Zionist center, but a new kind of world metropolis, as an attempt to cheat Jewry of its ancient hopes, instead of offering, as it actually does, a more solid basis for their active fulfillment. This view of the terms for Jerusalem's elevation and unification is not, I insist, a desertion of ancient promises, still less a counsel of despair; rather it is a call to fresh thought and action, released from imprisonment to past errors, past feuds, past animosities. If once ready to entertain the possibility of such a departure, the leaders of Israel and the planners of Jerusalem would find as their allies and collaborators the best minds in every country — including, it seems reasonable to hope, the genuine leaders of thought in Arab and other Moslem countries.

This is not the place to describe the long-term consequences of establishing Jerusalem as a world city rather than as a national government center. The least of these consequences would be the establishment of a new political capital — comparable to Washington or Canberra — on another site, while Jerusalem itself would enjoy the special immunities and the extra-territorial status of e Vatican City.

But once this basic change was made, a coordinate one would be in order: namely that of establishing in Jerusalem, alongside the Hebrew University, a World University, whose special task would be to offset deep-rooted national and religious particularism by emphasizing the universalism of the scientific method and the fresh outlook of the modern world. The germ of such a renovated university already exists in Jerusalem: indeed this development was foreseen and partly provided for in the 1920s by my old master, Patrick Geddes, in his plans for the University of Jerusalem. In order to establish the sites and the housing facilities and the special buildings needed for such a university on a scale commensurate with future needs, some of the present allocations of space would, doubtless, come in for revision. But what could be a better contribution to Israel's special cosmopolitan function — the historic complement to its otherwise exclusive and isolationist nationalism — than such a world university? By taking part in the building of that institution, and participating in the intellectual traffic it promoted, all other nations would acquire a stake in Israel's future.

With the many concrete consequences of treating Jerusalem as both a symbol and an active cultural instrument for world unity, I have no time to deal, nor is this the proper occasion. Enough to point out that if this potential were taken seriously, it would demand substantial rectifications of the present plan: above all in its forecasts for a greater population.

Though I have disqualified myself from criticizing the details of the Jerusalem 1968 plan, I nevertheless cannot leave the subject without also challenging some of the minor assumptions that have governed this plan.

And first let me point to a basic fallacy which this plan shares with too many other contemporary plans: the fallacy of extrapolation. This pseudo-scientific process consists in taking accurate statistical evidence based on past events as a rational guide to the future. Except in dealing with the briefest time span, say five or ten years, that practice cannot be justified; the future so defined is not the real future at all, but an accelerated and amplified past. If sometimes such statistical predictions prove justified, this is because they have eliminated equally cogent alternatives and unduly influenced decisions by parading the predicted consequences as inevitable.

Take the most weighty forecast in the plan 1968: the probable future population or the Jerusalem area, with what was once Jordanian territory treated as an integral part of the new municipal entity. This plan suggests a foreseeable population by 2010 of 890,000 people. Such a forecast does not discriminate between what is probable, what is necessary, what is desirable, and what is possible: yet all four factors must play a part in every intelligent planning decision. As the American planner, Albert Mayor, has neatly put it in the title of an excellent book: “Trend is Not Destiny”.

If Jerusalem were to perform the special functions I have suggested, as a world center of culture and religion, then its economic, industrial, and governmental growth would necessarily be curbed, in order to make the best use of this site for these major purposes. As a consequence, instead of providing for indefinite urban growth, the population of Jerusalem, both transient (tourists, students) and permanent, must be kept within definitely prescribed limits, if adequate housing and usable open space is to be provided. This means that further expansion of non-cultural functions —and of course housing — must be shifted to other parts of Israel. Such a decision can only be carried out through a national settlement policy, beyond the scope of municipal authorities; for it implies a national program for the further creation of new towns and the redistribution of industries and administrative services, in relation to a regional pattern that gives weight to all the ecological factors. On these matters the writings of the Israeli planner and architect, the late Artur Glikson, should be given even more weight than they received in his lifetime.

Quite apart from the proposal I have made, I find it difficult to accept the present plan for Jerusalem, put forward as if Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa were uncontrollable urban entities, destined by inertia to continue indefinitely their present accretion and expansion and agglomeration. Such a view of these cities offers no reference to alternatives that can only be handled on a regional and national scale; and it pays no attention to the many kinds of environmental destitution and pollution that every expanding metropolis must at last face, if only because the human results have become increasingly sordid and degrading. If any lesson has become plain through the last half century of urban growth, it is that unlimited urban growth and congestion have everywhere already passed tolerable limits. The economic dynamism which has promoted such expansion has proved destructive, almost in proportion to the financial prosperity it generates: for today every great urban center shows unmistakable signs of disintegration, through physical wastes, pollution, organic poisoning, and environmental erosion on one hand, as well as through the rising incidence of disease, drug addiction, crime, and psychotic violence. The failure until recently to correlate those physical symptoms with the social dissociation and the functional congestion that uncontrolled urban growth promotes indicates the paralysis of our analytic, over-compartmentalized, “scientific” approach in dealing with social complexity.

Though no one can yet say with confidence what the optimum limits of population in any one city are, since many varied factors play a part, something like a limit of the present population of Jerusalem, around 300 or 400 thousand, seems the highest number capable of benefitting by physical contiguity. Beyond this, wider forms of association must be dematerialized by telephone, radio, television, and by occasional rapid mobilization from a wider area for special occasions as indeed happened even in slower ancient times, with the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, for the Passover.

If no limits to urban extension are set, and if no effort is made to handle as many urban functions as possible in smaller urban units designed to minimize unnecessary traffic, motorized transportation will in Jerusalem, as everywhere else today, necessarily take precedence over every other urban function and will gradually absorb capital and income and energy and living space essential to education, religion, and culture.

I have stated this general theorem at some length because the planners of Jerusalem seem to have overlooked the lessons that the mishandling of urban growth in every big city, from Los Angeles to Rome, should have taught them. Thus they have rejected nucleated planning by precincts, campuses, neighborhoods, though Jerusalem, in conformity to its hilly structure, favors such development. The planners have opted for the outmoded corridor streets and avenues on the grounds that Jerusalem's inhabitants favor continuous shopping streets rather than more concentrated market areas, as notably in Coventry and many other English towns. But they have forgotten the fact that the motor car as such impedes pedestrian shopping and raises local air pollution to an almost lethal level. As the density of residential population per acre rises, these disabilities rise too. Even prospective improvements of the private motor car — by confining urban traffic to a two-passenger minicar driven by electricity or gas — would not solve the problem; witness the blockage by stalled and parked bicycles in Amsterdam.

These are matters, fortunately, on which sound judgement is possible without intimate knowledge of present conditions in Jerusalem. I am speaking of all cities, not just Jerusalem, when I say that if a city is allowed to increase its population indefinitely, by surface expansion and by building both residential housing and commercial buildings at excessive densities, it must automatically produce traffic problems and social difficulties for which no solution is possible.

If all those problems have reached horrendous proportions in my own country, the United States, despite its high energy technology, its opulent productivity, its enormous taxable income, to say nothing of the expanses of open land still available, how can planning authorities ignore those factors in Israel? Every unnecessary street or highway or parking lot that is provided takes away that much potentially arable land or desirable recreation space. How can this misappropriation of land and water resources be defended in a country like Israel, whose territory is so limited that it must within a measurable term of years become closed to new immigration — unless it exports numbers of its native inhabitants.

Though I would ask these questions about any plan conceived on the same lines, I have a special reason for putting them forward here; for they are still another reason for holding that Jerusalem's growth should be determined, not by taking as inevitable the continuation of past economic and political tendencies, but by reference to a quite different set of values and purposes: namely, the special need for maintaining Jerusalem

as a symbol of cultural unity, and as a deliberate contribution to world comity. On those terms, the case for limiting the population of the Jerusalem area, and for concentrating on its development as a religious and educational center, become clear.

I do not of course minimize the difficulties in even discussing these new possibilities and entertaining this radically different approach. Though I have availed myself of the privileges and courtesies habitually accorded to an outsider, I realize that I have touched many tender spots that even the most delicately wielded probe might hesitate to approach. If I have spoken openly what until now have been private, unpublicized thoughts, it is because I feel that in Jerusalem not merely the fate of Israel but the destiny of the world in the centuries to come may actually be at stake. Yet this, I take it, may be one of those singular moments of which the great physicist Clerk Maxwell once wrote: when an insignificant force, exerted at a propitious moment, may effect an enormous change which would otherwise be beyond human possibility. These moments do not occur often; and they are seldom perceived in time, and still more seldom acted upon. But to close one's eyes to this strategic moment for fear of giving offense to this or that group, whether weak or powerful, would do no service to Israel: in fact, it would be a betrayal of the deepest aspirations of Judaism, long ago expressed by Isaiah.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am grateful to the Israel Science Foundation for supporting my research on Jerusalem. I am also grateful to Michael Turner, an extraordinary architect, educator, and public servant who shared with me his valuable insights about Mumford and the Jerusalem Committee.

EDITORS' NOTE

"Memorandum on the Plan for Jerusalem" is located in the Lewis Mumford Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts, at the

NOTES

1. The unilateral unification of Jerusalem by the Israelis followed the Six-Day War of June 1967. For a detailed history of the events described in this essay, see my book, *Seizing Jerusalem: The Architectures of Unilateral Unification* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). For a detailed history of the controversial 1968 Master Plan and the 1970 meeting of the Jerusalem Committee, see especially Chapters 4 and 5. ↩
2. United Nations, Resolution 181 passed by the General Assembly, November 29, 1947, calling for the partition of Palestine and the internationalization of Jerusalem. ↩
3. Teddy Kollek and Moshe Pearlman, *Jerusalem: Sacred City of Mankind, A History of Forty Centuries* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968). ↩
4. Casey Blake, "Lewis Mumford (1895-1990)," *Technology and Culture*, January 1991, 187-190. ↩
5. Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), 3. *The Conduct of Life* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951), 13. ↩
6. Blake, "Lewis Mumford (1895-1990)." ↩
7. "Advisory Panel Assails Planning for Jerusalem," *The New York Times*, December 23, 1970, 33. ↩
8. The Jerusalem Committee, organized by Teddy Kollek, consisted of prominent architects, urban designers, historians, and journalists. The group of twenty-eight men and three women that gathered in December 1970 comprised the Subcommittee for Town Planning. See *Seizing Jerusalem*, Chapter 5, "Frontier." It did not include any Muslim or Arab members, at least partly because Palestinians did not want to participate in any forum that would seem to legitimize Israeli rule. ↩
9. Louis Kahn, quoted in Abraham Rabinovich, "Planners Under Fire," *Jerusalem Post*, December 25, 1970. ↩
10. Willem Sandberg, quoted in Halprin Sketchbooks, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania, Lawrence Halprin Collection. ↩
11. Abraham Rabinovich, "Planners Under Fire," *Jerusalem Post*, December 25, 1970. ↩
12. Buckminster Fuller, quoted in Ari Avrahami, "Jerusalem's Not So Golden Plan," *Architectural Design* 41 (1971), 209–216. Fuller's remarks were made in a keynote address at an architects' conference held in Israel just before the meeting of the Committee. ↩
13. Teddy Kollek, quoted in Richard Meier, "Planning for Jerusalem: An Eye-Witness Account of the Recent Conference, in Which an International Group Considered the Future of Sacred and Secular City," *Architectural Forum* 134, no. 3, 1971, 56. ↩

CITE

Alona Nitzan-Shiftan, "Memorandum on the Plan for Jerusalem," *Places Journal*, December 2018. Accessed 30 Apr 2023. https://doi.org/10.22269/181204

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alona Nitzan-Shiftan

Alona Nitzan-Shiftan is an associate professor at the Technion, where she heads the Architectural Heritage Research Center.