CinC

CONFLICT IN CITIES AND THE CONTESTED STATE

RETHINKING CONFLICT INFRASTRUCTURE

Jerusalem

Briefing Paper 2

Rethinking Conflict Infrastructure: How the built environment sustains divisions in contested cities

Conflict in Cities (CinC) research has demonstrated that physical barriers – walls, buffer zones, checkpoints, urban enclaves, and even large roads, tramways and motorways – continue to play a major role in dividing cities. These conflict infrastructures can be complex and manifest themselves in various ways, with knock-on effects for socio-economic connection or division. Mobility, or lack of it, is often used as a tool of conflict. Interventions in the physical environment can overtly further the interests of certain groups, whilst seemingly well-intentioned and apparently benign encroachments on the landscape can create or sustain inequalities in ways that are hard to reverse. Social and political divisions may be exacerbated when populations are separated physically for long periods, resulting in a rejection of difference and distaste for mixing. Thus, conflict infrastructures can become more than just physical obstacles to reconciliation.

Conflict infrastructures

Conflict infrastructures in contested cities typically stand out by virtue of their size, frequency, and function in dividing populations. They are regularly located in dense areas and can irrevocably change the structure of their cities, destroying well-established spatial continuities and social connections. Arguably, walls and checkpoints have become the most recognisable examples of conflict infrastructure in contested cities. Conflict infrastructures may mean different things to different peoples: in Jerusalem, the Separation Barrier represents security for many Israelis, whilst Palestinians find their land confiscated and communities divided. Urban dividing walls should not be seen in isolation; often they are part of larger systems of checkpoints and restricted travel, either in blatant form or designed in less visible but equally devastating ways. We can speak of 'mobility regimes', which involve the intentional manipulation of movement to further selective aims in urban conflicts.

Walls can take on iconic status and local populations may respond to the prominence of such structures by covering them in graffiti, protest art and commercial advertising. To a large extent, Berlin and Jerusalem are,

Key findings for policy

- **Temporary conflict infrastructures intended to solve problems in the short term – for example, walls and buffer zones – tend to become permanent. Reversing the negative spatial, social, and economic effects of this can be extremely difficult or impossible.**

- **Policy makers should be alert to the implications of roads in contested cities. They can be used to connect and thus favour certain groups over others, and can divide with pernicious results.**

- **The planning of parks and green spaces – however well-intentioned – can contribute to further division by severing connections and creating urban spaces that are 'dead' for much of the time. Whilst such plans may be couched in arguments about ecological responsibility and preservation, they should be examined for hidden agendas that privilege particular points of view.**

or were, symbolised by their walls. However, such obvious manifestations are not the only form of conflict infrastructure. Rather, divided cities contain many others – for example, roads, parks, gated communities and buffer zones – that reflect various political agendas through planning decisions, and can have multiple and far-reaching consequences. By fragmenting and enclosing communities, reducing mobility and widening divisions – and so disrupting key spatial relationships that contribute to social and political economies – their effects extend to impact the most essential features of city life. In some cases, conflict infrastructures destroy the fundamental experience of everyday urban life.

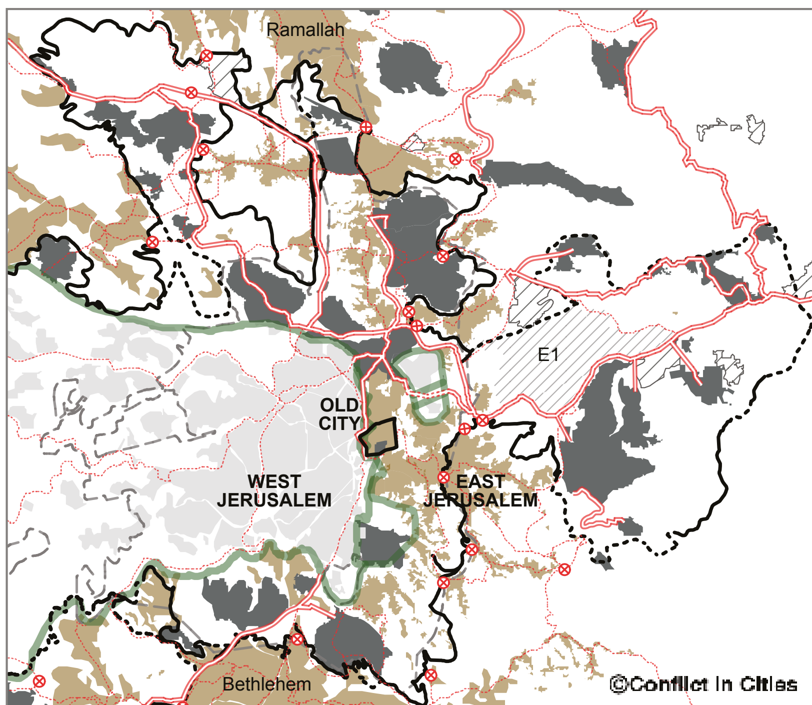
However temporary the conflict infrastructure is intended to be, it is common for it to become a permanent feature of cities. For example, not all walls have been conceived or built in the same way. Whereas the Separation Barrier in Jerusalem was planned and built by the Israeli state, Belfast's peace walls are relatively ad hoc – created where they were deemed necessary by the communities themselves in response to stone-throwing and fighting between rival groups.

Buffer zones often cut through the centre of divided cities, exactly where such dead spaces are wanted least. Nicosia's city centre had for centuries been the place where different communities came together. Intended as a solution to violent conflict, a buffer zone was used to divide the embattled Greek and Turkish Cypriots, creating a militarised no-man's land in the centre of the city. The dereliction inside the Buffer Zone has influenced the use and development of the adjacent areas, and urban initiatives are continually on hold whilst these parts of the city are kept in a suspended state of use and development. In Vukovar, many buildings in the city centre had belonged to ethnic Germans or Hungarians who fled the city after the Second World War. The property disputes over these buildings which were nationalised in the interwar period (1945-1991) meant that they have remained in ruin. This made the city centre dangerous both physically and psychologically, prompting many residents to avoid the area.

'Benign' interventions with adverse effects

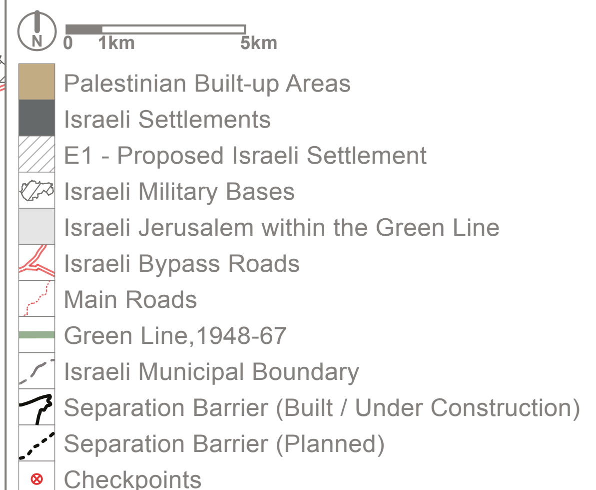
Two planning responses to the problem of dead zones are common – the construction of roads and creation of green spaces. Whilst apparently benign and pragmatic developments, and ostensibly very different to each other, both have the potential to perpetuate segregation and inequalities.

For example, Jerusalem's Road 1 not only divides Israeli and Palestinian areas, but is a key part of the bypass system that allows Israelis to travel to settlements on newly built high-speed roads that do not connect to



Greater Jerusalem

The conflict infrastructure of Jerusalem: the Separation Barrier is part of a larger system of closure and mobility control including checkpoints and bypass roads.



> **"They might declare it a green area like they did with Har Homa – then they re-zoned it into a building zone and chopped down 60 million pine…They aren't taking this land for preservation. The park area is a decoy"**
>
> *- Palestinian NGO representative*

Palestinian areas. Palestinians are generally restricted to an older network of narrower, lower-speed roads, constraining their mobility. Direct and convenient road connections between Israeli and Palestinian communities living side-by-side are rare, limiting the potential for contact between the two. Borders and mobility are not planned or deployed in the same way for both peoples. Whereas Israelis appear to have freedom of movement, Palestinian lives are dominated and fragmented by conflict infrastructures.

In Belfast, roads have also become central to how the city is organised socially, either providing a focus for community street life or forming hard boundaries between areas. Meanwhile, in Beirut, Sunni and Shi'a neighbourhoods now regularly oppose each other along the 'new Green Lines', which at times lie along major roadways. In Mostar during the civil war, the Bulevar (Boulevard) became – and remains after 20 years – the dividing line of the city, still marked by many buildings pockmarked with bullet holes and bomb damage.

In contested cities, decisions concerning the location of parks and other green spaces – particularly at points in the city where different populations come together – can be couched in apparently benign arguments about ecological responsibility and preservation. However, these must be examined closely for hidden agendas that privilege particular points of view, as planning can be used to remove other peoples and histories from these sites. Current Israeli planning is directed towards determining the future boundaries of Jerusalem, often by restricting Palestinian development and, again, will have the effect of cutting off existing urban relationships. In the centre, the park around the Old City, in the former no-man's land, does not help to link diverse parts of the city and remains mostly barren and unused.

Planning legislation around designated green areas, as well as restrictions on building heights and the issuance of building permits can help to perpetuate inequalities in the urban layout and service provision. For example, areas of the primarily Palestinian neighbourhood of Silwan are within the Jerusalem Walls National Park, and Israeli planning authorities employ relevant legislation to render illegal anything built within this area after 1974. This enables the assignment of demolition orders for homes in this area, and also allows the authorities to privilege initiatives such as plans for Israeli archaeological excavations.

Frontier urbanism

CinC research shows that conflict infrastructures contribute to wider topographies of conflict that affect large portions, if not all, of the city. This may result in 'frontier urbanism', which emerges when civilian groups are made to confront each other, deliberately using urban architectural settings and structures. The radicalisation and extreme conditions normally associated with border areas often shifts to the centre of contested cities.

Israeli settlements in Jerusalem are some of the best known examples. Such settlements are always separate from neighbouring Palestinian villages, with little if any direct physical access between the two. The fortress-like appearance of the buildings, combined with positions on hilltops overlooking Palestinian neighbourhoods, expresses visually the hierarchical social, economic, and especially political relationships. Since 1967, stemming from state-led planning, frontier urbanism has determined the periphery of Jerusalem, and since the 1980s Jewish settler groups have been active in the Old City, provocatively buying up Palestinian properties, especially in the Muslim Quarter.

It is worth noting that the nature of a frontier can change greatly during the course of conflict. For instance, in Beirut the former Green Line through the city that once divided confessional groups is now mainly home to the city's poorer populations, with the same streets and buildings occupied by residents from different religious groups. It is here that tensions and clashes now occur, rather than in the newly regenerated city centre.

As with other forms of conflict infrastructure, once a

frontier is created it is extremely difficult to dismantle it, making previous, or even new, functional urban relationships precarious or non-existent. Even in Berlin, which has instituted by far the most successful attempt to remove the physical traces of division, the continuity of functional urban relationships has not been completely possible. Large former border areas remain uninhabited and problematic in parts of the city. Frontier urbanism presents a new and largely irreversible urban condition.

The edges of Nicosia's 'Dead Zone'.

Further reading

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'Conflict in Cities and the Contested State' explores how divided cities in Europe and the Middle East have been shaped by ethnic, religious and national conflicts, with particular reference to architecture and the urban as a setting for everyday activities and events. It is concerned with how cities can absorb, resist and potentially play a role in transforming such conflict. The main research sites are Belfast and Jerusalem, with supplementary enquiry into other divided cities including Berlin, Beirut, Brussels, Kirkuk, Mostar, Nicosia, Tripoli (Lebanon) and Vukovar. This multi-disciplinary project is led by three UK universities - Cambridge, Exeter and Queen's Belfast, with an international network of partners. It is funded by the Large Grant Programme of the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK (RES-060-25-0015).
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