

THREE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN RAMALLAH

AGA KHAN TRAVEL GRANT REPORT - 2012

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INTRODUCTION

Learning environments have existed in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) since the late-Ottoman era, and the development of new education systems along with the construction of new schools is directly related to the progression of the conflict. The eldest of these systems is the private school system, whose learning environments have always been closely related to their immediate spatial contexts due to local community involvement. UNRWA refugee schools were instituted after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and sit on the edges of internal refugee camps on the land, remaining constrained to the same borders for 65 years. And since 1994, the OPT have experienced a proliferation of public school construction at which time the Palestinian National Authority became the official government of the Palestinian people. The most recent period of school construction is the result of humanitarian efforts and a discourse that demands education for all. Despite the boom in public school infrastructure, however, student drop-out rates have increased, enrollment rates have decreased, academic achievement is low, and students suffer from traumatic stress. Thus, this research questions the effectiveness of newly constructed schools that are designed as spatially and architecturally insular.

This architectural study looks closely at contemporary learning environments of the three educational systems, private, refugee, and public, from field work done in August of 2012. A total of 24 schools all over the West Bank were visited. This report focuses on three learning environments in Ramallah in part because of the way the OPT have been divided into unique military enclaves and thus must be treated independently of one another. But also in order to limit variables for a more comprehensive comparative analysis. Thus, in order to assist the reader in situating the schools into the spatial context, a brief description of Ramallah as a unique enclave will be given. This report looks closely at issues of donor contribution, design quality, and community ownership as they exist in terms of the school's architecture within the larger neighborhood context. Field work data was collected

through informal interviews, photography, and journaling. Interviews were held with officials from schools as well as professionals with the Palestinian National Authority, UNRWA, and UNICEF. Post-field work analysis was conducted using architectural drawings and spatial maps.

TRAVEL PREPARATION AND RESTRICTIONS

At the time of preparing for travel to the West Bank, the US State Department had classified the Occupied Palestinian Territories as a high risk location, and thus MIT students must obtain special permission to travel. Travel must be approved by the Chancellor at MIT under the guidance of MIT's legal aid. Permission was eventually given by MIT with specific safety protocol requirements per the same guidelines as US State Department Fulbright scholars.

All travel within the West Bank was done with a single vehicle and local driver provided by the Palestinian Water Authority. Due to Israeli military travel restrictions, no schools were visited in the Gaza Strip. Also, similar travel restrictions due to Israeli military checkpoints did not permit certain members of the research team to enter Jerusalem, and thus, schools in Jerusalem were omitted from the school sampling. Furthermore, travel from village to village was significantly lengthened due to Israeli road restrictions, in which, certain roads are permissible for Israeli settlers and other roads for Palestinians. This apartheid road system made travel in the region very difficult, and limited the number of schools visited per day.

At the time that this field work was conducted, schools were not in session due to the summer vacation. Furthermore, it was the Islamic month of Ramadan, in which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Thus, students were not seen in school buildings, and most Palestinians were not out and about because of the difficulties of fasting in the summer heat. However, school officials agreed to meet with me on their own time, and many of them who were Muslim were also fasting. Interviews with officials were not always easy as some would respond to questions with one or two-word answers and no

elaboration. Some of them only had a short period of time to spare for questions as well as supervising tours of the school grounds. Each official brought along the school secretary or member of the staff who held onto the school's single set of keys. When touring the buildings, each room had to be individually opened, and staff seemed to be exhausted from fasting and the high temperatures. While it was not possible to view students and teachers in their spatial elements, there was more opportunity to unobtrusively explore the architecture of schools as well as their context of city, suburb, or camp. If further field work were to be conducted, a different time of travel would be selected in order to compare the effects of people occupying the spaces.

FIELD WORK SAMPLING

In August of 2012, field work funded by the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT was conducted in the West Bank of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. During this travel, a random set of schools were visited in the Northern, Central, and Southern regions of the West Bank. These included four private schools, 15 UNRWA schools, and five public schools. From the private schools, three were located in the Central region, specifically the Ramallah governorate, and one from the Southern region in Beit Sahour. Of the UNRWA schools, six were in the Northern region, five in the Central region, and four in the Southern region. Finally, of the public schools, two were in the North, two in the Center, and one in the South. Therefore, most of the schools visited were in the Central region, specifically from the Ramallah governorate. A total of 10 out of 24 schools were located in the Central region from the Ramallah and Jericho governorates. The names of the schools and officials interviewed during visits were also kept out of this report in order to maintain anonymity.

The map in figure 1 depicts the different enclaves that were visited during field work.

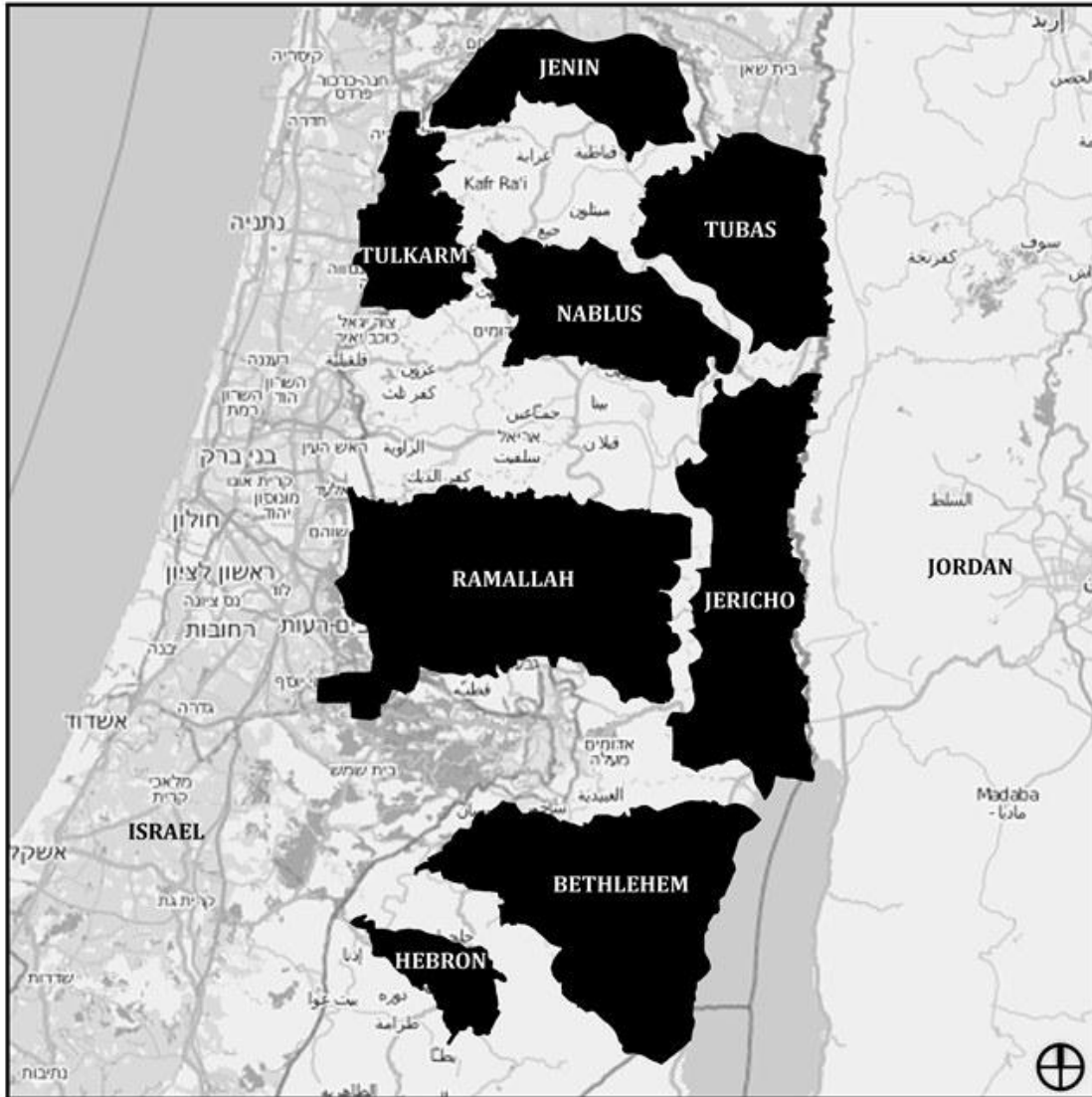


Figure 1: Enclave Site Visits for Field Work in August 2012, Not to Scale, Source: Jenine Kotob

The table below displays the schools visited with basic descriptions including number of year built, type, location, gender, student count, teacher count, and students per classroom.

School Name	Number of Buildings	Year built	Type	Location	Gender	Student Count	Teacher Count	Students per Classroom
School 1	7	2003	Private	Ramallah, Central	Mixed	900	54	28
School 2	5	1940-2007	Private	Ramallah, Central	Mixed	600	44	25-28
School 3	3	1991	Private	Ramallah, Central	Mixed	400	23	20-25
School 4	3	1964, 2011(reno)	Private	Beit Sahour, South	Mixed	675	-	-
School 5	2	1995	UNRWA	Central	Boys	750	33	32
School 6	2	2002	UNRWA	Kalandia, Central	Boys	900	24	33
School 7	1	1996	UNRWA	North	Girls	440	14	35
School 8	1	1996	UNRWA	Hebron, South	Boys	589	-	-
School 9	1	2004	Public	Ramallah, Central	Girls	700	31	23
School 10	1	2012	Public	Hebron, South	Girls	320	19	45
School 11	1	2002, 2012(expand)	Public	Jenin, North	Mixed	175	12	27
School 12	1	2000 (new)	Public	North	Boys	450	30	15
School 13	1	1999	Public	Ramallah, Central	Mixed	290	8	37
School 14	1	2007	UNRWA	Jericho, Central	Girls	558	27	35
School 15	1	2007	UNRWA	Nablus, North	Boys	-	-	-
School 16	2	1959, 2003(new)	UNRWA	Ramallah, Central	Girls	460	25	26-33
School 17	1	2004	UNRWA	North	Boys	600	35	35
School 18	1	1999	UNRWA	Jericho, Central	Girls	760	33	26-31
School 19	1	1984	UNRWA	North	Girls	768	24	30-32
School 20	1	1996	UNRWA	North	Boys	800	35	35-44
School 21	1	2011	UNRWA	North	Mixed	525	23	20
School 22	1	2006	UNRWA	Hebron, South	Boys	500	21	32-41
School 23	1	2007	UNRWA	Bethlehem, South	Girls	600	-	34
School 24	1	1997	UNRWA	Bethlehem, South	Girls	600	-	-

Table 1: Schools Visited in August, 2012 with Building Count, Year, Type, Location, Gender, People Counts, Information Gathered through Interviews with Officials

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A preliminary historical study was done on each of the three school systems found in the West Bank today. It was found that private schools have deep historical roots, and thus school grounds may be located closer to old historical centers and sites that have significance to the community. Overtime, the sites have had the opportunity to expand spatially and are deeply integrated into the neighborhood context. Today, private schools are doing the best in regards to economic, social, and academic stability. However, there are still some minor instances of behavioral problems due to community and family pressures. Private schools tend to be more diverse in their student populations as well as curriculums, and are strongly connected on a national and global scale through student travels and alumni work.

UNRWA schools were first instituted with the birth of the refugee population in 1948, and thus, their origins are related to war, displacement, and suffering. School spaces came first as tents, and then temporary one-to-two story structures, and today are tall standardized buildings. Their curriculum and school design are heavily influenced by humanitarian aid discourse. Refugees' schools solely serve a poor student population who are not granted official political recognition as Palestinians. Refugee students suffer from issues related to lower standards of living inside camps; and, sometimes display reported behavioral problems in the school place.

Public schools were controlled by Palestinians for the first time in 1994, after the signing of the Oslo Accords. While this step was significant in moving closer to Palestinian unification and growth, their beginnings were very shaky and also deeply influenced by humanitarian aid. Multiple stakeholders were involved in the development of public schools, and the most significant goal was the construction of new schools in order to make sure every student had access to an education. Historians acknowledge the limits that existed for the development of a national pedagogy due to the desire to maintain peace with Israeli neighbors. Today, these students, much like refugee students, display some reported

behavioral problems in the school place, and some suffer from domestically related issues and travel problems to and from school.

For both UNRWA and public schools, there has been a general decline in student achievement and an increase in student dropout rates. Some studies have attributed this to the lack of relevancy that today's schooling may have in the face of the reality of an occupation. Others have postulated that this could be a result of needing to help parents at home either monetarily or through house chores. In any case, there have been attempts to develop vocational education in parallel to general schooling, but these programs and their structures are outside of the scope of this research. In order to address some of the issues facing school communities, the following pages will look at the architecture of schools as they exist today and will base the analysis on historical research.

THREE CASE STUDIES



Figure 2: Private School Case Study, Source: Jenine Kotob



Figure 3: UNRWA School Case Study, Source: Jenine Kotob



Figure 4: Public School Case Study, Source Jenine Kotob

RAMALLAH AS A CITY OF FOCUS

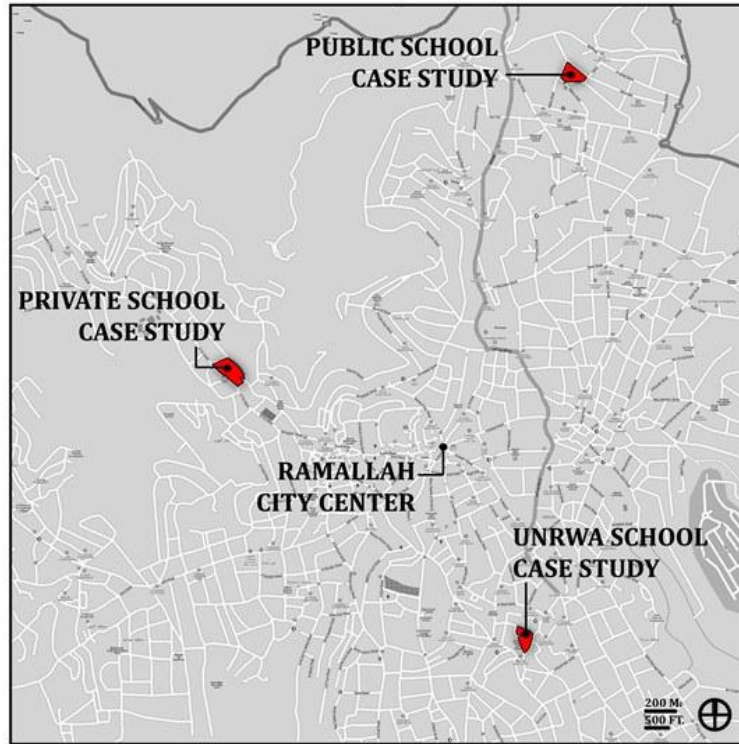


Figure 5: Map of Three Schools in Ramallah, Source: Jenine Kotob

In order to present the architecture of the three school systems in their current state, the following pages contain three analyses of specific learning environments that were visited in the Ramallah governorate during field work in 2012. Each one is depicted in figure 5 to the left. The first is a private school located in the west of Ramallah and will be referred to as Private School Case Study; the second is an UNRWA refugee school located in the south and will be referred to as the UNRWA School Case Study; and the third is a public school in the north and will be referred to as the Public School Case Study. The analyses will highlight differences in each of the schools as they relate to child, building, neighborhood context, and system.

Due to the complexity of the militarized enclavisation, Ramallah was chosen for its unique position as the official center of PNA government activity. Among Ramallah's characteristics is that it is home to many private, UNRWA, and public schools. According to academic Lisa Taraki, "No other city in Palestine has such an eclectic and diverse middle class, which has given Ramallah/al-Bireh its unique character."¹ She continues, "One of the more noteworthy effects of the post-Oslo urban regime in Ramallah has been the deepening of residential segregation and the salience of place-based class and

¹ Taraki, Lisa. "Enclave Micropolis: The Paradoxical Case of Ramallah/al-Bireh." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 2008: 14.

status differentials.”² Thus, even within Ramallah itself there are levels of segregation according to differences such as class and status. Prior to the establishment of the PNA, these class and status differences were less prominent as the disparate communities worked together, especially during the intifada. But, as Taraki points out, that is no longer the case:

*As social cleavages deepened and Ramallah became Palestine’s premier city, the language of coexistence began to change. Several incidents, strongly reminiscent of classic acts of urban violence in world cities where the dispossessed attack the perceived symbols of privilege and power, have occurred in recent years.*³

This is exemplified by the elite, middle class, and poor communities who are bolstered and supported by their own schools. Thus, for each school system in Ramallah, there are issues related to the context of the occupation but also deep social issues that divide the communities. In looking at the architecture of schools, not only will the infrastructure be analyzed as to how it can assist immediate communities, but also how it can promote connections across a divided land and society.

The private school is situated on a higher elevation than its immediate surroundings, and it is wrapped primarily by open fields with some residential units. Its prime location indicates the wealth of its communities in that they have networks that are able to support better lands, as well as the ability of families to pay the required tuition. The UNRWA school is situated on the same elevation as the Amari refugee camp and sits directly on its edges. The school serves a refugee community in which most staff and students live inside the Amari camp and suffer from lower standards of living and poverty. Finally, the public school is located in the urban residential area of El-Bireh within the Ramallah governorate. It is situated into the landscape so that its outdoor spaces are nestled into a hill. The school primarily serves middle class families who are unable to afford the private schools in nearby areas. Many of the

² Ibid, 15.

³ Ibid, 16.

public school's parents work for the PNA, the headquarters of which are located just a few minutes away from the school.

These three learning environments will be examined as representatives of the three school systems across the West Bank. At certain points, data and support from other school visits will be brought into the analysis in order to reflect a broader sampling.

PRIVATE SCHOOL CASE STUDY

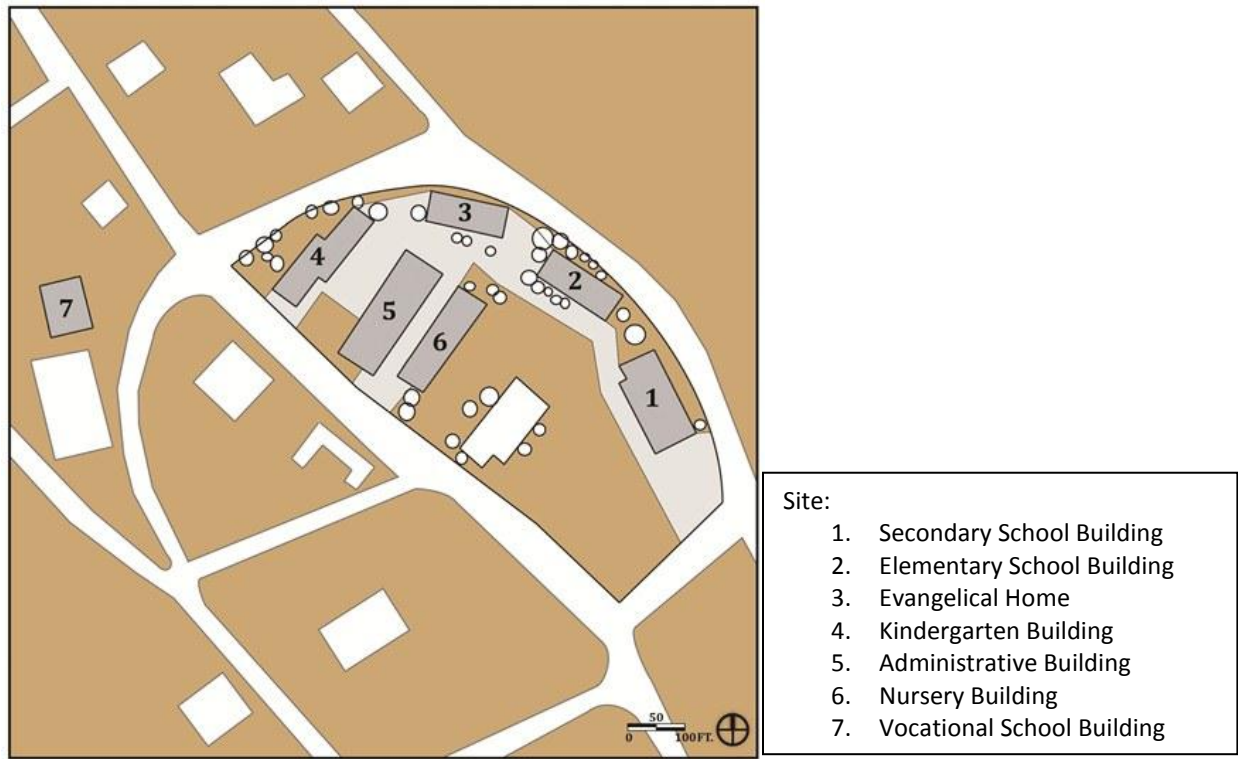


Figure 6: Private School Case Study Site Plan, Source: Jenine Kotob

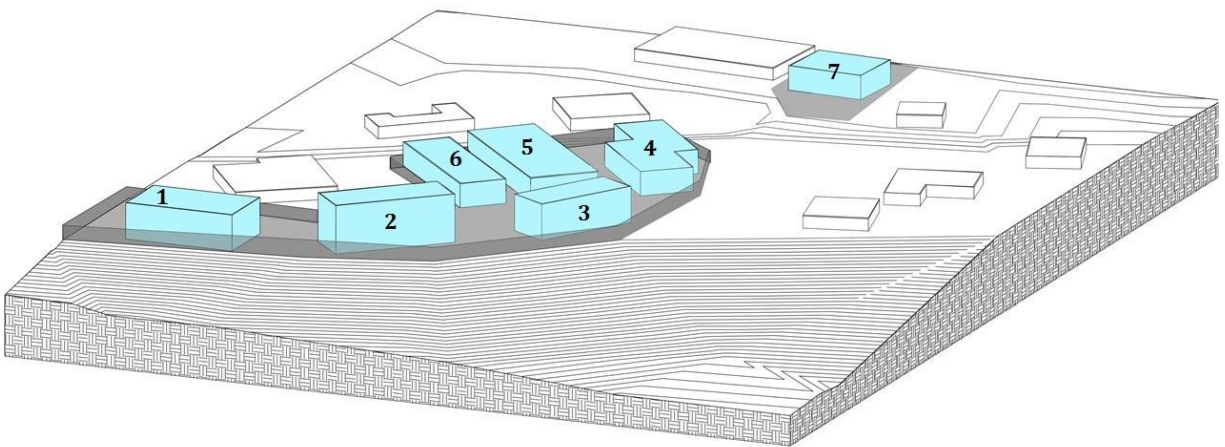


Figure 7: Private School Case Study Aerial, Source: Jenine Kotob

The private school has been in development on this site since 1967. At the school, flexibility in regards to the spatial boundaries has allowed this school to deepen its investment in the neighborhood context by tacking on buildings overtime. Even as newer buildings are being constructed, they span out beyond the immediate school zone further into the neighborhood. This expansion should not be taken lightly, as it expresses the ability of Palestinians to plan and construct broadly in the face of militarized enclavisation where the loss of land is always a threat.

The school perimeter wall delineates the boundaries for the school zone and is the first indicator used in qualifying outdoor spaces. School boundaries result in the exclusion of certain types of sensory information and the inclusion of others. Architect James Ackerman addresses the nature of institutions and architecture: "Buildings provide space and shelter for the functions of social groups. The purpose and the values of the group and its relationship to other groups is the essential content to which a building gives form. Architecture is the physical form of social institutions."⁴ The perimeter wall can be read as the negotiator between social institutions of the school system and the local community. The wall of the private school indicates the school's programmatic and functional flexibility in regard to its expansion over time, transformation, and amalgamation of materials. This flexibility enables a dialogue between the school's spaces and the neighborhood context, where both are pushing the bounds of one another over time. These intimate dialogues create the sense that there is a shared claim or ownership between the neighborhood community and the school community on the entire neighborhood context. This research argues that these moments of shared ownership of architecture and space are potentials for combatting years of a military occupation that seeks to dismantle Palestinian claims to land and collective community.

⁴ Ackerman, James. "Listening to Architecture." In *Architecture and Education*, by Kenneth Freidus and Robert Maltz, 4-10. Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1969.

In regards to community access, there were multiple entrances at this school giving the community at large greater access onto the site. However, the private school made no steps towards disabled people's accessibility. This is probably due to the old age of most of the structures, and would need to be considered for future updates. Programmatically, this school's auditorium is a special space, in that it can bring families and the local community into the school and allows them to get involved in their children's educational experiences. Encouraging and facilitating parent and student activity has been shown to enhance a child's education. This space is essential in bringing the local community into the school; however, academic Alan Green further states that these spaces must work to reintegrate what the community deems as necessary in regards to social services.⁵ Thus, just having the space is not enough. According to Green, schools should deploy their spaces, "based on the needs of the community... [including], out-of-school facilities and programs as a completely legitimate extension of the educational program."⁶

For students at this private school, because it was further away from the city, driving was typical. However, other private schools could be located closer to residential centers like a private school visited in Beit Sahour, Bethlehem. Whether a private school is located in a suburb or city, they tend to be further from structures of the occupation and their children have the option of driving as opposed to walking. Structures like the Separation Wall and settlements are seen in the backdrop to daily life and may not require much interaction. This realization was important, in that it began to show that regardless of class and status, every student at least visualizes what a military enclave is through physical manifestations such as high walls, towers, and barbed wire. Furthermore, neighborhoods that belong to Palestinians, poor and elite alike, sit in the shadows, at lower elevations than highly developed Israeli settlements that exist in Palestinian territories. Three miles east of the school in Ramallah is the

⁵ Green, Alan. "Planning for Declining Enrollments." In *Learning Environments*, by Thomas David and Benjamin Wright, 71. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974.

⁶ Ibid, 72.

Pesagot Israeli settlement, hovering above the rest of the city. The Separation Wall constructed by Israel is located approximately two miles to the south of the school. Thus, even though they may enjoy lifestyles that are better than some Palestinian communities, students of private schools still share the same fractured landscape.

Looking directly at the school's architecture, there are several buildings that serve 900 students, alleviating issues of over-crowding in classrooms and shared spaces. Each of the buildings is similar in form, plan, material, and scale – regardless of year of construction. The buildings as they develop over time have turned the school zone into a micro-city of its own. This has led to a mixture of interior and exterior spaces that allow for a diverse curriculum. Academic Paul V. Gump describes the journey that a child takes through a school building as a process of moving through experiential segments. Each segment indicates a moment of reality, with its own temporal duration, bound by certain spatial limitations. With more diverse and active segments, the learning environment can become more stimulating.⁷ These types of spaces allow children to have a variety of experiences on the school grounds each year. With each year that they progress, they move from floor to floor, then from building to building, with different outdoor spaces to utilize. The experiences of the youth in this private school are encompassed from the nursery age until adulthood and are expressed through their travel throughout the learning environment over the years.

The classrooms, regardless of subject, were fairly standardized and repetitive, and were laid out in a format where teachers stood in the front and taught to the students. This type of rectangular classroom has been described by academic J.W. Getzels as the room for the, “empty learner,” and is based off of theories on child cognitive processes from the turn of the century.⁸ Getzels explains that

⁷ Gump, Paul. "Operating Environments in Schools of Open and Traditional Design." In *Learning Environments*, by Thomas David and Benjamin Wright, 50. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974. (Gump 1974)

⁸ Getzels, J.W. "Images of the Classroom and Visions of the Learner." In *Learning Environments*, by Thomas David and Benjamin Wright, 2. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974.

these rooms were designed with, “the conception of the learner as an ideationally empty organism associating discrete stimuli and responses through the operation of rewards and punishments under the control of the teacher.”⁹ So even the newest structure on the site, the Secondary School Building (built in 2003), was still being designed without consideration for new theories on teaching methodology. This type of disconnect would indicate the severe lack of communication between architects and educationalists in the OPT as found in the preliminary research. This classroom layout was common in all of the private schools visited during field work.

The private school case study has certain positive and negative attributes in its learning environment. Overall, the school’s system with a minimal number of stakeholders who share a united vision allows school planning and design to happen on a much more intimate scale. Renovations and additions are much more relevant to what the school needs because they are determined by the school’s administration. Through research, it was not learned whether or not the community was also involved in a process of participatory planning and this would be a point for further exploration in the future. In regards to the neighborhood context, the school has developed a flexible perimeter that is tied with its longstanding development on the site. The correlation between time and school growth into the neighborhood can lead to a sense of shared ownership between community and school over the learning environment that can enhance the school’s relevance for students and families. In regards to the school architecture, the form and materiality of the buildings are still being constructed in more traditional school designs. Here, there is a potential for innovation and advancement which can add value to the neighborhood at large. Thus, the intention of new buildings should not solely be to enhance the quality of spaces in pursuit of better student scores, but rather to add value to the neighborhood richness through more diverse architectural projects. Finally, in looking at the classroom scale, where students spend most of their day, rooms are still being designed in traditional organizational plans with

⁹ Ibid, 3.

rote teaching methods in mind. Even though there is a variety of spaces, academics and architects agree that spaces must be designed in new, interesting ways where students are able to make their own decisions as a part of their individual growth.

In conclusion, by looking at the learning environment of the private school case study from the level of system to child, it is apparent that there are strong links between the neighborhood context and the school buildings. However, the school has not transformed its design since its establishment in the late 1960s, making most of its spaces and architecture outdated. New architectural forms for schools should be added to the Palestinian landscape, as an opportunity to counteract the bleak backdrop of enclavisation and to give students spaces to be proud of.

UNRWA SCHOOL CASE STUDY

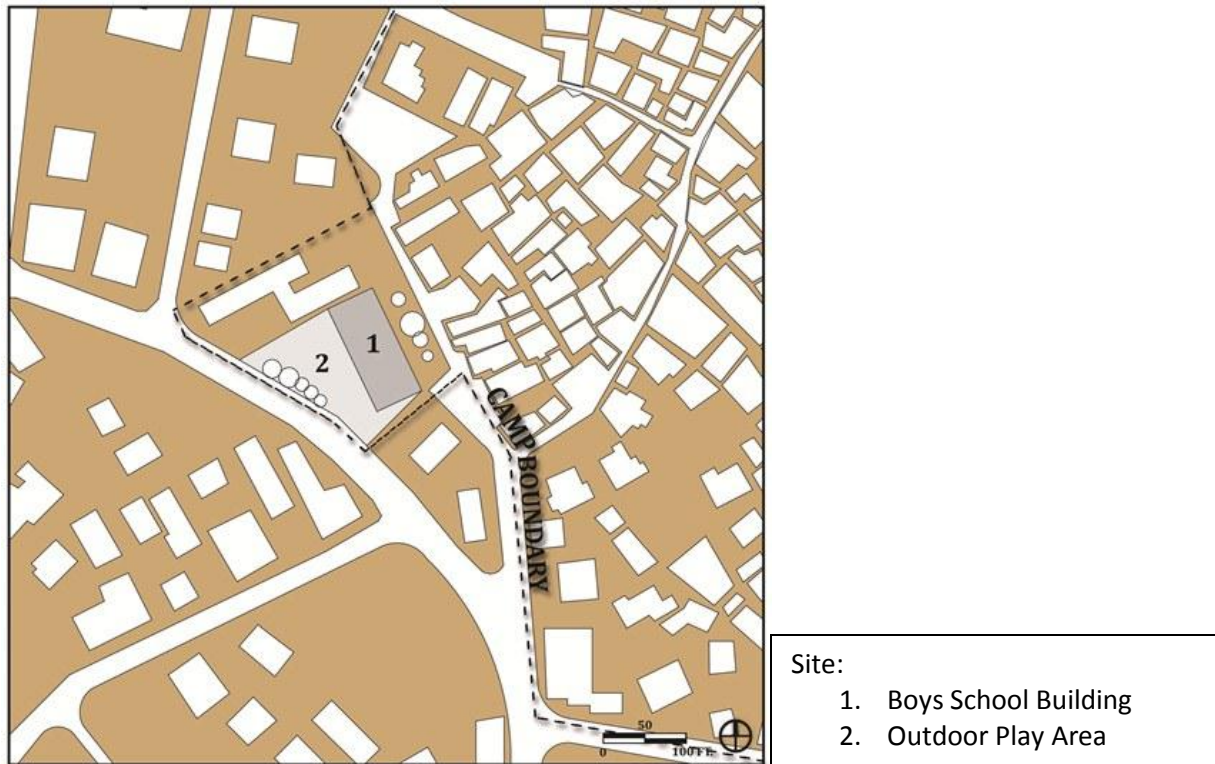


Figure 8: UNRWA School Case Study Site Plan, Source: Jenine Kotob

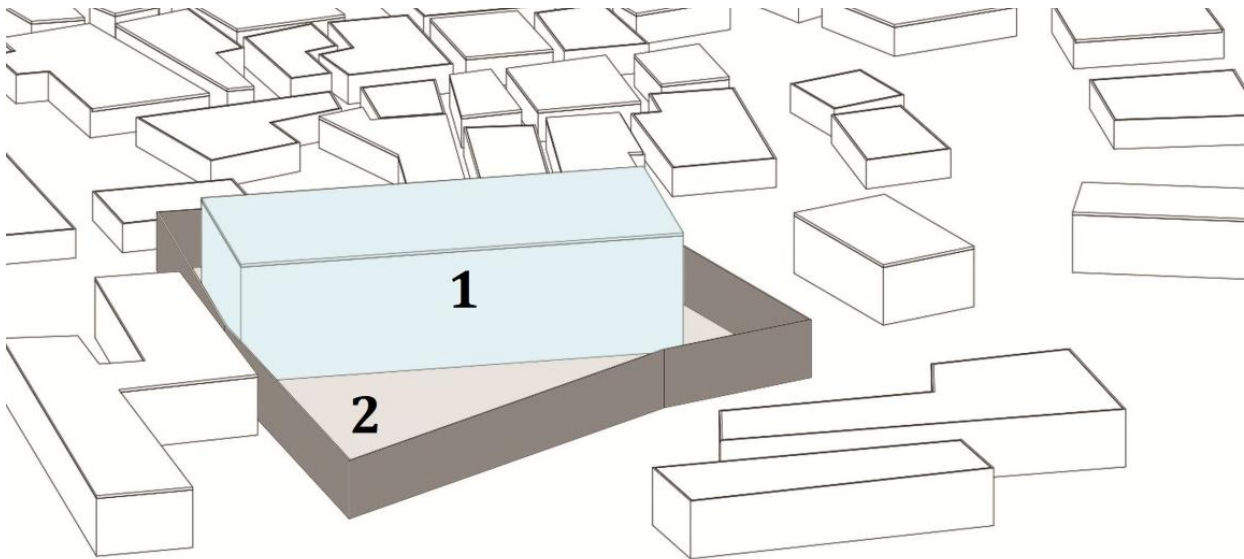


Figure 9: UNRWA School Case Study Aerial, Source: Jenine Kotob

This UNRWA school was constructed in 1995 and is one of several school facilities that serve the Amari refugee camp, which was established in 1949. In 2007, there was a total count of 4,713 people living in the camp's 97 dunums (24 acres) lending to overcrowding; of this, 39.1% were under 15 years of age.¹⁰ In 2012, the unemployment rate of the camp was recorded at 45% lending to issues of poverty.¹¹ The camp is connected to public electricity, water, and sanitation networks that each suffer from their own inefficiency's and require rehabilitation and upgrading. Thus, camp residents suffer from electricity cut-offs, water loss at certain points of the system, and wastewater discharge into camp streets. These infrastructural issues affect the quality of living in the neighborhood context for the school and its children. The camp is clearly distinguished from the rest of the Ramallah governorate, which tends to be of a higher quality, lending to more unique and negative experiences for refugee children. Furthermore, refugee camps are often targeted by Israeli Defense Forces and suffer from military incursions. UNRWA schools, like the Amari Camp Boy's School, are broken into with tanks and then occupied on top floors as look out posts.¹²

This school is part of the larger UNRWA administration which is responsible for the institution of the school as well as the refugee camp. On an administrative level UNRWA is focused on improving the basic needs of the camp, which as mentioned earlier, can have a significant impact on children and their relative success in school. The camp has its own committee that has regular workshops and works with the UNRWA Camp Improvement branch. Through these workshops, it was determined that certain projects were necessary including: paving streets and improving the landscape of the camp, improving infrastructure and restoring houses, establishing a sewage network, rehabilitating the electricity

¹⁰ Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem. *Al Amari Camp Profile*. Jerusalem: Azahar Program, 2012, 6.

¹¹ Ibid, 9.

¹² UNRWA. "Press Statement: UNRWA School in Amari Camp Occupied." *UN International Meeting on the Question of Palestine*. March 13, 2002. <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/B845E45881766ED185256B7C0057C3DC> (accessed May 6, 2013).

network, constructing public spaces, and providing furniture for certain institutions.¹³ Many of these proposals were developed through a participatory approach that involved the community. Thus, UNRWA's close relationship with the community it serves at large as well as the school community is a positive aspect of its administrative organization.

However, because of the extra-territoriality of the camp, it functions more independently of the host country – the OPT. Because of this, the camp and its school have more of a connection with their refugee counterparts in other nations across the Middle East. This presents a strange dynamic for the Palestinian education community, in that, the societal and administrative divisions are extremely deep between the different groups.

Furthermore, refugee students attend these schools only until grade nine, and after that are expected to go to public schools. In several interviews, this transition was described as being difficult on the students because of the stark socio-economic and cultural differences between the different populations. In an interview with a school, an UNRWA official explained that the school established a summer program to assist students who were expected to join a public school in the next year. The students were exposed to the school during the program ahead of time and were able to meet other children in an informal setting. These internal socio-spatial relations, as mentioned by Taraki, result in tensions between different communities in Ramallah; but, they may not be as severe in other enclaves within the OPT where economic and political differences between refugee and non-refugee communities are less significant.

Next, the relationship between school building and neighborhood context will be looked at more closely. While UNRWA is responsible for both school and camp, it maintains that the school functions on an independent level from the camp; and, this is expressed through the perimeter wall that strictly defines the school zone. This tall, massive wall limits community engagement with and access to

¹³ Ibid, 15.

the school. The UNRWA school case study has one entrance that faces the suburbs of Ramallah. Even though its students and some teachers and staff live inside the camp itself, they are required to walk around the building to the main road to enter the site. Furthermore, the wall defines the boundary where the camp ends and where school begins. This type of delineation is difficult considering the fluid nature of the camps. In other school visits during field work, it was found that certain communities would use the perimeter wall of the school informally as walls for their own homes. There were examples of the wall being punched through for windows and even exhaust systems. It is impossible to contain the school zone and keep the camps out.

A deeper look must be taken at the dynamic across the boundary between the neighborhood context and the structure for education itself, the building. This dynamic encompasses social issues that affect the child's experiences in both realms, and during the journey in between. Academic Hugh Matthews describes a child's journey through streets, or what he describes as "thirdspace." Streets can be understood as the margins in between the spaces that have been designed for us to occupy. According to Matthews, the streets are uncontrolled and enable a variety of experiences and cultural confrontations. "...The street provides a setting for disparate activities, it also is a space that is deeply invested with cultural values that forms part of the spatiality of growing up."¹⁴ From this, it can be understood that all children as they explore streets are involved in a constructivist process of attaining knowledge through the accumulation of experiences – which are both unique and similar at the same time. Matthews describes a child's movement through streets as a walk from childhood to adulthood. For children in the refugee camp, moving towards adulthood means growing with the occupation, not independent of it. Recognizing a child's experiences outside of the school zone is both an issue of curriculum development as well as spatial flexibility in school planning. Here lies the opportunity for a

¹⁴ Matthews, Hugh. "The Street as a Liminal Space: The Barbed Spaces of Childhood." In *Children in the City: Home, Neighborhood, and Community*, by Pia Christensen and Margaret O'Brien, 103. London: Routledge Falmer, 2003.

connection between the realm of school and neighborhood; but, in facing the school away from the camp and using a tall perimeter wall, there is a complete denial of these experiences and the journey of a child.

On the level of architecture, the building on this site is similar in design to that of the private school structures. It has a rectangular floor plan, with a single corridor and classrooms on either side. The school was four stories in height, with a UN flag mounted on its top. Unlike the private school, the camp school had no views into the neighborhood from the ground floor, but rather was encapsulated by a tall perimeter wall. The building is one of three standard UNRWA designs, and is called a hammerhead because of the stairs situated on either end of the building. For UNRWA schools, once a site was selected, one of the three designs was chosen depending on its shape and space. The leftover spaces would become children's outdoor play area. This results in a lack of design care for the outdoor play area, which has the potential to be a significant space for adding to the richness and variety in student activity.

Academic Robin Moore reflects on the work of landscape architect Simon Nicholson who postulates about the nature of school yards:

The only way to provide for a high degree of individual expression is to ensure that the environment is ambiguous, open-ended, and changeable so that the children can manipulate it physically and mentally to suit their own ends. This will require a revolutionary change in the way in which authorities manage school yards.¹⁵

Moore continues that outdoor spaces should be diverse and should allow for children to play. In this passage it is important to note that it is encouraged to design the school yard as open-ended and changeable. This concept is significant in that it recognizes each child is unique, especially as they come in with their own experiences from the neighborhood context or "thirdspace." Comparing the outdoor

¹⁵ Moore, Robin. "Anarchy Zone: Kids' Needs and School Yards." In *Learning Environments*, by Thomas David and Benjamin Wright, 95-120. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974.

spaces of the UNRWA school to that of the private school, there is a significant difference in how diversity is interjected into the landscape. The private school case study has provided students with a variety of outdoor spaces that encourage a milieu of experiences. Even though UNRWA schools do not have the luxury of expansive space as the private school, Moore notes that diversity in space does not need a lot of room. Diversity can be programmed through the use of structural elements, plants and trees, water, and even wildlife. Architectural elements can be placed throughout the open space to break it up, providing spaces for hiding and exploration, climbing and moving.

Furthermore, these spaces are only allowed to be used by the student population during school hours. During other interviews, it was explained by officials that this was done in order to minimize potential damage to school facilities without the supervision of the administration. While this could present a problem indeed, it seems like the lack of public spaces in the camps is a larger problem – especially as indicated by the camp community network.

School yards...represent potentially neutral territories at the social interface of school and community where the culture of the future and the culture of the present – childhood and adulthood – intersect.... The hope for change lies in the power of the community to take over these dead territories and work with children to redevelop them. It is a political situation requiring direct community action involving the fundamental rights of children to have access to a healthy environment.¹⁶

The outdoor space of the school should be made accessible to the local community and families throughout the year, making it a shared space by both school and neighborhood. These types of opportunities lay the foundation for bridging community and school, and making each one have a sense of responsibility and investment in the other.

Also, the fixed nature of the perimeter wall does not allow for expansion of the school zone over time. Other UNRWA schools that were visited had a process of school construction, then demolition, and then new construction in order to make more space for a growing population. This has resulted in a

¹⁶ Ibid, 119.

process of verticilization as opposed to horizontal expansion. By moving vertically, the school grows in height and its monumentality as an institution grows – separating it further and further from the community. Thus, the school building’s design is significantly limited by the lack of space of the camps and the inflexibility in the boundary of school zone.

Another UNRWA standard that was seen from site visits was a structure that included an atrium in the center with a winding stairwell; and, a wing on either side with classrooms and spaces. UNRWA’s use of other designs that are not typically found in the Palestinian landscape has added some diversity to the architecture of schools. During an interview with an official from UNRWA’s design team, it was mentioned that the MOEHE requested to see UNRWA’s construction documents and was beginning to implement their designs in the OPT as well. UNRWA’s global influence has provided it with the ability to transcend certain limitations or drawbacks of being in the OPT; and, at certain times newer architecture indicates innovations in school design that counters the negative aspects of the structures of the conflict – including refugee camps. However, regardless of new innovations in design, if these structures remain behind tall perimeter walls and do not work to integrate the community better, they cannot be actualized as transformative and empowering spaces.

Beyond form, this school building has an image that is being presented outwardly to the community, and a different image that faces inward towards itself and students. UNRWA’s position as an international humanitarian organization grants it the right to put its own flag on top of school buildings. The flag, which embodies the humanitarian mission, implies that the school is a symbol of peace. Furthermore, all over the building’s façade and interior spaces are images of no-gun signs. This also implies that the school is a symbol of peace and more specifically, a no-violence zone. However, as was mentioned schools can suffer regularly from military related activity. Thus, these symbols of safety and peace remain just that, superimposed, institutional images on a building. This institutionalization is

the type of façade and message that is being presented towards the community and has little to do with any sort of local tradition.

Also, visible on the façades of UNRWA buildings are plaques that indicate donor aid either for an entire building, wing expansion, or floor addition. Out of the entire school sampling, this varied if multiple buildings or levels were newly constructed or expanded over time and all currently existed on the site. This is because UNRWA's designs have also changed overtime, and thus plaques become temporal indicators of when a building was constructed. And buildings become symbols of changing institutional styles. Between the UN flags, donor plaques, and no-gun signs, the school gave a sense of otherness – more closely connected to other UNRWA schools scattered throughout the Middle East as opposed to the immediate context.

On the interior of the building, walls of classrooms, as well as hallways, were typically painted with murals that evoked traditional Palestinian themes. These images had within them symbols that were prevalent in Palestinian political discourse. Elaborate murals are common in Palestinian public spaces, as the one depicted below in the northern city of Nablus.



Figure 10: Public Art Mural in Nablus, August 2012, Source: Jenine Kotob

These symbols can be distilled forms from Palestinian traditions and cultural practices such as dress, food and dance. Or they can relate more directly to themes of loss and conflict, such as the symbol of the key which represents homes that once belonged to Palestinian families. However, murals inside school buildings were not commonly found, except for UNRWA schools. These murals either focused on symbols of Palestinian traditional life or on religious themes. In the UNRWA school case

study there were both types of themes. The elaborate imagery speaks to the nature of refugee memory and narrative.¹⁷ The future of refugees is left unknown and is at the heart of the political debate. Thus, they remain inside temporary camps with no future in sight. They live a sort of in-between life and often find the strength to survive to the next day by recalling on memories from before the *Nakbe*, or the Catastrophe of 1948. These stories are shared from generation to generation.

Religious imagery is not typically found in schools, even Christian private schools. Thus, it is interesting to find it so abundant in refugee camp schools. However, in preliminary research it was discovered that old *kuttub* schools that were located in villages during the Late-Ottoman era were deeply connected with the local mosque and focused on religion. *Kuttub* schools became absorbed into the public school system when the British took control, and indicate one of the last forms of community-led education. Perhaps the emergence of these symbols in refugee schools is a recollection or reinvention of older memories of localized, religious schooling.¹⁸

At the smallest scale, the classrooms are also rectangular in shape and indicate traditional designs with the teacher in front of the room. The same ideas are echoed from the analysis of the private school, where the classroom environment does not allow for new types of teaching methodology and more current theories on student experience in space. Furthermore, while there was some diversity in classroom program such as computer and science labs, these rooms were not always accessible to disabled students because they were on higher floors. On a global scale, newer designs for classrooms include proposals like open plans where the space is left completely free of objects. The hope here is that there will be less interference from teachers in an effort to increase student capacity to make their own decisions. However, even if a classroom was designed in a certain way, research has

¹⁷ For more information on Palestinian memory of place see: Slyomovics, Susan. *The Object of Memory*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

¹⁸ For more on the reinvention of village life in refugee camps see: Maraqa, Hania Nabil. *Palestinians; From Village Peasants to Camp Refugee*. University of Arizona, 2004, 42-43.

shown that it is difficult to enforce this after teachers and students took over.¹⁹ Thus, school architecture all the way down to the classroom, is not being examined for its impact on human behavior, but rather for its role as a building that can serve the greater community. Expanding classroom and building function so that community is enabled to enter the structure will enable a greater sense of neighborhood ownership of the school.

The UNRWA school case study has some positive and negative aspects in its learning environment. Overall, it was found that the biggest limitation on the expansion and flexibility of learning environments is the restriction of space. While the private school was able to expand overtime and deepen its roots in the community, the refugee camp school, along with the camp, has fixed boundaries that were established in 1949 that can never be transformed. This lends to a sense of static-ness, where the school zone and even its interior spaces are frozen in a past time. Even if UNRWA as a global network has some positive impact on school designs by adding variety, these structures are still hidden behind tall perimeter walls that are used for safety and protection of the school.

The perimeter wall that wraps the school and access points into the school zone express a rejection of the camp and produce inwards facing environments. Furthermore, the façade of the building portrays an image of humanitarian institutionalism and offers no connections with the local community. As mentioned earlier, it is important that the architecture of schools instill a sense of positivity in order to combat the negativity of the camp and other manifestations of the occupation. However, this opportunity is missed by isolating the school behind a tall, impermeable perimeter wall and by using outward indications of the institution of UNRWA.

¹⁹ Higgins, Steve, Elaine Hall, Kate Wall, Pam Woolner, and Caroline McCaughey. *The Impact of School Environments: A Literature Review*. A Literature Review, Callaghan: The Center for Learning and Teaching, University of Newcastle, 2005.

In conclusion, this school, along with UNRWA's other refugee schools must place more effort in bridging the gap between school building and neighborhood context in order to make learning environments more suitable for children. However, UNRWA should continue moving towards the construction of more innovative projects in order to provide positive structures that can add value to the neighborhood in opposition to the sensation of loss that is a result of the occupation.

PUBLIC SCHOOL CASE STUDY

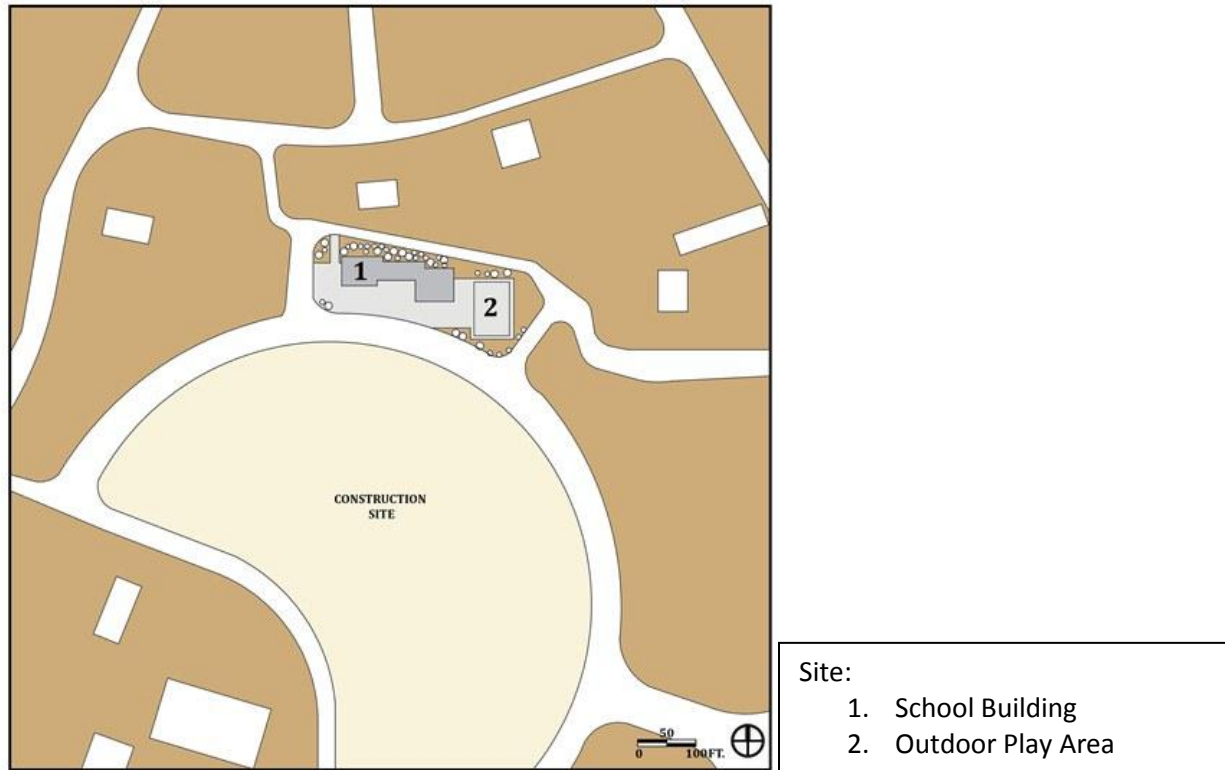


Figure 11: Public School Case Study Site Plan, Source: Jenine Kotob

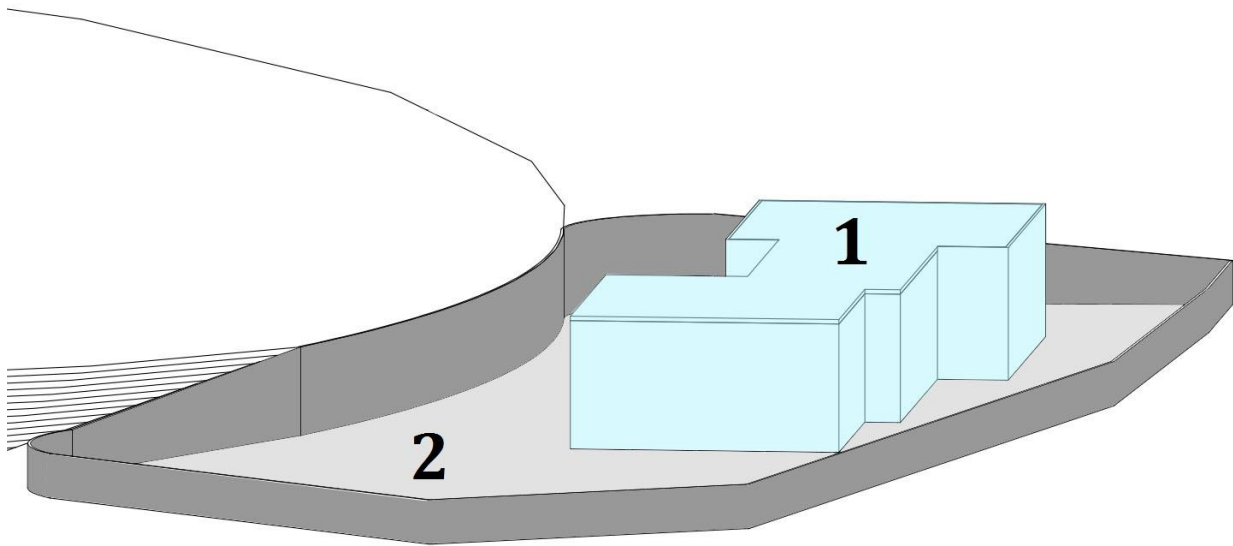


Figure 12: Public School Case Study Aerial, Source: Jenine Kotob

This public school was constructed in 2004, and is the newest of all the three schools that are being analyzed in this chapter. While this school is public and is fully controlled by the MOEHE, it was completely designed by an independent organization from Spain. This makes the school somewhat unique in comparison to private and UNRWA schools, because the administrative body that is in control of it is not responsible for the school's design. Furthermore, of the public schools visited another was completely designed by an outside organization and another had an entire new structure added to the site with funding from an independent donor. This pattern is common for the Ministry when constructing new schools because no money for construction comes from local sources. Several organizations have approached the Ministry over the years, such as the Child Friend Schools funded by UNICEF, to deploy school pilot programs for research.²⁰ This presents a strange situation, where public school design can start to be viewed largely as a product of the humanitarian aid phenomenon. Each school starts to be unique across the OPT and falls more within groupings that are categorized according to who the donor is, as opposed to the educational system or even geography. These designs also reflect developments in theory on school architectural design, because humanitarian agencies tend to stay up-to-date with the most recent research and have more flexibility in terms of funding for innovation.

This lends to a great deal of diversity for public school design across the OPT and from the public school sampling newer projects had different architectural designs. The newest of all the schools, built in 2012, had a large atrium in the center, a skylight overtop, and all circulation and classrooms wrapping around the center. This school used sound panels to mitigate noise in the atrium and was painted with bright colors. One school had two buildings, an older one with a part that was constructed in 2000 and another that was newly built in 2012. The old structure had a typical rectangular form with a long

²⁰ For programs that have implemented pilot studies and infrastructure design for schools see: The Child Friendly Schools Case Study by UNICEF, Palestinian Territory Belgium Partnership Program, Arab Fund Support Program, Agence Francaise Development Grant, Support to Palestinian Education Program and the KfW Development Bank.

corridor as its central axis. The new structure was the only school visited across all three systems that had curved surfaces on its façade and was a bright orange as opposed to the traditional, white limestone. A school built in 2000 indicated older, traditional school design; and, also had a rectangular form with a corridor for classroom access. The last of the public schools was built in 1999, and fell more in line with older, traditional building types as well. It had a simple rectangular building form, with a corridor cutting through its center and classrooms along this axis. The schools that were built in 2012 were much more colorful and unique in their design; while those from 2000 and 1999 older styles. Thus, in looking at the sampling and reflecting off of publications from pilot studies, there seems to be a trajectory of moving towards more diversified and unique designs as a result of humanitarian aid influence. So when analyzing the public schools in the OPT, certain generalizations can be drawn however each school should mainly be treated independently of the others.

In looking at the neighborhood context of the public school case study, it is an area that primarily serves a middle class young adult population with apartment complexes around the school. This population is not the same community as the students that are attending the school, and thus most commute either by foot or car. The school is located approximately one mile to the east of the Pesagot Israeli settlement and to the approximately four miles north of the Israeli constructed separation wall. There were no real complaints in regards to the school being too close to structures of the occupation; however, these manifestations would still serve as a background to the everyday life of the children. Some of the children come from other villages and are required to travel through checkpoints and the Separation Wall, and have mobility issues in regards to delayed travel. Thus, the location of the school is not necessarily ideal for the type of population it is serving but the expansive lends to more space for the school zone.

The public school is designed to be integrated into the site, nestled about 20 feet down into a hill. Its perimeter wall is actually a massive concrete retaining wall that traced its edges. In the back of the building was a large basketball court, elevated slightly higher than the rest of the site, lending to a feeling of openness. Integration into the landscape can serve as a positive development in school design especially in regards to countering the negative and invasive structures of the occupation. Structures like the Separation Wall and settlements have often been described by historians and architects as being alien-like and unnatural to the land.²¹ In designing schools to be more naturally inserted in the land, there is an opportunity to utilize the architecture in a manner that promotes a sense of belonging for Palestinian youth. School architecture can also serve as a sort of curriculum or be enriched with the possibility of teaching lessons. Schools should be designed in a way that they provide youth and communities with the ability to reflect on their identity as Palestinians, be active members of society, and feel like owners of their own landscape.

On the exterior surfaces of this site, murals depicting far off places are used as a means to beautify the school grounds. The use of artwork in school spaces is not a new phenomenon that is specific to the OPT. However, the art must be made relevant to the immediate context of the society and should be able to make an important statement. In other public schools in the sampling, art work was sometimes used to teach students lessons about issues like hygiene, respecting the environment, recycling, and physical activity. These are positive ways to use artwork as an addition towards holistic curriculums that help develop the whole child in all aspects of his or her life. These types of work can be furthered if they are considered as pieces that can directly come into dialogue with the gray world of an occupation. The intention should not be to design art that can be politically charged, but that is transformative and meaningful.

²¹ Nitzan-Shiftan, Alona. "On Concrete and Stone: Shifts and Conflicts in Israeli Architecture." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 2009: 51.

Kamal Boullata describes a mosaic mural that was designed by artist Abed Abedi in the mid-1980s for a school in the Galilee. The artist focused on recreating a biblical story that could be reinterpreted to encourage cooperation and connectivity between Muslim and Christian religious groups, while simultaneously reflecting on the nature of living in conflict.

Here, Abedi, a Muslim by tradition, working together with a Christian leader ... did not play to the theatrics of the great theme of "Palestine" nor to the confining interpretation of religious art. Instead, Abedi drew his inspiration from a legend that he interpreted through his palpable experience of Christians and Muslims living in a Jewish state.²²

Furthermore, the artist used the children of the school as the builders of the mosaic which enabled them to, "physically recreate their own environment with the new imagery of a legend that functions as a bridge between a mythical past and a promising future."²³ Engaging students in the creation of their own spaces instills a sense of empowerment and ownership of the learning environment around them. These types of design mechanisms are what serve as responsive, as opposed to simply reactive.

Because of the expansive site, the school building was constructed with a large footprint. The building is broken into two volumes with classrooms and interior spaces; and, a volume that connects the two with a corridor. The building sits staggered on the landscape, making movement inside the structure slightly more dynamic where students and staff can move around corners and wind down the hall. However, on the smallest scale, classrooms are still the same rectangular plan as was found in more traditional buildings in the OPT. Outside the building, exterior spaces are also very large. However, these are all spacious black top school yards with no elements that break up the space that can enrich it programmatically. Thus, the school building and the outdoor spaces, which together make up the school zone, have much potential for innovation and creativity in design. Only time will tell how this building and its spaces transform.

²² Boullata, Kamal. "Palestinian Expression Inside a Cultural Ghetto." *Middle East Report*, 1989: 25.

²³ Ibid, 26.

In conclusion, in analyzing the public school case study, along with other public schools from the sampling, it was determined that newer public schools in the OPT have the potential to be designed in more creative and innovative ways because of influence from humanitarian aid designs; such as, the school with the curved exterior façades and the brightly painted walls. The case study school was specifically designed in a way that was more integrated into the landscape; however, the architecture of the building still reflects more traditional forms and plans. There seems to be an over-emphasis on site-integration, which is often proposed as a mechanism to make school more relevant and incorporated into a community. However, this should not result in overlooking potentials for upgrading interior designs and building forms which can reflect contemporary discussions on learning environment theory. Furthermore, the immediate context in which this school is constructed does not necessarily seem to be the same environment in which students are living. Students must travel to this school from distant places, making travel more dangerous and time consuming. Great consideration should be placed on how students are arriving to school and how a child's approach can impact the design of the school. It was learned from this analysis that artwork in school should also make a statement that is meaningful and engaging with the students. Artwork, as well as architecture, in school place must be able to serve as a platform for building hope and vision, enabling the youth in the OPT to see a future beyond walls, checkpoints, and settlements.

SYNTHESIS OF THREE SCHOOL CASE STUDIES

Since the British Mandate, locating the territorial border between Jews and Arabs has been a tenuous project. Yet such a border is at the heart of the “symbolic resources” that both Israelis and Palestinians deem necessary to establish visceral ties to the land. Throughout history, one of the most explicit, and most meaningful, ways to bind people to the land, and to history, has been architecture.²⁴

As academic Alona Nitzan-Shiftan reveals in the above passage, borders and divisions as manifested through structures of an occupation result in the need to design architecture in a way that is long-lasting and meaningful in order to institute cultural and social ties to the land for both Palestinians and Israelis. The architecture of schools are not outside of this realm, as they are potentially the ultimate structures in encouraging cultural ties to land because of the nature of their function as cultivators of future citizens.

The analysis of the three schools looks at how each educational system approaches its own learning environments, and what positive and negative aspects can be ascertained from each one. Looking at school architecture at this stage in the OPT is essential for assessing the opportunities for growth. Furthermore, the analysis across the three systems implies that schools can begin to view one another as potential resources for promoting a more integrated educational system.

In the OPT, the conflict consistently presents a problem for developing architectural ties to the land. It is difficult to predict when violence, trauma, and crisis can occur, which can result in the complete or partial destruction of buildings. Each school in the sampling has within its history the narrative of conflict as recalled through staff, families, and students. Resilience in school architecture is inextricably tied to the strength and investment of a given community. However, school architecture also has the potential to develop and nurture those ties if it is given the opportunity to develop in the land overtime.

²⁴ Nitzan-Shiftan, Alona. "On Concrete and Stone: Shifts and Conflicts in Israeli Architecture." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 2009: 52.

Private schools showed that smaller and localized administrative bodies can have more control over the construction and renovation of their school grounds. But public and UNRWA schools taught that global networks can offer new ideas and innovations in learning environments in regards to architecture and site-planning. There must be a balance between the two levels of administrative work, where global and local come together to produce architecture that is more relevant to communities. In looking at neighborhood context, UNRWA schools show that denying the immediate site can result in exclusion of experiences that are a part of a child's development and growth. Opportunity to counter this may lie in site-integrated designs as promoted by public school designs. Further, if school grounds have time to develop, private schools show that buildings can move beyond the immediate school zone – resulting in shared ownership over the neighborhood by locals and school community.

In regards to school architecture, older schools regardless of system tend to be more traditional, with spaces that do not promote diversity and creativity as discussed in newer theories on learning environments. However, newer schools, specifically found in the public school sector because of the great influence from humanitarian aid, are on a trajectory towards new, innovating designs. Standardization, as in the UNRWA schools, is not necessarily viewed as a negative thing in this report as it is helpful in providing infrastructure for education at a faster pace. However, there should be attempts to redesign the school façade and outdoor spaces in a way that is more locally relevant and thoughtful. Finally, on the child's scale, his or her journey from home to school encompasses within it a series of visual and physical experiences related to the conflict. Regardless of school system, all children live the realities of the occupation with Israeli structures of fragmentation and enclavisation all around them. Thus, there should be an emphasis both in school curriculum as well as through responsive learning environments to promote positivity in a militarized land.

Israeli military and occupation structures have been inserted into the realm of reality for all children, regardless of class, identity, and status. Confronting these structures is part of the everyday routine of a child, including their journey to and from school. While the conflict continues, architecture of schools must provide a way for this landscape to be re-visualized by children. There is a potential in school architecture, where it can serve not just the children that use its spaces but the community as well. Conceptualizing learning environments in this all-encompassing and responsive way can enable greater links between community and school on a social level, perhaps alleviating some of the difficulties of life under an occupation.

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