



Spatial Development of Bethlehem and East Jerusalem: A bleak future?

By Ahmad El-Atrash



Bethlehem, like Jerusalem, is considered a sacred city for the three monotheistic religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Until 1967 – before the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory that included the occupation of East Jerusalem – Bethlehem was developing and spatially growing, maintaining an organic connection with Jerusalem city. Since the occupation, Bethlehem city, along with its twin cities of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour (henceforth the Bethlehem City-area) has witnessed an ever-changing flexible frontier with Jerusalem and thus, the long established socio-cultural,

*Spatially Severed - The Bethlehem-Jerusalem Road.
Photo by Ahmad El-Atrash.*

economic, and above all spiritual lifeline between the Bethlehem City-area and Jerusalem has been undermined by the Israeli matrix of control manifested by settlements, outposts, by-pass roads, and the Separation Wall that infiltrates the city and dissects the urban fabric of the Bethlehem City-area from Jerusalem city.

Bethlehem City-area was considered an inclusive neighborhood of Jerusalem until it was extracted from the milieu of its territorial realm, which ultimately directed the urban growth away from

It is clear that if the status quo persists, the repercussions of spatial development in present-day Palestine at large will be catastrophic, undermining the sustainability of the foreseen Palestinian statehood. If the Israeli occupation is not ended, sustainability of Palestinian cities will never eventuate - especially if Jerusalem city, the center of life, remains out of reach for Palestinians.

Jerusalem, and thus away from the center of life for Palestinians. A probing look at the urban morphology of the Bethlehem City-area today reveals that it is characterized by a sprawl of fabric. The directional and rotational trajectory of growth for the urban fabric of the Bethlehem City-area has radically changed since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank territory. The resulting

Bethlehem in the foreground, the Separation Wall, and the settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim.



