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# Building and Developing HaMesika Park: From Resistance to Collaboration

**Diego Rotman and Eytan Shouker**

## Toward the Slow Movement: From Fast Freeway to the Railway Park

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### Introduction

At a time when it was unusual in Israel for a group of residents to organize a grassroots campaign against a municipal decision about urban planning—and triumph—something even more uncommon occurred in

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Jerusalem: three students from the *Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design Jerusalem* instigated the first steps for such a campaign and launched important actions that contributed greatly to the establishment of a green park where a four-lane highway had been approved. Route 34 was slated to be paved along the route of the old railway from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, and thence through the *Pat* and *Gonen* neighborhoods at the outskirts of the *Talpiot* industrial zone, the *Mekor Hayim* neighborhood, and *Emek Refaim* Street.[1] The joint initiative, initiated by neighbours and students from Bezalel and later joined by the *Garin Dvash* (Honey Group) of the *Society for Protection of Nature* and the *Keshet* School, ended with the halting of the urban plan to pave the new road and the construction of a park along the railway tracks—dubbed the *Railway Park [Park hamesila]*. The park has turned this inter-urban nexus into one of the most challenging connections within one of the most divided cities in Israel and beyond.

This study reconstructs the brief and recent history of the mobilization process and the actions taken by members of the *Art, Activism, and Public Space* course at *Bezalel Academy*, in collaboration with the residents of the *Gonenim* neighborhood in Jerusalem, by collating information that highlight the dialogical nature of the process and the achievements of the joint campaign. It has been written from the perspective of Diego Rotman, Lea Mauas, Eytan Shouker, and Eldad Cidor, who served as lecturers of the course.

The compilation of the various texts into a single narrative will reflect the power relations between the lecturers and the students, between the neighborhood residents and the course lecturers and students, and between all of them and representatives of the establishment. Examining the various relationships enabled to articulate how the *Railway Park* itself serves as a platform for integrating and competing interpretations and narratives.

## The Program

The multidisciplinary course *Art and Activism in the Public Sphere* was the brainchild of Eytan Shouker, who in November 2003 put forward a pro-

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[1] The municipality's original plan was to build two projects along the railway tracks: in the eastern section—between *Bak'ah* and *Emek Refaim*—a walking trail and cycling track, and a highway in the southwestern section, between *Gonenim* and *Mekor Haim*, *Talpiot*, and *Beit Safafa*.

posal to the president of *Bezalel Academy* to establish a special projects unit that would address social, community, media, and cultural issues. The course's goal would be to develop ideas that will bring together the professional skills of various departments in the academy in a number of projects.

In the wake of this initiative, the artist and photographer Eldad Cidor joined up with Eytan Shouker. Together, they taught a course that sought to develop art projects in collaboration with various communities (2004–2005). Following their collaboration with the *Sderot Conference for Culture and Society*, it was decided to hold the summer semester of the course in the town of *Sderot*, next to the *Gaza Strip*, at the height of Israel's disengagement process from the *Gaza Strip*. During this period, a hail of Kassam rockets rained upon the town from the *Gaza Strip*, which disrupted the local residents' daily routine. After two years in the town, during which time ten projects had been produced, Lea Mauas and I—members of the *Sala-Manca group*[2]—joined the course. Since its third year, and after intensive discussions between the four course facilitators, we decided to work with the students only in the city of Jerusalem (both western and eastern parts), because we felt that we should study, investigate, respond, and create in the urban context where the *Bezalel Academy* and the students themselves reside. We also hoped that in this way we would establish a dialogue between us and the communities that we worked with during the school year. In the 11 years since the course began, over 45 projects have been developed in the public sphere, in collaboration with a variety of communities. The course, as presented in *Bezalel's* online journal in 2013, "is intended for students interested in the development and implementation of an art project, whose goal is not only to reflect a certain reality, but to intervene in it and even change it" (http://www.bezalel.ac.il/res/academic/shnaton2010/klal.pdf).

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[2] The *Sala-Manca Group* is an independent group of artists that has been active in Jerusalem since 2000, and produce creative works in a wide variety of fields, such as performance, video, poetry, curatorship, and public art. The group consists of two artists—Lea Mauas and Diego Rothman. The group works in collaboration with many artists, curators, and cultural institutions in Israel and abroad, and has published the newsletter *Footnotes*, curated the Heara (footnote) events of independent art, and established and directs the *Mamuta Center* for Art and Research at *the Hansen House* in Jerusalem.

The course is divided into two semesters. The first is dedicated to a survey of the artistic projects taking place outside the galleries and museums that have a direct bearing upon the community and their social, economic, and political circumstances[3] and to learning theoretical concepts that are key to understanding the field. The second semester is devoted to the design and production of joint projects for the group of students taking part in the course. Through these projects, students are asked to leave the "safe" academic space and operate in the public sphere.

In the summer semester, students are required to develop three or four projects within small work groups. The course supervisors accompany the projects and are responsible for preparing the students to go out into the field, conduct a preliminary investigation, and formulate the proposal for the project that they wish to implement with their chosen community. After deciding which projects can be produced during the summer semester, the facilitators accompany students as they develop the idea and construct a budget and guide them on how to present the project to members of the community.

As part of the project production, the facilitators expand the theoretical aspects of the course that had been learned during the first semester, and expand the students' toolbox by providing practical and special tools for the project at hand (such as techniques for work in areas where students have insufficient knowledge), as well as a discussion on the social and political aspects of the community they have chosen to work with. As they go through the design and execution stages of the project, the students are exposed to the voice of the 'Other'. This process aims to turn the students and community representatives into project partners. Working with the community challenges the knowledge that students acquired during their theoretical studies, and how they are used to working in the academic framework. In the process, they acquire knowledge and practices that are not usually taught in art studies (such as drawing up a contract, creating collaborations, and using sponsorships). At the same time, the students

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[3] In the past nine years, projects have been realized thanks to funding from the ITC and the support of organizations and foundations, such as the *Sderot Conference for Society*, as well as the support and mentorship of the Dean's Office of the *Bezalel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, and grants from the *Perach* Organization.

and facilitators discuss ethical and legal issues related to actions in the public sphere, as well as aesthetic and political issues. Projects involving collaboration with any urban entity raise further issues related to the municipal bureaucracy and ways of dealing with those bodies. All the projects require the students to gain interdisciplinary knowledge that transcends the boundaries of the disciplines they have studied and the boundaries of the discourse of artistic practice. This, in turn, leads to a discussion on the function and role of the artist in society.

The learning process enables both students and facilitators to be exposed to power politics and the mechanisms wield it in various social arenas. However, the academic framework is responsible not only for expanding the knowledge of the students, but also of the facilitators and others involved in the project. It is also a powerful body that enables students to open doors, forge collaborations, enlist support, as well as produce and implement the planned project. The very opportunity of collaborating with one of Israel's central institutions of art instruction—*Bezalel Academy*—provides a kind of stamp of approval that opens up possibilities that would not have existed in other circumstances. The deliberate use of the academic establishment to empower the students and the community is therefore a strategy that benefits all the partners in the project.

The lecturers see artistic practice as a central component in expanding the students' and instructors' body of knowledge, and therefore the projects serve as the learning material for the courses that follow. The success of a project, the difficulties that arise in its course or failure, as well as the documentation of the stages of planning and production provide exceptionally good raw material for instructing the next batch of students. In the 11 years that the course has been running, the students' projects have become one of the main bodies of knowledge through which the connection between art, public space, and activism is studied. The city has become an art laboratory.

## Fragments from a Collaborative Discourse

In 2007, Yaniv Turgeman was a third-year student of architecture at *Bezalel Academy*. As part of the course, he decided to hold a fictitious

competition for the design of the new *Bezalel* building on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, which was supposed to serve as the future home of the Israeli Defense Forces' (IDF) Institute for Advanced Studies. This was supposedly in response to rumors that the various colleges of the IDF (the Command & Staff College, The National Security College, and the Military Academy) were about to move to the *Bezalel Academy* building on Mount Scopus, while the Academy would relocate to Jerusalem's town center. His competition poster was inspired by the actual poster created for the design competition for the new *Bezalel Academy* campus in the city center at the *Russian Compound*. To explain the change in the competition's purpose, Turgeman's poster unveils a (fictitious) collaboration between *Bezalel Academy* and the IDF. The poster was put up at several departments in *Bezalel's* architectural studies building, and he even managed to dupe the architecture department's office staff—who failed to spot the spoof—into distributing it by e-mail to the department's entire student body. As a result, the poster sparked a lively discussion about the future of the academy, the place of the IDF at its future location on Mount Scopus, and the reluctance of the students of architecture to take part in the design and consideration of the academies' future campus in the city's downtown core.[4]

The use of critical alternative design proposals (either real or fictitious), guerrilla communication (culture jamming), or fictitious campaigns, in a bid to raise awareness or to spark thought or criticism on a given topic, and interventions in the public sphere are some of the actions and tactics used by the students in the course, after learning certain artistic and activist practices as part of the curriculum. The use of humor, "playfulness," and spoofs is characteristic of the tactics of artistic resistance. Such undermining of the culturally dominant messages transmitted by hegemonic forces is rooted in avant-garde movements such as Dada and the Situationist movement.[5] Debord ([1970](#)) argued that the power of *détour-*

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[4] The actual plan to transfer the IDF colleges to Mount Scopus was approved in June 2012, with the designated site situated between the Hebrew University and the Mormon University, in the eastern part of Mount Scopus.

[5] The Situationist movement was an international movement of avant-garde artists, intellectuals, theorists, and social activists that operated mainly in Europe in the years 1957–1972. The movement was influenced by Marxist theories and avant-garde art movements of the 1920s—particu-

*nement* stems from the additional meaning it gives to a given message or object, besides its familiar meaning. The students' course projects did indeed, among other things, feature examples of such hijacking of meaning (Firat & Kuryel, 2010).

Turgeman's proposals were provocative alternatives to Jerusalem's urban planning: The proposal within the intervention exercise was aimed at sparking a critical discussion of the plan to transfer the IDF colleges to the Mount Scopus campus as well as the design competition of the new *Bezalel Academy* building.[6] The new and no less challenging idea for a project at the public space arose following Turgeman's participation in a studio course led by the architect Professor Ayala Ronal as part of his studies at the Department of Architecture. While attending our course, Turgeman sent an e-mail to his lecturers on March 24, 2007, in which he put forward a proposal to preserve an area in Jerusalem by rejecting a plan to build a new road within it, and instead developing it into a green space along the route (from the *Hinnom Valley* to the *Malha* neighborhood)—noting that there are residents and organizations who may be interested in joining the campaign.[7] This is an opportunity, he argued, to develop a green campaign in a very simple fashion and help the local residents to learn and spread the word about it. Turgeman believed that the students could help by using the tools at their disposal.

Initially, the *Bezalel Academy* students thought that they possessed all the necessary knowledge and skills that the neighborhood residents lacked in their fight against the authorities, but (as shall presently become apparent) this perception changed during the joint effort.

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larly Dada and Surrealism. One of its principal criticisms of capitalism was related to the notion of the "spectacle". Debord was one of the movement's leaders.

[6] For more on the international competition for the design of the new *Bezalel Academy* campus, see Peleg-Rotem (2006). For more on the critique of the design, see Yaacobson (2011).

[7] The alternative plan Turgeman was responding to was designed at the request of the Jerusalem Development Authority as part of the master plan of the *Emek Refaim* Park. The architects Yair Avigdor, Raz Matalon, Hagit Bergman, Shlomi Zeevi, David Eran, and Roman Katz participated in designing the master plan. At first, the plan was supposed to create a "leisure route" dedicated to sports activities, parallel to a narrower road whose paving the municipality had approved. The plan was divided into four parts: Part I—a "cultural area", including a section of approximately 800 meters from the train station near the *Khan* Theatre to the *Bethlehem* Junction; Part II—an urban boulevard from *Bethlehem* Road to *Oranim* Junction; Part III—an extension of the boulevard to the *Patt* Junction; and Part IV—from the *Pat* junction to the railway station at *Malha*.

Two other students joined Turgeman's project: Arbel Berger—a student from the Photography Department, and Niro Taub—a student from the Visual Communications Department. Going out into the field made the students realize that they faced a much more daunting challenge than they had been told: contrary to Turgeman's belief, there was no organized community in the neighborhood, and only a few residents were even aware of plans to build a road through the area that had been designated to be an urban "green lung." The students therefore had to find activists in the neighborhood; spread the information about the new plans for the public space; put forward alternative ideas for the space; and try to establish a group of residents with whom they could develop their summer project.

## The Project in the Gonenim ("Katamonim")

In 1952, housing projects were built south of the *Katamon* neighborhood (on lands of the Arab village Beit Safafa), to accommodate Jewish immigrants from Arab countries. At first, the immigrants were provided with two-story apartment blocks that were under government ownership. The apartments themselves were small, but the areas surrounding the buildings were quite large, and allowed the cultivation of vegetation, including fruit trees. In the years that followed, further housing was built for young couples. Some were built in the "train carriage" style—three- or four-story apartment blocks with several entrances. The neighborhoods were built one by one, and were named *Gonen A*, *Gonen B*, and so on, in the order of their construction, but the name "*Gonen*"—the Hebrew name given to the original *Katamon* neighborhood—was never taken up by the public in common parlance, so these neighborhoods became known as *HaKatamonim* ("the Katamons").

The urban and economic development of the southern Jerusalem area that began after the *Six-Day War* included the establishment of business centers in the *Talpiot* and *Malha* industrial zones, the construction of new neighborhoods, and the paving of new major traffic arteries. These changes also triggered a revitalization of the *Gonenim* neighborhoods. After the 1970s, most of the previously government-owned apartments in the neighborhood were sold to their tenants, who began improving and expanding them to improve their living conditions. Since the year

2000, young families have begun to move into the neighborhood, in appreciation of the low-rise buildings and open spaces that are lacking in most of the neighborhoods closer to the city center.

Turgeman, Berger, and Taub's project began by identifying neighborhood residents who were willing to meet with the students to formulate initial courses of action. The invitation to the first meeting, which was distributed via e-mail, reveals the students' approach: residents were invited to halt the implementation of the plan to develop Road #34—which the Jerusalem Municipality had already approved—and to offer green alternatives instead. The invitation was signed by the students under their names without stating their institutional affiliation with the *Bezalel Academy*— which made it look as though they, too, were local residents. The meeting was at the private home of Ms. Sharon Elizur, a local resident—which also suggested that this was an independent grassroots initiative, unrelated to existing familiar organizations operating in the neighborhood.

The initial announcement was sent to only a handful of local residents—Amit Assis, Sharon Elizur, Yossi Blonder, and Shai Betner—in the hope that they would spread the word to a wider circle of residents. At the first meeting, eleven residents took part, apart from the students and facilitators from *Bezalel Academy*. Following this first meeting, a synopsis of the discussion was e-mailed to all participants, titled "Summary of the meeting on Aug 1st regarding actions for a green space in the *Katamonim* area, currently designated to be a highway rather than a park."

The document's title demonstrates the transition from resistance rhetoric ("against the highway") to positive language ("for a green space"). The discourse adopted by the residents and students became one of the main tactics used in the attempt to change the urban plan. The synopsis reveals that three proposals were raised for the space in question: (1) an urban park, (2) a health trail, and (3) Road #34. The aims of the meeting and future courses of action were also agreed. These included an investigation into the current extent of green areas in Israel's large cities:[8] the

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[8] See the results of the study conducted by the residents that were published in December 2007 in a blog established by the residents in promotion of the campaign:

"A week ago, we promised to reveal data and maps that prove that the [provision of] green areas in the southern neighborhoods of the city and in the *Gonen* neighbourhood in particular are sub-standard by any measure. […] As evident from the maps, the *Gonenim* neighbourhood has been discriminated against, and its green areas situation is sub-standard, in

development of projects to enhance the environment and society; raising local awareness—particularly with regard to all things "green"; and enhancing the community's social cohesion. Among the projects proposed at this meeting that were ultimately realized were the creation of environmental sculptures in collaboration with the neighborhood youth and laying out a "green strip" in the middle of the road for a few hours to highlight the absence of green space in the neighborhood. A decision was made in principle to carry out several "positive" changes to the local surroundings, and to increase awareness of the importance of green spaces in the area.

The success and effectiveness of the first meeting not only led to the formation of a detailed plan of actions, with a proper timeline and goals but also—as evident from the document—established bonds of mutual trust between the residents and the students, which made possible their actions toward a common goal. The invitation to the second meeting was to "all the residents of the neighborhood". The purpose of the meeting was no longer defined in relation to the threat of paving the highway, but rather "for a green space in the neighborhood." Moreover, it did not take place at a private home but in the open public space, near the *Adika* Supermarket. It was presented as an opportunity to express opinions and positions, and to exchange ideas. The invitation was signed "The Neighborhood Steering Committee and members of *Bezalel.*" It was sent to a wider mailing list.

Amit Assis added in the invitation mail a text of his own, including an introduction to the process of awakening in the neighborhood:

Hello everyone,

Several groups in the neighborhood are working to involve the residents in determining the appearance of the neighborhood: the synagogue community and the *Keshet* school, the Physical Committee at the community center, the campaign for a green park along the railway tracks, and other groups and initiatives. The groups were organized among people who care about the city in general and the neighborhood in particular.

Last week, a meeting was held with people from *Bezalel Academy* who want to help us organize a broad base of support for our activities in the

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relation to other neighborhoods […]". (from http://israblog.nana10.co.il/blogread.asp?blog=497224&blogcode=8292997 [In Hebrew]; accessed November 30, 2018)

neighborhood. Attached is an invitation to a meeting for information activities and mobilization of residents for involvement and actions. Please pass it on to your neighbors in the neighborhood, or hang the attached file at bus stops, on electricity poles and in apartment stairwells as you see fit and come along in your hundreds and thousands.

—Amit

From the correspondence it is evident that the nature of the group's actions needed elaboration and explanation. Assis subsequently wrote another e-mail, in which he presented the residents' initiative as a campaign against the municipality, whose plans were liable to adversely affect the character of the neighborhood (the plan to build a four-lane highway, demolish-and-develop construction plans, etc.). He cited the reasons for the area's neglect—first and foremost, the residents' lack of awareness of the influence they can have on the appearance of the public space, which enabled developers to promote projects that were not in the residents' interests—and ended with a call to the residents to assume responsibility, to lobby and self-mobilize, and to gain more power in their struggle against the municipality and the developers.

## From Text into Practice

As part of the discourse on green urban activity, the student's group decided to give itself and its series of actions a name—*Green Spot*. The ironic label was deliberate: within the gray neighborhood, the green might appear as a spot, but it is not one of dirt but a beacon of urban renewal—or more precisely, a precursor to making green the norm or a goal in relation to the neighborhood's future appearance. The tagline chosen by the students to accompany the group's name was "Paving the Way to the Park"—a play on the establishment's rhetoric of paving a road, with the opposite goal: instead of a road, the proposal was to pave a path to the green park to be built in the area designated for the road—transforming rapid traffic to slow movement.

The rhetorical struggle reflects the discrepancy between the municipality's perception of the neighborhood area and how it should develop, and

how it is perceived by the residents and the students. de Certeau (2012) describes how individuals can make subversive use of rituals, representations, and rules by which a space is administered. Instead of adopting strategies of frontal resistance, they can conduct themselves in a manner that offers a different interpretation to what the establishment is offering. The subversive use of the social order weakens the power of the existing order. de Certeau examines the uses and manipulations made by end users, rather than those of people in authority. He underlines the central importance of the act of speech that occurs on the linguistic plane, and suggests that its impact be examined, as well as the processes of appropriation and reappropriation of language by its spokesmen. These practices, he explains, make it possible for the voices of the oppressed groups to be heard. In the case at hand, with the help of the simple tools at their disposal, the students and residents adopted the role of the municipality in the urban design of the neighborhood: they took the design into their own hands, by performing actions that advanced the design of *Gonen Park*, long before the architectural design process began, and before the urban planning was changed. In effect, the *Gonenim* residents and the students were engaged in a reappropriation of language and space. The textual and rhetorical actions they took may be regarded as poetic linguistic practices with great transformative power.

The first *Green Spot* action took place on Friday, August 17, 2007, near the *Adika* Supermarket. The action was simple and clear: a mural on one of the "unsightly" walls of the building facing *Yossi Ben Yo'ezer* St. The students painted the outlines, and other students filled in the painting together with children and residents of the neighborhood. The purpose of the event was to serve as a platform for collaborative creation, and in particular to introduce the students to the community; create social involvement; recruit new members; and disseminate information about the group's goals and future plans. The operation was a success, and resulted both in a painted wall and in the enlisting of many new forces from the neighborhood.

The next steps of *Green Spot* centered on two aspects: enhancing community cohesion and awareness of the road plan and of the campaign for a green neighborhood and holding events locally—in particular, establishing "green facts" (even if only symbolic ones) around the neighbor-

hood and in the designated park area. The first example was the hanging of cardboard signs in the shape of trees that directed local passersby to the park—that is to the vacant area where they wanted to build the park in the neighborhood (Fig. 6.1).

A second action, in a similar vein, involved placing sculptures in form of "trees" in the area where the activists wanted to build the park. The signs and "planting" of the trees served as "proofs" on the ground that underlined the gap between reality and the green utopia. Their presence made the park a real prospect—in the eyes of the residents and the students alike. Both the signs and the sculptures were an example of collective design and action that opposed the urban planning proposed by the municipality. Indeed, over time, the metal trees became the symbol of the struggle for the park.[9]

The demands for a green space and a park are similar to actions that have occurred elsewhere to reclaiming the public space. One of the major movements in this field is the *Road Liberation movement*, which strives to change the typical use of roads in Britain and elsewhere in the world. In the wake of its actions, many highways become a pedestrian street at certain times of the day, which serves as a meeting place and as a space where a "temporary utopia" might exist (Jordan, 2002). Jordan also quotes Raoul Vaneigem, a notable member of the Situationists, who foresaw the potential of turning the street into a space of cultural revolution, and wrote:

> Placing 'what could be' in the path of 'what is' and celebrating the 'here and now' in the road of the rush for 'there and later', it hopes to reenergize the possibility of radical change. […] It is an expansive desire; for freedom, for creativity; to truly live. (Jordan, 2002)

Thus, the *Green Spot* rhetoric conveyed a clear message: there is no longer a need to *build* a park—only to *continue to build* it, to expand it. This is no utopia, but a reality. Defining the abandoned area as a park and as a site for green and cultural activity in the neighborhood was one of the main tactical actions that characterized the work of students and residents in campaigning for the park. Tactics and strategy are two key con-

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[9] According to a report published in *Kol Hazman* on August 22, 2008, following the theft of one of the sculptures, a picture of the sculptures is added, with the caption: "The symbol of the campaign to establish the *Railway Park* in the *Katamonim* neighbourhood—one of three sculptures created by students from *Bezalel*—was stolen last week. The environmental sculpture was put up by the residents in an area where they demand to build the park" (p. 28).

**Fig. 6.1** First *Green Spot* promotion flyer. Design: Niro Taub

cepts that de Certeau (2012) borrowed from the culture of warfare, and redefined. As he put it, "strategy" is how the establishment defines its actions—which, by its very nature, cannot be easily dismantled and reassembled. A "tactic", on the other hand, is an action that is created in the absence of place, because "no demarcation of externality is sufficient […] autonomy" (ibid., p. 118). Tactics are the place of the 'Other', insofar as they are deployed in a territory run by the rules of an external authority. In the case of the *Gonenim* neighborhood, tactics were how the neighborhood residents and students acted against the urban strategy. In contrast to the slow and cumbersome urban bureaucratic system, the activists executed a rapid demarcation of the park through cultural, rhetorical, and artistic actions that created facts on the ground and changed how the area in question was perceived—in the eyes of both the residents and the authorities. Graeber (2002) argues that the goal of the new global anarchist movement is "to reinvent democracy," (p. 70) and ultimately to reinvent daily life in general. While the construction of the *Railway Park* had no anarchist motives, by challenging the established urban planning and design methods, and through the inhabitants' attempt to design their space—and their habits and leisure culture—by themselves, they introduced a dimension of "reinvented democracy" into their action.

In September 2007, in parallel with the *Green Spot* actions, Yossi Saidov and other neighbours established an online blog titled "Blog of the Residents Committee for the Construction of the Railway Park in South Jerusalem," where, on November 18, 2007, he published a post titled A Vision of the Railway Park:

> We, residents of the city's southern neighborhoods, see the importance of planning and developing the open spaces along the railway tracks that pass near our homes and within our communities. Over the past year, the residents of the city's southern neighborhoods have got together and worked to raise awareness, and to discuss the municipality's plans for their neighborhoods. The fate of the open spaces along the old railway tracks will affect the lives of tens of thousands of residents of the neighborhoods of *Gonenim* (Katamonim), *Mekor Haim*, *Bak'ah*, the *German Colony*, *Beit Safafa*, and Old Katamon—some of which already suffer from a dearth of green areas today. […] We take upon ourselves to involve as many of our

neighbors as possible in the processes of envisioning, design, and development. In return, we demand that the municipality help us make the dream a reality […].[10]

This blog was a tool for magnifying the impact of actions already taken, by calling on residents to take part in future actions, to publish articles on the subject in the media, organizing letter campaigns to the municipality (and receive the municipality's replies to these), report on the responses of municipality functionaries, and elected officials in conversations with the residents' association, and document the students' projects and the responses they received.

The *Green Spot* actions ended at the end of the summer of 2007, and the residents continued their organized actions with the authorities independently. In the following school year, we presented the course students with the *Green Spot* project and encouraged them to continue the actions of their predecessors, or to revive it as part of the course's summer project. Guy Eisner, a third-year student at the Photography Department, chose to develop a follow-up project with the residents of *Gonenim* and to continue using the name *Green Spot*. His project dealt with collecting "historical" stories of the neighborhood's residents about the area, in a bid to illustrate highlights from local histories by presenting them in the no-man's-land of the railway tracks.

In keeping with the practices of folklore researchers, Eisner contacted neighbors and approached residents at their homes and on the street, in a bid to find stories that would uncover the richness of the neighborhood's local lore. He managed to collect stories from about 30 residents, and of these he chose nine stories about particular points along the route of the planned road, or the envisaged park. Ron Dror, a student at the Visual Communication Department at *Bezalel*, illustrated the stories, and short excerpts were printed, with illustrations, on ceramic tiles attached to short granulite columns that were placed opposite the relevant sites. Together, the series of stories created a circular 800-meter-long

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[10] http://israblog.nana10.co.il/blogread.asp?blog=497224&blogcode=7948600    [In    Hebrew], accessed November 30, 2018.

פארק המסילה | מסלול הקיפוד

רעיון 'פארק המסילה' עלה בעקבות הימצאותו של קיפוד דרוס בצומת אורנים על ידי שוחרי טבע ואיכות סביבה. הם ביקשו ליצור שביל בטוח עבור חיות בר אל העיר ומחוצה לה. השטחים מסביב לפסי הרכבת, שעברה במקום עד שנת 1998, נשארו פראיים אך מוזנחים, וכיום מבקשים התושבים להקים באזור פארק ומסלול אופניים והליכה לרווחת הקהילה.

אורך המסלול המעגלי כ-800 מטר זמן הליכה מתונה כ-15 דק'

ראש השנה תשס"ט, אוקטובר 2008

יוזם המסלול | גיא אייזנר, סטודנט במחלקה לצילום, אקדמיה לאמנות ועיצוב, בצלאל
מנחים | איתן שוקר, אלדר סידרון, קבוצת סלה-מנקה
עזרו במימוש הפרויקט | ארבל ברגר, גלי גנות, דודיק כהר, יוסי סעידוב, יעל כהן, יפחת צורראל, מיכל אבגר, משפחת הרב משה וקס, עמיר בלבן, תניה ציון
סיפורו | תושבי שכונת גוננים ומקור חיים
עיצוב גרפי | רון דרור, סטודנט במחלקה לתקשורת חזותית, אקדמיה לאמנות ועיצוב, בצלאל
ביצוע קרמי | דפנה גליה & ורה דוידסון

"מסלול הקיפוד" בפארק המסילה נרקם מתוך הווי סיפורי התושבים החיים במקום. הפרויקט נוצר ע"י סטודנטים בקורס לאמנות, אקטיביזם ומרחב ציבורי באקדמיה לאמנות ועיצוב בצלאל, תוך שיתוף פעולה עם "כתם ירוק" ותושבים הפועלים למען הקמת פארק המסילה.
אורך המסלול המעגלי כ-800 מטר.

Academy-Community Partnership for Social Change

**Fig. 6.2**  Maslull hakipod (the Hedgehog Trail) - Project by Guy Eisner. Design: Ron Dror

route that was dubbed *Maslul hakipod* (the *Hedgehog Trail*—after a hedgehog that had been run over there in the past) (Fig. 6.2).

Each station along the route contains a reference to the previous station and the following one. Apart from recovering local narratives that might otherwise have been lost, and illustrating the urban space, the project defined a route within the railway track area, that was still comparatively wild.

Unlike conventional walking paths that are usually demarcated within a given recreational space, here the trail created the space, preceded the

park, and created a heterotopia—indeed, perhaps *the* key heterotopia in the history of the campaign for the park's creation (Foucault, 1967).

At the inauguration of the trail in November 2008, approximately 150 residents showed up. They gathered near the ceramic tiles, listened to some of the stories of local inhabitants, and toured the wilderness, thereby inaugurating the *Railway Park* some four years before its official opening. Like Richard Long's conceptual art work, A *Line Made by Walking* (1967)—created by Long's traipsing back and forth on a grassy field in England until his tracks marked out a straight path—the communal walk along the *Hedgehog Trail* was an anticipatory action that marked out a route for future walkers in the *Railway Park*. It also exercised the right of the residents to the area that belongs to them. Thus, the walk within the vacant area became an act of reappropriation of both the public space and of local history (the route is also a local answer to other urban projects, such as the *Orange Route* in Tel Aviv and the Image in Stone in Jerusalem, which document hegemonic historiography).

The inauguration of the *Hedgehog Trail* was held on November 21, 2008, about two weeks after Nir Barkat's first election as mayor. The Chair of the Railway Park Residents Association, Professor Kimi Kaplan, Yossi Saidov, and other residents had made sure to approach the candidates well before election day, and consequently, a host of city officials attended the event—including the City Engineer, Shlomo Eshkol; his deputy Osnat Post; the Deputy Director of the Jerusalem Development Authority, Anat Tzur; and Barkat's two deputies—Kobi Kahlon and Naomi Tzur (who was formerly Chair of *the Society for the Protection of Nature* in Israel). Tzur hailed Mayor Barkat's commitment to work toward establishing a park in the area.[11]

Meanwhile, the students of the course continued to spearhead projects that helped bring the park to the front of mind of local residents prior to its actual construction. One of the interesting projects put forward was the construction of a maze on an area of half a dunam (~an eighth of an acre, or 5000 sq. ft.), which the children of the neighborhood designed

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[11] israblog.nana10.co.il/blogread.asp?blog=497224&blogcode=10207504 [In Hebrew]; accessed November 29, 2018.
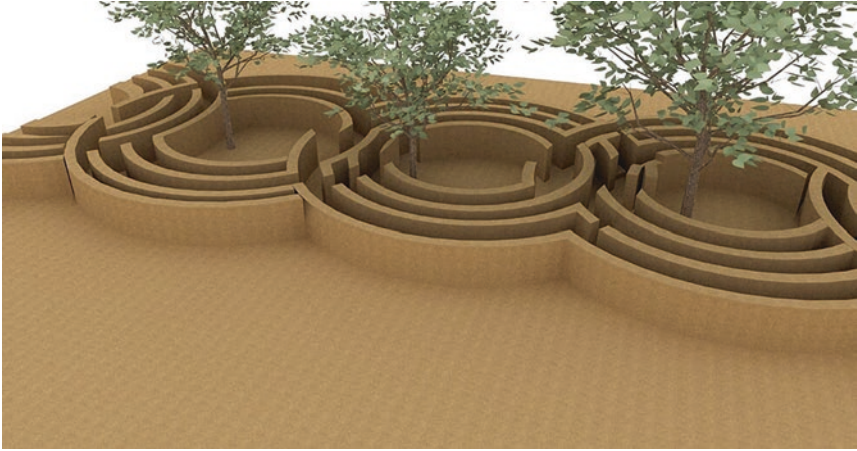
**Fig. 6.3** Maquette of the Maze by students and neighbours. Photo: Tome Bookshtein

together with course students Tome Bookshtein (photography), Barak Brinker (photography), and Ron Hadar (architecture) (Fig. 6.3).

The maze was supposed to be a focal point of the future park and to mark the start of the park's construction. The elements of the maze were laid down through hard work using "mud sleeves", with a view to raise the labyrinth to a height of about 1.5 meters (~5 ft.) and cover it with vegetation—but with the arrival of winter, the construction process was halted, without proper permits.

The intention was to continue the work in the spring and obtain the necessary permits in the interim. But then it was learned that the municipality had planned to install a fitness facilities compound at the same location (when the site had been chosen for the maze, the residents had tried to discover the intended purpose of the area next to the neighborhood lot, but no municipal department was able to give them a definitive answer). While Eyal Ezri tried to help secure approval of the project at the municipality's Department of Plastic Arts, another department at the municipality demolished the maze foundations in order to install an outdoor fitness facility for the neighborhood's residents.

The sculpture garden that began with metal trees continued to develop elsewhere, near the football field and the home of Amir Busheri—another

*Green Spot* activist. The residents built the sculptures themselves, with the help of other artists, and invited students and graduates of the course to help paint them. Thus, the collaboration between residents and artists continued in initiatives that were not directly related to the course.

## Getting Rid of Walls

The municipal establishment and the neighborhood residents have different—at times, even contradictory—perceptions of the urban space. This stems from the different designations assigned by the parties to various urban spaces. A clear example of this is in the separation of the *Gonenim* neighborhood from that of *Mekor Haim* by the railway tracks. Over the years, the Jerusalem Municipality approved designs for new buildings and projects based on a perception that perpetuated this historical divide. However, since the termination of train services on that route, the residents of the neighborhoods had begun to see the rail tracks not as a separation but as a bridge between the two neighborhoods—a kind of "back garden" with the potential to become a "front garden" and a rare opportunity to develop areas for culture and leisure. In 2010, a multistory apartment block was built in the *Mekor Haim* neighborhood, overlooking the railway tracks, next to a playground. The developer received a permit to build a wall between the playground and the railway tracks, blocking access from the *Gonenim* neighborhood, and effectively making the playground a kind of private facility for the residents of the new building.

In a meeting of the course facilitators and students with Yossi Saidov—one of the principal activists of the *Gonenim* neighborhood—Saidov explained to the students the importance of the playground for the children of his neighborhood, where most playgrounds are run down. He described how the *Gonenim* residents appealed to the authorities to change the situation—to no avail—and expressed how he and his neighborhood's children dreamed of "bringing down the wall."

The desire to remove the wall appeared to be a perfect test case for the separation of neighborhoods, populations, and social strata that characterize Jerusalem. It also seemed to be an opportunity to try to bring down at least one wall—or, as the children put it, "to make it go away". Yossi's

dream, and that of the children, became a winter semester exercise for the course students. One of the students proposed a simple and brilliant idea: to shoot a movie featuring the children of the neighborhood, based on the idea of the animated film Up (in which an elderly man transports his home to somewhere else using helium balloons), and project the film on the wall itself.

The students wrote the script, approached the neighborhood residents, and invited their children to take part in the project as a whole and in the video (Levine et al., 2011). The video was shot in the neighborhood and projected with great fanfare on the wall itself, at an event that became a neighborhood celebration, planned and produced by the students. The children arrived with their parents, a local rock band played several songs—including *The Wall*, by Pink Floyd—and there was a popcorn machine, a clown who entertained the children, and more.

One of the key factors in the project's success was the presence of the media at the event, and the widespread subsequent coverage it received—including online (Eli, 2011), especially by virtue of the film in which the children "made it go away" by lifting it up and away by means of balloons that they attached to as a symbolic realization of their dream (Alman, 2011; Hasson, 2011; Mendel, 2011).

Saidov claimed that the moment the movie was screened, he understood that "the wall was no longer there", and that after the screening it was only a matter of time and bureaucracy to make it a reality. Sure enough, in the wake of the artistic action and the public pressure, the municipality changed its position, and ultimately, in the space of a few months, the wall was removed, and the children of *Gonenim* once again had direct access to the playground.

## Challenges and Achievements

The removal of the wall in the film anticipated its actual demolition—just as the tree statues anticipated the green area, and the walk along the *Hedgehog Trail* anticipated the walks by thousands of people along the same route after the *Railway Park* was built. The film foreshadowed a

change in Jerusalem's urban space, and the simple action of calling it a "park" demonstrated a rhetorical political tactic in which the act of speech and artistic activity heralds design and construction.

Using the means of resistance that James Scott (1985) calls the simple weapons available to weaker groups, and which were manifested in the students' actions in collaboration with the residents (actions taken without permits from the Jerusalem Municipality)—coupled with effective leadership, collaboration with the relevant bodies, and creativity—can bring about real changes: they enable residents to influence municipal decisions, shape their future, and restore public space to the public. The delicate interplay between compliance with the law and challenging it became the framework for the students' actions and was taken up by the neighborhood residents.

The development of the *Railway Park* and the design of *Gonenim Park* (by Yair Avigdor's office, in collaboration with the neighborhood's residents) shows that even if the success of such a project depends on many factors, residents can design their neighborhood and town, given the right circumstances and leading figures, and even stop the implementation of urban plans that promote economic interests in the name of efficiency or modernization, but which are not responsive to the wishes of the inhabitants. If a grassroots campaign succeeds, if the wishes of the local residents are recognized, and if artistic and creative tools are used for the purpose, a breakthrough occurs. As early as 1968, Lefebvre wrote about the necessity of art in the creation of urban society—primarily because of its way of observing life in the city in particular and life in general (Purcell, 2002). Admittedly, due to various economic, political, or historical ties, such collaborations are not always effective, but in our case, the encounter between a community of active residents and art students made possible the creation of another city—a city where spaces can open up, walls can come down, routes can be turned from rapid to slow, and languages and cultures can mingle. The next challenge was to preserve and nurture the inhabitants' conceptual and organizational autonomy. In his article titled "The Right to a Town" Lefebvre writes: "Although necessary, policy is not enough. It changes during the course of its implementation. Only social force, capable of investing itself in the urban

through a long political experience, can take charge of the realization of a program concerning urban society" ([1996](), p. 156).

## Discussion

The campaign for the construction of the *Railway Park* and *Gonenim Park* was not a linear process, but a multivocal endeavor involving many tactics and actions with diverse goals, scope, and means. This study has sought to express one of the narratives of the story of the establishment of the *Railway Park*—a narrative that tried to reveal the complexity of the process and the dynamics of developing joint activity between academia and the community. As evident from this case, the success of such a process lies in several factors, such as identifying activist individuals; persistence; rapid response capability; development of long-term relationships; building mutual trust; recognizing the roles of the various participants; creativity alongside practical actions; and use of the tactics of activist art. These aspects created the collaboration framework that ultimately brought about groundbreaking processes in Jerusalem's urban space. Would there have been a groundswell of support for the development of a green park if there had not been a threat to build a freeway there? It is difficult to answer that question, but the urban threat undoubtedly contributed to the mobilization of the residents, to the students' initiative, and to the desire to join forces for the sake of a joint initiative. In the end, the project succeeded in changing not only those particular programs, but also in contributing to changing the establishment's approach to the potential of any community organization. In this project—which we accompanied and continue to accompany in various ways—the groundwork has been laid for urban development in which establishment, communities, academia, and other civil bodies are all involved. All these are finding the possibility of a different, more humane, and democratic existence in the conversion of rapid interurban traffic (of the railway and of the planned highway) into the slow movement of walking, reading, running, and cycling that knits neighborhoods together.

# The Reading Station in the Railway Park

Eytan Shouker

## Conflicts in Jerusalem

In early 2013—on the day that the *Railway Park* was inaugurated in the presence of the Mayor of Jerusalem[12]—we opened an information booth about the projects that the course was involved in the *Gonenim* neighborhood. During the event, a young man approached me, and said: "You have no idea what's going to happen now: the residents of *Beit Safafa*[13] will be able to come over here—and downtown—without any supervision! We have to set up a checkpoint on the Trail route, between the neighborhoods."

I don't know if the young man was a resident of the neighborhood, or just happened to be at the event for other reasons, but his statement reflected the conflicts and fears that pervade the city. Today, the residents of the *German Colony*, *Gonenim* and *Beit Safafa*, walk, jog, and ride along the *Railway Park* every day. The regular users of the route already recognize each other, some nodding hello to each other. However, the trail has also led to some conflict situations. During Operation *Tzuk Eitan*,[14] the Palestinian students in the course reported getting glaring looks from some of the residents of the area, as they walked along the trail (and downtown, as well).

During the 70 years of the State of Israel's existence, the city of Jerusalem has experienced military upheavals and changes of sovereignty. East Jerusalem residents have had the status of Permanent Residents of Israel since June 1967, but most are not Israeli citizens.[15]

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[12] Mr. Nir Barkat.

[13] An Arab neighborhood (formerly village) adjacent to the *Gonenim* neighborhood.

[14] A large-scale military operation led by the IDF in the *Gaza Strip* in the summer of 2014. The operation included heavy aerial bombings and ground incursions into the *Gaza Strip*.

[15] Permanent residents cannot vote or be elected to the Israeli Knesset (Parliament), nor are they entitled to hold an Israeli passport. They are allowed to apply for Israeli citizenship.

About a third of the population in the city are Palestinians, and only one-third of the city's Jews define themselves as secular (vs. two-thirds in Israel as a whole).[16] The city has seen nationalist-related suicide bombings and violent demonstrations against the religious status quo—all of which have been seared into the minds of the residents. Students who come to the city from elsewhere sense its innate sense of conflict, and usually live in communal enclaves that provide a sense of protection and calm.

## From Activism to Community Development

In the early summer of 2014, we received a challenging proposition from Yossi Sa'idov, the then chairman of the Southern Community Administration:

> At the entrance to an apartment block on *Maagelei Yavneh* Street in the *Gonenim* neighborhood, a young couple[17] has established an active library that has steadily grown in size. The neighbor on the ground floor has contacted the municipality, to complain that the activity was disturbing her. I thought this might be a suitable challenge for your course.

When the summer semester got under way, we suggested that students take up the challenge. We set up a think tank and design group comprising interested parties as well as officials from the relevant departments at the Jerusalem Municipality. Since one of the outstanding students in the course was a resident of the Arab village of *Beit Safafa*,[18] we thought this would be a good opportunity to promote the creation of a library in *Gonenim* and in neighboring *Beit Safafa* at the same time. However, from discussions that we held with Baha and with other locals, it was felt that it would be difficult to promote this idea to the community administra-

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[16] According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics.
[17] Naama Tayer and Tom Axelrod.
[18] Baha Alyan.

tion of *Beit Safafa* or to the Jerusalem Municipality, due to the tensions arising from Operation *Tzuk Eitan* (the Israel-Gaza conflict in the summer of 2014). Accordingly, we decided to focus on designing the libraries in the *Gonenim* neighborhood and in the *German Colony*.

This was our first project in the *Railway Trail* area that was not defined as an activist action, but rather as a collaboration with Jerusalem Municipality (and funded by it). However, initially the scope of the budget was unclear, which meant that we had to plan the design and production within a minimal budget and time frame. During the meetings, the group defined the needs and challenges, and the students began doing research on libraries in the public realm in Israel and around the world. One of the main issues that came up in the discussions was the libraries' operating model: Would they be opened during the day and closed at night, for fear of vandalism? Who would operate them? What kinds of activities should one initiate around them? During the summer, the location planning, design, and operating model were drawn up. We conducted a dialogue with the municipality's Culture & Recreation Department, where initially they expressed reservations about our proposed model—a library that would be open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, stocked with books from the community, which would be donated and borrowed without restriction. By the end of the process, we reached a consensus. An official agreement document was drawn up, and we made the beginning of the works contingent upon the municipality signing off on it. The main points of the agreement were as follows:

1. The project will operate initially as a pilot for three years.
2. The library will be open 24/7.
3. The municipality undertakes to employ an appropriate coordinator from the community throughout the pilot period.
4. The coordinator will enlist volunteers from the community and be responsible for instigating cultural programs on books and reading in the vicinity of the library.
5. The municipality will be responsible for ongoing maintenance of the station during the pilot period, to maximize its visibility within the neighborhood.

**Fig. 6.4** *Establishing the reading station in the German Colony*. Photo: Eytan Shouker

The design of the libraries was based on repurposing redundant and disused bus stops, with incorporated wooden shelving. The two libraries were presented as "reading stations" and placed along the old railway track. Subsequently, solar panels were also installed, for nighttime lighting. The students built the shelves, and the neighborhood residents helped in constructing the stations. On the opening day, dozens of residents arrived, and the shelves quickly filled up with books (Fig. 6.4).

## Art or Community

During the construction of the reading station in the *German Colony* neighborhood, we had an unexpected meeting with a passerby named Baruch Mashkovsky. Our brief conversation with him illustrated what the course is all about, and the connection—which is not at all self-evident—between art, activism, and community. Seeing that the students

had trouble with the welding, Mashkovsky—an ultraorthodox man—grabbed the welding torch and deftly and confidently welded on the steel shelf supports. Rotman, my teaching partner in the course, who documented the construction process, asked him where he had learned to weld like that, and he replied:[19]

> Once, before the army, I worked at an auto shop and welded a lot. After the army, I studied art at the *Bezalel Academy*, and welded a lot. After a few years I worked at a metal shop, and also welded a lot.

When Rotman asked him whether he still made art, he explained:

> I'm a social worker—I make art with people, because back then they studied conceptual art—so I decided to work with people, and since then I'm a social worker. Masters in Social Work after *Bezalel*.

His words seemed to embody the Wochenklausur manifesto: "Art should not act as if it could exist of itself and for itself. Art should deal with reality, grapple with political circumstances, and work out proposals for improving human coexistence" (http://www.wochenklausur.at/kunst.php?lang=en). Mashkovsky apparently understood that had he continued on the conventional path to becoming an artist, he would have likely been required to devote himself to conceptual art, which dominated the art field in Israel at the time, and which may have prevented him from daily contact with the "real" world. Even today, the field of art and art teaching is still largely engaged in commercializing art and art objects, and to displaying these in galleries and museums. In contrast, the students' exposure to participatory art—which ignores the interests of art collectors while offering artists an economic alternative to earning a living—offers them a vast range of possibilities.

In the video clip Stop Motion,[20] which records 24 hours in the life of the *German Colony* reading station, we see:

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[19] See  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CBY0Vmt5Tw&t=194s  [in Hebrew and English], accessed December 3, 2018.

[20] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qJMDFlGvh4&t=9s        [Hebrew        subtitles],      accessed December 3, 2018.

1. At any given time, there are about 1000 books in the library
2. An average of 10 people per hour use the library—about 2000 people per week
3. Forty percent of books change daily
4. The library has books in Hebrew, English, French, Arabic, German, Russian, and even Yiddish

*Beit Safafa* Reading Station joins the *Railway Trail* network of libraries in 2017, through the *Taasu Makom* project of the Jerusalem Municipality's Society Division,[21] we received a request from the *Beit Safafa* Community Administration to build a reading station in their neighborhood. We were delighted to receive this request in light of our previous attempt at collaboration.

## Beit Safafa: Background

*Beit Safafa* (بيت صفافا) is a Palestinian neighborhood in southern Jerusalem.[22] Its current population is approximately 13,000 residents. At the end of the 1948 war, the then village of *Beit Safafa* came under Jordanian rule, along with a section of the railway that crossed the village. In the armistice agreements that concluded the war, the railway tracks and northern part of the village were handed over to Israeli control. To maintain access to their lands, some 300 residents of the northern part of the village moved to its southern part. Over the next 19 years, until the 1967 war, the village was divided: the southern part (with some 1500 inhabitants) was under Jordanian rule, while the northern part of the village (with some 500 inhabitants) was in Israeli territory. A barbed wire fence was put up between the two parts of the village, parallel to the railway tracks. The fence divided families. In 1967, the village was reunited, and the

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[21] *Taasu Makom* ("Make a Place") is a joint venture of the *Eden* Company and the Society Division of Jerusalem Municipality, in collaboration with its operations manager. The project's purpose is to promote and execute projects that create creative, pleasant, and inviting public spaces throughout Jerusalem.

[22] *Beit Safafa* is referred to by its residents and residents of Jerusalem as "a village" or "neighborhood". According to the Community Administration officials, they themselves use the various labels interchangeably, depending on the context or interests.

fence separating its two parts. Today, *Ihud HaKfar* ("Village Unification") Street runs along the route where the fence used to be. Over the years, the villagers' lands have been expropriated, mainly to make way for roads and the establishment of the *Gonenim* neighborhood for the Jewish population.

Direct encounters between Palestinian communities and our students is familiar to us from previous projects in East Jerusalem—including a previous project in *Beit Safafa*, where we carried out aerial photography using simple devices, with the help of the village children, to map out the new roadworks. Although that project did not lead to any in-depth collaboration, it ended with a campaign of posters that were put up around the area with the words "Begin divides Jerusalem"—a play on the name of the four-lane road that bisects *Beit Safafa*, named after the iconic *Likud* leader who championed a united Jerusalem.[23]

In the new project, we set as one of our goals to maintain continuous interaction between the students and the residents of *Beit Safafa*, with a view to engage in joint and long-term design efforts. Four of the students were Palestinian, and one of them was a resident of *Beit Safafa*—a fact that helped forge a relationship of trust between the students and the local residents. This was an important starting point, as it made it possible to hold the meetings mainly in Arabic with Hebrew translation—rather than the other way around.

The establishment of a relationship of trust is a key element in the students' collaborative work with communities (Checkoway, 1995; Levine, 2011; Siegel, 2011). It is a process that must be built gradually by being fully attentive to the needs of both the students and the community, as well as to the unspoken feelings that may lie beneath the surface. The groundwork for such a relationship was laid at a systemic level in a meeting between the lecturers and the liaison officials from the Community Administration. It was an encounter meeting with full of inherent tensions: academic lecturers represent the privileged, intellectual, and creative establishment that sits in an "ivory tower." As far as the

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[23] The project was covered in the national press. See, for example, an article in which a photograph of the campaign was presented by students from our course in the public space (Hasson, 2013a).

Community Administration officials were concerned, we are merely casual guests who arrive for a short while and have different interests from their own. Moreover, the talks between the parties are conducted in Hebrew, which is not the residents' mother tongue, and there was a clear constraint of a timetable dictated by the course curriculum. We are paid (at least somewhat) for our work, come from outside the neighborhood for a limited time each time, then leave. Cultural differences between the parties can also create tension, for example, due to different attitudes to concepts such as time and honor, or in the perception of needs and reality. Without a respectful dialogue that is aware of these differences, it is impossible to establish trust, which is the basis for building common interests and a common vision (Checkoway, 1995; Huss, 2015; Siegel, 2011).

As in every year, we gave the students a tour of the various *Railway Track* projects: from *Green Spot* actions, through *The Hedgehog Route*, *The Maze*, "Making the Wall Go Away," and the libraries in the *German Colony* and *Gonenim* neighborhoods. During the tour, the students met with course graduates and residents that we had previously worked with on joint projects. The tour ended at the *Beit Safafa* Community Center, where we met Iyad Abu Shama and Mohammad Lafi—youth counselors at the Society and Youth Administration—who took upon themselves to lobby for the library. It was a first get-to-know-you meeting between the students and community administration. After this encounter with the community, we returned to class and worked with the students to reflect on what we had learned, using the insights we gained in theoretical studies and relevant projects. Class meetings were also devoted to mentoring the work groups for the purposes of design and production. The course requires students to invest a great deal of time, to work in multidisciplinary teams, to travel to the "field", and to engage in work meetings outside class time. After several lessons in class, we conducted a tour that enabled students to get to know the local narrative, ask questions, and hold a direct discussion.

Reflecting on the process to that point, the student Yosi Hayu[24] said:

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[24] A student at the Department of Architecture.

In architecture studies we study for five years—from forming a concept, getting to know the site and population, history, and changing situations. We try to create a concrete learning setup about the place, the population's problems and wish. At the same time, during the studies we don't get the frank and physical preparation to implement the learning, we don't have the situation where we meet at a 1:1 scale [*sic*] with the population, with the community and with the walls that tell their story.

## Creating a Joint Workgroup

As the semester progressed, we held a meeting with members at the Community Administration Building. The meeting was attended by youths (male and female) from the neighborhood; residents who had previously taken part in "placemaking" events; members of the Community Administration's Executive Committee; civil engineers; and the director of an architectural firm. At the start of the meeting we asked one of the Palestinian students (from the Department of Architecture) to speak a little (in Arabic) about *Bezalel Academy* and about the process that we would be going through together. After a few sentences he was stopped by one of the members of the Executive Committee, who spoke in Arabic with an emphatic voice. The student grew tense and apologetic. Since my parents are from Iraq and I partly understand colloquial Arabic, I understood the gist of what was being said. One of the committee members resented the student's remarks, which suggested that the residents would present the community's needs, and the students, as professionals who possessed all the knowledge, would design the library. "It's exactly the other way around!," he boomed. "We invited you to implement *our* ideas." Each of them saw the other as an instrument for advancing their goals. The student claimed that he was misunderstood, and the conversation was on the verge of deteriorating into mutual recriminations. Tensions that had lain below the surface suddenly erupted with vehemently and indubitably.

This was an opportunity to address the unspoken power dynamic in the encounter between academia and the community. Rotman and I asked to hear the opinions of the residents and students. An important

discussion ensued, in which issues of hegemony and establishment could be raised (both by *Bezalel Academy* and by the Community Administration) and about where the necessary knowledge resided (in the wisdom of the community and its experience, or in the students' know-how), and about cultural differences and mediation. We concluded that the two viewpoints were not contradictory or conflicting, but complementary and intertwined. The community's knowledge of the place, the culture, the history, how one should conduct oneself in the public sphere, the future plans, the climate, and so on is always greater and richer than that of the outside expert, however authoritative.

As Yosi Hayu, Jorden Turgeman, and Arbel said later, after considering what they had witnessed:

> […] If we take the first encounter, we felt in a hostile environment towards us, because of an argument that developed during the get-to-know-you conversation, due to generalizations […] and so when the "unpleasant" stuff got out of the way (in the first meeting), in the recent meetings we felt more connected than ever.

After the discussion, the atmosphere became more congenial, and allowed us to pose the first question: Do the residents want to emulate the converted bus-stop model that had been used in the two previous libraries that we had built on the *Railway Trail*? Should indeed they even consider a different operating model? Residents and students raised convincing arguments for every option, and in the end most of the residents voted in favor of creating a new and tailor-made design, and to reexamine the operating model.

## Start-Up Event

In a bid to enlist more residents to our approach, we held a start-up event at the library's designated site. Various creative workshops for the neighborhood children were developed and held at the event, in collaboration with the students and the residents. A local band played music that attracted more and more residents. Issues that the students had

encountered—such as building trust, reciprocity, use of language and its limitations, the use of art as a tool for community development and ethics—became an experience to contemplate. The students Joanne, Shihab, and Amit wrote:

> In meetings with the community itself, from the very beginning there was a very strong emphasis on the creative aspect of the work—and later on at the happening, as well, which was part of the information event for the rest of the *Beit Safafa* community. […] While the groups began to think about the library itself, we also began to think about what to do at the happening event—what information should we give the community. Virtually all the actions, if not all, were creative. The first meeting was attended by a few youths who wanted to take part in the activity and participated in a lively manner and demonstrated a desire to help. In one of the groups several girls came up with ideas for a joint drawing action and expressed a wish for the drawing to show positive and community-building emotions. At the happening we felt some kind of merging of minds through the use of the arts. At the Booklets Station [writing and binding of a booklet], communication was largely through the use of hand gestures on the topic in question—here was almost no verbal communication, nor was it necessary. The happening created a kind of dynamic that succeeded as it did because of the creative part, in the creation of broken boundaries, and creating something new.

## A Surprising Design Session

One of the following meetings was (unavoidably) scheduled on "Jerusalem Day"—the anniversary of the Israeli conquest of East Jerusalem, or as it is officially known in Israel, "Jerusalem Unification Day." On that day, the Palestinian partners chose not to come to the meeting but sent a delegation of children instead of the adults. Because of the unexpected change in the group, we improvised an activity and asked both the children and the students to spend 20 minutes drawing their vision for the library and its preferred location, what it should look like, and what they think is key to its success (Huss, 2015). At the end of the allotted time, we asked everyone to present their drawing.

The first girl—Lian—showed a drawing in which the library was designed as an open book. She explained her intention:

> As I see it, the library should be open and set up in an area where there is a lot of traffic of people—both children and adults—so that they would run into it and maybe want to exchange a book. The adults' books would be at the top. Although it's summer right now, we should think about protection from the rain, so the books don't get damaged. Besides, there might be boys who might damage the library, so we should set up a camera that is monitoring the library—in fact you could put a non-operative camera, if only to prevent vandalism.

The hall fell silent. The students were dumbstruck—as were we, the lecturers. One girl after another introduced their drawings and ideas, each of which had clever and surprising insights and original suggestions for design. Months of research with the best experts in preparation for the design of the first library on the *Railway Trail* had yielded results similar to those reached by a group of girls within 20 minutes. It was a sobering lesson. As the student Yosi Hayu later put it:

> […] like the surprising children's meeting: like in a fantasy, we sat, architecture students and local children, and designed a whole library together—and the truth? Kids do it better than adults—the barriers that we have, they don't have in their heads.

The last lessons of the Spring Semester were devoted to conceptualizing the experiences and insights, and linking them to theories from the fields of sociology and art. We devised a program for the summer course and set the completion of the joint design with the community as a goal.

## Joint Design

Most of the students from the spring semester went on to the summer course. Residents and students met several times in small working groups and discussed the location, needs, operating model, and design. There were differences of opinion over the design, but there was general

consensus that it should include acknowledging the mosque situated across from the designated location.

It was agreed that the students would develop the insights in small groups in order to formulate four or five design proposals that expressed the important objectives that had been identified during the meetings. After about a month, each group presented its proposal to the residents, and they, in turn, asked questions and made comments. After the presentations, we put the proposals to a vote.

The residents chose Joanne Abu-Dalu's proposal, which seemed to be the most mature, and the most suited for development. Its design included elements of arches, as suggested by some residents, as a symbol of the blend of East and West, orientalism and modernism. It also called for planter boxes for herbs, such as mint and sage—an idea that emerged from the girls' suggestions, who drew the library as they imagined it. It was agreed that all students would develop Abu-Dalu's proposal together, while taking into account the community's comments. When the plans were finalized, we drew up an estimated budget for the project, and received a green light from the municipality.

## Construction of the Library

We realized that the students and the residents could not be expected to make the steel structure for the library, which would require a professional metalworker. We decided to look for one locally, in *Beit Safafa*, and of the several suggestions we received, we chose the Sa'id Lafi metal shop—in part because we were impressed by his ability to develop the drawings patiently with the students.

We chose a local metalworker for several reasons. As Kedem, one of the students, noted reflectively:

Working with the local community was the obvious thing to do, in my opinion, for several key reasons: First and foremost, using a local professional. […] This fact is very significant in such projects; first of all, because it provides local employment, but also because it forges a bond between the local people and the project, and to work from a non-patronizing

perspective that respects the skills of the people who live there; thereby underlining the idea that a community can make a difference and create things for itself.

The design processes and the building permits extended over many months and spilled over into the following year's course. One of the most significant means of connecting a project to the community is the project implementation stage—the work in the field. Even if the community is a full and active participant in the design stage, the most compelling, experiential, and meaningful connection of all comes from the sense of creating something out of nothing. The collaborative creative atmosphere particularly captivated the children and the youth. Although we couldn't involve them in the welding work at the metal shop, we did assign them to two activities: building the planters and painting the floor with colorful arabesques borrowed from sample painted tiles found in many houses in the village.

  More from Kedem's reflection:

Even though I have lived my entire life in Jerusalem in a neighborhood nearby, I felt that I had a rare opportunity to meet with Arab youth—something that if it were not for the project, I had not been exposed to, experience, or learn. With a few words and mainly a lot of hand gestures, a real and close encounter was created, headed by a common goal. … The work on the library could have ended with just a few simple technical actions of transportation and welding and didn't really require many working hands. But the decision to create a surface of tiles (painted in layers), as well as a library of herbs (with planters that are entirely hand-made, not bought) in order to create something together—is very fundamental and very significant, and not something we could pass up on. Working together with the youth, beyond the fact that it led to a sincere meeting, brought a sense of commitment and partnership to the reading station. […] The youth, who, based on my impressions, felt like a full partner in establishing the library, will take care of it to maintain the station. It is, after all, in the public space, open to all, and could easily be a target for vandalism. […] Strengthening the youths' sense of competence can spur them to try to find other ways in which they can apply the skills they discovered in themselves, and thereby leverage the entire community.

## Discussion

The more the academy is able to devise programs that bring together students from different worlds to engage in creative, challenging, and professional work with a variety of communities, the students will, I believe, develop bonds both between themselves and with the individuals of the communities that they work with. Their shared goals and visions create bonds and closeness that underscore what people have in common, rather than define an individual based on how they are different. Academia in general, and of art in particular, has a key role in *human* development, as well as the development of scientific knowledge. Venturing out from the academic world forces students to see the world from different viewpoints from their own. The theoretical knowledge they acquire in academic life becomes an experience of making and creating, and profoundly internalizes the tools they have acquired. As a result, they also become better professionals, and more attentive and informed individuals.

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