



The New Israel Fund-Shatil Mixed Cities Project

“We believe that one of the most essential assets in Israel’s mixed cities is the preservation and development of a sense of belonging, pride and love of locale. This is the sine qua non for advancing the socioeconomic level of the mixed cities.”

Buthayna Dabit, Director of the New Israel Fund-Shatil Mixed Cities Project




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25 Years for Social Change
25 שנה של עשייה לשינוי חברתי
25 عام على العمل من أجل التغيير الاجتماعي



According to Architect Buthayna Dabit, Director of the New Israel Fund-Shatil Mixed Cities Project, “The bleak reality of the Arab population in mixed cities is the direct result of neglect and discrimination over so many years afflicting the Arab minority in Israel in general and in the mixed cities in particular. We believe that only through joint, consistent, and constructive work can we improve the current situation and achieve higher, more dignified quality of life. Project staff are working to bring about a paradigm shift among local residents, decision-makers and the general public, in order to promote actual change; it is part of the effort to build a new reality based on equal rights and social justice for Arab residents in mixed cities. We feel that “it is better to light one candle than curse the darkness.”

The status quo:

Israel’s mixed Arab-Jewish cities (Acre, Haifa, Jaffa, Lod and Ramle) there are about 90,000 Arab residents – Palestinian citizens of Israel.

- Most Arab residents in the mixed cities live in the poorer sections of the city.
- The Arab neighborhoods are rife with dilapidated buildings and roads. They are lacking in public institutions, in parks, and in health, educational and social services.
- The gap between Arab and Jewish neighborhoods in the same city is manifest in terms of urban social and community infrastructure.
- The hardships facing Arab residents of the mixed cities are diametrically opposed to the situation that prevailed in these cities before the state of Israel was founded in 1948, when these cities were centers of life and culture.
- Many neighborhoods are not officially recognized by the establishment and do not appear on town planning schemes.
- There are physical barriers between some Arab and Jewish sections.
- Houses are being demolished: since 2003, there have been more than 100 house demolitions in Ramle, Lod and Acre, and at present, there are 500 Demolition Orders for Lod and about 150 for Ramle.

Why were we established?

The discriminatory policy towards the Arab population in the mixed cities has cried out for change – and still does. This need for change has given birth to the New Israel Fund-Shatil Mixed Cities Project.

Who are we?

The Mixed Cities Project was established in 2003 at the initiative of Shatil, the New Israel Fund’s Empowerment and Training Center for Social Change Organizations, with the support of the European Commission. The Project operates in the mixed cities of Lod, Ramle and Acre, fighting to promote equality in housing, infrastructure and planning and for the advancement of social justice.

Our Vision

A strong community of Arabs and Jews living in equality and dignity in Israel’s mixed cities.

Objectives

1. Building and reinforcing a local community involved in community life, leading change and improving the status quo in the spheres of housing, official recognition policies, infrastructure and land.
2. Exposing the current local and national policy on the issue of unrecognized neighborhoods, and reforming it.
3. Building and strengthening civil society in the mixed cities.
4. Raising awareness among decision-makers, the media, social change organizations, the general public and the afflicted population.



Open drainage ditch between the "Rakevet" (Train) neighborhood and Pardes Snir, Lod 2006

Goals

A. In the sphere of empowerment and building the local Arab community

1. Establishing and support of housing forums in the mixed cities.
2. Inculcating tools and information to residents through courses and in-service training workshops in resource development, lobbying, the media and public struggle, planning and building procedures, law and justice.
3. Increasing the number of participants in public community advocacy.

B. In the sphere of exposing policy on issues of official recognition, infrastructures and housing:

On issues of official recognition:

1. Structuring alternative planning and building projects for specific neighborhoods in Ramle, Lod and Acre.
2. Initializing the relevant bodies' authorization process of the planning schemes for Dahmash neighborhood on the Lod-Ramle seam and Acre's Barbour neighborhood.
3. Authorization of the plans.
4. Implementation of the alternative plans by the year 2010

On infrastructures issues:

1. Operating public transportation lines in the unrecognized neighborhoods.
2. Initiating volunteer activities with the participation of neighborhood residents.
3. Garbage disposal in the unrecognized neighborhoods.

On housing issues:

1. Incorporating mixed cities' populations in the Public Housing Law so that residents can purchase apartments on terms equal to those of Amidar tenants.
2. Obligating Amidar to provide maintenance services to public housing residents' apartments.
3. Legal struggle against new projects that exclude the Arab population

C. On civil society:

1. Locating and liaising with organizations, NGOs and public figures in mixed cities on both the individual (legal assistance) and public levels.

D. On raising awareness:

1. Organizing tours for decision-makers, media personnel and the general public
2. Producing publicity material
3. Conducting opinion polls
4. Exposing the issue via the media
5. Holding and participating in conferences

Local stories



Demolishing Ramle's Armenian neighborhood, 2003



Playground in Ramle's Rakevet neighborhood, 2004



Children building a playground in Dahmash Village, 2006



Building a playground in Gan Khakal, 2006



Children building a playground in Dahmash Village, 2006

Ramle

The unrecognized neighborhoods in Israel's mixed cities

The Rakevet (Train) neighborhood of Ramle

The Train neighborhood of Ramle was built during the British Mandate as a residential colony for British officials who worked on the railway. Over the years, it became a mixed population neighborhood of Jews and Arabs. Gradually, Jews left the neighborhood, and today only Arab residents live there. The Municipality does not recognize the neighborhood, and therefore does not provide even the most rudimentary municipal services such as surfaced roads and sidewalks, public transportation, garbage disposal, clinics and streetlights. The neighborhood is an enclave between the junction of a national highway to the east and an overpass to the northwest and between the railway routes to the south, a location which endangers the lives of neighborhood residents on a daily basis. There is no safe way into or out of the neighborhood, no secure railroad crossing and no protective wall to separate the railway from the residents who live only a few meters away. So far, the lives of six neighborhood residents have been lost on the tracks.

Jamal Salameh, Ramle's Grassroots Coordinator for Shatil's Mixed Cities Project, says: "By now, everyone understands that the reality of living under the difficult current conditions requires systemic solutions to address the situation immediately and provide suitable housing alternatives to the residents of the unrecognized neighborhoods."



Demolition of houses in Remez neighborhood, Lod, 2005

Lod

Walls of separation in the mixed cities: Pardes Snir, Lod

Separation walls between Jewish and Arab neighborhoods in cities preserve and perpetuate the gaps between Jewish and Arab residents, breach human rights and prevent constructive internal dialogue among residents. The separation wall between Lod's Arab neighborhood of Pardes Snir and the Jewish Moshav [rural community] Nir Zvi was built in 2003. It is about 4 meters high and about 1.5 km. long, creating a territorial and symbolic barrier between Jewish and Arab residents. Pardes Snir is a distressed neighborhood, suffering from lack of basic municipal services, with no plans regulating construction. This situation prevents even a minimal response to the population's basic needs, and most of the construction that is going on is not regulated.

There are presently about 3,000 Arab residents living in Pardes Snir, most of them on a low socio-economic level. Nir Zvi, on the other hand is a comfortable, suburban-style neighborhood, with a population of upper middle-class Jewish residents.

As **Arafat Ismail**, Lod Grassroots Coordinator for the Mixed Cities Project, has remarked, "We believe in the need to create connections rather than barriers between the city's different populations. We see this trend as destructive for the future of this place and its residents. We hope that municipal resources will be channeled into finding basic and constructive solutions."



Lod Master Plan



Playground construction in Dahmash, 2006



Compound 10 in Old Acre, 2005



Barbour Neighborhood, Acre

Acre

The struggle for preservation of the Old City of Acre

There are about 7,500 Arab residents in the Old City of Acre, living in apartments managed by Amidar Ltd. and the Old Acre Development Corporation. The latter has been conducting widespread projects to “preserve” the Old City. Millions of shekels have been invested, yet the “preservation” activities have skipped over the Arab residents. For the Arab residents, “preservation” constitutes a methodical trampling of their historical and geographical rights, contributing to the perpetuation of the authorities' discriminatory policy towards Acre's Arab residents. The current mode of “preservation” is damaging to the economic and social texture of the city, while threatening the lives of its Arab residents and ignoring their needs. It prevents them from being planning partners in preservation policies and processes, and leads to the takeover and privatization of their assets. The current approach to preservation stands to change the city's character and identity, while leading to the closing down and neglect of public buildings.

Most of the residents living in the dilapidated buildings are refused permits and/or financial assistance to renovate, and the few who do so, are obligated to carry out the work according to painstaking technical specifications that make the work more expensive by tens of thousands of shekels.

Sami Hawary, Acre Grassroots Coordinator for the Mixed Cities Project, had this to say:

“At present, residents living in houses that have undergone renovation are worried, as a plan to sell their renovated houses to the highest bidder is already in place. They feel that they must be given priority in purchasing the homes in which they have lived for decades.”



Compound 10, in Old Acre, 2005

What have we achieved?

Since its inception, the Project has been active on the public, community, legal and parliamentary levels:

- For the first time, the issue of Arab-Jewish Mixed Cities has been placed on the public and political agenda.
- Forums of neighborhood residents for the advancement of housing and education rights have been established.
- A public struggle has begun for the preservation of the Old City sections of Ramle, Lod and Acre.
- Study days and demonstrations were held in Lod and Ramle protesting house demolitions, with a turnout of hundreds of residents.
- Partnerships were built between the Project and various social organizations, among them the Karameh Association, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Adalah, Community Advocacy, Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights, Sikkuy – the Association for Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel, The Center for Jewish Pluralism, Residents for Good Governance in Lod, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv University and the Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem.
- Student projects were structured on the issue of mixed cities in Bezalel, the Mandel Leadership Institute and Ariel College.
- Playgrounds were established in Ramle and Lod in association with Ta'ayush-Jewish Arab partnership and the Association for Art in the Community.
- 5 public opinion polls were produced referring to planning issues in the mixed cities.
- Guided site tours were held for correspondents, parliamentary committees, Government Ministers, local and international decision-makers and for Jews and Arabs from Israel and abroad.
- Working relations were built up with many relevant agencies among the political and professional echelons of government, the Knesset and state planning authorities.
- During 2004-2005, several administrative appeals were filed in association with Adam Teva Vedin - Israel Union For Environmental Defense with the Pardes Snir, Lod Neighborhood Association and the "Rakevet" (Train) Neighborhood, Ramle, following which garbage bins were introduced into the unrecognized neighborhoods.
- In 2005, the Tel Aviv-Jaffa Administrative Court ruled that there was no justification for the erection of a physical barrier such as a separation wall between the Pardes Snir neighborhood in Lod and Moshav Nir Zvi, and its construction was halted. The ruling was handed down following an appeal filed on behalf of the Pardes Snir residents, encouraged and assisted by the Project through the Clinic for Human Rights.
- In 2005, the Tel Aviv-Jaffa Administrative Court directed the Ramle Municipality to resume its busing of students, which had suddenly stopped. This ruling came following an administrative appeal filed with the Court, with the assistance of the Karameh Association and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI).
- In 2006, the Tel Aviv-Jaffa Administrative Court ruled that the Ramle Municipality must register the children of Dahmash Village for kindergarten and First Grade for the school year. The judgment was handed down following an appeal filed by the Project, assisted by Karameh Association and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI).
- The 16th Knesset held a series of debates on the Internal Affairs Committee, followed by a Report that adopted the Project's recommendations on Israel's mixed Arab-Jewish cities.
- The Project initiated the formation of a lobby in the 17th Knesset to advance the issue of the mixed cities, headed by MK Nadia Hilu (Labor), and a Lobby for Lod was set up headed by MK Yoram Marciano (Labor).
- In 2006, following discussions in the Knesset, cooperation began between the Planning Administration and Project representatives concerning three issues:
 1. Examination of the existing outline plans with the goal of revising them, to enable a change in the existing planning and construction policy for the Arab neighborhoods in Israel's mixed cities.
 2. Preservation and revival of the Old City sections of the mixed cities with the double objective of developing the mixed cities as tourist attractions and reinforcing the communities living in the ancient quarters.
 3. Examination of planning options for mixed ethnicity neighborhoods.
- In 2006, the Project and the monitoring committee for Arab education initiated and held a unique professional development training workshop for Arab lawyers from Lod, Ramle and Jaffa on "Law, Education and Social Change."
- In 2006, the Project filed an administrative appeal for the operation of public transportation in Ramle's Arab neighborhoods, with the assistance of ACRI.
- In 2007, the Project operated women's empowerment training in the unrecognized neighborhoods of Barbur in Acco and the Train neighborhood in Ramle.
- In 2007, the Project brought an expert urban planner together with residents of Barbur and the Train neighborhood to draw up alternative plans and options to bring about recognition of the neighborhoods and the residents' rights.

Coalition partners

The Mixed Cities Project is implemented by SHATIL, an organization providing support and consultation services for social change organizations, founded by the New Israel Fund. SHATIL initiated this project and has been supporting it throughout the entire process. Thanks to the European Commission which has been assisting in funding the Project and thanks to all those who have taken part and contributed to the Project's advancement since its inception.

What else must be done?

While we have become empowered and strengthened by the various coalitions and partnerships created over the years with civil society movements for social change and NGOs, we still feel the need to continue to enhance these partnerships and expand upon them. We call upon all those who wish to join our struggle to contact us.

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