

Communities By Design, a
nonprofit 501c(3) training and education
organization, in cooperation with the
City of Redwood City,
is pleased to present:

The Forum *at Redwood City*

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION ON CITY DESIGN



PLANNING PALESTINE: Urban Design Amid the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict

2006-07 SEASON: FORUM #1
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2006
BIG FOX THEATER
2209 BROADWAY
REDWOOD CITY
6:00 P.M. - 7:45 P.M.

On October 4, 2006, the City of Redwood City and the nonprofit "Communities By Design" hosted its kick-off presentation for the 2006-2007 Forum season. The presentation was given by Planner and Urban Designer, Doug Suisman, Principal and Founder of Suisman Design, Santa Monica, CA. Mr. Suisman, spoke about his internationally acclaimed project "The Arc" in his presentation entitled "Planning Palestine: Urban Design Amid the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict."

In early 2004, Doug Suisman was approached by non-profit research institute, Rand Corporation, with a seemingly impossible task. Mr. Suisman was charged with an undertaking few can wrap their minds around: Designing the State of Palestine once peace and stability had been achieved.

Groundwork

The 7-8 billion dollar project "The Arc" was initially financed by two private donations to the RAND Corporation, one of which was from a Jewish man. The objective of the report was to discover what it would take for a Palestinian State to succeed. This massive undertaking included more than 40 researchers, nearly a hundred and fifty reports by international media, as well as 200 or more briefings throughout the world, including White House and EU briefings.

The entire premise was based around the following five key assumptions that were crucial for the viability of the project and a healthy future for Palestine.

1. That a peaceful state could be accomplished.
2. That borders could be defined.
3. Palestine must have a sovereign presence in Jerusalem.
4. Israel must see that Palestinian success is in their best interest.
5. The population of Palestine will have doubled by the year 2020.

The outcome of the report concluded that it would be difficult but possible to achieve a successful Palestine as a part of a two state solution with Israel. To accomplish this, Mr. Suisman says, the following criteria were outlined.

1. Sound security is a prerequisite.
2. Connectivity is crucial to success.
3. Ease of exchange of goods and people is necessary.
4. Financing the execution of The Arc is expensive yet possible.

“The Arc” provided a formal structure for the implementation of a sound infrastructure where energy, resources, land-use, transportation, urban development and housing issues were addressed. Because neither RAND Corporation nor Mr. Suisman is native Palestinian, a concerted effort was made that The Arc be a “built symbol of Palestinian aspirations.” It was also important that it be a model for sustainability, as well as “a framework for national prosperity.”

Map of “The Arc” in Palestine from www.suisman.com/palestine



The framework for the project was directed by a number of pre-existing elements that helped form the concept of The Arc. Mr. Suisman pointed out that patterns began to immerge while studying the topography, rainfall, population densities, settlements, cities, agriculture, and agro-ecological conditions of Palestine. The form that consistently arose from these patterns was the simple, primordial shape of an arc that functioned as the backbone of the project.

Urban Density and Distribution Pattern

If population projections for the year 2020 are achieved, Palestine will have the highest national density, second only to Bangladesh. Gaza will be an especially dense region with an estimated population of 9,300 people per square mile. With the goal of prosperity in mind, the design sought to avoid the usual urban sprawl growth patterns of healthy developing economies. A model of moderate to moderately high density was desired for New Palestine, consistent with traditional Palestinian settlement patterns, with an optimum number of 30,000 people per square mile in urban centers. Interestingly enough, the San Francisco Bay Area was the best fitting comparable model as far as function, density and transportation, given the small amount of space there would be to work with. Mr. Suisman points out that walkable, compact, urban towns and cities leave surrounding space open for preservation. After coming up with the desired density per square mile, different locations for population distribution were assessed. Once again, an arc shaped pattern emerged along a string of major Palestinian cities as the best fit solution for population distributions.

Connections

Currently Route 60 is the singular road that connects of all of the West Bank area, which is clearly inadequate, says Mr. Suisman. In the past, the need for a safe passage route was

obvious yet always politically and pragmatically unrealistic. Still, Gaza and the West Bank must be connected. The proposed solution includes a multi-use corridor, with a linear reserve of land for various public uses along the arched structure of Palestine. The option of a rail system to connect the West Bank and Gaza was looked into because of the speed and efficiency it could provide. However, carving rail lines through established settlements was not only expensive, but it would drive up real-estate prices, which in turn would put too heavy a price on ancient cultural sites. The solution was to connect the major cities along the arc with a rail and multi-use corridor. Bus rapid transit would run perpendicular to the “spine” and connect the train stations to town centers, so that, as Mr. Suisman put it, you create your own corridor- “like training a vine.”

Preservation and Energy

With a population projected to double by the year 2020, Palestine will need access to adequate resources and energy to sustain both population and economic growth. There is little water or oil in Palestine, but there is sun and wind to be harnessed. Mr. Suisman confronted the need for policy to instate the infrastructure for water, natural gas, communication networks, and also a green system to be funneled along the arc system. The project emphasized use of renewable resources and conservation. Concerns such as how to protect forest and agricultural lands, as well as how to prevent poor farmers from selling their land for cheap to developers, were addressed in RAND’s final report. The Arc model allows for a globalized economy that will attract large-scale investments, but protects and improves the Palestinian way of life and culture.

Outcome

The recommended cost of the project including education, health, governance, water, as well as “The Arc” itself was estimated at \$33 billion. Despite sounding like a daunting sum, RAND concluded that it would be possible to raise the necessary amount from both public and private investments. This would mean a total of 160,000 jobs would be created each year over a five-year period! The reception of The Arc project has been tremendous. Positive feedback came from Palestine, Washington, European Union, World Bank as well as from many others, and support continued to pour in as the briefings continued.

Then, in December 2005, the contentious Hamas was elected and direct negotiations regarding “The Arc” with PA Ministries reached a temporary impasse. Due to the fact that it became illegal to fund the unrecognized Hamas, it is impossible to go forward with the project for the time being. Partnership between Mr. Suisman’s group and President Abbas along with various NGO’s and private sector interest groups remain open and optimistic. Mr. Suisman stays hopeful that the project will still serve as “framework for a new dialogue in the region” and someday will help secure a prosperous future for the young people of Palestine.