

Landscape has dominated Haifa's

political and social construction for more than a century, and still plays a key role in city life. The events of the last Israeli-Lebanese war, when during five weeks in July and August 2006 Haifa came under daily Hezbollah fire, were a reminder of the way landscape makes us see and be seen. The landscape considerations of hundreds of reporters fighting for the best vantage points in the city and up to the Lebanese border remind us of similar professional efforts to frame the cityscape.

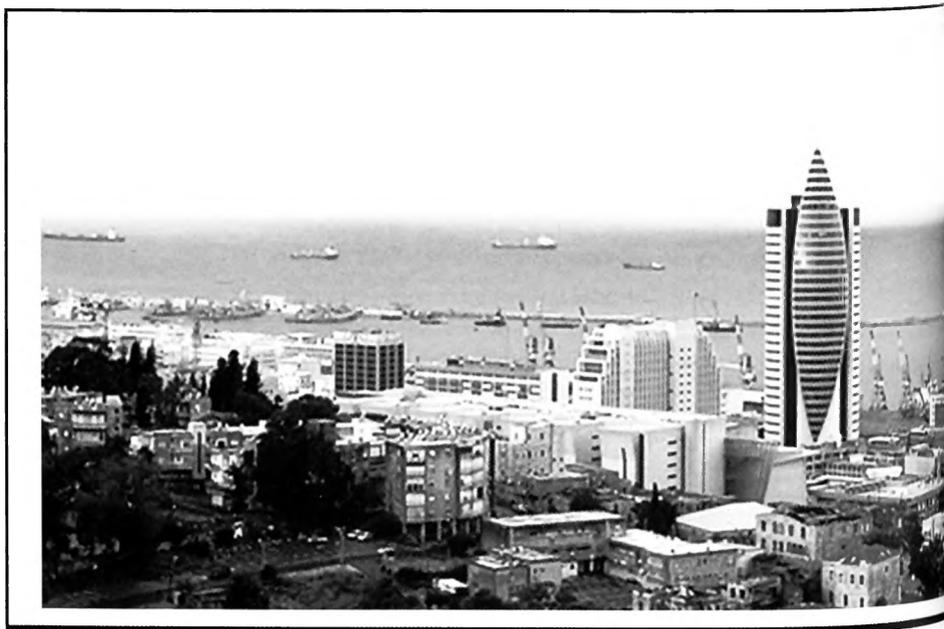
Further to current discussion of the landscape's dynamic role in socio-cultural production, it is seen as evidence of power and knowledge. Landscape is created and recreated by spatial technicians - landscape architects, architects, and planners - ideologically empowering and empowered by politicians and administrators. So, behind silent and everyday perceptions of landscape, there are landscape production systems, efficient tools with which to inject official strategies, ideologies and values into everyday life. Under the British Mandate the city was an important port and economic and strategic asset. In the 1950s Haifa, dominated by the Labour party, was a political, economic and social centre of an evolving Israeli nation-state.

Seeking simple, legible and recognisable development guidelines, Watson, Haifa's city engineer during the British Mandate, implemented an English-style Green Belt "in order to separate the industrial zone from the residential one...an ultra-modern planning idea...we hope it will set a model throughout Israel". The Haifa Bay Plan of "Emek Zevulun" by Abercrombie projected also a large Green Belt between the workers' neighbourhood of Kiryat Haim and its adjacent industrial zone of the harbour to provide quality of living and attain political control. Abercrombie placed the Green Belt in the "Emek Zevulun" plan along the Kishon River, as idyllic greenery against the ills of urban industrial life. Ironically, this area collects

the industrial waste water of the whole river basin and is today one of the country's most polluted areas.

With the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Green Belt became a prime planning device for national Haifa. As during the colonial era, landscape development was used to create new political, social and economic dynamics. Moulding the cityscape according to the national spatial vision attempted to shape territory and people. Aba Hushi, Haifa's powerful mayor, while declaring independence from the British model, exhorted city planners to implement the Green Belt concept. "Only lately I saw Abercrombie's Greater London Plan in a book...we shall be proud to be the first city in Israel that will embrace that town planning concept", he told his city council.

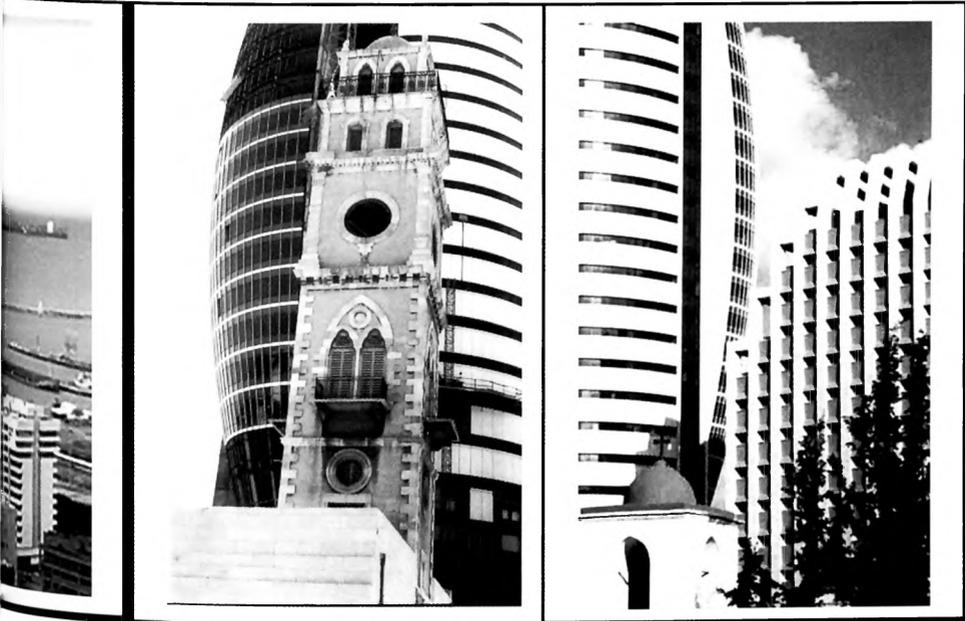
Haifa's leaders used the city's landscape as a physical and imagined platform for integrating the city in the scheme of the new nation. Haifa's newly-prepared town plan was not just a matter of bringing the new immigrants into a unified national community but also a means to create a new urban workers' society. The city leadership, guided by the powerful national Labour party, was interested not only in connecting the imagined community to its land, but envisioned a socially just urban community that would connect the workers to their city.



The rationale of the city scheme as embedded in Haifa's Master Plan of 1953, attempted, as Hushi said, to "consolidate the city and its residents" by providing a "secured green land" (in the Master Plan, the Green Belt surrounds the city, apart from the shoreline). Displaying his urban vision, he declared: "I oppose the idea of putting the residential areas in the bay region [in Kiryat Haim, as proposed by the British planners] and suggest having the workers on the Carmel Mountain, since I think this area should not be used merely for the wealthy upper class, but also for the workers who deserve a climatically pleasant and healthy location."

So Haifa's Master Plan of 1953 proposed new residential quarters on the mountain slopes of the Carmel overlooking the harbour and the industrial zones. It could be claimed that this connected the workers visually to their work place, as in a British town scheme. But it could also symbolise the pride of workers in their workplace as proclaimed by a socially-committed leadership.

In contrast to the rather limited colonial approach to the Green Belt in Haifa, the idea played a central role in the City Master Plan of 1953, solidifying the city's boundaries in a wide green cordon. Over 58,000 dunams of forests and parks divided the built up areas from surrounding agricultural zones, including the adjacent small



satellite towns. Yet, at the same time, the Green Belt was used as a fortification device, aiming to keep workers tied to their residential and working areas.

Although condemning the British plan, which according to an official "only promoted the empire's plans, with no consideration of the city's needs", Haifa authorities built the Green Belt into the cityscape. It certainly separated and divided different land uses, but it was also meant to consolidate the city for the evolving Zionist community. So the same landscape concepts used in colonial planning to separate residential quarters from working areas and to provide for health, safety, and well-being were used to create the workers' city of 'Red Haifa'.

Watson, the British City Engineer, considered the Old City of Haifa a typical Middle Eastern urban agglomeration, unsuitable for modern living, "although the Old City [has] oriental romantic heritage, it is a serious burden to a modern city's planning development and a serious sanitary and transportation problem," he declared to the British planning authorities.

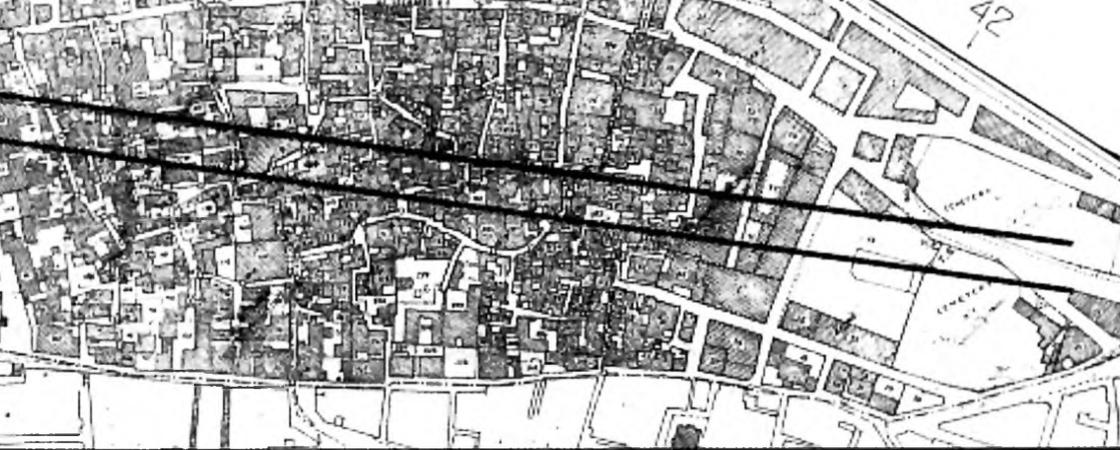
The Old City, established in the eighteenth century under Ottoman rule, had a typical chaotic urban pattern consisting of high-density, narrow, winding streets with haphazard buildings and no consistent geometric order. This presented a problem to the British concept of modern planning based on systematic control.

Due to Haifa's unique topography the Old City was quite evident when viewed from the top of the mountain. This view downward from the Carmel was a major concern for the city planners who aimed to create a panorama of the major imperial projects - the new downtown, the port and the industrial areas.

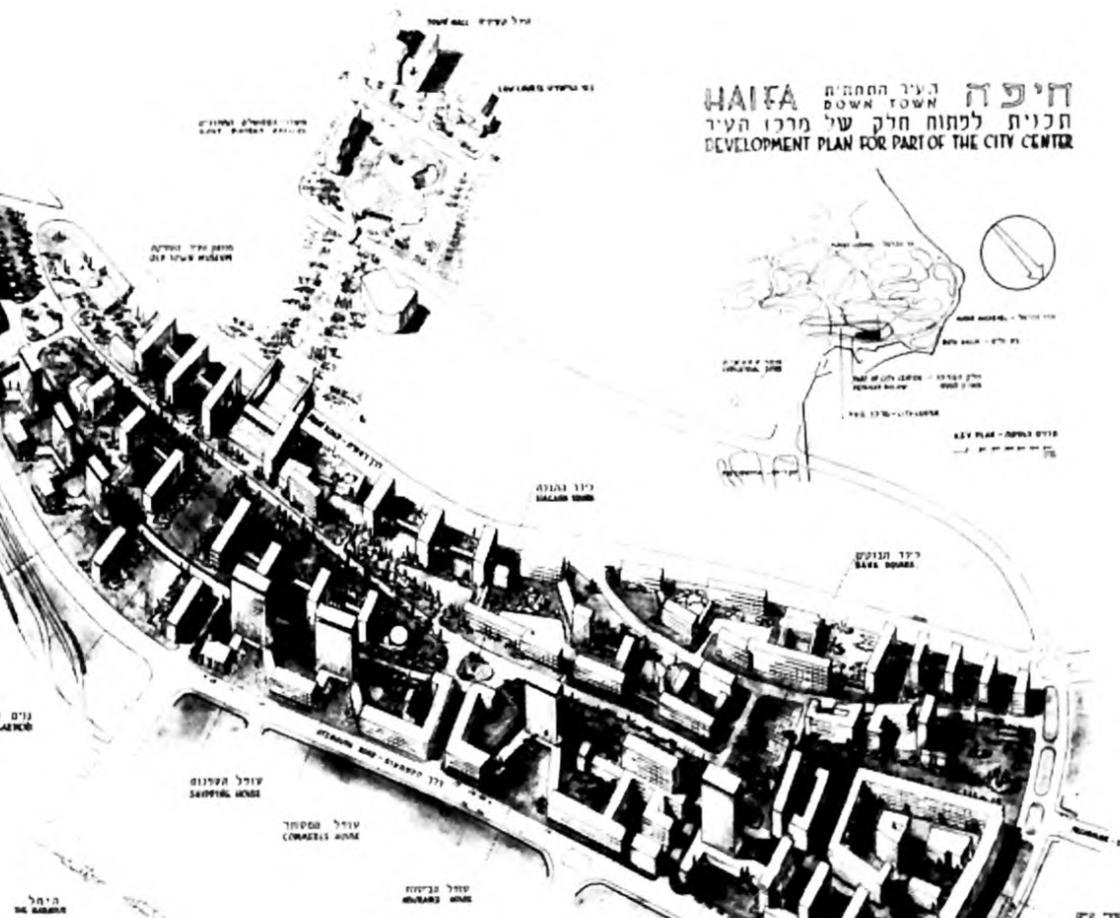
Poor conditions sealed the Old City's fate. Its demolition, like a surgical procedure, was seen as a necessary intervention in the "virtual heart of the town" in order to free the clogged city and bring rapid transportation and improved sanitation. The demolition scheme was to be handled in three strategic steps over ten years.

The first step, initiated by the British military, was intended to open a wide 'imperial' road called "George the Fifth Avenue" in the centre of the Old City while demolishing a large part of it. The second step (1938) was intended to reconstruct the entire Old City area while the third step (1947) called for the Old City's complete demolition, rebuilding it along with its entire surroundings.

The three demolition plans, though approved, made official, and included in the Mandatory planning scheme for the Haifa downtown area, were never executed by the British. But they



PLANS FOR PART OF HAIFA'S CITY CENTRE. Line through Old City by British engineers was the V Avenue and involved widespread clearance. It was never built, but prepared the way for 1948 when a 1951 planning competition to create a new Central city spine took place.



prepared the ground for the demolition of Haifa's Old City following the establishment of Israel in 1948.

During and after the 1948 war Haifa's urban fabric changed dramatically. More than 60,000 of the city's Arab residents left, escaped, or were expelled before and during the war. The downtown and Old City area became practically deserted, with the exception of churches, mosques and synagogues. The Old City's clearance became easy. Large portions of the urban structure were left in ruin and have remained uninhabited to this day.

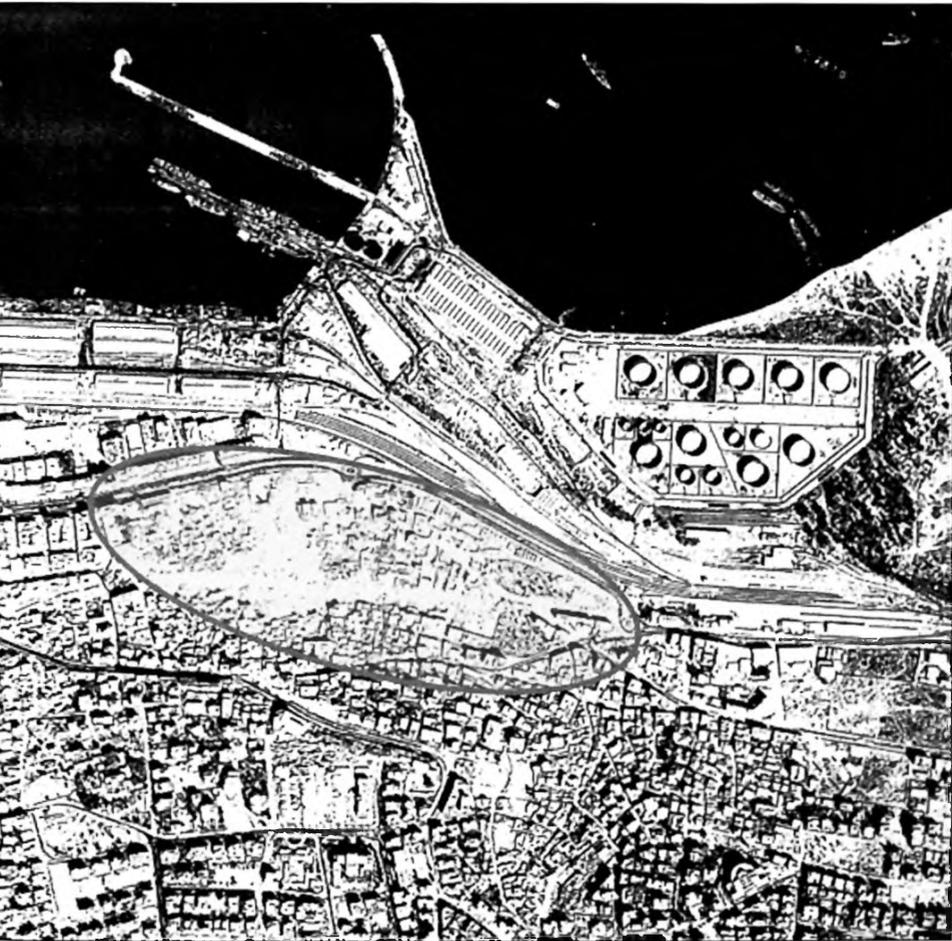
A new planning competition, initiated in 1951, aimed to rebuild the Old City and give it a new shape. This paralleled the attempt to reconstruct the remaining Arab neighbourhoods, the downtown area, Wadi Salib, Wadi Nisnas, and the German Colony. Like the British argument of the disorderly Orient, the idea was to modernise the whole area by implementing progress and development.

The Old City, the landscape of the Arab "natives", represented for Israelis the Middle Eastern culture of the enemy. Extended demolition plans were a powerful mechanism to relocate Arab neighbourhoods and create a new space for a new Jewish society. The clearing of land was intended to create a new urban image and replace the primitive and hostile landscape of the "other" by a Jewish city.

The competition for the 'New City Centre' was won by a proposal recommending an entirely new urban image for Haifa. In the name of modernity and progress it projected an urban society bound by the common theme of a reconstructed country. In the name of the new city, socio-cultural identities were to be forgotten and buried - both the identities of newly-arrived Jewish immigrants and those of the indigenous Arabs. The new city was like a leviathan, swallowing up the people, wiping out their differences, and consolidating the urban mass into a new collective.

Modernising Haifa's Old City was a common goal of both colonial and national powers, intended to replace its unordered landscape with an ordered one. However, where British colonial attempts to transform the landscape were made in the name of modern urban planning, the Israeli national challenges were based on a far-reaching political agenda. Like the colonial vision, the national scheme was intended to provide better living conditions for the city's residents. But with the call for progress and development, Israeli Haifa planned a transformed urban image. Its landscape

cing a city fit for the new state.



VIEW OF PORT DISTRICT highlighting the *Old City clearance area*.

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