



« Reinventing public space in Bethlehem » 2019-2022



@E.Cuenca, Ville de Paris



Since the beginning of 2000, the cities of Paris and Bethlehem have nurtured a friendship and established a fruitful cooperation. Today, Paris is helping Bethlehem to turn the Nativity Square, which has become over time a parking lot, into a friendly public space suitable for all users.



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In both Paris and Bethlehem, urban planning is evolving. Public space division is being reconsidered and pedestrians are now central to planning policies. Paris has been since 2019 interacting with Bethlehem to "[Reinvent the public space](#)", with funds from the **Agence Française de Développement**.

Mobility has revolved for a long time around privately owned cars, this project aims at reclaiming **public space for pedestrians and community life**. It involves awareness-raising activities and turning the Nativity Square into a space for everyone.

Understanding the Paris-Bethlehem cooperation

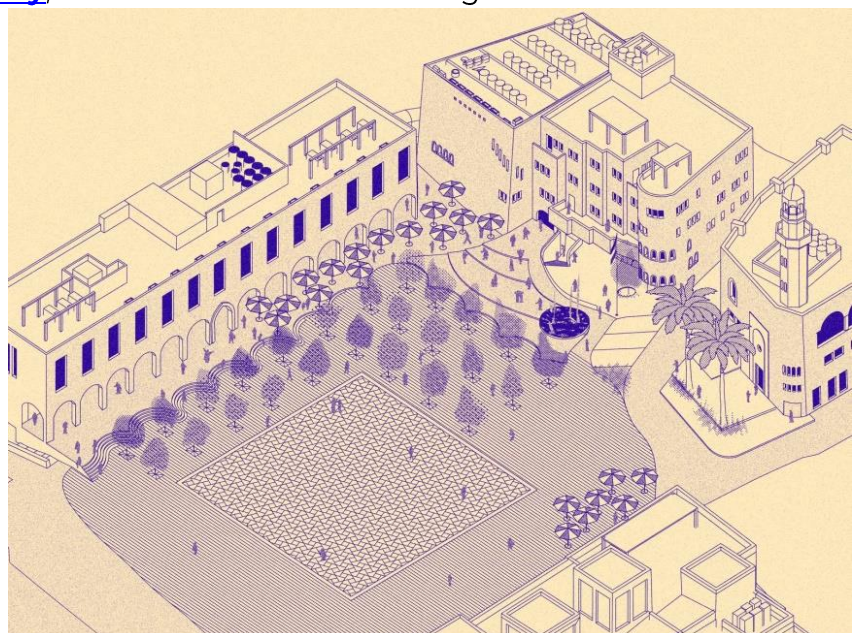
Cyrus North, a youtuber, has made an informative video explaining the background and goals of the cooperation. In the video, he explains why Paris is working with the municipality of Bethlehem and shows how a conversion of the square is possible. [The video was produced in partnership with the City of Paris and AFD](#):

Involving the citizens

Citizens are central to the process. Cultural and participatory urban planning tools are deployed through experiments, workshops and animations, to imagine with the residents the future developments and enable **cultural and social life**. Confronted with the pandemic, consultation activities have been introduced online: questionnaires, photographic marathon, virtual museum of the square, children's recreational activities with the [Conseil Architecture Urbanisme et Environnement de Paris](#) (drawing competition, tutorials for pop-ups and mini-theaters, photo rally).

The dialogue opened with the residents has revealed **the multiple identities of Bethlehem** and the many local divisions: socio-economic, religious, political and geographical.

The Nativity Square transformation project has been designed by **Palestinian architects and designers, of the [AAU Anastas agency](#)**, and will be exhibited during a final consultation with the residents at the end of 2021. The square will be made entirely pedestrian friendly. In front of the Municipality a space will be created with a multifunctional fountain and the arcades will be extended onto the square, with a seating system inspired from local landforms. The actions are minimal and focused on improving users' comfort with vegetation and stronger seating. The uses will thus be multiplied. Work should begin in the summer of 2022 for an inauguration at the end of the year.

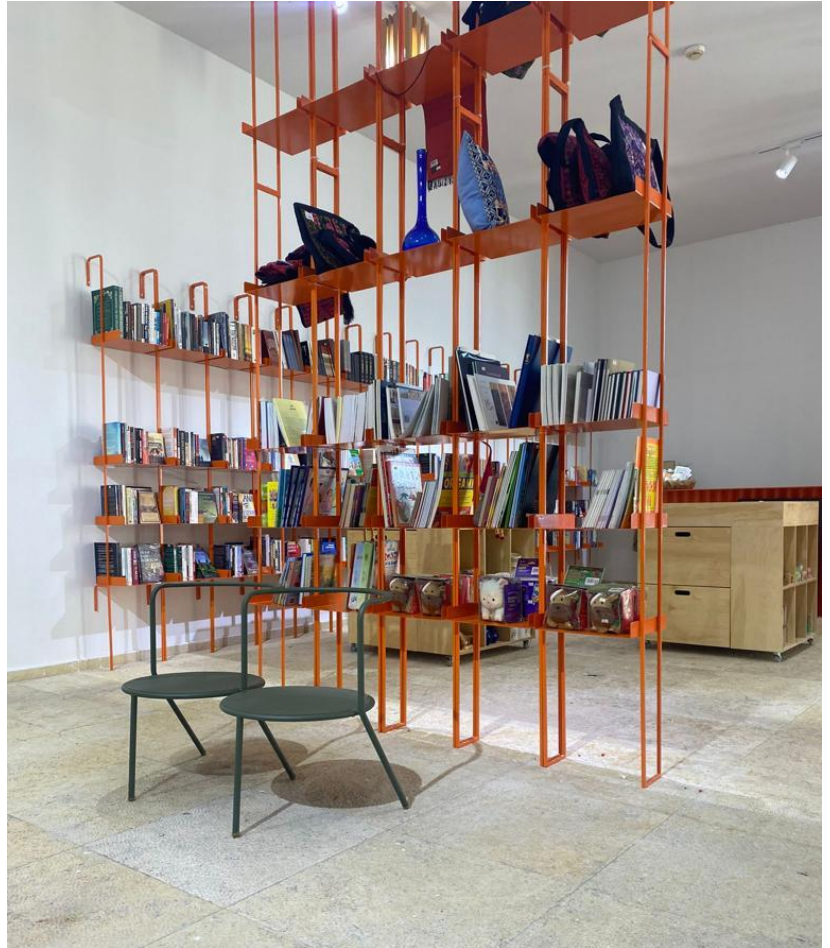


@AAU Anastas

Reinventing the Peace Center

The Peace Center, built through a Swedish cooperation, is a large-scale municipal cultural facility located in the Nativity Square. Today it receives few visitors and its renewal is at the core of the strategy to revive the square. The aim is to open up and bring the building back to life in the square, with ambitious cultural and social programming and amenities.

The ground floor of the building has thus been renovated for the project and turned into a multifunctional space. It has been designed to meet the expectations of residents and visitors: toy library, bookshop, tourist office counter, etc. The furniture has been produced by local craftsmen through [the Local Industries platform](#).



@Elias Anastas, Local Industries

Activities to boost cultural and social life

In connection with the label "**Bethlehem, Arab Capital of Culture**" in 2021, several activities have been planned and will be held in 2022:

- A campaign to promote **walking**, including tours on foot in the old town and renewed signage;
- Opening of the first **Palestinian Architecture Biennale**. Local architects, designers and artists will present their views on the contemporary use of public space and on social life in Bethlehem;
- Series of videos, including a flash mob *#We are Bethlehem* on the square ;
- **Work in 4 pilot schools** to improve pedestrian walkways (3D and creative crosswalks, tree planting, sidewalk repairs) ;
- Creation of a toy library and a domino set to re-design a new square;
- A photo exhibition with **large portraits of the residents** in the square to emphasize the shared identity;

- Events programmed to offer a “genuine ” **Christmas experience** in partnership with the city of **Strasbourg** (lightings, video-mapping, markets).