RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMPARING HABITATS

New Imagining in Palestine. Too Sensitive, Too Daring or Too Naïve.

AUTHORS

Dorota Kozaczuk

AFFILIATIONS

1 Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID), Geneva, Switzerland

CONTACT
dorota.kozaczuk@graduateinstitute.ch
Abstract

The paper offers an auto-ethnographic note from the Jerusalem Urban Resilience Studio workshop in Palestine during summer 2011. The ethnographic note describes participants’ efforts to plan for the new East Jerusalem neighbourhood Al Addasseh and introduces three different visions: two proposed by groups that formed in the course of the seven weeks in Palestine and authors own interpretation as an Architecture Diploma Student in London in the academic year 2011-2012. Analysis of the visions conceived in the course of the workshop is complemented by the description of the groups and intergroup dynamics. The following theoretical discussion offers insight into the anthropology of expert knowledge. It is organized around concepts from the ontological vocabulary of architecture and planning: imagining, praxis and reality. I will argue that study of architects and planner’s proposals need to account for many realities the professionals operate in including their professional conditioning and interests, their dialectic with found site and broader social context they practice in. The analysis problematizes the internationals’ offering their expertise in a politically contested place.


Introduction

In summer 2011 while a student of architecture and planning at London I travelled to Palestine. I joined the Jerusalem Urban Resilience Studio (26th June-11th August) organised by the International Peace and Cooperation Centre (IPCC). Together with a group of colleagues, I encountered the problematic of practising architecture and planning in an area of prolonged conflict. The paper offers an auto-ethnographic note on the workshop participants’ efforts to plan for the new East Jerusalem neighbourhood Al Addasseh and my proposition composed during the final year of my diploma studies in architecture. The ethnography is followed by a theoretical discussion.

In my experience, the Palestinian planning NGO's office became a space for restitution of foreign practices entrenched in their mainly Western social dynamics. Participants of the workshop divided into professional formations and produced two visions for Al Addasseh and one feasibility study. My workshop colleagues in the three professional groups negotiated into their propositions their nationalities, academic discourses, and professional practice experiences. Their forms of analysis of the site of Al Addasseh varied. The ethnographic note in the first section of the papers introduces visions proposed by workshop group as well as my interpretation of the site's problematic in the safe haven of the London architecture studio.

In the second section, I introduce an analytical lens to the groups and intergroup dynamics of the workshop. The discussion offers an insight into the anthropology of expert knowledge. The analysis problematizes the international efforts providing expertise in a politically contested place. A theoretical discussion is organised around concepts from the ontological vocabulary of architecture and planning: imagining, praxis and reality. In this short paper, I propose to focus on professional practices as avenues to the realisation of professional imaginings. I argue that professional practices and thence also their imaginations are subject to many subjective and objectified imputes, contestations, and negotiations. Those are inscribed in the architects’ and planner's proposals. Maps and
DOROTA KOZACZUK

drawings offer reading into realities the professionals operate in, including their professional conditioning, social imaginaries and their dialectic with the context of practice, in this paper: the broader Palestinian context.

Seven Weeks in Palestine

I went to Palestine as a student, in the summer break before my final year of Diploma in 2011. I joined a workshop organised by the Palestinian planning NGO: International Peace and Cooperation Centre (IPCC). I formed a group of international architects and planners: German, British, Irish, Canadian, Scottish, Swedish, Italian, Brazilian, and me, Polish. We all abandoned our respective academic or professional positions for seven weeks and came to Palestine to join the studio. We were asked to 'help' in designing the East Jerusalem Neighbourhood Al Addasseh. We acted as employed professionals, IPCC was our client. Our host, the Palestinian NGO, on the one hand had given us an ambitious brief challenging to fulfil in the Palestinian political context, on the other hand, introduced us to the planning issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Confronted with the inconsistent dynamic of the Palestinian reality and the clients unlikely-to-be-realised brief, from the second week of the workshop, we set about using the best of our various methodologies and technical skills to propose visions for Al Addasseh.

Impossible brief

The client brief's scope of the new Al Addasseh neighbourhood in East Jerusalem was ambitious. The vision relied on an expanded planning provision of the new Jerusalem Masterplan, that was supposed to update the 1979 municipal Masterplan. The old Jerusalem Masterplan and its various updates provided Jerusalemite Palestinians with the right to build in only 7% of East Jerusalem, mostly in existing Palestinian neighbourhoods. As analysed by Weizman, in the municipal area of East Jerusalem 'the floor area ratio - a planning ratio that defines the relation between the size of a plot and the size of the building - is kept low' [1]. In most of the area permitted for Palestinian construction in the East Jerusalem, the plot ratio was in the range of 35%-75%. In East Jerusalem, only two land-attached housing units per dunam were allowed. This provision dictated a particular type of spatial vernacular: a small Palestinian house on a large land plot. In effect only the suburban characteristic of Palestinian neighbourhoods was permissible. Whereas in the Jewish West Jerusalem the plot ratio was in the range of 75%-120%. Consequently, up to six housing units per dunam are allowed construction in three or four-storey buildings in Jewish neighbourhoods.

IPPC relied on the new provisions in the new unapproved Jerusalem Masterplan. IPCC aspired to mobilise new spaces allocated for the Palestinian neighbourhoods' expansion. Al Addasseh was the biggest of the provided for sites. The site covered an area of 677000m2. (Fig 1). Despite the provision of new land for the Palestinian neighbourhoods, Jerusalem municipal administration kept the numbers of permitted housing developments low. Despite the administrative restriction, in the brief IPCC communicated with the workshop participants asking for a realisation of a Palestinian new urban centre of commerce and culture combined with high rise blocks as well as an extensive housing neighbourhood. The IPCC gave the workshop participants an ambitious, if not impossible brief, that meant turning the hill of Al Addasseh into a 'Centre of Life'.
Jerusalem Municipality was actively limiting the scope of the brief while at the same time it was the primary gatekeeper for its coming into being. IPCC had been in negotiations with the Jerusalem Municipality for a long time before the workshop. They had proposed three local plans between 2007 and 2011 (Fig 2), none of which had been approved. Nevertheless, in the course of negotiations with the Jerusalem Municipality, IPCC managed to increase the allowed housing density from an initial 500 units to 2500.
Throughout the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict the Jerusalem Municipality used administrative provisions to acquire Jerusalemite Palestinian land and dwarf their housing expansion (establishing extensive planning zones in East Jerusalem for archaeological sites, parks, as well as infrastructure projects). 74 plot owners had a stake in the planning process towards the new urbanity in Al Addasseh. They were required to give up their historical plot ownership and surrender to the urban processes of ‘re-parcellation’. Such processes were hostile to the Palestinian population. To obtain planning and development permission, the owners of plots had to give up between 20% to 40% of their land towards infrastructure spaces that would fall under Jewish administration. The IPCC worked to overcome this mistrust via their activism among the local population. IPCC informed the international professionals participating in the workshop of this dynamic, yet that inscribed in the Al Addasseh brief was a certain level of distance from the considerations arising from the history of Palestinian and Israeli conflict. The ambitions for the ‘Centre of Life’ in Al Addasseh deserted some of the administrative restrictions Palestinian Jerusalemites were subjected to, as well as the distrust of the local population in the administrative processes and changes in the status quo of their spatial belonging.

The ambitious striving of the IPCC’s brief was informed by the shortage of Palestinian housing and city facilities in East Jerusalem, while the brief’s feasibility was restricted by the political particularities of the Palestinian - Israeli conflict. Thence, the workshop group of professionals was asked to work towards the realization of this contradictory brief. Upon an initial and diagrammatic analysis, the workshop participants rapidly realised that the allowed 2500 houses, which the IPCC held as a success, were not going to exhaust the potential of the site and would not create the desired urban centre fabric. The site, to have a credible city centre spatial vernacular, needed to be filled to its full capacity of 10,000
housing units and in some places rise above the permissible plot ratio. On the one hand, in order to secure land for future development, beyond the allotted 2,500 housing units necessitated a strategy of a low rise urban sprawl with extensive gardens to secure maximum Palestinian ownership of the site under the new Jewish administration’s planning provisions. On the other hand, workshop participants were expected to propose a legitimate, high rise urban centre with schools, a hospital, medical clinics, a commercial centre and an industrial area. Such strategy necessitated dense urban fabric that used up available housing units, in an area of one-third of the site.

Responses

All participants that arrived in East Jerusalem in summer 2011 responded to an international call sent out by the IPCC. Some prospective participants circulated the call amongst their colleagues and among those who responded to the studio advertisement where a few who had known each other from working or training together in the past. I was presented with the IPPC workshop leaflet by my planning teacher in London. Upon arrival in Palestine, initially unified as international experts the group soon divided into subgroups. The three groups in the workshop formed mainly along sympathetic and alike forms of past practices, sometimes complemented by their past professional relationship. Participants’ nationalities played a secondary role in the groups’ composition. The internal processes of leadership formation, negotiations of inputs within groups and across groups were also started up. Here again past professional positions played a significant role. Upon completion of this process the new professional formation the participants of the workshop focused back on the project for Al Addasseh. The groups responded to the IPCC’s brief and the site embedded in the Palestinian political situation in varying ways. At the end of the workshop IPCC was presented with two visions for Al Addasseh and one feasibility study. These offered three different ways of tackling the local Palestinian problem. While ‘Experiential’ plan offered a careful analysis of the site’s spatial conditions and possibilities, the ‘Grid’ plan rejected the political problematic and overall spatial constraints and produced conceptual strategies.

The first group was composed of British, Irish, Scottish and Canadian nationals. One British and two Irish members of the group had known each other for a long time, practised or studied together before coming to Palestine. They headed small architectural practices and were unit leaders in a school of architecture in London. The Canadian architect alike worked in education and directed a small practice in Canada. Finally, the Scottish member of the group was a student of architecture at the time. The group focused on the locality and the ground analysis. At the end of the project, the group proposed an ‘Experiential’ plan (Fig 3).
The 'Experiential' group spent a long time surveying the site. They went in the heat of the Palestinian summer to the Al Addasseh hill, mapped the trees, the vegetation, the fences, the stones. They consolidated surveyed information into one labour-intensive drawing recording the site's fragments. In their proposal, they were protecting the hill's wealth: terraced hills, olive trees, the archeologic site, the Bedouin camp, fauna and flora of the seasonal river valley. The groups' proposal cherished the geography of the place, and the drawing attempted to convey an atmosphere of appreciation to what was there. However, under the pressure of time, in the last weeks of the workshop, the group filled in the unmapped areas with diagrammatic propositions of housing and city infrastructure as per the IPCC's brief. In their final drawing, the proposed urban development stood in the sharp contrast to the hill's detailed, immaculately mapped fragments.

The 'Experiential' final proposal for Al Addasseh resulted in reminding the IPCC of the British Garden City vernacular. The client's request for new 'strong urban identity' was compromised in the proposed vision. Also, although the IPCC was appreciative of the sensitivity inscribed, this approach did not serve strategic goals of the NGO, who foresaw the acquisition of all the land on the site under the project and proportional redistribution of parcels under the new vision for the area. The experiential approach did not respond to the Palestinian political conditions or the IPCC's brief. The 'Experiential' group's mapped and incorporated into the design sensitivity was not endorsed by the Palestinian experts, who wished for a new urban identity. The members of the workshop had little time to consolidate their qualitative observations into a proposition that would withstand the political conditions of planning in Palestine and tap into the client's imaginaries.
The second group's response to the clients' needs focused on processes needed for the realisation of the project. The 'Grid' vision (Fig 4) projected confidence in the future of Al Addasseh. This group was larger and composed of two British, Irish, Swedish, Canadian and Polish nationals, complemented by help from two Palestinian students. Three individuals, British, Irish and Swedish, formed the core of the group and had known each other before the workshop, as they had been working together on large-scale infrastructure and neighbourhood development projects across Europe. They all had worked in large planning consultancies and had also experience in teaching architecture and urban design. The Canadian group member was a landscape architecture student and was interested in large-scale sustainable issues. I worked with this group during my time in Palestine. I had known two of the core group members from my education in Britain.

Fig 4. Grid Map

The 'Grid' vision proposed a highly diagrammatic strategy. The members of the group initially visited the site and continued to work from IPCC offices via diagrammatic experimentations with Al Addasseh in Auto Cad and In-Design programmes. The proposed Cartesian grid overlaid onto the site dealt with the issue of potential land loss due to underdevelopment, by suggesting the development of the whole site. The height of the buildings was relatively low due to planning restrictions. In the context of the Al Addasseh hill, it the proposed development of the site along the grid infrastructure and expressed no culturally or historically sensitive relation to the site's geographical conditions. Instead, New York served as a feasibility study. The vision strategically did not relate to Palestinian cultural heritage or its inhabitants' traditional forms of occupation. The strategy conveyed the urge to organise the messy, arbitrary ever-changing conditions of the East Jerusalem.
It seemingly negated the bureaucratic stresses of the occupation: the need for the negotiation between Palestinian experts and the Israeli administrative apparatus. It was also a definite rejection of initial planning done by IPCC. As such, it was an impossibility from the outset, yet IPCC welcomed it. Although the IPCC found the proposition too rigid in its spatial disposition, the 'Grid' vision communicated a sound strategic move that demonstrated the planning steps required to realise close to a square kilometre of the urban fabric. For the NGO members it was an exercise in fresh thinking. They welcomed the abstraction from and above the imaginative restraints of the conflict setting and their past hegemons.

The third group had not proposed any vision, but rather a feasibility study. They interviewed site residents and landowners, analysed how the site would develop under the present political status quo, anticipating informal settlement expansion across the site. Theirs was a necessary reminder of what was socially and politically possible in Al Addasseh under restrictive planning provisions of the Jerusalem Municipality. The group's feasibility study did not relate to the site's spatial conditions, nor responded to IPCC's expectations. It provided the client with the information IPCC was very familiar with due to years of dialogue with the residents and landowners of Al Addasseh. However, the feasibility study findings were shared with other groups and incorporated into their studies.

Towards the end of the seven weeks seminar, all three groups began exchanging information, consolidating findings and learning from each groups' methodologies, conclusions and finally IPCC's reactions. By then, however, the time has run out to negotiate those into a single proposition.

I took on the project of Al Addasseh as the subject for my final year of Diploma in Architecture in London in the academic year 2011-2012. At the university, I had time to conduct a more thorough historical study. I had read about Middle Eastern architecture and planning restrictions in Palestine. Under the discursive influences of Orientalism in the readings I covered, I fell into two traps: a naïve historicity, and surrender to conditions of the arbitrariness of war and time. I proposed a very artistic process of 'stitching the city' (Fig 5). I had refused to submit a unified vision or a strategy. Instead, I prescribed a method. I believed in a slow process of city making that would not disturb the existing land ownership structure of Al Addasseh. Relying on my historical reading of the Islamic city origin, I instead offered structure to such urbanisation. I presumed that the historic environmentally sensible to local climate vernacular was the desired one. I proposed low rise shaded courtyard housing incorporating sustainable water redistribution strategies between courtyards that relied on the geography of the hill. The stitching of the scarf was a metaphor for a city fostering bottom-up, cohesive, communal and non-divisive process. I incorporated the thematic preoccupation with sustainability and the civil society.
In this proposition, I underestimated the hegemon of modernity that has taken hold in Palestine. I was mistaken to think that the pre-modern was timely and neglected the desires of the nucleolus Palestinian family of a villa type of house. In my proposition, I neglected to problematize IPCC's reactions to my colleagues' proposals a year earlier and incorporate those into my final Architecture Diploma project. The IPCC had asked for the modern aesthetic statements and brave strategies that would counteract the constraints of the occupation. I had witnessed how the propositions of my workshop colleagues' turned out to be too sensitive (Experiential) or too daring (Grid), while my own was too naive. No realisable proposition for Al Addasseh came about in that summer 2011, mine a year later was no exception. None of the proposals envisaged the IPCC's urban centre ideal.

Discussion

Following the summer 2011 workshop in Palestine and the final year of my Diploma in Architecture in Britain, I begun reflecting on my role as a professional in Palestine. The ethnographic account needed to be placed among theoretical debates and looked back into again. This PhD proposition began with an intent to rethink the practice of experts in Palestine. Architects and planners practice to alter the reality, ideally to better it in some
way. Their imaginaries are inscribed into maps, drawings or documents. The architectural and planning practice mediates between processes of mapping and drawing and the profession's ways of conceiving of the context. I thence mobilise the ontological elements of practices of those professionals: imagining, praxis and reality. Furthermore, the ethnographic account presented places those elements of professional practice in the space of conflict. The theoretical, or empirical analysis of the context of conflict is beyond the scope of this paper. Furthermore, the discussion below will focus solely on one element of the ontological trio: practices, via which it will nevertheless be revealed how imagining and reality are conceived and objectified among the professionals.

Practising Imagining

Architects and planners practice the art of imagination while placing it in reality. The professional practices of imagining and form of professional engagement with the found reality are non-uniform. The relationship of the imagination with reality is an important one to conceptualise as it informs the practices themselves. According to a philosopher, Baudrillard ‘Our consciousness ... comes more spontaneously from challenging reality, from siding with objective illusion than from objective reality. This challenge is more vital to our survival and for the survival of the species than the belief in reality and existence’ [2]. This assertion sustains that although escaping or challenging reality to bring about the better world, imagining is nevertheless responding to its objectified forms. Also, according to the art theorist Adorno, the purpose of imagination is altering the world. ‘If art has psychoanalytic roots, then they are the roots of fantasy in the fantasy of omnipotence. This fantasy includes the wish to bring about a better world’ [3]. Those statements of both philosophers establish a theoretical link between imagination and reality. Both authors argue that imagining is geared to bring about change, yet they remain inconclusive as to the levels to which the imagining is far-reaching and exceeding the conditions of the found world.

To varying degrees, the architectural and planning imaginings exceed the reality. Realities are not conceived as uniform in time and space, and thence professional imaginings are subject to continuous change as a response to different realities. There is however in architecture and planning a set of core professional practices that mediate the ways of engagement with contact and the ways of conceiving new visions. Historically architects and planners practice via concepts: ethics and aesthetics, and tools like orthographic projection, mapping and drawing. Saint argues that architecture is a weak profession holding on to its ‘moral hegemony’ [4]. He writes that ‘architecture is the only liberal profession whose welfare - possibly its very survival - depends on its ability to enunciate and rally around a set of moral principles ... [that] shift and evolve’ [4]. Hence the concept of ethics in architecture although always present is an evolving one. So too that of aesthetics. According to Leach ‘ firmitas (structural integrity) and utilitas (usefulness) in fairly objective terms, but the third term of the Vitruvian triad, venustas (charm, beauty), has proved so subjective that architects have resorted frequently to moral terminology to justify it. ‘Becoming’, ‘seemly’, ‘appropriate’, ‘sincere’, ‘good’’ [5]. Leach’s argument sustains that aesthetical practice is, like ethics, an evolving one. Moreover, he claims that architects ‘anaesthetize reality’ [6] in the process of ‘sink[ing] blissfully into an intoxicating stupor, which serves to cushion the individual from the world outside like some alcoholic haze’ [6]. Drawing and mapping are the tools of this blissful imagining. Kulper’s discussion about the ‘discursive images’ echoes Leach’s argument. Kupler points to ‘inherent danger [that lies] in their capacity to alter disciplinary discourse, such that technique becomes the ersatz
“content” of architecture’ [7]. Consequently, ways of making images, an important part of architectural practice, mediate professional relationship with the reality. Yet again, the scholarly discourses make no conclusive statements as to the degree to which the ‘imaginative stupor’ is inscribed into the drawings.

Structuring practices

The above discussion concludes that the architectural and planning practices are relational to ever changeable profession’s core concepts: ethics and aesthetics. The professional core practices: image making and mapping avail this mobility. On the one hand the core concepts of architectural practice allow for subjective processes of imaginative response to reality, on the other, however, they can become elements that actively structure professional imagination. This dual dynamic of the practice itself is expressed in Adorno’s assertion: ‘Art is not only the plenipotentary of a better praxis than that which has to date predominated but is equally the critique of praxis as the rule of brutal self-preservation at the heart of the status quo and in its service’ [3]. This suggestion is further explored by insights from social sciences’ analysis of objectifying elements of professional practices and their struggle to escape objectification of imagination. The inability to imagine the world otherwise and to better the practice would mean professionals’ submission to ‘tyranny of the status quo’ (ibid.).

Charles Taylor [8] argues that practices structure what he calls ‘social imaginaries’, among those ‘ideas, sorties and legends’ (ibid.:p.23) that in turn structure practices. According to Taylor imaginaries are ‘shared by large groups of people’ and it is ‘that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy’ (ibid.). Social imaginaries are hard to change. In a process that he calls ‘a long march … new practices, or modifications of old ones, either developed through improvisations among certain groups and strata of the population (e.g. the public sphere among educated elites in the 18th century, trade unions among workers in the 19th); or elsewhere launched by elites in such a way as to recruit larger and larger base’ [8], I argue experts and artists are the groups of the 20th century embodying both improvisation, innovation, knowledge and status while operating among their respective societies at large. In experts’ and artists’ practices, we find the reasons and mechanisms of this ‘long march’ - the objectifying forces of their imaginations. We also uncover modes of radical change of practices, namely entry into new social formations and contexts.

The historical skills - shared knowledge and tools like ethics, aesthetics, orthographic projection and drawing, are structuring the processes of architects’ and planners’ imagining. This forms professional habitus that Bourdieu describes as ‘a system of durable, transposable dispositions, [that] function as structuring structures, that is … as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes’ [9]. He further argues that ‘habitus, like every art of inventing, is what makes it possible to produce an infinite number of practices that are relatively unpredictable (like corresponding situations) but also limited in their diversity’ (ibid. 9).

We find Evans analysis informing us of a similar impossibility of imaginative excess within architecture. According to Evans ‘what connects thinking to imagination, imagination to drawing, drawing to building, and building to our eyes is projection in one guise or another, or process that we have chosen to model on projection’ [10]. Although according to Evans all those moments of an inscription of an idea into a drawing are ‘zones of instability’ (ibid.) he summarizes his analysis saying that ‘when architects attempt to escape from the
tyranny of geometry, meaning by that the tyranny of the box, where do they escape to? Either they must give up geometry altogether ... or they escape to another, always more complex and demanding geometry’ (ibid. 10). Architectural and planning practices are subjected to historical structuring restraints of orthographic projection and so are therefore professional imaginaries at large. The practices of imagination via this historical set of skills leads to the objectified form of imagining, where, a Bourdieu argued, proposed professional visions are inescapably similar.

Further structuring imagining is the materiality of architecture. The architectural objects in any moment of history were constructed with their contemporary materials and construction solutions. Those solutions became standards as evident in the old books of architectural construction. The contemporary professionals alike use globalized and standardized types of architectural construction. Benjamin in ‘The work of Art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction’ [11] debates the relationship of repetition or uniqueness to art. The author examines the conditions under which an object is conceived as art introducing a concept of ‘aura’. The architectural object even in the moment of its conception and bare imaginative existence in a form of a drawing relies on a small repertoire of construction materials and methods. Possibilities of the architectural form are limited. To become art, according to Benjamin, an (architectural) object needs to embody authority, needs to become a spectacle of meaning, symbolism, the very social imagination Taylor wrote about. There are other possibilities for art to gain ‘auratic’ existence. The art also relies on the authority of the artist, or profits from the context in which it is displayed.

Finally, architects and planners form social coalitions with their counterparts and other professions, that structure and objectify forces of imaginative flaneuring. According to Howard Becker artists operate in the domain of their own ‘art worlds’: that ‘rests on an extensive division of labour’ [12] and is especially true with material arts. Not speaking explicitly about architects Becker’s argues that ‘members of art worlds coordinate their activities by which work is produced by referring to a body of conventional understandings embodied in common practice and in frequently used artefacts. The same people often cooperate repeatedly, even routinely, in similar ways to produce similar works’ [12]. A network of participants in the work of art’s production requires and relies on patterns of collective activity. Alike architecture as the process involving many people across various professions relies on patterns of cooperation and structures of architectural production. Architecture that is embedded in social relations that make it possible, is limited by those relations in its form.

The authority of the architectural object can also arise from ‘artist's authority’ that is sustained by the idea of embodied knowledge. In architecture and planning, this takes the form of reaffirmation of their creative and knowledgeable subjectivity, beyond structuring processes of drawing, constructing and patterns of practice. According to a sociologist of the profession, Abbot: architects are among occupations that guard lifelong embodied knowledge. Those individuals in collective interest safeguard professional skills against commodification [13]. They do so via refining the practices (new geometries, materials, ideas like sustainability) yet this process as analysed before, is limited. They hence continue to reaffirm the professional hegemony of moral and esthetic practices, and often both are mobilised (sustainability is ethical, and can be made beautiful). Imagining itself and the embodied ethical code become key to the autonomy of the professionals. When ethics and aesthetics become codified (codes of conduct, rules of proportion) professional autonomy necessitates escaping from structuring element of professional class that is limiting its imaginations on the level of ontological concepts.
In a particular techno-social constellation, architecture and planning are inescapably able to propose standardized and objectified solutions. The possibility of practising the arts requires the professional to break away from the forces limiting his imagination. For the architects and planners, the new setting and entry into new social formations, therefore, offers possibilities to imagine differently in response to new condition and in this process advanced are the professional practices themselves.

Negotiated practices

Architects and planners practice in various social and professional formations irrespective of the context. Speaking specifically about architects (and also lawyers and engineers) Abbot, argues that those professionals form ‘linked ecologies … a coalition that links one group of firms, government agencies, and voluntary associations into an alliance against other alliances linking other companies, agencies, and nonprofits’ (ibid. 13). Professionals abroad as well as in their home countries need to continuously communicate their projects and vision across social groups: clients, contractors, municipalities, professional counterparts. Travelling professionals have an opportunity of breaking the patterns of practice among home professional formation. In the new context, they are exposed to other construction technicians, materiality and ecology of different geography. The new context for the architects and planners offers a potential for a renewed relationship of their subjective imagining to the found reality. New context also offers entry into a new professional relationship and thence refinement of professional practices.

The new context is not a social vacuum, it is filled with otherwise conceived social formations. Travelling professional enters distinct ‘social imaginaries’: expectations, ideals, myths, histories. An architect or planner travelling to the new location to practice enters there into new professional negotiations that are new to him, yet also rely upon otherwise established patterns and common social imaginaries in the host context. Once outside their home professional formations, in the new social context architects and planners need to communicate and negotiate their imaginaries with various groups involved in the project. To that end, they rely on the common professional notions and concepts (ethics and aesthetics) and on shred professional historical practices (drawing, mapping).

The core professional concepts and images/maps become the key to inscribing different expectations and knowledge’s among newly formed coalitions. They are what sociologists of professions call the ‘boundary object’ [14]. According to Star and Griesemer, ‘boundary object’ (engineers drawings in their analysis) is ‘an analytic concept of those scientific objects which both inhabit several intersecting social worlds … and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them’ [14]. Architectural plans, maps and planning documents are such objects. Also, ethics and aesthetics are ‘boundary concepts’ that allow for communication across professionals and social formations. Those objects and concepts can be used for contestation of ideas, for competition or negotiations of values.

In well established existing or competing coalitions the same maps and concepts function as ‘work artefact’ [15] or elements in ‘jurisdiction struggles’ [16]. According to Bechky ‘workplace artefacts’ were ‘objects [that] represented occupational legitimacy: because they transmitted reputations, … to claim standing as valid practitioners of a particular occupation’ [15]. Maps and drawings, ethics and aesthetics are therefore all potential elements used in hostile or cooperative professional negotiations within and between coalitions of social actors. Maps become a space for negotiation, objectification and communication of imaginaries.
New context opens the possibility of (not always realized) positive conception of mapping and drawing towards cooperation. At a minimum new coalition is a space for ontological negotiation of both core concepts and tools of professional practice. In the new context, among new social formation, negotiation of visions possibly necessitates invention of new strategies and new practices, yet they all really on the communication via the image making processes. In new professional constellations, the image or a map becomes a space of this negotiation and the artefact of negotiated values and social imaginaries across cultures.

Conclusions

Entering into a new context, architect or planner strategically escapes constraints forged by social formations and social imaginaries of their own society. Being in the new location and among new social formations allows the professional to exceed beyond the objectifying forces of habitual restraint and to refine their practices. However, in the process of negotiations in the new social formations they strengthen their reliance on the core concepts and tools operational in the profession. The core negotiation that takes place is of values inscribed in ontological concepts of architecture and planning.

The maps presented in this paper were read as inscribed processes of professional practices. In the IPCC workshop of 2011 the international architects and planners entered Palestine for seven weeks, worked in the new formation, with a new site, negotiating their conceived imagined visions among themselves and with the IPCC. The images have traces of their professional constraints but they also as visions test what is possible, critique, historicize, romanticize and challenge. They reveal stable and unchangeable elements of professional practices, which are the necessity for communication and successful negotiations among professionals inside and outside of a particular context.

My colleagues and I not only entered into a new context but into the context of the conflict in Palestine. As explained, the groups in the workshop rejected the conflict problematic in their proposed visions. In the context of conflict, the professional counterparts relying on standard practices communicated well on the level of practice. However, this dialogue was problematized by the existence of ontological vocabulary specific to the context of conflict, that the visiting architects and planners had no lived experience of: occupation, colonialism or violation of human rights.

In reviewing my experience in Palestine described in the ethnographic account in this paper, I hold no regret for testing my professional skills in Palestine, however fruitless. The comings and goings of foreign professionals in Palestine will in the light of the theoretical debate, affect their home practices more than bring to fruition the work done on a project. The new context was more prone to free up their imaginative strivings. In the short period of the seven weeks workshop, my colleagues and I had not even begun to understand the social imaginaries and values in Palestine. And yet the cooperation of international professionals with the Palestinian NGO challenged everyone involved to think beyond their habitual and hegemonic restraints. Cross-cultural short encounters like the ones I described take us away from our professional practices entrenched in our home environments, broadening social imaginaries, one's professional formations, not least the act of drafting itself. Practising across cultures, however, brings to light those restraining forces and allows us to reflect on our professional practices wherever they are.
References