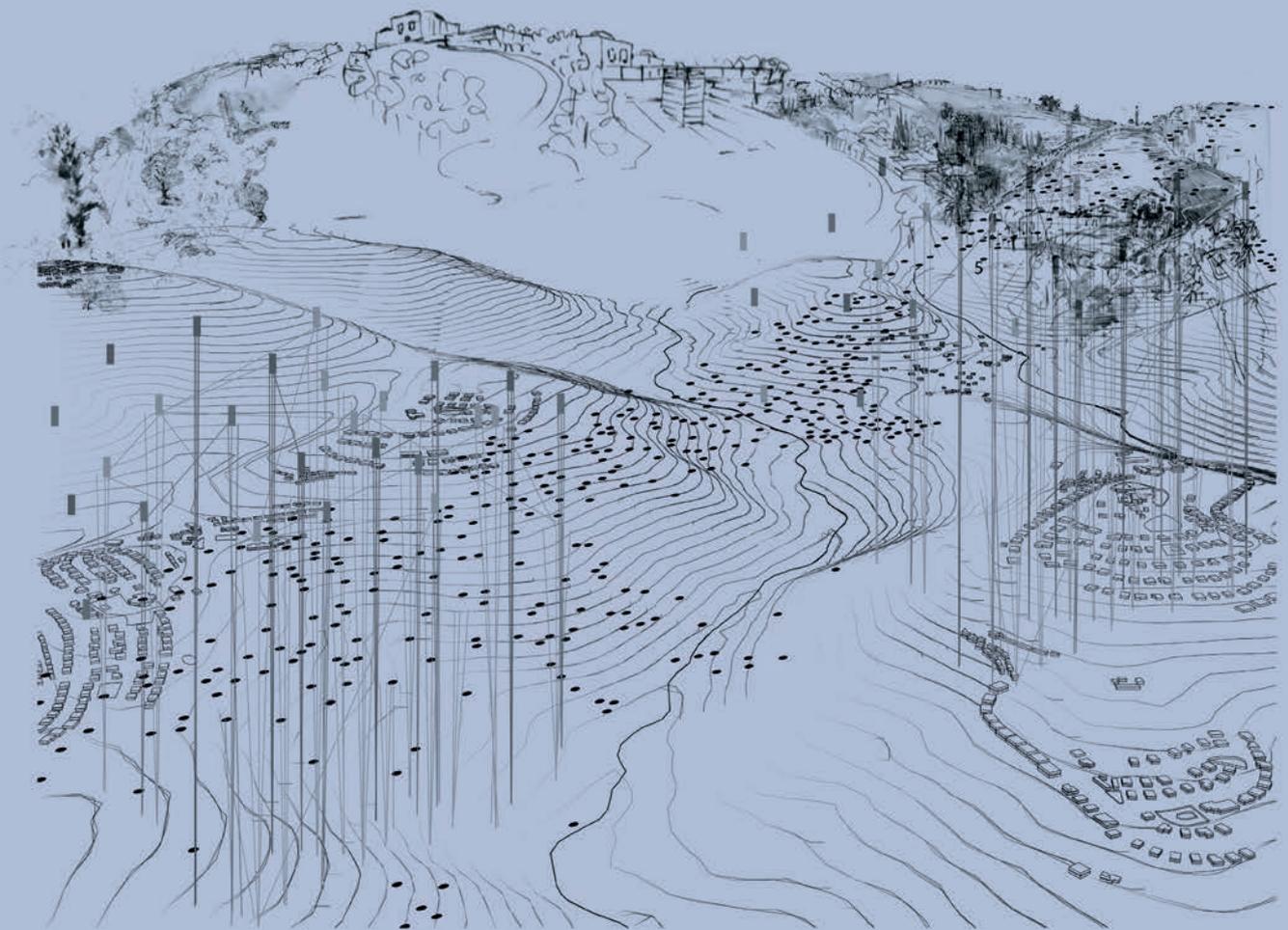


# STITCHING, HEALING AND EMPOWERING

Interrogating the Garden as a Space of Reclamation  
Occupied Palestine



NASSER GOLZARI  
YARA SHARIF

UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTMINSTER



DESIGN RESEARCH FOLIO 2021



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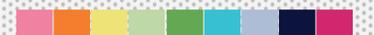
**Architect:** *Golzari NG Architects and  
Palestine Regeneration Team (PART):  
Nasser Golzari, Yara Sharif*

**Funders:** *AWAN UK, PART, NGA,  
RIWAQ, Sakiya*

**Collaborators:** *Awan, RIWAQ  
(NGO), Sakiya (NGO), Women's  
Association of Beit Ikksa*

**Location:** *AWAN Festival UK, Chicago  
Biennale, Berlin Film Biennale, Beit Ikksa,  
Palestine, Ein Kinya, Palestine*

**Date:** *2016-2020*





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Fig. 1  
A strategy looking at the birds as a means to reclaim the contested sky and stitch Palestine's fragmented landscape together  
collage: NG Architects

Figs 2, 3  
Beit Iksa village, before and after renovation

**ABSTRACT**

This folio sets out recent projects undertaken by Dr Yara Sharif and Dr Nasser Golzari who established the Palestine Regeneration Team (PART) in 2008, with work including designing urban layouts and retrofitting existing buildings in derelict Palestinian towns and villages.

PART combines built and speculative design to enable communities in Occupied Palestine. An overarching theme of recent projects is that of the garden and the landscape and how green space can be used to stitch Palestine together in a sustainable manner following sustained external assaults, and doing so in a way that empowers the Palestinian people. Stitching, healing and empowering are guiding principles in reinforcing their identity and relationship to the land.

Golzari and Sharif's approach brings forward 'absent' narratives through spatial means. Using techniques of 'social mapping' and the analysis of everyday life and traditional cultural practices in Palestine, the projects promote low-cost, sustainable responses. This work forms part of an ongoing group of interlinked projects which offer architectural interventions to heal rural communities in Palestine.

As working and tested prototypes, the projects are then used as models to be implemented in other villages across the West Bank and Gaza. PART has worked on this with local NGOs, UN-Habitat, and municipalities through the repair of landscapes and the regeneration of historic village centres across the West Bank and in the reconstruction of destroyed neighbourhoods in Gaza.

This folio features case studies which reflect the dual nature of PART's strategic lessons and models for reclaiming the rural, where pragmatic built interventions are complemented by more speculative and experimental design work. The former is represented here by the Beit Iksa village project near Jerusalem, where a part-ruined village has been regenerated through design participation into a stable and productive landscape where vegetable gardens and eco-playgrounds become spaces of reclamation.

The strategic lessons and models for reclaiming the rural are interwoven with a strand of more speculative and experimental design work, such as the Digital Garden and the Garden of Production projects (2019-ongoing). This is part of both the broader international dissemination of the built work and the development and promotion of a positive, Palestinian-based creative response to a threatened identity that explore the potential for stealth interventions within the fissures created by Israeli occupation.

PART's ongoing work was short-listed for the RIBA research awards 2016. The Digital Garden formed the centrepiece of Sharif and Golzari's curated exhibitions, with Palestinian heritage NGO, RIWAQ: Centre for Architectural Conservation, at the 2019 AWAN Festival UK, the Chicago Architecture Biennial and the 2020 Berlinale.



Fig. 4  
The rural landscape in the central highlands of Palestine (West Bank today) with its olive terraces and historic fabrics



Fig. 5  
Representing Beit Iksa with its surrounding rural landscape

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How may responsive projects at very different scales be developed to help heal and stitch together landscapes and local communities, empowering them within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
- How may village-based eco-projects form part of a wider landscape reclamation strategy to a marginalised community with a context of limited resources and control?
- What role can the garden play in this in its various physical and conceptual forms?
- How may speculative and imaginative projects develop the outreach and cultural potential of such initiatives?

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Sharif and Golzari used the physical realities and cultural ideas of a garden as a tool for regenerating a damaged Palestinian village working with the village to establish a new productive landscape. As with all their work, this feeds into a wider strategy linking direct participatory built projects with wider strategic and cultural dimensions.

Through a sequence of responsive design interventions, PART's overarching aim is to find constructive ways of using architecture and urban design to mend the fragmented Palestinian landscape through the principles of 'stitching', 'healing' and 'empowering'. In addition to designing urban strategies and refurbishing buildings in derelict towns and villages in Palestine, PART also engages in speculative design projects that explore hidden potentials within the fissures created by Israeli occupation.

There are many components to PART's Palestine-wide projects and many iterations to the conceptual and physical use of the garden in using greenery as part of the stitching and empowering process. The garden can become a tool to challenge the land-grab that has followed Israeli occupation and be the inspiration for imaginative projects that can transcend the externally imposed physical restrictions that constrain everyday life for Palestinians under occupation.

Working locally and through participation with specific villages, the projects develop and test models which may then be shared across the Palestinian landscape. Culturally significant heritage buildings and village landscapes are literally stabilised and strengthened along with an emotional strengthening of society. Though physically small, and architecturally all-but-invisible from afar, these live projects, together part of a grassroots architectural engagement, feed into a strategy for regeneration in Palestine more widely.

One of the projects shown in this folio is the semi-ruined village of Beit Iksa near Jerusalem. The village, set in its characteristic terraced landscape of olive grove, suffered in the incursions since 1948 and was largely destroyed in the Israeli offensive of 1967 (the Six-Day War).

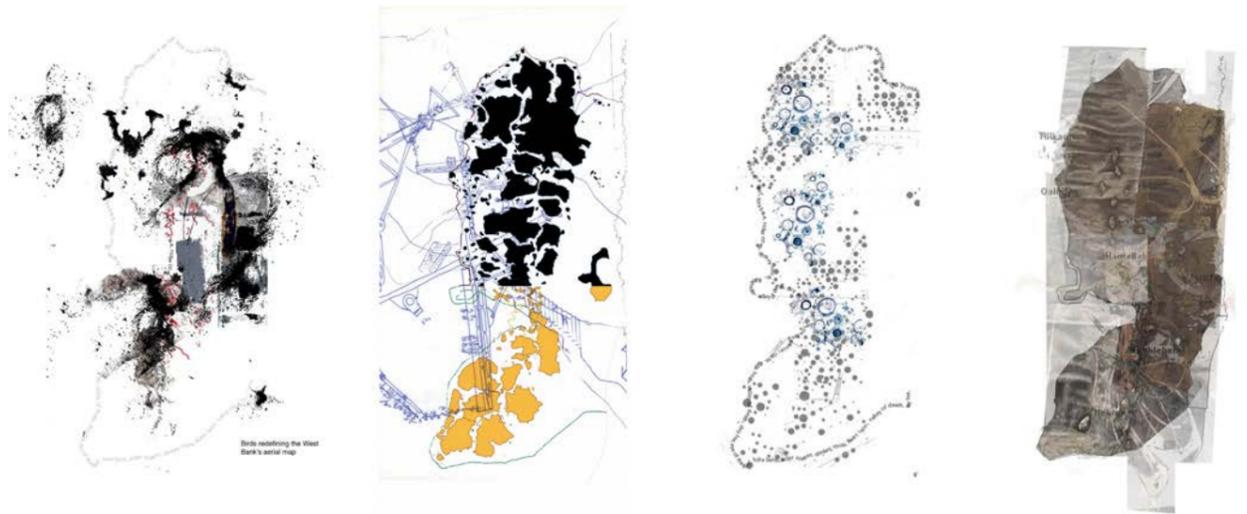


Fig. 6  
Redefining the West Bank's aerial map  
through the flight routes taken by birds



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Fig. 7  
Beit Iksa before reconstruction

Fig. 8  
A speculative scenario to reimagine  
the Palestinian landscape, flooding the  
surface



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In this project, Sharif and Golzari's work – in collaboration with the NGO RIWAQ – forms a strategic infrastructure and landscape scheme, combining structural stabilisation and revitalisation to some important heritage buildings such as the village castle and key historic houses with productive gardens spread across the village at ground level and created on the roofs of the stone-vaulted Ottoman-era houses.

The Beit Iksa project proposes a collective kitchen in a restored structure that allows the women of the village to generating an income by providing school lunches locally alongside a playground to accommodate their children, and environmental and wildlife measures (bird follies). The project was developed through a series of participatory workshops which Sharif and Golzari ran with the local community, in collaboration with RIWAQ. They also tested out available materials, and alternative and affordable construction techniques.

The physical gardens and green roofs are one element of the larger, umbrella garden project across the wider landscape that reclaims both actual territory and the imaginative and cultural sense of a garden as a 'healing, stitching and empowering' process for a fragmented Palestine. This concept of the garden expanded beyond the physical into the speculative by Sharif and Golzari working with RIWAQ on the project: 'Secrets of a Digital Garden: 50 Flowers, 50 Villages', and with Sakiya on exploring 'The Garden of Production'. This digital garden has been exhibited at both Chicago Biennale (2019) and 2020 Berlinale. It explores new ways of navigating the landscape of Palestine and assists in an imaginative liberation from restricted material conditions.



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Figs 9-12  
The division of built up areas of Palestine with walls, checkpoints and roadblocks  
Photos: Majdi Hadid



Fig. 13  
Palestinian neighbourhoods, fragmented by the separation wall.  
Collage: PART



**History and Politics**

**CONTEXT**

PART projects are grounded in the extraordinary conditions of everyday life in occupied Palestine where an exclusionary representation of its landscape and social narrative by Israel is accompanied by an actual rapid process of physical erasure. The land is overlaid by endless lines of division and barriers; by artefacts of occupation that circumscribe Palestinian villages, towns and cities. These create endless voids and marginal spaces; all of which make the map very difficult to read, let alone to navigate (Sharif, 2019). It has also been catastrophic for the region's built heritage, cultural landscapes and infrastructure.

The division of the West Bank into Areas A, B, C (indicating various degrees of Israeli control) as a consequence of the Oslo Accords in 1995, has intensified this control through Israeli walls and illegal settlements. Palestine is now an archipelago of communities divided from one another and with limited control over their natural resources such as water or access to farmlands and orchards that were once the physical and economic hinterland to villages, including Beit Iksa.

Area C forms the largest division of the West Bank. 62% of it is farmland and villages but it is under full Israeli control, giving Palestinians no right to build without permits which are consistently refused. In this context, any construction can appear an act of resistance.

**Palestine Regeneration Team (PART)**

PART was founded in London in 2008 by Yara Sharif and Nasser Golzari, who run Golzari NG Architects (NGA) and teach at the University of Westminster, along with co-founder, Murray Fraser, Professor and Vice Dean of Research at The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. All of PART's projects are carried out through the agency of Golzari NG Architects. Miriam Ozanne, a mechanical/services engineer at Arup, as well as other environmental specialists, supplement the core team.

PART works closely with international and local organisations and NGOs such as UNESCO, UN-Habitat, the Palestinian Engineering Association, Sakiya, the Palestine Natural History Museum and RIWAQ: Centre for Architectural Conservation.

PART's work polemically demands a change of attitude towards architecture and the conservation of cultural heritage away from what is an essentially reactive and romantic act (with monuments and other objects as their focus), to a critical approach embodying a strategy for social change. In Palestine, any act of preserving/conserving cultural heritage becomes, per se, an act of resistance and a form of creative action.

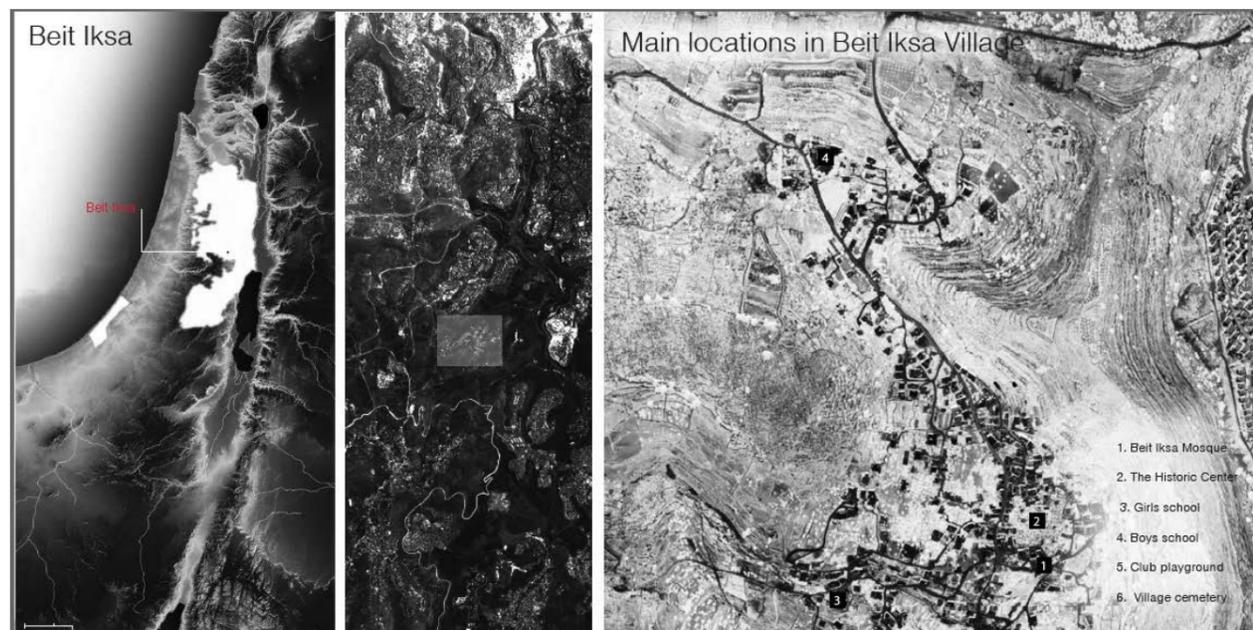
**Cultural Heritage**

The initial springboard for Golzari and Sharif's work in Palestine came from partnership with RIWAQ: Centre for Architectural Conservation, a non-profit organisation based in Ramallah which was founded by Suad Amiry in 1991 to protect architectural heritage across Palestine. RIWAQ's surveys of Palestinian built heritage suggest there are 50,320 historic properties in 422 sites across the West Bank/Gaza Strip. From this, RIWAQ identified '50 Villages' to prioritise, where regeneration would lead to the protection of around half of Palestine's surviving historic buildings.<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 14  
Aerial photograph of Beit Iksa, showing the vegetation masking the village from the sky and further destruction  
Photo: RIWAQ Photo Archive

Fig. 15  
Beit Iksa village at the edge of Jerusalem with the surrounding settlements and military zones  
Image: Luke Evans, David Moore, John Ball



The pilot project to revive the historic centre of Birzeit, near to Ramallah, won an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2013. PART and RIWAQ also jointly won a 2014 Holcim Award for Sustainable Construction in the Middle East Region for their continuing design work for Beit Iksa (as part of that submission).

**The Garden Projects**

The idea of the garden as a space of reclamation emerged from Sharif's doctorate research exploring spatial possibilities in Palestine. It has found initial physical expression working in villages, including Beit Iksa and Ein Kinya, where the regenerative focus is as much on the spaces between structures as the buildings themselves.

The garden in its representation across history and culture has diverse symbolic meanings. It might also suggest a means for settling in and domestication and a space of leisure and play. As defined by Francis Bacon (1883), gardens are 'the purest of human pleasures and the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man'. Equally, gardens can be spaces of production and place-making.<sup>2</sup> They can be a place for collective activity, accumulation, as well as the re-appropriation of nature.

The Palestinian landscape itself has been transformed and threatened by occupation where military destruction, zoning and land confiscation has helped undermine local narratives. This has affected people's perspectives, needs, and their day-to-day practices. Palestinians' relationship with their land has transformed gradually, with farming no longer seen as a viable source of income. Instead, increasing numbers of ex-agricultural workers now work in Israel as wage-labourers and, with limited land available, construction encroaches heavily on agricultural land. Much of Palestine's historical fabric has been abandoned in rural areas.

For PART, a garden has significance as a way to narrate the rural landscape of Palestine, with its strong relationship between culture and nature, as a fertile ground for the reclamation of Palestinian cultural identity and a means to challenge the colonial project, returning marginal space into a culturally central position. Instead of being alienated, the rural landscape becomes a space of production.

**Rural Villages**

The village of Beit Iksa is located on the outskirts of Jerusalem in Area C of Palestine. It is on an historic route between the city and the coast. There is archaeological evidence for inhabitation from the Hellenistic period onwards. In the early sixteenth century, the village was incorporated into the Ottoman empire and much of its surviving fabric dates from this time. It is set out on terraces amid a traditional olive grove landscape. It was a 'throne village' – a centre for tax collection – and has structures dating from various centuries. It was heavily shelled by Israel in 1967 and its semi-ruined state continued in highly challenging conditions with restricted access to land and water. Much of the damaged village fabric became covered with a wild, ad hoc roof of undergrowth, and almost disappeared from aerial views.

The rural landscape such as that of Beit Iksa and Ein Kinya has been intentionally marginalised further by Israeli policies such as monopolising water and other essential resources, typically sold back to Palestinians at inflated prices. Masterplanning also excludes the village from nearby cities. Similarly, the Sakiya Project is located in



Fig. 16  
 Speculative imaginary scenarios for the  
 subversive landscape of Palestine  
 Collage: PART and Andreas Christoudoulou

**Participatory Design**

Area C in the village of Ein Kinya. The attempt to rethink it as a Garden of Production is a way to challenge the erasure of the land from the mental and physical map.

In the context of the physical attack experienced by the villagers from the original shelling, and the constant attack on morale, the idea of ‘cultivating’ roof gardens in Beit Iksa is an attempt to offer a connection beyond the physical, social and psychological barriers.

In its participatory design work, PART draws on previous engagement approaches in this sector such as Walter Segal’s self-build, Nabeel Hamdi’s theory of ‘small change’ and the community-driven projects by Teddy Cruz along the Mexican/US border. Within the Palestinian context, participatory work needs to consider the external constraints placed upon communities and the ways in which participatory design might also be a liberationist undertaking that also intensifies a sometimes fractured sense of belonging. At Beit Iksa, for example, a grey-water filtration system was developed by women volunteers, the local plumber and children of the village, testing techniques that would help challenge their dependency on Israeli infrastructure. The approaches have been tested out elsewhere such as PART-guided self-build projects in Gaza.

PART’s projects are always conceived and disseminated within a wider urban strategy to reclaim the landscape practically and imaginatively and the repairing and development of both physical heritage and cultural identity underlies all of this work. The integration of hands-on local building with the landscape-scale, strategic thinking and speculative work is a fundamental to PART’s design approach.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

All Sharif and Golzari’s projects with PART explicitly adopt PART’s wider aims and objectives.

- To reclaim and revitalise the destroyed and abandoned historic fabric and derelict landscapes both culturally and economically through creative and participatory architectural approaches to thinking, making and doing, that builds on local initiatives, skills and circumstances.
- To explore what sustainability means in the context of a country under occupation, in social, environmental and economic terms. To work with local resources, skills, materials and possibilities to generate new models of construction, water management, building methods and economic initiatives, and to share these both across Palestine and worldwide.
- To explore and test the central potential of the garden as a core idea in PART’s ongoing approach, which links imaginative and cultural dimensions to hands-on, practical and economically liberating work, enabling the marginal to become central by validating and celebrating local initiatives.
- Exploring wider cultural outreach; linking pragmatic and speculative design via installations which disseminate knowledge and potential.

This folio explores the implementation of these at Beit Iksa.



Fig. 17  
Gardens as a Space of Production.  
Reclaiming Area C



Fig. 18  
Developing the concept of the garden  
as a new process of re-imagining the  
landscape

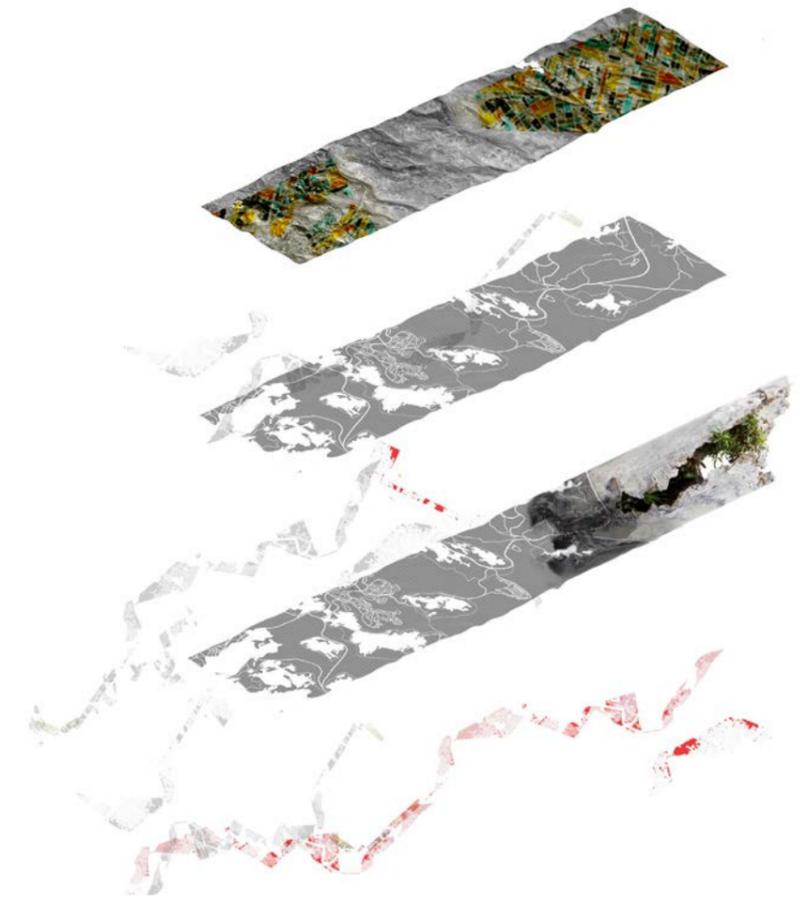


Fig. 19  
Developing the concept of the garden as  
a space of production in collaboration  
with Sakiya

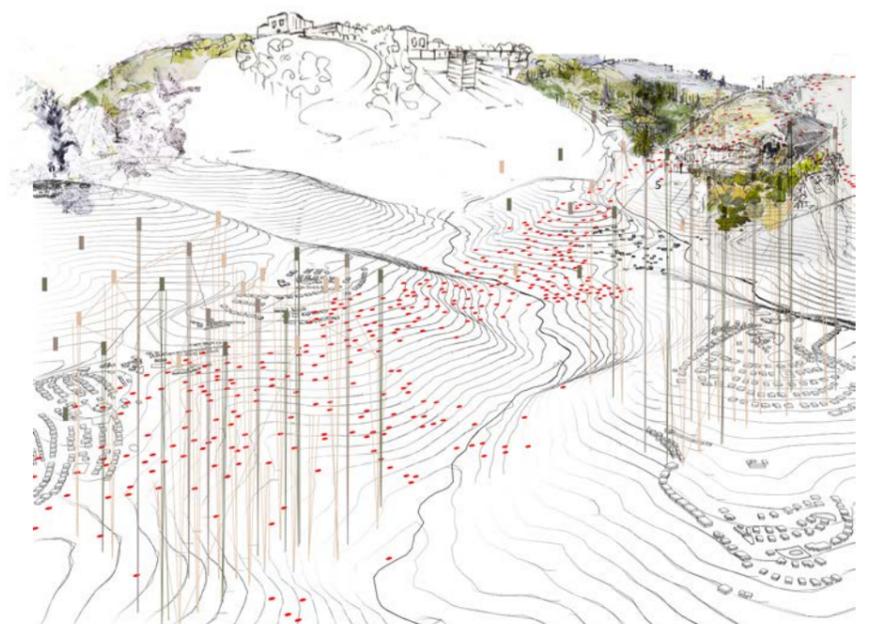


Fig. 20  
A conceptual drawing to illustrate the  
future of the rural landscape with the  
'Digital Flowers'



Fig. 21  
Mapping the marginal landscape of rural Palestine

Fig. 22  
Beit Iksa's urban strategy which reflects on the rural context and the need to stitch it to its surrounding



## METHODOLOGY

Although grounded in live projects and interventions, often of a domestic scale, Golzari and Sharif's constant engagement with broader speculative ideas feeds into urban strategies on the national scale too, often revealing further the hidden potential of the landscape in the process.

The speculative and strategic dimensions of the garden projects are also a way of liberating the mental space of the local residents and are thus as important as pragmatic local tasks; research for, and the building of, any project operate in a symbiotic manner throughout the whole process. Design research is not something that happens only in an initial R&D stage, before the architect moves into more normative production mode. PART deploys the full range of techniques for designing/making including sketches, drawings, models, digital imaging, prototyping, interactive design, materials testing etc.

Given the fragmented and distorted terrain, the projects address this landscape from other perspectives including from above by, for instance, incorporating bird migration patterns into design thinking.

The principles of 'stitching', 'healing' and 'empowering' govern the aims of PART; the terminology itself governs the projects. Architectural and urban interventions are a means to 'stitch' together the fragments caused by many years of Israeli occupation, heal communities by healing land (cultivation) and restoring buildings, as a path to 'empower' Palestinian groups. By providing a tangible outcome which immediately benefits the local community, a link is provided between research and something that can be directly understood on the ground.

## Social Mapping

In terms of its research methods, PART's distinctive technique of 'social mapping' is used in all projects to explore the spectrum of invisible networks, socio-economic activities and emotional responses to a site within a realm where colonialism has 'othered' the indigenous people. Mapping is not only used as a method to record the facts on the ground using drawings and text but also to imagine scenarios that might happen. They may even provide ironic commentary as a critical reflection on the situation.

These processes are always carried out with local community groups through diverse activities such as interviews, surveys, workshops, archival research and personal observations. Proposals are sketched, modelled and tested as part of developing the final suggestions.



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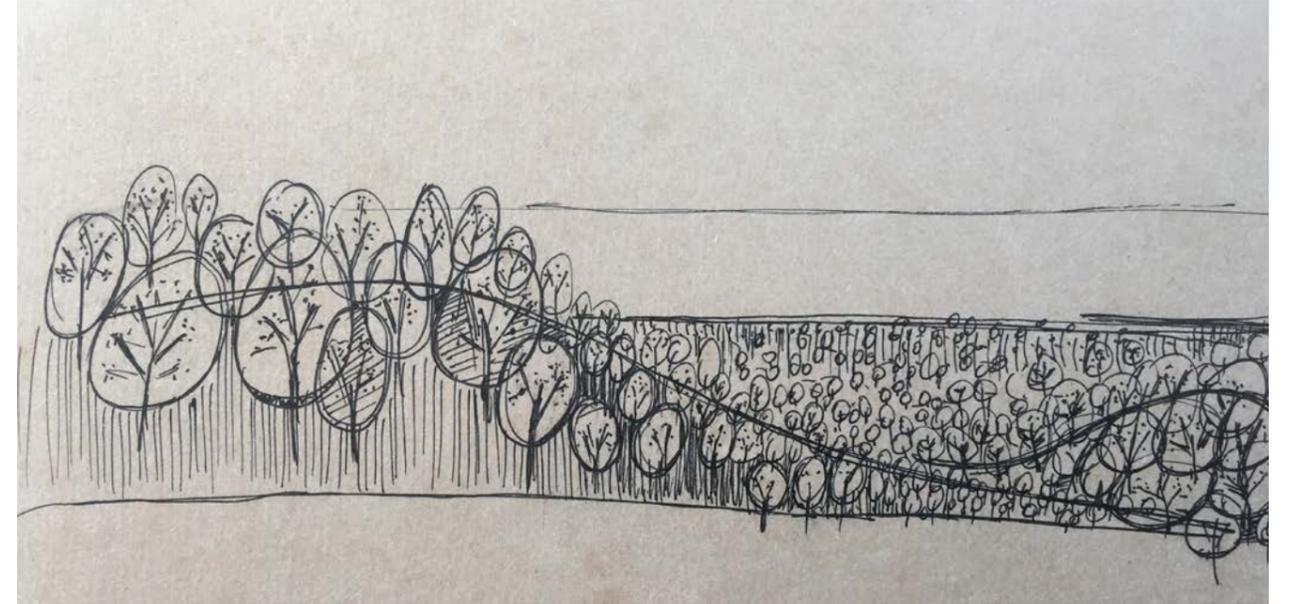


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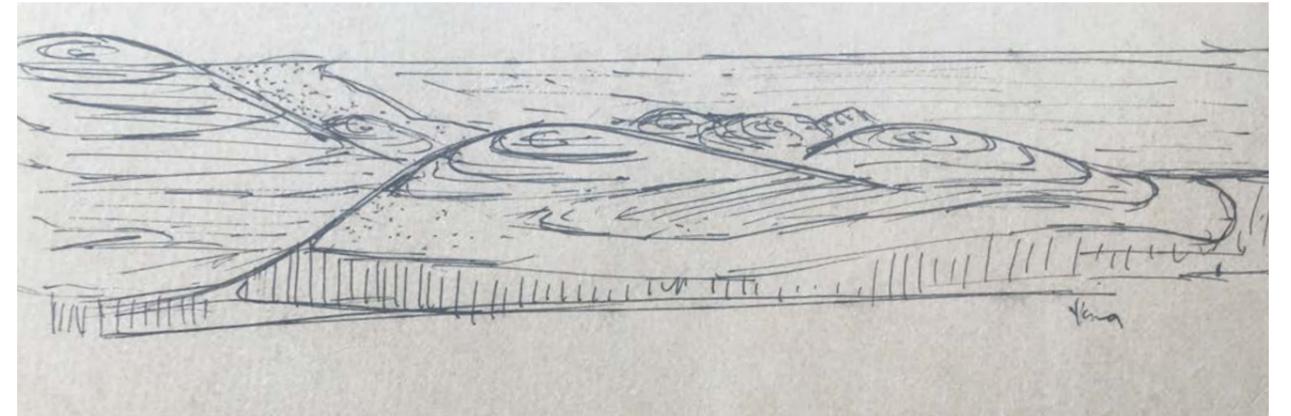


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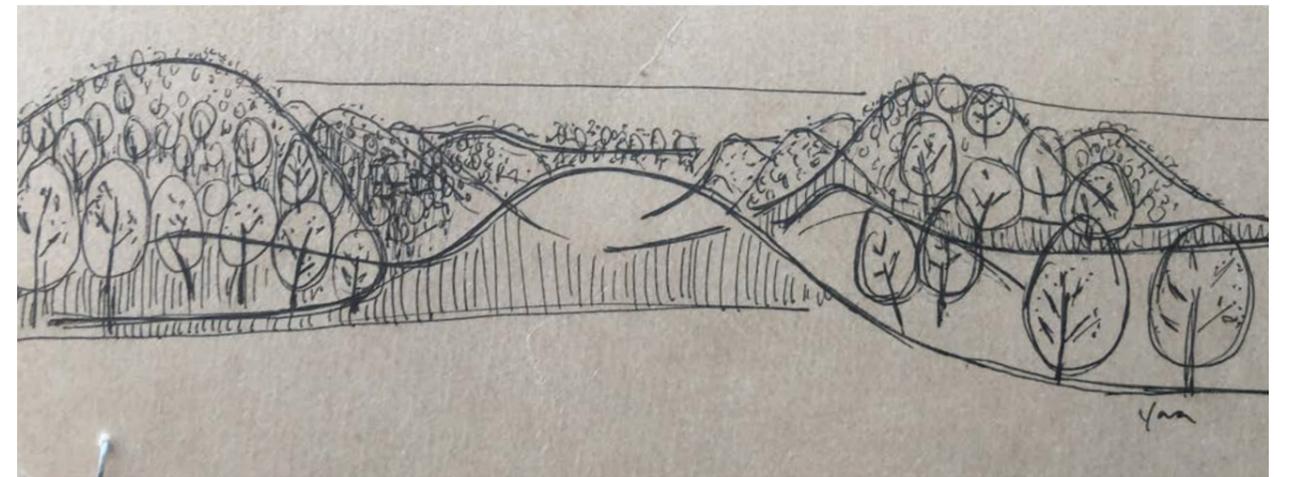
Figs 23-25  
Joint workshop between Sakiya and PART to discuss concept of the Garden of Production with students from Birzeit University and University of Westminster, DS22



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Figs 26-28  
Sketches by PART to explore idea of the garden

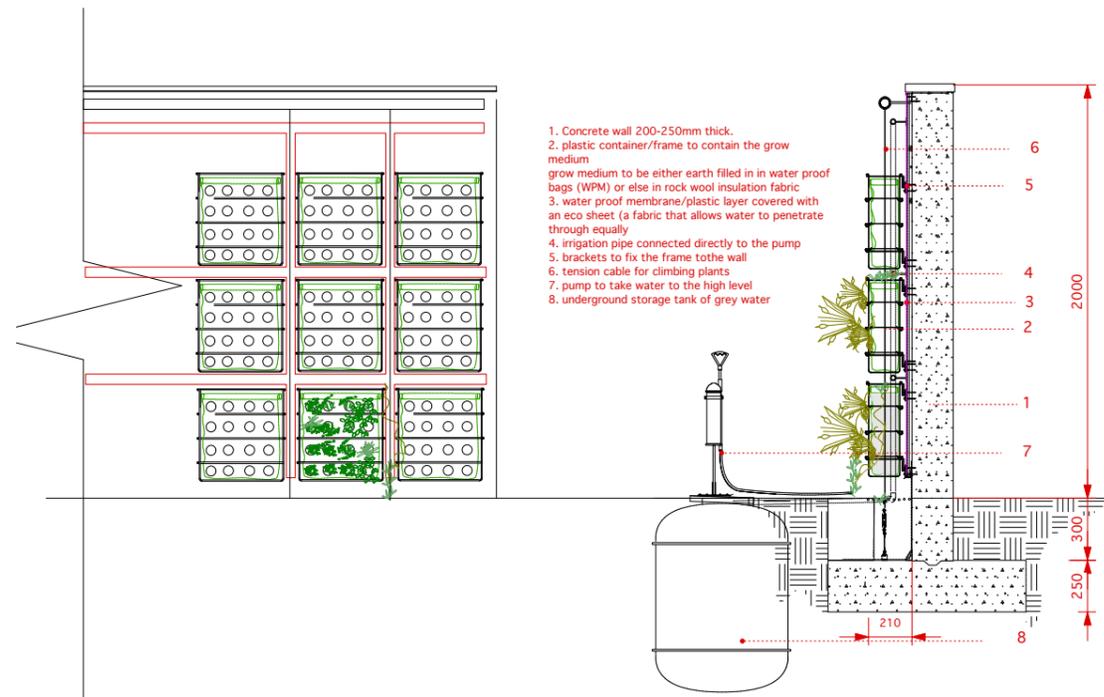


Fig. 29  
Proposed grey water filtration system  
detail  
deveLoped with Arup group

Fig. 30  
Digital Garden staging, Chicago  
Biennale, 2019  
photo: Rim Kalsoum



**Environmental and Economic Empowerment**

PART's environmental strategy uses greening to create 'urban pockets' that stitch together the Palestinian built fabric, and reconnect it to the rural landscape beyond. The organisation initially devised this strategy for the Gaza Strip, and later for Hajjah. Its principles have been described in the booklet *Green Initiatives and Guidelines for Building Practices*, which apply to both new and refurbished buildings in Palestine. This approach has been pushed even further in the Eco Kitchen project at Beit Iksa where PART developed a unique technology, designed using local labour and recycled materials, that provide Palestine's first 'green roofs'—an example of 'invisible and affordable technologies' that are inspired by daily cultural practices.

PART has reconfigured existing dwellings to save energy and improve internal thermal comfort through simple modifications and/or extensions. Environmental strategies inspired by local practices include seasonal living to respond to the climate. In response, PART created 'winter rooms' that face south and allow for capturing heat through foldable glass pockets and 'summer rooms' that are multi-layered to create shading and passive cooling techniques such as the use of evaporative cooling from clay panels or water sources to cool down the air. (Clay is used for cooling drinking water however here it is used as an integrated part of the skin of the building).

This has included intensive in situ climate monitoring as well as testing. A politicised reading of the need for low-energy, low-tech design seeks to build self-sufficiency into communities; thus experiments PART first tested and implemented in Gaza are then exported to other places such as Hajjah and Beit Iksa. Physical prototypes can also become exhibition pieces.

Working with local NGOs and other community groups, interventions such as these reflect Nabeel Hamdi's idea of 'small change', where small-scale, sometimes invisible alterations can ripple through to have far larger repercussions for the community and beyond.<sup>3</sup> In this case, the building, remodelling and renovation generated work for local builders, employment for local women and new economic practices such as a 'swap scheme'.

**Speculative Work: The Garden and the Air**

Speculative explorations aim to create new forms of dialogue. This is done through workshops, exhibitions and installations. Here, the projects draw upon the representation of the garden across history and culture; its diverse symbolic meanings, its relation to domestication and as a space for leisure and play.<sup>4</sup> They also draw on air – the space above the ground used by birds and concepts such as the aerial view and concealment.

Installations use drawings and technology to engage the user in collective acts of imagination, and form a kind of dissemination both of the challenges facing Palestinians and of a positive and creative response to it.



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Fig. 31  
3D model of Beit Iksa redevelopment

Fig. 32  
Beit Iksa scheme plan

Figs 33-35  
Refurbishment of Eco Kitchen building

Fig. 36  
Eco Kitchen elevation and sections  
*Drawings & photos: NG Architects*



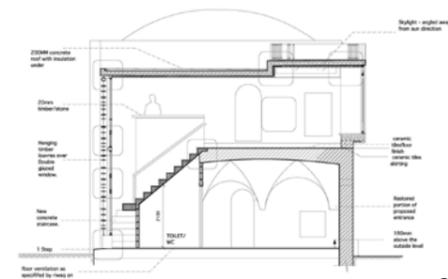
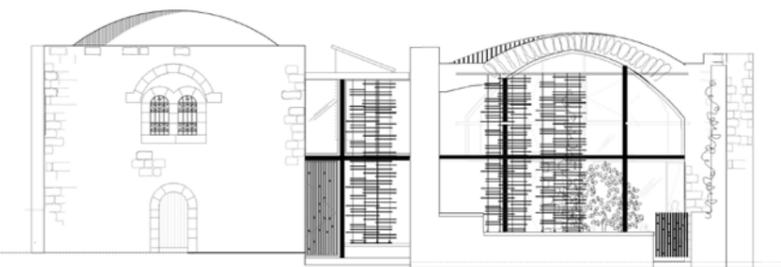
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**Strategic Dissemination**

Dissemination of strategies and solutions is endemic to the work in the participatory sharing of knowledge between designers and villagers, as well as the spread of ideas across Palestine and the creation of awareness through the work on the ground and its interpretation through speculative concepts and physical installations.

All these are mutually reinforcing and are expanding from village to village, place to place. This includes an ongoing project with the Natural History Museum in Bethlehem where a new extension by Sharif and Golzari will interrogate the idea of the garden and biodiverse landscape.

**OUTPUTS AND FINDINGS**

The projects' outputs span from the pragmatic physical, infrastructure of interventions in villages, such as Beit Iksa, to the imaginative outreach of the Digital Garden and the Garden of Production. The physical projects include the restoration of village structures and the activation of the village landscape and economic and social patterns which is manifest at these different scales.

**Project Design Strategy:  
Greening Beit Iksa**

Beit Iksa is a landscape and infrastructure project and an economic enabling project. From small interventions, like the bird follies, to full building renovations, the physical elements are used to test out new construction methods, which often need adaptation for traditional forms.

There were some 50-60 unoccupied historic structures at the outset in the village. The project has structurally stabilised some with a view to future occupation and restored others to use. Most interventions were not individual private homes but spaces that could be used collectively. They range from the village castle to a collective eco-kitchen. Projects also looked at the spaces between structures to create a productive landscape that envelops the village and reconnects it to its hinterland.

Ottoman-era buildings with stone-vault roofs were among those adapted to create a series of green roofs for growing food. The vaults allowed substantial soil depth at the edges and corners of the roof. Early water retention ideas were tested including specialist imported membranes, but instead low-tech, water-retaining recycled local cork used in food markets for produce was used. Other technologies were adaptations of what was available such as membranes re-purposed from car covers. The green roofs also improve thermal mass.

These green roofs celebrate the stepped terrain of the village while improving the village's self-efficiency. Grey-water filtration systems irrigate the roofs and other green projects. Smaller green roofs were created for children to look after alongside eco-playgrounds – green spaces where children could play among features such as bicycles that generate electricity for the collective kitchen.



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Fig. 37  
Village enterprises

Fig. 38  
A typical scene of the Palestinian rural landscape overtaken by road blocks and illegal Israeli Settlements  
Photo: Majdi Hadid



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Fig. 39  
Constructed green roof



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**Eco Kitchen**

The Eco Kitchen project is not just the kitchen itself but these green roofs and nearby productive and eco-playspace. It is a prototype to explore affordable technologies that can improve the quality of life and challenge residents' economic and social 'isolation'. One structure is designed to serve as a kitchen run by the Women's Association where cultural and social activities can be promoted. It now supplies the local school with meals, offering the women an income through farming and cooking. Some rooms are used as a kindergarten and a library.

Through a training project developed with local NGO Ma'an, the local women are trained in horticulture and catering. The project has created networks across the whole neighbourhood including a 'knowledge swap scheme' which has been created, whereby essential items are exchanged within a barter system. The blacksmith, for instance, agreed to produce all of the metalwork needed to restore Beit Ikka's historic fabric in return for being provided with his own grey-water treatment system and a 'green roof' to enhance his own home.

All this work operates with the conceptual idea of the garden and, in particular, its place in Palestinian culture and identity, and its ability to help challenge the colonial project that aims to alienate the landscape via what Edward Said referred to as Imagined Geography. (Said, 1993) Since the British Mandate, this has included giving land over to pine forests and, since the establishment of Israel, ideological projects such as 'making the desert bloom'. Since the 1967 war, the agricultural fields of Beit Ikka have faced an aggressive process of forestation. More recently, this aggressive forestation has helped with the foundation of the illegal settlement of Ramot that is encroaching on the farmland of Beit Ikka and surrounding villages.

PART's greening work and tracing of territories in the air (see below) are a critique of Israeli 'spaciocidal' strategies, an added layer to the matrix of spatial possibilities away from the exhausted surface of the land.

Figs 40-45  
Workshops in collaboration with Women Association and RIWAQ and PART, taking place as part of the Eco Kitchen project to test out the green roof construction and explore alternative passive environmental construction techniques



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Fig. 46  
Speculating the future of the absurd  
Palestinian Landscape with the Digital  
Gardens taking over.  
Collage: PART and Andreas Christoudoulou



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Figs 47, 48  
Children making bird houses as part of  
the Children Eco-Play area  
Photos: RIWAQ

**Bird Follies in the Garden and  
Landscape**

Bird Corridors are proposed in rural villages in and around Beit Iksa, meaning green spaces are not only productive but aim to improve wildlife habitats. This feeds into a wider project of bird follies that both provide habitats and whose locations trace migration patterns across Palestine, flying above ground-level barriers and conceptually reuniting the fragmented landscape. These are used to mark territories that are being lost through political reclamation, etching the lost territory.

In order to create the 'bird corridors' through Beit Iksa, bird-watching stations are proposed to be scattered through the village. Bird habitats in the form of bird houses used for feeding birds and for nesting, were also designed to be integrated within the stone façades by taking advantage of the ruins and the voids. The idea was also accompanied by a workshop for children to create a mass of birdhouses that together form a new façade for one semi-ruined structure. The bird follies are a way of capturing the imagination of the community and become a key moment in a village 'Memory Belt' – that is, sites that anchor local identity in place.

Across the wider landscape, larger-scale follies are envisaged as a series of potential towers, part of a conceptual urban strategy to connect the villages of Palestine to the migratory movement of the birds above and mark the villages that are slowly being erased or out of reach as a result of the divide. Their locations, identified on aerial plans, emphasise the matrix of villages and cities to be connected. Over time these towers would accumulate, creating a series of metaphorical 'aerial bridges', a form of virtual stitching across the landscape with the follies acting as beacons.

These 'bird machine' follies are conceived as a series of vertical structures / posts scattered across the landscape with fabric pockets filled with seeds and other elements, such as twigs for nests. Some of these pockets are imagined as being attached to tensile structures which could stick to hard surfaces like the Separation Wall. The concept was exhibited in London with 1:1 scale towers as part of the 2012 Cultural Olympics to represent the Palestine Pavilion with the support of the British Council. They are subversive in their claiming of air space and nod to the fact that the Israeli forces lose more planes to bird strike than enemy action. The concept builds on a previous installation which envisaged such follies leaning against the separation wall.

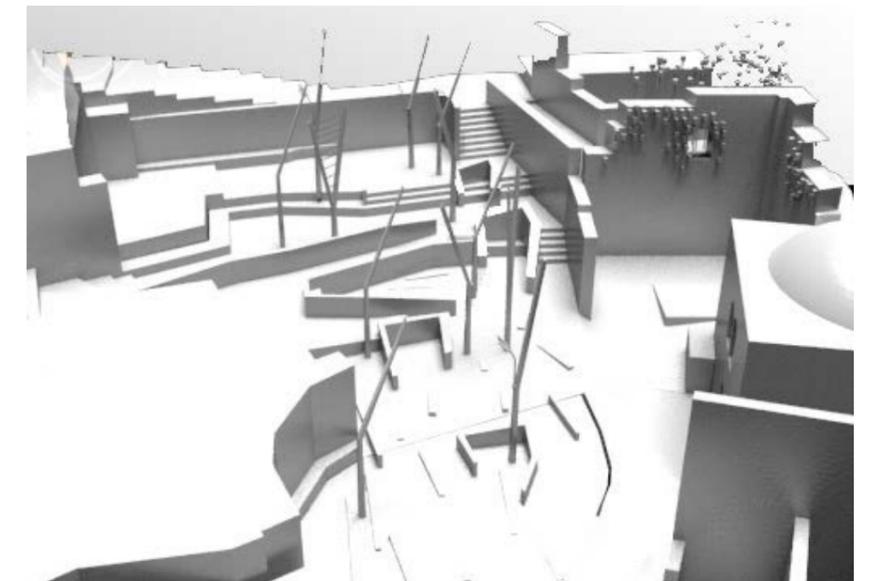


Fig. 49  
3D Visualisation of the imagined bird  
follies through Beit Iksa  
Image: Part



Fig. 50  
Secrets of the Digital Garden poster; still taken from the film

Digital Garden

The recent staging of Secrets of a Digital Garden installation, in collaboration with RIWAQ, at the Chicago Architectural Biennale 2019 and Berlin Film Festival 2020 has been used to explore new forms of narration that create a dialogue about rights to the landscape and activate digital cloud data. It takes the form of a garden representing Palestinian villages. The garden is planted with 50 Perspex 'digital flowers', one in each flower bed containing earth from each of RIWAQ's 50 villages. Each flower contains a USB and a capsule with some organic fragment from each village as 'digital DNA'. Through a QR code on the petals, visitors can read the story of each village. These flowers are like rare species found in zoos, signalling that without protection they will die, or in the case of the villages, their unique culture and stories will be lost. In this way, it aims to preserve the historic Palestinian landscape in digital form.

The USB and code also links to a digital archive with land registry information whose database relates land plots to their owners. The system helps residents to claim their land and protect it from appropriation. The data-sharing seeks to keep the archive active beyond Palestine.

A state of 'inbetweenness' is sought – between the real and the imaginary, surface and below, absurdity and irony, physical and virtual exists. This becomes fertile ground for reclamation; the garden becomes an active agent.

Fig. 53  
Photograph of installation with film  
*Secret of a Digital Garden* produced by Yara Sharif and Nasser Golzari, 2019, shown as part of Berlinale, February 2020.  
Photo: PART



Figs 51, 52  
Secrets of the Digital Garden installation, Chicago Biennale 2019  
Photos: PART



51



52

## CRITICAL SELF-APPRAISAL

Sharif and Golzari conclude that the projects successfully seek to appropriate the 'ordinary' and the 'everyday' and small-scale as a viable alternative to high-tech answers, but the architects admit that the ego-driven desire to create an 'iconic' building which could become a more obvious architectural reference remained present at certain moments.

They argue that the architect needs to work hard to remain a facilitator, agent and curator, to allow themselves to remain 'invisible' and leave the accumulation of these interventions to make their impact on society. This can only be achieved by matching the community's aspirations and respecting and engaging with their cultural practices and needs. There is a danger, when working without ego and with deliberate invisibility that the modesty of individual projects means that they are marginalised and under-valued.

However, these architectural aspirations also need to be seen in the socio-political conditions in Palestine, and indeed the global context of capitalism, where limiting access to resources is being used as a strategy to push families out of their villages. Sustainability means empowering the marginalised, rather than creating hi-tech dependent solutions to the challenges of water, heating and cooling. As summed up by environmental geographer Eric Swyngedouw, a fair distribution of resources is crucial to protecting a community's homes and above all their right to the city:

*"The question of urban sustainability is not just about achieving sound, ecological and environmental conditions, but first and foremost about social struggle for access and control to the city itself".<sup>5</sup>*

**DISSEMINATION, ACHIEVEMENTS, PEER REVIEW****Books**

- Fraser, M. (2013) *Design Research in Architecture: An overview*. (London: Routledge).
- Golzari, N (2015) 'Cultivating Possibilities', in Bshara, K. and Amiry, S. (eds) *Reclaiming Space: The 50 Villages project in rural Palestine*. (Ramallah: RIWAQ), pp. 45-69.
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- Sharif, Y. (2019) 'Landscape of Time and Immobility', *Landscape Research*, 77(7): 872-91. (doi: 10.1080/01426397.2019.1623184) [accessed 26 March 2020].
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**Exhibitions**

- Secrets of a Digital Garden (2019), at *Chicago Architecture Biennial*, 19 September 2019 – 5 January 2020. Film projection and an installation, curated by Yara Sharif and Nasser Golzari.
- 'Secrets of a Digital Garden' (2020), at *Berlin Film Festival Berlinale*, 20 February – 1 March 2020. Film projection and an installation, curated by Yara Sharif and Nasser Golzari.
- 'Moments of Possibilities: Air, Land & Sea' (2016), part of *Qalandiya International*, London, 5 October 2016 – 31 October 2016. Curated by Yara Sharif and Nasser Golzari.
- Dressing, Undressing the Landscape*, London, 1 – 29 March 2019. Curated by Yara Sharif and Nasser Golzari. [Staged in collaboration with Arab Women Artists Now (AWAN), funded by Art Council England, and exhibited across a series of platforms at Rich Mix, University of Westminster and P21 Gallery, London.
- 'Searching for Rural Bridges in the Village of Beit Iksa', at *Re-Imagining Rurality*, hosted at the University of Westminster, London, 27 – 28 February 2015.
- Introducing and discussing the film 'Infiltrators', at Human Rights Film Festival, Oxford Brookes, 21 February 2015.

**Conference**

PART (2015) *Open Gaza*, symposium, University of Westminster, 27 November 2015. [co-organised by Nasser Golzari, NG Architects and Michael Sorkin, New York].

**Lectures**

- Sharif, Y. (2018) 'Cities and colonialism: The space of colonialism', Royal Academy, 3 December 2018. Yara Sharif (speaker, presentation). (Available at: <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/event/the-space-of-colonialism-cities-and-colonialism>).
- Palestinian Museum (2019) *Landscapes of Palestine: New Perspectives since 1999* (Symposium), Palestinian Museum, Palestine 16 December 2019. (Available at <http://www.palmuseum.org/landscapes-of-palestine>) [accessed 26 March 2020].
- Zaha Hadid Architects (2019) 'Unknown: Strategies and Solutions in the Built Environment', Aga Khan Centre, London, 23 July 2019. Organised by Zaha Hadid Architects, Yara Sharif (speaker).
- Sharif, Y. (2018) 'The Not So Ordinary: Capturing Possibilities Through The Gaps', Aga Khan Programme Lecture: Harvard University, 19 November 2018.

**Workshops**

Sharif, Y. and Nasser, G. (2019) 'Garden as a Machine', workshop run in collaboration with Sakiya, Ein Kinya, Palestine.

Fig. 54  
Presentation at the Mosaic Room, London,  
as part of Qalandiya International  
event. (2016)  
Photo: PART



### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Bshara, K. and Amiry, S. (2015) *Reclaiming Space: The 50 Villages project in rural Palestine*, (Ramallah: RIWAQ).
- 2 Hunt, J.D. (2000) *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory*, (Penn: University of Pennsylvania Press).
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- 4 As defined by (Bacon, 1625) they are the 'purest of human pleasures and the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man', as well as being spaces of production, collective act and accumulation. According to Hunt, gardens are 'concentrated or perfected forms of place-making' (Hunt 2000).
- 5 Swyngedow, E. (2004) *Social Power and the Urbanization of Water: Flows of Power*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

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