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The Potential Politics of Urban Artist-Run Residencies (UARRs) as Public Art in East Jerusalem



The photo features RRR East Jerusalem participants and team (clockwise from left to right): Diana Mardi, Riman Barakat, Nasrin Abu Baker, Anat Litwin, Zoe Bray, Rasem Masalha, Khitam Edelbi. The Roundtable took place on December 28 2016 at the Willy Brandt Center, Abu Tor neighborhood of East Jerusalem. Photo credit: Salam Qasam. Image courtesy of Anat Litwin.

Overview

What role do art and artists assume in a given social, cultural and political context? **Dr. Zoe Bray**, visiting fellow at the European Forum of the Hebrew University, has been asking this question in Jerusalem (Israel-Palestine). In 2017, through an invitation to participate in the Roundtable Residency Research East Jerusalem led by Anat Litwin, she has been investigating the possibility of developing Litwin's idea of **urban artist-run residencies (UARRs) in the specific context of East Jerusalem**, characterized by continuing nationalist, ethnic and religious clashes.

Research topics and results

The artist and researcher Anat Litwin coined the term ‘urban artist-run residencies’ (UARRs) to introduce a new form of public art that is beneficial for both artists and the local community for its social and collaborative qualities. The term was developed as part of international research that Litwin initiated and titled Roundtable Residency Research (RRR), aiming to investigate future prospects of UARRs in different urban spaces across the globe. I examine the possibility of UARRs to develop in East Jerusalem, a part of the city marked by nationalist, ethnic and religious conflict. From an anthropologist perspective, the article points out the necessity of a critical approach to what role art and artists assume, especially in areas of conflict where everything becomes acutely political.

Motivation for research

As both an artist and anthropologist, the relationship between artists and their environment is central to my work. When I moved to Jerusalem, I was curious to discover how my artwork might evolve and relate to the city’s context, being particularly aware of its specific conflictive situation; and, as an anthropologist, I wished to investigate how artists, by their presence, could be stimuli for new interactions in this difficult social and political setting. Residencies are privileged spaces of creativity, and Litwin’s notion of UARRs appears to me additionally as an innovative and challenging approach to residencies, with artists and their local interaction radically at the core. While the artist part of me embraces the idea of UARRs as a creative project, the anthropologist also in me draws to empirical research. Hence this study.

Contribution to the field

The paper discusses the possibilities of realizing the notion of urban artist-run residencies in an ethnopolitical context, and stresses the necessity of a critical approach to what role art and artists assume beyond normative assumptions.

Key learnings

The study brings further empirical data to the conflictive social and political contexts of art residencies.

Zoe Bray is an artist and social anthropologist, visiting fellow at the European Forum of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem 2014-2018. Prior to this she was professor at the Center for Basque Studies of the University of Nevada Reno, USA. Her work is concerned with art, identity and the politics of representation.

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