



Heritopolis - a global consortium on metropolitan heritage

MetroHUB



**WORLD
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FORUM**



GAZA A VISION OF HOPE

RECONSTRUCTING AND
RECOVERING GAZA

RECONNECTING GAZA
WITH THE REGION

A TRANSBOUNDARY
METROPOLIS



Disclaimer

This booklet has been produced by HERITOPOLIS, to be presented at the World Urban Forum 12 in Cairo, on 5 November 2024.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document is the collective work of a team from the HERITOPOLIS Consortium, jointly with other experts addressing specific issues relevant to the *Anthedon Initiative* and in consultation with key local professionals.

HERITOPOLIS - Heritage and the Metropolis - is an open-ended research network established in 2021 to explore how metropolises are being (re-) shaped by heritage and how they are redefining its meaning. HERITOPOLIS addresses these challenges linking research and practice through the UN-Habitat UNI - University Network Initiative - MetroHUB partnership within the framework of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda.

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ANTHEDON - A VISION OF HOPE

WHAT IS ANTHEDON INITIATIVE?

Anthedon is an international initiative under HERITOPOLIS, a UN-Habitat UNI consortium, aimed at fostering hope through a comprehensive recovery strategy for Gaza. This initiative seeks to propose the transformation of Gaza into an open metropolis with robust urban services and a sustainable, climate-resilient economy, emphasizing the importance of culture and heritage in rebuilding civic identity and social cohesion.

ADDRESSING THE DEVASTATION

The ongoing conflict has led to a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza, leaving urban infrastructure, services, and cultural institutions in ruins. The displaced population faces a precarious existence, raising urgent questions about the future. Key challenges include overcoming hate, fear, and mistrust to facilitate recovery, reconstruction, and effective governance, while pursuing realistic incremental steps for economic redevelopment.

THE ELEMENTS OF THE VISION

Anthedon Initiative prioritizes the needs and aspirations of Gaza's communities, considering demographic changes and economic prospects. A metropolitan governance framework is essential for managing the area, fostering regional connections, and promoting dialogue, healing, and reconciliation. This vision for the future of Gaza, the West Bank, and the Middle East region aims to advance regional peace based on a two-state solution and common interests, shared infrastructure, emerging markets, and transport networks.

GAZA AS A HISTORICAL HUB

Historically, Gaza has been a key Mediterranean trade hub, where Anthedon was the historic name of its port. This rich heritage inspires a future vision for Gaza, integrating ancient trade routes with Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and beyond through economic exchanges, joint environmental projects, and shared heritage to enhance social identity and cohesion.



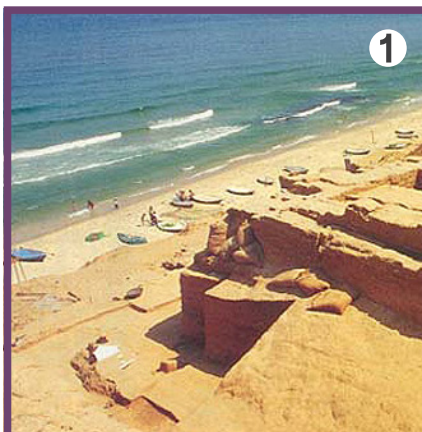
Integrated systems of civic infrastructure

and resources. Source: Report on the Impact of the Recent War in 2023 on the Cultural Heritage in Gaza Strip - Palestine ANSCH November 7, 2023

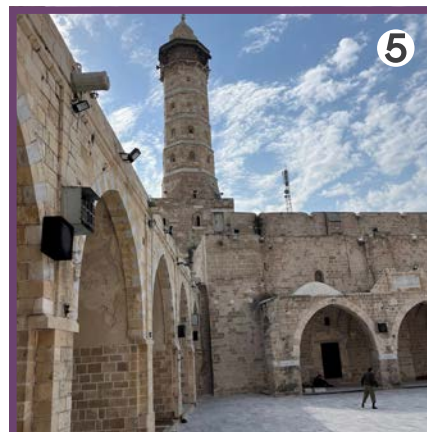


Gaza seaport.

Credit: Municipality of Gaza



Remains of Anthedon along the coast of Gaza. Credit: Archaeology Wiki



Great Mosque of Gaza/Omari Mosque. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

WHICH FUTURE FOR GAZANS?

The reconstruction of Gaza and its transformation into an area that connects people with the region and the outside world, integrated within a new metropolitan governance, largely depend on the scenarios that will emerge after the conflict and the steps taken toward a two-state solution supported by the international community.

1 Scorched Earth

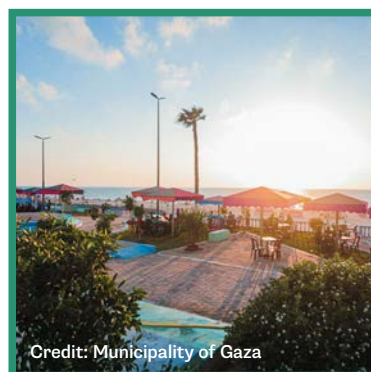


In this scenario, Israel actively obstructs all reconstruction efforts to prevent residents from returning to major cities and refugee camps. Polarization and antagonism intensify, leading to unprecedented levels of destruction and widespread dislocation of the civilian population. This worsening humanitarian crisis deepens local resentment and could create a scorched-earth reality with consequences lasting for decades.

0 Status Quo

The Palestinian community adopts a self-sustaining approach to reconstruction amid ongoing conflict with minimal international support. Utilizing local and recycled materials, individuals rebuild homes, educational spaces, and markets.

2 Rebuilding Homes and Space

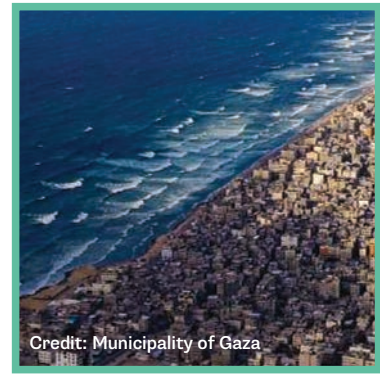




Credit: World Bank/William Stebbins

3 Reconstruction as Resilience

International recovery efforts focus on recreating essential services rather than permanent urban reconstruction, aiming to strengthen infrastructure and ensure access to healthcare, education, water, and electricity to endure ongoing instability and occupation.



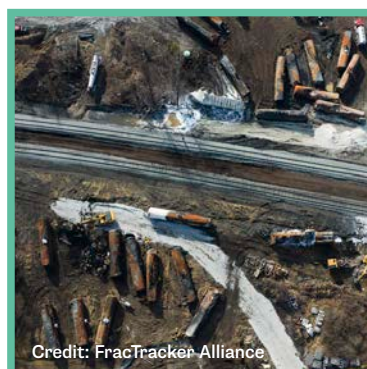
Credit: Municipality of Gaza

5 Global Coalition to Establish the State of Palestine

Recovery occurs within a global coalition aimed at fostering the two-state solution and regional strategy, promoting cross-border collaboration in sectors such as energy, water, and trade. This initiative aims to establish the State of Palestine as a vital partner in regional stability and prosperity.

4 Reconstruction Toward Statehood

Reconstruction is linked to broader peace initiatives and aspirations for Palestinian statehood. Efforts would support governance structures, institutional building, and national infrastructure, aligning with the political goals of statehood.



Credit: FracTracker Alliance

ADDRESSING MULTIPLE CRISES

A STRUCTURED APPROACH

Effectively addressing multiple crises necessitates a structured approach that evaluates individual components while considering community impact to prioritize responses. Special attention must be given to women and children, focusing on empowerment and protection.

A clear cross-border communication strategy will help manage expectations, reduce anxieties, and foster healing for future cooperation. It should mobilize essential resources—people, finances, and time—and develop micro-economy response plans that balance immediate actions with long-term strategies. Encouraging interdisciplinary teams and organizations is crucial for comprehensive solutions, alongside continuous monitoring and thorough post-crisis evaluations to improve future responses.

APPLYING THE APPROACH

- 1. Focus on Basic Services:** Rebuild key infrastructure to restore essential services like electricity, clean water, healthcare, and education.
- 2. International Funding:** Engage donors (e.g., EU, U.S., Arab and Muslim countries) for financial and technical assistance in reconstruction.
- 3. Regional Cooperation:** Collaborate with neighboring countries on energy and material imports for reconstruction, building cross-border trust and cooperation.
- 4. Strengthen Local Governance and Civil Society Institutions:** Empower local municipalities and civil society to enhance reconstruction efficiency and impact.
- 5. Transparency and Accountability:** Ensure transparent processes for fund allocation and project oversight to prevent corruption.
- 6. Involve Communities:** Use a participatory approach to engage local communities in decision-making, restoring their sense of ownership and identities.
- 7. Rebuild Homes and Spaces:** Prioritize housing and community areas that reestablish normalcy and personal connections.
- 8. Create Economic Opportunities:** Use reconstruction efforts to generate jobs, particularly in construction, technology, and trade sectors.



Overcrowding of displaced people's tents on the beach of Deir al-Balah

Credit: WAFA News Agency, 2024



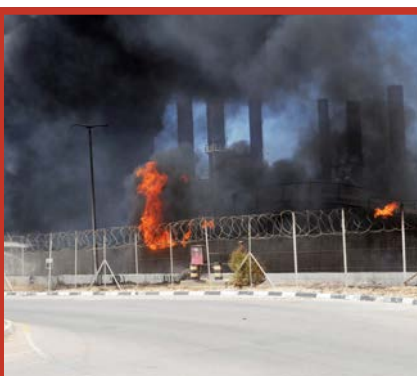
Destruction in historical Shuja'iya neighborhood.

Credit: Heritage for Peace, ANSCH



Polio vaccine campaign in Gaza.

Credit: UNICEF/EI Baba



Power Plant hit in Gaza.

Credit: UN/Shareef Sarhan



Gaza Life among the ruins.

Credit: EU/ECHO/Caroline Gluck



Ongoing attacks and destruction.

Credit: Wiki Palestine



Forced displacement from the eastern Khan Yunis to the west.

Credit: WAFA News Agency, 2024



Gaza port after attacks.

Credit: WAFA News Agency, 2024



Spatial fragmentation.

Credit: Heinrich Böll Foundation



Waste disposal at Wadi Gaza.

Credit: The Palestine Chronicle/Mahmoud Nasser



Destruction of the 17th century Al'Pasha Palace Museum.

Credit: World Bank/EU/UN

IMMEDIATE NEEDS

GAZA IN DISTRESS

Even before October 7, 2023, Gaza faced a severe humanitarian crisis, with an unemployment rate of 53% and nearly half the population living on less than \$5.50 a day. Access to basic necessities like safe drinking water and electricity was critically limited, while health services deteriorated. This situation stemmed from a 17-year Israeli blockade, seen as collective punishment, despite Israel's withdrawal of settlers in 2005. By late 2014, almost 80% of Gazans lived below the poverty line, and there was a housing shortage of 71,000 units.

DESTRUCTION

As of October 2024, conditions have worsened significantly. Gaza has lost about 2% of its population, with over 42,000 reported killed and around 100,000 injured. Approximately 150,000 have fled, mostly to Egypt, while 1.9 million people—nearly 90% of Gaza's population—are now internally

displaced. Infrastructure damage is extensive, affecting 360,000 buildings, with 60% of residential and 80% of commercial facilities destroyed. Education has also been impacted, with 88% of schools affected.

A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The current humanitarian crisis arises from the destruction of housing and essential services. Establishing emergency shelters will be crucial, along with recovering remaining structures. Immediate recovery efforts must prioritize restoring essential services, infrastructure, and transportation networks to facilitate economic recovery. Damaged transportation networks isolate communities and hinder access to healthcare. The lack of sanitation and clean water exacerbates public health issues, complicating recovery efforts. Support for displaced families must be integrated into health and education redevelopment initiatives.



Displaced people queuing for water.
Credit: UNRWA / Mohammed Hinnawi, 2024

CLEAN WATER



Displaced citizens living in UNRWA shelters in Deir al-Balah. Credit: WAFA News Agency, 2024

SHELTER



Power outage since the beginning of the crisis.
Credit: WAFA News Agency, 2024

POWER



Distrupted food systems. Credit: WFP

FOOD



Students at Al Shami Girls Secondary School.
Credit: World Bank/Arne Hoel

EDUCATION



Temporary clinic in Gaza. Credit: WFP/ Ali Jadallah

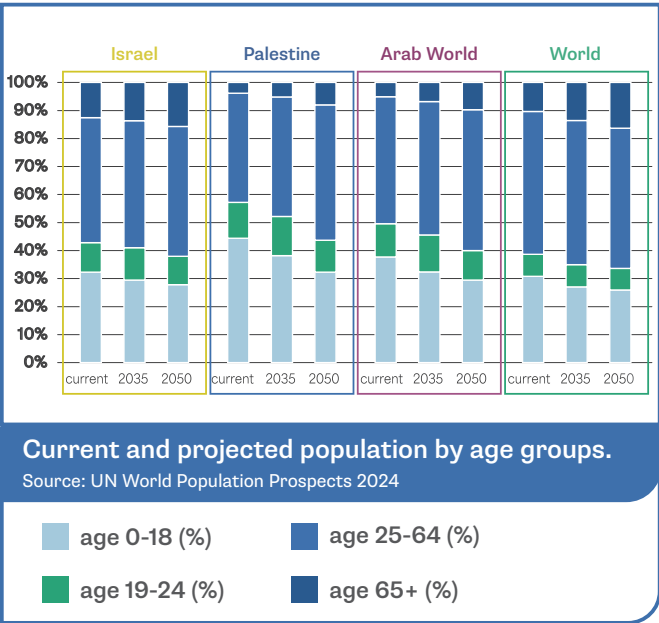
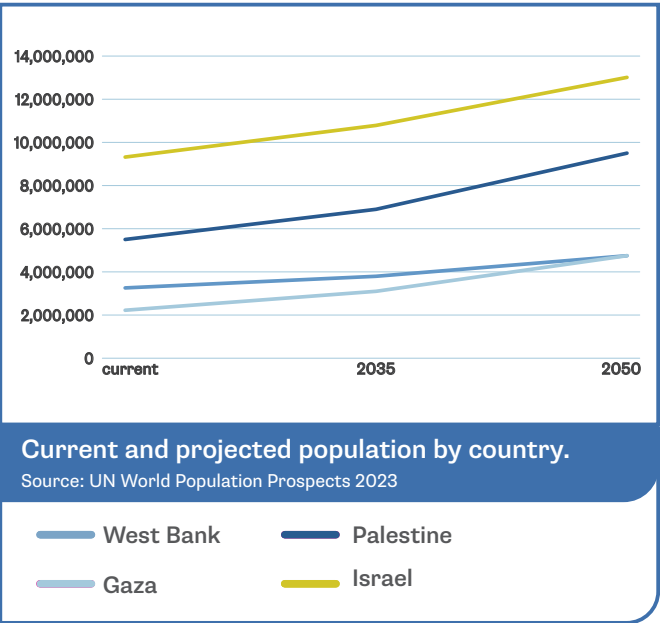
HEALTHCARE

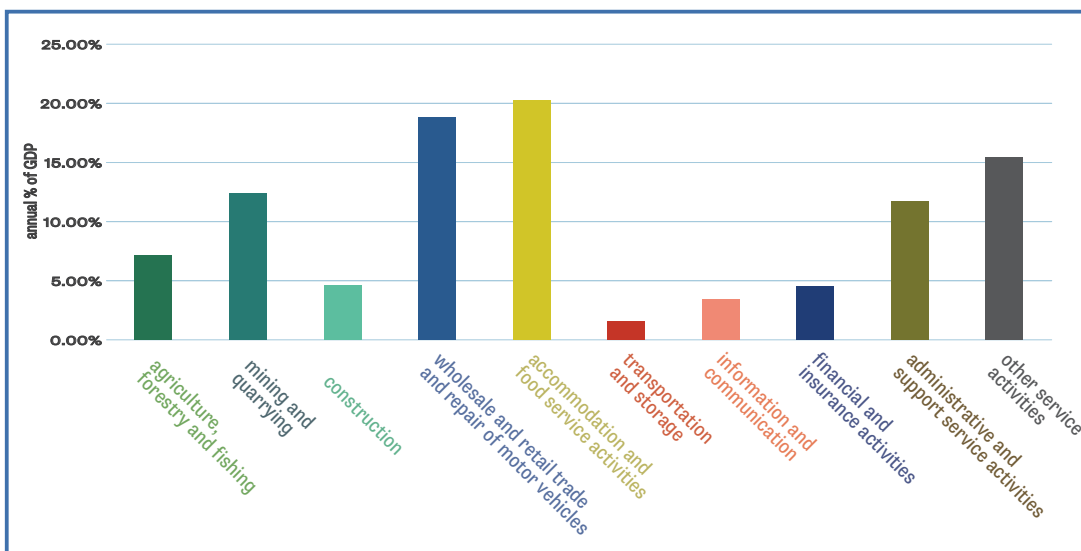
SOCIAL & ECONOMIC RECOVERY

POPULATION TRENDS

In 2023, Gaza had a population of 2.2 million, making it one of the most densely populated areas globally, with nearly 6,200 people per km², compared to 582 in the West Bank and 421 in Israel. Approximately 47% of the population is under 15 years old due to high fertility rates. By 2030, Palestine’s population is projected to grow from 5.5 million to 6.9 million, with an estimated 3.1

million in Gaza and 3.8 million in the West Bank. By 2050, demographic shifts are expected to result in a larger working-age population, creating economic opportunities but necessitating investment in education, health, and job creation. Life expectancy increases are anticipated to improve socio-economic development, with a projected total population of 9.5 million by 2050, evenly split between Gaza and the West Bank.





2023 Palestinian GDP by sector.

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

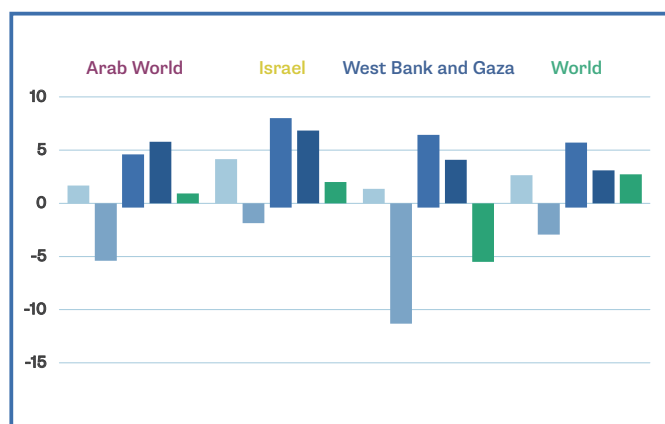
ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Gaza is facing a severe socio-economic crisis due to conflict-induced devastation, famine, and the collapse of social security systems, leading to high poverty rates and deteriorating infrastructure. Expanding social safety nets is crucial to reduce poverty and inequality. However, the resilient population of Gaza has potential for recovery, especially with international support to boost employment and promote sustainability and resilience.

Micro, small, and medium enterprises can play a vital role in this recovery by

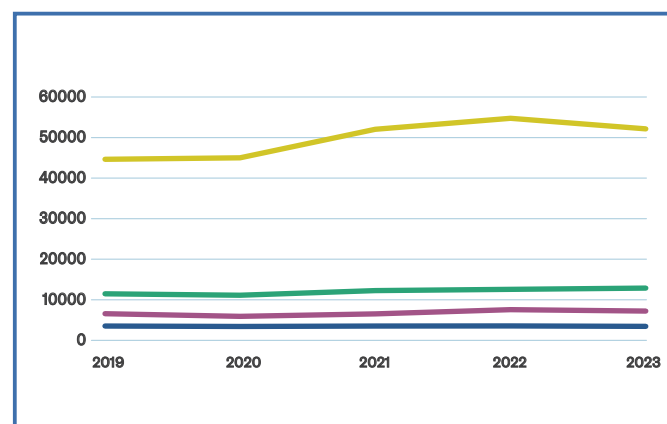
empowering local entrepreneurs and fostering community initiatives. Supporting these businesses through vocational training and a favorable regulatory environment is essential for attracting investment and addressing youth needs.

Revitalizing the agricultural and fishery sectors can enhance food security and restore Gaza's historical agricultural exports through targeted investments and sustainable practices. This should align with a robust economic strategy involving Egypt, Palestine, Israel, and other regional partners to address national needs and population growth.



Annual GDP growth by country (2019-2023).

Source: World Bank



GDP per capita by country (2019-2023).

Source: World Bank



BUILDING BACK BETTER

LEARNING FROM PAST EXPERIENCES

Recovery and reconstruction after disasters involve interconnected issues. Recent successful reconstruction efforts in various regions provide valuable lessons. Affordable housing and the rehabilitation of damaged homes are essential for social stability, enabling families to rebuild their lives. Additionally, heritage and culture play critical roles in supporting recovery and fostering social cohesion.

RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION

Post-conflict recovery in Gaza offers a chance to restore essential services while creating a sustainable, resilient environment that factors in predicted climate changes. This is the essence of building back better rather than simply reconstructing what existed before.

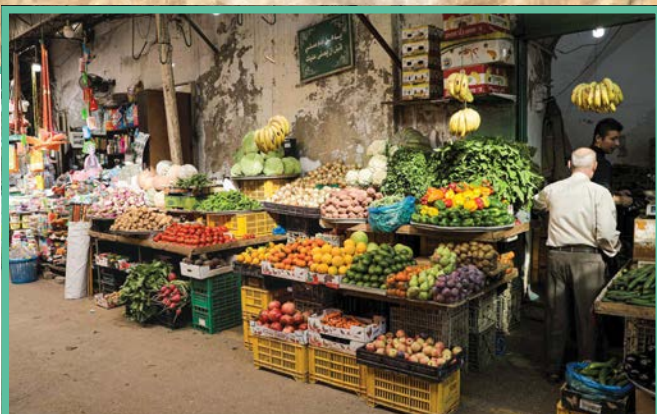
This involves integrating sustainability across water, sanitation, transportation, and energy systems alongside social services. Achieving this will require substantial investments and international aid, aimed at addressing immediate needs and promoting sustainable development within a new governance framework, enhancing Gaza's integration with the Palestinian territories and the broader region.

Sustainable reconstruction must prioritize grassroots community engagement, involving local residents in planning and maintaining services and infrastructure. Capacity-building initiatives, such as training youth and local professionals, will enhance skills for ongoing maintenance.

REBUILDING SERVICES

A dual approach is necessary: long-term international support coupled with immediate local community recovery based on realistic steps:

- **Education:** Reconstructing schools and expanding vocational training will equip the younger generation with essential skills.
- **Healthcare:** Rebuilding healthcare facilities is vital for restoring community health, emphasizing primary care and mental health access.
- **Social Welfare:** Expanding safety nets for vulnerable populations is crucial for equitable recovery.
- **Community Facilities:** Developing public spaces and recreational facilities promotes social cohesion and enhances well-being through increased interaction opportunities.



Al-Zawya Market. Credit: Municipality of Gaza



Students at Al Shami Girls Secondary School.
Credit: World Bank/Arne Hoel



EU-funded Oxfam programme to upgrade desalination plants and water quality. Credit: EU/ECHO/Caroline Gluck



Solar panels on the roofs of the buildings in central Gaza. Credit: UNRWA/Lucrezia Vittori

RECONNECTING GAZA INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORTATION

SUSTAINABLE RECONSTRUCTION

Reconstructing Gaza's infrastructure after conflict presents a vital opportunity to restore essential services while creating a more sustainable and resilient environment. A priority will be to integrate sustainability across transportation, energy systems, water, and sanitation infrastructure. The proposal will build on individual plans and policies from Egypt, Palestine, Israel and other countries, with the potential for sharing each of the resources in the future.

TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Developing integrated transportation networks and the construction of air and sea ports will enhance connectivity and trade, driving economic growth. It is crucial to modernize internal roads and transport infrastructure for efficient transboundary movement between Gaza, the West Bank, and the broader region. Additionally, enhancing communication through a submarine ICT network will support education and economic development.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Utilizing the potential for solar energy through solar farms in the metropolitan region will reduce the dependency on offshore Gazan natural gas and assist in the water desalination in Ashkelon. To tackle water scarcity, rainwater harvesting systems are essential for improving water security. Efficient waste management, including recycling and composting, is vital for establishing a

circular economy that does not degrade the environment. Innovative strategies should be adopted for green building practices will also enhance living conditions.

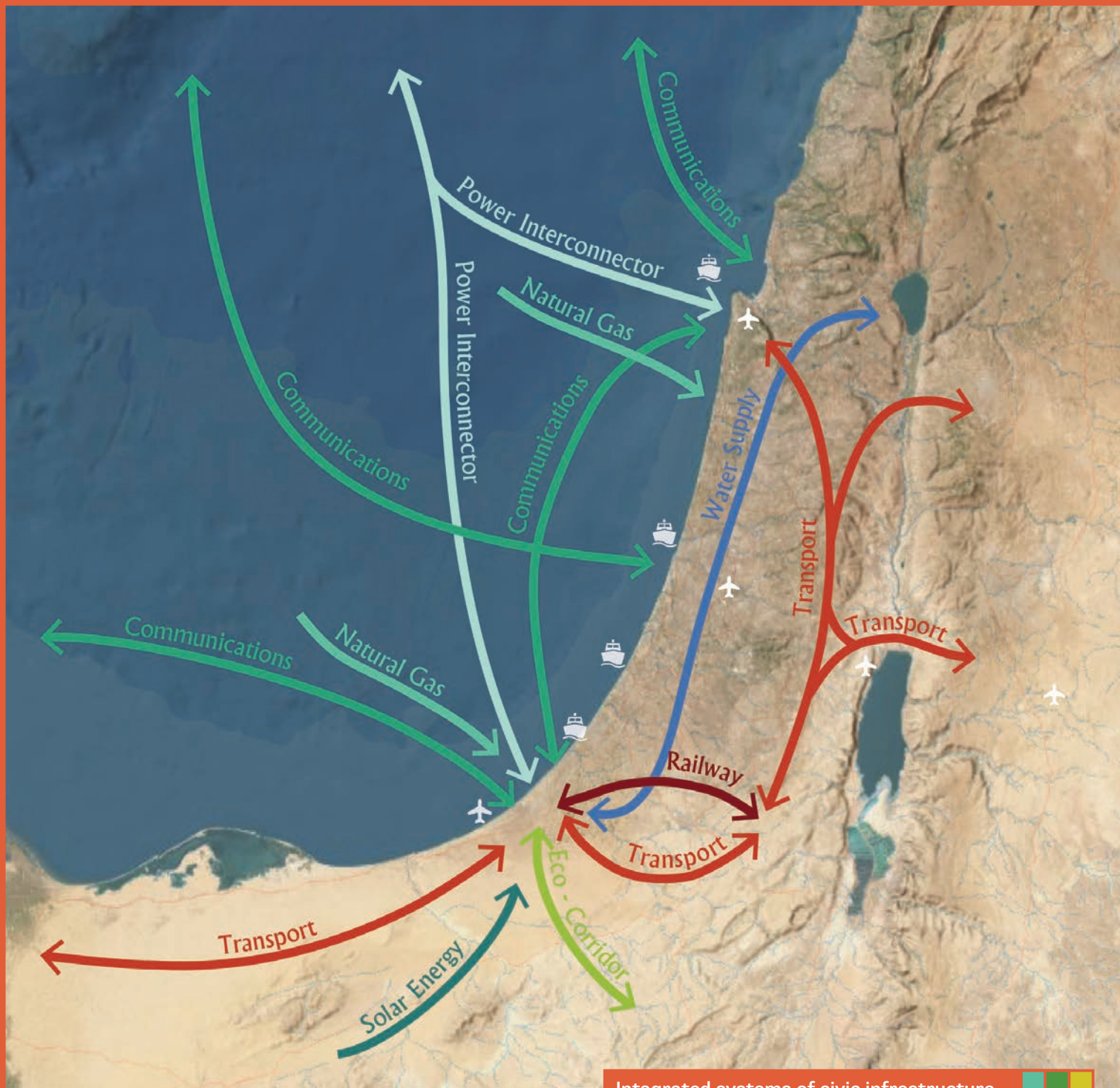
REUSING RUBBLE

The volume of rubble left in Gaza is staggering—estimated by the United Nations Environment Programme to equal the volume of twelve Giza pyramids. Traditional disposal methods, such as landfilling or dumping at sea, are costly and environmentally harmful. In contrast, reusing rubble offers a sustainable approach that mitigates waste, reduces reliance on new resources, and stimulates local economies. The clearing of rubble should prioritize recovery by identifying areas for essential services, removing dangerous debris and contaminants, and recognizing cultural and natural sites for shared heritage together with the design of new landscapes.



Metal scrap collectors in Gaza.

Credit: World Bank



Integrated systems of civic infrastructure and resources. Source: EcoPeace, EIB, FEMIP, Global Palestine Connected Gaza



Cleaning rubble in Gaza for rebuilding efforts.
Credit: EU/ECHO/Caroline Gluck

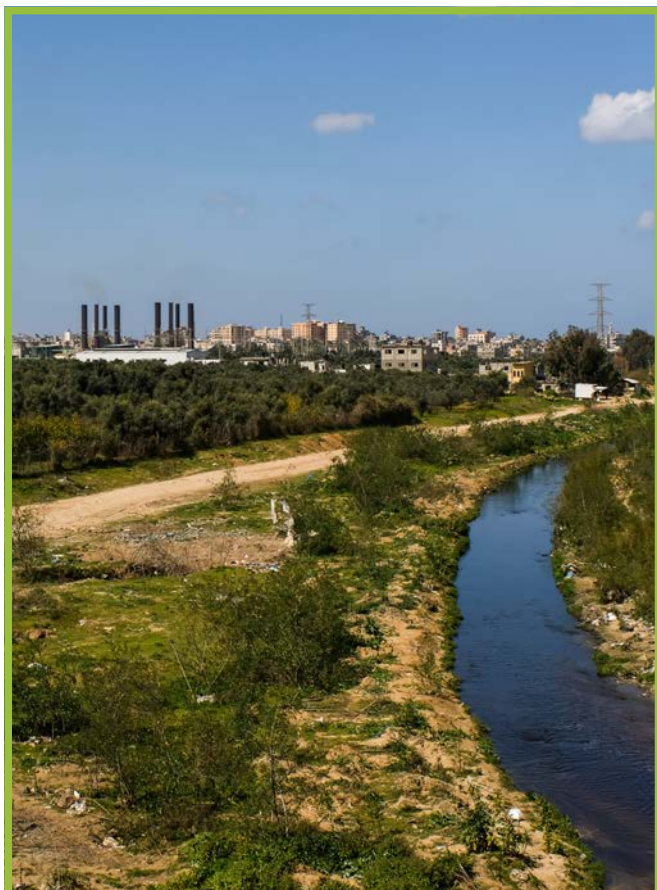


Reconstruction in Gaza after 2014.
Credit: Heinrich Böll Foundation

RESTORING THE ENVIRONMENT

A SEVERELY DAMAGED ENVIRONMENT

The environmental situation in Gaza is dire, marked by significant degradation due to years of conflict, overpopulation, and inadequate infrastructure. Key challenges include severe water scarcity, polluted water sources, and damaged ecosystems. The destruction of natural habitats and the over-extraction and hence probably also salinization of groundwater have led to a crisis where clean water is scarce, with many residents relying on contaminated supplies. Air pollution from debris further compounds health risks for the population.



Distrupted environment of Wadi Gaza
Credit: The Palestine Chronicle/Mahmoud Nasser

THE REALITIES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

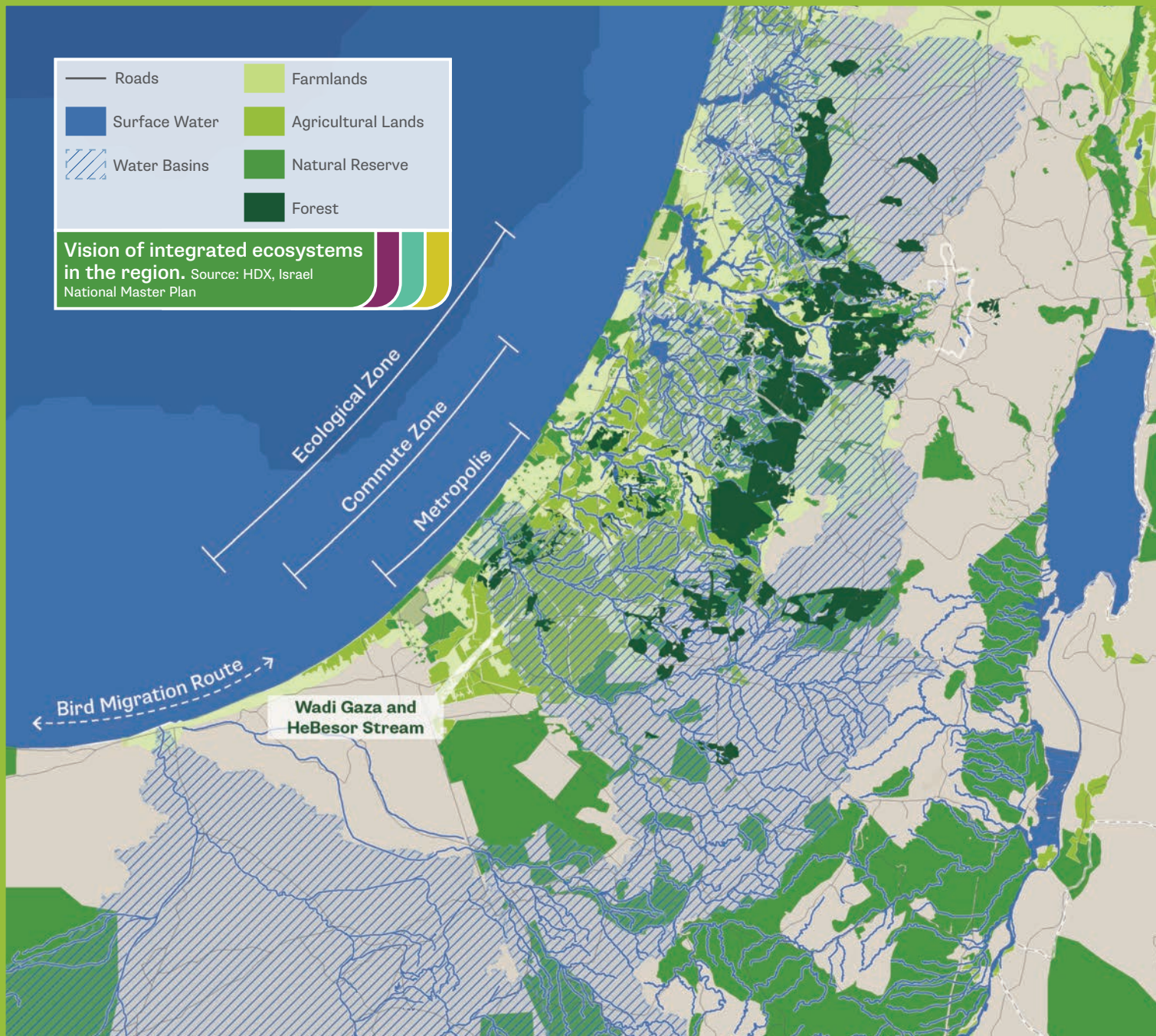
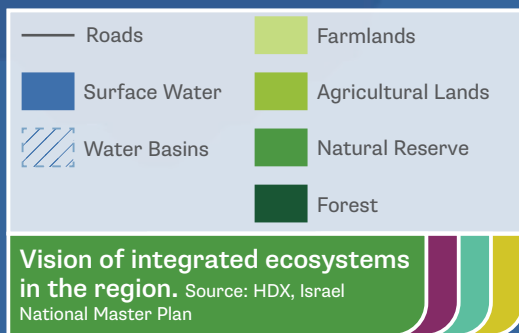
The rate of climate change has increased since the 1980s: the Mediterranean's surface temperature is 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, causing more high-temperature extreme events, while sea level has risen by 2.8 mm annually since 1993, and ocean acidity is increasing. Rainfall patterns are also changing. All recovery and reconstruction processes must factor in these unavoidable and irreversible realities.

RECOVERING THE ENVIRONMENT

To restore a healthy environment in Gaza requires a multifaceted approach. First, rebuilding and upgrading water and sanitation infrastructure is critical. This includes establishing modern wastewater treatment facilities and rainwater harvesting systems to ensure access to clean water for all. Implementing sustainable agricultural practices can help revive the local economy while conserving natural resources.

Additionally, habitat restoration projects should be initiated to rehabilitate degraded lands and support biodiversity. Engaging local communities in environmental education and conservation initiatives will foster a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their natural surroundings.

Finally, regional cooperation is vital. Cooperative efforts with neighbouring regions can enhance climate and ecological resilience and promote shared resource management. With targeted investments and international support, Gaza can transition towards a healthier, more sustainable environment, ensuring a better quality of life for its residents and future generations.



Hula Valley in Israel, a nesting area for migrating birds.
Credit: Wikimedia/Nava Harel



View from the Jordan Valley. Credit: Heinrich Böll Foundation

A NEW SPATIAL ORDER

SUSTAINABLE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

The primary challenge will be to implement spatial sustainability principles to manage urban growth and development effectively. This entails establishing a comprehensive legal metropolitan framework—including policies, legislation, and regulations—for governance in the context of Palestine's altered territorial landscape and fragmented communities. A crucial aspect will be redefining boundaries that promote economic, social, and environmental sustainability throughout the wider region. This will require collaborative efforts among stakeholders to ensure that development aligns with sustainable practices and community needs.

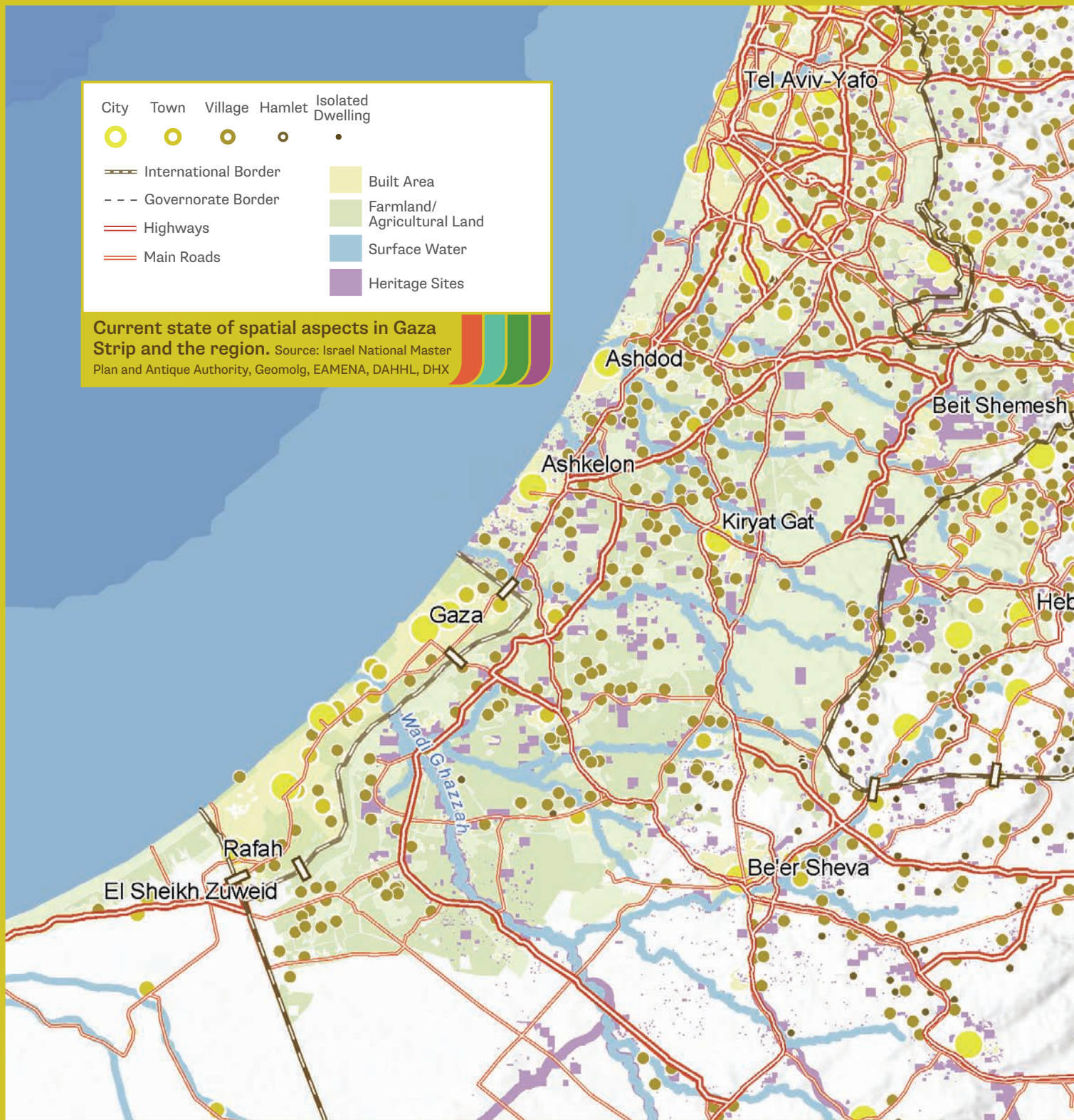
CONNECTIVITY OF URBAN, PERI-URBAN, AND PERIPHERAL SETTLEMENTS

The destruction of the built environment, coupled with displacement and significant changes in population density, has dramatically affected the dynamics between urban, peri-urban, and rural settlements in the region. These challenges have altered economic activities, disrupted the distribution of essential services, and reshaped connectivity between settlements, leading to fragmented social and economic interactions. Weaving the parts together in a phased process will redefine the urban, peri-urban, and peripheral areas.



REORDERING THE METROPOLIS

The urban modelling will identify the inter-relationships between the nodes of the sub-districts, by also defining commuter boundaries and eco-system regions and increase equitable access to jobs, housing and social interactions between Palestine and Israel; fostering spatial and functional integration, and continuity to enable economies and encourage sustainable relationships to natural habitats. Strengthening national and regional development planning will be vital to promote connectivity, fostering integrated and sustainable growth that benefits all communities involved.



The Park of the Unknown Soldier, Al-Rimal neighborhood. Credit: Municipality of Gaza



Sport facility in Gaza. Credit: Heinrich Böll Foundation

RETRACING HISTORICAL & COMMUNITY HERITAGE

A NEW APPROACH TO HERITAGE

In the aftermath of significant cultural destruction, a non-conventional approach is vital for reconstructing Gaza's heritage, emphasizing healing and memorialization driven by its citizens. This strategy encourages Gazans, civil society, and cultural actors to redefine heritage by merging the spirit of the place with collective memory, reconnecting historical remnants to inform recovery and reconstruction plans.

REIMAGINING HERITAGE

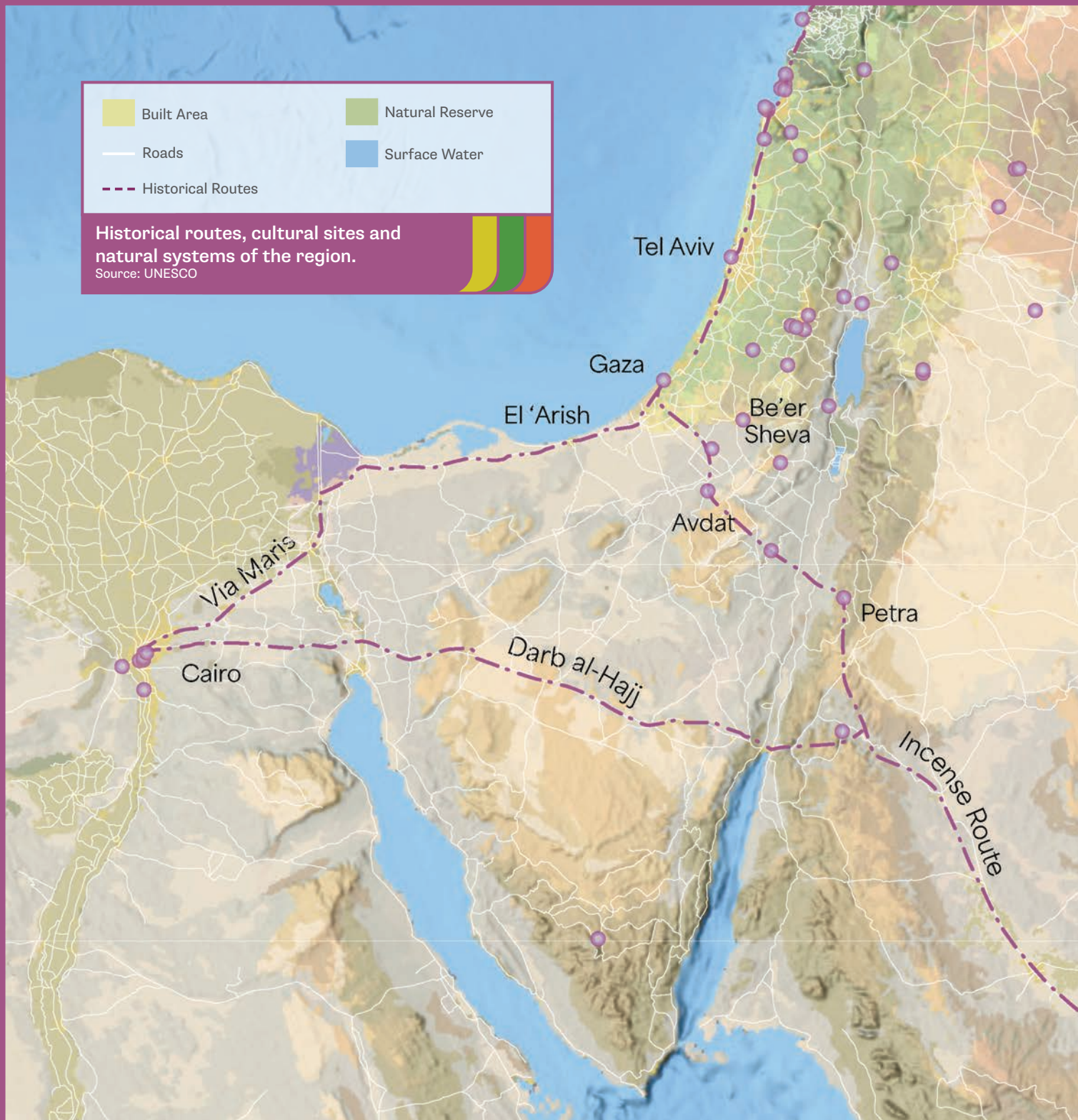
Cultural mapping can integrate Gaza's rich history into its regional context, enhancing the remnants of ancient civilizations. A broad definition of cultural heritage—covering historic sites, oral histories, and geospatial data—should guide new urban planning practices. However, decades of conflict and urban development have severely eroded this fragile heritage, with over 200 of Gaza's 350 heritage sites of historical, scientific, religious, and archaeological significance lost or damaged.

RECOMPOSING THE HISTORIC URBAN LANDSCAPE

Collective memory is essential for reconnecting fragments of historic remnants and guiding recovery efforts. It can help weave together the torn fabric of Gaza's urban landscape, preserving traces of the past and enhancing cultural itineraries, such as the Via Maris and the Frankincense Route. These routes have survived urban encroachment and can serve as a foundation for regional cooperation.



Saint Hilarion Monastery/Tell Umm Amer.
Credit: Première Urgence Internationale (PUI)



RECOVERING NATURAL HERITAGE

Key natural features include the kukar ridges and unique coastal watersheds. Reconnecting Wadi Gaza/Nahal Besor with broader transboundary ecological corridors will foster regional environmental resilience and biodiversity, transforming the area into a public space that serves as a cultural and ecological hub. This transformation will enhance local identity and promote long-term sustainability through open spaces providing regional stopping along the migratory bird flyways.



Disrupted environment of Wadi Gaza.
Credit: The Palestine Chronicle/Mahmoud Nasser

A TRANSBOUNDARY METROPOLIS

A NEW GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Creating peaceful coexistence within a region necessitates establishing a fully functioning Palestinian state, complete with a national government and local authorities. A transboundary metropolitan area, comprising the urban regions of Al Arish - Rafah, Gaza, Ashkelon-Ashdod, could ensure coherent governance of environmental and economic processes, facilitate the integration of respective economic activities, and enhance development on both regional and international scales.

While the current reality may seem distant from this vision, effective reconstruction plans must prioritize the potential for cross-border integration. This process requires incremental actions with a long-term perspective, extending beyond traditional disaster recovery timelines, alongside concrete international support and partnerships from the outset.

Key components of this approach include:

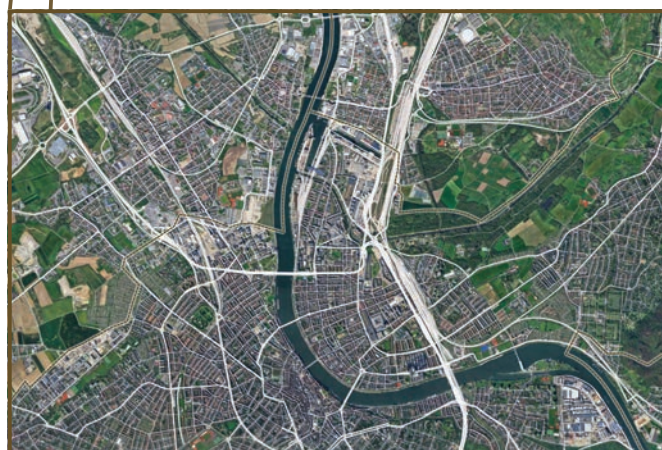
- Developing cross-border community initiatives with tangible events to foster trust and healing.
- A multi-level governance system encompassing local, national, metropolitan, and supranational levels.
- A multi-dimensional strategy focusing on six integration dimensions: economic, functional, institutional, informational, cultural, and interpersonal connections.

TRANSBORDER METROPOLISES ARE A REALITY

Proposing a form of metropolitan governance based on UN-Habitat expertise of the Metro-Hub in Latin America will be supported by case-studies and research of the French Transborder Operational Mission (MOT). This positioning may facilitate a structured dialogue between national authorities and local and regional players, demonstrating mutual functional support and providing valuable insights for viable solutions.



Puerto Iguazú/ Foz do Iguaçu/Cuidad del Este tri-border area connecting Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Source: Google Earth and OSM



Basel Metropolitan Area (Trinational Eurodistrict Basel) connecting Switzerland, France and Germany. Source: Google Earth and OSM

A VISION OF HOPE

REIMAGINING GAZA

Reimagining Gaza's future amidst its catastrophic destruction is a daunting challenge. With infrastructure, housing, social services, and heritage obliterated, the population faces a precarious existence without clear pathways to recovery. However, a vision that transcends the current conflict and positions Gaza as a regional gateway to the Mediterranean is needed, where heritage plays a pivotal role in rebuilding civic identity and pride and giving hope.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

The Anthedon Initiative aims to develop this vision by defining Gaza as part of a cohesive Palestine within a two-state solution. This future includes comprehensive urban services, sustainable economic practices, and a vibrant society. The initiative proposes the creation of a transboundary metropolis, enhancing connections between Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Jordan and other countries in the region, while recognising the natural and cultural heritage as a key factor for recovery and addressing environmental challenges through renewable energy in the context of a changing climate. It recommends positioning the immediate needs within a **Vision of Hope** for peace and cooperation.

A WAY FORWARD

- **Initiating** reconciliation and healing by building cross-border communities of hope
- **Supporting** the reorganisation of local communities and their activities
- **Encouraging** initiatives based on strengthening social and physical components
- **Rebuilding** Gaza as a region full of life and opportunities
- **Reconnecting** Gaza with the West Bank, the region and the outer world
- **Developing** a transboundary metropolis
- **Restoring** cultural and natural heritage and itineraries
- **Reengaging** international communities
- **Fostering** a viable and democratic peace process.

Reimagining the organization of this territory and its connections with the wider world remains the only path out of a prolonged—and potentially permanent—conflict.

These conclusions will be refined in collaboration with local populations and international partners, with results anticipated in early 2025.

**projected connectivity of peace and cooperation
in the region, based on urban modeling.**

Sources: UN, World Bank (population, economic and transport data)







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