



By Carmen Ghattas



# Aiming for Bethlehem Capital of Arab Culture 2020 Bethlehem Municipality Leads Sustainable Cultural Development



Despite its relatively restricted area that constitutes 7.5 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of 28,500 inhabitants, the city of Bethlehem is considered the region's cultural, commercial, and touristic hub. It is frequented daily by hundreds of merchants and shoppers from the surrounding villages, in addition to hosting more than 1.2 million tourists annually. This has made Bethlehem a cosmopolitan city that embraces a plethora of people from various backgrounds and cultures, in spite of the daily challenges encountered.

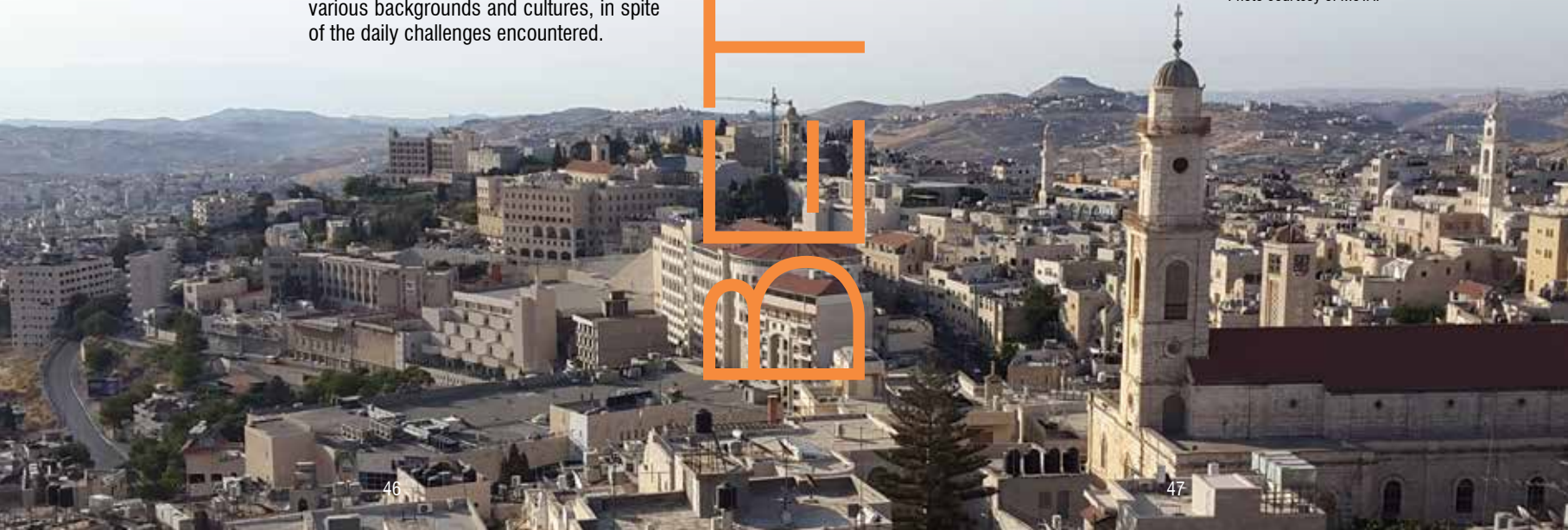


In preparation for the flagship Capital of Arab Culture in March 2020, Bethlehem Municipality has invested in the city's cultural sustainability through a variety of means consistent with its commitment to a "clean and green" environment as a component of national identity and unity based on the proper management and conservation of the city's cultural heritage. Several projects are thus being conducted through the interplay between cultural heritage and environment as a major contributor in sustaining Bethlehem's identity and authenticity.

**New Urban Resources** is the municipality's first project to be implemented as part of its agenda to achieve the seventh and eleventh United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals that aim to reduce energy consumption. Renewable energy would be produced through installing 300 kWp photovoltaic solar panels on the rooftop of Bethlehem's central bus station, and hence its cost would be deducted from the public street-lighting bills paid by Bethlehem citizens. Funded by the Italian Agency for Development



Star Street during Bethlehem Live Festival. Photo courtesy of MoTA.





Children of Bethlehem cleaning a public street, as part of Bethlehem Clean, Bethlehem Green awareness campaign. Photo by Fadi Ghattas (Public Relations Department, Bethlehem Municipality)..

through the Municipality of Turin, the three-year project started in 2018 and includes awareness-raising activities among youth and the local community.

**Bethlehem Clean, Bethlehem Green** is an environmental awareness campaign that addresses children through a series of animated videos. Implemented by Bethlehem Municipality, the series is grounded in Palestinian culture and aims to educate children on how to protect the environment of their city and maintain a clean and green area.

Thinking green: Bethlehem Municipality is drafting the final phase

of its **Mobility Plan** funded by the French Agency for Development-AFD through the Municipality of Paris, which promotes Bethlehem as a place of many opportunities. Through implementing green solutions for mobility, such as encouraging people to walk and use public transportation, Bethlehem hopes that by 2030 it will have achieved its goals to be efficient and accessible, green and sustainable, attractive and enjoyable, authentic and collaborative, and safe and healthy.

Due to limited physical public spaces, one of the mobility plan's recommendations resulted in the

The personalities of the animated series "The heroes of the Neighbourhood", Bethlehem Municipality.



**Reinventing Public Spaces Project** to redesign and consolidate an efficient and effective use of public spaces, in particular Manger Square, in a manner that complies with green and adaptive standards. The project continues to be funded by AFD through the Municipality of Paris to reflect the urban fringe of Bethlehem and provide a place for locals to socialize within the old city of Bethlehem.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site: The Church of the Nativity and Pilgrimage Route. Bethlehem Municipality has started a project to revitalize the Pilgrimage Route through a fund provided by the Russian Federation. The project to **Revitalize and Restore the Historical and Religious Center of Bethlehem** encompasses various infrastructure activities that aim to transform the route into a green pedestrian area to eliminate pollution in the area and to revive the tourism flow by giving tourists the opportunity to walk through the old city and admire its architectural heritage, and to elevate local economic development through encouraging shop owners along the route to invest in their properties. The municipality still seeks funds to provide electric buses to facilitate the movement of people with disabilities and the elderly, local inhabitants and tourists alike, along the route.



Bethlehem is home to a vast treasure of cultural heritage attractions associated with archaeological and religious sites. In order to ensure the sustainability of these attractions, environmentalism and greening have become the pillars on which cultural-heritage management and restoration can build in order to bequeath this national wealth to future generations.

*Carmen J. Ghattas, director of public relations at Bethlehem Municipality, has a demonstrated history of working in management, strategic public relations planning, international relations, and brand management. She holds a master's degree in tourism studies from Bethlehem University and another in management of development from the University of Turin.*