

“Saving the Stones”, Akko  
Revitalization of Weizman Street

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Weizman Street is an historical axis; the main of the three streets that connect the Old and New cities of Akko. For decades it has been the main commercial street, and a place for people to meet. The recent development of Ben Ami has lead to neglecting Weizman; the lack of a strong connection between both sides of the fortifications is reflected in the street's decay.

The goal of this project is to analyze Weizman in order to bring awareness of the importance of the current condition of the street and the possibility of revitalizing it.

On a first phase, we will analyze and evaluate Weizman: identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and understanding the possible threats of not treating this street.

A second phase, not developed in this project, would be to give possible solutions; and architectural and urban proposals for the different issues presented on this project.

We will start analyzing the start and growth of the city outside of the fortifications (the “New City”), the first trace of Weizman and an overview of the most significant Masterplans for Akko. We then present Akko today, focusing on Weizman and the different issues we have encountered as well as its strengths.

With this we were able to make a diagnosis, showing what the opportunities are, both to revitalize and preserve this historical area.

## 1 - Analysis through Historical Pictures.

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*Aerial picture of 1917* - The city starts to expand outside of the city walls. The new constructions are built around the walls. The Old City serves still as a center. We can talk of a concentric expansion.

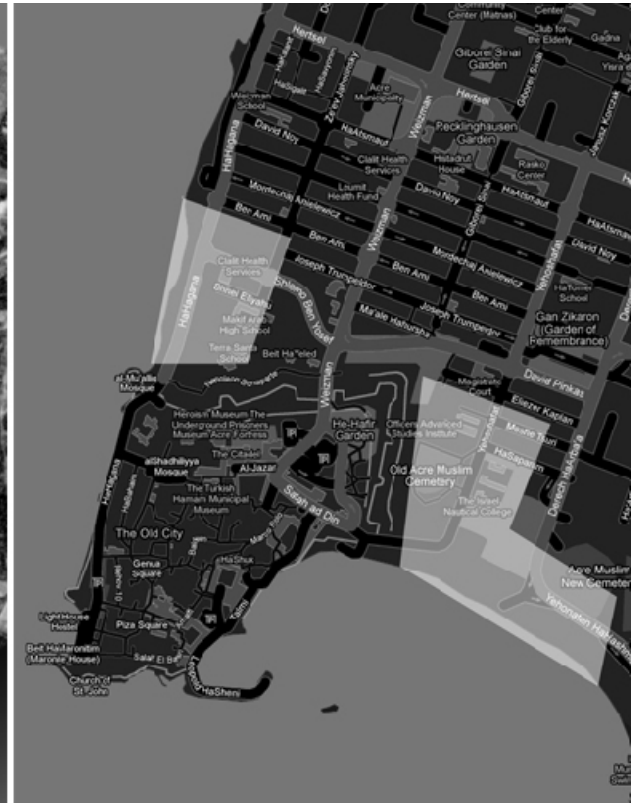


aerial picture,  
1917



Comparing with a current map, we can see the areas occupied in 1917.

Aerial picture of 1923 – The city continues its expansion following the coast line. Roads appear more clearly traced, and we first see an orthogonal (planned) intersection.



Comparing with a current map, we can see the areas occupied in 1923.

*Aerial picture of 1930* – There is a quick development; in 7 years (comparing to the picture from 1923) the “voids” between the 3 areas that were built were filled. Transferring the occupied area to current maps, we can more or less determine the grid occupied the area up to what today would be Haatzmaut St.



*Comparing with a current map, we can see the areas occupied in 1930.*

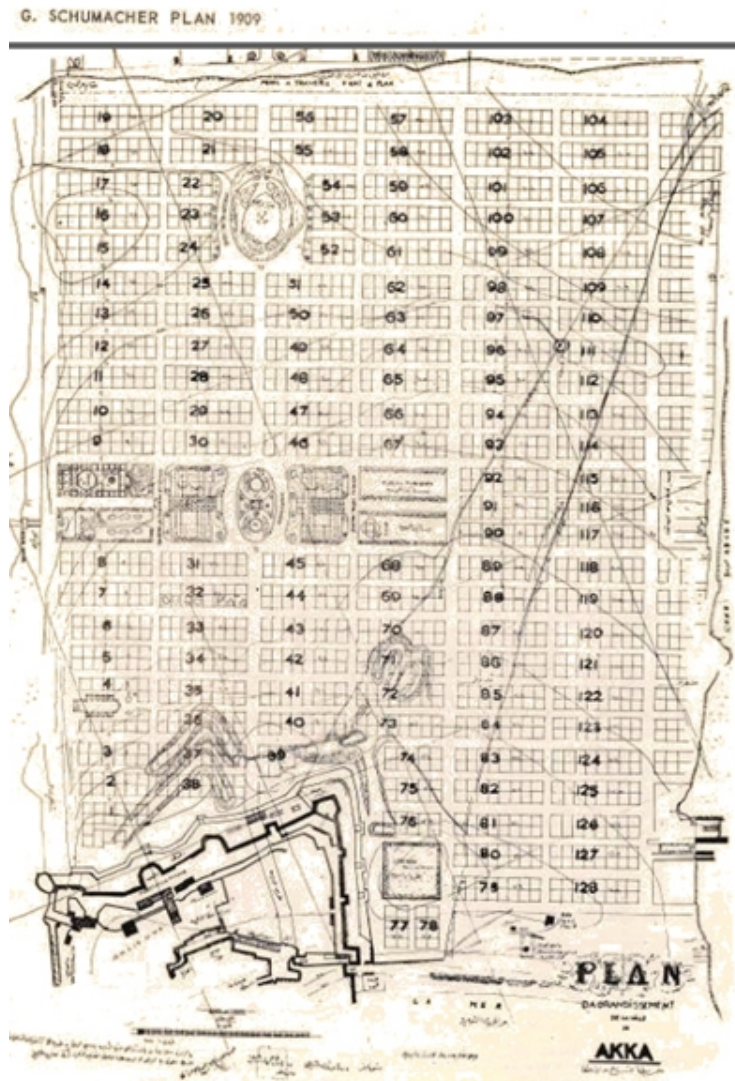
*Aerial picture of 1946* – There is not much difference with the previous picture of 1930. In these 15 years not much has been added in the New City. The grid has kept expanding or has gained density and seems complete, still up to Haatzmaut St only.



*Comparing with a current map, we can see the areas occupied in 1946.*

## 2 - Analysis of Old Masterplans.

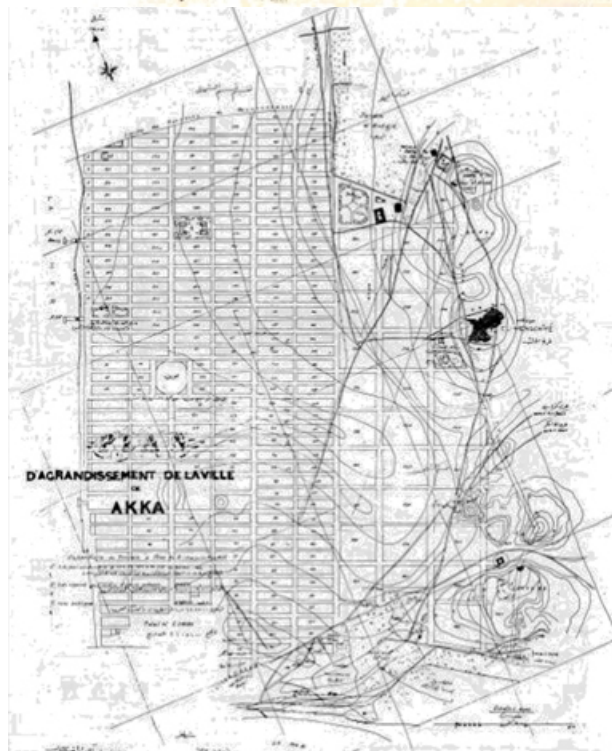
### The Schumacher Plan



The Schumacher plan of 1909 shows Weizman was indeed planned as an axis, as it connects the Old City with at least two new important intersections in the New City, apparently designed to hold Public buildings and green areas.



The grid is completely orthogonal. This grid is 140 m x 40 m and holds 8 lots. This is an uniform grid all over the area considered for the masterplan, except for the area designed for the Municipality. In fact this is the first time we see the planning of Hertsel St., that intersection with Weizman and the location of an institutional/governmental sector.

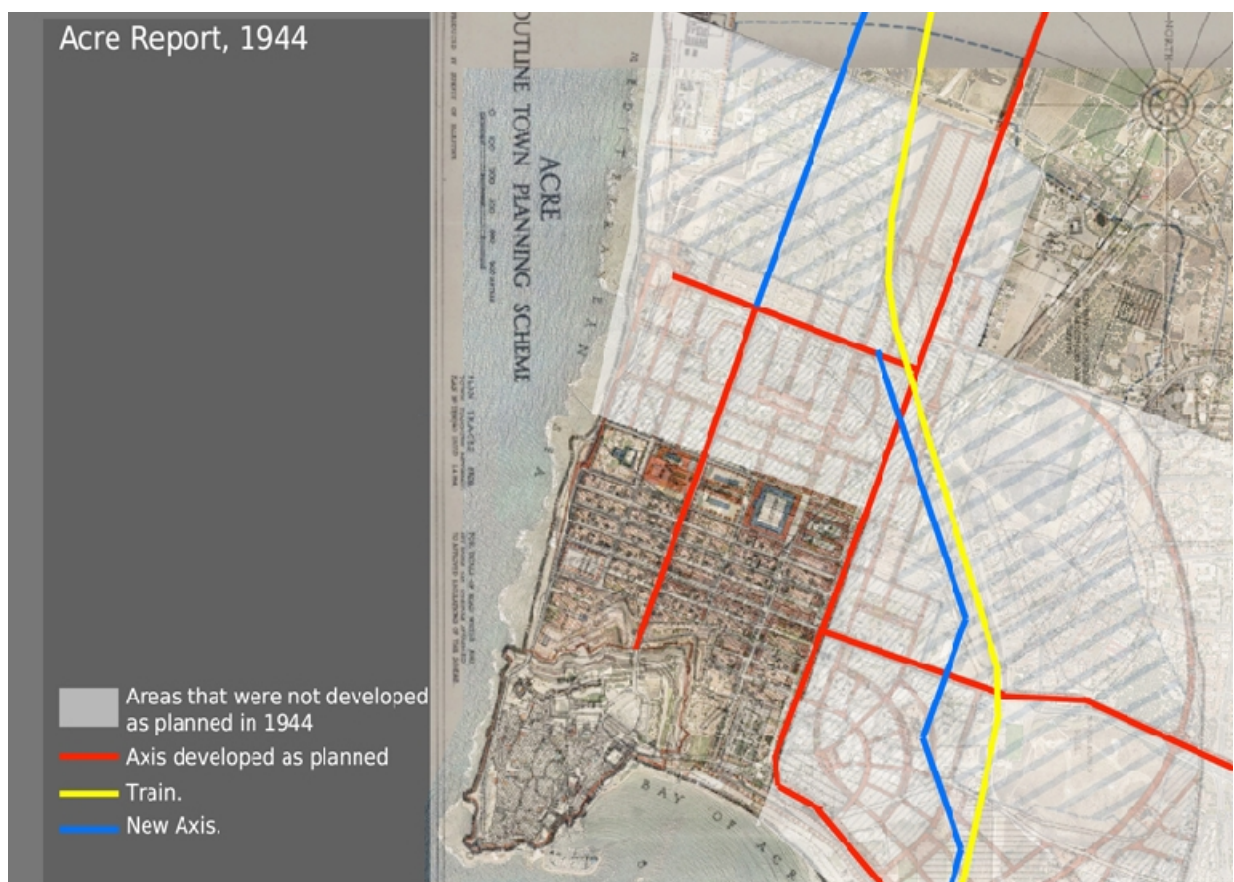


This grid had no connection to the coast line or to the Old City. It had been planned with orthogonal streets that had no “dialogue” with these two crucial characteristics of Akko.

## The Acre Report



Overlapping with a current aerial picture, we can compare both layouts.



The Acre Report of 1944 shows the orthogonal grid that had already been built (up to Haatzmaut St.) as well as the creation of a public-institutional block on Hertsel Street. Unlike the Schumacher plan, the grid is not regular, but has a different geometric layout.

Of what was actually done from this masterplan, we can identify some axis, like Weizman. The street, as an axis, seems to have been concentrated from the Old City up to the Municipality and then seems to lose importance towards the north as there is no other focal point like there was on the previous masterplan.

Areas outside of the grid existing up to the 1940's weren't completed like it was suggested on this plan. New axis appeared later in time, like the train and therefore a main road, parallel to the train and a train station, leveled with Hertsel St., increasing even more the importance of this street that already held the Municipality.

### 3 - Akko Today.

#### Main roads, and access to Old Akko



There are two main entrances to the city, which are Roads 4 (South-North) and 85 (East-West). Road 85 becomes Ben Ami, hence the traffic and commercial development on this street. Another main axis is the train. The train station is on Hertsel Street. Again, this street holds a lot of traffic because of this. The municipality is also on Hertsel, making it an obvious axis. Ben Ami and Hertsel are parallel to each other, and are the accesses to the City from the East.

The Old City itself has three entrances, one through the original gate, on the east side, one near the sea and the third one is Weizman. Weizman connects the center of both the new and old cities (municipality and the main touristic area in the old city) and this is what makes it the main entrance and why it is fundamental to preserve. It is also one of the most relevant North-South streets, together with HaHagana (coast line) and Yehoshafat or Derech HaArba'a (bus traffic).

### Comparison of Aerial Pictures, 1923 - 1946 – 2009

Comparing the evolution of Weizman, we can see the first traces in 1923. On the picture of 1946, the street has been straightened and has the shape it has present day. Also the grid is the same; there have been no modifications on Weizman itself.

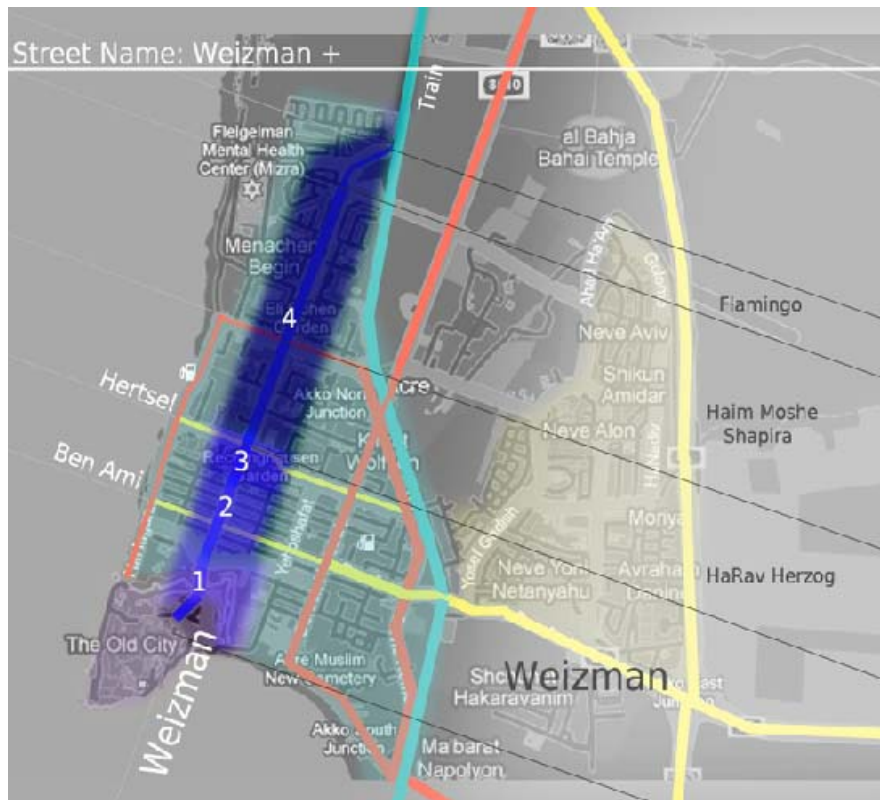


1923 – 2009



1946 – 2009

### 4 - Weizman Street.



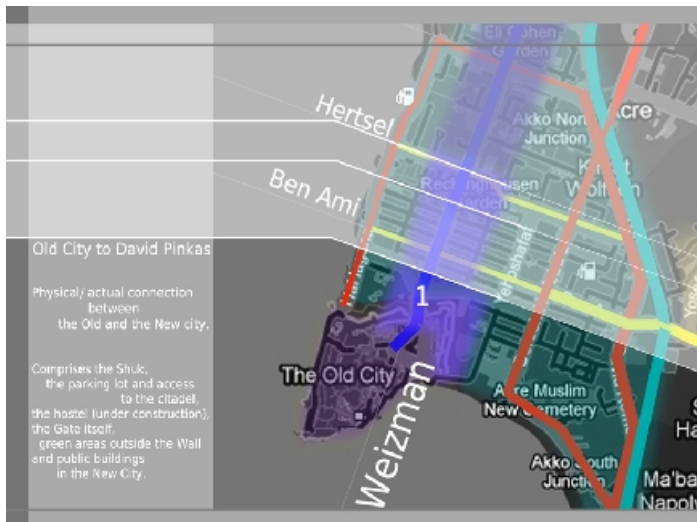
Even though the street is continuous up to its intersection with the train, it is only called “Weizman” up to Hertsel.

In fact this is the portion we will analyze since it's what makes the connection between the center of the New City (the municipality and public green areas) and the center of Old Akko.

## A – Identification of Sectors



All through Weizman and its continuation after Hertsel, the street changes its appearance or main characteristics. By dividing the street according to the characteristics of each section, we can determine its potentials. We can divide it into four sections.



Old City to David Pinkas

Physical/actual connection between the Old and the New City.

Comprises the Shuk, the parking lot and access to the Citadel (the main touristic spot), the hostel (at this time under construction), the Gate itself, green areas outside the Wall and public buildings in the New City.

The first section goes from the Old City to David Pinkas. This is the physical connection between both cities. It comprises the Mosque, the Shuk, the parking lot and access to the Citadel (main touristic spot), the hostel (at this time under construction), the Gate itself, the green untreated areas outside of the city wall and the public buildings just outside of the fortress (library, schools...).

The potential resides on the Gate and the green areas that have no urban program to enhance the entrance to a city like Akko. The importance of this area is obvious since it is the place where all tourists first arrive when in the city. It is also gathers people from all over Akko that go to the Mosque or the Shuk.



The Main Parking Lot and Visitors Center



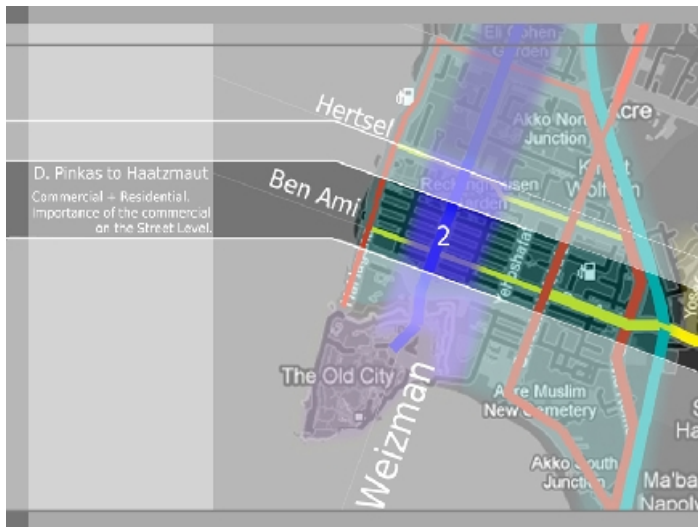
the Mosque



The Walls



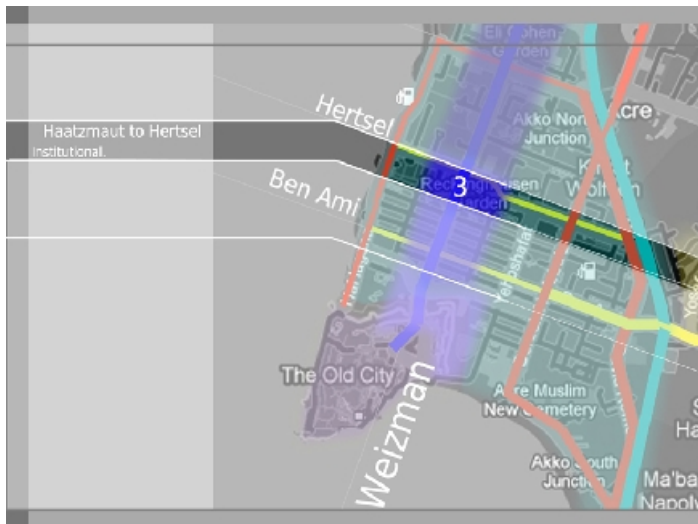




The second section goes from David Pinkas to Haatzmaut. This is a mainly commercial and residential area. The intersection with Ben Ami, a commercial street (maybe today's most important commercial area of the city) should be taken as a potential to develop stores or restaurants also on Weizman. To develop this as a core for commercial use would be of great benefit.



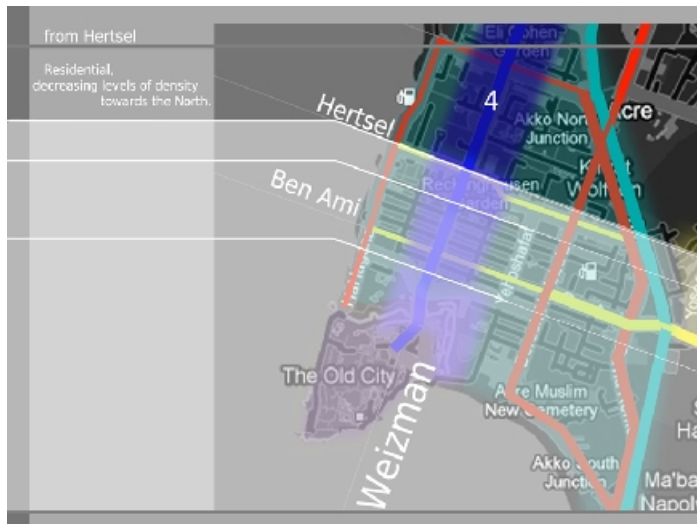
*The intersection of Weizman St. and Ben Ami.*



The third area goes from Haatzmaut to Hertsel. These two blocks hold an institutional space. It includes the Municipality, the park in front of it and across Weizman, and different schools and offices. The two green areas on both sides of Weizman are very different to each other. The one in front of the Municipality has an institutional character in the urban layout. It gives the building perspective, hence highlights the presence of the Governmental building. The park across Weizman has

another function which is a more social one. However it doesn't seem to be fulfilling this function as it should, which is function as a center, or as a place for people to meet up. The amount of people that go to this park is limited.



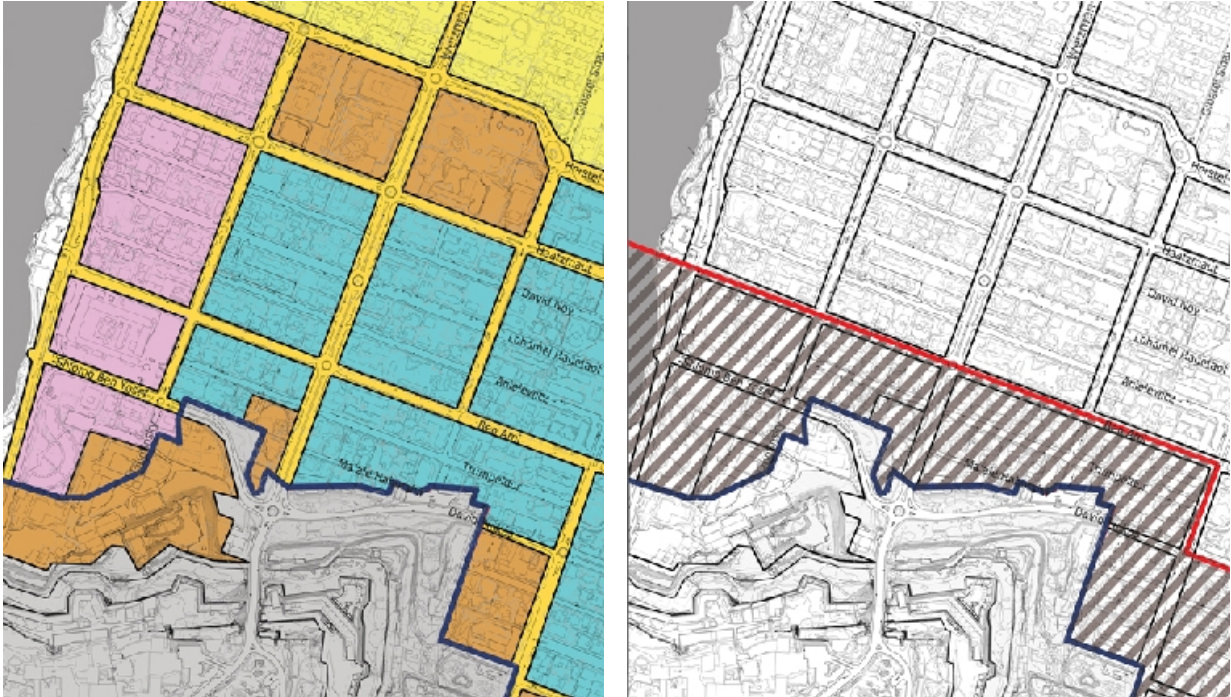


The fourth and last area goes from Hertzel and up north. This area is fully residential, with few public or commercial buildings. As we mentioned before, this street changes its name and is not called “Weizman”. This makes us see that in fact the key section of the street is “Weizman”, connecting the Municipality with the Old City.



The fact that we can determine four different sections on such a short street shows us that there are many factors that can be worked on to revitalize it, and that these few blocks can hold a lot of activities and attract many people.

## B – Current Masterplan and UNESCO's Buffer zone.



On the Masterplan, Weizman appears as an *existent* or *approved* road. The institutional, commercial and residential areas correspond well to what exists today, which means this plan is showing the situation in present day in this area, and there is no plan to make any changes. Indeed we don't believe there needs to be a change of function, but a need of enhancing or developing these "categories" on each section. We can also see that on both ends of the street, there are institutional areas. This idea needs to be developed, putting a bigger emphasis on these institutions "starting and ending" Weizman.

The Buffer zone for Old Akko goes from the Old city up to Ben Ami (on the Weizman street area). These few blocks affected by the Buffer Zone cannot suffer just any modification (new buildings, or heights, etc.), and need to follow certain rules.

## 5 - Approach to Revitalization: a close-up on the Buildings.

### A – Pictures of the street

At a glance, we have taken pictures of each block, to have a better understanding of what is built, and what buildings might need to be preserved. (We only put pictures of blocks holding these kinds of buildings).



## B – Identification of Buildings



Using the aerial picture from 1946, we have marked the buildings we see in turquoise. We have used for this first step the entire picture even though we are actually focusing on Weizman. (It could be interesting to use this same technique for other areas of the city). Some of these buildings still stand, some don't.

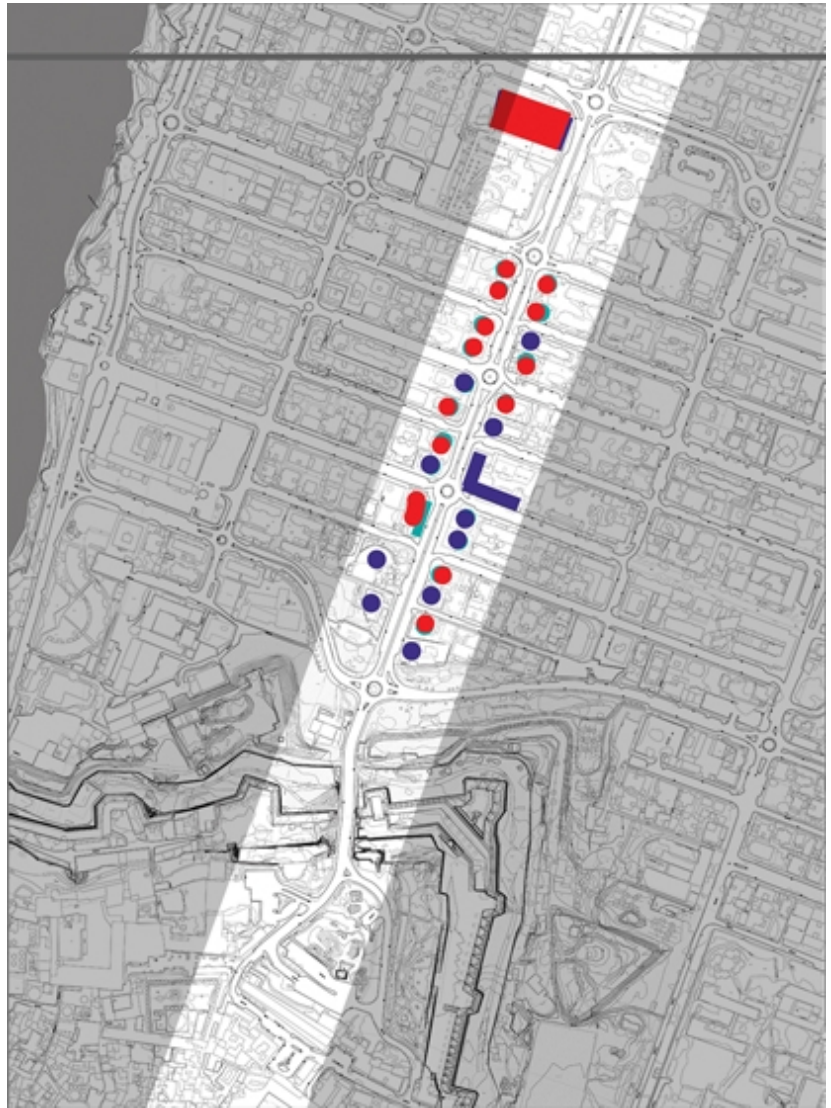
On a second map we pointed out in blue, buildings built after 1950's.

Overlapping both we get a first idea of what has been demolished from before 1946 to build new things.

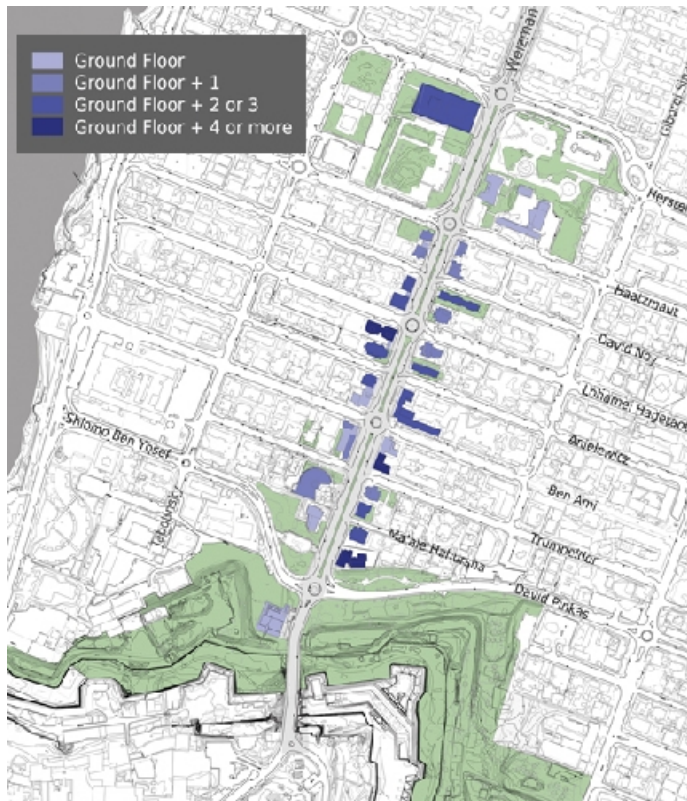


On a third instance we have marked the buildings that should be considered for preservation in red.

Overlapping all three of these maps, we can see the relation between buildings that need to be preserved and date they were built on, as well as what has been demolished from 46.



## C – Urban Surveys

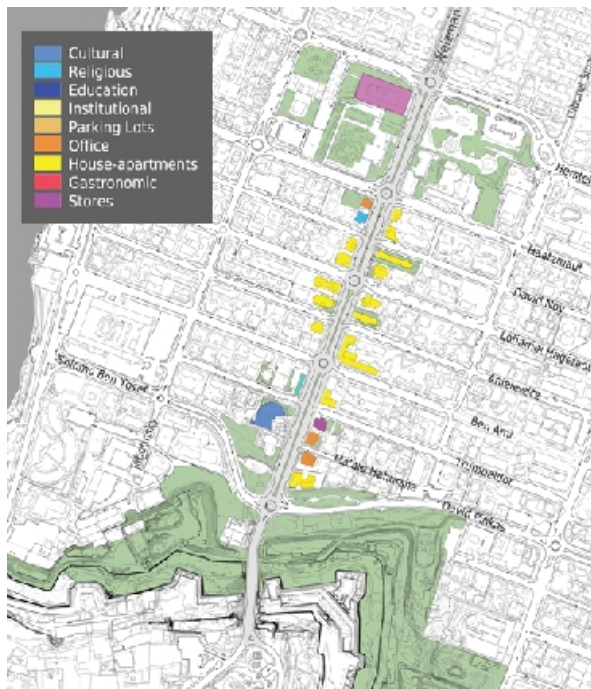


Different Urban Surveys were conducted. These help us have a better idea of different situations on the street, and determine possible issues or strengths by identifying a pattern etc.

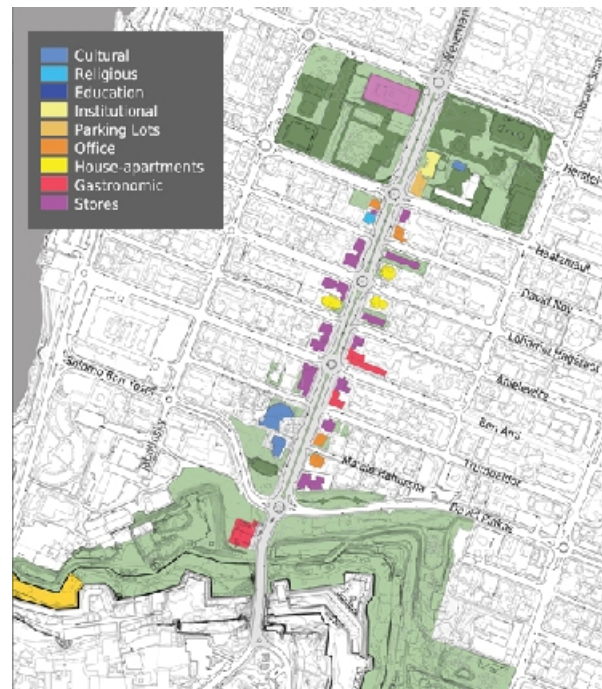
This first plan is of heights: we have categorized the heights into four groups, from ground floor only, to ground floor + four stories high. We can easily get a general idea of the street using these surveys. We see that there are mostly one or two story-high buildings, some three or four story-high buildings and the taller buildings are easily distinguishable, only four, one of them being the municipality.



The conservation survey was done over the buildings that should be considered for preservation. The categories we chose are *bad*, *good or average* and *good to very good*. We recognize that, in general, buildings are good or average, and the building between Ben Ami and Trumpeldor pops out as *bad*. This gives us an indication that while at least 50% of the buildings need preservation work, (being at an “average” condition for its age), there is one building in particular that needs to be treated. (We will see this later on when we will focus more deeply on Conservation itself).



*Ground floor*



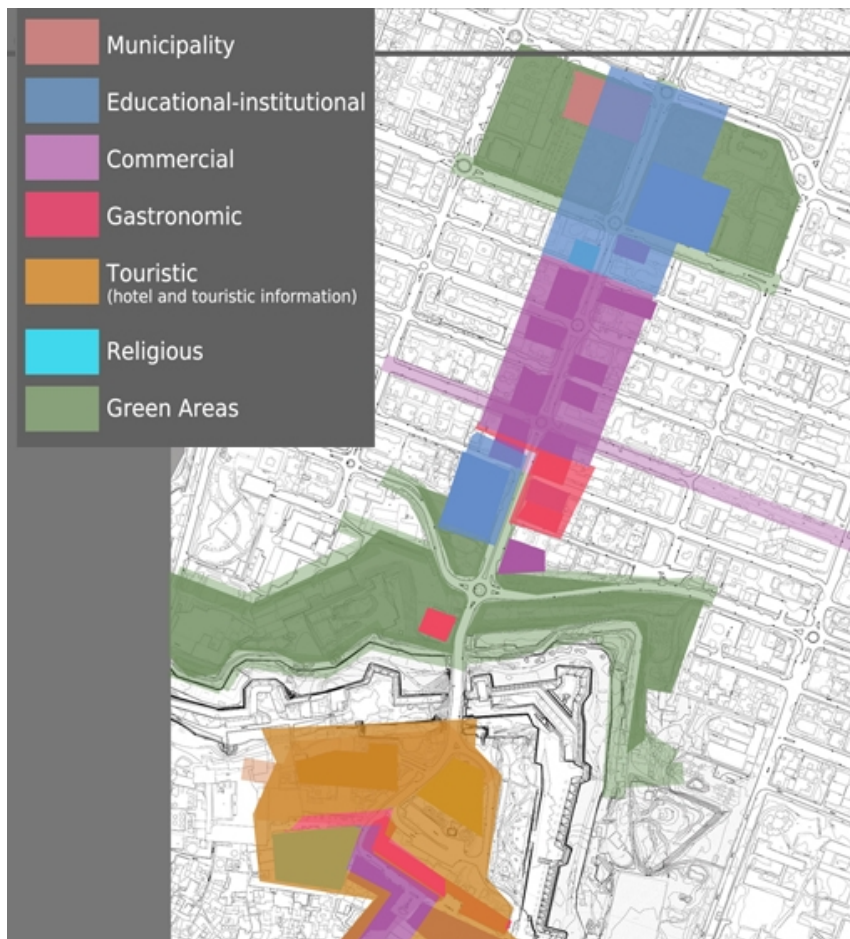
*Upper Floors*

The survey on Use or Function was made on two stages: one for the “upper floors” and a second one on ground floor. For some buildings, function is the same both on the ground floors and upper floors. However sometimes an apartment building has commercial use on street level and this is crucial for the analysis.

All of the functions surveyed where listed: cultural, religious, education, institutional, parking lots, offices, house or apartments, gastronomic and stores.



## D - Analysis of uses and function.



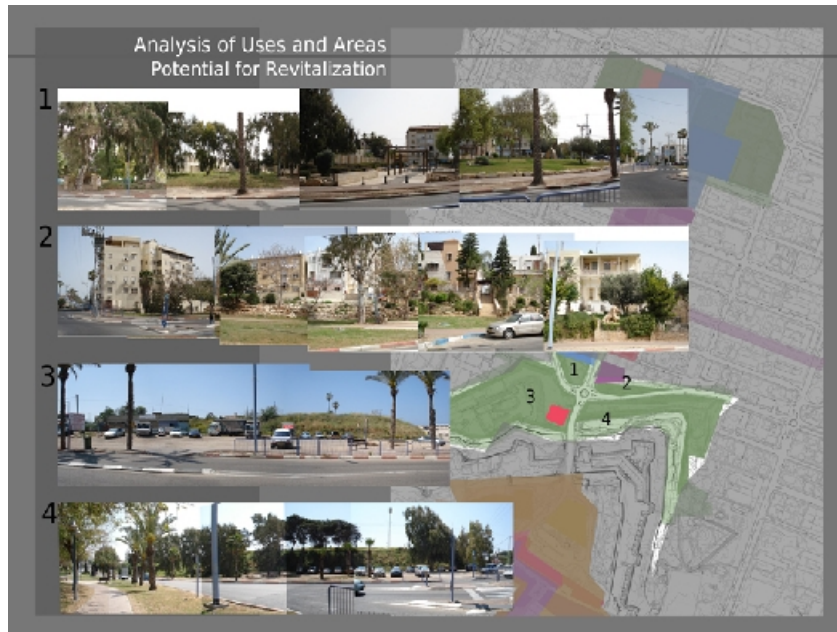
Using the *use* survey, we were able to determine general areas defined by their main function. This way we can highlight 6 areas; two green areas, one on Hertsel (1), and one just outside the city walls (2), an institutional area including the Municipality, a commercial area around Ben Ami (3), gastronomic (4), and Touristic in the Old City.

It is important, when talking about use, to include the Old City. In this aspect, the city inside the fortifications is fundamental, since the importance of Weizman is indeed the linking of the two “sides” of Akko. It is

with use/function that this connection is created because it’s what will make people walk on this street. It basically creates the need on people to go there.

(1) We have identified with this, the fact that Weizman starts and ends with two green areas; the existence of a commercial area around Ben Ami; a tension between the Municipality and the attraction that the Shuk and Mosque create inside the Old city, evidencing Weizman as a fundamental axis in this City.

This gives us a first idea of the areas or possibilities that could (or need to) be developed for the revitalization.



The two green areas we have mentioned are very different to each other. We have already described the parks near the Municipality; outside of the Old City (the four corners), near the walls, is a unique location. Walking or even driving on Weizman towards the Old City, one should be able to tell or feel you are about to enter “something” great. These green areas (some still untreated), are a great

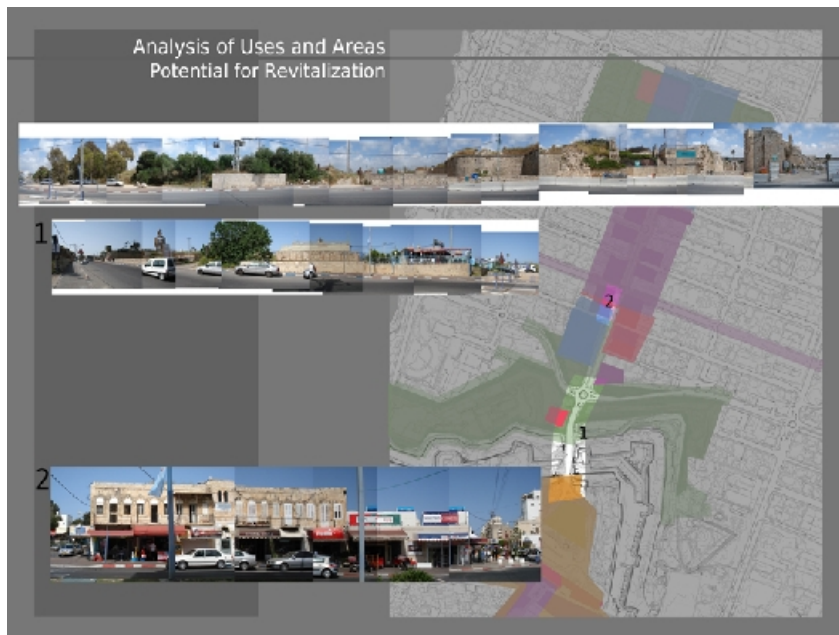
spot to intervene, and if done right, strengthen the access to Old Akko. This area that today is not being taken care of, dilutes from the idea of entering such a special city.

It is also important to note that these four corners are very different one from the other, and that is something that also is a strength that could be developed.



(2) The park across from the Municipality has more of a “center” kind of use. It is indeed in the commercial center on New Akko and on Hertsel Street which again is the street that connects with the train station. This park should gather people up, be a meeting point for youth, etc. Its use should be studied to evaluate if it in facts serves as a meeting point or a reference area.

(3) The commercial area, where the intersection with Ben Ami is the strongest sector, is also to be developed, using Ben Ami’s success to attract more people to Weizman. This means continue with similar strategies used on Ben Ami to keep the flow of people coming to Weizman instead of letting all commerce concentrate on one street.

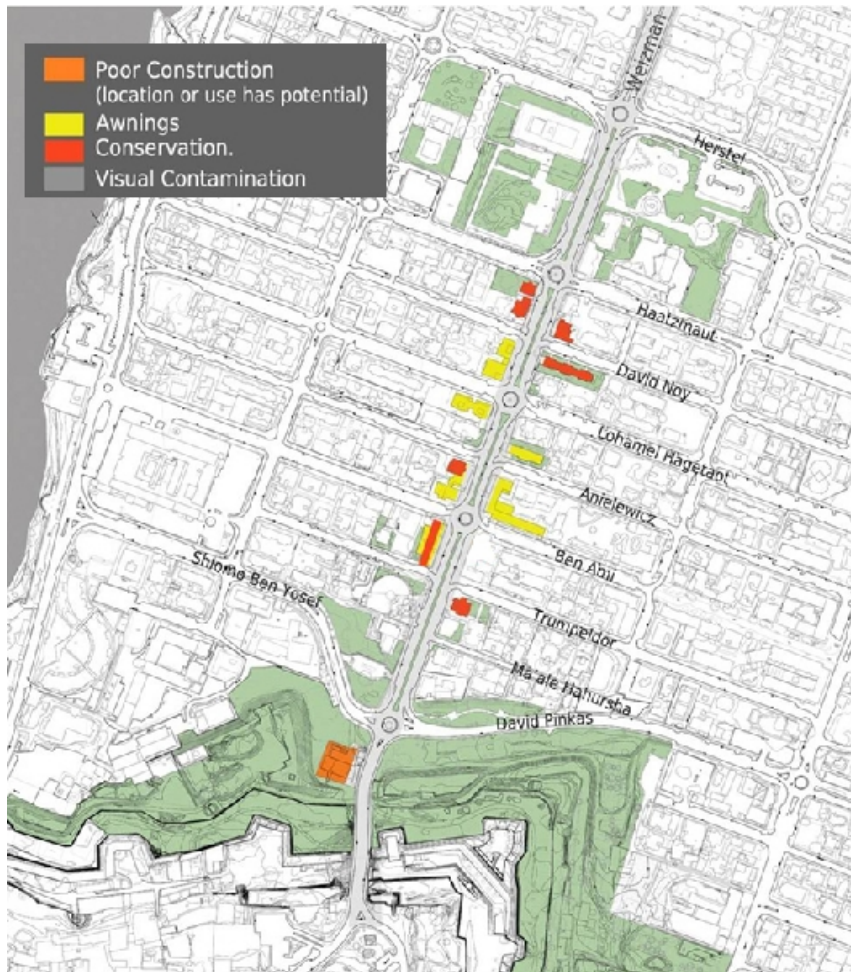


Another aspect to be considered is the access to the Old City itself. The entrance is what reinforces the link between what is on both sides. It's the introduction to the city, what first presents it to the visitor. Coming from outside, walking or driving on Weizman, because of that last few hundred meters before entering the city are neglected, it is not inviting and they do not reflect or anticipate what is about to come, which is

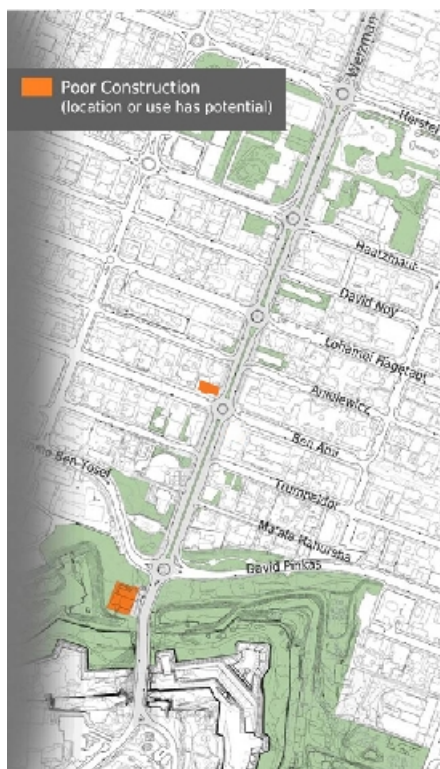
the uniqueness of a city like Akko. It would seem like one is walking towards an abandoned site, not a preserved city that has been declared as World Heritage by UNESCO.

Lastly, the building between Trumpeldor and Ben Ami is another sector in itself. This building seems nowadays abandoned (at least on its second floor). Because of the size, location and of course architectural and historical value, this is a main site to intervene.

E – Main Issue per Building.



We have focused on four issues that are more specific or localized; poor construction on a parcel that has potential, awnings, conservation and visual contamination.



*Poor construction on a parcel that has potential* – we have catalogued two buildings or parcels where there could be a better construction, because of the potential of the location of that parcel. One is on the intersection with Ben Ami and the other is the small restaurant at the entrance of the Old City.

The corner with Ben Ami is a strategic place to reinforce the commercial aspect and bring it onto Weizman.





*Awnings* – awnings are temporary or removable roofs over the street, usually belonging to the stores on the ground floor. They serve mainly the purpose of extending the area of the shop, both stores of cafes/ restaurants. It is of commercial interest. Many coffee houses put tables outside. The roofs provide shade while walking on the street. It can also become almost like a gallery type of area, when there are several stores one next to the other. However these awnings are all different and do not follow any kind of criteria. This makes the street look messy and distracting. They are also sometimes built in such a way they cover up the building without having a previous concept or design. Especially in a longer building with several different stores one after the other, the different awnings bring down the building behind them.





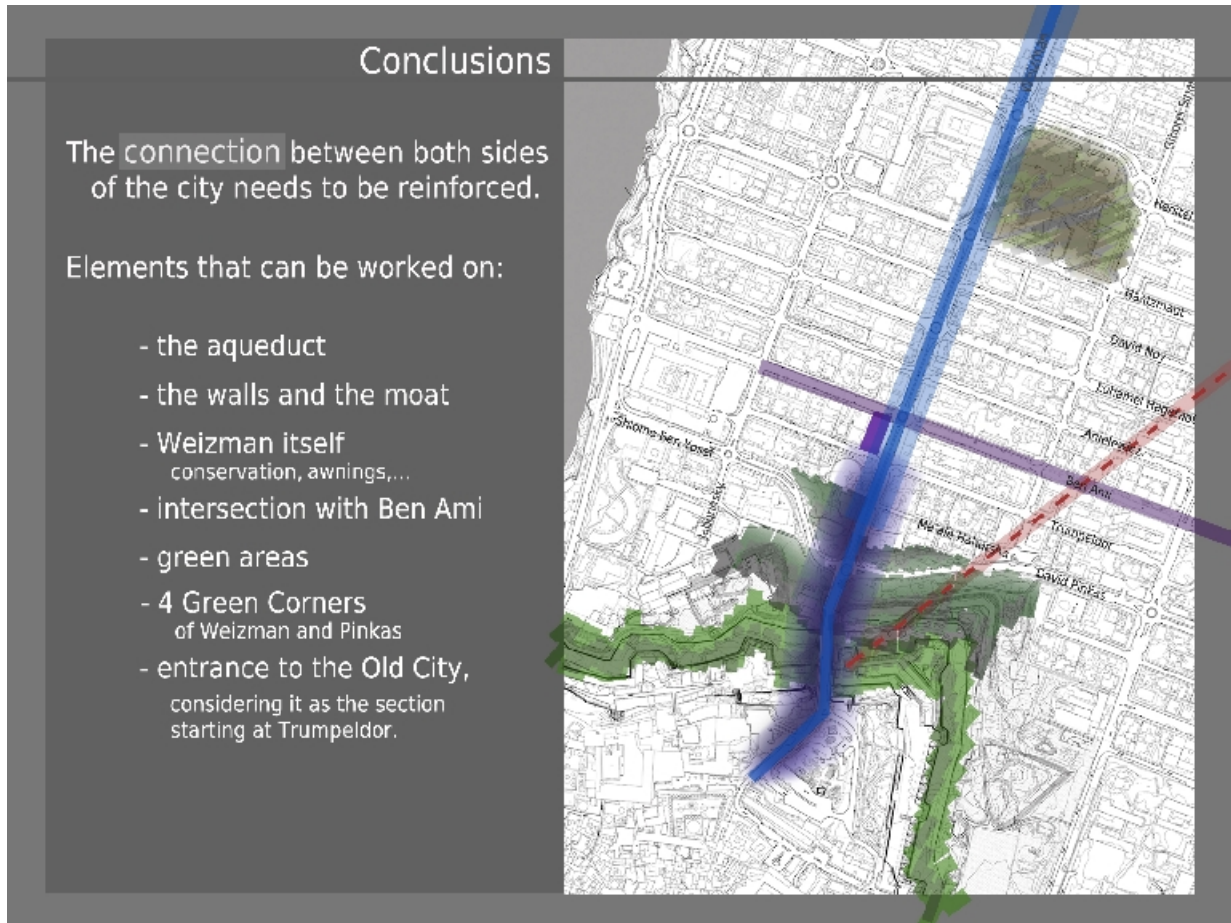
*Conservation* – many buildings in this street should be preserved. However not all of these are well maintained. Conservation is fundamental to keep the spirit of the street, and it is important that they are in good condition. Later additions, awnings, wires, air conditionings are some of the main issues that bring down the appearance of these houses.

A documentation of these buildings would be required. This could incentivize owners to maintain their houses in good condition.



*Visual Contamination* – signs are randomly disposed, especially entering the Old City. Sometimes there are several different signs, one after the other. They don't respond to any design or logic in its organization. This makes the city unattractive and messy. Electrical posts and wires across the street also contribute to this.





As we have seen, Weizman is the link between the two centers, and should serve to bridge the Old and New Cities. It is now in decay, and the space between the city walls and the new town is a hard stop.

Since the connection between both sides of the city need to be reinforced, this could be a good starting point for conservation in Akko, outside of the limits set by UNESCO, highlighting Ottoman and Mandate-period structures.

This strengthening of the relation between the Old and the New can be done by working on just this one street. By taking action in a more localized way, it could incentivize the rest of the owners or the city, to do like it was done on Weizman, leaving this street as an example and hopefully make the habitants proud of their city.