Ann-Catrin Andersson  Identity Politics and City Planning – The Case of Jerusalem

Ann-Catrin Andersson (b.1973) is a researcher and teacher in the field of Political Science at Örebro University. She is also a member of the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CUReS) and this project has been performed within the Research School of Urban and Regional Studies. This is her PhD thesis.

Jerusalem holds a special place in the hearts of people all over the world. It is a holy city, but also a place where people live their everyday lives. It is a disputed city as part of the Israel–Palestine conflict. This book concentrates on Jerusalem in Israeli identity politics and city planning. Although being a central part of Israeli identity, there are different views of what Jerusalem should be, mainly based on different interpretations of Zionism. The study focuses on identity politics and city planning from four perspectives: the role of Jerusalem in Israeli identity politics; the interplay between territorial identity and Jerusalem planning practice; the coping strategies and the role of the Jerusalem planner; and the “Safdie Plan” process as an illustrative case.

The results from the analysis show that there is a constant interplay between Zionist identity discourses, territorial strategies, and the planning practice of Jerusalem. The Israeli identity politics is based on a claim that Jerusalem is the eternal, indivisible capital of Israel. Strategies of territoriality, in the form of city planning policy, are implemented in order to reach that goal. This can be seen in policies approving controversial Israeli housing projects in East Jerusalem, rehabilitating historic heritage, renewing the city center, creating demographic balance, and developing the local economy. In this politically sensitive context, the role of the planner is crucial, and although the public planners aspire to professionalism in different forms, planning practice is nonetheless linked to political visions. As illustrated by the “Safdie Plan” process, there is an ongoing challenge to traditional Zionism from other forms of identity discourses, such as new, and post-Zionism. The dominant collective planning doctrine is challenged by an individualistic approach, global economic and environmental issues, as well as local grass-roots movements. In any case, Jerusalem is today a priority in Israeli identity politics, which has not always been the case.