

Cross-border dimensions of peace-building: European experiences and the future of Gaza, Israel, and neighbouring countries

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Abstract

Borders are not simply lines of separation, but rather dynamic spaces of interaction, making them central both to conflict and to peacebuilding. Building on this premise, this paper examines the Anthedon initiative and its flagship report “Gaza: A Vision of Hope” (2025), which proposes a vision for the reconstruction of Gaza within a broader regional framework involving Palestine, Israel, Egypt, and neighbouring countries. Developed by a multidisciplinary team of experts from Heritopolis, UN-Habitat, and diverse backgrounds, the initiative places cultural and natural heritage, urban renewal, economic connectivity, climate resilience, and cross-border governance at the core of a transformative agenda for recovery and reconciliation. It is precisely these cross-border aspects that will be explored throughout the paper. The article first revisits the content and context of the Anthedon initiative and the Vision of Hope report, and highlights the relevance of European experiences in cross-border cooperation as a valuable reference for the region. The paper then synthesises the current context in Gaza and key scenarios for future trajectories for Palestine and Israel, emphasising their spatial, political, and societal implications. Finally, it develops a detailed analysis of cross-border components embedded in these scenarios, structured around a multi-level governance framework and articulated through six dimensions of cross-border integration aimed at fostering cooperation, trust-building, and peace. By bridging scenario building in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with insights pulled from the experience of European integration, the paper argues that cross-border approaches offer a productive lens through which to reimagine post-conflict futures in Gaza and its wider regional environment.

Keywords: Integration, peace-building, cross-border cooperation, European Union, Gaza, Israel, Middle East, conflict resolution

Figure 1: Map of projected connectivity of peace and cooperation in the region, based on urban modelling



Extracted from the "Gaza: A Vision of Hope" (Anthedon Initiative, 2025, p. 4)

Introduction

Borders have long been at the heart of conflict. However, rather than fixed lines, walls, or fences, they are evolving spaces, making them equally central for peace. This consideration lays an important foundation for Anthedon, an international initiative dedicated to a shared future between Palestine, Israel, and their neighbours. Anthedon proposes a comprehensive path to recovery for Gaza, with a focus on cultural and natural heritage, urban renewal, economic connectivity and climate resilience, aiming to foster reconciliation and lasting peace through cross-border dialogue, empathy, and cooperation throughout the region.

As part of a multidisciplinary team taking part in the initiative, experts from Heritopolis (Heritopolis, n.d.), UN-Habitat, and professionals from various backgrounds published a report, "Gaza: A Vision of Hope" (Anthedon Initiative, 2025), in 2025. Heritopolis's work addresses the role of cultural and natural heritage in the metropolis and its contribution to

spatial sustainability. Building upon this approach, "Gaza: A Vision of Hope" started as an exploration of ideas for regional cooperation based on the understanding of cross-border metropolises, with steps towards a "two-state solution" between Israel and Palestine. The report examines different scenarios for the future of this region, which is marked by deep divisions and, especially in recent years, by unprecedented violence. Implying that the reconstruction of Gaza within its current limits is unsustainable, a specific hypothesis of the report is to imagine the reconstruction of Gaza in the context of its integration into a region connected with Israel, Egypt and neighbouring countries, thus implying the development of multi-level cross-border governance. It is in this scope that the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière, n.d.), an expert in this subject in European contexts, became involved in the project, in particular to draft the chapter "Metropolitan Governance" (Anthedon Initiative, 2025, p. 54–59).

The present contribution to the ABCD Journal recalls the extreme context in which the aforementioned report was prepared and draws on European experiences in imagining a Vision of Hope for Gaza. It describes in a synthetic way various scenarios for Palestine and their implications for Israel, developed by experts, and presents in more depth the cross-border components of these scenarios, within a multi-level governance framework, according to six dimensions of cross-border integration aimed at building peace among the territories concerned.

"Gaza: A Vision of Hope": The context of the Anthedon initiative and the pertinence of European experiences

The Anthedon Initiative and the Vision of Hope report

The Anthedon initiative is an international effort aimed at fostering a sustainable and inclusive recovery strategy for Gaza, developed under the auspices of Heritopolis - Heritage and the Metropolis, a UN-Habitat University Network Initiative global research consortium linking heritage and metropolitan issues. Grounded in a long-term vision for the region, the initiative reimagines Gaza as an open and interconnected metropolis, supported by resilient infrastructure, advanced urban services, and a climate-adaptive economy. As noted in the Gaza Compendium, while, over the past decade 13 Spatial Plans and 18 Strategic Proposals have been prepared for Gaza with two overview reports (Anthedon Initiative, 2026), the Anthedon Initiative presents a fundamentally different vision for the reconstruction of Gaza that places people, memory, and social cohesion at the centre of recovery. Rather than treating reconstruction as a technical exercise focused solely on infrastructure, housing, and spatial planning, it argues that lasting recovery requires rebuilding a social fabric that has been systematically eroded by decades of occupation, blockade, political fragmentation, and repeated cycles of destruction. Central to this approach are the core concepts of Heritopolis, which emphasise culture, heritage, and interpersonal connections as key drivers of reconstruction. Complementing this framework, the Anthedon Initiative promotes cross-border cooperation and cross-cultural

dialogue to revitalise civic identity, strengthen social cohesion, and restore Gaza's historical role as a regional hub. The Greek name "Anthedon" itself refers to the ancient port of Gaza, a gateway to the Mediterranean, which for over a millennium served as a strategic hub of cultural and commercial exchange, as a crossroad along the Incense Route and the Via Maris, connecting Africa, Asia, and Europe (Anthedon Initiative, 2025, p. 4). Drawing on this legacy, the initiative proposes to reintegrate Gaza into transnational networks linking Palestine with neighbouring countries through trade, environmental cooperation, and cultural restoration. Rather than focusing solely on the rebuilding of Gaza, Anthedon aims to reposition it as a key actor in the regional economic, social, and political landscape. The dynamic role of cross-border dimensions is central in better understanding this future trajectory. As the region faces the potential to emerge from trauma and conflict, as the EU emerged from World War II, functioning cohesively alongside neighbouring countries becomes essential for peace-building, while a failure to do so would threaten the well-being of all.

As these lines are written, a ceasefire is supposedly established in Gaza, but violence persists. In the context of the current paper, as well as the Vision of Hope report, scenarios for peace are based on the assumption that a ceasefire is effective. Another strong hypothesis of these scenarios, at least the most advanced, is the "two-state solution" in its many forms, as well as the possibility of establishing a multi-level functional governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Peyrony, 2020) model of a common territory, including Palestinian and Israeli components. The latter is clearly beyond the traditional Westphalian perspective of sovereign States contained within linear borders. Today, the main source of inspiration of such an approach lies in the post-1945 European integration process and a reflection on the phases and levels of interactions. This contribution thus focuses on the European experience, drawing pertinent parallels while also acknowledging differences compared to the geopolitical, socio-economic, and cultural contexts of the Middle East.

The functional relevance of the European experience

The reference to Europe here is fruitful firstly for functional reasons. The European process is based on the existence of Nation States as strong foundational units for the progressive establishment of an overarching entity, the European Union. Kahn (2014) proposed to consider the EU as *"mutualisation of sovereignty in a supranational state which is an association of sovereign nation states"*. According to him, the sacralisation of national sovereignty led to the two World Wars of 20th century. EU integration is based on the mutualisation of a shared territory and thus the desacralisation of borders. In this context, national territories are mutualised into a single European territory, further reinforced by Europeanised policies, such as single currency or free movement. Europe has also contributed to the emergence of cross-border "Euroregions", supported by, inter alia, Interreg, a series of EU funding programmes that support cooperation (Wassenberg et al. 2015).

In this logic, and contradicting a nationalist prism that considers countries as monads, territorial boxes that can be either opened or closed, coined by Faludi (2018) as “territorialism”, territoriality has become post-nationalist and post-bellicist. Kahn refers to the example of peace in Ulster, made possible by the Good Friday agreement – even after Brexit. The Franco-German example, which will be elaborated on further in the following paragraphs, involves the additional, supranational level of the European Union which encourages and facilitates cross-border cooperation - free movement within the EU Single market, and EU cohesion policy funding, including Interreg programmes. While this does not exist around Gaza, it could be an inspiration for a similar “umbrella” framework including Egypt, Israel and the region.

The Franco-German Example and European Integration

The evolution of borders has been particularly evident in the history of the European Union after World War II. To exemplify such changes, it is worth turning specifically to the Franco-German border, a territory that was subject to multiple changes in rule even before the beginning of WWII, with Alsace-Lorraine switching between French and German jurisdiction on various occasions throughout history (Wassenberg et al. 2015; Wassenberg & Reitel, 2020). It is worth noting that this territory was also a physical clashing point during both of the World Wars. In the aftermath of WWII, a heavy death toll, including civilian casualties, as well as general trauma linked to annexation and the lived experience of the bloodiest conflicts in human history, left France and Germany deeply divided. Hatred and fear ran high, specifically a fear of another war.

Territorial instability and the question of borders presented an additional challenge. Although national borders in Western Europe remained largely unchanged after 1945, one important exception concerned the Saarland. Its economic and strategic significance, largely due to its rich coal reserves, made the Saar a long-contested territory between France and Germany. Following the war, the area was occupied by France and eventually became the Saar Protectorate, thus separating it politically from Germany for various years, until the territory was reincorporated into Germany in 1957, following the outcome of the 1955 Saar Statute referendum (Schön, 2022). More generally, the German territory continued experiencing changes in the following years, notably the division between East and West Germany, which reflected a political fragmentation that, despite not directly reshaping the Franco-German border, created a difficult and continuously changing context for decision makers. It was in this complex and particularly sensitive environment, heightened by fear and animosity following the war, that German and French leaders made the revolutionary decision to collaborate.

This move was supported in a broader context by the Marshall Plan, which aimed to revitalise post-war Europe through strategic investment, infrastructure rebuilding, and economic integration. An important step towards such integration was the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, which pooled strategic industries under a supranational High Authority with equal representation, ensuring that another

war would be, in the words of the 1950 Schuman Declaration, “*not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible*” (Schuman, 1950). This cooperation deepened with the European Economic Community (EEC), which established a common market by removing trade barriers and adopting a common external trade policy.

Later initiatives such as the Schengen Agreement in 1985 enabled the free movement of people, strengthening everyday cross-border ties. As integration deepened and ties between countries strengthened, the European Union emerged with the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s, marking a shift toward broader political, social, and economic union. Programmes like Interreg further enhanced regional cooperation, while the introduction of the Euro marked an important step in socio-economic integration among participating countries.

In parallel, Franco-German reconciliation was solidified by the Élysée Treaty in 1963, fostering lasting cultural and youth exchanges, and more recently, the 2019 Aachen Treaty reinforced this partnership through practical mechanisms such as the Cross-Border Cooperation Committee, tasked with identifying priorities, addressing local challenges, and proposing solutions in border regions (Peyrony, 2021). This institutionalised Franco-German model has not only remained central to European integration but has also inspired similar bilateral frameworks elsewhere, such as the Quirinal Treaty between France and Italy, demonstrating how their cooperation set a precedent for broader European collaboration.

This non-exhaustive series of events, implemented over a period of over half a century, all contributed to a deepened integration between European countries, and a reflection on the sequence of cooperation may shed light on applying these experiences in other situations. This integration was not only on economic and practical bases, but also on personal levels, as interactions between citizens was facilitated and a common European citizenship was formalised through the introduction of EU passports and common EU rights. By opening borders, border territories gained the possibility to become cross-border living areas - acknowledged as “cross border regions” in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Peyrony, 2024) - rather than being divided along national lines, thus strengthening unification and diminishing divisions. While national identities and languages remain and are celebrated within the EU, as echoed in the motto “*united in diversity*” (European Union, n.d.), the villainisation of the other between citizens of member states, beyond sport, has largely been mitigated, making the EU, despite criticisms and challenges, successful in assuring peace between member countries since its founding. Save for Brexit, no country has expressed the wish to leave the EU (Kahn, 2026).

It is worth noting that the European Union, despite its commendable achievements in bringing countries and people together, is far from flawless and, in a certain light, far from fully integrated. Health crises, migratory pressures, an unprecedented reintroduction of border controls that threaten supranational unity, and war at its external borders, have put the EU system under stress, and even challenged the ambition for peace that brought the Union into being. Born in a culturally specific context, existing in a time of polycrises,

and evolving to fit ever-changing needs, the EU is unique in the world. While not a model that is directly replicable, different elements of the European Union, drawn from its foundations and more specifically the cooperation at its internal borders, can serve as helpful inspiration for peace-building. The pertinence of the EU as an example is thus based on possible lessons learned from integration that must be adapted to local realities, but also the broader understanding that such severe conflicts and crises require new and innovative solutions, starting with frameworks for cooperation. Notably, it is important to recognise the fragility, not only on a socio-psychological level but also on a political and territorial level, in which the construction of the European Union began. The process of integration and subsequent peace is not necessarily linear and has been unfolding gradually in the EU over decades. While it is difficult to predict the trajectory of territories in different contexts, coordination between states serves as a foundation for progress. The shared recognition and respect of borders and sovereignty, which constitute a current challenge between Palestine and Israel, serve as important first steps in the development of a common future and long-lasting peace.

Historical relevance: Links between the EU, Israel, and Palestine

Another reason to connect the European approach to the search of a solution for a peaceful future for Israel and Palestine is of historical nature. Albeit with pitfalls, Europe, Israel, and Palestine have had a shared destiny, especially in the 20th century. Beyond the historic connections to the Holy Land, the 1916 Sykes–Picot Agreement between the United Kingdom and France, defined their mutually agreed spheres of influence in an eventual partition of the Ottoman Empire, was the basis for the 1918 Anglo–French Modus Vivendi. This new colonialism, divide et impera, became a bone of contention for Arab nationalism. Moreover, Israel’s history has its origins in Europe with Zionism as a European ideology aiming to answer a European problem: antisemitism and resulting pogroms, rife since the 19th century. The mutual acknowledgement between European nations could only occur after the end of the Second World War: France and Germany were successively defeated, and the intra-European crime of the Shoah obliged each State to face its responsibilities. In Europe before 1945, according to Karsenti (2024), national pride always turned into deadly rivalry, while following the end of World War II, individual national pride could only happen through belonging to Europe, preventing such failure from repeating itself.

To better understand such connections and how these links can be used productively to imagine a post-conflict future, it is essential to unpack the current context in the region shared by Israel and Palestine.

Current day Gaza and Scenarios for Palestine and mirrored in Israel

Current Context in Gaza

The conflict between Palestine and Israel has deep historical roots shaped by territorial disputes, political instability, and competing national narratives. These longstanding tensions were violently brought back to global attention following the Hamas-led attack on October 7th, 2023, which triggered a devastating escalation in Gaza and intensified an already severe humanitarian crisis. While the recent violence marks a critical turning point, the conditions underlying the conflict had been deteriorating for decades, making Gaza politically isolated, economically fragile, and socially fragmented.

It is important to note that Gaza's humanitarian crisis predates the events of October 2023. Even before the recent escalation, the territory faced extreme socio-economic hardship. Unemployment rates had reached approximately 53%, while nearly half of the population lived on less than \$5.50 per day (Anthedon Initiative, 2025, p. 61). Access to basic necessities such as safe drinking water, reliable electricity, and adequate healthcare services was critically limited. These conditions developed largely within the context of a 18-year Israeli blockade, and subsequent Egyptian blockade, imposed after Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007, and despite Israel's withdrawal of settlers in 2005 from the Gaza Strip. This was also aggravated by the Israeli policy to sever Palestinian ties between Gaza and the West Bank. The blockade has been widely criticised by humanitarian organisations as a form of collective punishment due to its severe restrictions on movement, trade, and access to essential goods. By 2014, nearly 80% of Gaza's population was living below the poverty line, while the territory faced a housing shortage estimated at 71,000 units (Anthedon Initiative, 2025, p. 61). The cumulative effects of economic deprivation, infrastructural decline, and political isolation created a highly vulnerable environment long before the latest outbreak of violence.

While Gaza, with its human capital, strategic location and legacy as a hub for trade and cultural exchanges, has great potential for integration into wider transnational networks linking Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and neighbouring regions, the ongoing conflict has severely undermined these possibilities and the hopes re-establishing such connections. The latest escalation following October 7th has caused unprecedented destruction across Gaza, including widespread damage to housing, infrastructure, healthcare systems, educational institutions, and cultural sites. Large segments of the population have been displaced, deepening insecurity and exacerbating existing social divisions. Restricted mobility and limited access to external markets continue to isolate Gaza from regional and global economic systems, impeding both immediate recovery and long-term development. Beyond physical reconstruction, meaningful recovery also depends on overcoming the psychological consequences of prolonged violence, including fear, mistrust, hatred, and social fragmentation, all of which have been significantly

heightened both in Israel and in Palestine and pose major obstacles to reconciliation and cross-border cooperation. The extent of the damage caused and underway is difficult to estimate, demonstrating the urgency of a Vision of Hope.

In this context, the future of Gaza cannot be understood solely through the lens of conflict and destruction. Its historical role as a centre of connectivity and exchange offers an alternative framework for reconstruction and regional integration. Re-establishing these connections through trade agreements, shared economic corridors, environmental cooperation, and the restoration of cultural and natural heritage could contribute significantly to regional stability, economic revitalisation, and mutual interdependence. Addressing the current crisis requires not only rebuilding physical infrastructure, but also fostering political cooperation, economic inclusion, and social reconciliation across borders. Sustainable recovery will depend on restoring Gaza's ability to participate in broader regional systems while creating conditions that support security, dignity, and long-term stability for both Palestinians, Egyptians and Israelis.

Present and Future: Scenarios for Israel and Palestine

The possible futures of Palestine and Israel can be better understood through a series of interconnected scenarios that explore different political, social, and humanitarian trajectories emerging from the current crisis. Rather than predicting a single future, scenario building analyses present realities and identifies key forces to create a set of coherent and contrasting narratives that allow decision-makers, communities, and institutions to reflect on strategic choices, anticipate risks, and identify opportunities for action under different conditions. These scenarios are not simply isolated possibilities, rather, they may represent successive stages in a broader process that could move Gaza and the wider region from devastation and instability toward reconstruction, coexistence, or further fragmentation. While these scenarios are explored in depth in the Vision of Hope report (Anthedon Initiative, 2025, p. 13-21), the following sections summarise the key takeaways. By examining these pathways and sequences, it becomes possible to better understand the challenges, risks, and opportunities that may shape the future of both Palestinians and Israelis.

The Anthedon initiative involved a Palestinian scenario-building process as part of the Vision of Hope. The goal was not to design governmental or security regimes, as these are matters to be negotiated and agreed upon by Palestinians and Israelis through a political process, but rather to explore alternatives, identify opportunities, and examine societal foundations for sustainable peace, all through a bottom-up approach. It was designed as a fully participatory and locally owned methodology that centred Palestinian voices and leadership from Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, that engaged approximately 120 people representing a broad cross-section of Palestinian society. The process combined rigorous evidence-based research with an inclusive participatory methodology. It began with a series of thematic background papers prepared by experts covering governance, demographics, spatial and territorial planning, economic development, education, regional

dynamics, and the history of the peace process. These studies informed a series of full-day in-person workshops, complemented by online sessions, during which participants identified key driving forces, critical uncertainties, megatrends, and potential game changers shaping Palestine's future. Between July 2024 and April 2025, seventy-six participants representing civil society organisations, women's groups, youth, local leadership, professionals, and private sector actors contributed to shaping the scenarios. The process was further strengthened through targeted interviews with experts and key stakeholders, and the resulting scenarios were refined through successive rounds of consultation and feedback. This iterative approach ensured that the final scenarios reflected lived Palestinian realities, aspirations, and concerns rather than externally imposed visions, while remaining responsive to the rapidly evolving political, social, and economic context.

In the Vision of Hope Report, the five Palestinian scenarios resulting from this exercise (End of National Aspiration, Status Quo, Ribat, Neo-Oslo, and One Palestine) were mirrored with five Israeli scenarios (Apartheid, Israel as an Island, Israel 100, Oslo C, and the Two-State Solution). However, it is important to distinguish between the methodologies underpinning the Palestinian and Israeli scenarios. The Palestinian scenarios emerged from a structured, participatory, and locally led scenario-building process involving a broad cross-section of Palestinian stakeholders. By contrast, the Israeli mirror scenarios were not developed through an equivalent participatory exercise involving Israeli stakeholders. Rather, they represent an analytical interpretation prepared by the Anthedon team to facilitate comparative analysis and explore the interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian futures. While a future participatory scenario-building process with Israeli stakeholders would strengthen the analytical robustness of the mirrored framework, the present approach provides valuable perspectives on future trajectories for the region. Together, these paired futures illustrate how developments on one side directly shape political and social outcomes on the other, with the need to prevent mismatch and synchronise the ambitions over time.

End of National Aspiration / Apartheid

The most catastrophic Palestinian scenario, "End of National Aspiration," envisions the collapse of the Palestinian national movement through mass displacement, destruction of governance structures, annexation, and fragmentation. Israeli military operations render large areas of Gaza and the West Bank uninhabitable, while reconstruction is actively prevented. Palestinians are displaced from Gaza, East Jerusalem, and major areas of the West Bank, producing conditions described as a new Nakba. With both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas discredited and incapable of governance or resistance, Palestinian society fragments into localised struggles for survival and identity. Traditional tribal and religious structures replace national institutions amid chaos, extremism, and social breakdown. International disengagement compounds the crisis, leaving Palestinians facing existential catastrophe without meaningful external support.

The corresponding Israeli scenario, “Apartheid”, describes a de facto one-state reality in which Palestinian national aspirations are eliminated through displacement, military force, and demographic control. Although Israel achieves overwhelming territorial and military dominance, it becomes increasingly isolated internationally and widely condemned as an apartheid-like state. Internal moral divisions deepen within Israeli and global Jewish communities, while displaced Palestinian populations continue demanding return and recognition. Despite short-term military control, Israel remains trapped in perpetual instability, lacking legitimacy, peace, or a sustainable political future.

Status Quo / Israel as an Island

The “Status Quo” scenario represents the continuation of current conditions. Gaza remains devastated by war, displacement, and humanitarian collapse, while reconstruction occurs through fragmented grassroots initiatives under ongoing conflict. Palestinians rebuild shelters from salvaged materials amidst widespread destruction, insecurity, and the constant threat of renewed violence. In the West Bank, de facto annexation accelerates through settlement expansion, home demolitions, military operations, and settler violence, which contribute to a climate of intimidation and insecurity. East Jerusalem experiences heightened tensions and increased settlement activity while the Palestinian Authority faces political irrelevance and financial collapse.

The corresponding Israeli scenario, “Israel as an Island,” depicts a society increasingly shaped by militarisation, fear, and isolation following the trauma of repeated violence. Israel invests heavily in surveillance, border fortification, and security technologies while abandoning hopes for peace. Right-wing political rhetoric and policies reinforce a worldview centred on military control and national survival. Internationally, Israel faces growing diplomatic isolation and criticism due to humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the West Bank. In this future, Israel functions as a heavily fortified regional stronghold, constantly defending itself from perceived external and internal threats while struggling with deep moral and political tensions.

Ribat / Israel 100

The “Ribat” scenario is centred on collective resilience, steadfastness, and community-driven survival in the absence of political breakthroughs. Ribat, understood as both physical and spiritual resistance, emphasises Palestinians’ refusal to abandon their land despite destruction, blockade, and displacement pressures. Across Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, grassroots initiatives replace weakened political leadership, with communities rebuilding homes, restoring daily life, cultivating land, and preserving cultural and religious identity. Reconstruction occurs through self-sustaining local efforts using recycled and salvaged materials, while international actors provide primarily humanitarian aid rather than long-term development support. In the absence of functioning governance structures, survival itself becomes a form of resistance and preservation of national identity.

The corresponding Israeli scenario, “Israel 100”, developed by a team of professionals for Israel in 2048, reflects a prolonged stalemate shaped by fear, mistrust, and weak political leadership on both sides. Israeli society maintains relative normalcy but remains permanently alert to recurring violence and instability. Limited economic interaction and restricted border zones provide some mutual benefits, yet the broader conflict remains unresolved. The “Israel 100” framework prioritises long-term planning for Israeli society while largely excluding Palestinian territories from its vision. Israel sustains diplomatic and economic relations internationally, but ongoing control over Palestinians continues to generate criticism and instability.

Neo-Oslo / Oslo C

The “Neo-Oslo” scenario envisions another interim political arrangement shaped largely by external actors, preserving limited Palestinian autonomy without genuine sovereignty. The Palestinian Authority remains internationally recognised but weak, functioning as a caretaker administration managing fragmented territories under continued Israeli control. Hamas is marginalised, while settlement expansion, military dominance, and territorial fragmentation eliminate the possibility of a viable contiguous Palestinian state. Reconstruction in Gaza is managed primarily by the Palestinian Authority with support from international donors, yet governance remains dependent on external aid and constrained by Israeli control over borders, movement, and resources. The Palestinian Authority focuses on maintaining bureaucratic and security structures rather than implementing transformative economic or political reforms, resulting in continued dependency, stagnation, and limited reconstruction capacity.

The corresponding Israeli scenario, “Oslo C,” reflects a strategy of conflict management rather than resolution. Israel maintains control through temporary arrangements and limited Palestinian self-governance while presenting itself internationally as a stabilising actor. Although appearing cooperative, this model sustains a highly managed form of occupation that prevents Palestinian sovereignty. Israel appears outwardly a typical state but internally continues to grapple with unresolved national and political questions rooted in the ongoing conflict.

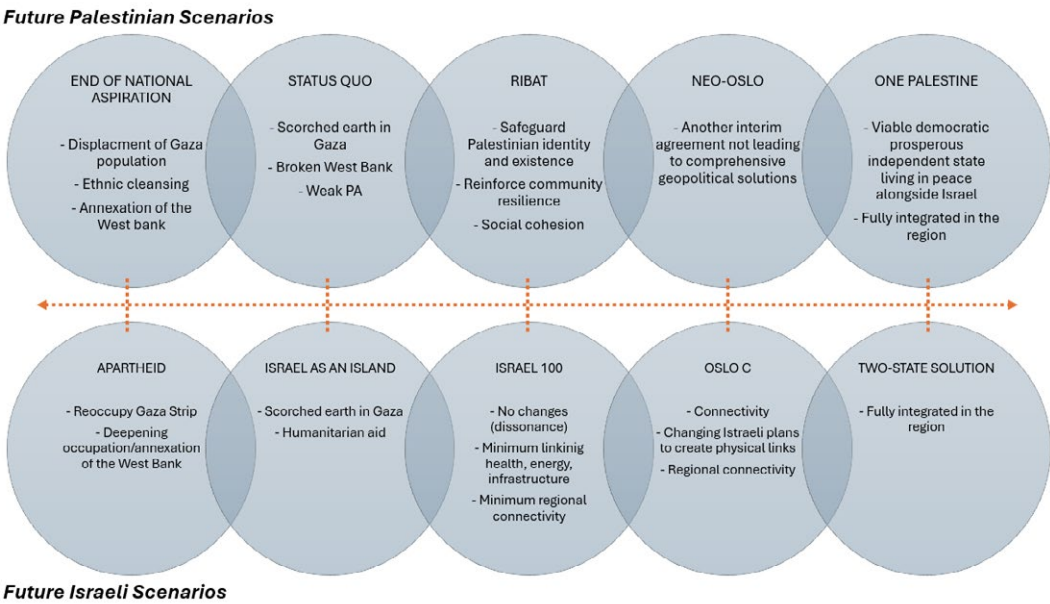
One Palestine / Two-State Solution

The “One Palestine” scenario represents the most optimistic future for Palestinians, envisioning the realisation of national aspirations through sovereignty, unity, justice, and self-determination achieved within a rights-based political settlement, linking Gaza and the West Bank into a single entity. In this scenario, the Israeli occupation ends through a historic peace agreement recognising secure borders and mutual sovereignty for both Palestine and Israel. Palestine emerges as a democratic, inclusive, and economically vibrant state integrated into regional cooperation alongside Jordan, Egypt, and Israel. Jerusalem becomes a shared capital and symbol of peace, while Gaza is transformed into a regional hub of innovation, trade, and culture. Reconstruction is embedded within a broader

regional development strategy emphasising cross-border cooperation in infrastructure, energy, transportation, sustainability, governance, and economic integration. Gaza reconnects with major Palestinian urban centres such as Hebron and Nablus, while the Jerusalem metropolis functions as a central economic link integrated into regional and global networks.

The corresponding Israeli scenario, the “Two-State Solution,” imagines Israel overcoming decades of fear, mistrust, and violence that culminated in the events of October 7th, 2023. Israeli society moves toward inclusivity, coexistence, and accountability, while peace with Palestine brings enhanced security, regional cooperation, and shared prosperity. Israel transitions from a heavily militarised society defined by conflict into a regional partner engaged in economic, environmental, and cultural collaboration. In this future, Israel becomes internationally respected as a model for reconciliation and regional integration.

Figure 2: Diagram adapted from the Gaza: A Vision of Hope report (Anthedon Initiative, 2025, p. 21)



Taken together, these scenarios demonstrate the profound interdependence between Palestinian and Israeli futures. Each trajectory directly shapes the other’s political, moral, and geopolitical condition. Central to this approach is the guiding principle of security for all. Both Palestinians and Israelis have equal rights to safety, dignity, and self-determination, and a successful path to peace will recognise that the security of one is intrinsically connected to the security of the other. The idea of privileging one side’s security over that of the other is thus counterproductive to the aim of true peace. The scenarios suggest that a just, stable, and prosperous Palestine is closely linked to a more secure, democratic, and internationally respected Israel, while increasing violence, displacement, and oppression produce growing instability, isolation, and crisis for both societies.

Importantly, even under the most optimistic scenario, lasting security and stability for both Palestinians and Israelis cannot be achieved without a credible political horizon leading to a negotiated two-state solution based on equality, rights, and international law. Sustainable peace ultimately depends on building equitable cross-border cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis while expanding regional cooperation with neighbouring countries and the European Union. Without such a political horizon, neither security nor long-term stability can be sustained for either side.

Throughout the various scenarios, interaction among territories plays a key role, either through the perspective of socio-economic integration or increasingly harsh divisions. Ideally, progress should move towards peace and stability for all, based on mutual recognition and respect, regarding not only self-determination and governance, but also the recognition of states and their borders. The sequence of events, as described in the context of post-1945 Europe, needs to be progressive, based on shared natural and cultural heritage and taking into consideration the role of sustainable development. Synchronising expectations is key to providing a realistic process and success. The Vision of Hope is based on the desire for all to live peacefully within a region that includes territories of different states. This long-term goal requires the establishment of a fully operational Palestinian State, with a national government and local authorities, as well as a framework for integration which allows for free movement of goods, services, and persons across national borders. It is precisely in this context that the cross-border dimensions of integration are essential to take into consideration to ensure win-win situations across the region.

Cross-border components of these scenarios, within a multi-level governance framework

Regional Integration between Israel and Palestine

From this section forward, the current contribution presents proposals developed in the Vision of Hope report about cross-border governance and a framework for creating cross border integration and cooperation (Anthedon Initiative, 2025, p. 54-59), allowing free movement across national borders. Developing cultural and natural interactions was considered key to building trust. This could be realised through the engagement of international mechanisms such as Man and Biosphere programme, Ramsar and World Heritage Conventions and European mechanisms such as Faro and Landscape Conventions. The natural heritage corridors of Wadi Gaza/Nahal Besor, a river system that runs broadly from East to West, and the kurkar ridges, lithified sea-sand dunes resulting from transgressive coastlines and forming successive ridges along the shore running from North to South, transcend political boundaries and provide a foundation for environmental sustainability, integrated water management, food security, and resilience to climate extremes. At the same time, the shared cultural heritage embodied in the historic itineraries, the Via Maris and Incense Route, and the Pentapolis offers a framework

for fostering trust, dialogue, and hope, serving as a basis for meaningful cross-border cooperation. For World Heritage, Wadi Gaza is a Palestinian nomination to the Tentative List and the Incense Route is an Israeli inscribed site since 2005, and both can be extended as transboundary nominations.

Moreover, the viability of a Palestinian territory requires economic integration, through trade and cross border engagement, with the neighbouring states, and particularly Israel. Such an integration is also necessary for Israel to respond to the need for a cross-border workforce. Strengthening such ties would be mutually beneficial and would also help support a larger goal of bridging divides between the two territories and the region. Economic ties are a concrete basis for integration, as evidenced by the example of the construction of the European Union that emerged through cooperation in this sphere. However, integration, which goes beyond cooperation, spans across various other dimensions as well, which interconnect to form strong foundations for mutual development and peace.

While regional integration is today far from the reality, and reconstruction plans implemented so far have not taken into account the need of cross-border integration, the Vision of Hope provides the framework to take short-term decisions that may have regional support in the long-term. It is important to note, however, that the situation is further complicated with the separation of Gaza from the West Bank.

An incremental process within the context of a long-term perspective (far beyond usual time scales for reconstruction after disasters within one single country) and an ambitious vision established from the very beginning are essential. What follows is based on a model of multi-level governance of borders (Peyrony, 2024) elaborated in the European context, within a study carried out by Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) for the European Commission (Peyrony et al. 2022). The study assessed two years of border management during the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on border regions and their inhabitants, and then formulated recommendations for future management. The European paradigm was a virtual erasure of internal borders, but when in March 2020 they were brutally closed by States, without coordination between them, the border regions' inhabitants were affected in different dimensions of their daily life: as economic actors (e.g. cross-border workers) through the interruption or severe restrictions on cross-border mobility; as users of cross-border public services, the first to be interrupted; as citizens, suddenly only nationals and with European citizenship largely forgotten; as informed individuals, as information was suddenly no longer readily available across the border; as individuals inspired by the culture or ethics from other countries, because trust was fractured and residents on the other side of the border were suspected to be dangerous; as individuals connected within couples or families, when some were separated by borders. Authorities seemed to forget that each inhabitant might be at once a user of public services, a citizen, an informed and inspired individual, a parent, and a "person" as a wholly complex being, rather than simply an "essential worker". These six dimensions correspond to six spheres of collective action (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), which has

proved helpful in understanding European and cross-border integration (Peyrony, 2014; Peyrony, 2018); and symmetrically six categories of obstacles to cross-border integration (ISIG, 2013): economic, functional, institutional, informational, cultural and interpersonal, that are used in this section as a common thread.

All over the world, the COVID crisis, acting as a crash test, revealed the nature of cross-border daily interdependencies, of which public authorities and opinion often have no clear view. Their first reactions mainly took place within domestic frameworks through trade-offs between these six spheres, turning their backs on each border, which resulted in major difficulties of coordination across borders, and inappropriate border management measures. The assessment of two years of border management and its impact on border regions and their inhabitants have led to recommendations for their management in future crises of different natures (sanitary, security, migration), through a multi-level governance of borders.

To better contextualise the role of these six dimensions, especially in the context of Israel and Palestine, it is first essential to understand the role and form of borders themselves, also in relation to varying levels of governance.

The role of borders

Due to the conflictual history of the region, strongly controlled borders or even closed borders may appear as the only solution in the future. However, the Open Borders Paradox holds that secure borders depend on extensive cross-border cooperation both for their effectiveness and legitimacy, and not on closed borders and unilateral action (Leuprecht & Hataley, 2021). Comparative studies all over the world (Leuprecht et al. 2021) show that effective border security is most likely to emerge through the development of border security communities. Pluralistic forms of communication and interactions that extend beyond the borderline play a key role in the emergence of friendly and trustful relationships among border dyads. Border security communities can mature when they result from reciprocity: the accumulation of mutual trust, as in the case between Canada and the United States, or through a shared pre-existing higher authority, as in the European Union. In both contexts, coordination constitutes the essential first stage of laying the foundation for deeper cooperation and, ultimately, collaboration: the ultimate expression of resilient border governance and trust.

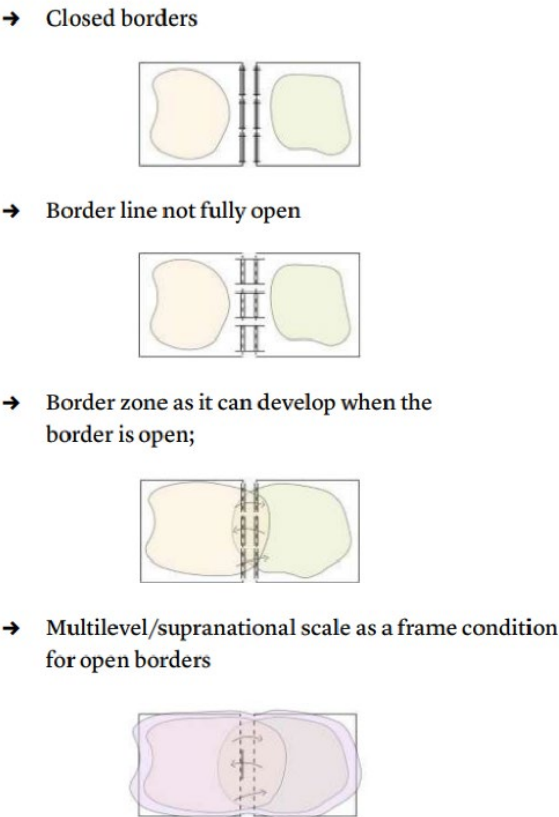
The future of Israel and Palestine will depend not only on political agreements, but also on the gradual development of practical forms of cooperation capable of fostering stability, prosperity, and mutual trust. In this perspective, a multidimensional approach is essential. Rather than seeking immediate full integration, this perspective emphasises realistic and incremental progress, beginning with limited cooperation and confidence-building measures while allowing different sectors and border regions to evolve at different speeds and across different levels - local, national and regional, with different spatial dimensions based on their functionality.

Following this model, the present contribution develops the aforementioned six-dimension approach within a multi-level governance, including three levels: local authorities; States; and a supranational level which, in the Gaza context, includes UN agencies, regional organisations and international donors, summarised in the table on pages 243 – 245.

The question of levels of governance in the context of cross-border integration is particularly important. Local levels of governance on either side of a border can cooperate on a scale of their cross-border area, defined by close proximity exchanges and bottom-up initiatives. These can be supported on a national level, potentially through bilateral agreements to facilitate cross-border flows and initiatives. Eventually, and looking at the European Union for inspiration, a third, supranational level can be envisioned. In this context, a supranational level unites territories under a series of metaphorical umbrellas, each creating a unifying force that can contribute not only to the creation of common policies, but also the building of shared identities. Across all levels, cooperation can be facilitated, or hindered, by the form of the border in place, as described below:

- Closed: A closed physical border greatly limits the extent of possible exchange and thus of cooperation, making integration difficult. Citizens of one territory, despite close vicinity with those of the other, rarely interact. This increases risk for negative perceptions of the “other”.
- Controlled: With a controlled border, interactions can take place but remain limited. Checks at the border discourage the creation of a coherent cross-border living area, and borders are seen mainly as lines to be crossed rather than integrated zones.
- Open: An open border facilitates integration by decreasing barriers between territories. People can cross national lines freely and thus develop interpersonal connections with their neighbours on the other side of the border. This can further be supported by bilateral agreements which can ease logistical difficulties related to entering and exiting a said territory.
- Open with a supranational level of governance: A supranational level of governance allows for a common structure that spans beyond national borders. Supranational policies create uniting factors that do not differentiate between national citizenships, thus creating a harmonious, unifying sphere which allows cross-border integration to prosper. While this level does not necessarily change the physical representation of an open border, it introduces a level of governance that supports cooperation and cohesion across territories.

Figure 3: Diagram adapted from the *Gaza: A Vision of Hope* report (Anthedon Initiative, 2025, p. 13)



Dimensions of Integration

The conditions of borders, which are closely linked to multi-level governance, have repercussions across the various dimensions of integration. Different levels of governance can exist simultaneously in diverse forms for each dimension. As referenced previously, cross-border integration can be considered across six main dimensions: economics and employment, functional infrastructures, governance and management, information systems, socio-cultural elements, and interpersonal connections. These are further detailed in the following paragraphs.

Economics and Employment

Economic fragmentation and border restrictions currently limit trade, investment, and labour mobility between Israel, Palestine, including the separated Gaza and West Bank, and neighbouring territories. Beginning phases of integration tend to focus on facilitating controlled cross-border economic activity, including trade corridors and regulated workforce mobility. In the short and medium term, virtual connectivity and sector-specific cooperation, particularly in technology, agriculture, and creative industries, could help rebuild economic ties while avoiding immediate political sensitivities. Over

time, bilateral agreements could establish cross-border economic zones with coordinated industrial policies and shared investment strategies. In the long term, the development of a supranational economic system enabling the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people could be envisioned, thereby strengthening regional interdependence, economic growth, and stability.

Functional Integration and Public Services

Public infrastructure and essential services currently operate within strictly separated national systems, often resulting in inefficiencies, unequal access, and weak emergency coordination. In the perspective of cross-border integration, cooperation in key sectors such as healthcare, energy, water management, transportation, and emergency response is prioritised. Early initiatives could involve shared infrastructure projects and coordinated service delivery in border areas, particularly where reconstruction and humanitarian needs are most urgent. As cooperation deepens, regional planning mechanisms could integrate infrastructure development and public service management across borders. The role of the metropolis in providing services that go beyond the city could provide a valuable basis for cross-border actions. Such coordination would improve resilience, optimise resource allocation, and ensure that critical systems operate more effectively during both crises and periods of recovery.

Governance and Institutional Cooperation

Governance structures in the region remain largely confined to national jurisdictions, limiting opportunities for institutional coordination and joint policymaking. The perspective of cross-border integration proposes an incremental approach beginning with bilateral agreements that support practical cooperation on shared concerns such as infrastructure, environmental management, and economic regulation. At the first stage, institutional cooperation for addressing environmental challenges is envisaged with specific action for coastal erosion and climate extremes. In later phases, dedicated cross-border governance bodies could be established with democratic decision-making mechanisms and representation from local and national authorities. Ultimately, successful integration envisions a multi-level governance system combining local, metropolitan, national, regional, and supranational institutions. Such a system would provide the regulatory and institutional foundation necessary to sustain long-term cross-border integration while balancing sovereignty with regional cooperation.

Information and Communication

Fragmented information systems and restricted media cooperation currently hinder transparency, coordinated policymaking, and public understanding across borders. Cross-border integration therefore emphasises the importance of improving cross-border data-sharing mechanisms and encouraging collaborative media and research initiatives. Initial steps could include cooperation on statistics, public information systems, and policy

analysis, helping governments and institutions make more evidence-based decisions. In the longer term, transnational information networks could emerge through harmonised statistical frameworks, integrated research institutions, and cooperative media platforms. These initiatives would not only strengthen governance capacity but also contribute to the development of a more connected regional public sphere involving citizens, civil society, and businesses.

Cultural Integration, Heritage, and Identity

Cultural heritage and educational systems in Israel and Palestine are currently shaped by separate national narratives, often reinforcing division rather than shared understanding. To work towards cross-border integration, cultural and educational exchanges are an essential foundation for building trust and social cohesion. In 1972 under the aegis of UNESCO, a German-Polish Textbook Commission was established to replace distorted ideas with historical truth. In 2008, the Commission began work on the “Joint German-Polish History Book” with the first volume of the textbook published in 2016. Early initiatives in the context of Gaza could include joint educational programmes, academic partnerships, youth exchanges, and collaborative cultural events. Over time, more institutionalised forms of cooperation could emerge, including joint heritage conservation projects, integrated cultural institutions, and educational curricula that acknowledge the histories and identities of multiple communities. The identification of shared heritage both cultural and natural may develop into trans-boundary and trans-national World Heritage serial nominations or joint Man and Biosphere programmes. This approach would aim to strengthen regional cohesion while preserving the distinct cultural and historical identities of all populations involved.

Interpersonal Connections, Families, and Communities

Legal restrictions on mobility, residency, and personal status currently create major obstacles for cross-border families and communities. Cross-border integration proposes initial bilateral measures to recognise and protect cross-border family rights, including residency arrangements and mobility permits. In later stages, a broader transnational legal framework could address migration policies, refugee status, residency rights, and civil protections across the region. Such reforms would help ensure legal consistency, safeguard human rights, and promote social integration. Strengthening interpersonal connections is viewed as a critical component of long-term peacebuilding, as durable stability ultimately depends not only on institutions and economies, but also on sustained relationships between communities and individuals.

Table 1: The Dimensions of Integration in Different Border Scenarios

Types of space/ dimensions of cohesion	National territories; closed borders	Border line not fully open	Border zone as it can develop when the border is fully open; bi-lateral intergovernmental arrangements	Multilevel/ supranational scale as a frame condition for open borders
Economics and Employment	States are only concerned with flows within domestic markets; closed border, no cross-border flow.	Cross-border economic flows (commuting Cross- border workers, goods...) are allowed. Cross-border integration only economic No common cross- border management > spill over effect impacting non-cross- border actors Cross-border workers generally paying income tax abroad, but no public investment funding across the border	Consideration of cross-border living areas (not only workers, consumers; also citizens) Cross-border markets, and cross-border economic policies Cross-border Free trade area zones Co-development: Bi- lateral agreements on Cross-border development, tax retransfer	Regional Free trade area Free movement of persons, goods, services, capital "Green lanes" for goods. Supranational framework for taxation of cross- border work, social security Supranational funding programme for cross-border activities
Functional - Infrastructure, rubble and de-mining - Environmental, health and wellbeing - Spatial/ Planning	National territories: bundles of domestic public services maintained by States	Public services end at the border Limited interoperability Untapped potential for economies of scale and agglomeration Borders as filters	Cross-border metropolitan integration Cross-border sectoral/spatial planning Cross-border public services guaranteed in case of crisis: cross-border living area card. Health criteria coordinated on each border	Regional harmonisation of national frameworks, Referring to SDGs Cross-border public services regional framework, Green pass integrating the needs of cross- border living areas Common health criteria

Types of space/ dimensions of cohesion	National territories; closed borders	Border line not fully open	Border zone as it can develop when the border is fully open; bi-lateral intergovernmental arrangements	Multilevel/ supranational scale as a frame condition for open borders
Governance and management	Institutional sphere embedded within each State, founded on national democracy-limited to national citizens State provides security, solidarity, public goods and services via public policies State monopoly of legitimate violence	Possibility of cross- border cooperation structures No or little coordination on the borders	Bi-lateral treaties Cross-border governments or structures, under democratic control, with full mandates and competences Cross-border democracy: Cross- border citizen debate forums; towards cross-border election Towards Cross-border citizenship Dual citizenship recognised and encouraged	Supra national governance Multi-level governance of borders, regulated at supranational level Transnational citizenship in particular in the cross-border context Transnational competence in crisis management, public health
Information, integration and modelling	Statistics, production of social sciences, education and media organised at national level State monopoly of evidence	Border, place of contradiction between States Lack of cross- border information, redoubled in case of crisis Misunderstanding	Cross-border media, cross-border data Cross-border information organised on the basis of cross- border and multilevel structures	Transnational, multi- level information, media Common statistical system

Types of space/ dimensions of cohesion	National territories; closed borders	Border line not fully open	Border zone as it can develop when the border is fully open; bi-lateral intergovernmental arrangements	Multilevel/ supranational scale as a frame condition for open borders
Demography, social – heritage	Civil society structured within national framework Each national territory is a community united by a “national narrative”, heritage, common language	Borders: places where different cultures, visions, languages, clash Boundary between 2 national universes turning their backs on each other	Emergence of a cross-border civil society People to people, educational, cultural (heritage) projects to rebuild trust Learning the neighbour’s language Common history teaching Knowledge of the past, vision of common future, preconditions for cross-border integration and its maintenance in case of crises	Emergence of a common transnational civil society Transnational education programmes
Inter-personal	Life of couples and families regulated within domestic framework (civil status) Recognition of national citizens only Networks in a predominantly national framework	Only economic agents (cross-border workers) or national citizens considered Non-recognition of non-nationals (including in case of cross-border couples or families) Distrust Networks back-to-back at the border (boundary)	Guarantee of rights for persons, couples, families, living in cross-border living areas (beyond economic or national citizen status); including migrants, refugees Cross-border living areas cards Informal, interpersonal cross-border links, going beyond routines: resources for cross-border public action, to be reinforced Multi-level structured cross-border networks of persons	Family rights; migrant and refugee rights acknowledged in a transnational perspective Transnational framework Extended networks at transnational scale

Overall, the cross-border integration framework recognises that progress across these six dimensions will not occur uniformly. The fluid and diverse border forms and sectors may advance at different speeds depending on political conditions, security concerns, and local realities. First stage processes could, for example, prioritise virtual activities in “Information, integration and modelling” dimensions and “Inter-personal” dimensions. Shared public services, labour mobility, local institutional cooperation, and people-to-people initiatives, are also foundational building blocks for a gradual deepening of connections. In the context of Gaza and its metropolitan region beyond borders in Israel and Egypt, international donors and regional organisations are expected to play an important role as facilitators and neutral brokers throughout the process. While full supranational integration may remain a long-term aspiration, gradual cooperation, practical reconstruction efforts, and sustained regional engagement can create the foundations for a more peaceful, stable, and interconnected future for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Physical recovery and reconstruction need to be accompanied by a Vision of Hope. Multiple strategies should be employed and adapted to different locations; historical patterns require an urban restoration approach while areas of public land and refugee camps need processes capable of controlling urban metamorphoses using design mechanisms. This would respond to a bottom-up people-centred approach of self-help. There is a need for a growing evolutionary mechanism that sees urban environments as fluid dynamic equilibriums to be continuously renegotiated. For this, Albrecht & Galli (2023) propose urban triggers and backbones, being elements shaped by design, as a system of hooks and suggestions capable of defining an open range of possibilities.

Conclusion

The reconstruction of Gaza cannot be understood solely as a question of rebuilding physical infrastructure. While restoring housing, services, and economic activity is essential, long-term recovery ultimately depends on rebuilding social cohesion and restoring trust, within and beyond borders, as well as creating the political and institutional conditions necessary for lasting peace. The Anthedon initiative strives to ensure that reconstruction becomes a process through which communities actively shape their future rather than merely receive external assistance, an approach that aims to reintroduce a sense of collective purpose and avoid reproducing the very fragmentation, dysfunctionality and vulnerability that have dominated the landscape over the past decades.

Gaza’s recovery also cannot be isolated from the broader regional context. Sustainable reconstruction requires moving beyond frameworks that treat borders exclusively as lines of separation. Instead, reconstruction efforts should keep open the possibility of future cross-border cooperation in areas such as trade, environmental management, infrastructure, cultural exchange, and economic development. While such prospects may appear distant amid the current realities of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, they are vital considerations from the earliest stages of reconstruction. Synchronising expectations in the phasing of such a process may also benefit be furthering and monitoring the scenarios

together with grass-roots actions on the ground in effort to build trust. The decisions made today will shape not only Gaza's future, but also the opportunities for integration and peace across the entire region.

As explored in the present paper, the European project offers valuable lessons in this regard. In the aftermath of the Second World War, proposals for cross-border cooperation between former adversaries would have likely been seen as premature if not unimaginable. Yet the gradual process of European integration, which began unfolding years after a formal end to the war, demonstrated the power of shared institutions, economic interdependence, and cross-border collaboration in building cohesion and peace in former areas of violent conflict. Although the historical and political circumstances of Europe and the Middle East undoubtedly differ, the European experience illustrates the importance of embedding reconstruction within a broader vision of regional cooperation rather than limiting it to strictly national recovery.

Ultimately, lasting peace and prosperity in Gaza will require both local ownership and regional engagement. Reconstruction must therefore be conceived not only as the rebuilding of a city, but as an opportunity to lay the foundations for new forms of cooperation across borders. By combining community-led recovery with a long-term vision of regional connectivity, reconstruction can contribute to breaking cycles of fragmentation and violence and create pathways toward a more stable, resilient, and interconnected future for Gaza, Israel and their neighbouring countries.

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