[Page 2]

**Case Study: The Ben-Yehuda Street Pop-Up**

[Text under image: Ben Yehuda Street, 1939, photographer unknown]

[Page 3]

**Turning a Challenge into an Opportunity**:

**The Light Rail Construction is Transforming Ben Yehuda Street**

Ben Yehuda Street stretches from North to South, just one block from the Mediterranean Sea. It is a typical main street in the historic Geddes Plan for Tel Aviv-Jaffa. It consists of superblocks of residential buildings with commercial frontages that developed in the 1930s and 1940s. Ben Yehuda Street is also a bustling commercial area featuring a variety of restaurants, cafés, and shops, and it serves as a central transportation artery that attracts many visitors and residents.

Construction of the Purple Line of the light rail along Ben Yehuda Street began in April 2021. In this area, the light rail is planned to run above ground along the section between Arlozorov and Allenby streets. The construction is being executed in two phases: first, the installation of underground infrastructure, followed by the laying of above-ground tracks. Consequently, one side of the street (either east or west) is always excavated and fenced off. Beyond the dirt and noise, this means that the street is closed to vehicles and public transport, parking is eliminated, and accessibility is significantly disrupted.

**>>>Since construction began, business owners and residents have reported a prolonged and severe disruption to their livelihoods and quality of life. The once-bustling traffic on the street has died down, businesses have closed, foot traffic has diminished, and the overall atmosphere has become unpleasant.**

As part of the municipality’s efforts to address the environmental impacts caused by the construction, the Ben Yehuda Street Pop-Up initiative was launched as a spatial intervention to support residents, the local community, and businesses.

The initiative involved redesigning the street space under construction, enhancing the area with artistic murals, adding street furniture along the route, and introducing pop-up activities to create a sense of community and relaxation.

**>>>This was a pilot initiative by the Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality, designed with a forward-looking approach to enable residents to enjoy their neighborhood environment even during ongoing improvement works. Here, we will review four similar projects carried out in different parts of the city and evaluate their impact on residents and business owners, noting both positive outcomes and areas for improvement.**

**­­­­­**[Text next to image: The light rail route, running from North to South along Ben Yehuda Street. Expected completion: 2027]

[Page 4]

**Listening to the Residents**

**Street Interviews with Passersby and Business Owners**

**>>>The atmosphere in the area affected by the construction - marked by noise, poor cleanliness, and maintenance issues - was a key factor prompting the need for intervention.**

Residents, visitors, and business owners described Ben Yehuda Street prior to the infrastructure work as a lively and inviting place filled with local visitors and young people. It was home to many businesses and offered a safer, calmer environment for pedestrians, with less traffic congestion, fewer blockages, and reduced noise.

The Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality undertakes many urban improvement projects that require similar infrastructure work. To make the most of these temporary situations, the municipality explored the idea of allowing the local community to use and benefit from these spaces in coordination with the construction work through four different projects. Although areas under construction share certain characteristics, the potential for their use varies from one space to another. Maintenance efforts were tailored to the duration of construction, periods of activity, and the post-construction period.

In sections where construction work had not yet been completed, the cleanliness and maintenance of the area were poor, involving issues such as dust, sand, and considerable dirt. These conditions negatively impacted the overall experience of being on the street, especially for those more sensitive to environmental elements, such as toddlers, children, and the elderly. Therefore, it was essential to create a safe and inviting environment.

Enhancing the space required continuous attention to cleanliness and maintenance, particularly on streets where construction was still underway. This involved sectioning and closing off areas filled with dirt and dust to create a safe and pleasant environment for residents and visitors. Following the interventions in the spaces and sections where the light rail construction had been completed, the area returned to being cleaner and better maintained.

**“Sheer horror. Pure suffering. You live here, and you suffer.”**

* Regular passerby and local resident, 33 years old, and mother of a seven-year-old boy.

[Text under image: Infrastructure work for the Purple Line on the eastern side of Ben Yehuda Street. Photo by Keren Avni]

[Page 5]

**Deciding with the Community**

**The Ben Yehuda Street Pop-Up: What to Plan and Where?**

**>>>Beyond improving the level of maintenance, it was important to understand the points of interest and the street’s significance to local residents. As part of the planning process, preliminary research was conducted to assess the needs of the residents and business owners. This involved interviews with passersby and business owners, observations of the intervention areas, and sample measurements of traffic and pedestrian flow.**

This approach made it possible to begin implementing the improvement plan and choose the pop-up’s location based on the data and in coordination with the light rail construction works. The decision to hold the pop-up activities in the section between Bugrashov and Trumpeldor Streets was based on a survey of establishments along the entire length of Ben Yehuda Street that revealed that the Bugrashov area had a particularly high concentration of food and beverage businesses, making it an ideal location for holding community activities in the public space.

[Images: Right to left]

**Interviews with visitors on the premises**

What brings you here?

* Local residents
* The beach
* Running errands
* Tourists
* Passersby
* Visiting acquaintances
* Work

**Interviews with business owners**

Business location by street section

* Bugrashov-Trumpeldor
* Mapu-Mendeli
* Mendeli-Bugrashov
* Gordon-Mapu

[Page 6]

**Waking Up the Street**

**The Ben Yehuda Street Pop-Up for Temporary Relief in a City Under Construction**

**>>>The Ben Yehuda Street Pop-Up initiative spans a temporary public space on the Eastern side of Ben Yehuda Street, between Gordon and Trumpeldor Streets. The area designated for the initiative covers approximately 6,500 square meters, with a length of about 800 meters and a width of about 9 meters.**

The project was designed for neighborhood residents and adapted to the local environment, incorporating compatible businesses. Its goals were to address various issues and improve public spaces in a city undergoing construction.

**Project Goals:**

* To improve mobility in public spaces for pedestrians and cyclists and provide a temporary and aesthetically pleasing solution for people passing through the light rail construction area.
* To create an inviting space for sitting and relaxing.
* To strengthen neighborhood community activities and support local businesses while expanding the range of street activities.

**The intervention included the following actions:**

* Removing fences and resurfacing the street.
* Artistic painting in shades of purple to mark the future route of the Purple Line while branding the space with references to the “Purple Dunes” (relating to the historical geography of the site).
* Establishing and marking bicycle lanes.
* Chairs and picnic tables will be installed as temporary seating areas.
* Hosting weekly pop-up events during the summer of 2023, organized by the city’s community managers, to offer residents a meaningful short-term benefit.

**“Since they opened the bicycle path, walking here has become much nicer.”**

* A 19-year-old woman completing national service at a kindergarten who commutes to the area by bus every day.

[Text under the image: Artistic painting on asphalt, *Sands in Purple*, Ben Yehuda Street Pop-Up (designed by Megama/Rebecca Sternberg, photo by Keren Avni)

[Page 7]

**Project Results**

1. **Improved mobility for pedestrians and cyclists and enhanced appearance of the environment.**

**>>> The goal: to improve the mobility experience for pedestrians while providing a temporary and visually appealing solution for those passing through the light rail construction area.**

The intervention on Ben Yehuda Street led to an improvement in mobility conditions. Dedicated bicycle paths were created and marked clearly, and numerous issues were addressed: damaged sidewalks near crosswalks were repaired, potholes in the asphalt were filled, and obstacles in the bicycle lane were removed. All of these actions improved the experience for cyclists, pedestrians, and parents with children and strollers.

The bicycle path led to a significant increase in the number of cyclists, as many had previously avoided entering the area due to the uneven road and unannounced blockages. However, the increase in cyclists, including motorized scooters, sometimes poses a danger to pedestrians.

Despite the improved environmental conditions, the presence of toddlers and elderly individuals has remained limited, and people with disabilities are still almost entirely absent from the area. While the intervention on Ben Yehuda Street did enhance the overall space, it does not fully meet the safety and accessibility needs of these groups. Elements such as accessible sidewalks, safe pathways, and adequate shading are essential for encouraging their presence in the area.

Interviews with pedestrians suggest that it is now more pleasant to walk and cycle in the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall, with many highlighting how much easier it is to ride their bikes and navigate with children. One interviewee even noted that the space was convenient for workouts. Overall, there has been an improvement for both cyclists and pedestrians. However, moving forward, it is important to focus on the needs of vulnerable populations by improving the area’s appearance and ensuring better separation.

Graphs – right to left:

**Improvement in the Mobility Experience**

**Average scores by indicator (7 = very positive, 1 = very negative/not at all)**

Bicycle path

Walking with a stroller

Walking

Post-intervention Pre-intervention

**Interviews with pedestrians and cyclists**

**N=30 Have mobility conditions on the street improved?**

Yes

Slightly

Insignificantly

[Page 8]

1. **Creating a Welcoming Space for Rest and Relaxation**

To encourage local residents and passersby to make greater use of the public space along Ben Yehuda Street, one of the key goals of the intervention was to create new opportunities for people to linger in a more inviting atmosphere. To achieve this, chairs and picnic tables (some shaded) were placed along the street to provide temporary spots for sitting and relaxing in a constantly changing area due to ongoing renovations.

In areas where umbrellas and chairs were set up near businesses, visitors were seen making use of these amenities while spending time on the street. In shaded spots with added umbrellas and benches, people often stopped to rest and linger longer. However, most of the seating was placed in hot areas, some in direct sunlight and others far from businesses. The heat and lack of shade made these seating areas less appealing, especially during the summer months. Once the weather cooled and became more comfortable, their use noticeably increased. Additionally, security and regular maintenance were required to prevent vandalism of the installations in the intervention area.

[Graph:]

**Improvement in the Experience of Being in the Space**

**Average Scores by Indicators (7 - very positive, 1 - very negative/not at all)**

Seating Areas

Cleanliness and Maintenance

Post-intervention Pre-intervention

Despite the improvements along the street, it became clear that creating a pleasant atmosphere that encourages people to linger in construction areas requires careful consideration of environmental conditions and strategic placement of facilities in shaded areas and near businesses. The planning should be purposeful and aimed at supporting specific uses rather than just offering a resting place for passersby.

**“This is great. I can stop and sit down. There are umbrellas for hot days like today, so I don’t have to walk the whole way without a place to rest.”**

* A 71-year-old woman who visits the area several times a week, interviewed while running errands.

[Text under image: Shaded seating areas near businesses: Mapu-Mandela section. Photo by Keren Avni.]

[Page 9]

1. **A Pleasant Surprise: Boosting Neighborhood Community Activities and Support for Local Businesses while Expanding the Variety of Street Events**

With its improved amenities, the newly created public space offered residents an urban retreat and a chance to establish a new community hub, even in an area still under construction. As part of the pop-up initiative, the Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality organized weekly community events from June to September, featuring music and children’s activities. Both residents and visitors found these events to be a pleasant surprise that strengthened community bonds and praised the municipality’s efforts as a success. The pop-up activities enhanced neighborhood engagement, fostered a sense of community, and attracted more visitors to the area.

The success of these activities was largely due to the improved physical conditions, accessibility, and convenience of reaching the site. The designated area was easy to access, especially on foot or by bicycle, and was located close to home in a safe, enclosed space. Observations showed that the conditions were ideal for the target audience: the area was shaded, secure, and well-maintained. The timing of the events during the summer break also met the residents’ needs for nearby leisure activities. Seen as high-quality and enriching, the activities attracted a wide range of ages. Together, these factors helped create a new communal third place that strengthened residents’ sense of belonging and reduced feelings of loneliness.

Business owners near the pop-up activities saw a slight increase in customers. However, some reported that participants used restrooms and seating meant for their patrons and, in some cases, even used the businesses’ electricity to run the events without prior coordination. To better address the needs and ensure the success of these tactical interventions in an area undergoing construction, it is important to set clear expectations and have business owners more actively involved in future efforts.

**“Very well organized. I’m amazed it’s in the shade! You can even feel a light breeze!”**

* A 37-year-old mother with children aged five and three, who came to the pop-up activity by bicycle and was not a neighborhood resident.

[Text under image: Parents and children participating in the pop-up activities. Photo by Guy Yechieli]

[Page 10]

Although there was some increase in customers, interviews with business owners indicated that the intervention only partially improved the business environment. They noted reduced noise, improved cleanliness, and a generally enhanced street atmosphere. However, only a few businesses reported better access due to sidewalk repairs, new bicycle lanes, and available parking. Overall, the changes mainly improved accessibility for couriers and suppliers, with only a minor impact on customer traffic.

While the pop-up initiative improved the street’s appearance and created a third place for parents with young children through community events, the ongoing construction of the light rail on Ben Yehuda Street continues to disrupt mobility and the overall experience in the area, particularly affecting local businesses. Construction vehicles and materials on the sidewalks create obstacles and inconvenience for pedestrians, negatively impacting customer traffic.

[Graph:]

**Businesses Post-Intervention**

Improvement No improvement

[Text beside image: Construction debris in the Trumplerdor-Bugrashov section. Photo by the Center for Educational Technology]

**“Every few days, there’s a water or power outage without any prior warning. The street is dirty, and it was really hard to get through when they opened the sidewalks.”**

* Jewelry store owner, east side of the Bugrashov-Trumpeldor section.

**“Now that there’s a proper sidewalk, customers can actually reach the business. There were days when the construction site’s safety fence was so close to the door that people couldn’t even get in.”**

* Nail salon owner, east side of the Bugrashov-Trumpeldor section.

[Page 11]

**The Ben Yehuda Street Pop-Up: Conclusions**

**Positive Impact for Residents, Partial Success for Businesses**

**>>>The intervention on Ben Yehuda Street improved the experience for visitors following the completion of infrastructure work, with better conditions for walking and cycling. The bicycle lanes and pedestrian sections are now much easier to navigate, even with strollers and children. The pop-up areas on Ben Yehuda Street have also become more inviting, providing places to stop, sit, and rest, with some shaded by umbrellas.**

The initiative was surprisingly successful in terms of the diverse range of pop-up activities that unexpectedly drew in local parents with young children. The success of these activities in transforming the space into an accessible community hub with minimal investment underscores the value of using tactical closures for similar events in other areas where construction is temporarily halted. However, the intervention on Ben Yehuda Street was also intended to support local businesses, and it did not lead to a significant increase in business activity. Better results might have been achieved with a more deliberate integration of the pop-up activities with local businesses and by placing seating areas closer to their entrances

In other words, the physical location is not the only factor. To ensure the success of similar efforts in different areas under construction, it is important to set clear expectations with business owners, engage them actively, and secure their support. This approach would help identify their needs during construction and create more tailored solutions. For residents, providing advance notice regarding the intervention’s stages, timing, and locations would create a greater sense of certainty regarding the initiative and encourage greater public participation and involvement.

Images:

Right, top: Pre-intervention right bottom: Very few people present – the intersection of Ben Yehuda and Gordon streets

Left top: Post-intervention left bottom: Pop-up activity participants. Photo by Guy Yechieli