**The Regional Sustainability Partnership as an Example of Collaborative Governance[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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**What is the Partnership?**

The Regional Sustainability Partnership is a partnership between Ramat Hanadiv and five local authorities, all of which share the same geographical area: Zichron Yaacov, the Alona communities, Binyamina-Givat Ada, Jisr a-Zarqa, and Hof HaCarmel.

**The Partnership Vision:** *“To ensure that the region we live in will be one that enjoys lasting environmental, social, and economic resilience; that the communities in the region implement principles of sustainability in their lives and work constantly to improve the condition of their human, economic, and ecological environment; that the authorities work together and share a joint strategy for realizing the vision”* (website of the Regional Sustainability Partnership)

The Partnership began as an initiative of Ramat Hanadiv, which is a public benefit company (PBC) under the terms of the Ramat Hanadiv Parks Law, 5718-1958. Ramat Hanadiv occupies a site of some 4,500 dunams, including gardens and a nature park, close to Zichron Yaacov. These gardens serve as a memorial site for Baron Edmond de Rothschild and his family. Ramat Hanadiv is funded by Yad Hanadiv, a philanthropic foundation of the Rothschild family. As noted, the idea to develop a regional partnership arose from the aspiration to strengthen the subject of sustainability, which lies at the heart of Ramat Hanadiv’s activities, while adopting a regional approach across different local authorities.

The partnership focuses primarily on three areas:

1. Coexistence between nature, agriculture, and humans: finding ways for dialogue and for all three to exist, through understanding and mutual consideration, and without one coming at the expense of the other.

2. Sustainable transportation: reducing the use of private vehicles and expanding the use of alternative means of transportation, including public transportation, infrastructure for bike riding, and cooperative transportation.

3. A sustainable regional economy – encouraging local businesses through community development, the advancement of connections between the local authorities and local businesses, etc. (from the website of the [Regional Sustainability Partnership](https://www.hashutfut.org/en)).

**What Led to Considering the Need for Collaboration?**

The management at Ramat Hanadiv was looked for avenues to help move the region toward more sustainable behavior. To this end, it began a process of exploration and learning. Various models from Israel and other countries were examined, and interviews were held with members of the communities and stakeholders in order to understand the region’s challenges and needs. In order to promote the establishment of a geographical region managed in accordance with the principles of sustainability, it is vital that all key players in the region be enlisted in support of the idea, the strategic process, and the stages of implementation and action. The goal was to promote a region in which efforts in various spheres, such as nature preservation, agricultural development, landscaping, and trash collection are created jointly through the mutual commitment of various partners. It was recognized that if the goal is to create a sustainable region, and not merely to define external objectives of sustainability, there must be an emphasis on ensuring that all of the stakeholders accept mutual responsibility, including: heads of the various authorities, officials in the local authorities and the district, farmers, business owners, residents, educators, and others. There is a need to create a “shared story” in which the voices of the partners are not ones that raise complaints and blame the “other,” or refrain from taking action, but rather a voice that defines needs and accepts joint responsibility for the action itself. In other words, the positioning and stance of the partners involved in the process (the stakeholders) is altered. For example, stakeholders may change from being the exclusive owners of a given area to partners who see the value of a complex and participatory process; or shift from criticism about a lack of efforts to becoming partners in action. Joint responsibility has various facets: some of the players are also accountable to the public for the outcomes and action, but their responsibility is also derived from their involvement in the various stages of the process. People, authorities, and organizations involved in the process become responsible and committed to the process, and accordingly will work to promote action in the region. Accordingly, it is important that these are all partners in the process.

**What is the Connection Between the Regional Sustainability Partnership and Collaborative Governance?**

**Goal:** The vision of the Regional Sustainability Partnership is to maintain a space for regional cooperation. This is a public goal that seeks to promote a broad public interest. The public interest indicates the need to change the way the region is managed and to inculcate the principles of sustainability in planning, development, and implementation. The basic assumption of the leaders of the process is that it is not possible to do this alone, but also that it is not desirable to do it solely with the heads of the local councils and the formal officials. An understanding has emerged that the best way to reach this goal is by building a network of cooperation between the authorities (from action inside the “blue line” – the boundaries of each authority – to an approach that extends across boundaries); within the authorities (different sectors in the authority, such as officials, residents, business owners, farmers); and between communities in the region (residents from the communities, of different cultures and socioeconomic profiles). Accordingly, a special effort was made to create arrangements (mechanisms) that would encourage the participants to cooperate, and to adopt a multidimensional perspective. The transition to discussion based not only on perceived personal interests but also on additional perspectives – including those of the stakeholders themselves (a participant, for example, is not just a business owner but also a partner in regional economic development, a resident concerned about environmental aspects, etc.) as well as those of others (the needs of other groups, farmers, residents of other local councils, etc.) – enables the development of a space that helps consolidate a “common identity.” These aspects are central to being able to establish the core of the sustainable space, whose conduct is not necessarily defined by its municipal boundaries, and the responsibility for which (and for whose action) is broad and includes the various partners.

**Leadership:** The concept of governance, in the sense of national or local government as the leading body, does not accurately reflect the Partnership.[[2]](#footnote-2) At the outset, the question arose as to who would lead the Partnership, and this issue was clarified with various players, including the heads of the authorities. To a large extent, it was convenient that a body such as Ramat Hanadiv, which is apolitical, neutral, and professional, and which enjoys a high level of trust, should undertake leadership of the Partnership. This was not a simple matter for Ramat Hanadiv itself. It was clear to the initiators of the idea that they were entering a political arena with various conflicts and interests, and that this would also require skills they had not previous possessed; it would also require a willingness to forego control and management in favor of creating institutional frameworks for the joint consolidation of consensus. All these aspects required changes in patters of activity.**UP TO HERE**

**Mechanisms and players:** After the five local authorities in the initiative area reached basic agreement, an inner team developed a strategy for managing the process. However, from the early stages it was agreed that no attempt would be made to control the decisions that would be taken. No particular direction is determined on the various issues; instead, there is a genuine desire to include as many partners as possible through a meaningful and participatory process. The Partnership operates by means of a leading team – a broad forum of around 120 stakeholders that takes decisions regarding the selection of key themes and actions. Additional forums include: three working teams that discuss selected issues (sustainable economy, sustainable transportation, and coexistence of nature, agriculture, and humans); a forum of heads of authorities; and additional thematic forums. The teams advance the carious issues by defining a picture for the future, joint goals, and modalities for securing the goals. They present the broad areas of action to the plenum forum (Regional Sustainability Partnership, Annual Summary, 2016).

After the approval of the plenum, a covenant was signed by the heads of the authorities, including a summary of the agreements. In addition, specific discussions are held with the heads of the authorities, particularly on issues relating to powers and resources, when it is appropriate to secure their agreement in advance. Over the three years, dozens of discussions were held in the various teams and forums, moderated by counselors with expertise in leading processes, and with the involvement of professional experts on the different issues as necessary. These discussions were consolidated into practical avenues of activity and various projects, at least some of which are already being implemented on the ground. Examples include: regional educational programs, the promotion of the use of pesticides that are friendly to the environment and to humans among farmers and residents, transportation projects (such as a carpool parking lot at Binyamina train station specifically for passengers using cooperative transportation), a project for the eco-hydrological rehabilitation of Taninim stream, sustainable landscaping in the local authorities, and so forth – all projects that are already active (ibid.).

The stakeholders who participate in the forums include a wide range of representatives, from representatives of groups of residents, parent committees, and local environmental organizations, through officials from the local authorities and district offices, heads of councils, farmers, business owners, experts, and others. All enjoy an equal voice at the discussion table, and each represents a group. Whether the member is a head of an authority or a farmers’ representatives, their voice in the forum is meaningful and respected.

**Discussion, discourse, and agreement (deliberation):** One of the key components of collaborative governance mechanisms is deliberation: discussion between numerous participants characterized by mutuality, whereby knowledge and attitudes move in both directions between different partners and there is a clear aspiration to secure consensual agreement whenever possible. In the case of the Partnership, too, the key question was how to manage the discussion. It was clear that there is a different between the discourse of a body that wields control and has professional answers to discourse based on discussion and on raising questions before a broad forum of stakeholders. Questions to which the answers remain unknown, and the joint process of searching, are what matter and what create the added value of a complex perspective, alongside the development of trust between the partners. The creation of discussion forums that include numerous voices, in which all the participants must respect each other and choose together, through consensus, the questions and responses. Much thought was devoted to how to lead respectful, broad, and consensual discourse. Particular emphasis was placed on the fact that no-one is prioritized, and that joint attendance is what matters. For example, in order to start to choose the main themes in which the Partnership would be involved, 13 issues were selected by a forum of professional experts in order to ensure that the discussion would have a substantive foundation. These issues were then brought before the plenum, with around 100 participants who were divided among eight tables. Each table included diverse stakeholders, with an emphasis on the representation of the different local councils. Through a process of deliberation and mutual persuasion, the participants at each table selected two issues. These were raised in the forum, and by collating the decisions of all the tables, three issues were chosen: coexistence with nature, agriculture, and humans; sustainable transportation; and sustainable regional economy.

On the whole, shared wisdom is recognized, and each representative – whether of a parent committee or farmers – enjoys the same status as each official. It is important to note that the discussions did not always lead to consensus. Sometimes conflicts emerged, some of which could not be resolved. For example, disagreements emerged concerning the construction of a road crossing Hanadiv Valley: some of the heads of the local authorities opposed the plan, while others were in favor. The issue remained unresolved, despite the deliberative mechanisms. However, the mere fact that the issue was raised, the transparency, and the practice of “putting things on the table” played an important role in promoting joint discussion. More important than solving the conflict is the process by which the participants internalize how to hold better discussions that lead to agreements. A significant part of this process is creating genuine commitment to the process and a willingness to listen to others and to reach outcomes you did not think of beforehand.

**What are the Advantages and Disadvantages of the Work in the Partnership?**

**Advantages:** The main advantage is the creation of common space for discussion and action that raises issues that were not previously advanced on the level of each individual local authority, but for which joint action can provide a convenient platform that in some cases can be relatively easily implemented. Moreover, the budgetary issue sometimes appears to be less of an obstacle and more readily solved when there is joint action. An example is the preparation of a book of regional suppliers, which requires joint action and guidance more than money. Other examples include promoting a cooperative transportation project to the train station, and an initiative to promote integrated pest control in farming areas. The additional advantage is that this type of action has a ripple effect that leads to joint action and discourse on other issues, too. Relations are created between partners, and the discussions extend to issues other than those they came to address. These discussions create circles of impact that form the essence of sustainable partnership.

**Disadvantages:** It was not always easy to reach agreement, and when there are conflicts, these sometimes emerge more sharply. Since the level of tolerance to failure is low, it is not easy to absorb such situations. Nevertheless, it is important to expose these conflicts, even if they remain unresolved. It is important to understand that the discussion in the collaborative governance model is irrelevant if the desire is merely to create legitimacy for a closed outcome. It is impossible to ensure that one particular conclusion will be reached, or to guarantee the expected outcome. Accordingly, if a head of a local authority knows in advance where s/he is heading, the partnership will not always make a contribution. A further difficulty emerges due to the fact that this is not a decision-making body with powers. In this context, on certain issues there is a need to reach agreement and recruit the players that have power in advance, since otherwise implementation will not be possible. In most cases it is possible to recruit these players. Lastly, some of the players may experience a disadvantage since, in certain senses, they lose control and are dependent on the outcomes of the consensual and participatory processes, which take more time.

**What Contribution Does the Partnership Make to Promoting Public Values?**

Several key values can be identified in the Partnership’s actions:

**Sustainability:** Sustainability is a goal, but it is also a value in its own right. Creating a sustainable region demands a joint approach and joint action, and the collaborative governance model helps to realize these. This value requires a reduction in discourse that focuses on personal identity, and its replacement with conceptualizations of shared identity. All these create a foundation for advancing a sustainable region as a value.

**Narrowing gaps:** A further value that is promoted by the Partnership relates to the narrowing of gaps between the residents of the participating local authorities in the region. This is particularly true regarding Jisr a-Zarqa, where the starting point in terms of infrastructures and the lack of resources limits the abi.ity to advance goals and plans. Mobilizing players to action that advances the partners and narrowing gaps are a value that the Partnership seeks to encourage.

**Trust between population groups:** The Partnership process enhances trust between the partners. This is true in the context of the issues that are discussed, but there is also a larger value: It creates a ripple or snowball effect in terms of deliberative capabilities based on the creation of trust.

**Public participation:** A further value that is promoted is civil participation. Citizens and representatives share in the action and the responsibility for public activities – for their own benefit, but no less importantly for the benefit of the region as a whole.

**Savings:** Lastly, the regional Partnership mechanisms allow the more efficient exploitation of community resources for the general good. This is true both because of the advantage of scale that is created by the development of joint infrastructures (for example in garbage removal) and because of the ability to recruit common resources, create large circles of clients, etc.

Lastly, the status of Ramat Hanadiv within this initiative is that of a body that convenes and facilitates the processes. However, Ramat Hanadiv cannot continue to lead the Partnership in the long term, in part in light of the perception of the sustainable character of the model itself. A further participatory process intended to formulate the future operating model of the Partnership found that the most relevant model was the “regional clusters” approach developed by the Interior Ministry. This approach has already been implemented in various regions of Israel. Over the first few months of 2019, discussions began regarding the adoption of the Partnership’s vision and management mechanisms and their inclusion in the Interior Ministry’s cluster activities. In this manner, Ramat Hanadiv is expected to gradually exit from the management of the initiative and to transfer the responsibility for managing the regional processes to the regional cluster. The assumption is that once a strong infrastructure is in place for joint discourse, this may also be channeled in other directions that will maintain a sustainable region in the broadest sense of the idea.

Sources

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Interview with Ms. Naomi Epel, Director of the Regional Sustainability Partnership, 23 January 2018.

1. Ms. Naomi Epel, Director, Regional Sustainability Partnership, Ramat Hanadiv; Dr. Lihi Lahat, member of the team that led the collaborative governance research group at the Center for Social Justice and Democracy in memory of Yaacov Chazan at the Van Leer Institute, and senior lecturer at Sapir Academic College. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Some definitions in the literature regard collaborative governance as a governmental initiative, while others do not require that the initiative be governmental and argue that it may also come from other sectors. The definition formulated by the research group, and underlying most of the chapters in this book, focuses the definition on a governmental initiative. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)