**EVALUATION OF THE LEV HAGALIL PROJECT**

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**Evaluator:**

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**Background**

The Society for the Protection of Nature has lead a unique project, with financing by the American Embassy, the purpose of which is to offer a model for a reduction in planning conflicts in a Jewish-Arab environmental space.

For years, many such conflicts have sprung up and arisen between the development of Arab society settlements, the development of Jewish society settlements and the requirements of protecting nature. These conflicts have increased in recent years in light of accelerated development processes in Israel in general and in settlements of the Arab society in particular. The increased scope of development in Arab society settlements in recent years has even drawn the particular attention of nature and environmental bodies and required unique tools suitable to these unique incidents.

The rationale of the project derives from the fact that these three “vertices” (Arab society, Jewish society, the environment) have needs and interests, but these have frequently found expression in conflicts in planning processes and in the planning institutions. In order to reduce these conflicts and permit thoughtful planning that will allow and ensure a common life for all, a planning forum has been established, the purpose of which is to handle conflicts at the pre-planning stage (but not only that) and to deal with issues of development and preservation in a defined space. In the framework of the forum, a dialog has been taking place between the interested parties while at the same time attempting to build trust, in order to reach a better understanding among the participants of the various requirements of the different interested parties at the planning stages. This forum is necessary and vital for the building of a consensus with regard to the needs of preservation and development, which can lead to better protection of the goals of preservation than a continuation of “business as usual” with conflicts and collisions between the various interested parties at the tables of the statutory committees.

The space in Lev Hagalil-Bikat Sahnin includes a number of both Arab and Jewish settlements as well as open areas containing woods, nature reserves, agricultural areas, streams and ecological corridors. There are many interested parties in the space, all of whose common work in the orderly framework proposed in the project can contribute to planning agreements in the space, its successful and sustained development and ensuring the existence of the open areas for the inhabitants.

After two meetings of the planning forum, it was decided to advance one project relevant to all the interested parties that were members of the forum. The decision was to focus on promoting an offer to an open area fund and the planning of the Nahal Hilazon area, while a spatial project was planned along the stream, which is located next to Jewish and Arab settlements, which will provide a response to the needs of a large number of authorities and will include activity which requires cooperation between them.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship created between the members of the forum and the atmosphere and communications in the framework of the forum. We will examine the various results achieved in the framework of the forum’s activity and the continuing commitment to consensual planning processes.

**Chapter 1: The Research Method**

**A. The Evaluation System**

The research method includes a qualitative evaluation combined with a quantitative evaluation. The data collection of both kinds was done according to a simultaneous sampling; i.e., qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time. In the report, qualitative and quantitative data will be combined beside one another in order to permit a fuller understanding of each component of the evaluation.

**B. Population**

1. **Quantitative evaluation**: this evaluation includes a survey among the members of the forum before the start of the forum’s work (March 2021) and after about two years of activity (between January 2022 and March 2022). Table 1 lists the number of subjects who replied to the questionnaire divided according to time periods:

**Table 1: Number of Subjects who Responded to the Evaluation Questionnaire:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Before the start of activity** | **After about one year of activity** |
| Lev Hagalil Project forum members | 14 | 14 |

Out of the subjects who responded to the questionnaire: 29% belong to local authorities, 64% are members of a governmental/statutory organization and 7% belong to the third sector. Where out of them, 71% are Jews and 29% are Arabs. And the average professional seniority comes to 10 years.

2. **Qualitative evaluation**: The collection of qualitative data was done during the period between March 2021 and December 2021 and included semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 11 forum members and project leaders. Moreover, 3 observations were made during the activity of the forum (the opening meeting, the third meeting and the final meeting[[1]](#footnote-1)).

**Chapter 2: Findings of the Evaluation:**

This section will deal with the perceptions of forum members regarding the creation of trust between the various office-holders and entities regarding the atmosphere and communication in the forum, regarding interpersonal acquaintances, recognition of the needs of different interested parties involved in the process, regarding the various results achieved in the framework of the activity of the forum and with regard to the ongoing commitment to consensual planning processes. In addition, analyses of the interviews will be included within the chapter on the findings.

The questionnaire that was given to the participants before the start of the process was short and included questions referring to the ongoing commitment to the consensual planning process and the creation of trust between the various office holders and entities. Therefore, a comparison between the pre- and the post- will be shown only for these indexes in the relevant chapters.

Below the reports of the respondents are presented regarding the various questions shown to them. For each topic detailed in the document, the data of the various statements are shown.

As can be seen in Addendum No. 1 (The Questionnaire of the Study), the response scale in the questionnaire was from 1 (including “disagree”) to 5 (“agree very strongly”). In the framework of the presentation of the data, the percentages of agreement are reported for “agree strongly” to “agree very strongly”.

**2.1: Creation of Trust between the Various Office Holders and Entities on the Jewish-Arab Axis, the Environment-Development Axis and the Local Authority-Environmental Organization Axis**

The members of the forum were asked to assess the trust and effectiveness of the work between the different office holders on the various axes: Jewish-Arab, environment-development and local authority-environmental organization. In addition, we will present the status of the agreement between the participants regarding the project.

Diagram 1 shows the subject reports with regard to the trust between office holders and the various entities:

**Diagram 1: Subject Reports on the Creation of Trust between the Office Holders and the Various Entities**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Percentage reporting agree “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent”** |  | | | | |
|  | | **The level of trust between the participants is sufficiently high to permit cooperation** | **The level of trust between environmental persons and development persons in the project permits cooperation** | **The level of trust between participants from the Jewish authorities and participants from the Arab authorities permits collaboration** | **How much agreement is there on the planning subjects among the forum members** |

**Before After**

Somewhat confusing data arise from the diagram: on the one hand, the subjects report after the joint activity of the forum on an increase in agreement regarding the fact that the level of trust between environmental persons and development persons permits cooperation as well as an increase in the level of agreement regarding the existence of agreements on planning subjects among the members of the forum, while on the other hand there was a decrease in reports regarding the idea that the level of trust between the participants is high enough to permit cooperation. An attempt to explain this finding can focus on the fact that only after various issues (some sensitive) were viewed in the forum itself, the participants in fact needed the trust issue for the purpose of cooperation. In addition, as the process advanced, understanding flourished in regard to the challenges of cooperation as well as the necessity of cooperation. Together with this process, the gap grew between “what is” and “what is wanted” grew, and there was less satisfaction with partial cooperation.

***Findings which arose from the interviews:***

*The participants of the forum were asked in interviews* ***to describe the status of agreements between participants regarding the project.*** *All the participants agreed that the development of Nahal Hilazon is an important initiative, and there is a desire to promote it and to be partners and promote responsibility over the shared space.*

*During the stage in which the interviews were held, basic agreements were reached regarding the rehabilitation of Nahal Hilazon by using grants received from the Open Areas Fund (an application was submitted[[2]](#footnote-2)). The stream passes through the areas of all the authorities involved in the project. At this stage, a process of listening took place in the framework of which each interested party in the project expressed its desires in the project (it appears that the local authorities are interested in the rehabilitation and draining of the stream for the creation of recreational areas, while the green bodies want to protect nature). The meetings began with a discussion on needs, and later there is hope that large budgets will become available for the project.*

*Already at these stages, it was necessary to reach agreement that everyone involved feels that they are reaching their goals. The ability to create a meeting, not in a planning committee, but rather by means of a meeting around one table of representatives from the local authorities, the Nature and Parks Authority. the Society for the Protection of Nature, the drainage authority, etc., during the process of building a consensus is preliminary. For this matter, the project has grown “from below” out of all the bodies involved (contrary to the various types of committees, where matters are laid down from above). There are preliminary understandings between green bodies and municipal bodies. A mapping was done of needs that permit a suitably adapted project to be built. When there is involvement of a variety of interested parties, the preliminary achievement is the creation of a leadership body consisting of various interested parties: a union of towns, the drainage authority, authority engineers, government bodies and green bodies.*

**2.2 Creation of a General Positive Atmosphere in the Forum and Good Communication between the Participants**

In this subchapter, we will present the reports of subjects regarding communications in the framework of the forum, both in the meetings themselves and outside the meetings. In addition, we will present the subject reports regarding the general atmosphere in the framework of the forum.

**Diagram 2: Subject Reports on Communications in the Framework of the Forum**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Percentage reporting “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent”** | |  | | | | | |
|  |  | | **Shared learning and thinking about problems** | **Conversations between interested parties according to need even outside the team meetings** | **Attempts to impose opinions by the participants** | **Lack of sharing of information/ concealment of information** | **Cooperation in an attempt to solve problems** |

It appears from Diagram 2 that most of the subjects report “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” regarding the existence of cooperation in the forum in an attempt to solve problems (80%) and shared learning and thinking on problems and challenges (75%). Almost half the subjects report great to very great agreement that conversations took place between interested parties according to need even outside the meetings of the team. Very few of the subjects (8%) reported agreement on the concealing of information and not one reported agreement regarding attempts to impose opinions by the participants.

**Diagram 3: Reports of Subjects Regarding the Atmosphere in the Framework of the Forum**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Percentage reporting “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent”** |  | | | | |
|  | | **Trust** | **Mutual respect** | **Struggle between conflicting interests** | **Listening and an attempt to give a response to what is important to each one** |

As can be seen from Diagram 3, it appears that all the subjects report “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” regarding the relationships in the forum being relationships of mutual respect. In addition, there were high rates among the subjects reporting “agree to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” that in the framework of the forum there was listening and an attempt to give a response to what was important to each one. When the subjects were asked in general on the trust between all the members in the forum, most (58%) expressed agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” regarding the trust prevailing among the members. At the same time, only about one-fifth of the subjects reported agreement regarding the existence among the members of the forum of a struggle between conflicting interests.

**2.3: An Increase in the Sense among the Participants in the Project that their Voice and Interests Were Heard during the Planning Process as Well as Recognition of the Interests of other Interested Parties**

In this section, we will present subject reports regarding their sense that their interests were being heard in the framework of the planning process of the project and that they learned to recognize the interests of additional interested parties in the forum.

**Diagram 4: Subject Reports on the Feeling that their Interests Were Presented in the Planning Processes, and that They Learned to Recognize the Interests of other Organizations**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Percentage reporting “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent”** |  | | | | |
|  | | **The agreements reached in the project were also good for the organization I represent** | **I feel that following the project, other organizations better understand and respect what is important to my organization** | **I feel that I undersant and respect what is important to other particpants in the project** | **During the work in the project, there was good conversation / understanding between those representing environmental considerations and those representing development considerations** |

It appears from Diagram 4 that a very high rate (92%) of subjects report agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” regarding agreements reached in the project being good for their organization as well, that they understand and respect what is important to the other participants in the project and that during the work, there was understanding between those representing environmental considerations and those representing development considerations. About three-quarters of the subjects reported agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” regarding the fact that following the project, other organizations participating in the forum understand and respect what is important to their organization.

***Findings which arose from the interviews:***

Those interviewed were asked a number of questions examining their positions regarding the various interests of each organization and the degree of acceptance of these interests by other organizations:

*First, those interviewed were asked* ***whether they feel that there has been a change in the way in which environmental protection issues were being taken into account among the interested parties in Arab society.*** *Most of those interviewed reported that there was “a positive movement” in the manner in which the environmental protection issues were taken into account among interested parties in Arab society. First, there is a basic understanding that the Nahal Hilazon Project requires a balancing of interests between development and green bodies. During the meetings, an engineer from one of the Arab authorities referred to aspects of energy and environmental protection. In addition, in the framework of the discussions in the Arab authorities, there was no objection to the prevention of development beyond the Sahnin bypass road.*

*Interviewees from the local Arab authorities reported that at present there is a deep awareness of environmental protection topics: vandalism has declined, foot paths are being established with benches and trash receptacles, and in sum, generally things are being protected.*

*Another interviewee said that since the manner of operation of the governmental ministries is proactive, without a broad regional view, there is a problem in the implementation of environmental protection in the Arab authorities, and the Arab authorities on their part put a checkmark on environmental protection actions in specific projects, but the processes are not in depth, while at the same time, the Arab authorities have many existential challenges, and environmental issues are not at the forefront of their minds. In any case, it appears that at this stage of the discussions, they have not gone into the heart of the matter regarding planning issues.*

*Interviewees from Arab society who were asked* ***whether they had a feeling that their voices and interests were being heard in the planning processes,*** *they claimed that the establishment did not yet fundamentally understand their needs, since they do not fundamentally comprehend the Arab mentality, the critical nature of the land issue and the limited ability to come and ask for land for public needs.*

*Later, the interviewees were asked* ***whether they feel that there has been a change in the way in which issues of development and construction are being taken into account among the green bodies.*** *Again, as in the previous question, there is a fundamental understanding that the space is complex and the interests of everyone must be taken into account. At this stage, they have not yet gone to the heart of the matter, and there are general agreements only. When they delve into details, it will be possible to clarify whether in fact there has been a change and whether the green bodies are taking issues of development and construction into account. There are interviewees from green organizations who said in during recent years, there has been understanding of the shortage of places of residence, and therefore they are required to balance between development and the preservation of environmental values, and they have been conducting a dialog which takes this matter into account.*

*One of those interviewed pointed out that in order for the green bodies to take various issues into account, an in-depth political step is required which will include thinking with partners in local government, environmental and governmental organizations and dealing with human and land issues as well as the promotion of environmental subjects and open-area administration within the local Arab authorities, between Arab authorities and between Arab and Jewish authorities. The feeling at present is that this space is being neglected, and the matters end at the blue line within the construction areas, while Arab authorities are less free to deal in the these spheres, since they are dealing with local problems.*

**2.4: Various Affects of Participation in the Project on Members of the Forum**

This section will deal with subject reports on the various and varied affects of participation in the project.

**Diagram 5: Subject Reports on the Affects of Participation in the Project**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Percentage reporting “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent”** |  | | | | | | | | |
|  | | **Better acquaintance with participants from other organizations** | **Identification of common interests of members in the project** | **Better under-standing of the needs of other organizations** | **Increase of willingness to cooperate in general (not necessarily in the planning processes)** | **A change in my positions in the project in which I was involved as a result of the dialog in this forum** | **Creation of additional joint ventures between the organizations participating in the project** | **Increased trust between participants in the project** | **Increase in the ability to conduct a dialog and reach good solutions instead of argument and confrontation** | |

It appears from Diagram 5 that all the subjects report agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” that participation in the project led to an identification of common interests among members of the project. High numbers of the respondents also reported that participation in the project led to a good acquaintance with participants in other organizations, better understanding of the needs of the other organizations, an increased openness to cooperation between organizations in general, an increase in trust between the participants in the project and an increase in the ability to conduct a dialog and reach good solutions instead of argument and confrontation. Lower numbers of respondents (54%) reported agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” regarding participation in the project leading to the creation of additional joint ventures among the organizations participating in the project and regarding a change occurring in their positions as a result of the dialog in the forum (46%).

***Findings which arose from the interviews:***

*The people interviewed were asked* ***whether in their opinion the project raised the awareness of the participants in the process regarding planning issues and dilemmas in Arab society.*** *It appears from the interviews that although this project in Nahal Hilazon did not really deal with areas of responsibility of each council in the framework of the project, the Arab authorities involved in the project definitely shared less in various planning issues and dilemmas than Arab society deals with. For example, one of the leaders of the Arab authorities shared that he had received a budget from the Open Areas Fund to create a foot path with sitting areas. Since there had been vandalism (that he had anticipated), he expected an additional round of the budget for repair and improvement, but he did not receive it. He noted an educational process being undergone by the residents in order to put an end to the removal of tables and the throwing of trash on the path. Schools in the Arab authorities have been cleaning foot paths since the awareness of leisure and vacation has increased.*

*Interviewees from different bodies in the project indicated that they had deepened their interest in matters of private lands and an inability to expropriate them in favor of a public project, issues unique to Arab society. For example, in one of the meetings, a person from the Nature and Parks Authority suggested a solution for a path that would make it possible to avoid widening the route in order to avoid expropriating private lands.*

**2.4: Ongoing Commitment to Consensual Planning Processes:**

This section will deal with subject reports on their ongoing commitment to consensual planning processes. In addition, we will present the suggestions of forum members for future cooperation between them. We will examine whether the subjects think that in the framework of the project, goals were achieved that no single one of them could have achieved alone. Finally we will examine the perceptions of the subjects regarding the communication processes and consensus building. We will examine their positions toward the Society for the Protection of Nature as a result of the project and we will present the challenges the shared process raised.

**Diagram 6: Subject Reports Regarding Ongoing Commitment to Consensual Planning Processes**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Percentage reporting agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent”** |  | | | | |
|  | | **Interested parties from neighboring authorities need to reach agreement in planning processes regarding neighboring areas** | **Cooperation between various bodies (local authorities, environmental organizations, government ministries, etc.) in planning processes creates added value** | **There is a commitment to cooperation on the part of all the organizations participating in the project** | **It is important to establish ongoing joint planning** | |



Diagram 6 shows the level of ongoing commitment to consensual planning processes of the respondents before and after their participation in the forum. As appears from the diagram, the level of commitment to these processes can be seen to increase following participation in the project: the respondents report an increase in the rate of agreement with the idea that interested parties from neighboring authorities must reach agreement in planning processes regarding neighboring areas, and therefore it is important to establish an ongoing joint planning forum (from 93% to 100%). In addition, a significant increase appears in agreement regarding the commitment to cooperation on the part of all the organizations participating in the project (from 71% to 91%).

In addition, it appears from the diagram that from the outset (as well as at the end of the project), all the participants in the project report agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” that cooperation between various bodies in planning processes creates added value.

***Findings arising from the interviews:***

*In response to the question* ***do the subjects think that it is worth establishing an ongoing joint planning forum among all the interested parties participating in the project,*** *they all replied “certainly”. In response to the question what recommendations do the interviewees have so that such a forum should succeed, the following answers were given:*

* *There are two groups of interested parties in the framework of the project: one, the local government and the governmental ministries - they have a common language and the ability to work together. The second group of interested parties is the town association, the JNF, the Society for the Protection of Nature, the Drainage Authority and the Nature and Parks Authority - they have no common language. A joint forum must assist in the building of a common language among all of them as well as the ability to lead joint measures.*
* *It is necessary to appoint someone to lead the forum: a leading entity that can build the mechanisms of activity of the forum and will coordinate the meetings and organize action teams according to tasks. It is necessary to make a decision whether the various partners will also invest money in the framework of the activity. It is desirable that the entity leading the forum try to be neutral while leading. For example, the current project, in which the interests of the Society for the Protection of Nature, which are protecting open areas, do not receive a high priority in the process.*
* *The forum must be directed to practical action around defined projects that will permit success stories to come true. In the framework of the forum, there must be a strategic annual work plan from which work plans are derived.*
* *It is desirable that at the start of the work of the forum, programs are chosen which most of the participants want to see realized and regarding which there is a low level of disagreement among the participants. For example, it is desirable not to choose projects dealing with municipal boundaries between authorities.*
* *To invest in the creation of trust between members of the forum; an engagement in the building of relationships among the participants at the personal level in order to permit cooperation and the building of abilities among the participants.*
* *To reduce participation in the forum so that it is more professional, with relevant persons only.*

Those interviewed report that the participants are starting to recognize the forum and its importance, and the recognition is leading to cooperation around other processes taking place in the space between the bodies. For example, it was decided to conduct a public participation process in another project which includes the Drainage Authority, one of the local authorities and the Society for the Protection of Nature. The cooperation flourished out of the recognition that formed around the project at Nahal Hilazon. **Below are suggestions raised for future cooperation among the forum members:**

* *Nahal Hilazon is a project with few conflicts. It is a good basis for the promotion of cooperation in more complex matters, issues in which the limitations are determined due to human beings (and not due to the path of a river).*
* *Different issues for which interested parties will develop a common language, such as: development of the woods south of Dir Hana, the Sahnin bypass road, a water well on the north-west edge of Sahnin, etc.*
* *Cooperation around educational and environmental quality projects.*
* *A guardians-of-the-river project which has entered Arab society.*
* *Projects dealing with youth at risk.*
* *Development of a joint industrial area.*
* *Development of parks in areas shared by all the authorities.*
* *Development of hiking trails.*
* *Participation of the authorities around the administration of open areas and their supervision.*
* *The holding of community events and joint festivals.*
* *Ecological ventures shared by a number of bodies.*

**Diagram 7: Subject Reports on the Ability to Reach Goals in a Project that No One Individually Could Reach Alone**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Percentage reporting approval “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent”** | **To what extent can the project reach goals that no one of the participants could have reached alone**  **Before After** |

A somewhat confusing fact appears from Diagram 7: before the participation in the project, all the respondents reported agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” that in the framework of the project, the participants could reach goals that they could no one of them could have reached alone, while at the end of the project, “only” 75% reported agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” in this regard. An attempt to explain this finding can focus on the fact that in the end, in the framework of the forum one project was chosen regarding which conflict at this stage of the project was not broad, and in total, the agreements from the beginning were broad among the participants.

***Findings that arose from the interviews:***

*In the framework of the interviews, the subjects were asked* ***what were the advantages of the communication process and consensus building in the planning processes.*** *Below are their responses:*

* *By means of the communication process which places representatives of a range of interested parties around one table, it is possible to build a success story around the project at Nahal Hilazon - this kind of success story can teach additional authorities to cooperate in planning processes and to have hope that this is possible.*
* *The process allows the sharing and hearing of a variety of opinions. It permits the participants to develop a systemic spatial vision that goes beyond their narrow needs.*
* *The process creates trust between the parties.*
* *The process mitigates conflicts.*
* *The involvement of a range of interested parties in the project may reduce objections in the planning committees. The dialog is from the top to the bottom as well as from the bottom to the top, since governmental bodies as well as participants from the authorities sit together.*
* *The process makes it possible to discover roadblocks at an early stage and to give a planning response acceptable to all.*
* *The process permits a reduction of regulation. The planning processes are exhausting and are generally accompanied by many conflicts in the planning processes in Arab society. Building a consensus provides an alternate path to promoting plans, without a statutory committee which generally produces a large number of roadblocks. The alternative of consensus building with those interested parties sitting in the committees is free of bureaucracy and reduces pressures existing in the committees.*
* *The process also assists development bodies in understanding the desires and needs of the participants. This creates new partners in the protection of nature. In the framework of the building of in-depth processes, the local authorities become a partner in the nature protection processes.*

*The subjects were also asked* ***how they viewed the Society for the Protection of Nature in the framework of the project.*** *Most of those interviewed see the Society for the Protection of Nature as very professional and serious in leading the project, as having the ability to create the links between the professional bodies and the different communities. Most mentioned their (positive) surprise at the consensus-building process by an external body whose interest in the framework of the project is not distinctly the interests of the authorities. There were some who said that in the past they viewed the Society for the Protection of Nature as predatory, and they discovered in the framework of the project that it is a body wishing to go deeply into the planning issues in Arab society. One of the interviewees said that she hopes that the change in attitude of the Society for the Protection of Nature will also lead to a change in the attitude of additional organizations.*

*Representatives of the Society for the Protection of Nature in the framework of the forum were asked* ***whether the Society for the Protection of Nature has developed organizational knowhow that will aid it in consensus building in future planning processes.*** *It appears from their answers that at this stage the groundwork for continuation has apparently been laid. A process has been set in motion that will bear fruit if it has continuity and maintenance in the following stages. Systematic organizational knowhow has not yet been developed.*

*In response to the question* ***which challenges were raised by the joint process,*** *the following challenges were mentioned:*

* *The first challenge was to decide on a joint project of all the interested parties. Some of the participants wanted to work on roads, some on parks and some on the Dir Hana pool. In the end, the leaders of the project succeeded in focusing everyone on the project at Nahal Hilazon, a project submitted for financing by the Open Areas Fund. During the evaluation of the project, approval for the financing was received.*
* *The large challenge around the project is the balance between development and preservation of the natural environment. There is a list of decisions which must be made revolving around the axis between development and preservation. For example, if lighting is abandoned, the level of safety declines, while the preservation of the natural environment increases, since the harm to the flora and fauna declines.*
* *An additional challenge which arose is not connected directly to the project, but rather the period during which the project was conducted. The period was that of a pandemic; some of the face-to-face meetings were problematic. There were quite a few sick or quarantined participants. The ability to dream and execute such a project during these times was not at all clear.*
* *Coordination between all the participants was not simple. There were people who were very busy, involved in many other projects. As a result, the work was not always continuous, which made it difficult to establish the stability of the forum and its working methods.*
* *Occasionally there was a gap between the organization participating in the process and its specific representative around the table. For example, one of the heads of the council was in favor of the project. But the representative who was sent on behalf of the council did not agree to sign the project support document. It was possible to bypass the representative, but in the end, after massive persuasion, the representative gave his support.*
* *One of the challenges was to decide when to broach sensitive issues during the process, to ensure that the participants were ripe to listen.*

***Finally, the subjects were asked to give*** *feedback on the manner in which the project had been executed (framing of the goals, choosing of the projects, the place each interested party received, the process in the work groups, the manner in which the work in the work groups was summarized, instructions, etc.). Below are the comments raised:*

* *Beyond the meetings which were held, more work between the participants is needed. It is necessary to maintain a permanent forum with updates, emails which share the status, WhatsApp groups, etc. It is necessary to maintain the contacts between the participants in the project.*
* *Ran’s guidance was professional and lead to a respectable and honest dialog.*
* *Listening to the needs of the participants was notable. Also the fact that in the end one project was chosen and not a number of projects as had been planned in advance.*
* *Bian was in the area and involved in everything and succeeded in harnessing many organizations around the same table. This was not at all self-evident.*
* *The sharing of success stories from similar projects was needed. This added wind to the sails of the project in Nahal Hilazon.*
* *It was possible to create a link to additional projects existing in the space, such as the industrial area in Teradion. Moreover an update was needed regarding things which took place beyond the marked blue line.*

**Chapter 3: Discussion and Recommendations:**

From the findings described above, it is desirable to discuss the following topics in particular:

* Undoubtedly the establishment of a planning forum with the aim of dealing with conflicts at the pre-planning stage and including all the interested parties is a precedent-setting and welcome move in the view of all the participants. The ability to sit around one table and conduct a dialog, identifying common interests while building a structured consensus brought about a number of positive effects: the creation of trust between office-holders and a generally positive atmosphere as well as good communications between the participants and good awareness between them, an understanding of the needs of various organizations, an increase in a willingness to cooperate and the ability to conduct a dialog and reach good solutions in place of argument and confrontation.
* It appears from the study that the participants in the forum attribute many advantages to the negotiation process and consensus building in the planning processes. The process allows the participants: to develop a systematic spatial vision beyond their narrow needs, to create trust between the parties, the constructive management of conflicts, a reduction in the number of objections in planning committees, a revealing of roadblocks at an early stage, making it possible to provide a planning response as well as a reduction of regulation in the framework of building in-depth processes. The local authorities become a partner in the protection of nature.
* Admittedly, the project has not yet matured to the point of detailed planning processes in relation to the rehabilitation of Nahal Hilazon, but it certainly appears from the report that among the interested parties in Arab society, there has been a change in which environmental protection issues are being taken into account. The participants from Arab society referred to aspects of energy and environmental protection, presented their difficulties and the attempts to promote a leisure culture in the public space. An update in light of the evaluation of the project: during the extension period of the project, a positive reply was received from the Open Areas Fund for the financing of the Nahal Hilazon planning project, and at the time the project concluded, the Drainage Authority and the Beit Netufa Towns Association were preparing to issue the execution project.
* Continuing the previous point, other organizations also deepened their understanding regarding planning issues and dilemmas in Arab society. For example, an understanding regarding an issue unique to Arab culture - the significant difficulty of expropriating private land for a public project.
* Undoubtedly the Society for the Protection of Nature changed its image among the participants in the project. They were pleased to discover the delving into planning issues in Arab society and there was an increased hope that the changed attitude of the Society for the Protection of Nature would also lead to a change of attitude among additional organizations.
* The participants in the forum showed a very strong ongoing commitment to consensual planning processes, and at the end of the project, all the participants expressed agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” regarding the establishment of a joint ongoing planning forum among all the interested parties participating in the project.
* It is necessary to be attentive to the recommendations examined with regard to the establishment of a joint ongoing planning forum: the appointment of a body to lead the forum and be responsible for the building of organized action mechanisms, the forum’s occupation with practical action around defined projects, at the first stage to choose projects regarding which there is a high level of consensus, dealing in the framework of the forum with the building of ties and the development of trust, a reduction of participation in the forum to the minimum number needed.
* There must also be a strengthening of the ties among the participants of the forum between formal meetings by means of emailed updates, WhatsApp groups, etc. It appears that some of the participants in the forum lacked a strengthening of the ties between them.
* We can hope that in the wake of the Lev Hagalil Project, the Society for the Protection of Nature has laid the groundwork of organizational knowhow that will also aid in communications and the building of a consensus in additional planning processes in which the Society for the Protection of Nature is involved.

**Chapter 4: An Update of the Assessment Report in Light of the Assessment of the Project**

When the assessment report was submitted for the approval of the client (the Society for the Protection of Nature), confirmation was received from the American Embassy that it would be possible to continue the execution of the project for an additional six months. The research program was constructed and executed within the original time frame for the execution of the project, and therefore there was a difficulty in expanding the execution of the assessment for the extension period of the project. In order to bridge this gap, it was decided that when the project was terminated, interviews would be conducted with Ran Kuttner, the consensus-building consultant who had accompanied the project in order to extract insights from this period.

We will first show the milestones during the extension period of the project:

1. Receipt of approval for the financing of the Nahal Hilazon Planning Project by the Open Areas Fund. The financing application was filed by the Beit Netufa Towns Association for Environmental Quality, which is a member of the forum, and the application was prepared with the support of all the members of the forum.
2. The conducting of a closing meeting for the project, which was an opening shot for the execution of the Nahal Hilazon Planning Project.

Insights from the project extension period (arising from the interview with Dr. Ran Kuttner, consensus-building consultant, who accompanied the project):

* All the participants in the project, and particularly the office holders from the authorities, strove for concrete, rather than abstract, progress in the project.
* In the framework of the project, preliminary trust was created as well as an understanding of the needs and constraints of all the different participants. Finally, there is an ability to include different and varied needs and to compromise accordingly.
* A positive spirit was created, providing a strong tailwind to continue the work - we may learn from what was done during the extension period that the work was progressing more smoothly and more quickly. There is reason to hope that this will continue.
* An ability to create a new spatial institution that is sustainable and does not yet exist. The effort to build the forum as an ongoing forum must continue, rather than an ad hoc forum for the rehabilitation of the stream.
* The extension period was also utilized for transferring the baton to the Drainage Authority and the town association as comprehensive bodies, i.e. bodies responsible for maintenance of the integrative work. It remains to be seen to what extent these bodies will commit to this complex role and will know how to follow up on various inclusive tasks that go beyond the immediate tasks to promote the stream. It appears that the town association is more committed, while the Drainage Authority sees itself as an executive body which executes and is not as available for comprehensive work. It is worth continuing to work with both bodies and advise them so that the comprehensive tasks will in fact continue.

Quantitative Questionnaire for Work Team Members:

Dear Participant,

Recently we have been conducting a study for an evaluation of the Lev Hagalil Planning Forum Project.

The study examines the patterns of action of the work teams, the interactions among them and the effectiveness of the process. I am contacting you as a member of the work team in order to learn about your perceptions regarding the project.

Despite the personal appeal, the findings of the study are anonymous, and the information delivered by you will remain confidential and will be used only for the purposes of the study, without identifying your name.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Dr. Anat Avrahami Marom,

Project Assessor

To what extent to you agree with the following statements?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | To a very small extent | To a small extent | Moder-ately | To a great extent | To a very great extent |
| 1 | Interested parties from neighboring authorities must reach agreement in planning processes connected to neighboring areas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2 | Cooperation between different bodies (local authorities, environmental organizations, government ministries, etc.) in planning processes creates added value | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3 | There is a commitment to joint work on the part of all the organizations participating in the project | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4 | It is important that a joint ongoing planning forum be created | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

5. To what extent has the project achieved goals that none of the participants could have achieved by itself?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| To a very small extent | To a small extent | Moder-ately | To a great extent | To a very great extent |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | To a very small extent | To a small extent | Moder-ately | To a great extent | To a very great extent |
| 6 | I feel that the project helped me to rely on participants from other organizations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7 | The level of trust between the participants is sufficiently high to permit shared work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8 | The level of trust between the environmental people and the development people in the project permitted shared work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9 | The level of trust between participants from the Jewish authorities and the participants from the Arab authorities permitted shared work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10 | To what extent is there now agreement in planning subjects between members of this forum in your opinion? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

To what extent did the following exist in the process:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | To a very small extent | To a small extent | Moder-ately | To a great extent | To a very great extent |
| 11 | Shared learning and thinking on problems and challenges | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12 | Conversations between interested parties according to need even outside the team meetings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13 | Attempts to impose opinions on the part of the participants | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14 | Non-sharing of information/hiding of information | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15 | Cooperation in an attempt to solve problems | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

In general, to what extent were the relations between the participants in the process relations of:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | To a very small extent | To a small extent | Moder-ately | To a great extent | To a very great extent |
| 16 | Trust | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17 | Mutual respect | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18 | Conflict between opposing interests | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19 | Listening and an attempt to give a response to what was important to each one | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | To a very small extent | To a small extent | Moder-ately | To a great extent | To a very great extent |
| 20 | The agreements formed in the project are also good for the organization I represent | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21 | I feel that following the project, other organizations better understand and respect what is important to my organization | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22 | I feel that I understand and respect what is important to other participants in the project | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23 | During the work in the project, there was good discussion/understanding between those representing environmental considerations and those representing development considerations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

To what extent did participation in the project lead to:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | To a very small extent | To a small extent | Moder-ately | To a great extent | To a very great extent |
| 24 | Better acquaintance with participants from other organizations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25 | Identification of common interests of members in the project | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26 | Better understanding of the needs of other organizations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27 | Increased willingness for cooperation between organizations in general (not necessarily in planning processes) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28 | A change occurred in my positions in the project in which I was involved as a result of the discussions in this forum | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29 | Creation of additional joint ventures between the organizations that participated in the project | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30 | Increased trust between participants in the project | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31 | Increased ability to conduct a dialog and reach good solutions instead of arguing and confrontation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Summary:

32. In your opinion, what are the central achievements of the project so far (regarding progress in the project and in the ability to work cooperatively?

33. What new insights do you have following the project in regard to working cooperatively in planning processes?

34. What were the difficulties in the work of the team in the project?

35. What in your opinion is needed in order to institute a joint ongoing planning forum in which you or another representative of your organization will participate permanently and continuously?

Demographic questionnaire:

36. Which organization do you belong to?

A. A local authority

B. A governmental/statutory organization

C. Third sector

73. What nationality do you belong to? A. Arab/Palestinian B. Jewish

38. What is your seniority in your position? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Addendum No. 1: Study Questionnaire for Members of the Steering Committee and the Work Teams**

1. Please note: the Lev Hagalil Project was meant to conclude in March 2022, but just prior to the date of conclusion, approval was received to extend its implementation by an additional six months. The final meeting shown here refers to the last meeting prior to receipt of the approval of the extension. Afterward, due to the approval of the extension, additional meetings were held. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As of the original date of termination of the project, an application was filed, but no positive/negative response was received. During the extension period for the execution of the project, a positive response was received for financing from the Open Areas Fund. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)