**EVALUATION OF THE LEV HAGALIL PROJECT**

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**Evaluator:**

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**Background**

The Society for the Protection of Nature (SPNI) has led a unique project, funded by the American Embassy, aimed at offering a model for reducing planning conflicts in a Jewish-Arab environmental space.

For years, many such conflicts between the development of new community settlements for the Arab and Jewish sectors and the requirements of protecting nature have arisen. These conflicts have increased in recent years in light of accelerated development processes in Israel in general and in the Arab sector in particular. The increased scope of development in Arab localities during this period calls for special attention from nature and environmental bodies in designing suitable tools for addressing these unique cases.

The project’s rationale derives from the fact that these three “vertices” (the Arab, Jewish, and environmental sectors) each have unique needs and interests, but these have frequently been expressed in conflicts in planning processes and institutions. To reduce these conflicts and facilitate thoughtful planning that will allow and ensure coexistence among all the actors, a planning forum has been established to address conflicts at the pre-planning stage (among other stages) and to deal with issues of development and preservation in a defined space. A dialogue has been taking place between the stakeholders within the framework of the forum to build trust for the sake of achieving a better understanding among the participants of the diverse needs of the different stakeholders at the planning stages, resolving conflicts, and building collaborations that will facilitate cooperation in the space of all stakeholders in the planning stages. This forum is necessary and vital for building a consensus regarding meeting the often conflicting needs of preservation and development, which can better meet the goals of protecting the environment than would a continuation of “business as usual,” with conflicts and collisions between the various stakeholders at committee meetings.

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 stakeholders in this space, whose joint work in the orderly framework of the project can contribute to planning agreements in the space, to its successful and sustained development, and to ensuring open areas for the residents.

After two meetings of the planning forum, it was decided to advance one project relevant to all the stakeholders participating in the forum. The decision was to focus on promoting the Open Areas Fund and on developing the Nahal Hilazon area while a regional project was being planned along this stream, located in close proximity to Jewish and Arab communities. The project is intended to provide a response to the needs of a large number of authorities and will include activities requiring cooperation between them.

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

**Section 1: Research Method**

**A. The Evaluation Method**

The research method combines a qualitative and a quantitative evaluation. The data collection of both kinds carried out 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 juxtaposed in order to permit a fuller understanding of each component of the evaluation.

**B. Participants**

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 approximately one year of activity (between January 2022 and March 2022). Table 1 lists the number of participants who replied to the questionnaire according to time periods:

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

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

Of the respondents who answered the questionnaire, 29% are associated with local authorities, 64% with governmental / statutory organizations, and 7% with the third sector. Among the latter, 71% are Jews and 29% are Arabs. In addition, the average professional seniority is 10 years.

2. **Qualitative evaluation**: Qualitative data was collected 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 course of the forum’s activities (the opening meeting, the third meeting and the final meeting[[1]](#footnote-1)).

**Section 2: Evaluation Findings**

This section will deal with the perceptions of forum members regarding the creation of trust between the various officials and parties, the atmosphere and communication in the forum, interpersonal acquaintances, recognition of the needs of different stakeholders involved in the process, the various results achieved in the framework of the forum’s activities, and the ongoing commitment to consensual planning processes. In addition, the findings section will include analyses of the interviews.

The questionnaire given to respondents 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 officials and parties. Therefore, a comparison between the pre- and the post-forum results will be shown only for these indexes in the relevant sections.

Below are presented the replies of the respondents regarding the various questions they received along with data about the statements shown according to the topics in the questionnaire. As can be seen in the Appendix (The Questionnaire of the Study), the response scale in the questionnaire ranged from 1 (“strongly 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 Officials and Parties on the Jewish-Arab, Environment-Development, and the Local Authorities-Environmental Organizations Axes**

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

Diagram 1 shows the respondents’ reports regarding trust between officials and the various parties:

**Diagram 1: Respondents’ Reports on the Creation of Trust between Officials and the Various Parties**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **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 and development members in the project enables 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**

The data in the figure is somewhat confusing. On the one hand, following the forum’s joint activity, respondents reported an increase in agreement with respect to the statement that the level of trust between environmental and development members enables cooperation, along with an increase in the level of agreement regarding the existence of agreements on planning subjects among forum members. On the other hand, there was a decline in responses supporting the idea that the level of trust between the participants is high enough to permit cooperation. This anomaly can perhaps be explained by noting that only after various issues (some sensitive) were raised in the forum itself did participants in fact need the trust element for the purpose of cooperation. In addition, as the process advanced, understanding grew regarding the challenges and 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 from the interviews***

*In interviews, respondents were asked* ***to describe the status of agreements between participants regarding the project.*** *All the respondents agreed that the development of Nahal Hilazon is an important initiative, and that there is a desire to promote it, to be partners, and to 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 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 hearing process took place in the framework of which each stakeholder in the project expressed its goals for the project (it appears that the local authorities are interested in draining and rehabilitating the stream to create recreational areas, while the green organizations want to preserve nature). The meetings began with a discussion on needs, followed by expressions of hope that large budgets would become available for the project.*

*Already at this stage, it was necessary to reach a consensus so that everyone involved could feel that they were achieving their goals. The ability to have a meeting not in a planning committee, but rather through representatives from the local authorities, the Nature and Parks Authority, SPNI, the drainage authority, and others sitting together during the process of building a consensus is unprecedented. Indeed, this project has grown “from the ground up” among all the bodies involved (in contrast to the various types of committees, where determinations are made in a “top-down” manner), resulting in preliminary understandings between green organizations and municipal bodies. A mapping of needs was carried out to enable the design of a suitably adapted project. When a variety of stakeholders are involved, the preliminary achievement is the creation of a leadership body consisting of various stakeholders: a union of towns, the drainage authority, authority engineers, government bodies, and green organizations.*

**2.2 Creating an Overall Positive Atmosphere in the Forum and Good Communication Between Participants**

This subsection presents respondents’ answers regarding communications in the forum’s framework, both within and outside its meetings. In addition, we will present the respondents’ answers regarding the overall atmosphere in the forum.

**Diagram 2: Respondents’ Answers Regarding Communication** **in the Forum’s Framework**

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

Diagram 2 shows that most of the respondents’ answered “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” regarding the question of the existence of cooperation in the forum in striving to solve problems (80%) and of shared learning and thinking on problems and challenges (75%). Almost half the respondents reported agreement from a great extent to very great extent with the question regarding whether conversations took place between stakeholders as needed even outside team meetings. Very few respondents (8%) reported agreement on the question regarding concealment of information and not one reported agreement on the question regarding participants’ attempts to impose opinions.

**Diagram 3: Participants’ Responses Regarding the Atmosphere within 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 respondents answered “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” to the question regarding the relationships in the forum being ones of mutual respect. In addition, there were high rates among the respondents reporting “agree to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” with the question regarding whether there was listening and an attempt to give a response to what was important to each one in the framework of the forum. When asked about the issue of trust in general, most (58%) responded that they agreed “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” with the statement that trust prevailed among the members. At the same time, only about one-fifth of the respondents reported agreeing with the questions regarding the existence of a struggle between conflicting interests among forum members.

**2.3: An Increase in Respondents’ Perception that their Voice and Interests were Recognized along with the Interests of Other Stakeholders**

In this section, we will present respondents’ answers regarding their perception that their interests were being heard in the framework of the project’s planning process and whether they had learned to recognize the interests of other stakeholders.

**Diagram 4: Respondents’ Answers** **Regarding their Perceptions 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 undersand and respect what is important to other particpants in the project** | **During the work in the project, there was good dialogue / understanding between those representing environmental considerations and those representing development considerations** |

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

***Findings that emerged 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, interviewees were asked* ***whether they felt that there had been a change in the way in which environmental protection issues were being taken into account among the stakeholders in the Arab sector.*** *Most of respondents reported that there was “a positive movement” in the manner in which environmental protection issues were taken into account among stakeholders in the Arab sector. First, there was a basic understanding that the Nahal Hilazon Project requires a balancing of interests between development and green organizations. 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 there is now a deep awareness of environmental preservation topics: vandalism has declined, foot paths with benches and trash receptacles are being established, and in general, environmental interests are being protected.*

*Another interviewee said that since the governmental ministries’ manner of operation is project based, without a broad regional view, there is a problem implementing environmental protection measures in the Arab authorities. The Arab authorities “put a checkmark” on environmental protection actions in specific projects, but they do not engage in in-depth processes. Facing many existential challenges, the Arab sector cannot always have environmental issues at the top of their priorities. In any event, it appears that at this stage of the discussions, these authorities have not gone into the heart of the matter regarding planning issues.*

*Interviewees from the Arab sector who were asked* ***whether they had a feeling that their voices and interests were being heard in the planning processes*** *responded that the official authorities 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 Arab sector’s limited ability to request land for public needs.*

*Later, the respondents were asked* ***whether they felt that there had been a change in the way in which issues of development and construction were being taken into account among the green organizations.*** *Again, as with the previous question, respondents reported feeling that there was a fundamental understanding that the space is complex and that the interests of everyone must be taken into account. At this stage, there is a perception that the green organizations have not yet gone to the heart of the matter, and that there are general agreements only. Only when participants later delve more deeply into details, will it be possible to clarify whether in fact there has been a change and whether the green organizations are taking issues of development and construction into account. Some participants from green organizations reported that in recent years, there has been more understanding of the shortage of residential stock. Consequently, they must now balance between the values of development and of environmental preservation, and they have been conducting a dialogue that takes this issue into account.*

*One of those interviewed pointed out that in order for the green organizations to consider various issues, an in-depth political process involving brainstorming among partners in local government and environmental and national governmental organizations is needed regarding human and land issues. These issues include promoting environmental matters as well as determining how Arab and Jewish authorities should administer open areas within the local Arab 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 operate in the these areas, since they are dealing with more immediate local problems.*

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

This section examines respondents’ reports on the various and varied effects of participation in the project.

**Diagram 5: Respondents’ Reports on the Effects 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 project members** | **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 dialogue 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 engage in dialogue and reach satisfactory solutions instead of argument and confrontation** | |

Diagram 5 shows that all the respondents reported agreeing “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” that participation in the project had led to an identification of common interests among members of the project. High numbers of the respondents also reported that participation in the project had led to improved acquaintance with participants in other organizations, a 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 dialogue and reach satisfactory solutions instead of argument and confrontation. Lower numbers of respondents (54%) reported agreeing “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” that participation in the project had led 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 dialogue in the forum (46%).

***Findings emerging from the interviews:***

*Interviewees were asked* ***whether in their opinion the project had raised participants’ awareness regarding planning issues and dilemmas in the Arab sector.*** *It appears from the interviews that although at this stage, the Nahal Hilazon project had not yet really dealt with the areas of responsibility of each council in the framework of the project, the Arab authorities involved had openly shared the various planning issues and dilemmas faced by the Arab sector. 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 walking path with sitting areas. Since there had been vandalism (which he had anticipated), he had expected an additional round of budgeting for repairs and improvement, but he did not receive it. He noted that residents were undergoing an educational process 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 following an increase in awareness of recreation and vacations.*

*Interviewees from different bodies in the project indicated that they had deepened their interest in issues involving private property and the difficulty of expropriating it for a public project, issues unique to the Arab sector. For example, in one of the meetings, a representative 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.*

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

This section will review the respondents’ answers regarding 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 participants think that goals were achieved in the framework of the project that no single one of them could have achieved alone as well as theirs perceptions of the communication processes and consensus building. Finally, we will examine their positions toward SPNI as a result of the project and we will present the challenges the shared process raised.

**Diagram 6: Respondents’ Answers Regarding Ongoing Commitment to Consensual Planning Processes**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Percentage reporting agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent”** |  | | | | |
|  | | **Stakeholders 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. The level of commitment to these processes can be seen increasing following participation in the project, with respondents reporting an increase in the rate of agreement with the ideas that stakeholders from neighboring authorities must reach agreement in planning processes regarding neighboring areas, and that it is important to establish an ongoing joint planning forum (from 93% to 100%). In addition, a significant increase appears in agreement with statements 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 agreeing “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” with the idea that cooperation between various bodies in planning processes creates added value.

***Findings emerging from the interviews:***

*In response to the question* ***do the respondents think that it is worthwhile to establish an ongoing joint planning forum among all the stakeholders participating in the project,*** *they all replied “certainly.” The following include some of the responses to the question about what recommendations the participants offer for ensuring the success of such a forum:*

* *There are two groups of stakeholders 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 stakeholders is the town association, the JNF,*  *SPNI, the Drainage Authority and the Nature and Parks Authority – they have no common language. A joint forum should be able to assist in building a common language among all of them as well as the ability to lead joint measures.*
* *A leader for the forum needs to be appointed: a leading actor that can build the mechanisms of the forum’s activity and that will coordinate meetings and organize action teams according to tasks. It is necessary to decide whether the various partners will also invest money in the framework of the activity. Also, it is advisable that the entity leading the forum try to be neutral while leading. For example, during the current project, the interests of* *SPNI, which involve preserving open areas, did 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 materialize. In the framework of the forum, there must be a strategic annual work plan from which practical work plans are derived.*
* *It is advisable that at the start of the forum’s work, programs are chosen that 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 advisable not to choose projects dealing with municipal boundaries between authorities.*
* *Invest in building trust between members of the forum. There should be engagement in building relationships among the participants at the personal level in order to permit cooperation and the growth of abilities among the participants.*
* *Reduce participation in the forum so that it is more professional, with relevant parties only.*

Those interviewed report that the partners are starting to recognize the forum and its importance, and this 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 SPNI. The cooperation grew 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 promoting cooperation in more complex matters, issues in which the limitations are human (and not due to the path of a river).*
* *Different issues for which stakeholders will develop a common language, include the development of the woods south of Dir Hana, the Sahnin bypass road, a water well on the northwest edge of Sahnin, and others.*
* *Cooperation around educational and environmental quality projects.*
* *A guardians-of-the-river project that has also penetrated the Arab sector.*
* *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.*
* *Cooperation of various authorities regarding the management and supervision of open areas.*
* *Holding community events and joint festivals.*
* *Ecological ventures in which a number of bodies collaborate.*

**Diagram 7: Respondents’ Answers about Being Able to Achieve Goals within the Project that Could Not have been Achieved Individually**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Percentage reporting approval “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent”** | **To what extent can the project achieve goals that participants could not have achieved individually?**  **Before After** |

A somewhat confusing fact appears from Diagram 7. Before participating 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 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. This finding may be explained by the fact that in the 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 emerged from the interviews:***

*In the framework of the interviews, respondents were asked* ***what the advantages were of the communication process and consensus building in the planning processes.*** *Some of their responses can be found below:*

* *Through the communication process which places representatives of a range of stakeholders 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 instill optimism that this is possible.*
* *The process allows the sharing and hearing of a variety of opinions. It permits the participants to develop a broad systemic vision that transcends their narrow needs.*
* *The process creates trust between the parties.*
* *The process mitigates conflicts.*
* *The involvement of a range of stakeholders in the project may reduce objections in the planning committees. The dialogue is both top-down and bottom-up, since governmental bodies sit together with participants from the different authorities.*
* *The process makes it possible to discover obstacles at an early stage and to find a planning response acceptable to all parties.*
* *The process permits a reduction of regulation. The planning processes are exhausting and, in the Arab sector, are generally accompanied by many conflicts. Building a consensus provides an alternate path for promoting plans, without that need for a statutory committee, which generally faces a large number of obstacles. The alternative of consensus building with those stakeholders sitting in the committees is bureaucracy-free and reduces the pressures found in the committees.*
* *The process also assists development bodies understand the desires and needs of the participants. This creates new partners in nature preservation, as the local authorities become a partner in nature preservation processes in the framework of building in-depth processes,.*

*The respondents were also asked* ***how they viewed SPNI in the framework of the project.*** *Most of those interviewed see SPNI as very professional and serious in leading the project, and as having the ability to create the connections 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 had viewed SPNI as predatory, and in the framework of the project, they discovered that it is a body seeking to delve deeper into the Arab sector’s planning issues. One of the interviewees said that she hopes that the change in attitude of SPNI will also lead to a change in the attitude of other organizations.*

*Representatives of SPNI in the framework of the forum were asked* ***whether SPNI has developed organizational know-how 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 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 know-how 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 stakeholders. 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. Financing approval was received upon the project’s extension.*
* *The big challenge around the project is balancing between developing and preserving the natural environment. There is a series of decisions that must be made revolving around the development and preservation axis. For example, if you give up lighting, 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 to the period of the coronavirus pandemic during which the project was conducted, making some of the face-to-face meetings problematic. There were quite a few sick or quarantined participants. The ability to envision and execute such a project during this period was not at all clear.*
* *Coordination between all the participants was not simple. There were people who were very busy and 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 ready to listen.*

***Finally, the respondents 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 stakeholder received, the process in the work groups, the manner in which the work in the work groups was summarized, instructions, etc.). The following are some of the comments:*

* *Beyond the meetings which were held, more work between the participants was needed. It is necessary to maintain a permanent forum with updates, emails sharing the status of the work, WhatsApp groups, and more. Maintaining the contacts between the participants in the project is also essential.*
* *Ran’s guidance was professional and lead to a respectable and honest dialogue.*
* *It was evident that the needs of the participants were listened to and that, ultimately, one project was chosen and not a number of projects as had been planned in advance.*
* *Bian was in the field and involved in everything and succeeded in harnessing many organizations around the same table. This was not at all self-evident.*
* *It would have been helpful to share success stories from similar projects; this would have added wind to the sails of the Nahal Hilazon project.*
* *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 occurrences beyond the marked blue line.*

**Section 3: Discussion and Recommendations**

Based on the findings described above, it is worthwhile 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 stakeholdersis a precedent-setting and welcome move in the view of all the participants. The ability to sit around one table and conduct a dialogue, identifying common interests while building a structured consensus produced a number of positive effects: the creation of trust between officials and a generally positive atmosphere as well as good communications between the participants and positive relationships between them, an understanding of the needs of various organizations, an increase in a willingness to cooperate and the ability to conduct a dialogue 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 broad systematic vision transcending their narrow needs; create trust between the parties; constructively manage conflicts; reduce the number of objections in planning committees; and uncover obstacles at an early stage, making it possible to provide a planning response as well as a reduction of regulation. The local authorities become a partner in the preservation of nature in the framework of building in-depth processes.
* 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 stakeholders in the Arab sector, there has been a change whereby environmental protection issues are being taken into account. The participants from the Arab sector referred to aspects of energy and environmental protection, and presented their difficulties and the attempts to promote a recreation 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 Union of Beit Netufa Municipalities were preparing to begin the project’s implementation phase.
* Continuing the previous point, other organizations also deepened their understanding regarding planning issues and dilemmas in the Arab sector. One example is an understanding regarding an issue unique to the Arab sector – the significant difficulty of expropriating private land for a public project.
* Undoubtedly the image of SPNI changed among the respondents during the project, who were favorably impressed by SPNI’s commitment to delving into planning issues in the Arab sector. There was also increased optimism that the changed attitude of SPNI would also lead to a change of attitude among additional organizations.
* The respondents showed a very strong ongoing commitment to consensual planning processes, and at the end of the project, all expressed agreement “to a great extent” to “to a very great extent” regarding the establishment of a joint ongoing planning forum among all the stakeholders participating in the project.
* It is vital to be attentive to the recommendations examined regarding the establishment of a joint ongoing planning forum: appointing a body to lead the forum and to be responsible for building organized action mechanisms; becoming involved with practical action around defined projects; choosing projects around which there is a high level of consensus during the first stage; dealing with building ties and developing trust in the framework of the forum; and reducing the number of participants in the forum to the minimum number needed.
* Ties among the participants of the forum must be strengthened between formal meetings by means of emailed updates, WhatsApp groups, and more. It appears that some of the participants in the forum suffered from a lack of maintenance of the ties between them.
* We can hope that in the wake of the Lev Hagalil Project, SPNI has laid the groundwork of organizational know-how that will also aid in communications and the building of a consensus in additional planning processes in which SPNI is involved.

**Section 4: An Update of the Evaluation Report in Light of the Extension of the Project**

When the evaluation report was submitted for the approval of the client (SPNI), confirmation was received from the American Embassy that it would be possible to continue executing 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 evaluation 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 present 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 Union of the Beit Netufa Towns , which is a member of the forum, and the application was prepared with the support of all the members of the forum.
2. Holding a closing plenary meeting for the project, which was an opening shot for the execution of the Nahal Hilazon Planning Project.

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

* All the participants in the project, and particularly the officials 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 was an ability to include different and varied needs and to compromise accordingly.
* A positive spirit was created, providing a strong momentum for continuing the work. From what was accomplished during the extension period, we can learn that the work progressed more smoothly and more quickly. There is good cause to believe that this will continue.
* An ability to create a new spatial institution that is sustainable 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 responsibility to the Drainage Authority and to 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 of furthering the stream. It appears that the town association is more committed, while the Drainage Authority sees itself as an executive body that implements and is less available for comprehensive work. It is worthwhile to continue to work with both bodies and advise them to ensure that the comprehensive tasks will in fact continue.

**Appendix: Study Questionnaire for Members of the Steering Committee and the Work Teams**

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 | Stakeholders 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 stakeholders according as needed 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/concealment 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 dialogue/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 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 dialogue 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. To what nationality do you belong?

A. Arab/Palestinian

B. Jewish

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

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. Subsequently, 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 had been filed, but no positive/negative response had been 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)