

BUSINESS PLAN

**Biodiversity Conservation and Community Development
in Al-Makhrour Valley in Bethlehem, Palestine**

Funded by Darwin Initiative-UK

**Implemented by Bethlehem University - Palestine
Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability/Palestine
Museum of Natural History (BU-PIBS/PMNH)**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The project

The project "Biodiversity Conservation and Community Development in Al-Makhrour Valley in Bethlehem, Palestine" intends to conserve biodiversity in Al-Makhrour Valley of Bethlehem (Palestine) benefitting the local communities through sustainable use of ecosystem services, including (a) promoting agriculture/green practices, (b) developing ecotourism, and (c) reducing human impact via environmental awareness and education programs while promoting sustainable lifestyles. This business plan is an outcome of the tourism component of the project. The plan will attempt to focus on understanding the resources and capacities, available and potential, in the targeted area. It will attempt to bring forward the potential synergies and networking that could advance the area as a unique ecotourism destination based on the values of community-based tourism. Consequently, the plan will evaluate the market segments that might be interested in such a product on one hand, and all the necessary preparations that need to be put in place in order to create an impressionable experience on the other. Hence, increasing the chances for the local community to advance their incomes and employment opportunities as well as enhancing the general livelihood of their towns and villages.

2. Management Conservation Plan of MOTA

It is worthwhile investigating the management conservation plan and study that was prepared under the supervision of the ministry of tourism and antiquities for Al-Makhrour area and the village of Battir in order to protect it as a world cultural heritage site. The study aimed at improving the sustainable management of the site as a world heritage property (WHP), assisting the socio-economic status of the local

community, protecting biodiversity and improving the interpretation of the site for the visitors. The study contains a thorough account of the resources of Al-Makhrour and suggests a value driven methodology for its development.

3. Synergy driven vs value driven approach

This business plan will take the conservation plan forward from a value driven approach to a synergy driven approach. This takes place first by identifying the core values of the various villages that are linked to Al-Makhrour area and that are targeted in this initiative. Then, in order to identify and seek synergies that resonate well with the suggested values, a strategy to transfer ownership to the local community in each of the participating towns and villages should be formulated and a networking to advance community-based village tourism among the targeted villages should be assumed. Indeed, tourism need to be first identified as a competitive economic driver of each of the participating towns and it also need to be accepted and welcomed by the local community. Tourism is able to both provide a platform for cultural heritage protection and to link with other sectors in these towns like agriculture, commerce and local cultural and heritage production in order to engage farmers and local producer groups as well as other stakeholders in the towns' development based on tourism as the main economic driver.

In this respect, it is important to mention that there are a number of other projects and initiatives that have a similar as well as strategic approach to realize community-based tourism development in Palestine. It is recommended for this project to connect with these actions because of the potential added value that can be acquired from the underlying synergies and the likely partnerships. To mention but a few:

- *The Rozana Association governance project – This project attempts to improve tourism development in Palestine by creating local tourism boards or destination management organizations. These organizations are intended to carry the responsibility to manage their resources and capacities in order to enhance their specific identities and foster their competitive advantage.*
- *Masar Ibrahim community development initiatives supported by the World Bank, AFD and other French partners. Masar Ibrahim is considered the spine of community-based tourism development in Palestine. A lot can be learned from this link.*
- *Bethlehem University’s ICP project. Again, the university and its partners provide another depth to understand the local capacities and their utilization to bring about and protect the various elements of the diverse Palestinian cultural heritage.*

INVESTIGATION

Upon an agreement with the management of the BCCD project and the Museum of nature in Palestine, a number of meetings and workshops were organized with representative leaders from the different participating towns and villages. The initial meetings were intended to examine the awareness of the local leadership of their resources and capacities as well as their genuine interest in pursuing a tourism-based development and transformation of their towns or villages.

1. Individual meetings with each participating village

Meetings were held with the following villages consecutively

- a. Beit Jala: The meeting included a number of stakeholders from the municipality, the civil society, farmers and businesses from Beit Jala as well as Al-Makhrour area. The municipality is very eager to realize tourism development in Beit Jala. Investors in Al-Makhrour area are also very keen to enhance their potential. The meeting attempted to show the attendees the various resources that exist in Beit Jala that could enhance its attractiveness in order to develop the town's potential as a stand-alone destination. It turns out that Beit Jala is quite rich with resources. However, its value as a destination is limited and requires a strategy to improve its positioning in this respect. This strategy should include a component for AlMahroure area that is able to engage the other towns that also share this area and that have an invested interest in it.*
- b. Battir – This village is quite active and engaged in various tourism initiatives. They have a distinguished leadership in this respect that is also quite gender aware. In fact many of*

the local leaders in community-based tourism development are women and each one of them is involved in various tourism initiatives. The local leadership is quite aware of their resources and capacities but lack the income to sustain their management structures and needs. Their workshop didn't focus on their specific resources but rather on the tourism strategies they need to build, in order to maintain Battir on the Palestinian ecotourism map, enhance its offer and improve its specific brand and differentiated identity.

Beit Jala	Battir	Husan	
			

- c. *Husan – This village has several natural resources and noteworthy private investments in tourism. They see themselves as the capital of the western countryside. Most of the stakeholders, however, have little awareness of the importance of tourism and urban planning. Their local cultural heritage leadership is involved in other initiatives and their town needs to improve its identity as a tourism destination. The first meeting was initially a discussion of their potential resources and their search for identity and positioning.*
- d. *AlWalaja – This village is overwhelmed by the Israeli wall and by the various Israeli practices that seem to suffocate the town. The discussion with the village council and representatives from the women association focused on what makes this town unique despite the fact that it seems to miss some of the basic resources that exist in the other villages at the first instance.*

2. Two-day workshop – participations of public, private and civil society

The two-day workshop brought together the stakeholders from the different towns and villages in the targeted area. A number of representatives from the ministry of tourism, the ministry of environment and the ministry of local government were present. Some private sector representatives also attended the workshop.

The purpose of the workshop was to investigate the knowledge of the various villages of their specific identities, competencies and core value (considered as the soul of the village) as well as of the other participating village partners. The workshop also discussed who will manage these resources and in what capacity.



3. Preliminary SWOT based on first perceptions

This SWOT was presented to the attendees on the first day of the workshop in order to explain how perceptions were generated and how it is perceived by an outsider at the first glance.

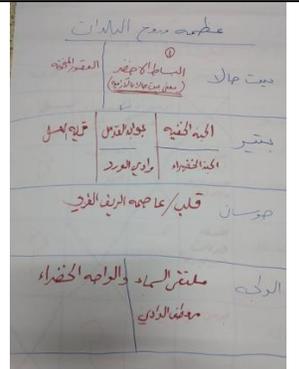
town	strenths	weaknesses	challenges	opportunities
Beit Jala	historic sites	organizational	wall	diaspora
Beit Jala	historic area	image - pass by	area c	community tourism

Beit Jala	social / culture	differentiation	seasonality	municipal support
Beit Jala	business	strategic plans		
Beit Jala	environmental			
Beit Jala	makhrou			
Beit Jala	infrastructure			
Beit Jala	welcoming			
Beit Jala	mobilized			
Beit Jala	agricultural			
Battir	historic sites	organizational	wall	community tourism
Battir	historic area	strategic plans	area c	municipal support
Battir	social / culture		seasonality	
Battir	environmental		unesco	
Battir	makhrou			
Battir	welcoming			
Battir	mobilized			
Battir	agricultural			
Husan	historic area	organizational	area c	community tourism
Husan	social / culture	image - pass by	seasonality	municipal support
Husan	environmental	differentiation		
Husan	business	strategic plans		
Husan	makhrou	urban awareness		
Husan	agricultural			
Walajeh	environmental	organizational	wall	community tourism
Walajeh	makhrou	image - political	area c	municipal support
Walajeh	welcoming	differentiation	seasonality	
Walajeh		strategic plans		

4. Results of the village core competency exercise.

Part of the workshop discussed above was for all participants to explore the core value or soul of their villages and to come up with a “two word” description of their villages. The importance of this exercise is to create the foundation for each towns urban and tourism development strategy. Once the local leadership is aware of its core value, then it is in a position to study and develop a focused and

purposeful strategy. The photo below shows the results of the exercise:

 <p>عظمه مع المراتل بيت جالا بيتير حوسان الدوحة</p>	Beit Jala	The Sculpted Palaces The green carpet
	Battir	The Hidden Paradise, the green paradise, Alquds Gate, The rose valley, the honey village
	Husan	The capital of the western country side
	AlWalaja	The vista point of Heaven, The valleys corner, the green oasis

5. Results of the destination management organization establishment exercise:

This exercise required the participants to build their own destination management organizations. The purpose is for the local leadership in each village to understand the professional underlying requirements and the amount of efforts and investments needed to establish such an organization and who will its members be. In this exercise each town decided to establish its own destination management organization. This could change later when, in reality, they discover they need each other's resources. Each DMO is named, membership is discussed, partnerships and coordination with the local village council as well as with the various ministries and the museum of nature are analyzed. Additionally, a main policy is suggested to be advocated for with the government to ensure sustained development.

Community-based tourism principles and interpretation methods were also discussed. These underlying principles will be discussed more fully in the strategy section below.

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

1. Area profile

Wadi Al-Makhrour is a valley located about 7 km south of the old city of Alquds and about 6 km northeast of the old city of Bethlehem. It is connected to other valley systems stretching from AlWalaja and Cremisan valleys in the South of Alquds, taking in the water of Al-Makhrour itself (between Beit Jala, AlKhader, and AlWalaja) to drain it into the Battir, Husan and Nahhalin valleys respectively. Hence, Al-Makhrour is an important part of the system that refills the water aquifer of Bethlehem District area and its fresh water springs. Al-Makhrour is the last remaining biodiversity-rich area in Alquds and Bethlehem areas.

Wadi *sensu strictu* is 2.6 Km² of natural areas interspersed with agriculture and rich flora and fauna (Amr et al., 2016) also with an equivalent buffer zone of an area more than 5 km² was initially selected for study. It is also one of the rich biodiversity areas according to the government and one of 13 important bird areas per Birdlife International in Palestine. It is also rich in cultural heritage, including old Roman tombs, wells along with old Palestinian watchtowers. However, no environmental management plans or conservation programs have been implemented by any organization in the area. As the valley is located in Area C it suffers from diverse pressures: (1) habitat loss and land fragmentation; causing biodiversity loss, (2) challenging livelihood conditions as a result of the lack of economic motivations, no subsidies for farming practices, and inadequate markets for extra production and others. It is an area estimated to have rich biodiversity and was designated by the Palestinian authority as a biodiversity hotspot. The Bethlehem Governorate between Hebron and Alquds has only one remaining rich

habitat based on our preliminary studies: that is Al-Makhrour Wadi and Hill System.

2. The Valley and Battir as a UNESCO world heritage site

Battir in 2014 was submitted for UNESCO under the title "Palestine, lands of Olives and Vines, Cultural Landscape of southern Alquds" and immediately included on the List of World Heritage in Danger, after it was acknowledged that the landscape was threatened by emerging and intensifying sociocultural and geopolitical transformations with the potential to cause irreversible damage to the site's authenticity and integrity. The World Heritage Site stretches from Al-Makhrour Valley to Battir village to Al-Ayoun Valley in Husan. It includes traditional footpaths and various human settlements that developed around the many springs that dot the slopes of the mountains. This has contributed to the creation of a unique cultural landscape composed of dry-stone supported agricultural terraces, agricultural watchtowers (manatir or qusoor), olive oil presses, ancient irrigation pools collecting the water flowing from the springs, ancient irrigation canals and the remains of human settlements (khirab). This heritage was conserved by the local villagers (Battir, Husan, and Beit Jala) for centuries.

As a part of its commitment, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities prepared a draft management and conservation plan for the WHS and buffer areas. The final management plan aims to expand on the existing MOTA (2018) draft management plan for this UNESCO site but also to improve self-sustainability in order to conserve the outstanding universal value (OUV) for this area.

3. Description of resources

A number of studies have listed the resources as well as the attractiveness of Al-Makhrour Valley and of the villages and towns that

surround it. In this section some of these values are presented to shed light on the tourism potential that this area possesses and how it impacts the nearby communities.

Category	Description	Soul and competency value	Villages sharing same values
Historic	1. valley has been inhabited for centuries as evident in the ancient agricultural terraces and continuous human existence 2. The towns around possess tremendous historic value		All villages
Archeological	There are a number of archeological sites in the valley and in the villages.		
Architectural Heritage	Some villages still maintain their historic areas (old towns) and other architectural heritage monuments like Sufi Shrines, Churches, agricultural watch towers, olive oil presses	Carved palaces (Beit Jala)	Beit Jala, Battir, Husan
Cultural Heritage	This includes food, dress, storytelling, handcrafts as well as the specific traditional water system of Battir		All villages
Agricultural	The area is a produce basket very famous for eggplants as well as various fruit bearing trees including olives, peaches, figs and almonds		All Villages
Environment and wild life	has diverse flora and fauna including a number of indigenous plants, insects, mammals etc.	The rose valley (battir) The Honey Village (battir) The home of Birds (Battir) The Valleys corner (walajeh) The Green Oasis (walajeh)	area
Aesthetic	The contours of the area, its panoramas, vista points and foliage are of specific beauty and attractiveness	The Green Carpet (Beit Jala) Hidden Paradise (Battir) The green paradise (battir) The Heavens Tryst (walajeh)	Walajeh, Beit Jala, Battir
Political	as well as parts of the other towns	Alquds Gate (Battir)	Walajeh, area

	and villages belong to areas C and the Israeli wall is threatening its contiguity, heritage and existence		
Socio cultural	There is a lot of pride and belonging in area. Local leadership is quite diligent and sincere.	The capital of the Western Country Side (Husan)	All villages

- The first column - Category - in this table lists the categories that can be incorporated in different tourism programs such as alternative pilgrimage, cultural heritage, UNESCO heritage sites, agriculture, harvests, fact finding, solidarity, adventures and ecotourism tours.
- The Second column - Description - sheds light on related resources linked to the categories in the first column. These resources can be packaged in various ways to produce impressionable experiences for the discerning visitors.

Attractions chosen by the workshop participants for each village	How villages believe they can benefit from each other

- The Third Column - Soul and competency value - The titles listed in this column are taken from the 2 days workshop. It was one of the outcomes of the various exercises but its importance lies in how the participants perceived the competencies of their villages or towns. In the column they are listed next to the

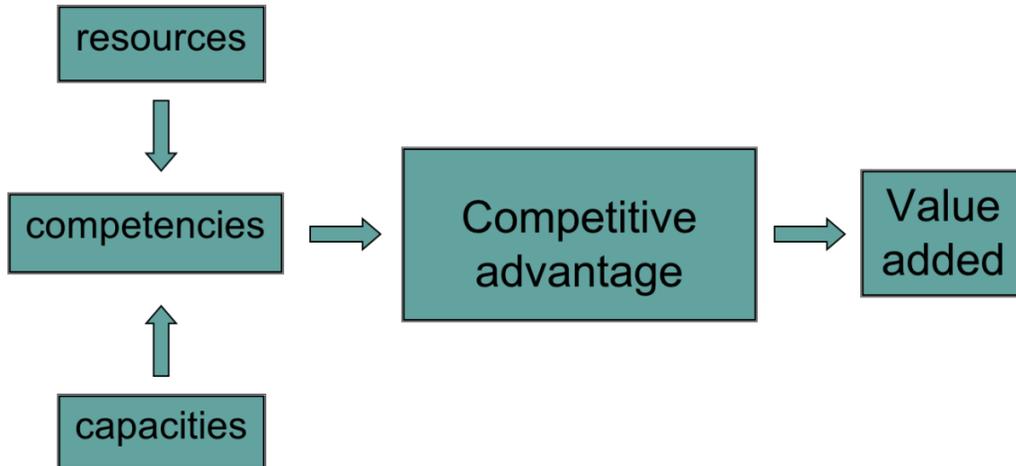
values they represent best. However, any urban planning or economic development strategy must interpret these competencies across all the values so that future interventions will contribute to the protection of the essential resources of each village. Hence if a village has beautiful vista points, for example, urban planning should prevent any obstruction of these points if tourism is going to continue to be a main driving force of the village's economy.

- d. The fourth column – villages sharing same values – this column lists the villages that more obviously share the related values. This listing is not absolute but it intends to shed light on the obvious values in each village or town.

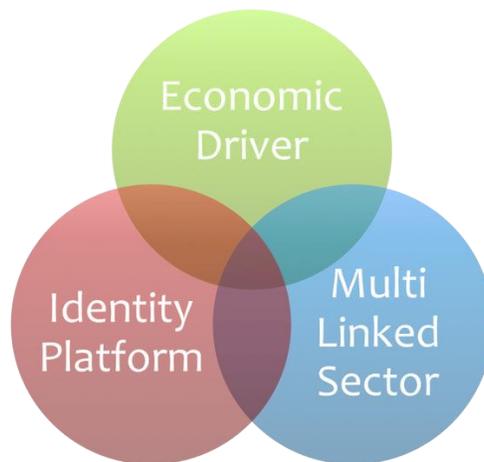
The second table lists the results of two additional exercises. The first shows the various attractions that exist in each village accumulated from all villages' participants separately. The second shows how each village participants believe they can benefit from the other villages in their program development. The role and contribution of AlWalaja is not seen as considerable for most villages except Beit Jala where the connection is limited to Al-Makhrour trail.

4. A Competitive Model

Once tourism is chosen as a developmental tool for a certain village, town, city or a cluster of communities, it is important to think of improving the local competitiveness as a strategy for development. Competitiveness is the productive capacity of a nation, a region or a community in effectively managing their human, financial and natural resources. The following diagram explains the process of creating the desired added value, which once established can contribute to the differentiation and distinction of the desired experience, product or service.



5. *Tourism as an economic driver and a vehicle for resilience*



Any development that includes a village, a cluster of villages, a town, a city or a community must first identify the economic driver that possesses the competitiveness to advance and position this community forward. A lot of community development plans do not take this into consideration and revert to searching for ways to realize a horizontal development equally, influencing the various sectors. A competitive driver, once identified needs to be interpreted across all the developmental plans and strategized in order to effectively manage the available and potential resources and capacities. The better the

competencies are managed, the better the results are. Management and planning are key elements in this respect.

Part of the competitiveness is to design activities, programs and products that utilize the specific identities and the specific cultural heritage of each locality. In this respect, tourism becomes a platform for cultural heritage preservation as well as exchange with the world. Tourism becomes a vehicle or a platform to protect identity and hence to promote resilience of a local community based on its potential competitiveness.

Tourism is also such a sector that has multi links with various other sectors. Its value chain is diverse and multilinked. In the case of this project, tourism is obviously linked to cultural heritage production, food, dress, storytelling and handcrafts. It is, however, also linked to the religious, IT, commercial and the agricultural sector. Farms can be integrated in an agro-tourism or ecotourism products. Farmers cooperatives can open restaurants and gift shops to improve their income and to foster the efficient management of their activity, to mention but a few examples.

6. Networking among the participating villages

The targeted villages: Beit Jala, Battir, AlWalaja and Husan in addition to Alkhader share parts of Al-Makhrour valley, hence it is only logical that they find a formula to cooperate and work together to develop programs and activities that utilize every village or town competency. The project ideally was hoping that the targeted areas would unite and form one single organization to bring them all on the same table to manage as well as their inner-city resources and capacities. The participants preferred to establish their own tourism organizations and then find a formula to cooperate and work together. This might end up a strategic choice and it may at one point revert to create a bilateral or

total unity among the neighboring communities which could help them reduce expenses while duplicating resources.

It is worth mentioning at this point that any local tourism organization, once established, is invited to become a member of the Network of the Experiential Palestinian Tourism Organizations (nepto.ps) which, in turn is a member of the advisory board for the minister of tourism and antiquities. NEPTO can provide experience and technical assistance as well as a platform to disseminate their activities and products to targeted audiences. NEPTO is essentially an advocacy group for community-based tourism organizations, hence the voice of the new organizations will have a better and a more systematic approach to be heard. This is essentially a strategic platform for the newly established tourism organizations to grow and become more known locally and internationally.

7. Environmental balances and protection need.

Humans must learn to live in equilibrium with their environment and to discover ways to develop their products without disturbing the ecosystem that sustains many other forms of life. Tourism can be a great contributor to this equilibrium provided it is managed properly. Tourism can enhance organic farming by offsetting expenses with related tourism programs, investments and activities. Tourism can utilize bird or wild life watching stations to enjoy and protect the ecosystems of these species. Tourism can also integrate various harvest activities, festivals and produce bazars. The environment is also a unique platform to understand cultural heritage and the underlying metaphors that exist in the scriptures. These metaphors are much more likely interpreted according to the local culture rather than with a foreign culture. Responsible ecotourism or community-based tourism endeavors can enhance the protection of the environment while sustaining and improving the livelihoods of people.

8. A Note on Capacities

Each one of the targeted towns has a number of specific capacities that are active in various areas that are directly or indirectly linked to the tourism development and are a part of its value chain. These capacities include certain private sector businesses and investments, various civil society organizations that are specialized in culture, heritage, special needs, agriculture, environment, fair trade, festivals, architectural heritage and others. Capacities also include local professional and specialized leadership, scholarly skills as well as open minded and dynamic municipalities and village councils.

9. Business Description

All the elements introduced in this section describe the tourism resources, the tourism environment and the tourism value chain. It is necessary to adopt a value chain approach in order to align all of these elements and then convert them into efficient and attractive offers and packages. The tourism value chain should not be limited to direct tourism services only. The multisectoral dimension of tourism should be well managed in order to utilize the various private, public and civil society actors that can be linked to tourism as a main driver for most of the targeted villages.

The tourism business development needs both an investment in the tourism industry as well as in the tourism development. The industry includes hotels, restaurants, guides, transport, shops and other related businesses. The developmental track, which is often neglected in Palestine, includes investments in an enabled environment, destination branding, cultural heritage preservation, infrastructure and attractiveness interventions.

The business of ecotourism that includes community empowerment must consider the balances between both tracks, essentially for sustainability purposes, identity emphasis and preservation of the resources and capacities that add value to the tourism sector locally, nationally and internationally.

Tourism related businesses should focus on impressionable experiences that foster innovation and creativity. They should employ the various differentiated aspects of each town including the core value (soul) of each town or village. Interactive and engaging experiences should be enhanced and could include, food production, trekking, storytelling, homestays, resorts and meetings and conferences to mention but a few.

STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

1. Tourism Nine Points Development Strategy

Indulging in tourism development requires a strategy of nine points. Indeed, it should be understood that a strategy should first follow the identification of tourism as a competitive economic driver of a certain predefined geographic area that could include one town or village or several. Identifying tourism as an economic driver first requires a research-based endeavor to identify the various resources and capacities, a serious local and professional leadership and an attractive differentiation.



The attached slide shows these nine points:

- a. *Tourism Governance: There are various forms of how a certain destination might decide to govern itself. In either case, this governance must be a professional and a specialized tourism endeavor. A destination management organization is a key aspect of any successful tourism development strategy. It is vital to foster the sustainability of the sector, to promote and enhance the local identity, to build the local offer and to market the destination.*
- b. *Civil Society: the role of the civil society in Palestine holds a specific importance because the political situation*

threatens the public sector and scares the private sector. The civil society holds the keys for sustainability. Hence, a sound tourism development strategy should advocate a PPCP approach (public private civil society partnership). Moreover, the role of the civil society is key in integrating elements of cultural heritage and local identity into the tourism offer.

- c. Tourism sites: a survey of all potential tourism attractions and historic sites must be done. A matrix of the intervention needs to protect these sites must be developed and updated.*
- d. Cultural Industries: These can include anything that can be incorporated in a tourism offer. They could include food, dress, handcrafts, storytelling, music and entertainment.*
- e. Hospitality: The essence of any tourism development is the humanistic dimension and the way a certain destination understands its guests. However, hospitality is more than just a welcome. It is an art. It is the art of accommodation, the art of gastronomy and the art of guiding...*
- f. Crafts and souvenirs: When people visit a certain destination, they are likely to take with them a gift or a souvenir to remind them of their trip and of their experience. It is important that these gifts and souvenirs be local and reflect the local attractions, activities and productions.*
- g. Logistics and tour operation: This will include all the necessary services to complete and make sure a certain experience is well organized and smooth. What is worth mentioning here is for a tour operation to be successful, the local product must receive demand. It is the responsibility of the destination management organization or alternatively the local tourism board to contract proper*

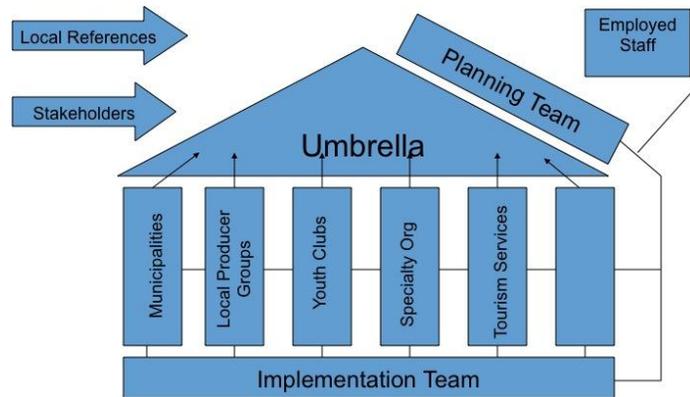
public relations companies or consultants to manage the demand for the local offer.

- h. Media, Marketing and new markets: There are various platforms to enhance the promotion and marketing of the local offer. What should not be undermined is the importance of a research-based approach to identify and profile the potential markets and the proper promotional platforms and strategies. Marketing remains an innovation-based endeavor and the options are limitless.*
- i. Training and research: capacity building, data collection, training needs, preparation of the future generations and other needs and balances must be well researched and the local community respectively sensitized.*

2. Working with the local the local community.

Transferring ownership of the local resources and capacities to the local community is an essential step to implement a community-based strategy. To achieve this, it is important to organize and prepare the local communities' capacity and readiness to receive guests. In Palestine the local community involvement is also a factor of safety, hospitality and cultural exchange, which further contributes to its importance due to the imposing political situation.

However, working with the community is not a straight forward thing, it must be respectful and indulging, it must be an approach that is keen not to bypass the local population but rather empower it and set a sustainable foundation for it to grow. As explained earlier, the first step in a tourism strategy is to establish the proper governance to ensure its sustainability.



The above Figure describes this approach. All stakeholders in a certain defined geographic area need to jointly establish this governance. The figure assumes a representative, gender based, ppcp based (public, private civil society partnership) structure. This structure also provides a foundation for a business model that is capable of selling community products and offers to individuals, tour operators and other discerning buyers. This means that the local itinerary is priced and sold as a package including all food, accommodation and guiding services considering the budgets needed to sustain the required standards and maintenance of the underlying infrastructure and hospitality.

- a. *The structure resembles a house whose pillars are the local stakeholder organizations and people providing tourism services to visitors.*

- b. *Each organization or reference should have some sort of a representation in the organizational structure. The institution building could take the form of a tourism organization, a tourism cooperative, a cluster or a destination management organization. The type of this structure depends on the dynamics, readiness and maturity of the local community.*
- c. *The planning team resembles the solar panel that provides the house with energy. The planning team should include both local and professional national organizations as well as community leaders. The municipality can alternatively be part of the planning team and not of the stakeholder's organization. This is often more true in the case of small municipalities or village councils that do not have the capacity or the focus to manage a tourism department. National community based tourism organizations may include references like the Rozana Assciation, Masar Ibrahim, Riwaq and other national organizations that are members of the Network of Experiential Palestinian Tourism Organizations (NEPTO).*
- d. **Country focal point (CFP):** *The planning team is led by a country focal point which is responsible to provide, guidance, technical assistance and other centralized services like promotion, marketing, advocacy, networking and know-how. In the case of this specific area, it is proposed that the Bethlehem University Museum of Nature be the CFP for the villages and towns around Al-Makhrour area because of its genuine interest in ecotourism, one of the main competencies there, as well as its access to various resources and connections. This CFP can network with other CFP's like Rozana association, Masar Ibrahim and NEPTO in other areas of Palestine in order to coordinate a national community-based tourism development.*
- e. *All of the above are part of the stakeholders' pool. The local references, however, are tribal leaders, political or religious references or even governmental agencies or ministries that possess the power to impede the entire initiative if they are incorrectly positioned. The local culture and traditions must be taken into consideration here. Some sort of a zigzag approach must be observed in order to guarantee periodic consultations with these references and ensuring that they are still on board. Their approval and blessings can save a lot of effort and can protect the proper, uninterrupted implementation of the action.*

The measure of success of the tourism initiatives among the different communities during the developmental process is not only the number

of visitors attracted to a certain destination, but more importantly the level of acceptance and adoption the local community expresses in this respect. The more local ownership of initiatives, the more success.

3. Understanding the value addition and soul of each village

In the Preliminary Investigation section point 4 above, a core competency exercise was done with representatives from the targeted villages and towns as well as participants from the public and private sectors. The results of that exercise are key elements to build a tourism and urban strategy upon. Each village or town attempted to delve into what makes it different, what gives it its uniqueness. The management conservation plan (MCP) produced by the Ministry of tourism and antiquities introduced the essential values of Al-Makhrour that provide a backdrop for conservation and protection. However, these values fall short to expose the soul of the nearby villages and their specific uniqueness. This uniqueness, once understood and appreciated provides a foundation for the proper interpretation and creation of a meaningful strategy that has more focus on competitiveness and less on ad hoc brain storming of possibilities.

To elaborate, some of the results of the workshop exercises in this respect will be discussed a bit further below.

Beit Jala – The sculpted Palaces – If Beit Jala has consensus support behind its attractive historical area and decides to protect its beautiful and spacious old building, it needs to think of how to revive them to give them the glory and glamour they deserve. A tourism development strategy should start with an interpretation of this point and should aim at reviving this value while packaging the rest of the competencies so that Beit Jala grows as a destination and not only a through passage to Bethlehem.

Battir – The Hidden Paradise – Again Battir’s beautiful terraces, its water irrigation system and surrounding nature are perceived by all residents as the basis for its soul and for its uniqueness. Houses’

balconies overlooking Battir's beautiful terraces can shed light on the hidden beauty of its nature at an arm's stretch. Building a vision for Battir must reflect this core value and uniqueness into consideration.

Husan – The capital of the western countryside – Although this suggestion for a core competency doesn't seem very touristy, its interpretation must consider all the services that must be established to operate as a central capital for the surrounding villages. It needs to think of how to urban plan its center, its entrance and how to add attractiveness to its value as a capital of the western countryside.

AlWalaja – The vista of heaven – The value embedded in this image is the impression that visitors receive as they enter the village. Although AlWalaja is suffocated by the wall and the imposed Israeli detachment, it has commanding views of its surrounding mountains. This is emphasized by the minimal clustering of houses that exist in other nearby villages. Perhaps AlWalaja needs to further examine this competency if it decides to pursue a tourism development strategy that adds value to its crumbling heritage as well as to the nearby villages and towns who, as the workshop revealed, see little value in adding this village to their packages.

4. Understanding community-based tourism principles as a basis for sustainable business planning

The role of the community in the tourism development process is essential not only on the participatory level but also as a contributor to the cultural, social and demographical identity creation of the Palestinian tourism. These are essential elements of differentiation that are capable of enriching the national tourism product. Principles of community-based tourism are important in areas that are accustomed to tourism but they gain further importance when working in marginalized areas. Through community-based tourism encounters with the local communities are augmented with local culture, hospitality and friendship. Community-based tourism indulges both the visitor as well as the local residents in memorable experiences and

creates a lot of opportunities for employment generation, entrepreneurship, social cohesion and cultural exchange. The Figure below illustrates the basic principles of community-based tourism.



Local Guides: In reality, what is meant here is a non-guide guide. This is not a licensed guide but rather a trained community member who is qualified to receive and welcome guests. His or her main role is to convert the visitor into a guest. Needless to say, this is the key entry point when visiting a micro destination particularly in a less known area. Moreover, Community-based principles advocate the development, training and employment of local capacities and skills. Young men and women in Villages and other marginalized communities leave their homes to find work in other places in the country or abroad. Community-based tourism opens opportunities to encourage local production and services to cater for guests. Local leadership is encouraged and young guides play an important role in promoting their village's services and productions.

Planning as Community: Community-based tourism is a bottom up approach. The role of the community in planning their programs and packages is essential not only for inclusion purposes but more importantly to establish their ownership of these programs and packages. This is an essential element of sustainability in an environment of uncertainties and challenges. As described above, in order for the community to plan its future it needs to organize itself. This responds to the first strategy in tourism development, namely tourism governance.

Benefiting Stakeholders: One of the principles to develop in working with the community is how to maximize the socio-economic and cultural benefits of its members and stakeholders. It is not enough just to encourage visitors to buy from the shops and bakeries or to eat at women centers or nearby restaurants. The involved community members and organizations need to be organized in umbrella associations and/or tourism cooperatives in order to best manage and maximize their benefits. Interested tour operators, agents and suppliers should be encouraged and persuaded to buy their entire package directly from the local communities at net rates to allow for future development and maintenance of the local programs and packages. Local packages' rates will calculate for such allowances to secure the sustainability of these programs and to maintain their standards. The local references should take into consideration the proper management of other social, cultural and environmental benefits when designing their packages. Moreover, community benefits are not limited to income generation. Actually, very important benefits can result from cultural exchange, twinning agreements and international partnerships.

Community Balances: Human beings need to manage their lives while preserving their resources and capacities, identifying their needs and respecting their social structures and sense of community. This is essential and must be made clear to visitors and guests in order to encourage a collective effort to maintain the human presence in equilibrium with the surrounding environment and the need for education, research and knowledge. If a certain village offers an important habitat for a certain type of animal or bird life, this habitat needs to be protected and the locals need to learn how to survive while protecting what could be an important resource for their tourism packages. Similarly, if a certain community chooses to adopt tourism as one of its economic drivers, the need to integrate tourism awareness in educational programs becomes important. This type of holistic and horizontal development takes into consideration such balances and contributes to the protection and preservation of potential resources and capacities.

5. Interpretation methods as a basis for community-based tourism development

Working close and interacting with the local community opens the door for visitors to experience the daily life and its many thousands of years of evolution through simple activities such as cooking with a local family, visiting a farm, telling and listening to stories and myths, exploring the landscape, the architectural heritage, discovering community challenges, investigating their opportunities and their plight to create social, cultural, environmental and economical possibilities. Community-based tourism and experiential travel opportunities are not only about visiting, they are also about protection. This is the essence of interpretation. It is said that learning alone doesn't lead to loving and interpretation is about establishing this link.

Interpretation methods consider building both an emotional as well as an intellectual link with the visitor. Interpretation avoids too many facts that are often forgotten when visitors leave and attempts to leave an impression by telling stories and indulging both the visitor and the host in a unique cultural and humanistic exchange. Interpretation is reciprocal and depends to a great deal on understanding the guests and relating to them. People are much more readily receptive to remembering stories and experiences that resonate with their interests. Community objectives are pivotal to this method and they need to be incorporated into the design of the program and the guiding approach. Through interpretation, there is understanding; through understanding, there is appreciation; through appreciation, there is protection. Hence, the visitor is encouraged to delve into the specifics of the experience, to understand its limitations and opportunities, to appreciate its value and need and to participate in the ongoing or proposed protective efforts.



The Figure above illustrates the particulars of the interpretation method and defines its approach:

- a. *Conveys a message or theme: The interpretation method depends on conveying a certain message or introducing a certain topic that is both linked to the host and related to the visitor as much as possible. The topic can be environmental, educational, anthropological or educational. Local guides are trained to identify pertinent themes and are encouraged to custom design their tours or activities in order to best convey the desired message. For example, if a bird habitat needs to be conserved and is threatened by new urban planning, it might be a worthwhile theme to present during such a tour.*
- b. *Organizes experience: In order for a tour to identify an issue, understand it, link to it and perhaps indulge in supporting or protecting it, the design of the tour and its different stages should be carefully thought of. It requires sensitivity and skill to organize a tour that deliberately starts from a certain point and ends with the appreciation required to establish the emotional link. In the case of the bird habitat above, the tour needs to lead the visitor to learn and appreciate that birds might disappear if the habitat is destroyed.*
- c. *Engages: Interpretation is a tool of indulgence. It is an experiential venture and it is a window to meet people, make friends and work jointly for the benefit of mankind. This type of tourism is new in Palestine but its potential is promising and diverse. Perhaps it is what Palestine really needs in to order to utilize tourism as a tool of heritage, identity and existence.*
- d. *Brings Benefit: The interpretation method brings benefits to the local stakeholders and to the community at large. Benefits are defined as socio-economic, cultural, environmental, educational, technological, and political. Benefits can be expanded through local, regional and international partnerships that deal with the various concerns and specializations undertaken by the local community.*

Maslow's need diagram shown in the slide below is the other dimension of interpretation. Above the tour management side has been explained, however Maslow's diagram helps explain how to manage the psychology of guests and their needs. This is of utmost

importance if the desired experience is to be completed. From basic needs like providing a clean toilet to self-actualization when a guest is fully engaged and connected to the experience. This is the key to protection and or careful and balanced development of tourism resources.

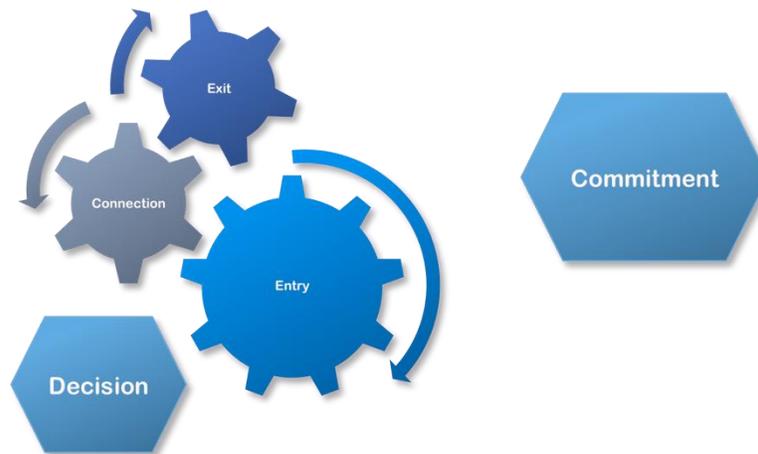


Maslow's Diagram

Creating a Quality Visitor Experience

Tourism remains an industry of perceptions; hence it is of utmost importance to create an impressionable experience for the guests and visitors, an experience that combines the goals of cultural exchange, environment protection and economic enhancement with guest needs. The basic guest needs are actually quite simple and are founded upon the provision of a safe and clean environment, mutual respect and clarity. The latter describes the clarity and accuracy needed to respond to visitors' expectations and tour descriptions. When a guest decides to visit any country or establishment, the concern is to achieve the required commitment for the business to prosper. This process is described in the figure below and its success contributes to the

differentiation of the tourism package and the desired commitment. It is also important to help organize the experience as discussed in the interpretation method above.



Creating Quality Experience

Decision: The point of decision when a guest decides to travel to a certain destination is the first step in creating a quality experience. It starts when this guest makes a phone call, sends a message or meets an agent abroad. The impression established at this point is of utmost importance as it could dictate and probably alter the guest's mind about the entire trip.

Entry: The point of entry is when the guest or guests arrive at the destination. The way they are greeted and welcomed impacts their first impressions of the upcoming experience. The feelings of mutual respect they receive from their ground agents and the clarity of the program presentation prepares the guests' expectations of a unique and worthwhile experience.

Connection: This is when the guests start their itinerary and program. The description of each of the program activities should not only be clear, they should be exciting and should include language and

elements and foster the emotional linkage with the specific itinerary. The entire program should be well organized in order to nourish the visitor's experience and link it to the place. If a destination, a village or town is able to convert its visitors into guests; if it is able to achieve this level of connection, satisfaction and appreciation, then this stage of the experience becomes mature enough to provide the projected program with the desired added value. Elements of culture, cuisine, handcrafts, local production, landscape and community should find their way into the prepared itinerary to establish this level of connection.

Exit: When the visit is over, a proper overview of the trip should remind people of its main highlights and this should not include further information but rather stress themes and experiences. It should show the gratitude of the agent and emphasize the appreciation of the local hosts where the visitors stayed. Leaving is as important as arriving and should be well thought of.

Commitment: The objective of the entire effort is to establish an impressionable experience and hence a commitment to return, to pursue friendships and to indulge in genuine promotion of the visit and the stories exchanged. This kind of commitment reflects the sustainable capacity of the visit.

Interpretation Centers

Each micro destination should establish an interpretation center which is an interactive and engaging center of exhibitions and shows. The interpretation center serves as an entry point to understand the main competencies, linkages and dynamics of the local character, identity and heritage. It must interpret the soul and image of the destination and hence, it should resonate with the established strategy. This type of center is more than an information center and should be dealt with as a cultural heritage endeavor. The center can manage local tours

and activities, provide cooking lessons, workshops, presentations as well as shows and performances.

6. Forms of local governance

This section will explain the various forms of governance proposed to run a micro destination. Each village or town, or cluster of villages in a defined geographical area and capable leadership should think of the best form of governance that fits their demographic fabric. The form of governance chosen should also consider projected partnerships with other micro destination organizations. Recommended are the following four forms of professional tourism governance:

a. A tourism organization.

This is essentially a number of interested individuals who come together to establish a local community-based tourism or ecotourism organization. The internal structure of such an organization consists of a board and a general assembly. Such a setup is registered with the ministry of interior and under the specialization of the ministry of tourism.

b. A tourism cooperative.

There are no tourism cooperatives in Palestine at the moment. However, if a destination wishes to organize their efforts as a cooperative, then their reference will be the ministry of labor. A group of farmers who would like to lead an agro-tourism destination may decide to establish a tourism cooperative that may include other stakeholders who can add value to their endeavor.

c. A tourism cluster.

A cluster is normally a number of businesses belonging to the same value chain and working in a specific geographical area. The clustering theory is based on the competitiveness model of Professor Michael Porter from Harvard university. Tourism clustering in Palestine was first attempted by the Jerusalem tourism cluster (JTC) which reverted to become a community-based tourism organization. Alquds has also established another cluster which is the Tourism and arts Jerusalem cluster (TAJ). There is no law for licensing clusters in Palestine, but they are overseen by the ministry of economy and the Union of the chambers of commerce.

d. A destination management organization.

This might be a much more flexible structure to include within it a public, private and civil society partnership with representatives of the various relevant and perspective organizations. The licensing of such a set up in Palestine might require a special decree from the president’s office because of the membership of the public sector. In essence it will be a semi-governmental organization like the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee which is engaged in administering, managing and receiving various visitors to Hebron. Alternatively, it can choose not to include any public references and can revert to being a consolidated committee of individuals and organizations.

7. Organizational Values to consider for the strategic plan

<i>Governance</i>	<i>Democracy, Transparency, Professionality, Bottom up, Humbleness, Gender Sensitivity</i>
<i>Social Cohesion</i>	<i>Community based outreach, Networking, Synergy based, Inclusion, The value of cultural</i>

	<i>heritage and identity, The human dimension, The power of the story, Dignity for all, Hospitality and friendship</i>
<i>Development</i>	<i>Knowledge based, Research Based, Dynamic, Strategic, innovative, Creative, Environmentally Friendly, Respectful of nature</i>
<i>General</i>	<i>Non-political, Non-partisan, Non-religious, Non-profit, Mutual Respect</i>

8. *Personality values to be expected from staff and stakeholders*

<i>Personality</i>	<i>Positive, inquisitive, celebratory, enthusiastic</i>
<i>Language</i>	<i>Intelligent, fun, informed, culturally oriented, interactive,</i>
<i>Tone</i>	<i>Welcoming, warm, inviting, relaxed</i>
<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Loves art, inspire, engage, inform, develop, liberate, innovate, create, empower, manage, preserve, protect</i>
<i>Avoid</i>	<i>Negativity, factional and religious advocacy, Exclusiveness, Silliness, Overly formal, Dryness, Judgmental</i>

9. *Policies and regulations*

Every village, town or community will develop certain demands as they indulge in the process of creating and managing new products, activities and offers. These demands are influenced by the prevailing (PEST) political, environmental, social as well as the technological dynamics. Policies and regulations, advocated by the local destination governance are deducted both from the PEST factors and the strategy that is interpreting the core strength and the desired image for the destination.

Referring back to the workshop, one of the exercises was for participants to suggest certain policies to advocate for as shown in the table below.

Town	Suggested Policy	Notes
Beit Jala	Effective utilization of the natural heritage and the preservation of green areas and natural reserves.	Beit Jala obviously is not happy with the rapid loss of green spaces in the town. The first thing that came to their mind was how to enhance the beauty of their town and how to interpret the name of Beit Jala which means the green carpet.
Battir	Sustainable development of community-based rural tourism	Battir has had several interventions in community-based tourism development. Given all of their circumstances, this culture seems to be growing among their local leadership.
Husan	Promote rural areas and enhance domestic tourism	Husan has a growing interest in attracting domestic tourism particularly that they have the Husan resort as well as ecotourism potential
Al-Walajeh	Foster tourism-based resilience and economic empowerment of families	Al-Walajeh still suffer from a lot of interference being next to the Israeli wall and affected by Israeli policies. Their suggested policy reflects their mental set up and their ambition to improve their resilience through tourism.

10. Role of the public sector and municipalities

The public sector first of all, need to understand the demand and aspirations of the local community. The relevant ministries need to integrate the local destination strategy, cultural heritage identities and the various resources and capacities in the national strategy that they are developing in order that bottom up and top down approaches meet at a certain point. The ministries need to quickly establish regulations, licensing and a plan to meet the bottom up development. Community guides must be approved, homestays must be regulated and classified, activities must meet basic safety standards, offers need to be nationally packaged and promoted and local policies need to be adopted.

Municipalities, on the other hand need to support the local destination management organization. They need to support it by providing office space, utilities, staff, contacts, networks and development of infrastructure where it is needed. Municipalities need to also understand and enhance the tourism development plan by integrating zoning regulations, urban planning and public services.

11. Role of other civil society organizations

Other civil society organizations like women groups, youth clubs, farmers cooperatives, commerce unions, schools, special needs centers, senior citizen centers and other specialized organizations in tourism, cultural heritage, science, art, wild life and other services all have a stake in the development of tourism in one way or another. Eventually, they all should be invited to join the destination management organization so that their voices are heard and their interest is integrated. Their role is to adapt some of their programs to help enhance the tourism experience in their destination. Also they should back up their destinations advocacy to achieve their demands.

12. Support from national organizations

- a. *Nepto: The Network of Experiential Palestinian Tourism organizations (www.nepto.ps) is the representative of the interest of community-based tourism initiatives in Palestine. NEPTO's membership is open to local destination management organizations where they can engage in the ongoing advocacy and contribute to the formulations of new policies in Palestine.*
- b. *Masar Ibrahim: This 331-kilometer trail (www.masaribrahim.ps) is managed by a union of three different organizations namely, The Wild Life Society, the Rozana Association and the Rapprochement center. Masar Ibrahim is the spine of community-based tourism development and its interventions can assist the targeted towns as well as the museum of nature as a CFP for area towns. The Masar can provide know-how, technical assistance, networking, integration in addition to a wide range of services that can enhance the local development and link it to other initiatives in the country.*
- c. *Rozana Association: The Rozana is specialized in rural tourism development based on community principles and methodologies. Similarly, the Rozana (www.rozana.ps) can provide a lot of services and know-how in this field. Rozana's focus in this respect is to develop local products, train community guides as well as homestays.*
- d. *Bethlehem university nature museum: The museum is well positioned to provide a number of central services and support to the targeted towns in this project, given that the museum is the manager of the current project. Hence, the museum can be the country focal point for ecotourism development in area villages and towns. This arrangement does not need to be permanent but it needs enough time to generate enough perpetual motion until the targeted*

towns figure out their path, networks and update their strategy.

13. Proposed vision and goals: With all of the above background methodology and theory, the targeted villages are now ready to formulate their vision and decide on their main goals. First, they start with setting their vision based on the research they make regarding their core competency and image. Their goals will then be formulated to move towards this vision for a set number of years, after which an evaluation should take place to monitor and retune the main goals for a second period and so on.

MARKET ANALYSIS

The purpose of this section is first to investigate the potential markets types and ways to deal with them. Second, to investigate the potential markets' interest in ecotourism, Palestinian cultural heritage, and the community community-based tourism in Palestinian villages and towns.

1. Mass tourism vs community-based tourism

From the perspective of this plan, there are two main approaches to organizing a tourism program:

- a. Mass tourism: the prevailing tourism in Palestine is based on pilgrimage travel, the vast majority of which is organized group travel. Most visitors, whether Christian or Muslim, are usually interested in their own religious sites and heritage. The management cycle of this form of tourism generally starts with the international tour operator who prepares the tour program and promotes it abroad. The local travel agent's role is mostly to prepare all the logistics and to provide the proper references, accommodation, busses, tour guides, restaurants and even the souvenir shops. Very rare encounters take place with the local community and the slowly developing alternative or new Palestinian programs seldom see the light. This form of tourism operates in closed circles and benefits the services within these circles. Small businesses benefit very little from this form of tourism. Still, there are few individuals who come on their own and their tour dynamics are much more beneficial to the community at large especially around the main historic and religious sites.*

The targeted villages in this project benefit very little from this approach and the small businesses in these villages find it very difficult to attract group travel.

Additionally, the code of ethics that was developed for tourism in Palestine and that is intended to improve the cultural exchange and the mutual respect between the host and the guest has little impact because it doesn't often reach either party.

Any type of tourism that is organized in this form whether it is historic, religious, adventure or environmental travel will probably bypass many of the developmental principles in tourism and will only benefit businesses in small circles. This form of tourism is usually also very sensitive to political fluctuations and its absence can negatively affect tourism institutions. An example of this is the quick loss and closure of half the hotels in Alquds.

- b. Community-based tourism: Alternatively, this approach is quite sensitive to people's aspirations, environmental concerns, economic benefits of the entire value chain of tourism and has particular benefits to less known destinations and marginalized communities. Hence, more focus should be put on initiatives that promote this form of travel.*

2. Groups vs individual travelers

As explained above, the more community-based travel the more sustainable and culturally reflective the experience becomes. This is particularly true for the targeted areas as well as similar other offers throughout the country that focus on ecotourism and other related types of travel. Individual travel has more controllable impact on the environment, can establish a more genuine, beneficial and in-depth experiences. Moreover, individual travelers to community-based

destinations are normally willing and prepared to spend more for their travels.

3. Profiling potential markets

Targeting more individual travel, particularly for virgin destinations like most of the villages in this project, requires a plan that can specifically target the people who show interest in the type of offer that exists in these destinations. Profiling the type of people who have this interest is important specially that there are social media and technological platforms that help a destination to do so. Once a certain profile of people is identified, it becomes a straight forward matter to target this profile in any desired country. One of the examples of such a tool is the Facebook pixels.

The country focal point (CFP) should do this profiling exercise for the benefit of its member destinations.

4. Description of markets

The following analysis targeting some of the European markets is the result of a survey that was made by Planet Life Economy Foundation for a project that aimed at creating centers of local culture including Palestine and where Battir was one of the beneficiaries. It is targeting group travel with emphasis given to small groups 10-15 people as well as individuals. A summary of the synthesis follows:

“A sampling and an analysis of the features of Associations and TOs interested in community-based tourism in Palestine has been realized in Italy, France, Spain, UK/US.

The following table synthesizes the results of a web research of the characteristics of Associations (letter A) and Tour Operators (letters B,C,D,E,F), interviewed on the basis of a questionnaire.

Survey of Associations and TOs

			Tot	%	Esp	Fr	It	UK	US	Oth
A	Religious associations organizing spiritual travels = Poor room for the Arabic culture.	Not a priority	21	23%	3	7	8	1	2	0
B	TOs offering religious institutions travels to Palestine.	<u>Interesting</u>	25	27%	1	5	17	1	1	0
C	TOs directed with preference to Israel but open to others.	Not a priority	3	3%	0	0	3	0	0	0
D	TOs ambivalent to Israel and Palestine with preference for Israel	<u>Interesting</u>	19	21%	5	5	4	1	2	2
E	TOs ambivalent to Israel and Palestine with preference for Palestine	<u>Important</u>	18	20%	1	8	7	2	0	0
F	TOs organizing socio-political travels in favour of Palestine - Solidarity travels	<u>Important</u>	6	7%	1	2	3	0	0	0
	Total Surveys		92		11	27	42	5	5	2

THE SURVEY OF THE ASSOCIATIONS INDICATES:

Not to concentrate on the associations, but to keep them in the loop and collect their details in a data base. Contact and inform them periodically of the work in progress. When the tourism in the villages will run, at least some of them can be approached with specific proposals. They will always maintain a fundamental spiritual Christian emphasis but since many repeat the Palestinian trip several times, their interest in rural and ecotourism has a potential to increase.

SURVEY OF THE TOUR OPERATORS INDICATES:

All the TOs except the "C - TOs to Israel", should be targeted. When the villages will be able to host tourists with an adequate hospitality the TOs "E, F and D" will be invited to a familiarization tour. The involvement of "B and D" will take place after tuning the whole process.

Other conclusions of the survey

Organization of the Tour

- All the organizations have previous travel experience to Palestine, the Middle East and northern Africa
- The groups are small (10-15 persons) and include both famous cities and villages provided a pre-sensitization takes place.
- The participation needs always a certain physical capacity to handle the walks needed in certain destinations
- The cost should be kept under a certain spending capacity including a 10-15 days duration, flight and meals.

Approach to travel

- The outlook is still slow. Not more than one trip per organization in 2019. (101)
- Religious, cultural and political aspects are all considered positive motivations of tourism to Palestinian villages and must be included in the future communication. (102)
- Fear (103) is the main motivation against travel to Palestine. Any promotion must be directed to reassure the potential tourists.

SURVEY OF INDIVIDUALS

The survey included 112 subjects mainly from Italy and some from Switzerland, Germany, England, France, and Austria. There were no meaningful differences because of the country of residence and all answers were integrated in the final synthesis.

- Characteristics of the selected sample
- Age: 15% were ≤ 30 years, 63% were 31- 60 years, 21% were ≥ 61 years.
- Gender: 57% were women, 43% were men
- Social Status: medium or medium-upper class.
- Education: 17% high school, 51% university and other 30% achieved a master or similar.
- Most of them know English (97%).

APPROACH TO TOURISM

- Almost half (49%) spend holidays abroad.
- Self-organized travels (86%).
- Travels with friends or even alone and less in organized groups (99%)
- Tailored instead of pre-packaged holidays.
- Holidays selected by themselves or with the help of suggestions (90%) instead of through publicity.

In fact, Palestine (and many other Middle East countries), unlike other destinations (e.g. European, US, Japan) have been mostly visited mainly by structured groups and less individuals, families, and small groups, also for the fear of the unknown.

The targeting of individuals dramatically changes the whole touristic supply chain.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS PALESTINE IN GENERAL

Palestine stays relatively unknown (only 28% already visited, in a population not lacking of financial resources), but most of the travellers would repeat the visit (83%). This opens the opportunity to new experiences in the villages giving another insight of the country.

This positive attitude is confirmed by the general appreciation of Palestine, visited by these people mainly for tourism (41%) instead of religion (14%), as fascinating (94%) because of its history (importance of storytelling), of cultural diversity, nature, people and, finally religion. A travel to Palestine is envisaged by the majority of the answers (77%). Only 17% show among the reasons for not having already visited Palestine "fear", "unsure", "place dangerous and hostile", "difficult political situation". But it is realistic to think that some of these reasons can be hidden behind the answer "no opportunity".

COMPETITIVENESS

The basis for competitiveness depends on two factors, namely price and uniqueness or a combination based on each factor as a base. The villages normally should be able to provide beautiful experiences at lower costs than many of the cities where prices are inflated by mass tourism.

The targeted villages and towns all possess their unique characteristics, some of which have been discussed earlier and presented with nine points strategy in the background.

Price competitiveness: Price or price-based differentiation is based on the accessibility of the destination of less expensive services, supplies or products. This is an ability to utilize the products of the different sectors like agriculture, food production and handcrafts and the ability to manage them in the most efficient manner.

Uniqueness: The ability to compete based on providing a unique offer that competitors are not able to match, an offer that people want, empowers the destination and extends its ability to control its prices and rates.

Local governance: according to the nine-points tourism strategy, the first step in achieving competitiveness is to manage all stakeholders' capacities and skills. This is not a straight forward matter and is often difficult to achieve, but without it there is no planning and no advocacy. There is no push to move forward!

Supporting enhancing sectors: Tourism actors in Palestine are often oblivious to the existence and importance of cultural and cultural heritage production, sports, theater, art, events and festivals to enhance the uniqueness of a destination. Such sectors and productions need to be understood and the way they can be packaged also need to be investigated.

Branding: To improve the competitiveness of a destination, it needs to improve its unique identity and brand. Branding may be divided into three levels:

- a. *Individual identity: this is a searching exercise in the personal identity of the people of a certain destination, what makes them unique, what are their stories and their specific cultures. The combined personal identity of each individual contributes to the overall brand of a certain destination. Hence, people from Beit Jala look, dress and act differently than people in Battir or other neighboring villages. This diversity is a catalyst in making a destination stand out provided it is well packaged, understood and integrated into the future generations*
- b. *Product identity: Each destination should prepare its own tours, activities and productions. The efficiency of synergies reflected in the management of the local products will improve the depth of the experience. Hence, if agricultural production is packaged to attract tourists and visitors through specialized restaurants, gift shops, farm visits and other experiences, it will enhance the destination ability to distinguish itself. A destination may also choose to create a number of iconic structures and events that can add value, distinction and identity. An iconic event is an annual event that consolidates the competencies of a certain destination and the identities of its core value.*
- c. *Quality brand: The credibility of products and services and the level of trust and approval of the visitors is important to increase sales and improve attractiveness. This needs to be managed. Vendors need to commit to certain principles and procedures and promotional campaigns need to be organized in order to advertise and market the quality brand. Quality does not mean five stars but it means credibility and transparency.*

Networking: In small towns, as well as in other attractions, networking stakeholders' capacities can only duplicate the existing resources and

improve the overall competitiveness. In Palestine, the prevailing culture is for people to work on their own. They run their own endeavors. With a networking plan, locally, nationally and internationally, a destination can greatly improve its positioning.

ORGANIZATION MANAGEMENT

Governance Recommendations

Although all governance forms are potential possibilities, it is recommended by this study to adopt the destination management organization (DMO). The reasons for this are:

- a. In this form of governance individuals and organizations can be members. This is more representative of the social fabric of the stakeholders in the Palestinian villages*
- b. Municipal members are not encouraged to become members of these organizations and the municipality should be part of the planning team that provides backup and support for the local DMO.*
- c. Networking the DMO's of the individual destinations together under one umbrella is probably easier if they follow the same laws and regulations. This umbrella can potentially be the basis for the Palestinian tourism board.*

Al-Makhrour management committee

Initially, the project attempted to create a cluster based DMO to represent the unified interest of the targeted villages. However, the involved members were much more immersed in their own destinations and reverted to establishing their own DMO's. The setback would be the added expenses of working separately. However, they are encouraged to create a joint tourism management committee for Al-Makhrour. This committee will work together to jointly plan Al-Makhrour tourism programs and cultural heritage protection policies. Needless to say, both the individual DMO's and the joint management committee will need to establish their own by-laws and or memorandums of understanding (MOU).

The main elements of the by-laws to focus on are the main goals and purpose and the membership regulations. Membership should be open to both organizations as well as individuals.

- a. *Organizations: chosen representatives of organizations can be voted into the DMO management council or board of directors as long as they are active members of their own organizations. Once that membership is changed, the specific organization will appoint a replacement to represent them until the next elections. Representatives of a certain organization can compete for membership in the DMO. Alternatively, the representatives can simply be appointed by their own organization. The local DMO may chose the model they prefer. Youth clubs, women organizations, local producer groups and other specialized organizations can become members of the DMO as long as they have an invested interest in the tourism value chain.*
- b. *Individuals: Cultural heritage experts, business owners, farmers, artisans and others can become members of the DMO as long as they abide by the membership regulations.*

BREAKDOWN OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Back to the survey made by Italian organization PLEF (Planet Life Economic Foundation), a number of interesting results shed further light onto the most appropriate products and services to support in order to attract more European and American travelers.

1. Participation trends in activities during travel gives the following indications:
 - a. Enthusiasm for meeting the local community (104), storytelling (105), contacts with Sufis and Hermits, spirituality (108), visit to small villages (109), Participation

in craft making processes and traditional food cooking lessons (104).

- b. The survey showed lower interest in the participation in local dances and songs and in horse, camel and donkey rides (104)

2. The most frequent reasons to travel to Palestine are:

- a. Faith: The life and places related to Jesus Christ. Sufism and Islamic spirituality and its parallel links with Christian hermit life and its different interpretations.
- b. Culture: The Art, architectural styles, community and family heritage in Alquds and other main Palestinian destinations.
- c. Comparison between Israel and West Bank life with emphasis on storytelling of Palestinian history, structure of the political and governmental organization, education, economy, relation with Israel and the external world.

Based on the above the survey suggests the following new model for tourism in rural and in less known destinations, which is in line with the exerted efforts in community-based tourism development and the advancement of the local cultural heritage.

A new model of tourism in Palestine

is based:

- Not only on palaces, churches, religious paths, which don't compete with similar attractions in the main cities, but rather on the atmosphere of ancient Arabic villages and the meetings with the local community.
 - Not only on entertainment that visitors can find much more interesting in Alquds, Bethlehem or Ramallah, but on experiences linked to the local culture and heritage that can only be experienced in authentic Palestinian villages.
 - Not only on the religious events which in the Holy Land are unique and matchless around the world, but also on the parallelism between the expressions of the Islamic, Catholic and Orthodox spirituality, for example, by Sufis and Hermits.
 - Not only on the international cuisine but also on the authentic Palestinian food and specialties.
 - Not only on watching or viewing events and festivities, but also on interactive participation in traditional activities linked to the local culture and intended to ease the foreign guests to understand and take part in the hosts life.
3. On sharing with local families, refugees and Bedouins the experiences of their way of life.

Alternatively, products and service to domestic travel should cater for that specific demand. Already, many people visit Al-Makhrour area to use the restaurants or to walk from or to Battir village which offers a number of alternative opportunities and serene experiences.

Women and ecotourism organizations as well as the Eco-museum and the guest house already offer spaces for people to eat and activities for people to do. These activities can be expanded in cooperation with the neighboring villages to offer unique and interpretive packages.

Visitors may start their tour with a breakfast in one of Beit Jala's restaurants commanding a vista view of the town. They can visit Beit Jala's main iconic church, St Nikolas and take a short walk inside the old town. Later they may start a trek in Al-Makhrour,

and walk towards Battir. In Battir, there are a number of options and things to see including the terraces, the Roman pool and the aqueducts. This tour will be conducted by the Battir DMO. After lunch, it is possible to follow the valley towards Husan and perhaps have a dip in the town's spring or in one of the pools of the nearby resort. Experiences and services may be added to enrich the excursion.

MARKETING PLAN

The main concepts and tools that form the basis of a marketing plan are presented in this section. This, however, need to interpret the main core value of each village which in essence is the main key for a focused developmental protective strategy. The main values chosen for the targeted villages are listed in the table below.

Village	Core Value
Beit Jala	The Carved Palaces
Battir	The Hidden Garden
Husan	The capital of the Western Country Side
AlWalaja	The Heaven's Tryst

Branding: Each village or any cluster of villages thereof will need to develop a brand or a logo that is able to reflect the message embedded in the proposed core values. Village and cluster destinations are expected to eventually join efforts to create a national governance or a representation committee to advocate for their demands and needs. In branding there is more than just the message; the design, the colors and other elements that should be used repeatedly in producing the various marketing tools of the specific destination.

Audience: Before stepping into any marketing endeavor, the audience needs to be identified. This process needs to take into consideration a number of aspects that will help the destination management to identify the profile of people that may be interested in its offer. Nevertheless, the plan needs to take into consideration two basic segments as it will probably affect the proposed packages and programs.

Local Audience: Generally speaking, the local audience main segments are families, schools and groups of friends. Hence, suggested programs need to take into consideration children's

activities, family safety, group facilities and space as well as adventurous programs for the youth, depending on the targeted segment or segments.

International Audience: Most of the tourists that currently visit Palestine are organized pilgrimage groups. Except for very few, it is not easy to attract this type of audience as its programs are often controlled by the international tour operator and implemented conservatively by the local tour agent. Hence, it might be more useful to think of a different strategy. In this respect, cultural heritage savvy audiences, alternative pilgrimage groups, adventure seekers, fact finding missions and expats might be a worthwhile investment. In order to efficiently target such segments and in order to utilize the limited financial resources, it is recommended that similar DMO's work together and centralize their marketing strategies. It is recommended that this be done through the country focal point (CFP), which for the targeted villages is the Palestine Museum of Natural History.

Top down and bottom up strategies: Traditionally in Palestine, most of the tourism marketing and promotional activities and efforts are orchestrated by the ministry of tourism with ad hoc participation from the private sector. This top down approach was rarely met by any sustainable bottom up networking or marketing. It is recommended to invest seriously in bottom up marketing strategies that utilize local and international networks, partnerships and twinning agreements. Managing the synergies that come out of this endeavor is essential to build a sustainable and fruit bearing marketing plan. It will also be less expensive, more focused, more fitting with the profile of people who would be interested in visiting Palestine and its people. Bottom up approach allows local Palestinian initiatives to position themselves among friendly circles all over the world based on rural tourism, cultural heritage, environment and wild life specializations to name a few.

Tools and platforms: The figure below illustrates various platforms and tools that can be used to disseminate content about each destination.



In the case of Masar Ibrahim, it was evident that the National Geographic magazine coverage and rating of the Masar has generated considerable demand and interest in the initiative. Based on this example, each destination can individually or

collectively pursue such opportunities to help advance their offers as well as other similar programs.

Mascots: Since marketing is after all a creative process to reach out to the targeted audience, it is worth investigating the design and utilization of a destination mascot. The designed mascot should represent the destination brand, identity and core competency. A mascot can be animated and used to convey messages and entice visitors to explore the destination. Souvenirs can be designed and produced based on the mascot for people to take as a memory of their unique visit.

FUNDING

In this section, some fundamental fundraising opportunities are discussed to provide the local destination leadership with tools and opportunities in order to sustain their programs and advance their touristic potential while preserving their overall cultural and socio-economic ecosystem. It is again recommended that a fundraising strategy should be orchestrated with the presence of the country focal

point (CFP), the municipality and the local destination management team.

National Policy and Strategy

Micro destination management by the local leadership is a promising strategy to build the Palestinian tourism from the bottom up. It is the role of the local DMO's, the municipalities and the CFP's to advocate for this change. This endeavor should be strategically orchestrated with the Network of Experiential Palestinian Tourism Organizations (NEPTO) in order to rally all pertinent national organizations around this policy and in order to pressure the government to dedicate a certain annual budget to assist the local DMO's in researching, identifying and managing their cultural heritage and tourism capacities.

International Funding

Palestine remains within the radar of international developmental support. This is an opportunity for local DMO's in cooperation with their CFP's and their municipalities to prepare projects that can attract international support and cooperation.

Donor support: this is usually synchronized with the Palestinian Authority developmental goal which takes us back to the first point. In any case, there remains an opportunity to raise funds through calls for grants that are normally published by the various donor agencies. The DMO's need to be able to focus on their strategic goals while adapting potential funding to foster their endeavors. Given that most donor grants require a great deal of bureaucratic processing, DMO's need to assess their managerial capacities and capabilities before getting immersed in this process.

Foundations: Local, regional and international foundations are another opportunity to raise funds for inherent causes like cultural heritage protection as well as other cultural and socio-economic issues. Foundations are not immediately apparent and need research to be able to pin point reciprocal interest. Because of their inherent interest, they are usually quite flexible, negotiable, aligned with local needs and dedicated to realize success and achievements. A joint and consolidated effort among various DMO's may be invested in researching and in establishing connections with such Foundations. Working with foundations is also a networked effort that can enhance the DMO's marketing plans.

Twinning Agreements: Municipalities as well as individual or collective DMO's can and should seek twinning agreements with their counterparts in the world. If managed properly and strategically, this can bring significant benefits to the local DMO's as well as interesting reciprocal cultural exchange. In the case of Masar Ibrahim, French and Palestinian twinning agreements among cities, villages and district offices raised considerable funds to realize various success stories and initiatives along the Masar.

Crowdfunding Campaigns: Using an ever-increasing database of networks as well as social media likes, can help in managing successful crowdfunding campaigns through platforms like Indiegogo.

Income Generation Activities

The local DMO should slowly but surely grow to manage income generating programs. These might include tickets to interpretation centers, museums, gardens or folkloric shows, cooking classes and handcrafts workshops to name a few. Interpretation methods in guiding usually aim at engaging guests in long term connections with

local endeavors that may generate some support, but more importantly networking and international positioning.

Municipal Taxes: The municipality is expected to harmonize itself with the strategic development scheme of its destination. The municipality of each DMO should find ways to generate financial resources to support the establishment of its destination. This requires both competitiveness as well as sensitivity to environmental and social equilibriums. The local community needs to be involved and engaged in the future and well-being of its area. Hence, the concept of additional, no matter how small, taxes to support destination development should be welcome.

The Diaspora

Literary, almost every village in Palestine has several of its residents somewhere in the world. Many of them are successful and often maintaining very strong ties to their villages and to their families who continue to strive for a good living in their own towns. With a holistic plan that takes into consideration the strategic developmental goals, the role of the diaspora can be integrated and their input can be maximized to create even better successful stories.

FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS

The below table presents a simple financial projection to help understand the underlying expenses and the potential profit that can be generated monthly for the destination management organization in order to cover its costs, benefit the service providers and help sustain its activity in the future.

The expenses section assumes two employees at the DMO, and a number of other expenses, some of which can be provided in kind by the municipality or village council like rent and utilities. The tour expenses section assumes a total of 375 visitors a month based on 25 groups of 15 people each. This obviously will vary as it might be less in the beginnings but will hopefully increase with dedication, perseverance and proper management.

With a 20% markup, it is enough to cover the overhead expenses while generating some profit for future investments. Based on the above and taking into consideration the assumed costs of services, which is subject to change upon the DMO's management decision, the cost per person in a tour is about \$145. Obviously, this number can decrease considerably in proportion with the increase in the number of visitors and the decrease in the overhead cost and the costs of the services provided. The latter is not recommended unless there is a serious need for it. Hence, focused and dedicated promotion is needed to ensure the increase of the total number of visitors to a certain destination.

Item	occurrence	Avg Cost \$	Lump sum cost	No based on 10 persons per group and 10 groups monthly	Total	
Expenses						
Salaries	Month	1500		2	3000	
Rent	Month	500		1	500	
Utilities	Month	700		1	700	
transportation	month	500		1	500	
Social media and websites		500		1	500	
Printing	annual	500		1	500	
Administrative		500		1	500	
				total expenses		6200
Tour expenses						
Guide	tour	60	2	25	3000	
Food & bev	tour	25		375	9375	
Entry tickets	tour	25		375	9375	
Accommodation	tour	30		375	11250	
Souvenirs	tour	5		375	1875	
Hospitality	tour	3		375	1125	
Brochures	tour	1		375	375	
Transportation	tour		100	25	2500	
				total expenses per tour		38875
				Overall expenses	45075	
Mark up	tour		20%	9015	54090	45075

tour per person 144.2