



Sustainable Israeli-Palestinian Projects

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Trip Report to Israel and the West Bank, January 2018

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This is an overview of the trip that several SIPP board members took to Israel and the West Bank in January, 2018.

Jan 2 - Peter and Bernard met with Avner Goren at the Eyal Hotel in Jerusalem. Avner briefed us on plans for the following several days and informed us that Joktan Cohen (EWB-Netherlands) needed to cancel his trip and won't be joining us. Avner joins Peter and Bernard for all of their meetings through Jan 8.



Jan 2 – Meeting: Anat (AJEEC-NISPED), Akram (Green Land Society) in Beit Jalla. Akram described the status of the Education Center, and reiterated the need for additional funding. SIPP makes plans to visit the center on Jan 7. We learned about a US State Dept grant proposal that AJEEC was preparing that would include SIPP. We confirmed that we would connect Randy Martin

to Akram. Randy, an air quality expert at Utah State Univ, will be a Fullbright Flex Fellow visiting Al Ajef Univ in Nablus in the spring to help establish an environmental program in the engineering department. There may be an opportunity for Randy to perform air quality monitoring at/near the metals processing sites near Hebron. This connection was then made subsequent to the meeting.

Observations and Recommendations:

- Follow-up with Randy and Akram to identify possible SIPP support.

Jan 2 – Meeting: Lisa Talesnick (educator). Lisa described the peace-oriented curriculum (<http://www.Paxology.com>) she is using at the Jerusalem School (<http://jspeace.weebly.com/>), in East Jerusalem. She also described her recent 3-hour meeting with the Pope, and a proposal she is drafting to bring Israeli and Palestinian students to a workshop under the auspices of the Vatican. We have a copy of the draft proposal.



Observations and Recommendations:

- Possible support for Lisa's Vatican proposal.
- Explore partnership with Lisa, and possibly EWB-Israel, for the State Dept Grant solicitation for a project at the Jerusalem School.

Jan 3 – Peter, Bernard and Avner met with Richard Laster at his law office. We also stopped by his office at the end of the day. Richard briefed us on the status of the planned sewage treatment in the Kidron/Nar basin. An existing smaller waste treatment plant in the West Bank north of the Kidron/Nar basin will be expanded, and a pipeline will be laid to intercept waste from Jerusalem and pipe it over to the expanded plant. Work is just beginning. We then discussed possible SIPP involvement in two other projects: one related to directly protecting the Mar Saba Monastery water supply, and the other related to the proposed "Pilgrim Paths" - this would also involve Engineers Without Borders (EWB) Palestine and EWB Israel. Avner Goren, who accompanied us, is directly involved in the Pilgrim Paths, as they are basically extensions of the Abraham Path. Avner was responsible for the Abraham Path in Israel.



Observations and Recommendations:

- SIPP support for the Pilgrim Paths project is probably premature. While the landscape is spectacular and infused with cultural, historical and religious significance, this project would have much more merit once the Kidron/Nar basin is cleaned up. For that to happen, the sewage from Jerusalem needs to be redirected (as planned), local communities need to require sewage treatment, and unfettered disposal of refuse and debris need to be curtailed. It is possible that the development of the Pilgrim Paths could be a driver for basin cleanup, but much groundwork would need to be laid for that to happen. Avner Goren should be consulted if this project proceeds.



We left Richard's office and traveled to Al Ubeidiya, where we met the new mayor and his chief waste water engineer - Maher. Maher showed us the existing constructed wetlands (which unfortunately has yet to operate due to leaks that have since been repaired), and the likely location of the larger community wetlands.

After Al Ubeidiya, we decided to pay a surprise visit to the Al Menya landfill. The director of the landfill wasn't able to spend much time with us, but one of his staff gave us useful information on the state of recycling at the landfill and in all of the West Bank. The landfill services much of the central West Bank, including Bethlehem. Recyclable material that is sorted at the landfill is sent to Hebron – approximately 120 tons (annually??). The landfill has capacity for approximately 20 more years of operation. Details of the recycling operations were not provided.

Returning to Richard Laster's office, we met and compared notes with Gideon Bromberg, EcoPeace's Israeli director. Richard pessimistically opined on the wretched state of recycling in Jerusalem. There is a LOT of work that needs to happen on both sides of the Green Line to change entrenched attitudes on waste minimization/reuse/recycling.

Observations and Recommendations:

- The poor state of recycling in Jerusalem might be a significant concern to faith communities in the US and provide an opportunity for SIPP to work with those communities and our partners in the region.

Jan 4 - Lisa, Avner, Bernard and Peter traveled to Al Ubeidiya and then to Mar Saba. Lisa also accompanied us to Nazareth and Haifa on Friday.

In Al Ubeidiya, we spent some time with the new Mayor, and his head engineer: Ratib Ibayat. Ratib accompanied us to Mar Saba and our "walk the wadis" tour. Ratib is himself a mayor of a small town near Bethlehem. At Mar Saba, we met several of the monks and went over maps and water quality test results associated with e-coli contamination of their drinking water. Some of their sources tested clean, while other sources are clearly contaminated. We then walked approximately three miles



through the Judean desert as we followed the mostly dry wadis upstream toward Al Ubeidiya. We learned a lot and recognized that there is no easy engineering solution to the drinking water contamination at Mar Saba. The monks told us that their priority is securing the land within the 2-km radius zone (1943 map). Water is important to them but they seem to be able to rely on the water from the northern channel, water trucks, and the holy spring that has been flowing for the past 1500 years.



Observations and Recommendations:

- The southern drainage is most contaminated, per lab results, and we observed trash in the drainage. We also observed 3 structures/homes and livestock in close proximity to the drainage and waste piles outside of those structures. These structures are well within the 2-kilometer buffer surrounding the monastery which is supposed to have no development per a 1943 British mandate.
- The drainage was dry within the immediate vicinity of the monastery, while it had flow/sanitary waste in closer proximity to Ubeidiya (approximately 1.7 km from the monastery).
- The e-coli likely comes from waste generated by the three residences mentioned above and by human waste left by tourists who wander around the water channels.
- Water from the holy spring tested clean (for e-coli), but tasted brackish. We don't know anything about the water (i.e. its age or other water quality parameters) or where it originates/recharge area.
- Since the holy spring is one of the main sources of drinking water for the monastery (25 liters/day), and since it has an elevated cultural and religious significance, we recommend that the water be further tested to determine the presence of other contaminants, and to determine the age of the water, and the hydrogeology be understood in order to better protect this drinking water source. If the holy spring water is found to be archaic (i.e. really old), further evaluation of the water source may not be necessary. If it is found to be relatively new water, the recharge area of the groundwater needs to be identified so it can be protected.
- The sanitary waste from Ubeidiya has potential to add to the pollution if the Wadi experiences flow (flash floods), which according to the monastery has not happened for the past five years. The wadi was dry near the monastery. Nonetheless, we recommend that a barrier should be built at and near the entrance to the southern water channel to protect the channel against nearby trash, livestock, domestic animals, and flash floods. Better, no waste should be deposited into the wadi.
- Unrelated to the Monastery, we think Ratib is a possible candidate to come to Boulder as a SIPP guest/visiting engineer.



Jan 5 - Before leaving Jerusalem for Nazareth and Haifa, we met two other incredible people: Elie Pritz, author of the Paxology curriculum which teaches history through "peace heroes", and Dr. Vered Blass, professor at Tel Aviv Univ and director of Engineers Without Borders - Israel. Dr. Blass is also an expert on electronic waste. Ms. Pritz will be doing a TED Talk next month on Paxology.

Observations and Recommendations:

- Consider connecting Akram to Dr. Blass.
- Explore potential SIPP support for the Paxology curriculum at the Jerusalem School.

In Nazareth, we met with Lillian Daniel, an Israeli-Arab environmental educator in the process of obtaining her PhD, and Ibrahim Etheiga, Director of the Masar Institute for Education in Nazareth. With Lillian, we discussed the possibility of partnering with her on two grant proposals to create a hands-on STEM-oriented environmental curriculum



for the Masar Alternative School that would include composting, recycling, and wastewater treatment. With Dr. Etheiga, we discussed the appropriateness of creating a school pairing project between the Masar Alternative School, a nearby Jewish school, and an American school. Dr. Etheiga was not supportive of the pairing proposal.

Observations and Recommendations:

- Given Dr. Etheiga's perspective, we don't recommend proceeding with a school pairing effort with the Masar Alternative School.
- However, we recommend working with Lillian to develop grant proposals for an environmental laboratory at the school. Such a laboratory could enhance the STEM fluency of both students and faculty at the school, and be a demonstration project for other schools that cater to Israel's minority populations. The timing on any cooperative work with Lillian will need to wait until next year when Lillian is back at the school.

Our Haifa meetings will much less formal as we meet with Mark Talesnick, a colleague of Bernard's and founder of EWB-Israel, over dinner.

Observations and Recommendations:

- EWB – We have connections to three people involved with EWB-Israel (Mark, Vered, and Avner), and should look for ways to partner with EWB in our projects.

Jan 6 - Met Yo'av (getsolarbox.com) to learn about his new company that creates inexpensive portable solar energy systems. He, with a partner in Gaza, started shipping units to Gaza last week. He may solicit future funding from SIPP to allow him to expand his inventory.

Observations and Recommendations:

- Connect Yo'av to EWB Israel and EWB Palestine (especially in Gaza) [Post-Script: Bernard has already made these connections.]

Jan 7 - Tara joined us for the remainder of our trip. At Idna (West Bank), we met Akram and explored the new environmental education center. The center focuses on all manner of recycling, including electronic waste. There is a real opportunity to make an impact in the community through environmental education.



Observations and Recommendations:

- Akram's ongoing costs are apx \$1500/month.
- The recycling center is a necessary start to try to change people's attitudes of not minding the outdoor trash. The neighborhood where the center is located is industrial and debris is pervasive.
- Akram is open to having volunteers work with him at the education center.
- Post Script: We are working with the Boulder Rotary Club to see whether they would be interested in learning more about the education center.

After Idna, we went to Wadi Attir in the Negev. After touring Wadi Attir, and learning about the various education projects at Wadi Attir, we met Ariel from AJEEC-NISPED and discussed their numerous projects, including SIPP's partnership in a grant proposal that was submitted that evening.



Observations and Recommendations:

- Avner has Bedouin and other artifacts and would like to set up a Bedouin museum – possibly at Wadi Attir. SIPP might want to consider assisting with this effort. Avner will be working with Mohammed, the Mayor of Hura, and Wadi Attir on this proposal.
- SIPP is now a named partner in a US State Dept grant proposal with AJEEC and the Green Land Society.
- Wadi Attir – SIPP should continue to look for ways to support the educational programs at Wadi Attir.

Jan 8 - We spent last night in Sde Boker and this morning met Noa Avner of the Arava and Dead Sea Environmental Center and Keshet. She took us first to a location where we saw some ancient Nabatean petroglyphs while she explained their culture, and compared them to current-day Bedouin. We then went to visit a nearby unrecognized Bedouin village (one of



approximately 11 in this part of the Negev), where we heard various proposals that would attempt to integrate the community into the larger society and also an effort by the community to develop eco-tourism. We also heard a proposal by Keshet to develop an outdoor kindergarten program in the Bedouin village, modelled after a similar program in Mitzpe Ramon.

We then went to Mitzpe Ramon to view the Makhtesh - a very large crater caused by erosion. Hard to know what the SIPP angle was to that stop, other than we cannot be in the area without stopping at the crater.

Observations and Recommendations:

- Avner Goren is interested in being the SIPP's representative in Israel.

ADDITIONAL VISIT TO RAMAT HANEDEV

On Jan 9 – 11, Peter and Tara continued their stay in the region to investigate programming opportunities to support a joint Sister City relationship between Boulder and the Ramat HaNegev Regional Council. Tara, in addition to being on the SIPP board, heads up the Boulder Ramat HaNegev Sister City Initiative. While they visited several environmental, educational, and cultural sites, the following potential projects are included in this report as they may be relevant to SIPP.



Meeting with Yoni Shrir – Coordinator for Bedouin Affairs Ramat HaNegev



Discussion and update about current challenges and initiatives between the Bedouin communities in Ramat HaNegev Regional Council. Yoni described a new project between the Sde Boker Environmental High School (a highly ranked Israeli boarding school located in Midreshet Ben Gurion) and local Bedouin teens. The project would have an environmental focus.

Observations and Recommendations:

- Opportunity to help support a new initiative to partner the environmental high school with local Bedouin teens on an environmental project.



We traveled to Nitzana, a very small community on the Egyptian border. Nitzana hosts an “eco village” (environmental education center), and an Israeli Bedouin boarding school (high school boys, taught by Bedouin teachers and teaching Bedouin cultural values, such as the Quran).



Observations and Recommendations:

- There might be an opportunity to assist with the environmental and/or STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics) curriculum at the school.