

Collaboration with Communities Living next to Protected Areas, for the Conservation of Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage in Israel

Shaul Goldstein, Director-General of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, 3 Am Ve'Olam Street, Jerusalem 9546303, Israel.

Raya Shurki, Sharon Golan-Hershkovitz, and Uri Ehrlich, Department of Community and Public Relations, Israel Nature and Parks Authority, 3 Am Ve'Olam Street, Jerusalem 9546303, Israel. E-mail: rayas@npa.org.il

Eti Koriyat, Northern Division of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, Tel Meggido National Park, Box 166, Meggido 19230, Israel.

Simon Nemtsov, Head of International Relations of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, 3 Am Ve'Olam Street, Jerusalem 9546303, Israel. E-mail: simon@npa.org.il

Protected Areas in Israel

The Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) is Israel's government agency in charge of all legally protected areas (Nature Reserves and National Parks). The INPA has been working for many years in collaboration with local communities. This connection between the INPA's Nature Reserves and National Parks, and the local communities that live next to them, is a longstanding association with mutual implications. Over the years we have experienced a rise in the public's impact upon the environment. This is due to the tremendous growth in the size of the population in Israel and the concomitant reduction in open spaces, and also due to the public's increase in awareness and the desire of the public to be more involved in environmental issues. In order to protect biodiversity, landscapes and heritage over the long term, the INPA realizes that we must have the public as a cooperative partner.

The INPA is empowered by Israeli law to protect and manage the biodiversity, landscape and heritage of Israel, and we use a variety of tools to implement this responsibility, including planning, enforcement, monitoring, research and development, education and public awareness, and running an assortment of activities in our Nature Reserves and National Parks to develop long-term connections with local communities.

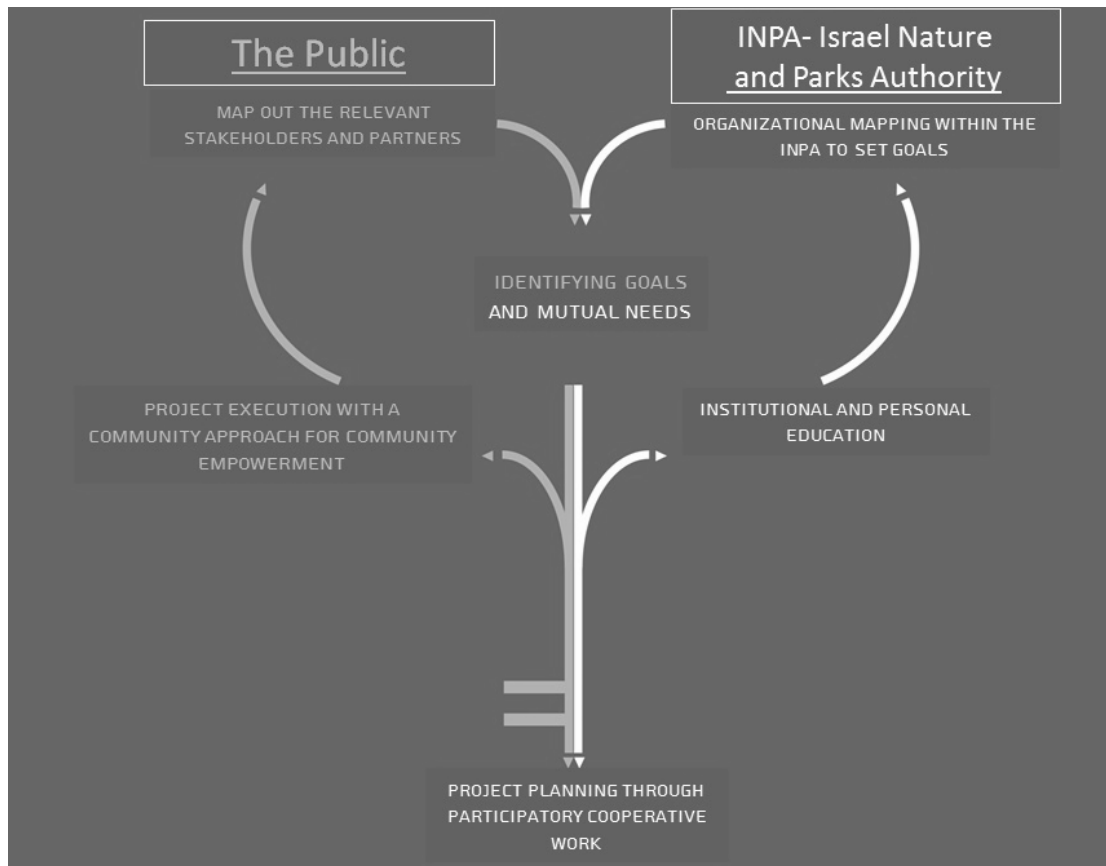
Over the last few years, the INPA has done extensive work to define anew its collaboration with the public and the tools that are necessary for this. A new professional standard within our organization has been established for collaboration with communities, and we have hired a new Coordinator for Community Relations in each of the INPA's four national regions.

Israel's Nature Reserves and National Parks contain a tremendous variety of biodiversity, as well as many protected landscapes and important heritage. While neighboring communities can sometimes come into conflict with protected areas due to different interests and perspectives regarding these natural and historic areas and their resources, the communities can also be a valuable source for support and collaboration. This support can be nurtured to the point where the community actually identifies itself by the protected area and it actually becomes a patron and a source of activism for its protection.

In Israel there have been social trends lately for greater public involvement in government issues, and a trend by government to facilitate greater transparency and public input. These trends have resulted in greater participation of local communities in sustainable development and management of the INPA's Nature Reserves and National Parks.

The "Key to Success" Model

The INPA has adjusted the agency's vision statement to reflect this new spirit of collaboration and transparency in order to make the public more involved and active in the INPA's efforts, and we have developed a new model built upon participatory planning for cooperation with the public in general, and with neighboring communities in particular, We call our model: "The Key to Success".



The "Key to Success" is a model that involves participatory planning and collaborative work between the Public and the INPA, with feedbacks to ensure improvement of the action plans by both parties. The model is depicted in the figure in the shape of a key.

The Key to Success (see figure) has six activities that all feedback to each other, from mapping the various participants and stakeholders and their needs, to learning from the effectiveness of projects and actions, and on to project planning through participatory cooperative work.

Details of the model and each of its components are described in a booklet and all managers of Nature Reserves and National Parks are taught to use it. Each component of the model is broken down into 8-10 action points and the managers are given practical guidelines for accomplishment. There are also detailed checklists and worksheets that the protected area managers receive in order to keep track of their progress in using the model.

The Key to Success model has worked extremely well with quite a number of local communities in Israel.

Collaboration with neighbors through volunteers

A natural connection always exists between protected areas and the communities that live next to them. This connection can be positive, negative, or mutual apathy (ignoring each other), and such will be its outcomes. The INPA seeks positive connection between the

protected areas and their neighbors for two major reasons: practical (in order to increase activities to a larger audience), and also for the principle of serving the public and protection of nature, landscapes, and heritage.

Many of the collective projects between the INPA and neighboring communities were actually initiated by INPA workers who came from within these communities. The goal was to manage these connections by creating a model for mapping the potential partners for each protected area, in order to create larger circles of active participants.

We encourage activism in our projects by setting up possibilities for volunteer work in many of the INPA's endeavors which are appropriate for the neighboring community. This volunteer work empowers the community and brings them closer to understanding the INPA. Working together to achieve goals reaps better results than had been possible only by the INPA without these community-based volunteers.

The INPA workers who are also members of the nearby communities choose their volunteerism for a number of reasons, including the feeling of belonging to a large and successful organization combined with the positive public image, and activities that incorporate fun and enjoyment.

In this way the local communities learn to experience nature and this brings a stronger link to their love of the land, since everyone is connected to nature together.

This is in keeping with the famous saying by John Muir: "*When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.*"