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Tourism and social dialogue for local development in Akko

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Background information:

Acre (Hebreu), Akko (in Arabic and modern Israel) is situated in the Western Galilee region of Northern Israel at the northern extremity of Haifa Bay. Akko was a strategic coastal link to the Levant during the period of Crusades. In 2001, the old city of Acre was recognized by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Many visible remains reveal the stories of the Crusader and Ottoman quarters. Acre is also the holiest city of the Baha'i Faith¹. Acre is a mixed city with 72 percent Jewish and 28 percent Arab which represents 6,000 to 8,000 inhabitants depending on the source. The heritage values of the city were identified in the new Master Plan of the city in 1993 and again during the Nomination process of Acre as World Heritage in 2001. In 2003, the Old City of Acre was inscribed as a World Heritage Property by UNESCO. In spite of its cultural and historical importance, the efforts to transform Acre to a leading heritage site faced many difficulties. One of the characteristics of this failure is lack of adequate participation of the local community in processes and efforts to develop tourism.

The 23-25 May 2011's workshop conducted at the University of Haifa, Israel by Prof. Yoel Mansfeld, head of the Center for Tourism, Pilgrimage & Recreation Research (CTPRR) aimed at optimizing community benefits in and around cultural-based World Heritage Sites (WHS) with a special case of the Old City of Acre, Israel. This workshop was the second of Unesco/Unitwin Network "Culture, Tourism, Development" : the first workshop conducted at the University of Bologna (Rimini, September, 2007²) and was a follow-up to the first three meetings (Paris, March 2005, Gréoux les Bains, May 2006, Laval, June 2010) which enabled the Network to engage in exchanges views and experience regarding the contribution of tourism to the promotion of cultural diversity, efforts to reduce poverty and support sustainable development of territories. The meetings have always focused on practical cases and lessons learnt on field to enrich university education, and vice versa. Since its creation, the Network has also endeavoured to translate the principles of the UNESCO Conventions of

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¹ The Bahá'í Faith is a monotheistic religion founded by Bahá'u'lláh in 19th-century Persia, emphasizing the spiritual unity of all humankind. There are an estimated five to six million Bahá'ís around the world in more than 200 countries and territories.

² <http://www.economiarimini.unibo.it/NR/rdonlyres/6EC45FDE-0BDA-4D57-88A4-20FA3ED9D11C/212653/Atti1AtelierEnglishversion.pdf>

1972, 2003 and 2005 into strategies and activities, and to convey the aims of the Unesco/Unitwin Network "Culture, Tourism and Development" program. The next meetings will be in Gabon (3-8 June, 2012) and Tunisia (June 2013).

The workshop used the Old City of Acre as a case study to analyze the relationship between a given local community and all other stakeholders involved in developing tourism in a World Heritage Site. A conceptual model integrated into a group technique was used as the methodology for this workshop. The evaluators of these interrelations between the community and the other stakeholders were cultural tourism experts who are cultural tourism researchers and planners. All are members of the UNESCO-UNITWIN network on "Culture, Tourism & Development"³.

The aim of the Haifa workshop was to help the different political, economic actors to find solutions to the existing dilemmas, among them, upgrading the living conditions of the local population with an integrating strategy of community-based tourism. How to manage Akko tourism so that it pays to protect the place not destroy it? How to create jobs, integrate the community values? These were the issues discussed during the different studies. Were invited to the academic workshop, the stakeholders, among them, the representatives of the Old Acre Development Company, Akko Municipality, Ministry of Tourism, and the Jewish, Christian Arabs and Muslim Arabs residents of Acre. Many political, cultural, economic and education issues presented a challenge to rise such as the Jewish-Arab conflict, poverty, property ownership, and tourism.

After visiting the Akko World Heritage Site, listening to different involved locals through conferences, a three-round result and recommendation was used with the international academic team at the University of Haifa conducted by Prof. Yoel Mansfeld.

The **first round** of the workshop results and recommendations was dealing with the issue of how we can better integrate social cultural tourism into the old city using the "Value Stretch" (VS) model and Nominal Group Technique (NGT)⁴ referring to the current attitudes and perceptions of the local community in old Akko towards cultural tourism's impacts.

These are some of recommendations to create a integrating strategy of community-based tourism:

- Putting in place heritage/tourism pedagogical strategy
- Strike a contract between the central government and the local community
- Creating awareness and communication tools
- Establishing an incubation center
- Identifying job opportunities
- Using the WH inscription and label as a branching tool
- Creating a cooperation mechanism of all stakeholders
- Enhancing collective use of public space and free access

³ The participants went from all world:

France (H. Barré, Unesco; M. Gravri-Barbas and S. Jacquot, IREST, Sorbonne Paris 1 ; J. Napoli, University of Toulouse 3), Canada (L. Bourdeau, University of Laval, Quebec), Italy (F. Dallari, and A. Mariotti, University of Bologna), Russia (o. Dyakonova, and N. Laguseva , Russian Academy of Tourism), Spain (N. Morere, Ray Juan Carlos University), Argentina (C.M. Ramos, UNESCO Chair on Culture, Tourism & Development, Buenos Aires), Belgium (N. Salazar, University of Leuven), Israel (Y. Mansfeld, N. Collins-Criner, and E Ketter of CTPRR, University of Haifa ; S.A. Peleg of Israel Antiquities Authority and the University of Haifa).

⁴ Yoel Mansfeld, (1995); *The «Value Stretch» model and its implementation in dedecting tourists' class differentiated destination choice*. Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, Vol.4.N° 3pp.71-92.

- Providing incentives for local entrepreneurs:



Pict 1: Touristic streets in Akko. A local shop



Pict 2, 3: Local entrepreneurs initiative to provide fresh orange

- Enhancing collective use of public space and free access :



Pict 4: Local square in Akko



Pict 5: Unexploited square in Akko

- Allow property ownership of tourism businesses and homes



Pict 6, 7: Renovation for a high standing hotel in Akko by local entrepreneur

The key issue of the **second round** of the workshop was on what cultural tourism development and operation attributes currently characterize old Acre?

The current situation with some illustrations:

- Lack of community integration in tourism system
- No local leadership
- Poor tourism governance
- Inability of the leading tourism stakeholders to prioritize community interests
- Multi-faceted array of conflicts between stakeholders
- Lack of visible itineraries
- Lack of money spending opportunities
- Negligence of urban spaces:



Pict 8: Local garbage in the city centre

- Very poor representation of local art:



Pict 9,10: Local souvenirs in the oriental bazaars



Pict 11,12: Local souvenirs in the oriental bazaars



Pict 13: Parking space

The **third round** was on the future expectations, how to improve the current situation in the future?

Some key points:

- Providing educational programs to improve local understanding of heritage
- Translating all tourism and planning materials to Arabic
- Involving the local community in future tourism planning
- Improving integration between the local community and stakeholders
- Removing obstacles for local people's operation of business
- Using religious leaders as promoters of cultural tourism
- Creating community focused walking tours
- Encouraging NGO's involvement in tourism planning and operation.



Pict 14: Entrance of old city of Akko

The NGT workshop yielded data on the collective assessment of Acre's community involvement in its tourism system. The expert team elaborated aspects of community and tourism development in Acre on the five following levels:

- Recognition and acceptance - of the people living in the Old City of Acre as a legitimate stakeholder that is expected to voice his needs, expectations and limits for acceptable change (LAC), and that is expecting that this voice will be heard, taken into account and implemented in policies, planning processes, development processes and in implementation of Acre's operation of its tourism system.
- Cooperation, communication and dialog - that will transform the local community in the Old City to an equal partner aware of tourism processes, involved in operating the tourism system and support tourism as a legitimate economic base in the Acre.
- Economic inclusion – taking all necessary steps to actively integrate the local community in tourism, either as employees or as entrepreneurs of local tourism businesses.
- Education, training and awareness – activities which are required to gain the community's positive attitude toward tourism based on their LAC on the one hand, and on their wish to utilize the cultural tourism resource as a mean for economic prosperity.

Tourism product management and maintenance – to assure that the tourist quality of the tangible and intangible cultural assets of Acre are maintained and managed in a sustainable manner.

These intensive three days of expertise on the old Acre allow the international academic team to highlight the different historical, cultural, religious, political, economic aspects to the local community. To promote the development of the city, relations between the residents and the local cultural heritage must be encouraged and strengthened. Creating an awareness of an identification with the archeological sites will contribute decisively to creating one complete urban system that integrates dwellings, heritage sites, commercial activities, and tourist attractions.

Enhancing the colorful oriental bazaars of Acre, the city of walls, the fisherman's wharf, and wonderful restaurants are all part of the special attractions of the city, to highlight renovating the streets, businesses, and Public Square, spaces, creating cultural events by involving the local community it creates a better place to visit and to live.

To promote the development of the city, relations between the residents and the local cultural heritage must be encouraged and strengthened. Creating an awareness of and identification with the archeological sites will contribute decisively to creating one complete urban system that integrates dwellings, heritage sites, commercial activities, and tourist attractions. Renovating the streets, businesses, Public Square, spaces, creating cultural events by involving the local community will create a better place to visit and to live. A final report will be presented to UNESCO and to the Community of Acco.



Pict 15: Heritage restoration



Pict 16: Fisherman



Pict 17: Local market at the bazaar



Pict 18: Shops in the bazaar, Akko



Pict 19: Restaurants in Akko



Pict 20: Hammam museum in Akko