

Balfour community forest: linking forest use and management through public participation in Israel

Heike KAISER

*Kassel University, School of Architecture, Urban Planning, and Landscape Architecture
Faculty of Landscape Planning and Land Use, Kassel, GERMANY*

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Abstract:

Community Forests play an important role within the urban green space. Such forests represent nature close to where people live, offer unique recreational settings, and provide special educational environments, e.g. for children and people with special needs. The objective of this article is to link recreational forest use and management by elaborating a sustainable development concept for a peri-urban forest and by showing approaches of how local communities can participate in the processes of planning, designing, establishing, and managing their forest.

This article contributes the example of the participatory development concept for Balfour Forest. The area is located in northern Israel, and it is part of a replanted forest network around Nazareth. It constitutes a cultural landscape that originates from the 20th century, representing the unique legacy of forestation efforts in Israel, with some plantings dating back as far as the British Mandate Period.

The case of the Balfour Community Forest is presented and approaches to shaping peri-urban forests according to the (ever changing) preferences and needs of local urban societies are discussed. Such approaches imply that peri-urban forests are managed on the basis of differing local needs and use preferences in order to become sustainable cultural landscapes.

Keywords: *Community Forest, Peri-urban Landscape, Public Participation, Multi-cultural Society, Sustainable Development, Local Identity, Cultural Landscape, Outdoor Recreation, Quality of Life.*

Introduction: Need for public green spaces

In recent years, the need for public green spaces has been growing corresponding to rapid urbanization processes in various countries, and increasing attention has been given to their importance for the quality of life and the environment. Due to lack of resources, it is necessary to identify the factors that form successfully managed and used open spaces. Some of the factors mentioned by previous studies are: involvement of the local community, accessibility of the green space, and development of recreation facilities. Various concepts and approaches have been developed to

describe the many functions and values of green spaces in urban surroundings. Among others, the term 'urban forestry' has come into wider use referring to the planning and management of all tree-dominated green resources, both publicly and privately owned, in and near urban areas (e.g. Randrup et al., 2005; Konijnendijk et al., 2006).

Just like trees along streets, gardens and parks, peri-urban forests, i.e. forests located at the periphery of cities and towns, are elements of this wider 'urban forest'. They play a very important role within the overall urban green space resource due to their particular characteristics (Konijnendijk, 2008).

Peri-urban forests represent nature close to where people live and offer recreational settings where people can get away from urban life. Moreover, they provide an important educational environment, e.g. for children and people with special needs to learn about nature. In order for peri-urban forests to meet the demands of urban society, it is important that local users are involved when these green spaces are planned, designed, established and managed (Van Herzele et al., 2005; Janse & Konijnendijk, 2007).

Community forestry

This is reflected in the increasing use of the term 'community forestry' in urban settings. Traditionally community forestry has related to forest management for and involving local rural communities (e.g. Brender & Carey, 1998; Konijnendijk, 2003). Community forestry in an urban context, however, is rather about shaping peri-urban forests according to the ever-changing preferences and needs of local urban societies - and often together with local people (e.g. Davies & Vaughan, 1998). This approach implies that peri-urban forests are managed and take shape according to the particularities of local urban society as, for instance, reflected in local use of these forests. Together with factors such as forest size and the presence of alternative nearby green spaces, local communities determine how particular peri-urban forests look, for instance, in terms of structure. Thus, better understanding of the interrelations between the local urban community and their peri-urban forest structure is essential for improving management and use of the forest.

Although the individual topics of peri-urban forest use and forest management have been covered rather extensively in literature (e.g. Konijnendijk et al., 2006), the linking of the two has been less common. Moreover, the topic of local community characteristics and their impacts on forest use and management has been considered much less frequently. This linking is part of the present paper, which aims at contributing a sustainable development concept for Balfour Forest located southeast of Nazareth in northern Israel.

Background: Community forestry in Israel

Israel is a highly urbanized country since more than 90% of the population live in urban settlements. In addition, Israel has a highly diverse population reflected in its 7.6 million people from various origins and their religions (75.5% Jewish, 20.4% Muslim and 4.1% Christians et al.). Immigration contributes significantly to the already high population growth rate of 1.8% per year (CBS Israel, 2009).



Figure 1. View on Balfour Forest with its linear border of aged Aleppo Pines from the east.

Rapid population growth has led to ongoing development of existing and new communities, roads and infrastructure creating tremendous pressure on green spaces, including forests. Threats to forests and their fragmentation are particularly severe near urban areas. On the other hand, more peri-urban forests and other green spaces are needed to meet the demands of the urban population.



Figure 2. Latest neighborhood extension in Ginagar on former citrus orchards.

The country presently has a forest cover of 8.3%, comprising 171,000 ha of native, natural and planted forests and 85,000 ha of other wooded land (FAO, 2005). As a rule, peri-urban forests in Israel are usually small. Some were originally planted as conventional forests throughout the 20th century, but due to urbanization processes, many have become rather unpleasant 'back yards' of the adjacent communities. Such forests are often bordered by culturally diverse neighborhoods whose residents might differ significantly in their attitude towards the forest and the way they make use of it.

Forests in Israel are managed by the Land Development Agency of the Jewish National Fund - Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel (JNF-KKL). Until a few years ago, their management policy was similar in traditional and peri-urban forests. In order to meet the changing demands of society, however, the JNF-KKL started a public participation program to improve the development and management of forests near cities. In the course of working together with several 'pilot' communities, they assimilated standards on peri-urban forestry that are similar to common ideals in Europe and the United States (Shaler & Konijnendijk, 2006).

In 2005, three peri-urban forests and their adjacent Jewish communities were chosen to serve as pilot projects, among them was Balfour Forest with the adjacent Jewish community of Migdal HaEmek.



Figure 3. Aerial picture of Balfour Forest and the adjacent communities of Migdal HaEmek (northwest), Yafia (northeast) and Ginegar (south) in the Nazareth Hills.

Landscape character analysis: Balfour Forest

Balfour Forest is a peri-urban forest extending over 420 ha around the town of Migdal HaEmek in the Nazareth Hills. Today, it mainly consists of various stands of conifers, such as Aleppo Pine (*Pinus halepensis*), Calabrian Pine (*Pinus brutia*), and Mediterranean Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*). The semi-dense forest landscape is scattered with several groves of Olive (*Olea europaea*) or Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*) and divided by wadis populated with River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). Particularly in western parts, the forest ground is dotted with protected geophytes, such as Persian Cyclamen (*Cyclamen persicum*), Sun Eye's Tulip (*Tulipa agenensis*), Crown Anemone (*Anemone coronaria*), and Nazareth Iris (*Iris bismarckiana*).

The forest encloses two central grasslands that once served as pasture lands or crop fields of the adjacent kibbutz and that are now increasingly being used as semi-legal grazing area for goats and cows by local Arab

farmers. Particularly in the east where large parts are often flamed on purpose, the grassland has degraded into phrygana, mainly consisting of Prickly Burnet (*Sarcopoterium spinosum*) and Spiny Broom (*Calicotome villosae*).



Figure 4. Carpets of protected geophytes, such as Persian Cyclamen, cover the western forest ground during springtime.

In addition to its botanical characteristics, the Mediterranean forest landscape holds historic monuments in the central part, such as a Jewish cemetery from 1935 and a memorial referring to the Arab Israeli War in 1948, as well as archaeological sites in the eastern part, such as remnants of wine-presses from the Bronze Age. In particular for local people, the forest is home to a range of unique spiritual landscapes, such as Kippa Hill or Demon's Hill.

Historic importance

The planning area belongs to a replanted forest network around Nazareth and represents the unique legacy of forestation activity initiated by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) that occurred in Israel during the last decades, dating back as far as the British Mandate period (1917 – 1948). After centuries of land reclamation and soil degradation during the Roman, Byzantine and Muslim Periods, this Zionist activity constitutes an outstanding enterprise. It has changed the Mediterranean cultural landscape (again), and the process itself has turned into a symbol of people's ability to shape their environment according to their needs and way of thought.

Being one result of this forestation activity, Balfour Forest has a special atmosphere: Initiated by kibbutz pioneers on former Arab agricultural land in 1928, the 'Balfour Forest Planting Project' was the first big JNF enterprise after World War I; in addition, it was the first forest to be planted in honor of a non-Jewish personality: Arthur James Earl of Balfour. Despite the JNF strategy of connecting the young 120 ha large forest with the kibbutz of Ginegar, Balfour Forest suffered from numerous flaming, arson and sabotage incidents during the Arab Revolt (1936-1939). Arabs from

Nazareth and adjacent settlements aimed at concealing bunkers and clandestine military training of the Jewish Palmach army. As a result, the north-eastern part was burnt down completely. Natural recovery and replacement planting during World War II, however, allowed its restoration (Liphshitz & Biger, 2004).



Figure 5. Ginegar cemetery was implemented by kibbutz pioneers in 1935 and constitutes one of many spiritual landscapes inside Balfour Forest.



Figure 6. Memorial in the midst of Balfour Forest, reminding of the Arab – Israeli War in 1948.

Current status

Most parts of the current forest were planted in the 1950s and early 1960s, and forestation was continued in the late 1970s and 1980s up to a size of 420 ha. Being easily accessible by foot, bicycle, public transportation or private vehicle, Balfour Forest slowly started to be used for flora excursions, holiday events and daily recreation activities by few local groups and individuals – despite the absence of appropriate infrastructure and recreation facilities as well as the occurrence of various use conflicts and the existence of several illegal dumping sites.

Until recently, however, especially families rather preferred to visit standardized urban parks as there were neither contemporary play devices for children nor organized activities concerning the forest, i.e. it was lacking important 'pull effects'.

Moreover, none of the three adjacent communities - Migdal HaEmek, a Jewish development town from 1953 with about 25,000 inhabitants of various origins; Ginegar, a Jewish kibbutz from 1922 with about 500 inhabitants; Yafia, an Arab satellite town of Nazareth from ca.1500 BC with nearly 18,000 Muslim and Christian inhabitants - was particularly involved in forest development and management. With regard to this unique setting at a socio-geographical 'clashing point', however, it goes without saying that public awareness and recreational uses are to be increased through the JNF-KKL Community Forest program in favor of the *genius loci* of Balfour Forest.

Common standards: Implementation of a community forest

The first stage of the JNF-KKL Community Forest program initiated in 2005 includes: Preservation and enhancement of the selected forests regarding natural and cultural heritage; minimizing urban development and improving recreational uses; creating partnerships between foresters, local authorities and users; and emphasizing free and open access to the forest and its facilities.

The second stage since 2006 mainly consists of adapting the program to several other peri-urban forests in the country, including the following approaches: Promoting the 'community forest' idea to foresters and district managers; organizing interdisciplinary workshops; completing vision, goals and management plans for the selected forests, promoting them to partners and establishing joint working groups for each forest; creating an open data and information network within JNF-KKL; setting periodic expert meetings; promoting the topic within the JNF-KKL management and local government heads in Israel; and national branding of community forests (Shaler & Konijnendijk, 2006).

Motivation term (Stage I)

Within the first of three years of the program, the JNF-KKL Community Forestry staff coordinates all forest matters in cooperation with local (Jewish) authorities, institutions and residents. Creating a joint management concept in accordance to a priority list of local wishes and problems is considered a powerful tool promoting the bonds between local residents and the forest. Moreover, it is an approach to achieve sustainability by combining JNF-KKL forestry skills with the knowledge and the constructive feedback of the adjacent communities, i.e. by communicating cognitive knowledge based on

individual technical expertise; experiential knowledge based on personal common sense and logic; and value-based knowledge based on social-political and normative-moral standards (Yaffe, 2009).

During a public participation process conducted by the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Haifa University, social responsibility is to be established in the community of Migdal HaEmek. Besides, such a program introduces an experiential opportunity for local residents to take active part in the processes of planning, development and nourishing the forest, e.g. they define a forest vision, learn about its sites and values and sign an official agreement to preserve it (Yaffe, 2009).

According to the JNF-KKL Community Forestry program, public involvement is to be realized by communicating knowledge in the form of public hearings, conferences and the formation of advisory groups. Accordingly, three working groups were established in Migdal HaEmek in 2008: Recreation, Attraction and Infrastructure; Forest Conservation and Development; Community Awareness and Education.

Implementation term (Stage II)

After the motivation term, the local communities are expected to initiate and continue Community Forest activities by themselves. The overall aim of such activities, combined with education on forest management as well as natural and cultural heritage, is to make them an integral part of the communal activities. A steering team, consisting of representatives of JNF-KKL, the residents, the municipality and the mayor, meets once a year to evaluate activities of the past year due to their stability, efficiency and adaptation to the communal needs and to determine the strategy for the following year.

The success of the program is expressed in the development of a common focus and the joint coordination of individual wishes and thus ultimately dependent on communication and constructive feedback between all adjacent communities and JNF-KKL as well as their flexibility to changes of social, ecological and economic conditions. By responding to local needs and by solving use conflicts, the program can make Balfour Forest become a central area for recreation and a major source of local identity and profit (Yaffe, 2009).

Planning objective: Recreational use and awareness-raising

Peri-urban forests provide a wide range of benefits. They offer attractive settings for outdoor recreation (e.g. Tyrväinen et al., 2005), and like all green spaces they can help improve health by encouraging people to be physically active in restorative environments (e.g. Nilsson et al., 2007). Social and aesthetic benefits of green spaces also include providing more attractive living environments, offering opportunities for open-air encounters and educational values in terms of keeping urban residents in touch with nature (Konijnendijk, 2008).

Not having been involved into the Community Forest project in Migdal HaEmek from the beginning and only having joined on a voluntary basis in 2009, the author has the following expectations how this project might best be developed in a sustainable way:

Proximity and accessibility

Recreational use is undoubtedly the prioritized use of most peri-urban forests. Although in urban environments, parks typically have the highest frequency of visitation, forests are also very popular. Proximity to local residents is a key factor here as walking time has clearly been identified as the single most important precondition for the use of urban green space. Proximity and accessibility are especially crucial for the many low income groups in the surrounding communities of Balfour Forest who often lack alternatives for nearby outdoor recreation. Together with other user groups that have special needs, such as children, young mothers with babies, the elderly and the disabled, they are considered key groups in the use of public green (e.g. Van Herzele and Wiedemann, 2003).



Figure 7. Popular meeting spot of local Arabs on a cultural heritage site near the main road between Migdal HaEmek and Yafia.

Attracting various user groups

That the preferences of different users can help shape urban woodland, for example by influencing design and management, is suggested by some studies (e.g. Coles and Bussey, 2000). According to personal observation and interviews of individual visitors, walking, picnics and cycling seem the most popular activities in Balfour Forest. Although these common recreation uses exist in Migdal HaEmek, knowledge about the preferences of all segments of the surrounding population is important for enhancing the use of the forest as different people associate forests with different feelings, possibilities for activities etc. (e.g. Tyrväinen & Mäkinen, 2004; Tyrväinen et al. 2005). Analyzing wooded areas inside Balfour Forest that children of various ages have spontaneously taken into ownership is an example of how the young population has their own ways of using green space and nature. Ethnic minorities comprise yet another particular user group of the peri-urban forest and might need their own recreation facilities (e.g. Konijnendijk, 2008).

Differing recreational preferences

Recreational use in open space is continuously changing, along with changes in society at large and local communities in particular. Today many people expect, for instance, to participate in outdoor leisure activities of their choice, at times and locations convenient to their own lifestyle, as a result of developments towards more individualistic and less organized recreation and leisure behavior (Pröbstl, 2004). Against this background, Balfour Forest is expected to be accessible for all kinds of environmentally-friendly recreation, such as walking, jogging, cycling, horse-riding as well as nature excursions and cultural events.

Principle: Multiple Learning from a Cultural Landscape

In accordance to the priority list set up by the local working groups as well as based on her SWOT analysis, the author outlined a development concept and management framework for Balfour Forest and its surrounding and suggested within her Master thesis which participatory set of action might at best be operated for the near future. The development concept is basically premised on the principle of 'Multiple Learning from a Cultural Landscape'. This approach is two-fold: Firstly, it aims at promoting various natural and anthropological elements of cultural heritage inside Balfour Forest; secondly, it is to engage awareness among all three communities in order to preserve these elements.

Cultural landscape

A cultural landscape can be defined as the result of an encounter between natures and culture, or as some form of integration between the human, the cultural and the natural factors. Accordingly, there are historians who take interest in the visible aspect of a community's historical development whereas planners may look at other aspects, such as the results of land use and changes of property. Moreover, there is a distinction between material cultural landscapes, which are physical and visible manifestations of human activity, and immaterial (ideal) cultural landscapes, which have a spiritual or symbolic meaning and whose traces may only be known by a limited group of people.

The cultural landscape of a peri-urban forest is not only influenced by humans, it also influences people's views of themselves, their local identity, their present and past. Peri-urban forests hold a certain identity value as



Figure 8. Evidence of how children have spontaneously acquired a particular place in the forest near Ginégar.

they represent or embody people's identity at the local level as members of a community. The peri-urban forest therefore has its own complex, distinct narrative - a story of its development that is worth to be told to the public. By highlighting and presenting its natural and anthropological elements, the local communities can preserve and promote important traces of their cultural heritage.

Space and place

Besides its cultural aspect, a peri-urban forest can also be considered from an experiential perspective, focusing on the concepts of space and place. 'Space' is a common symbol of freedom all over the world: It lies open, suggests a future and invites action. On the negative side, space also can hold a threat, as open and free can also mean exposed and vulnerable. In contrast to space, 'place' can be characterized as enclosed and humanized space, as the calm center of established values. In brief, place is security and home, whereas space is freedom and the unknown. Humans require both: They are attached to the one (place) while they constantly long for the other (space), always moving between shelter and venture, between attachment and freedom. However, "when space feels thoroughly familiar to ... [them], it has become place" (Tuan, 2007:73).

Meanings assigned to a place are unique and do not transfer to other places, even though the biophysical circumstances may be identical. A 'sense of a place' refers to profound emotional links that develop between people and the place they live in, perceive, experience and value. Moreover, it relates to the biophysical context of the natural (peri-urban forest) and built environment (surrounding communities) as well as to respective knowledge, values and attitudes.

Social scientists have argued that connections with places are often the strongest and most compelling when they are rooted in social interactions within a place. With the sense of a place deriving from people, experiences and memories created the place. Environmental psychologists describe this as 'place identity', referring to a strong sense of attachment to a place (Ardoin, 2006). Peri-urban forests, in this context, can be associated in first place with the sense of spaciousness. Although the cluttered environment of Balfour Forest may seem the antithesis of open space (except of the enclosed fields), it may be in fact a "trackless region of possibility" (Tuan, 2007: 56).



Figure 9. Semi-dense stands of aged Aleppo Pines in the eastern part of Balfour Forest offer a wide range of recreation possibilities.

Open-air forest classroom

It would be false, however, to see forests only as space, as wild and unknown areas of venture, exposure and freedom. They can also be places, being part of local people's daily living environment. The more residents feel 'at home' about their peri-urban forest and inert a local identity, the more they will take care of it and its environmental condition. Once their environmental awareness has been risen, they will strive at best to teach also their children and others how to behave according to nature in open spaces.

One useful element that can engage awareness-raising mainly among children - but also among their teachers, parents etc. - is the establishment of an open-air forest classroom. It can - once it is implemented - be easily integrated into the curriculum of the adjacent schools and become a core element of ecological and cultural education.

Development concept: Balfour Community Forest

The close links and the joint development of the neighboring communities of Migdal HaEmek, Yafia and Ginegar, with their own respective cultures comprising distinctive spiritual, material and emotional features, and Balfour Forest in their geographical center are key to the Balfour Community Forest development concept.

Regional scale: Preservation and extension of the green belt

On a larger scale, the concept aims at the preservation and extension of the green belt around Migdal HaEmek and Yafia. Accordingly, it suggests the establishment of green links towards urban green spaces as well as towards future neighborhoods in order to additionally strengthen the ecological integrity to the forest network of the Nazareth metropolitan region.

The proposed management framework focuses on ecological land use regarding habitat corridors and buffer zones towards the urban fringes. It

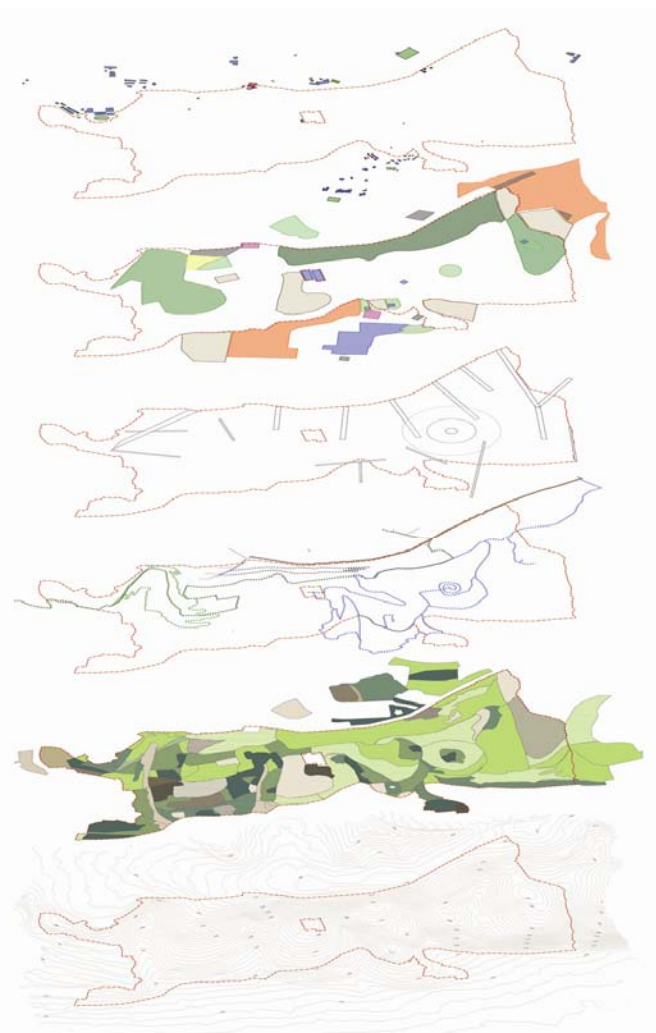


Figure 10. Important components of the Balfour Community Forest development concept, upwards: Topography; Forest stands; Educational routes; View corridors and lookouts (part I); Activity zones; Collaborating facilities (part II).

puts emphasis on productive agricultural areas inside Balfour Forest as well as in its surrounding by means of sustainable forestry and intercropping agriculture. In the political context, it supports a compact development of all three communities within the framework of the Israeli National Outline Plan No. 35. Due to economic capital, the communal management framework engages aspects of 'green business', such as long-term profitability, community benefit, sustainable material cycles and resource efficiency on a local scale, as well as fair trade, true cost pricing and product labeling on a regional or even national scale. In the social dimension, fundamental human needs, such as health and access to knowledge are provided. Regarding the communities, social equity, security, cultural diversity, cultural preservation and sense of place are to be considered relating to the aesthetic dimension of sustainability.

Local scale: Landscape features and scenic views, activity zones and cooperating facilities

On a medium scale referring to Balfour Forest and its immediate surrounding, the management framework proposes to preserve important landscape features and to highlight remarkable scenic views in the ecological dimension as well as to establish activity zones and to collaborate with local education facilities in the social dimension of sustainability.

The implementation of educational routes for different user groups is a main element of the first concept part. These routes proceed mostly along existing forest roads and make use of various forest habitats: *Eco Route* in the dense western part of the forest; *Balfour Promenade* along the Migdal HaEmek - Nazareth main road; *Planar Route* with not more than 8% incline along the northern slope; *History Route* through extensive parts of Balfour Forest, Ginagar and Yafia. With regard to the beautiful scenery, view corridors are proposed at specific spots in the form of narrow swaths offering restricted views towards a range of highlighted forest features. Moreover, panoramic viewpoints are proposed along Balfour Promenade and History Route. Apart from those, two lookouts inside forest and phrygana reserve offer 360° scenic views.



Figure 11. Beautiful scenic view across one of the forest wadis towards the agricultural fields of Jezreel Valley.

It is suggested to create a rather natural mix of dense and semi-dense stands so that visitors can experience a lot of different forest habitats on a relatively small scale. Carob and olive stands as well as the central grassland are designated to hold (again) agro-forestry uses, such as intercropping; areas of protected geophytes or phrygana are designated to be preserved due to their ecological value. In order to enhance the growth of

young stands, it is crucial to prohibit grazing inside areas of protected geophytes, phrygana and pine stands during the rainy season (October – April). This approach has a further benefit: Visitors are unhampered by cattle and can enjoy preserved habitats during the blooming season. Moreover, grazing during the dry season only - with the exception of young stands, intercropping fields and entrance areas - may help to prevent forest fires as cattle will browse the dry remains of surface cover responsible for expediting the spread of fire.



Figure 12. Local Arab farmers increasingly tend their goats in sensitive forest areas.

Another distinct element in the management framework is the use of drip irrigation on intercropped fields. This ancient method advanced with modern equipment is considered one of the most productive kinds of irrigation all over the Mediterranean region as it is in average 90% efficient and thus a most reliable technique for regions where water is scarce (FAO 2010).

The second concept part promotes different activity and development zones inside Balfour Forest that are all connected to the educational routes. Moreover, it proposes suitable areas for parking and residential extension at the forest fringe as well as areas of cultural heritage that need to be renovated or extended. Besides, collaboration with several facilities in the forest surrounding is recommended. According to a sustainable economy, the redevelopment of existing infrastructure is suggested as far as possible since some facilities or areas have already existed in their essence and only need to be renovated in an environmental-friendly way or to be re-located. By using natural but long-lasting materials for outdoor furniture as well as a user-friendly design language, the common temptations for vandalism are expected to decrease.

Furthermore, emphasis is put on the increasing involvement of local residents, municipalities and additional institutions. By helping to implement

specific activity zones, such as the renovation of the forest entrance area or the restoration of listed monuments in Ginegar, volunteers will feel more attached to the forest and will treat these areas with greater care in future. Apart from that, joint ventures and partnerships with adjacent schools are part of the management framework: Classes are encouraged to make use of the open-air forest classroom or help with tree planting. Another crucial part of the management concept is the idea that school classes, sport associations or youth movements become 'Forest Guards' and adopt a distinct forest area or activity zone according to the prevention of environmental nuisances.

Conclusions: A changing image of both forest and local communities

Since the need for open green space is growing corresponding to rapid urbanization processes, increasing attention needs to be paid to the contributions that peri-urban forests provide for the quality of life and the environment. In summary, a pertinent peri-urban forest management thus should reflect the local communities and their use of the forest by conducting to environmental, economic, social, political, and aesthetic sustainability (Selman, 2008). In order to conduct a successful Community Forest project in the planning area, it is necessary to involve the other two adjacent communities besides Migdal HaEmek into the overall project as Yafia and Ginegar have been neglected until now. After all, the major objective of this kind of innovative project is to lead a process of change inside society in order to strengthen the connection to the environment (both natural and cultural) and to take responsibility for its preservation.

In particular according to Yafia, a participatory process needs to be prepared in a sensitive way due to the obviously present ethnic-cultural gap between Arabs and Jews. After a separate initiation of public involvement among its Muslim and Christian residents, mixed meetings with the Community Forest working groups of Migdal HaEmek and Ginegar may offer the opportunity to discuss viewpoints and to find solutions regarding all environmental, social, economic, political, or aesthetic issues related to Balfour Forest and its surrounding, and thus to make the current local identity change to the better.



Figure 13. Road leading through agricultural fields, olive groves and phrygana towards Balfour Community Forest.

In the past, the landscape of Balfour Forest constituted a place of harvest and income to Arab farmers and later to the pioneers of kibbutz Ginegar. Accordingly, many narratives of special places derived from the forest,

establishing it as a spiritual landscapes to the locals. At the same time, however, it was an open space connoted with cultural conflict and fear towards the 'other' neighbors, and thus the ethnical groups fought about the land.

Nowadays, there is evidence of the ongoing cultural conflict between Arab and Jewish people, and a lot of provocation is done in this 'wild side of town' on account of the environment and elements of cultural heritage. While the open space has been used by the JNF-KKL Land Development Agency for forestry, it also provides a kind of mysterious place of the 'Great Escape'. Its proximity to the nearby settlements combined with its wilderness and sort of 'grey zone' character make it a convenient place especially for teenagers to get away, to meet in secrecy, to also go 'wild' in some ways. In contrast to this, adult people use the forest to 'escape' from everyday's life and stress.

With respect to the Community Forest project, Balfour Forest is expected to become an integral part of local governance. After all, it has best chances to become an element of pride and local identity and a cherished open space for future generations. Apart from that, Balfour Forest will always be a place of cultural heritage; it is, however, the present task of the local communities to refer to the past and to learn lessons for the future.

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