

THE DECENTRALIZATION OF CULTURAL POLICY – RAMALLAH MODEL



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Exchange of experiences
Cultural Promotion
Strategy development Attractiveness
 Local empowerment Institutional support

1. Context

Ramallah is a city about 10 miles north of the capital Jerusalem. Ramallah, like all other Palestinian cities, is struggling to rise from the destruction created by Israeli military forces during the last 60 years of occupation. Since the Oslo Accords and the return the Palestinian leadership to the homeland, Ramallah's status as the most vibrant and internationally recognized city was acknowledged. Besides its historic character as a city of tourism and great cultural activities, Ramallah nowadays is a vital economic, political and cultural center in Palestine. It hosts most of the foreign representative offices to the Palestinian Authority in addition to the government and international organizations. Ramallah has become the center for investment transactions.

Unlike other ancient Palestinian cities, Ramallah is a relatively young city, established only a few hundred years ago. Whereas the ancient cities exhibited clear and defined urban features and

characterized by long historical, social, and cultural traditions, Ramallah remained free to develop more spontaneously. This made Ramallah more hospitable and open to newcomers and new ideas, especially as the overwhelming majority of the city's original inhabitants have emigrated from Palestine, allowing for a huge margin of internal Palestinian migration, thus resulting in a social, cultural and religious fabric that is unique to Palestine, presenting a special model of co-existence and tolerance in a politically unstable zone. Yet Ramallah still faces major challenges that range from rapid urbanization, to threat on cultural heritage, lack of financial resources, limited horizontal expansion (due to Israeli occupation).

The Decentralization of Cultural Policy – Ramallah Model project stemmed out of a real need in the Palestinian cultural scene. As Ramallah was turning into a cultural hub and in the lack of a coherent and applied national cultural policy and in the almost complete absence of public funding for art and culture and community work, the Ramallah Municipality's council (first elected since 1976 due to Israel occupation) managed to identify cultural and social development as a main pillar of the Municipality' work, deviating from the normal expected role of local governments both by law and by practice. What started as small interventions in cultural and social programming slowly (and with the assistance, support and feedback of stakeholders) turned into a new pillar in the Municipality's mandate of work.

The cultural policy of the city has definitely assisted in keeping Ramallah an open and vibrant city, a city that is relatively safe and open where freedom of expression is guaranteed to a large extent. ┘

Whereas the Palestinian Ministry of Culture is allocated less than 0.003% of the national annual budget, the Ramallah municipality is the only semi-public institution that dedicated more than 6% of its budget to art, culture and community programming.

1. The project came to present a policy that aims to orchestrate and define roles of the different cultural actors in the city.
2. The project came to suggest a new way of looking at "the education tax" which was solely used for school construction, to being used also in support of projects that develop education and foster creativity.
3. The project came to emphasize that culture is a priority and that financial allocations are necessary for the development and presentation of culture.
4. The projects aimed to present local governments as a decentralized semipublic umbrella for cultural development of a city.
5. The project aimed to stipulate a cultural policy that allows for Ramallah to uphold and be committed to the concepts of diversity, openness and multiplicity.
6. The project came to break the cycle of elite and limited audiences for the art and culture in Palestine.
7. The project also came to present art and culture as a tool for employment and to encourage the involvement of women and girls in the process.

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2. Ramallah and culture

The Palestinian cultural policy model can be described as a non-systemized model predominantly oriented to the nonprofit sector. The model has limited grass roots orientation and works well in the central part of Palestine and in major cities. At the national level, the administrative functions of culture are carried out by the Ministry of Culture which when it was established in 1994, there already



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was a large and vibrant civic cultural sector. Sadly and since its establishment, Ministry of Culture was unable to formulate a clear identity and role on its own as a major player in the Palestinian cultural scene. Even though in 2011, the central government launched the first "Strategic Plan for the Cultural Sector 2011-2013", the plan remained without tools of implementation and activation. Due to the above and in the year 2010, it became clear to the Ramallah Municipality that the stipulation and implementation of cultural policies and programs should not be limited to the relevant ministries and civil society institutions; it has to become an increasingly essential part of the tasks of local government institutions. Experience has shown that it is not possible to isolate cultural work from community activity, and that culture is an essential part of development work in general, and in the work of local government institutions in particular, especially because of the institutions' ability, unlike others, to communicate directly with the various segments of society, and be constantly aware of their needs, whether by virtue of their social position or the role assigned to them by the communities. In addition, unlike the public sector in Palestine which basically depends on donor funding, the Ramallah Municipality manages its program from the revenue generated directly through taxation thus allows for financial sustainability. Consequently, the Ramallah Municipality organized a special conference in 2010 on the Role of Local Governments in cultural and social development and also another conference in 2011 under the title of "Ramallah and its Cultural Development" Conference. Stakeholders from all of Palestine and relevant public sectors met to discuss how the role the Ramallah Municipality could potentially play in the shaping of cultural policy. These conferences were followed by a series of specialized meetings and sessions that worked on a coherent cultural policy for the city of Ramallah. Now with the support of Global Communities, the Ramallah Municipality will be the first city in Palestine to present a 20-year development plan of the city with a specific focus on cultural development and cultural policy. The project was launched in January 2014 and will be completed by December 2014.

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The Agenda 21 for culture is the first worldwide document promoting policies and actions by cities and local governments for cultural development. It aims to enshrine their commitment to human rights, cultural diversity, sustainability, participatory democracy and creating conditions for peace. These objectives are extremely relevant in the context of Palestinian cities including the city of

Ramallah. In the absence of sufficient financial resources, political unrest, influxes of migrants and immigrants, and when human rights are jeopardized as is the case in Palestine and in the city of Ramallah, there is a dire need to introduce coherent cultural policy that can emphasize cultural diversity and contribute to sustainability and allow for good governance and practices. The Ramallah Municipality considered the drafting and implementation of cultural policy as a priority to the city out of a real and deep commitment that came as a result of a real need in the community and as a tool that allows for the city's survival and development.

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3. Primary objectives and challenges

To present a new model of cultural and social policy decentralized system that proved its efficiency and legitimacy and sustainability and is now being copied by other municipalities and is being actively used as a tool by lobby forces for the decentralization of cultural policy in Palestine in general and also in neighboring Arab countries. The policy consists of 5 more elements:

- Providing the adequate infrastructure to accommodate local and foreign cultural and social activity, supporting cultural and artistic events held by the civil society institutions, presenting the community with artistic and social programs that link art with the community and widen the base of art and culture audiences in Palestine, the preservation of the city's tangible and intangible cultural heritage by actively engaging the community with the project.
- The main specific goal of the project was to establish a cultural policy for the City of Ramallah in partnership with all stakeholders operating in the scene. The project also aimed to act as a tool to actualize (on a micro level in the city of Ramallah) the Strategic Plan for the Cultural Sector 2011-2013 launched by the government and lacked mechanism of implementation.

The cultural policy introduced by the Ramallah Municipality came to meet the following expectations:

- Provide the city's organizations and individual artists and community groups with a network of cultural and social infrastructure which was absent in the years of the Israeli occupation (state of the art theatres, a network of community libraries, Visual arts labs, recreational centers, children's centers, parks and gardens) all offered to the community either free of charge or with minimal fee in accordance with their identified needs and expectation.
- Assisting legislators in formulating the laws that aim at the preservation of tangible cultural heritage.
- Presenting public spaces as a main venue of cultural and social interventions through the first public art festival Wein a Ramallah established in 2008, which paved the road for tens of major public spaces activities
- Emphasizing the necessity of securing semi-public funding for art and culture in a country where most of the funding to this sector comes from the donor community.
- Introduced the concept of wide and horizontal and grass roots partnerships.
- Exposed the general audience into different forms of art and culture.
- Reutilization of educational tax (from solely schools construction to include also the support of educational and creativity projects).
- Linking art and culture to income generating vocations and allowing for the needed training and possible absorption on the market system.
- The promotion of cultural diversity and social cohesion in the city of Ramallah that hosts populations from all over Palestine and also from Palestinian returnees.

4. Main phases of the project

Phase 1: 2010 - This phase included the organization of the first national debate on the role local governments can potentially play in cultural and social development, by the Ramallah municipality (11/7/2010). . More than 35 representatives of local governments, Ministry of Culture and Ministry of

Local Government gathered and discuss the top at hand and came out with a list of recommendation that were integrated in the Ramallah Municipality's cultural policy in the city.

Phase 2: 2011 - This phase included another conference in 2011 under the title of "Ramallah and its Cultural Development" Conference Tuesday-Wednesday 27-28, July 2011. Stakeholders from all of Palestine and relevant public sector players met to discuss the how role the Ramallah Municipality could potentially play in the shaping of cultural policy. This conference was followed by a series of specialized meetings and sessions that worked on presenting a coherent cultural policy for the city of Ramallah

Phase 3: 2012- 2013 -This phase also included the participation of stakeholders in the mapping of the city's strategic plan for the years 2013-2015. It consists of two main major events: a stakeholders' workshop that was held on 29-3-2012 and it discussed the cultural policy and programing for the city in the presence of related stakeholders and a second workshop which was held from 19-21 November 2013.

Phase 4: 2014- Presently with the support of Global Communities, the Ramallah Municipality will be the first city in Palestine to present a 20 year development plan of the city with a specific focus on cultural development and cultural policy. The project was launched in January 2014 and will be completed by December 2014.

The concept of policy making in general and cultural policy making in Palestine is a new concept thus it is not still commonly applied and this is of course one of the obstacles that faced the drafting of cultural policy in Ramallah. Also the lack of sufficient research and statistics that can present an accurate reading in the cultural scene is another obstacle. The lack of competent and capable policy makers is also another factor that was overcome through working closely with Al Mawred al Thaqafi Cairo on the cultural policy project in the Arab world. The lack of cooperation of some other public institute was a challenge and the limitation imposed by the Israeli occupation that hinder development and access on all levels remains the greatest challenge to plan with predicted variables.



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5. Results and Impacts

5.1. Impacts on the local government

As a result of the project, the Ramallah Municipality now has 5 main pillars of action including a main one exclusively dedicated to art and culture:

- Affirming Ramallah's status local and internationally
- Development Ramallah's infrastructure and urban planning in an attempt to achieve economic development.
- Improving the environmental and health environment of Ramallah
- Attaining operational excellence (in administration and good governance).
- Contributing to the cultural and social development of Ramallah

For five years now, the Cultural and Social Affairs department has its own budget that constitutes no less than 5 % of the core budget collected out of people's taxation. In addition this model is now being duplicated by other cities in Palestine.

5.2. Impacts on the culture and the cultural actors of the city

The policy came to orchestrate work and highlight possibilities and to focus also on working with independent artists who are not affiliated with institutions. One of the policy's main objectives is reaching out to wider audiences, and through festivals and public events and as a result of joint effort of partners, the base of audiences is rapidly increasing. The policy has succeeded to ingrate women, young girls in the programing for art and culture.

To present a new model of cultural and social policy decentralized system that proved its efficiency and legitimacy and sustainability and is now being copied by other municipalities and is being actively used as a tool by lobby forces for the decentralization of cultural policy in Palestine.

5.3. Impacts on the city/territory

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5.4. Cross-sectorial impacts

The cultural policy of the city has definitely assisted in keeping Ramallah an open and vibrant city, a city that is relatively safe and open where freedom of expression is guaranteed to a large extend. Such an environment made Ramallah become a center of employment attraction and also an attraction for local and foreign investment. Ramallah is probably the only city in Palestine where single women can live and work away from their families and where early marriages are not very common and where education for women is highly valued.

Also the city witnessed the rise of some of the most important projects on environmental awareness in schools.

5.5. Continuity

In Palestine, local governments are the most stable and sustainable institutions and this can be traced back to a series of reasons. Local governments are elected bodies. Though the entire democratic process in Palestine is hindered due to the Israeli occupation and also due to internal disputes that even paralyzed the Palestinian Legislation Council, the country still managed to run a second round of democratic elections. Thus, the policies introduced by the Ramallah Municipality are supported by a legitimacy acquired by the people. Also, the Ramallah municipality plans its work through a strategic plan that is translated into annual plans. In addition, in an unprecedented move,

the Ramallah municipality in partnership with Global Communities is already working on a 20 year development plan for the city. Needless to say that the Ramallah Municipality's main fund comes directly from people's taxes making the municipality less dependent on donor funding and allowing for a real possibility of sustainable development and realization of goals. The Ramallah Municipality's Cultural Department is also run by a ground of art operators and technicians who have managed also to acquire a regional reputation in the field and who are also trained in policy shaping and are involved in the main project of cultural policy in the Arab world initiated by al Mawred al Thaqafi Cairo (www. <http://mawred.org/>).

6. Further Information

Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOLhuDKOf28&feature=youtu.be>

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