

# Tourism Across Borders in Israel/Palestine



Research report in the scope of  
*“Tourism Brings Us Closer”*  
An IPCRI commissioned and funded project

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This research was made possible with the generosity and support of the  
Swiss Embassy

Jerusalem, February 2019

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## Acronyms

COGAT	Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
FIT	Free Independent Traveler
IPCRI	Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PA	Palestinian Authority
PACBI	Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)
PCB	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
MOTA	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
UNWTO	United World Tourism Organization
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council
WTO	World Tourism Organization

## Executive Summary

This research report was written in the scope of the IPCRI project *“Tourism Brings Us Closer”*, which examines value-based tourism in Israel-Palestine as a tool for social and political change in the field of conflict resolution. Value-based tourism was identified as tourism that works towards a social and/or political mission so as to foster peace and co-existence in Israel-Palestine. With an increased global trend towards sustainable and responsible tourism and an increased interest in political and educational tourism in Israel-Palestine in particular, value-based tourism actors have developed a variety of approaches to accommodate the increasing interest: 1. Advocacy tourism, mainly practiced by NGOs, that uses tourism as a tool to bring about social justice and encourages political activism. 2. A Multiple Narrative approach that is often employed by tourism social enterprises that aim to create mutual understanding by showing as many perspectives as possible while aiming for objectivity. 3. Israeli as well as Palestinian tourism businesses that aim for a positive encounter with “the other side” and hence provide trips for leisure for Palestinians to visit Israel and vice versa. All the different actors practicing these approaches can roughly be divided into those that (1) provide tourism experiences in order to be educational and convey direct knowledge about social or political issues, and those that (2) believe in the recreational aspect of tourism, namely that visiting “the other side” without discussing any overtly political content can bring about what is referred to as the “real peace”.

Findings arising from this research furthermore highlight some of the most prevalent challenges of value-based tourism actors in Israel-Palestine as well as opportunities and solutions that were found to overcome them. Discussed issues span across three different levels: 1. On a political and legal level restrictions on travelers such as freedom of movement and lack of permits for Palestinians to come to Israel were identified. Moreover, political restrictions also limit Israeli tourism actors e.g. when trying to hire Palestinian tour guides. Here, the official Israeli tour guide licensing course poses an entry barrier for Israeli Arab citizens who want to become tour guides. On the other hand, nepotism and favoritism within the Palestinian political landscape hampers

Palestinian tourism operations in the West Bank and forestalls effective collaboration with Israeli partners. 2. On a socio-cultural level, Israeli aversion to join political tours to the West Bank is a challenge for many NGOs that try to use tourism as a tool to achieve greater political engagement and activism within Israeli society. In order to overcome such aversion, some tourism operators employ a tactical depoliticization while advertising their tours and rather convey underlying political content through cultural experiences and daily-life stories of ordinary Palestinians. On the other side, the concept of normalization within Palestinian society takes its effect on joint Israeli-Palestinian tourism operations which highlights the importance of due diligence processes and compliance with the principle of “do no harm”, not least to avoid cultural clashes. 3. Finally, on a business level, there is a risk that with increased tourism volume, the quality and impact of value-based tourism operations will be compromised. Here, the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> party monitoring systems as well as outsourcing to existing specialist tourism actors are feasible options. Moreover, Palestinian business capacity and tourism infrastructure is a major obstacle to tourism in the West Bank and Israeli-Palestinian joint operations. Here, a gap exists between Israeli tour guides’ factual knowledge and Palestinian guides’ first-hand, emotional experience. On both sides, there is a need for better education about the conflict and how to convey sensitive content in a professional manner.

Following those findings, three key recommendations that are meant to facilitate a more positive and inclusive tourism environment in Israel-Palestine are made: 1. Bilateral talks between the Israeli and Palestinian Ministry of Tourism about tourism in the region and official permits for West Bank residents to visit Israel. 2. The conduction of more research into how Palestinian business capacity and tourism infrastructure can be improved. 3. The creation of a tour guide specialization course for tour guides that want to specialize in the conflict and geopolitics in the region.

**Keywords:** Value-Based Tourism, Social & Political Change, Israel-Palestine

## 1. Introduction

“Don't let the truth get into the way of your legend”

- Tour guide participant of *Innovative View of Jerusalem Tour* (Feb 2019)

This quote was taken from an Israeli tour guide who partook in an IPCRI designed tour that was created for tour guides and was aimed to offer them new and alternative views on some of the most familiar tourism sites around Jerusalem's Old City. The tour, which was run in the scope of the IPCRI “*Tourism Brings Us Closer*” project, managed to bring together participants from across the social and political spectrum – from young, secular Tel Avivian liberals who just completed their guiding license, to religious West Bank settlers with more than 40 years of tour guiding experience. Whereas before the tour they only had one thing in common - namely their profession - afterwards they shared at least one more thing; namely the realization that there are different truths out there that often exist in total isolation from one another, and that tourism can be an immensely powerful tool to connect them.

And yet, we are all humans that have a natural tendency to hold on to our own long-held beliefs and values that constrain us from seeking alternative perspectives and instead confirm our inherent biases. With events such as the tour mentioned above, IPCRI attempts to challenge some of the most persistent narratives and stereotypes existing in Israeli and Palestinian society. At the same time, it is meant to reveal tourism's capability to bring people closer towards one another by creating a shared understanding of each other's reality and culture. In this way, it ultimately aims to highlight that tourism has the potential to generate a more positive, interconnected environment that can resolve conflicts, and even set the foundation to create lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

## 1.1. IPCRI

Israel-Palestine Center for Regional Initiatives (IPCRI), is a nonprofit think tank that was established more than 30 years ago for combining research with peace-building and advocacy initiatives across Israel and Palestine. The organization's mission is to engage policymakers and the public at large in ending the occupation and promoting a just and sustainable solution to the conflict. Through organized activities, the aim is to develop impact-oriented partnerships that empower local communities and apply participatory approaches and public diplomacy in engaging with policymakers.

IPCRI has two departments: Research and Information, and Sustainable Partnerships. Through its "Research and Information" projects, IPCRI aims to develop and advocate for practical political solutions to decision-makers and officials concerning the most divisive issues of the conflict such as Jerusalem, borders, economic relations, environmental concerns, and security.

IPCRI's "Sustainable Partnerships" aim to transform the conflict into neighborly relations built upon mutual recognition and interests. IPCRI believes that impact-oriented partnerships between Palestinians and Israelis in a variety of fields can strengthen regional tolerance and foster a climate of peace, preparing the way for a safe and sustainable resolution to the conflict. IPCRI invests in economic, academic, professional, political, and personal relationships that further two central goals: mainstreaming Israeli-Palestinian interactions to fight racism and segregation, and developing trans-boundary capacity for long-term Israeli-Palestinian cooperation.

## 1.2. "Tourism Brings Us Closer" - Relevance and Objective

A recent study by the WTTC (2017) concluded that countries with more sustainable and open tourism industries tend to be more peaceful. Both conflict-affected and non-conflict-affected countries' tourism industries show a correlation between the Tourism Index and higher positive peace, indicating that higher scores on the Tourism Index correlate with higher levels of positive

peace. Tourism can therefore be considered a tool for achieving positive peace, for example by putting pressure on governments to cease fighting in order to attract tourists. This is particularly important if tourism is a crucial sector of a country's economy. Furthermore, by acting as a confidence-building platform for people on both sides, cross-border tourism can facilitate better mutual understanding and respect, potentially reducing the intensity of any given conflict (Turner & Freiermuth, 2016).

In view of this, tourism in Israel-Palestine offers an interesting and promising subject that is worth exploring. Therefore, in November 2018, IPCRI started its project "*Tourism Brings Us Closer*" which ran until March 2019 and was funded by the Swiss Embassy. In the scope of this project, IPCRI used travel and tourism as a means to bring people closer towards creating a shared understanding of each other's reality and culture. This report collects the findings of four months of research and gives specific recommendations on how to enhance the current tourism industry's contribution towards social and political change.

In that sense, this report has relevance for tourism actors in Israel-Palestine, especially those value-based providers that work towards achieving peace and who wish to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the shared challenges and opportunities that exist among them. This research also has relevance for tourism actors in Israel-Palestine that do not work in this specific niche market but wish to learn more about the different approaches that exist. Lastly, provided recommendations may serve as an incentive for anyone who looks for meaningful and innovative opportunities to get involved in the tourism business in a way that adds value and cultivates a more positive, interconnected environment.

In the following, (1) an overview of relevant trends and development in the global tourism industry as well as Israel-Palestine in particular will be discussed, followed by (2) the research framework and methods section. Terminology and categorization in relation to tourism actors and their approaches for social and political change will be outlined before discussing



the findings including (4) specific challenges and opportunities faced by Israeli and Palestinian tourism actors. Lastly, (5) three concrete recommendations for future tourism projects and involvement are presented.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1. Global and Regional Tourism Trends**

Looking at global trends, over the past decades, tourism has become one of the key drivers for socio-economic development worldwide, even surpassing the business volume of the oil, food or car industry (UNWTO Website, 2017). This is largely due to the fact that tourism spans a variety of sectors, linking different industries and, thus, creates jobs and economic benefits for significantly more people than only those directly employed in the tourism industry. With 1322 million tourists travelling worldwide and no sign of growth slowing down, it is needless to say that tourism – if practiced in a responsible and sustainable manner - is a potent driver for socio-economic progress and well-being (UNWTO Press Release, 2017).

Such trends also largely hold true for Israel-Palestine. In 2018, a record-breaking 4 million tourists arrived in Israel (Schneider, 2019). This constitutes a full recovery after tourism numbers sank to a dramatic low after Israel's 2014 summer war with Hamas (Maltz 2018). Tourism statistics concerning visits to the West Bank are harder to come by: according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiques (MOTA) (2017), 3.2 million tourists visited tourism sites in the West Bank in the first half of 2017, 1.86 million of them being domestic visitors. Some statistics can be found about tourism in East versus West Jerusalem; in 2016, 8.200 hotel rooms (80%) were sold in West Jerusalem, while East Jerusalem had 2.100 rooms (20%) (Choshen & Korach, 2017). Whereas such numbers seem insignificant compared to other major tourism destinations around the world – for instance Spain received 10.5 million tourists in July 2017 alone (Maltz, 2018) – for a small region such as Israel-Palestine, those numbers indicate that tourism in fact has a great potential to serve as a key driver for economic, social and even political change in the region.

## 2.2. Increased Market Demand for Responsible Tourism

Another worldwide development that can be observed is a heightened market demand and interest in responsible and sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism, a term that was coined as a response to the perceived negative effects of mass tourism in the 1980s, is described by the UNWTO as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.” (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005, p. 5). A closely related concept is responsible tourism – often in contrast to sustainable, eco or green tourism that focuses first and foremost on the environment – places people at the heart of tourism operations, stating that it is all about “better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit.” (Esomba, 2012, p. 30).

Applying this idea to a disputed region such as Israel-Palestine, being socially responsible for most tourism actors inevitably means taking a stand on the conflict and political realities on ground while trying to influence it in a way that seems favorable to them. Yet, in recent years, practicing tourism in relation to the conflict does not only mean living up to a set of core values and ideological missions, but, as market demand for such tourism products rises, it also becomes more and more attractive from a business perspective. With travelers’ heightened awareness of not only for environmental issues, but also human rights and other socio-political content, it seems increasingly difficult for tourism actors to refrain from addressing the conflict.

## 2.3. Tourism and Social and Political Change

To start with, one can say that the political dimensions of tourism are numerous. Some may even argue that any form of tourism is inherently political given that tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and, thus, does not only carry ramifications on every possible socio-economic level but also operates and is operated within a complex political milieu where different private and public stakeholders compete for benefits, influence and power (Burns & Novelli, 2007). Hence, tourism is not only “affected by global economic and political trends and relations between nations – but the role of tourism in influencing

international diplomacy is becoming increasingly apparent.” (p. 2). Tourism also more and more becomes acknowledged as an effective tool for political and social action worldwide. This includes but is not limited to: calls for tourism boycotts of countries with undesirable regimes, tourism’s potential for poverty reduction, education through travel about politically charged topics or encouraging political activism and discourse. While there is not yet much literature available on how tourism may influence politics and stimulate political change, it is obvious that there is an increasing politicization of tourism and, hence, growing inter-relation between the two fields (Butler & Suntikul, *Tourism and Political Change*, 2010).

In light of this, and especially since the relation between tourism and politics in Israel-Palestine is likely one of the most interwoven and complex worldwide, it is important to understand the impact tourism can have on the environment and society it operates in; but also, in reverse, how tourism can be severely limited through political and social realities on ground (both on which this paper is aiming to shed light). Hazbun (2012) states that tourism practiced in regions of conflict can reveal cultural similarities and shared traditions, resulting in greater respect and benevolence towards the other side. Yet, such an outcome must not be assumed to come automatically; instead, specific strategies must be put in place with due diligence. It was seen, for example, that while personal encounters through tourism generally raise sympathy for “the other side”, it is not usually enough to witness Palestinian life under occupation to change pre-established attitudes. Furthermore, even for travelers that are already sympathetic towards the Palestinian cause, this does not automatically translate into increased social or political action. Here, McGehee and Santos (2005) argue that “tourism has rarely been examined as a catalyst of social movement participation or support for activism.” (p. 760)

Nevertheless, according to Pizam and Fleischer (2002) there have been successful attempts to create attitude change by carefully modeling a tourism experience along the five prerequisites needed for contact hypothesis to work. Contact hypothesis, which was developed by Allport in 1954 states that under the right circumstances interpersonal contact is one of the most successful

ways to reduce inter-group conflict and prejudice. Those five conditions are (1) equal-status contact, (2) intergroup cooperation towards a common goal, (3) intimate rather than casual contact, (4) an authority and/or social climate of supporting intergroup contact and (5) initial intergroup attitudes that are not extremely negative. All conditions but the first were taken care of during a study on attitude change by Pizam and Fleischer. Here, Israeli participants' attitudes before and after an eco-trip to Jordan were measured and the outcome was overwhelmingly positive. In addition, according to findings by Scheider (2019) tourism in Israel-Palestine does have the capacity to raise mutual compassion for the other side and even inspire transnational activism. Such studies, thus, show that tourism can indeed be a driver for social and political change. However, it also shows that such change does not come easily or by default, but that it rather has to be modeled and implemented carefully by the tourism provider in order to achieve states goals.

### 3. Research framework

#### 3.1. Research Question and Term Delineation

This research aimed to explore the following question:

**How can tourism in Israel-Palestine contribute towards social and political change?**

The terms are delineated as the following:

- Tourism is defined by the WTO as a “social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes” (UNWTO, 2016, p. 1)
- Israel-Palestine, in the scope of this paper, mainly refers to Israel Proper and the West Bank since there is an absence of tourism operations altogether in Gaza.

- while no uniform definition for concepts such as social and political change exists, for the sake of this research, the following will be looked at: social change may refer to “changes in the social structure, values, norms, opinions and attitudes of both tourists and residents who interacted with each other.” (Pizam & Fleischer, 2002). This includes, but is not limited to, greater understanding and empathy or engagement with “the other side”. Political change may not only refer to tourism’s ability to change political attitudes, but moreover to increase political discussions, to invoke political action and involvement in activism, and even the ability to leverage policy changes (Butler & Suntikul, 2017).

Another term that is used frequently throughout this report is value-based tourism actors. This is used as an umbrella term for those tourism providers – may they be tour operators, travel agents, tour guides, tourism educators or NGOs working with tourists – that practice tourism in view of a certain social or political mission so as to foster peace and co-existence. This commonly means to put an end to the occupation and demanding equal rights for Palestinians. While there are tourism actors that display social or political missions, yet in relation to a strong Zionist cause, those are not the focus of this research.

Thus, those value-based tourism actors constitute the main research subject of this paper, which will be detailed more closely in the below methods section. Furthermore, by applying those below methods and processes, this research furthermore aims to shed light on the following questions:

- What are the different approaches of value-based tourism actors in Israel-Palestine?
- What are differences and similarities in the challenges and opportunities they face?
- What are the gaps that stifle tourism’s contribution towards social and political change?
- What can be done to close those gaps? What are specific recommendations?

### 3.2. Methods and Research Process

In order to get a deeper understanding of how tourism in Israel-Palestine can be a driver for social and political change, the research project was divided into several stages. After an initial background research and analysis of the tourism landscape in Israel-Palestine, selected tourism actors from the region were invited for a round table discussion on how tourism can contribute towards change. Here, the majority of invitees were value-based tourism providers (as detailed above) including tour operators, tour guides, tourism educators and NGOs. The forum was moderated by IPCRI co-director Liel Maghen and project researcher Anne Bauer. Participants were asked to discuss their approaches, challenges and opportunities, weaknesses and strengths of their operations and the wider tourism industry in Israel-Palestine.



*IPCRI "Tourism Brings Us Closer" opening forum at the American Colony, Jerusalem, December 9<sup>th</sup> 2018*

The event constituted the opening forum for a series of multiple in-depth meetings with so-called "focus groups" that were formed after the initial

opening; those meetings consisted of two interviewers, one IPCRI staff taking minutes and two to four invitees. The latter were grouped into the following: (1) Palestinian tour operators bringing West Bank residence to Israel for leisure, (2) value-based tour operators working with different approaches and (3) tour guides experienced with providing political or otherwise sensitive content in relation to the conflict. Other one-on-one meetings took place with interviewees that couldn't attend any of the focus group meetings. All interviews were run in a semi-structured manner, meaning that most interview questions were pre-defined (see *Chapter 7. Appendix*) but allowed for follow-up questions and a deepening of discussion where perceived necessary. Overall, more than 25 experts were interviewed during the above-mentioned meetings.

Lastly, two pilot tours were run in the scope of this project; one was organized in affiliation with an organization called *EcoPeace* to the Lower Jordan River to make tour guides and other tourism actors aware of the environmental concerns at one of the country's biggest Christian tourism attractions, namely the baptismal site of Jesus. A second tour was run in and around Jerusalem's Old City. It was guided by three different tour guides who showed alternative perspectives of some of the country's most familiar tourism sites. The tour was specifically aimed at a tour guide audience, especially those that are not yet incorporating any kind of political content in their work. Those tours were created so as to see whether it is possible to open up tour guides to different perspectives and in fact raise their interest to learn more about how they can convey political and social issues in a sensitive and professional manner.





*IPCRI "Innovative Views on Jerusalem Tour" February 24th 2019*



## 4. Overview of tourism landscape

### 4.1. Value-based Tourism Landscape

In the following, a brief overview of the different value-based tourism actors in Israel-Palestine based on their approaches to achieve social or political change will be given. This is important so as to gain a deeper understanding of the differences and similarities between their operations and provide the terminology and framework for the subsequent discussion chapter.

#### 4.1.1. Advocacy Tourism

Advocacy tourism, or in literature also often referred to as 'justice tourism', "is often organized by marginalized groups and social justice advocates, who use tourism to raise awareness and encourage political activism" (Schneider, 2019, p. 65). In the Israeli-Palestinian context, this type of tourism usually runs on an anti-occupation platform along an established agenda. Hence, this type of tourism does not typically aim to be objective or unbiased, especially not on political issues or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is less concerned with presenting multiple perspectives and rather aims to give voice and speak on behalf of the weaker side.

Tours falling under this category are frequently run by human rights NGOs, and in that sense, become a tool – a means to an end - to advocate, raise awareness and further political change rather than for the sake of the tourism experience itself. As such, almost every Israeli NGO working to end the occupation has made running tours a part of their organizational strategy. Political issues are directly addressed and often constitute the sole content of those tours. This also becomes apparent in the ways such tours are advertised, as can be seen on the following examples:

#### Examples:

1. *Machsom Watch*, an organization of women peace activists that monitors checkpoints, declare that through their tours, participants "acquire an understanding of daily life in the West Bank while meeting with Palestinians who continue to wish for peace. (Machsom Watch Website, 2018).

2. *Breaking the Silence*, which collects testimonies of IDF veterans, runs tours to Hebron with the following description: “The tour is led by soldiers who broke their silence on their military service in the occupied territories, and explores the harsh consequences of the policy of separation and the military presence in the city.” (Breaking the Silence Website, 2018)

#### **4.1.2. Multiple Narrative**

As the name suggests, the multiple narrative approach tries to show as many perspectives and opinions on any given issue (may it be political, social, religious, ...) as possible. Although different tourism actors have chosen their own distinct names to refer to such tours, e.g. dual, shared or bi-national narrative approach, the differences between them were found to be mainly semantic rather than content-related. What differentiates them from other tours, however, is that they are frequently run by two tour guides (one Palestinian and one Israeli). In some of the tours the two guides are guiding simultaneously, in others one after another. Here, the common idea is to create an understanding of the myriad of different opinions in Israeli and Palestinian societies while create a setting where Israelis and Palestinians work on an equal level. In this way, such tours are meant to not only preach, but actually showcase co-existence and equality to the travelers.

In addition, tours of this type commonly aim to create authentic experiences through face-to-face meetings with residents, local organizations or institutions across the political spectrum (from left to right). Unlike tours for advocacy that want the participants to take away a specific message in support of their cause, by giving everyone a platform to speak, multiple narrative tours are more concerned with providing a view that is as unbiased and objective as possible. They are commonly social enterprises or for-profit tourism businesses that place importance on social responsibility and have a mission to create a more positive, interconnected environment.

### Examples:

1. *MEJDI Tours*, which has one Jewish and one Palestinian co-founder, coined the dual narrative approach in which one Israeli and one Palestinian tour guide guide simultaneously. On their website, they state that the “multiple perspective approach to tourism empowers travelers with a broader, more nuanced perspective of Israel, its culture, and its people.” (Mejdi Tours Website, 2019)

2. *Abraham Tours*, one of the most well-known tour operators and hostel chains around Israel, offers “a dual narrative tour of Hebron that brings participants to both the Palestinians and the much smaller Jewish section of the West Bank city. But because Palestinians are not allowed to roam freely on the Israeli side, and vice versa, the two guides never appear together before the group in that dual narrative tour.” (Maltz, 2018)

#### **4.1.3. Positive Encounter with “The Other Side”**

##### *1. Palestinians visiting Israel*

This niche market is probably the least known or understood of the entire tourism sector in Israel-Palestine, which is why this paper tries to shed some light on it. Since 2008, West Bank travel agents started offering one-day trips for recreation for West Bank residents to Israel. Since no official tourist visa exists for Palestinians to travel to Israel, those travel agents have only been able to obtain permits (granted by COGAT) via NGOs in relation to peacebuilding. Yet, operators of such tours stress that the trips they provide are strictly non-political and instead solely aim to provide a good experience for recreational purposes to West Bank residents. In this way, such trips are said to show the “real, peace” and how life could look like once the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been resolved. They furthermore aim to humanize the other side by showing Palestinians that there are Israeli civilians across the border leading a normal life (in contrast to the soldiers and settlers they are familiar with).

While in the starting years there was a high, unsatisfied demand for such tours, nowadays activities somewhat stalled due to changes in permit regulation and funding issues.

Example:

*Natural Peace Tours:* In 2008, the cooperation between an Israeli and Arab partner led to the creation of the first one-day leisure trips for West Bank residents to Israel. Tours were advertised mainly by word of mouth and were told to be strictly non-political, i.e. no political content whatsoever during the tours. However, its founders reveal that they are in fact aiming for an inherently political goal since their underlying intention is to bring about a natural, authentic peace between Israelis and Palestinians in which it becomes normal to visit “the other side” for touristic purposes.

*2. Israelis visiting Palestinian areas*

There are multiple tour operators in Israel that specifically focus on bringing Israeli or Jewish audiences to Israeli Arab villages or locations in the West Bank in order to create inter-cultural understanding and dialogue. Those trips have a strong social component and, generally speaking, are less overtly political. This tactical depoliticization is employed so as to create a natural setting in which Israelis and Palestinians can meet without a superimposed political agenda or cause. Just as discussed in the previous paragraph, such encounters are thus meant to show how a “real peace” between Israeli Jews and Arabs, as well as co-existence within one state could look.

Tourism actors of this kind are often a hybrid between an NGO and a social enterprise model, meaning they may in part receive financial and ideological support from an NGO, and for the other part sustain themselves by generated revenue from tourism activities.

Example:

*Shared Paths*, which grew out of an advocacy NGO, is a shared Jewish-Arab platform that aims for social change by creating a deepened understanding of Arab society among first and foremost Israeli-Jewish citizens. Their website states that “during these tours, groups can gain a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities of the Arab minority in Israel. Hear and see life through the Arab point of view: their history, narrative, culture, and tradition.” (Shared Paths Website, 2019)

#### **4.2. Conclusion**

After mapping the value-based Israeli and Palestinian tourism actors in the region, they can roughly be divided into two separate categories: (1) The ones that provide tourism experiences in view of an educational mission and so as to convey direct knowledge about social or political issues, and (2) the ones that believe in the recreational aspect of tourism, namely that visiting “the other side” without discussing any overtly political content can bring about what is referred to as the “real peace”.

While the different approaches complement each other given that all value-based tourism actors largely strive towards a common goal, it was nevertheless found that tourism providers oftentimes operate within their own confined microcosm without having full comprehension of the common challenges, the existing best practices to overcome them or opportunities for potential collaboration with other players. The following chapter is therefore an attempt to give an overview of the most prevalent aspects that emerged from this research. This will serve not only as the basis for specific recommendations that will be made in the final chapter of this report, but should also encourage the tourism actors in the region to aim for greater collaboration and dialogue between one another.

### **5. Analysis of Findings**

The following chapter discusses findings along three layers, namely (1) the political and legal, (2) the socio-cultural and (3) the business and operational level. Below, the most prevailing challenges that were brought up by the value-based tourism actors are outlined as well as opportunities and solutions to overcome them.

### 5.1. Political and Legal Level

Many of the greatest challenges that the various tourism actors in Israel-Palestine face are due to restrictions and limitations on a political and legal level. In the majority of cases, those are not issues that are exclusively faced by the tourism industry, but much rather account for the reality of life in a zone of conflict. However, unlike other industries, tourism spans across many different sectors and furthermore heavily relies on free movement as well as access to sites and places. Therefore, political restrictions in the form of borders, checkpoints, military zones, permits and visas become a fortiori an obstacle. Not only is Israel currently in control of all major tourism sites in the West Bank (Area C) with no chance for Palestinian residents to make money from them, it also regulates tourism through a variety of other policies as detailed in the following.

#### **Limitations for Travelers**

The most obvious challenge arises when trying to bring Israelis and Palestinians together in one physical space; since there is no legal way for tourism businesses to bring residents of the West Bank to Israel, nor is it allowed for Israeli citizens to travel to PA-controlled areas (Area A) in the West Bank, it is hardly possible for the two sides to meet one another. While tourism actors, such as *Natural Peace Tours*, have found ways to bring Palestinians to Israel (see chapter 3.1.), the issuing of permits for such purposes lies under the full control of the Israeli military and the COGAT. This brings with it a high uncertainty factor that severely hampers business operations (the rejection of a permit application may happen even on the morning of travelling and since most such Palestinian travelers are either young men or families, this may mean that an entire family is not able to attend a trip due to the rejection of

permit for one family member). On top of this, the issuing of permits also highly depends on the season, holidays as well as the current political situation, which makes operations all the more unpredictable.

This situation is unlikely to change as long as there are no attempts for bilateral talks between both the Israeli and Palestinian Ministry of Tourism concerning collaboration and a more regulated, transparent setting for obtaining such permits for tourism purposes and other pressing issues such as shared income from tourism between Israel and the West Bank as well as tourism sites within the West Bank.

### **Limitations for Tourism Actors**

Not only do political restrictions limit travelers, but also the tourism actors themselves face severe constraints to their business activities. As of now, there are only 50 special licenses given by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism to Palestinians from the West Bank to be able to guide in Israel. There is no exemption to this quota and a license is only passed on to the next tour guide in case of death of one of the former license holders. Those Palestinian guides that possess such a license are in high demand as tour operators are struggling to find suitable Palestinian tour guides for their operations. This creates an unhealthy competition over human resources, mistrust and anxiety of resource theft even between those tour operators that are supposedly working towards shared social and political goals. Hence, the wider ramifications of such policies are that great potential for business collaboration is forestalled and that the basic laws of supply and demand, as they would take place in a free market economy, are severely inhibited.

On the other hand, corruption, nepotism and favoritism within the Palestinian government were also mentioned as obstacles to building up a working Palestinian economy. Here, statistics show that 66.5% of Palestinian companies view corruption as a major impediment when doing business in the West Bank and Gaza, and further, that “wasta” (favoritism) and nepotism constitute the most common manifestations of corruption (Transparency

International, 2012, p. 1). Concern was raised by several interviewees that even if collaboration between the Israeli and Palestinian Ministry of Tourism would happen, it would be in favor of a few monolithic tourism businesses affiliated with the PA that would subsequently establish a monopoly and take all other less well-connected tourism actors out of business.

### **Israel Tour Guide Licensing**

On the other side, also Israeli tour guides are also impacted by Israel's policies around tourism, first and foremost by means of the Israeli Ministry of Tourism controlled tour guide licensing course. This course, which takes one to two years, and costs 24.000 NIS (about 6.650 USD), is said to be one of the hardest courses for tour guiding worldwide. On top of that, it was found to pose an entry barrier specifically for Israeli Arab citizens, since learned content appears to most of them as a consolidation of the Zionist narrative with little regard for any Palestinian perspective. In addition, geopolitical aspects are hardly discussed throughout the course and no practical tools are given to guides for conveying sensitive content in a professional manner. Even though the Israeli Tour Guide Association signed the *UNWTO Private Commitment to the Code of Ethics* in 2019, tourism ethics and moral dilemmas - especially those prone to arise in conflict-ridden regions - are rarely spoken about within the scope of the official state course (UNWTO Ethics Website, 2019).

Lastly, a gap was identified between the standards applied to Israeli Arab compared to Israeli Jewish tour guides. During conversations held in the scope of this research, both Jewish and Arab tour guides agreed that the latter have significantly less freedom to speak about politics, let alone criticize the State of Israel, due to a heightened risk of having their license revoked by the Ministry of Tourism. As a result, a high number of Israeli Arab guides refrain from talking about politics altogether.

### **5.2. Socio-Cultural Level**

While tourism by its nature is all about visiting and getting to know different cultures, people and places, it should not be forgotten that this may also be a



source of great conflict and tension. It doesn't take a setting of conflict for cultures to clash and for tourism to cause serious harm to the local populations and the natural environment in which it takes place. As discussed previously, socially and environmentally responsible tourism is on the rise, but nevertheless it is of great importance to look at some of the particular socio-cultural intricacies value-based tourism faces in Israel-Palestine.

### **Israeli Societal Aversion**

On both the Israel and the Palestinian side there is a societal price to pay when choosing to collaborate with "the other side". In contemporary Israeli society, the word "lefty" is often used as a derogatory term and especially organizations such as *Breaking the Silence* or *Machsom Watch* are contested and often disliked for their critical stance towards the State of Israel and the occupation in particular (Hartman, 2016). According to those organizations, they encounter great difficulties in reaching Israeli audiences to join their tours to the West Bank. Whereas tours prove popular with international travelers (for example *Breaking the Silence* tours to Hebron in English are usually sold out weeks in advance), the Hebrew speaking tours need the organization's subsidies to even be worthwhile running. Furthermore, those Israelis that choose to come on such trips can largely be regarded as center-left-wing, which is why the goal of the tours is not to change their attitude, but rather to convince them to become more active proponents or join the organization as a member. Nevertheless, *Breaking the Silence* has also managed to reach pre-military programs and other more right-wing organizations and academics with their message, which is currently one of their focus points with most promising levels of leverage.

Conclusively, organizations report a lack of interest from the general Israeli public in advocacy tourism (which is said to be aggravated by right-wing civic society and settler organization). However, approaches by corporate tourism actors have shown that it is nevertheless possible to convey political content to Israeli society without openly advertising it as such. *Experience Palestine*, a Jerusalem-based Palestinian tour provider, states to provide authentic experiences of the Palestinian culture. Amongst others, their audiences include

high-level politicians and delegations, corporate leaders and media figures from Israel (Experience Palestine Website, 2019). Importance is placed on working with customers in influential positions and disclosing inherently political content to them through a seemingly apolitical experience of daily Palestinian life and cultural lens. Hence, through a tactically employed depoliticization, initial aversion of Israelis to join trips to the West Bank is overcome and political content is subsequently communicated in a sensitive way.

### **The Issue of Normalization**

The concept of normalization<sup>1</sup> within Palestinian society is a familiar one; in the world of tourism, this means that Israeli businesses and organizations often encounter difficulties when trying to collaborate with Palestinian partners. Many of them are not willing to engage with any Israeli businesses, and those that are willing are in high demand. According to several tour operators, the pool of suitable tour guides becomes even smaller when looking for Palestinians that, on top of that, have enough factual knowledge and can convey sensitive content in a professional manner.

Yet, also here the issue of normalization remains. Israeli tourism actors have to be highly attentive to the delicate environment their Palestinian partners are operating in and need to understand that exposing them (e.g. openly advertising their names in affiliation with Israeli organizations or with politicized content) may cause them severe issues from within their own society. Therefore, when aiming for greater collaboration between Israeli and Palestinian tourism businesses, especially marketing and public exposure needs to take place with due diligence so as to forestall the negative backlash from anti-normalizers.

Interestingly enough, Palestinians that join a trip to Israel for leisure are not targeted by anti-normalization activities. Throughout the research, it became

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<sup>1</sup> According to PACBI normalization in the Palestinian and Arab context is “the participation in any project, initiative or activity, in Palestine or internationally, that aims (implicitly or explicitly) to bring together Palestinians (and/or Arabs) and Israelis (people or institutions) without placing as its goal resistance to and exposure of the Israeli occupation and all forms of discrimination and oppression against the Palestinian people.” (PACBI, 2007)

clear that most Palestinians see it as their natural right to visit places within Israel since most of them have been inhabited by their ancestors. Therefore, visiting sites in Israel is socially accepted under the premise that it is not in collaboration with an Israeli organization. This also explains why such trips are in much higher demand than tours for the sake of peace building with Israel (the latter of which is considered normalization).

### **Cultural Clashes**

Throughout the research project, tourism experts have stressed time and again the importance of approaching Israeli-Palestinian encounters with sufficient care, cultural as well as political sensitivity. This is so as to avoid clashes between a developed Westernized nation and a largely conservative (although changing and more pluralistic than often thought of), fragmented Palestinian society. Issues have for instance been reported by *Natural Peace Tours* when bringing young Palestinian men from the West Bank, who are used to women in modest attire, to Israeli beaches where they see women in swimwear. On the other hand, a lack of Israeli understanding (even of those that self-identify as left-wing) of Palestinian society and the hardship of life under occupation, has led to insensitive behavior and subsequent feeling of even greater aversion rather than rapprochement between the two sides. Lastly, whereas more Palestinians speak Hebrew than vice versa, language barriers frequently create additional obstacles on top of the cultural ones.

As a result, tour operators and tour guides alike stress the importance of acting under the principle of “do no harm<sup>2</sup>”. Amongst others, this means to put sufficient time and resources into preparing and de-briefing tourists (Israeli, Palestinian and foreigners alike) in order to help them process sensitive or emotional content since otherwise they might be left with a feeling of resentment, guilt or frustration, which renders even the best of intentions for positive change void.

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<sup>2</sup> Borrowed from the medical ethics and humanitarian aid that says that every organization/business must “strive to minimize the harm they may inadvertently cause through providing [tourism] as well as harm that may be caused by not providing [tourism] (such as adding to tension with host communities” (OCHA, 2013)

Overall, organizations and businesses have reported great success in changing participants' perception and attitudes towards the other side, creating intercultural dialogue and better understanding, breaking down stereotypes and humanizing the other side. Yet, while some tour operators collect feedback and evaluation of attitude changes after their tours, most of this evidence is not analyzed or documented in any structural manner that could e.g. serve to scientifically prove how or to what extent tourism can in fact influence participants' opinion (as detailed further in the next chapter).

### **5.3. Business and Operational Level**

As mentioned earlier in this report, there is a global trend towards responsible and sustainable travel and a regional trend towards special interest markets such as political tourism and tourism with particular concern for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is, hence, much potential to further this niche sector through a market-driven approach. Above all, this report shows one thing; namely, that there is a fair number of well-established SME tourism actors with authentic interest in furthering Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, which have been running operations since many years and, in so doing, managed to build up extensive capacities, resources, and infrastructure so as to deliver high-quality, value-based tourism services and products. More recently, also bigger tour operators have started responding to market forces and started providing similar offers, which most experts consider a positive trend that creates significant opportunities. Yet, there are also several challenges and risks that come along with such a development, which, if not managed with sufficient care, can create more harm than good to tourism in Israel-Palestine and its contribution towards social and political change.

#### **Volume versus quality**

Some of the tour operators have expressed their concern over resource theft by bigger tourism actors that are entering into this niche market and potentially

have the capacity to take away business and human resources from the SME tour operators that have invested time and money into building up a network of experts, suppliers and clientele in their specific field. This would not only put them out of business but may also come at the expense of honest, authentic and equitable cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian partners. Thus, this would create a heightened risk of what is similar to “green washing<sup>3</sup>”; however instead of environmental, the issues are rather societal and political.

Here, such issues often are so multilayered and complex that mainstream tour operators, who want to follow the market demand and try to incorporate more political content into their tours, do not have the experiences or necessary tools to process such information neither in-house nor towards their clients. This could mean, for example, that adding a political component to an otherwise non-political trip might catch the tourists off-guard and will hence create an unsettling experience with limited positive outcome. The same goes for untrained staff who are not used to being confronted with such content. They might not carry the same values and political opinions as those employees that consciously decided to work at the value-based tourism companies. Evidently, this makes it even harder for staff of a mainstream tourism establishment to sufficiently process, prepare and reflect on such experiences together with the tourists.

Thus, the question here is: how can critical content be made more accessible to the mainstream tourism market without causing more disturbance than actual insights, or else, being disqualified altogether for being “too critical” before even reaching any mainstream tourism audience? One answer may be that instead of trying to generate such content themselves, mainstream tour operators may do better to collaborate and outsource entire parts of their tours to those existing SMEs that already specialize in this niche market. However, if this is not done and the threat of mainstream tourism actors with a lack of social responsibility

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<sup>3</sup> According to Sobotta and Sobotta (2010) “when a company or organization spends more time and money claiming to be green through advertising and marketing than it does actually implementing green business practices, that’s greenwashing (p. 198)

taking over the market remains, value-based companies can distinguish and protect themselves by use of third party monitoring organizations and tourism certifications such as B Corp<sup>4</sup>. Such quality assurance systems require companies to account for their social impact by practicing CSR and to report on processes and outcomes in a transparent way. As of now, most companies or organizations that were interviewed do not have a structural measurement system in place that would evaluate their impact for instance on attitude change of the tourists or locals that they work with. Thus, becoming a member of a tourism certification program furthermore sets incentives to assess a business' impact more closely and provides a unique selling point that helps tourists to distinguish between value-based and "green washed" tourism actors.

### **Palestinian business capacity**

The lack of Palestinian business capacity was recognized by the majority of actors that have partaken in any sort of collaboration with Palestinian tourism players. While it is clear that Palestinians are unable to compete fairly with the Israeli tourism industry due to severe lack of free movement, restrictions to business operations and other obstacles brought about by the Israeli occupation, a gap was furthermore perceived between the Israeli mode of working and standards for service delivery, and the Palestinian one. Isolated attempts were made by companies such as *Natural Peace Tours* to strengthen Palestinian professionalism and business capacity by encouraging West Bank tour operators to work in a transparent and self-sufficient way, however such activities were never further pursued. Israeli tourism actors report that it remains a challenge to find Palestinian partners that are (a) willing to collaborate with Israeli businesses and (b) capable of working on an equitable level with their Israeli counterparts. An improved tourism infrastructure in the West Bank was thus identified as crucial so as to better connect the Palestinian tourism market to the Israeli one, and in this way create shared economic benefits, giving

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<sup>4</sup> According to Bcorporation Website (2019) "certified B Corporations achieve a minimum verified score on the B Impact Assessment—a rigorous assessment of a company's impact on its workers, customers, community, and environment".

further incentives for collaboration, ultimately even between both Ministries of Tourism.

The situation looks similar in regards to collaboration with Israeli-Arab tourism actors. As will be explained in more detail in the following chapter, there is a general lack of Israeli-Arab tour guides, as well as tourism offerings, attractions in Israeli-Arab locations. According to interviewed experts, there is a lot of underutilized potential and not a lot of attempts by Israeli-Arab entrepreneurs to make use of it. Whereas there are joint Jewish-Arab initiatives such as *Shared Paths* or *Tiyul Rihla* that create tourism offers in Israeli-Arab villages, they are often faced with the challenge of having to develop tourism products and services for their tours from scratch. This requires a lot of time and resource investment from the tour operator's side, which in most cases is beyond their business capacity, and hence inhibits them from offering tours to such areas in the first place. Apart from a few isolated projects, no attempts were heard of that have been made to strengthen Palestinian business capacity or infrastructure either from within or else through external support.

### **Tour guides at the forefront**

One of the most important roles in tourism is the one of the tour guide, who manages, narrates, educates and facilitates every part of the on-ground tourism experience. While being in direct contact with the travelers, he/she builds up a rapport and trust, which gives immense power to influence travelers' opinions and shape their perception. Most interviewed tour guides agree that while no one can ever be fully objective, the aim in tour guiding should rather be professionalism. Professionalism here ought to include raising awareness for the existence of different perspectives and letting go of a single-narrative approach along a personal agenda. This does not mean however that a guide must let go of his personal viewpoint; personal experiences and stories can add great value to a tour, yet they must be labeled as such, and instead of solely telling from one's own experience, a guide should first and foremost be a transmitter of the message of the local people across relevant social, political, religious or economic layers of the population.

As addressed earlier, there seems to be a lack of preparation and education of licensed tour guides regarding such topics and especially on how to approach political content in a professional way. A recently graduated tour guide on the *Innovative Views of Jerusalem Tour* mentioned that during the Israeli tour guide license course, he was told by a lecture that talking about politics is “digging ones own grave” and should hence be avoided at any cost. Yet, especially in the emerging scene of geopolitical tour guides the ethos is that it is imperative to address the conflict and the politics surrounding it, not only out of moral obligation but also so as to preserve the guide’s own integrity and credibility in front of his/her tourist audience. Foreigners often come to the region with the direct intention to learn about the conflict, and even those with no such intention are at least aware of its existence. According to one geopolitical tour guide, ignoring the conflict altogether means to “disrespect the tourists’ intelligence” and will sooner or later make the guide look inauthentic and untrustworthy.

This is especially true as the demand for political tours rises, and with it growing demand among tour guides to learn and educate themselves about the conflict in order to be able to compete. This is especially true for Israeli tour guides; on the other hand, among Palestinian political tour guides the general sentiment is that talking from experience (i.e. telling stories about how it is to grow up under occupation) is the way to go about conveying such messages to the tourists. Here, a discrepancy was identified: Israeli tour guides often surpass their Palestinian counterparts in terms of factual knowledge about history and politics, yet Palestinian tour guides can offer first-hand experience and often emotionally charged stories about how this history and politics directly affects their lives on a daily basis. While it is hard for a Jewish Israeli guide to transmit the emotional stories of a Palestinian without sounding patronizing, there is great potential for Palestinian tour guides (especially Israeli Arabs and East Jerusalemites) to enhance their competitive value by complementing their first-hand experience with more factual knowledge. According to interviewed tour operators, this would greatly enlarge the pool of Israeli-Arab guides that they would consider for hiring.



## 5.4. Conclusion

The previous chapter discussed many aspects in relation to value-based tourism and its specific challenges and opportunities in Israel-Palestine. Tourism providers in the region have come up with a myriad of new and innovative ways to use tourism as a tool to bring the Israeli and Palestinian people closer, and to strive for social and political change despite the great obstacle and challenges that exist in a region of intractable conflict. Findings have shown that change through tourism can come in many ways. For some tourism actors it may mean to accomplish change of attitudes and greater openness for dialogue, for others increased involvement in activism and politics is the goal. Again others look at the economic benefits created through their operations and how increased agency through business can bring empowerment of the weaker leading to a “natural peace” setting.

Whereas value-based tourism is still a relatively small niche market compared to the mainstream tourism industry in Israel-Palestine, the existing offering is varied and serves every target audience imaginable; some providers cater to politically interested customers, others choose on purpose to present themselves as apolitical so as to reach an apolitical audience with their message; there are tours for Israelis and Jewish communities to visit Palestinian and Arab areas, and tours for Palestinians to visit Israel; again other tourism providers cater to international customers ranging from delegation of politicians or experts in the conflict to FITs and first-timers that have no prior knowledge about the region whatsoever. It is therefore fair to say that there is hardly any opportunity that has been left untouched by the value-based tourism actors who, to their best of efforts, strive to contribute towards the social and political change they want to see in their immediate environment.

Yet, albeit with the best of intentions and the efforts of those who have chosen to use tourism as a driver to achieve social and political change, there are certain gaps and political realities that cannot be overcome by the tourism providers alone. There are limits to how much each and every actor can do in the scope of its operations, and while for example all of them face the problem

of scarce Palestinian tourism products, services and human resources, there is hardly anything that can be done on a business or organizational level to deal with such a fundamental issue. In the following, the recommendation chapter will therefore try to present possible solutions by offering three concrete recommendations for future undertakings to close some of the most prevailing gaps that the value-based tourism market faces at the moment.

## 6. Recommendations

The recommendations that arise from the conducted research are plentiful and some of the best practices and lessons learned from different tourism actors have been shared and incorporated in the discussion chapter for others in the tourism sector to capitalize on. The following three recommendations are specifically meant to fill those needs of value-based tourism actors that do not fall under the scope of a single tourism actor, but much rather require a holistic approach on a market or political level. Here, IPCRI hopes to be able to accommodate some of those wants by implementing one or several of the below recommendation. This may be done through future projects which, based on this research's findings, were found to be crucial so as to create a more supportive, interconnected environment that allows for a more effective contribution of tourism towards social and political change.

### 6.1. Israeli and Palestinian Ministry of Tourism Collaboration

**Recommendation:** Incentivize and lobby for bilateral talks between the Israeli and Palestinian Ministry of Tourism concerning how tourism between Israel and the West Bank should look like (under consideration of all below points). One of the discussed points should be the creation of an official permit for West Bank residents to visit Israel for tourism purposes.

**Rationale:** Currently, there is no collaboration between the Israeli and Palestinian Ministry of Tourism. While attempts have been made to draw the Israeli Ministry's attention to the promising potential of Palestinian tourism to Israel, no specific policy recommendations have been presented. As of now, there is no option for Palestinians to travel to Israel for tourism purposes, to stay over-night (and vice versa). Visits to Eilat even require a special permit for Palestinians. Nevertheless, such tourism exchange keeps on existing in a legal grey area, making its processes unregulated and hard to monitor. There have furthermore never been talks concerning how tourism between Israel and the West Bank in general should look like and what are the potential benefits and incentives for both countries' tourism industries.

### **Points For Consideration:**

- a) Any possible suggested change in policy regulations must take place through direct bilateral discussion between the two Ministries of Tourism as well as through involvement of COGAT. If policy changes will be made unilaterally by Israel, the risk is that it will result in a power imbalance with no agency for the Palestinian side. Policy changes must benefit both sides equally instead of being based solely on the Israeli economic motive. This should also include building up financial incentives or negotiate share of tourism revenue between both sides.
  
- b) Increasing the number of permits to Israel for tourism purposes might weaken Palestinian market. Furthermore, as with all industries, there is a risk that favoritism will put in place a few chosen tourism players which will establish a monopoly while undermining SMEs tourism businesses. Therefore, any reform in permits should be done simultaneously with increasing foreign and domestic tourism to the West Bank (e.g. through Palestinian capacity building as detailed below). This will insure diverse development with the involvement of different stakeholders.

### **6.2. Capacity Building of Palestinian Businesses**

**Recommendation:** Produce more research into where Palestinian tourism business capacity (West Bank as well as Israeli-Arab) is currently standing, what is lacking, how it can be improved, what are best practices in the region and internationally, and what can be done to create more tourism benefits for Arab communities in specific. This can serve as an incentive for them or external investors/donors to build up tourism products and services as well as for future fund raising so as to implement capacity building activities for the Palestinian tourism sector.

**Rationale:** Currently, there is no functioning Palestinian tourism economy or infrastructure in the West Bank and also tourism's potential in Israeli-Arab

communities is underutilized. Furthermore, a gap in capacity was identified between Israeli and Palestinian businesses, which obstructs linking the two tourism markets together, hampers collaboration and forestalls economic benefits for Palestinians. The need for the development and professionalization of the Palestinian tourism market becomes apparent and can be especially effective in combination with bilateral talks between both Ministries of Tourism as addressed above.

**Points for Consideration:**

- a) The use of technology, media and social networks can help significantly to build up Palestinian business capacity and connect individual tourism actors that look for collaboration. There are already digital platforms where Israeli tour guides frequently look to find Palestinian guides in the West Bank and websites such as <https://www.waysofpeace.org.il/> that give an overview of available educational tours from different providers. However, this potential is not fulfilled and should be developed and expanded.
- b) There should be a special focus on East Jerusalem tourism providers in aiding the Palestinian tourism market. As these providers speak Arabic, have a better understanding of the Israeli system as well as the Palestinian side, are located in geographical proximity, and have more accessibility, they have a potential to become the touristic bridge between the two sides.
- c) As tour guides are keen to learn more on the political issues and mainly on the current reality in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, a supplementary tour guiding training course (such as the one detailed below for Israeli tour guides) should be part of any capacity building activities.

### 6.3. Tour Guide Specialization Course

**Recommendation:** Development of a tour guide specialization course for Israeli tour guides to learn about the conflict and gain tools to process sensitive information in a professional manner.

**Rationale:** There is a lack of tour guides' education about geopolitics and the conflict within the official tour guide license process in Israel. There is no alternative to the state-controlled licensing course, which furthermore stifles Palestinian participation due to its Zionist orientation. There are multiple specialization courses that guides can take at their own expenses to become experts in certain fields (e.g. Christian pilgrimage, archeology). As tourists' demand to learn about the conflict increases, tour guides' demand to specialize in this field can be satisfied by the creation of such a course.

#### **Points For Consideration:**

- a) As tour guides are overwhelmingly busy, this course should be designed to be accessible for the larger group as possible. A one-week intensive course or the development of sub courses focusing on different areas, can allow this accessibility.
- b) In order to attract tour guides from a wide political spectrum, this course should be advertised by a use of moderate, fact-based language. An official approval from the ministry of tourism may offer such added value as well.
- c) In order to impact tour guides beyond the factual information, a potential course should include content about tour guiding ethics and could possibly include basic Arabic lessons specifically useful for tour guiding.

- d) As they can uniquely combine the experience of growing up in East Jerusalem with obtaining the factual knowledge about the conflict, a special and separate course should be developed for Palestinians. This course can emphasize story telling and improve partnerships between Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and in the Arab Sector of Israel.

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## 7. Appendix

### **Interview questions (applied in a semi-structured manner):**

1. What is the main approach you're using on your tours/activities?
2. What is your mission and core values?
3. How does it contribute to social or political change and where do you see the biggest impact?
4. Who do your operations benefit economically?
5. How do you convey politically sensitive content?
6. Do you talk about different narratives? If so, how?
7. What are the biggest obstacles and difficulties you face during your operations?
8. What are you doing to overcome those obstacles?
9. What needs to change in the environment you operate in in order for your operations to be most effective?
10. What role do you think tourism can play in Israel-Palestine in order to help resolve the conflict?