

# TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT IN LEBANON:

## HOW TO DEAL WITH COMPLEX SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSTRAINTS

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The present article presents a reflection on the involvement of local communities and other decision-makers (local, national, public and private) in the socioeconomic development of territories and environmental protection. It will analyze different partnership configurations, leading to the preparation of sustainable-territory charters taking into account the various characteristics and needs of the territories concerned.

The paper is based on different approaches to territorial management adopted by a Lebanese association, Mada. The main principles of these approaches led Mada to partner with concerned ministries to draw and adapt the legal and administrative framework needed to manage protected areas, among which sustainable territories.

Created in 1999, the Mada association works in Lebanon, with a specific focus on the north of the country, in various development sectors (environment, socioeconomic, including agriculture and education) with different stakeholders (local, national, public and private). Mada strives to reach a long-term mobilization in favor of societal change, based on endogenous and inclusive dynamics, and regulation patterns adapted to local realities.

## MADA'S EXPERIENCE IN TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT

Since its creation, Mada has supported four territories (Jord el Hermel, Upper Akkar, Upper Metn, and Jezzine Union), aiming at the protection of their natural and cultural resources and their socioeconomic development.

During this process, Mada first worked with the local communities directly (Jord El Hermel), then through the municipalities (Upper Akkar), and finally as a consultant and territorial facilitator (Upper Metn and Jezzine Union).

A first experience took place in the high mountains (Jord) of North Lebanon (Akkar, Hermel and Donnieh), an area inhabited by transhumant population during

the summer only and characterized by remarkable landscapes. Between 1999 and 2004, Mada partnered with urban investors and tribes' representatives to jointly develop an ecotourism project that would benefit the local communities and protect natural resources. The governance in the concerned area was mainly based on tribal traditions, with rare or nonexistent state or governmental intervention. Permanent conflicts due to divergences in approaches and practices led to the dissolution of this young, and maybe too idealistic, partnership.

Striving to take these lessons into consideration, and in partial continuity with this first experience (in terms of geography and the protection-and-development approach), the association decided then, in 2004, to start working with municipalities on the development of a natural park in the Upper Akkar-region. That park was planned in the National Master Plan for the Lebanese Territory (Schéma d'aménagement du territoire libanais – SDATL), along with six other natural parks.

Upper Akkar is a mostly deprived rural and mountainous area in North Lebanon, where exceptional natural resources are abundant.

The adopted territorial approach aimed at guiding two local unions of municipalities, Jord el Keitta and El Joumeh and the municipality of Qobayat, towards a preliminary territorial charter for sustainable development, aiming to improve socioeconomic conditions as well as to protect and showcase the territory's exceptional environment. We conducted studies and dialogues between municipalities with the aim of formulating a common vision for their territory and developing tangible projects or activities on the ground, while building trust with the communities.

Mada also involved the concerned ministries (Environment, Agriculture, Urban Planning and Interior) and the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR). In 2010, tensions between the municipalities concerning conflicting land ownership, the absence of a strong political power to carry the park project, as well as the absence of a legal framework to back up the initiative of establishing a Natural Park in Upper Akkar, resulted in the project being put on hold. However, Mada maintained its presence in the territory via other developmental projects.

Between 2009 and 2011, Mada provided methodological and technical support to the Union of Municipalities of the Upper Metn in the development of a charter for sustainable development in the concerned region. The Upper Metn is a mountainous, half peri-urban-half rural region, located on the slopes of the Beirut river basin, east of the Lebanese capital. The charter was drafted and signed by all concerned municipalities, but in the absence of a strong political commitment, dedicated funding, and a legal framework to enable the creation of a natural park, the project was halted.

From 2015 to 2017, Mada cooperated with the Jezzine municipalities' Union as an advisor and expert as they developed a sustainable territorial management charter. Located in South Lebanon, the district of Jezzine is a touristic region, known for its luxuriant forests. The charter that was developed, upon the request of the Union of municipalities, is still waiting to be signed by all municipalities and mukhtars (which is planned for June 2018).

The development of the three charters was supported or prompted by French public agencies (at the region-level) with a strong expertise in the creation and management of natural parks.

## TOWARDS A LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTED AREAS IN LEBANON

In parallel with the above-mentioned experiences, Mada has been lobbying since 2004 for the drafting of a common legal and administrative framework for protected areas in Lebanon (among which natural parks). In 2011, at the request of the CDR and the Ministry of Environment, and in strong cooperation with both public agencies, Mada reviewed existing regulations, and analyzed the existing territorial sustainable-development projects implemented in Lebanon, and the different schemes and models used worldwide. These different steps aimed at developing a legal and regulatory framework adapted to the Lebanese context.

This mission led to the drafting of a framework law and a draft decree on protected areas, including natural parks, but also nature reserves, sites and monuments. The draft framework law has considered an additional three categories next to "nature reserve", enabling the scope of protected areas to be widened to include sustainable socioeconomic development of territories in line with environmental protection. The draft decree foresees the operational management of the four categories.

The resulting framework covers the creation, funding, and management of natural parks by local mixed committees. The draft law is currently sitting in parliament, awaiting its adoption.

## HOW TO DEAL WITH COMPLEX SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSTRAINTS: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

After fifteen years of experience working within various territories on development and protection, Mada can outline the main challenges it faced. Some are due to the character of the association itself (small, independent NGO, external to the regions it worked with), while others are related to the local context and its various constraints

The challenges include: Time and the availability of funds, as the appropriation of an idea by individuals and communities takes time. Building trust with all stakeholders, national or local, requires sustained exchanges: on the field, a regular presence, special attention to details, patience and discretion are crucial. Local conflicts are common, and to ensure neutrality towards local tensions or disputes and therefore the success of the approach/project, an excellent understanding of the local context is required. The lack of a strong political will at local and national levels constitutes serious limits.

In addition, the territorial projects need to be backed by a legal framework to move from vision to implementation.

The main challenge will still reside in the difficulty of bringing different actors to work together to build a shared project, rather than “shares of a project”.

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