

Beyond the Gardens: Ramat Hanadiv Reaches Out

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Ramat Hanadiv was established in 1954 as the Memorial Gardens for Baron Edmond De Rothschild, a well-known benefactor who was very supportive of the early Jewish settlers at the end of the 19th-century and at the beginning of the 20th-century. Ramat Hanadiv's Memorial Gardens (7 hectares) are surrounded by a large Nature Park (450 hectares) and border two towns (Moshavot) Binyamina, named after the Baron and Zikhron Yaakov, named after his father.

For many years, Ramat Hanadiv concentrated its efforts within the borders of the Garden and the Nature Park, constantly working to improve its knowledge on ecology, education, and its visitor's experience. In 2012, The Community Department was established in an attempt to better connect with the nearby communities and to cooperate in a more significant way.

This paper will describe the evolution of the strategy the Community Department has employed since its inception three years ago, in an attempt to show the most effective way to reach out to the community.

Year One: - Objective: To strengthen the community's affinity for Ramat Hanadiv.

The most significant goal of our first year was to expand the presence and role of volunteers within Ramat Hanadiv.

Year Two: – Objective: To enhance sustainability issues within the community.

Throughout our second year, Ramat Hanadiv selected specific environmental issues, identified collaborators, and implemented activities in the nearby communities. Two of the main projects were: *The Quarry Quandary* – a communal process created to generate ideas for the rehabilitation of an abandoned quarry, and *Connect* – An Eco Pass Project for Kindergarteners. Both described below:

[*The Quarry Quandary*](#) project invited the community to a series of events at which the participants took part in the planning stage of the rehabilitation of a nearby abandoned quarry. The goals of this project were to develop ideas for rehabilitating the abandoned quarry and to connect the community to the quarry and its heritage. Analysis of the data revealed that area residents shared various ideas as to how to rehabilitate the area which included: a recreation and sports park, an environmental education center, a nature park, an entertainment venue for large audiences, an environmental art center, a quarrying heritage center and *A Man and Nature Park*. These concepts were analyzed on the basis of the following criteria: the extent to which they are in alignment with values of sustainability, how much they allow multiple and continued use, how well they serve the community, and to what extent they open and enable future opportunities. The steering committee reached the consensus that the best option was the concept of *A Man and Nature Park*, as described by the following vision statement:

The park will serve the community for purposes of enjoyment, interest, and inspiration, while raising awareness regarding the relationship between man and the environment, heritage, and future.

The site will serve as a link between values related to nature, landscape, and heritage in the surrounding area, incorporate community activity, and offer a meeting place to a variety of people and cultures.

Connect – Eco Pass Program for kindergarteners – For several years Ramat Hanadiv monitored animals as they crossed roads in and out of its borders, and in 2013, conducted a study *Lifelines for Ramat Hanadiv, An Analysis of the Necessity for Ecological Corridors* in cooperation with Alterra Wageningen University and Research Centre, The Netherlands. This study showed the necessity for ecological corridors and proved that without change most animal populations will be unsustainable, in particular, the emblematic gazelles that move between the open areas in the densely populated region.

In discussion with the mayor of a nearby town regarding the conclusions of the study, it became evident that Ramat Hanadiv could assist in raising support for the necessary changes to the already approved plans for the development of an industrial zone. The *Connect Program* was established to raise awareness of the importance of connectivity for the sustainability of wildlife. This program focuses on kindergarten children who then serve as ambassadors to their families and communities.

Year Three: Objective: – Striving for a community initiative.

Two years after the inception of The Community Department, Ramat Hanadiv instituted a new organizational strategy to promote sustainable development throughout the region. This initiative, The Partnership for Regional Sustainability, which engages the leaders, decision makers, and residents of the five neighbouring communities, together with the projects that had already been implemented by the Community Department, helped to set the tone for proactive participation by the community at large.

The main goal of year three was to promote collaboration with neighbouring communities through environmental projects in order to strive toward sustainability in the region. To best achieve this goal, Ramat Hanadiv published a call for proposals, named **Environment Builds Community**, inviting the nearby communities to initiate environmental and community projects that will promote sustainability in the region. Ramat Hanadiv chose the top 15 projects that promote sustainability principles and that create a connection between the communities. As a continuation to this process The Community Department established a hub like environment to support those projects in the shared learning process. At the hub, the participants meet every six weeks, each time visiting a different project, in a different location, gaining a deeper understanding of the projects, sharing thoughts and ideas, and expanding their knowledge of sustainability concepts.

These projects include:

- 1. The Happy Herb** - An attractive herb nursery, located in the deserted Roman quarry on the grounds of Kibbutz Ma'agan Michael, is geared towards educating the public about sustainability, healthy foods and organic horticulture.
- 2. The Nurturing Garden at the Well-Baby Clinic** - In a new community garden in the courtyard of the well-baby clinic, next to the school for special-needs children, the children themselves are responsible for building and maintaining the garden.
- 3. Like the Flower of the Field** - Ultra-religious women are learning how to create and nurture a community garden, featuring both edibles and ornamentals, in their neighborhood.
- 4. Forest Garden** - A new community garden takes shape and colour in an underdeveloped neighborhood of Givat Ada.
- 5. The 'Edible Forest'** - Strips of land next to the railroad embankments are being transformed into an ecological community garden for the pleasure of residents.
- 6. Boostanim** - An orchard is being planted in the back yard of the village's primary school, alongside a tributary of Nahal Tananim.

- 7. Nir Garden** - Development of the public space between a kindergarten and the Nili School will bring the spirit of Mediterranean landscapes and the 'edible forest' to Zichron Ya'akov.
- 8. Women Snap the Environment** - Taking photographs of their homes' surroundings, women from the village of Jisser el-Zarka develop their observational skills and awareness of the environment as they create a photo archive and organize an outdoor exhibition.
- 9. Heritage Trees** - Using an online system, the most venerable trees in Givat Ada are being mapped, with annotations based on historic archives providing additional details about each tree.
- 10. Grow Wild!** - Residents of Binyamina-Givat Ada 'adopt' sections of the streets, bordering their homes, and sow wildflowers there, in keeping with the principles of sustainable gardening.
- 11. Between the Field and the Plate...** - This project for kindergarten and primary school children, located in the agricultural farm in Zichron Ya'akov, graphically demonstrates the links between people and their food while deepening the kids' understanding of healthy eating.
- 12. Community Fly** - The Mediterranean fruit fly causes severe damage to fruits. In this collaborative effort, educational, hands-on activities for kindergarten children help raise awareness of this locally important subject.
- 13. Peace Garden** - With an eye towards the 'edible forest', village youngsters develop and maintain a special plot in Jisser el-Zarka's Peace Garden.
- 14. Where Are the Crocodiles?** - A group of environmental activists from Binyamina are helping advance the rehabilitation of the Taninim (Crocodiles) Stream. This project includes experiential activity days and construction of a bench alongside the stream, in cooperation with the Carmel Drainage Authority.
- 15. KinderGARDEN** - Together, kindergarten tots and their parents plant and care for a small, ecologically-sound community garden.

The evolution, scope, and objectives of Ramat Hanadiv's Community Department represents a worldwide approach to sustainability and to environmental education. The goal of raising awareness is an important one, but it is not enough. In order to make the necessary changes to reach our goal of a sustainable region, we must strive toward behavioral change. To actualize this change, we have created a process that allows individuals to identify and express their passions and personal wishes and to implement them in a supportive environment. This initiative enables the community to establish connections and work together toward the shared goal of sustainability.

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