

Regional Planning in Jordan, the Status Quo - Regional Planning in the Jordan Rift Valley

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Abstract

This paper is intended to examine and research a new way of planning on the Jordanian ground, regional planning, a planning approach proven to be highly effective globally on multiple levels but unfortunately not widely practiced in the Arab World. This research paper tries to examine how the area of the Jordan Valley is being administered regionally, and attempts to breakdown and discuss the different elements of this process in a critical manner. Outcomes of the reserch indicate mainly that although this planning approach is implicated to a certain degree; still it is seen as being more sectoral in nature.

Keywords: Jordan Rift Valley, Regional Planning, Dead Sea, Master Plan, Sustainability.

1. Introduction to the Jordan Rift Valley (JRV)

The Jordan Rift Valley (JRV) is a part of the Great rift Valley that extends from Syria in the North towards South where it goes through a big portion of Eastern African Countries (The United Nations University, 2011). The JRV is considered to be a region not according to administrative borders but according to its geographical characteristics mainly, it is a region that embraces many different spaces in it, most of these sub spaces vary a lot in their characteristics, for example climate and biodiversity.

The importance of the JRV to Jordan (Also to Israel) is significant, since it is considered one of their main water resources and agricultural crops provider, a main economic and touristic spine. The JRV is described to occupy a critical location, due to political disputes between its bordering countries (Jordan and the lands occupied by Israel). This diversity in the involved parties concerned with managing this very important area (politically, geographically & environmentally) gives the JRV a special regional definition in a sense that differs from most other regions in Jordan. This is what makes it such an interesting and important case study to research and analyze.

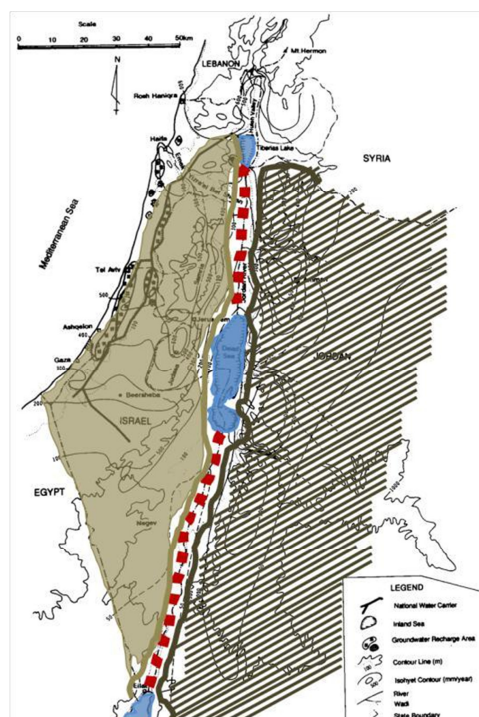


Image 1. Black & White Map of JRV. Source: The United Nations University

1.2 Regional Planning in the Jordan Rift Valley (JRV)

Regional Planning in the JRV can be categorized into 3 main levels as the diagram

below explains:

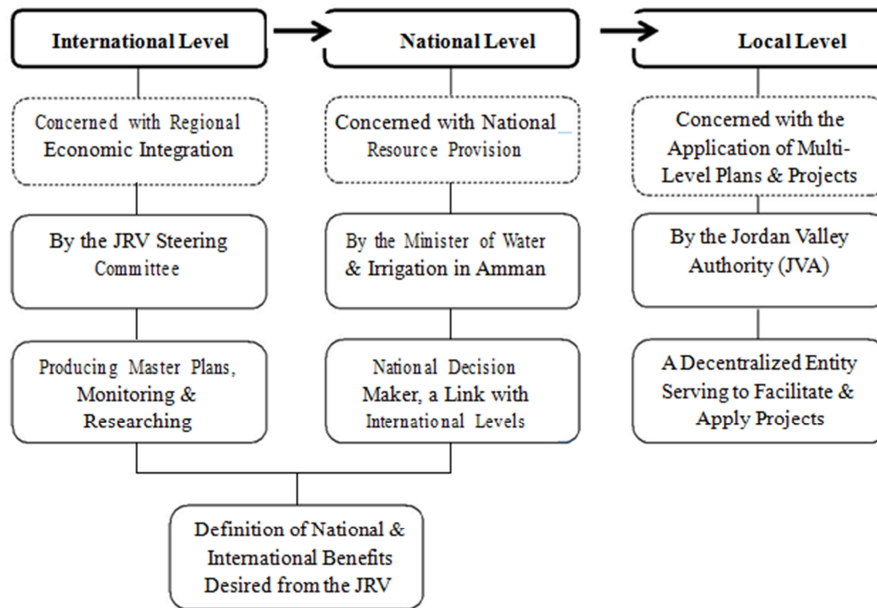


Chart [1]: Regional Planning Levels in the JRV. Source: Authors, 2014

Regional Planning on an International Level:

The JRV has been designated as a special development area and, as a result of a tri-lateral initiative between the United States, Jordan and Israel, the JRV Steering Committee was formed to develop a master plan for the integrated economic development of the JRV sub-region (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008).

"The aim of collaborative development in the sub-region is to consolidate economic integration through the provision of critical infrastructure and services to promote private sector investment." as it is stated by this steering committee.

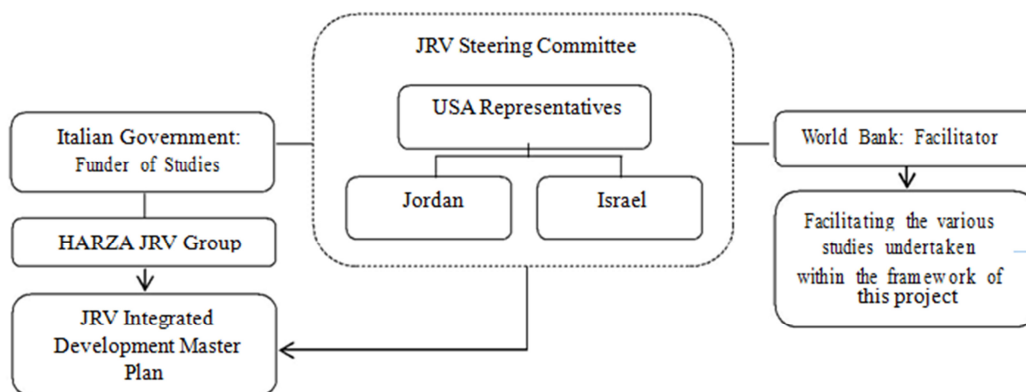


Chart [2]: International Stakeholders in Regional Planning in the JRV. Source: Authors, 2014

1.2.1 Regional Planning on a National Level:

The JVA in Jordan is connected directly to the minister of water and irrigation in the capital city as the chairman of the board of directors of the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA). This is an indicator of how important this region is for Jordan in providing it with clean water, usable for drinking and irrigation.

Also, this board of directors includes the membership of representative from the involved ministries in Amman such as the ministries of planning, agriculture, municipal and rural affairs, tourism and the department of lands and survey (Jordan Valley Authority, 2010).

These representatives communicate ideas and efforts between these ministries and the local JVA. But that does not seem to be enough for such a vast and diverse area, the direct involvement seems to be missing and the Jordan Valley Authority is given many responsibilities.

1.2.2 Regional Planning on a Local Level, the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA):

The local level planning is done by the Jordan Valley Authority, an entity with special laws and regulations facilitating development, different than most other areas in Jordan.

The main organizational structure of the JRA can be best described as follows (Jordan Valley Authority, 2010):

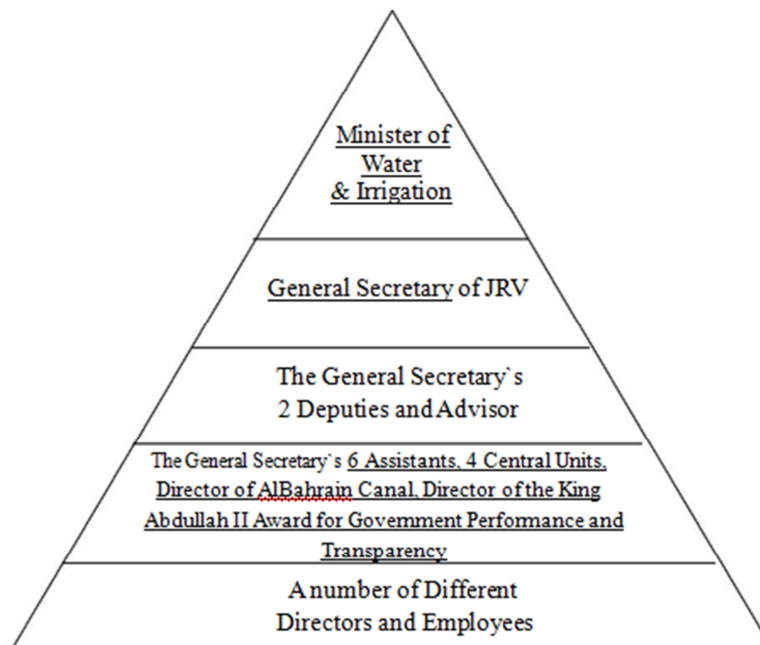


Chart 3. Structure of the JVA Source: Authors, 2014

The main formal responsibilities (roles & functions) on a local level in the region of this authority are to (Jordan Valley Authority, 2010):

1. Conduct regulating (structural) regional plans, land use plans and detailed plans for plots.
2. Enhance and develop water resources in the valley to be used in agriculture, houses, electricity generating, industry... etc.
3. Preserve these water resources and conduct studies in related fields and solve water disputes.
4. Study, implement, operate and maintain water irrigation systems and related facilities and sort agricultural plots
5. Develop and protect the environment in the valley and building the related facilities
6. Construct agricultural roads and services and tourism facilities.

As noted, the functions of the authority are mainly concerned with water resources rather than integrated development.

1.2.3 The Dead Sea as a Special Area in the (JVA):

The Jordan Valley Authority is divided into two main zones; the first zone extends from the Northern borders of Jordan to the Northern edge of the Dead Sea, the second zone extends from the Northern edge of the Dead Sea South to the borders of Aqaba Authority (Jordan Valley Authority, 2010).

According to these zones; the Dead Sea is actually a part of the Jordan Valley Authority (a part of the second zone in JVA), but the limitations come in relation to projects related to the Dead Sea, the Dead Sea is included in the JVA maps physically but not development wise, this authority has no power to initiate any projects or decisions in this area due to its joint importance between the two Banks. We can notice this even on a national level, where only small touristic projects such as hotels on the shores and Dead Sea productions take place.

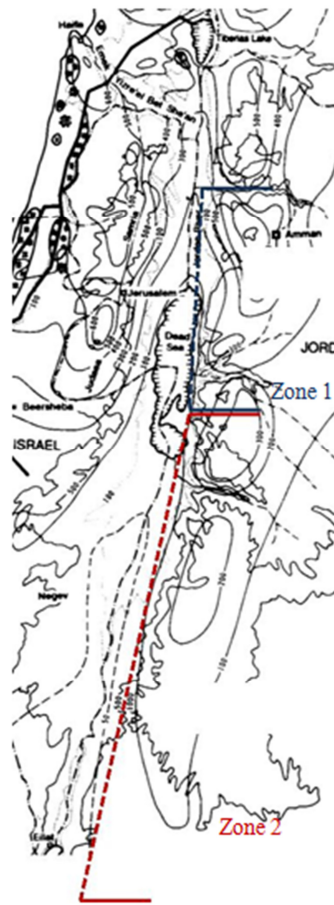


Image 2. Black & White Map of JRV. Source: The United Nations University

The Steering Committee is responsible of planning and developing this area to prevent any disputes and to insure justice and shared benefits for both sides.

The Dead Sea being excluded from the Jordan Valley Authority development wise puts tremendous limitations on the benefits desired, it also makes it harder to integrate other sectors and projects with that area, a state of unbalance in that region could be a result. But in the end it is understandable that a higher committee should take over this process if it works in collaboration with local authorities and governments.

2.1. Formal and Informal Planning in the JRV

In the international planning level; many international NGOs interested in this area are encouraged to be involved, such as the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) that helps governments to plan these protected areas and integrating them into different sectors (IUCN, 2008).

These foreign actors aid the authority in planning certain locations. The Authority and such organizations work hand in hand even if for achieving different goals.

On a national level, as mentioned before local ministries and departments are involved through representatives in the board of directors.

2.2 Regional Planning Tools and Instruments

Table 1. Tools & Instrument for Planning in JRV. Source: Jordan Valley Authority

Tool/ Instrument	
Administrative Border Plans	
Plans defining the exact administrative borders of the JVA to surrounding areas	
JRV Master Plan	Regulating (Structural) Plans Plans for the regulated areas in the JRV borders
North, South & Middle Regions` Plans of the Master Plan	Land Use Plans
	Plans determining the land uses for every plot
↓ Sub-Projects & Plans	↓ Detailed & Specific Plans Very detailed plans for every plot, indicating full detailed roads, borders, landscape & services

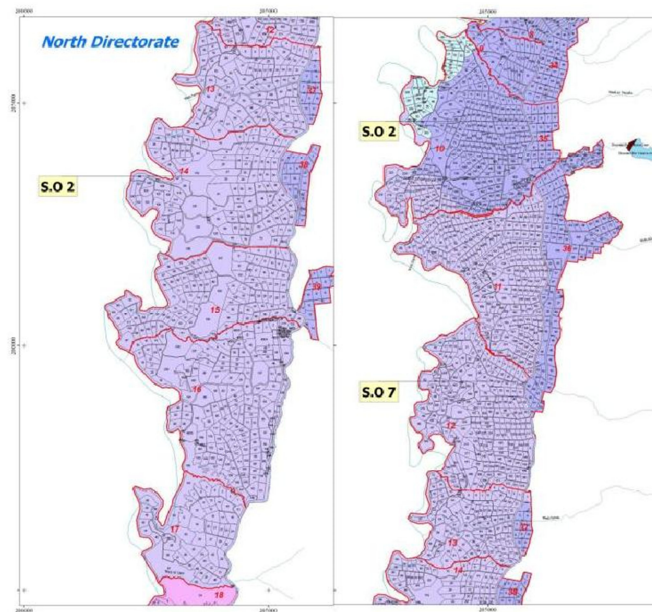


Image 3. Agricultural & Residential Land Use Plans. Source: JVA

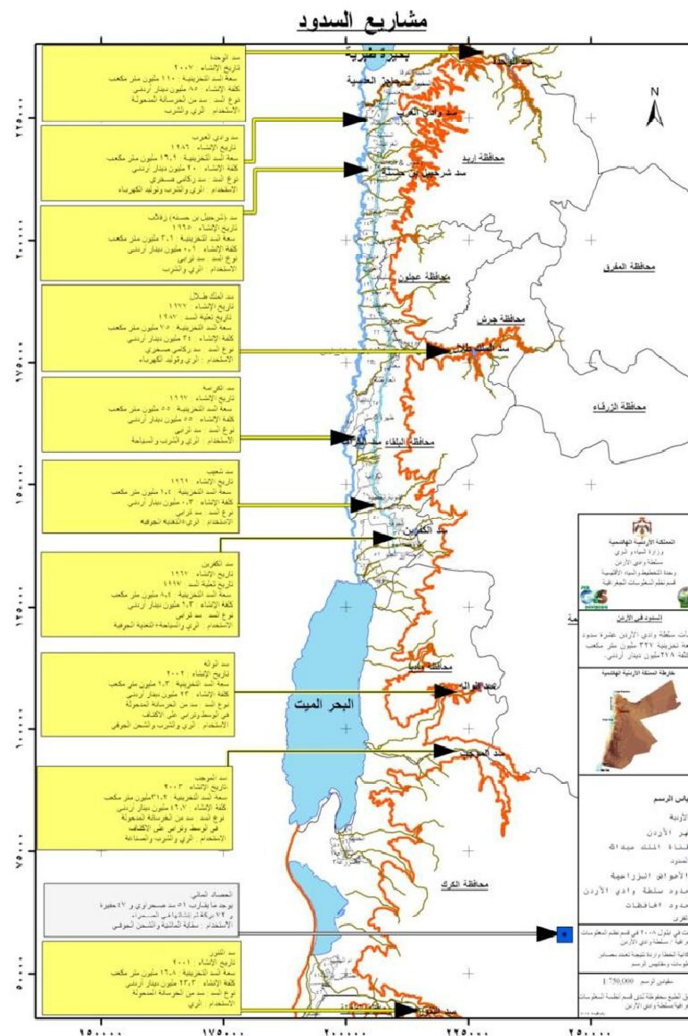


Image 4. Water Projects Plan Source: JVA

2.3 The JRV Master Plan

The Vision and Development Strategy of the JRV (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008):

Integrated development of the JRV is centered on three principal themes:

- **Development of the corridor links through the JRV.**

The establishment of peaceful relations opens up the opportunity for renewing **regional continuity**. This includes establishing land transport, energy and communications connections between the parties, as well as logistic facilities to serve both regional and international activities, flow of people and goods...

- **Sustainable exploitation of the JRV's shared environmental resources.**

This theme recognizes ecological interdependencies and the imperative of coordinated resource management. Accordingly, the establishment of institutional mechanisms for **cross-border**

collaboration is required. Economic activities tied to shared environmental resources include agriculture, industry and tourism.

- **Creation and exploitation of vertical and horizontal synergies.**

Development planning for the JRV underscores the importance of undertaking complementary activities. This includes the development of linkages between primary and supporting activities, the creation of scale economies, and exploitation of technology transfer and shared know-how, including agriculture and aquaculture, water management and energy generation.



Image 3. Master Plan of Northern JRJV Source: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

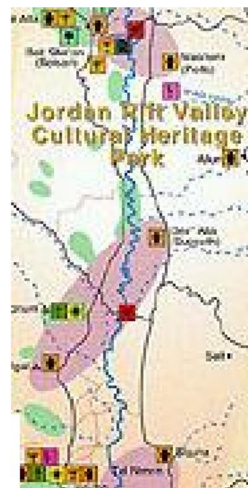


Image 4. Master Plan Projects in JRJV. Source: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

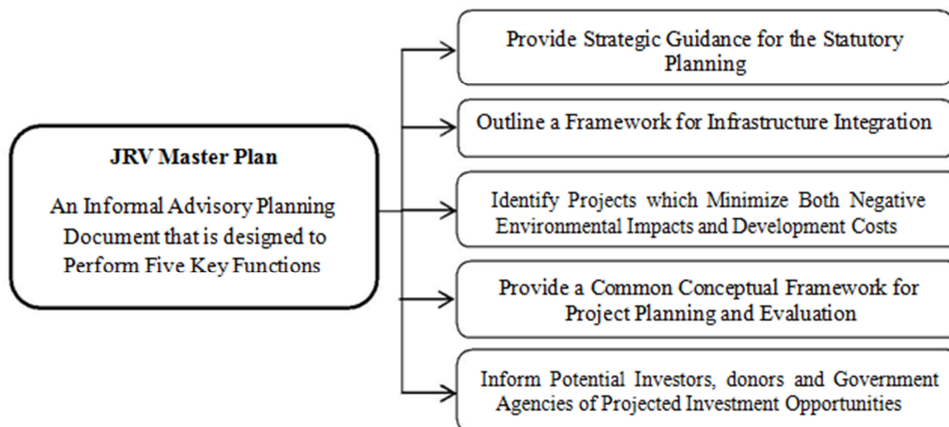


Chart 4. Key functions of the JRV master plan...Source: Authors, 2014

The Spatial Planning Strategy (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008):

Given the diverse nature of the JRV, no single spatial strategy can apply to the entire development area. New areas of urban growth as well as centers of economic activity will be developed:

Table 2. Spatial Strategy of the JRV Affairs. Source: Israel Ministry of Foreign

Location	Spatial Strategy Includes:
North and Central Jordan Valley	Limited additional dispersed development with possible new settlement around traffic corridors
South Jordan Valley and North Dead Sea	New pole of development, especially around Suweimeh, supported primarily by tourism activity
South Dead Sea to Gulf of Aqaba	Development around Safi and continued development of Aqaba/Eilat given accelerated economic activities in industry, tourism, commerce and trade

3. Gaps and Difficulties Facing Regional Planning in the JRV

The Jordanian focus on the JRV is mainly concerned with water provision and agriculture, again through assigning the minister of water and irrigation as the head of the board of directors in the Jordan Valley Authority. Not being directly involved in planning the other aspects of the JRV will result in neglecting great potentials the JRV can provide Jordan with.

Assigning a third party in the planning and decision making process in the JRV (represented by assigning the USA as the head party of the JRV Steering Committee) would have been a good idea due to the ongoing disputes between the West and East Banks if it was assigned to a politically neutral country.

We could also notice from many published studies that the Israelis are more aware of the importance of this region than Jordan, efforts have to be redirected towards this area to fully use and benefit from its capabilities.

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