

SHAMS - SEA Scoping Seminar, 23-27 July 2007  
**Mission Report**

**SHAMS**

**Sustainable Human Activities in Mediterranean Systems**

**Sub-project 1 - Bosra**



REGION DE BRUXELLES-CAPITALE

**SHAMS - Integral SEA Scoping Seminar, 23-27 July 2007**



**Mission Report**



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**Summary**

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## 1. Participants of the Mission

Bettina Geiken	Coordination SHAMS, IBGE Bruxelles
Anne Caspari	SEA expert/teamleader, Municipality of Rome
Elza Maalouf	Facilitator, Cultural Translator and Trainer for Value-systems. Centre for Human Emergence Middle East

The group met at Fiumicino Airport and left on the 23rd of July at 14.30

## 2. Objectives of the Mission

The objectives of the mission were

On the SHAMS project

- Provide the framework for a common understanding of the tasks, project concepts (such as “sustainability” and actions
- Introduce the notion of value-systems for decision making to the stakeholder committee and the leaders in Bosra
- Empower the leadership in Bosra
- To determine the objectives of the Local Development Office for Bosra
- Clarify administrative and coordination issues of the project
- Consolidate the notion of a two level/ speed project approach: short term visible change with the restoration project in the old town and the long term strategic plan

On the SEA sub-project

- Consolidation of the notion of “strategic planning”, “sustainability”, SEA and adaptation of the concepts to the local realities and value systems as foundation for the Strategic plan
- Create a “value-system landscape” of the persons involved in the project to better target communication
- Information of various groups of stakeholders about the aims of the project
- Information exchange with various stakeholder groups on main issues, problems and goals
- Determination of the scope (topics, geographical area etc) of the strategic plan with the administration and stakeholders committee
- Identification of tasks and distribution to various stakeholders: who does what by when..

Come into action!...

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#### 4. Results/conclusions/interpretation

This first meeting with the stakeholder committee with the integral training/spiral dynamics (SDi) was a cornerstone for the project. From earlier analysis, both by the Roman team which has had a good insight into both the cultural and the technical sides (antiquities and monuments), as well as from the point of view of the proposed SEA project, it seemed of paramount importance to set up first a common basis for our work.

Not only is there a difference between our own **value systems**, other cultural, political, or social mindsets or approaches to everything, different speeds and levels of developments, beliefs, or diverse political systems. This alone makes it very delicate to find a common basis to talk about complex planning processes and abstract western concepts, such as “sustainable development”. On top of that, we encountered also the rather usual internal problems in Bosra, where people, despite the fact that they share the same cultural values, political system, language and background, experienced huge differences in the approach to and the understanding of the SHAMS project or development issues in general, in some cases even right down to fights, oppositions or passive resistances.

Having had enormous success and excellent feedback from other sustainable development processes with the integral approach, we thought the introduction of a system that could act as a “**cross cultural translation**” not only between us, other external expert teams and the local stakeholders, but most of all also between the locals themselves, and **enable an effective leadership**, would make all the difference.

Elza Maalouf writes in one of her reports from her work in the middle East:

“The SDi model offers a fresh perspective to a region inundated by all kinds of Western designed theories that in most cases are not congruent with the culture of the Middle East. Most approaches face resistance, especially in the Arab countries where they are looked at as Westernization tools that can be disrespectful of Islam. The SDi model tracks how value systems form in a culture, and how they shape and are shaped by their geographic spaces and life conditions. It identifies the complex adaptive intelligences that emerge in response to these conditions. In the Middle East, that results in a change/transformation model that maps out real world strategies and actions to deal with the region's fragmented and polarized social systems. On another level, The SDi perspective allows the West to see the Middle East through different lenses; not Islam or Christianity, Arabs or Israelis, but people with different value systems and different cultural codes<sup>1</sup>.”

Given these premises, our first move was to apply the integral framework to project management, the stakeholder processes, the SEA planning process – and at the same time train stakeholders and local leaders in the integral approach for more effective communication.

“Integral Leadership is a situational leadership that has the resilience and complexity to deal with the spectrum of value systems in cultures and people. One of its main functions is to facilitate the emergence of new ways of thinking and to create a framework that can hold all key aspects of an organization in a coherent way: people, products, culture and

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<sup>1</sup> Elza Maalouf: “Field Testing the Integral Model in the Middle East”. [www.integralinsights.net](http://www.integralinsights.net)

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systems. The main mission of an integral approach is to incorporate the various insights, models and theories in a style that builds on the strength of its various components to support change<sup>2</sup>.

The application of the integral framework and the constant **assessing of the life conditions** through the lenses of the different value systems, a process constantly interpreted and accompanied by Mrs. Maalouf, allowed us to make much more sense of the immense amount of data and information gathered during this meeting, and also of our knowledge from research and previous visits. We were able to interpret the information people gave us and respond to the requirements of both the locals and the project itself in a comprehensive way.

### **The Shams Project**

The meetings with the local stakeholders made it clear once more, as it had already emerged from earlier visits, that the **intention of the Shams project was not clear** to most of the participants. Whilst some of the members of the congregation had a (limited) understanding about long term planning, most of them were confused, and also **frustrated** with the project. Most of the European projects they have come in touch with so far, have not contributed to a **visible change** in the physical reality of the local people, but had risen a lot of expectations. Even if other European projects were successful in meeting their objectives, they did not meet the expectations of the locals. This can be understood, when looking at the different value systems. According to our integral analysis, the 'centre of gravity' of the local people, especially the people living in the old town are on Purple/Red value meme (Spiral dynamics integral) which means their attention is focused on **safety** for the extended family, on **instant gratification** and on **visible progress NOW**, and their question is an impatient "*what does the Shams project give us NOW, for our houses, for our families – without having to wait, and regardless of the long term consequences!?*". Of course, this clashes with the intentions of most well meaning European project, that focus on long term results, that are most of the time working behind the scenes, on planning, sustainability and other rather abstract concepts (orange/green), that are not accessible to most local people.

Understanding the different levels of focus, we were able to establish some major points to satisfy some immediate needs of the locals: The stakeholders have grasped much more the idea of a **Shams-Project in two levels and speeds**. The level most important to them is the visible **restoration** of one of the houses in the old town, so they can see instant progress, something they can also be **proud** of, that will enhance the value of the old town, and the focus on it, and, also importantly, they can tell others about, when being asked, what Shams is all about. In the meantime, the long term planning process for the SEA has started and is on it's way to provide a framework for sustainable development.

The beginning establishment of the Bosra development office is also received well. The role of the SEA and the development office is still not clear to some of the members of local stake holders, and will need filling in with facts they can relate to and consolidation in each of the next visits.

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<sup>2</sup> Elza Maalouf: "Field Testing the Integral Model in the Middle East". [www.integralinsights.net](http://www.integralinsights.net)

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### ***Sustainability***

The term “**Sustainability**” is by now widely known in Bosra, distributed and printed on pamphlets even for the national elections (“*who elects the Prime Minister votes Sustainability!*”). However, when asked what sustainability could mean, people are not able to respond and connect the concept to values they can relate to. Sustainable development is a strategy concept that begins with Orange thinking, and is not accessible to Purple/Red value memes, while at the same time is attractive to them. In Purple/Red, there is **no strategy thinking** evolved yet, time cycles are measured more in seasonal harvest cycles, returning holy days and feasts. For example, while the more complex thinkers in the stakeholder committee have mentioned water supply as an important issue, there is still no overall strategy to a regional water management or even concern (little problem awareness), that the local reservoir has been empty for the past years.

Elza Maalouf: “So a project that is prepared by the EU at the Orange/Green levels (*development of Bosra, SEA process etc.*) is being applied in a Purple-Red culture and life conditions, (*such as the level of poverty, schools with very little funds, scarcity of water and poor economy*). Most engineers involved in the project are capable of Orange thinking, but are also eager to get paid and to show the city that they are providing good services”.

During the elaboration of the SEA, we will have to constantly provide examples for sustainability that are close to the mind set of the locals, in order to allow them to form their own notion about the concept. (e.g. reference to ancient houses as “sustainable”, as they are in place for over 2000 years, “the way of the ancestors”).

### **SEA Process Planning issues**

The stakeholder committee was set up with an eye on a **good distribution of different aspects** the representatives could bring into the planning process: **staff of the administration, other departments, women’s association, entrepreneurs and young people, and traditional local leaders.**

Together, we got a good overview on the problems and issues to address in the SEA process. The stakeholders mentioned the following topics as important for the process:

- **Water issues: drinking water, water levels, water supply, waste water management**
- **Social flows**
- **Tourism issues**
- **Antiquities and monuments, restoration**
- **Agriculture**
- **Investors, entrepreneurs and investments**
- **Property management**
- **Laws and regulations problems**
- **Management and planning problems**
- **Communication problems**
- **Education and capacity building**
- **Promotion**

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- **Financing**

The following issues came up during the sessions:

***The investments in the old town***

- The mayor, having had to wait over 8 years for action, was impatient about the non-development, and proposed an official call for investment: anyone who wants to sell should present the papers. Mrs. Maalouf warned, that this approach could be override the people in the old town, which – out of money problems would sell their houses, and then – once the place was restored and sold for much more money – could feel cheated. She warned not to see the property issues as a tourist problem but as a peoples problem, and that the administration should take the pride of the local people into account.
- The very fact that local people still live in the houses should be seen as an extraordinary asset, which makes Bosra unique. The plan should therefore not leave the local people out of the process. The grown social structure should be preserved.
- Despite the impatience to go ahead, there should be a plan for investments, like a small land use plan/local plan to indicate the final destination of the restored houses to have a healthy mixture of small craft shops, restaurants and other functions. The planning expert, Mr. Kamal: “don’t let it open, plan it”.
- Investment seems difficult because of the vicinity of Damascus. Investors prefer the capital for their money.
- There is a system of leaseholds (e.g. only 10 years) that is not attractive for investors
- The creation of Bed and Breakfast or hospitality faces a religious difficulty: couples need to be married or else sleep separately.
- An inventory on the old houses, social flows, property, inhabited houses, and their status with an indication of the priority is of prime importance. Some of the stake holders have agreed getting information in from Damascus university, and also from the governor’s team within a month time.

***Planning and administration***

- The Plan should contain **rules** and regulations. Also the Ministry of Tourism needs plans and specifications to be able to go ahead.
- Concerns were voiced about the **abuse of power** by some members of departments for issuing or not issuing **planning permissions**. This would need to be addressed.
- **Co-ordination problem** between the competencies of the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Antiquities through the levels local, regional, national.
- The committee members have started to address some of the **institutional problems**: top down takes a long time and puts limitations and breaks. It was agreed that we should **integrate top down and bottom up approaches** and **improve communication** between the different committees and departments.
- The committee problem should also be addressed. Complaints were voiced, that there were **too many committees** for the various fields: 3 committees for site management, with

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different proposals for tourist trails, that don't communicate to each other, are in competition to each other and nothing gets decided.

It was our impression, that with the sheer quantity of monuments and the vastness of the old town, with almost each action leading to the discovering more antiquities and monuments from different cultural strata, the members of the (Blue) administration in the departments are simply **overwhelmed** and don't now **where to start**, and **what the priorities are**. The usual response of forming a committee is, however, **avoiding personal initiative and responsibility** and is not furthering the process. This problem will have to be addressed. Mrs. Maalouf confirms this evaluation in saying, that in the coalescence of power, influence and authority, **power is missing** (initiative, personal responsibility and the power to decide), while authority and influence can be provided by the authorities. The governor of Dara'a could be an important player to bring in the missing power element.

### **Behind the scenes in Syria: power, authority and influence**

The current **power structures** in Syria (Blue) can be very favourable to the Shams project. From the Prime Minister himself, promoting the concept of sustainability, the Governor of Dara'a, who's takes the sustainable development of Bosra as paramount project with his personal involvement, down to the mayor, the project seems in good hands.

Blue laws and regulations are being applied, also with a system that is not what we would call a typical democracy, where the mayor is first appointed and then voted for. A behind the scenes look on these power structures shows, that the healthy blue authority prevents the time old approach of "traditional solutions to new problems". As life conditions in Syria and Bosra are becoming more complex: water shortage, over population, tourism, investment problems, and globally emerging markets and competition, internet, etc., the traditional (purple-red) answers, often tinted by traditional interpretation of religious values, are **no longer functionally fit for problem solution**. For example, some traditional religious leaders in Bosra have still heavy judgements on statues and ancient art, seen as an insult to the prophet, and perceived as a threat to cultural heritage, and not as valuable cultural heritage itself. If such a leader became mayor due to his role in the local society, there could be a net possibility that a large part of the very potential for sustainable growth in Bosra could be destroyed or, at least, not valued.

Elza Maalouf interprets the power scene as follows: "As expected, the culture in Bosra is Tribal/Power Driven (Purple-Red), set in a country that imposes Order and the rule of law (as much as a developing country can impose such rules while avoiding corruption) through Ministries and Institutions. A much needed order that allows projects to be achieved since they are usually protected with a Top-down decision-making structure. Some individuals involved in the project have the level of pragmatism and complex thinking that can facilitate the application of SHAMS and SEA process".

After the local elections, our most important partner, the mayor of Bosra will not stay mayor any longer, but has been promoted, but remains still the reference person for the Shams project, a structure which will continue to help the project immensely.



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**Conclusions:**

We have made an important start with the introduction of the integral framework in the Shams Project. Our own understanding has deepened about the changing and conflicting life conditions, the socio-political situation and with it the changing value systems and behaviours, and we will be much more able to fit sustainability concepts, planning processes and the respective values to the local situation to foster new ways of thinking. Our aim is to provide a guiding framework, in which – in alignment with their value systems - Bosra and its people find their next steps for a sustainable development. The participants in the process have already voiced that this project is different from others in its approach, language and intention.

The scoping session was successful in determining the range of issues, involving the stake holders actively and in distributing responsibilities. In the next months, we will have to consolidate this process, fill in the gaps, get started with tangible interventions (commune di Roma), and continue with the inventory and assessment for the SEA.