



An Institute is born: JIIS History

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Three decades ago, Professor David Amiran invited me to establish with him The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies. I could not imagine then that I was entering into a life-long adventure, and that thirty years would go by like a few days, usually good and fascinating days. That beginning had the typical characteristics of a "start-up" (although we were not familiar with the term then): An exciting idea - to establish an institute devoted to policy studies on Jerusalem, with little money but a one-time grant from the Jerusalem Foundation; a willingness to settle for modest conditions - and on the other hand - abounding good-will on the part of public figures who served as our founding team, and a great love for Jerusalem that brought together all those who assisted at the birth. As is the case with a "start-up," it was not clear which was stronger - the motivation of the founders or the need of the market for such an institute. Independent policy institutes in Israel were almost non-existent, some wobbly beginnings sparked here and there and soon faded

It was Teddy Kollek, then Mayor of Jerusalem, who conceived the idea. His devotion to the city and his understanding of its complex and unique problems led him to the conclusion that Jerusalem needed an academic, professional Institute to review the establishment, to propose ideas and solutions, and to serve as a reservoir of information about the city. As in the case of other important institutions that he founded in the city, Kollek strove to build an Institute that would have vitality and continuity, and mobilized the best people around the idea. Among the public figures who volunteered to act alongside Kollek for many long years were the President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Abraham- Abe Harman, Mrs. Ruthie Cheshin of the Jerusalem Foundation, Prof. Ruth Lapidot, Professor Joshua Praver, the Director General of the Ministry of the Interior Haim Kuberski, the Vice President of Bank

Leumi Baruch Yekutieli Prof. Moshe Sicron, and Prof. Arie Shachar. All contributed greatly to the building and functioning of the Institute.

Strategic planning

The idea of developing expertise on the subject of Jerusalem and a conscious choice of Jerusalem as our special "niche" was accepted by all concerned. The active and enthusiastic participation of Mayor Teddy Kollek in the work of the Directorate connected the Institute from the start to the areas of planning and activity of the city. In the tension (lessened over time) between the requirements of academic research and the needs of policymakers, the issues of policy had the upper hand over theoretical and academic issues.

The original policy of The Jerusalem Institute to focus on Jerusalem was put to the test when Teddy Kollek and Abe Harman connected us with the Revson Foundation of New York which became the main financial mainstay of the Institute since 1981. The Foundation stipulated its support upon carrying out policy research not only on Jerusalem and the Institute began its transformation to broader agenda and moving from a position of enterprise initiation toward institutionalization and structuring of patterns of action.

The entrance of the Revson Foundation signaled a turning point in every possible way. The Foundation sought to encourage the creation in Israel of an institute along the lines of the Brookings Institute, and examined several alternatives with that aim in view. Its process of assuming support of the Institute was carried out gradually and carefully. At first, annual grants were approved, based on performance in the previous year. In 1986, after thorough examination of the Institute's activities, commitments became long-term which opened a new era for the Institute, providing it with a basis for activities independent of the establishment, and enabling it to soar and design itself according to circumstances of time and place.

The Revson Foundation served as a lever to spring the Institute from a dependent and weak body to one assured of its existence, able to plan its activities for several years ahead and develop its potential. The Foundation turned out to be an ideal supporter: on the one hand, non-intervening in the choice of topics, modes of publication and

modes of action; on the other hand keenly interested and involved, attentive to problems at all times, and encouraging bold and independent attitudes. The Foundation's Presidents played a decisive role visiting (with or without members of the Foundation's Board) the Institute at least once a year, holding meetings and discussions with researchers and directors, expressing great interest in the contents and areas of activity of the Institute, and always appreciating and commenting on the manner in which it is managed..

The frequent interactions with the Revson Foundation created a unique relationship that was marked by complete candor. Information was shared in good and bad times, failures and mistakes were discussed as often as successes and triumphs. The donor-recipient relationship was replaced by a partnership of shared goals.

The support of the Revson Foundation stimulated growth. With their backing we became bolder in our search for additional sources of funding and more daring in initiating projects with the seed contribution to be later supplemented by other organizations. This is how we went from a budget of \$200,000 in 1981 that was one hundred per cent provided by the Revson Foundation to a budget of over \$2,000,000 thirty years later that is thirty seven per cent provided by the Revson Foundation. Not the bulk of the budget but certainly its most important component, the backbone sustaining the Institute and enabling the developing of projects, the upgrading of publications and the initiation of conferences and seminars. In gratitude we added "founded by the Revson Foundation" to our name and on the cover of each publication.

As the issue of independence is critical to us and we do not receive support from any governmental source, either national or local (except for specific projects) we highly prize the Foundation's policy of non political affiliation. We also appreciate the Foundation's policy of conducting comprehensive evaluations of the Institute's work every few years by outside independent evaluators. This is always difficult and challenging but at the same time honoring and affirming our efforts and abilities.

After the entrance of the Revson Foundation in 1981, a first master plan was drawn up for the work of the Institute, since then a new strategic plan is prepared every 5 years. The plans integrate aspects of administration and finance with research policy. The research areas are divided into three categories: areas in which the Institute had

absolute superiority; areas in which the Institute had a cumulative advantage and new areas that need to be addressed. The plans develop a "market approach" meaning an early identification of topics that will interest policymakers, identification of the needs of policymakers, and development of projects responding to these needs.. This is done with the active involvement of policymakers in the research process, and public participation in disseminating the findings and conclusions.

Finger on the pulse

In the nineties, a "finger on the pulse" approach was added. These years saw a growth in the number of policy institutes in Israel, and the competition for researchers of high quality mounted. Awareness of the importance of policy researches rose, as well as the willingness of researchers to be involved in them. At the same time, the establishment of advisory institutes by former senior public employees who retired from the national or municipal apparatus became widespread, and government offices as well as municipalities were required to make research contracts only through tender committees. The ability of the Institute to compete for government tenders against private advisory companies was quite limited, and this became apparent in its limited research funds and in the work plans. The proportion of government-funded projects dropped markedly between 1991 and 1997. The proliferation of research institutes had an impact on the competition for resources as well as the attention of policymakers and the media. In order to survive and develop in the new market conditions it was necessary to monitor closely developments in society and in the market and to react to them, to identify opportunities and use them, and to establish joint ventures. New ideas developed in response to a changing reality or to new funding opportunities. The Oslo Agreements, for example, awakened new areas of activity: joint projects were developed with Arab institutes, a mediation group was established for Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, a Peace Kit for the Negotiator was published, and a think-tank formed for the resolution of the Jerusalem question in the framework of peace negotiations. Cooperation was also established with international research bodies for the funding and implementation of joint researches. In 2000, a new Environmental Policy Center was established by the Institute, again supported by the Revson Foundation.

Where are the policymakers?

Who are the policymakers toward whom we direct our efforts? This is a long row of "impact-makers" beginning with the Prime Minister, the head of the opposition and the government ministers, through the mayor and senior municipality officers, senior figures in the government apparatus, Knesset members and senior members of the security, economic and political establishment. During its first decade, the Institute almost made an ideology of the participation of these policymakers. The Institute used various methods to enlist their involvement:

- Personal contact to convince policymakers to cooperate with us in the development of projects.
- The inclusion of policymakers in the steering committees of Institute projects.
- Development of projects aimed toward municipal or governmental factors.
- Encouragement of researchers whom government offices were interested in employing, to conduct their projects in the framework of the Institute.

Varied strategies were developed by the Institute to "reach" policymakers:

- Personal meetings with policymakers to learn their needs and what troubles them, in order to find ways to answer these needs.
- Creation of budgetary "levers" in order to encourage complementary budgeting by policymakers. We learned that the building of a project and the investment of seed money from Institute funds in creating a start, motivate governmental and municipal factors to join it and shorten the approval processes needed to initiate a new project.
- Identification of sympathizers among policymakers, and approaching those who appreciate research and make use of it.
- Contacting outstanding researchers, and encouraging them to stay within the Institute.
- Holding public conferences in order to disseminate messages, and to present new publications and projects.
- Restricted seminars for select target groups.
- Outreach to policymakers: holding conferences and seminars in government or municipal offices.
- Distribution of our programs of activities in thousands of copies.

- Development of series of publications by subject.
- Special attention to the clarity of presentation, "readability" to the target population.
- Investment in the design of publications and in giving prominence to the publication and the researcher over an emphasis on the Institute.
- Gaining impact through the media. We saw in the media an instrument enhancing the impact of research, and made efforts in this direction: press notices, press conferences, background-material for the press and contacts with media members. At a certain stage we published an information leaflet for the press about the researchers of the Institute, listing the areas of expertise and way of contacting each one.

Several structural problems are inherent to activity aimed at policymakers. Policymakers and government offices aspire to quick solutions to burning problems; research cannot respond. Policymakers want technical, procedural, detailed solutions - a recipe for action; research has difficulty in responding. Policymakers come and go, in keeping with democratic and political processes, and the investment in promoting contacts with them is an ongoing effort. Policymakers have a low threshold of tolerance, and contact with them is overshadowed by the criticism to which the researcher is committed. Therefore, many policymakers prefer the advisor to the research institutes, because they can influence the results of his work. The preferred product for policymakers often refers to a narrow issue. There is little demand for dealing with complex problems. Policymakers are wary of dealing with politically and publicly sensitive issues, and tend to reject ideas for policy change initiated outside their offices ("we know"). Finally, policymakers tend to dismiss a researcher or a research contradicting accepted views - mostly by questioning the validity of the research methods. In spite of all of the above and the difficulty in winning a government tender, work with government ministries has an undoubted advantage: it requires the research institute to be aware of the topics on the agenda of the policymakers, to foresee developments and design plans and proposals before the problems weigh heavily on the policymakers awaiting a decision. Besides, work with government ministries enables the Institute to create a network of useful contacts, and an image of a factor that can deal with problems fairly and efficiently.

How to cope?

Our view was that the foundation upon which the Institute is built is first and foremost high quality and reliability. We have always emphasized quality research meeting strict academic standards, whose contribution and validity are hard to ignore, and researchers whose expertise is beyond doubt.

We have placed less value on publicity and public relations, and have always insisted that publicity must be based on real actions and achievements. This attitude has caused internal and external criticism, when marketing became the name of the game in most walks of life. Our choice to invest in quality and reliability comes from a belief that these are accumulative. Quality and reliability are derived from the amassing of knowledge layer by layer, from focusing on broad yet definite areas, from the enrichment and propagation of new studies by a broad and deep knowledge infrastructure accumulated at the Institute. The adherence to these areas affords over the years an absolute advantage to the Institute that adheres to them, on condition that it stays open to innovation and transformation in its area of expertise and the needs and emphases of Israeli society, and on new research approaches.

Quality and reliability are built through good publications, even if in the short term they have no impact on policymakers, and even if they are not received enthusiastically at the time of publication. The reputation they create and their being an undeniable research asset even years later, build respect on the part of policymakers and researchers. Their quality not only stands for itself, but reflects on other studies from the same source.

Quality and reliability are built through identifying great ideas whose value the public and the policymakers have not yet realized; for a perspective is needed to know their true value. Such were, for examples, papers written at the Institute about municipal democracy; about the importance to the national economy of small and medium-sized factories; about new criteria for the support of R&D by the government; or the innovative idea to establish a group for mediation-arbitration in conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians. These ideas were ahead of their time. Quality and reliability are sometimes built by taking a stand against popular opinion. Such were, for instance, our papers on possible arrangements to the Jerusalem question in the

framework of peace negotiations; on the problem of settlement of the Bedouin in the Negev; on political violence accompanying a peace process;

It may be argued that seclusion in an ivory tower of research and publication, or an approach focused only on people of authority and public impact, serve the purposes of a policy Institute well. In such an "ivory tower" one gains academic recognition, and the effort turned toward policymakers is always pointed and effective. Staying with this approach saves resources and effort. Yet, exposure to the public and public action have an added value: the circulation of our publications and position papers broadens, a new generation grows from which come future policymakers, the public begins to identify the Institute as the most authoritative and reliable source on certain questions - all this without a massive investment in public relations, in conspicuous advertisements, or in image publications.

An Institute whose face is toward the public fills an important educational function of preparing public opinion, enriching public discourse and exposing subjects that the authorities would like to hide and to avoid opening for public discussion. Each subject that emerges from the darkness of secrecy and fear into the public domain, becomes less threatening when the possibility is given to study it and react to it in open and serious discourse. An example from the past few years is the public discussion we held about the question of sovereignty in Jerusalem within the peace process. This question seems to be the most loaded and problematic of all the questions between Israelis and Palestinians and between the right and left camps in Israel. The very engagement with the subject already brands one as a "divider of Jerusalem" and renders one suspicious of taking a stand that most of the public, according to survey, do not agree to. Actually, things turned out to be quite simple: the public understood that the Jerusalem question is on the agenda from the very fact that it was included in the Oslo agreements; it grasped the directions of a possible agreement indicated by current events; what patterns of sovereignty and what new approaches to it exist in the world today, and what could be relevant to the future of Jerusalem.

When considering quality, additional questions crop up, such as the deliberation between "narrow" research topics in government tenders and "broad" topics looking at theoretical questions, historical developments and questions of principle. The answer

to this deliberation is evasive and difficult to implement: one must find the right balance between macro- and micro-research. Actually, the balance sometimes leans towards "narrow" research, at other times broad research is preferred when resources that are not earmarked are available from general sources.

Another question related to the quality of a policy institute is how an institute becomes more than the sum of its parts; how to encourage cross-fertilization between single researchers from different disciplines, or between research groups dealing with separate topics but with problems having much in common. There is a tendency to develop interdisciplinary thought processes in contrast to the tendency of the academy to specialize in narrow areas. In an institute such as ours, the interaction and cross-fertilization happen naturally by the very proximity and meetings, but they become meaningful and influential when they are given direction by means of Institute seminars, information sheets, orderly and good updating - through interdisciplinary work of the research teams.

Once in a lifetime

Once in a lifetime, or in thirty years, in the life of a research institute, it enters center-stage, and its work is accepted as the single or main platform in an international discourse of crucial national importance. This was the fate of our concluding report of a special Task Team on resolving the Jerusalem question in frameworks of peace. published at the ideal timing one week before US President Bill Clinton summoned the American-Israeli-Palestinian Summit in 2000 at Camp David. The report, placed at the disposal of all policymakers at Camp David, set the framework of the deliberations. One of the Institute team members, Reuven Merchav, was invited to join in the deliberations, and the Institute was asked to present maps, ideas and proposals during the Summit. Local and international media showed great interest, and set upon the Institute emphasizing the special role a research institute may fulfill in a critical political process. For about one month the Institute starred in the world press and on world TV. TV teams from all over the world hovered about the Institute. The members of the Task Team were gratified that their work, hidden from view for many years, finally fulfilled the role of which they had dreamed.

The strained relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority after the Camp David Summit, that caused a recession in the political contacts and postponed the handling of the question of Jerusalem for an unknown time, did not diminish the importance and relevance of the team's report. We believe that the report as well as over 40 books and reports on related issues will be relevant for any future scenario, in peaceful as well as in turbulent times. The fact that it came before its time, when the leaders and politicians were not ripe to handle it, does not detract from its importance and from its being a breakthrough document.

The preoccupation with the peace negotiations over Jerusalem may have branded the Institute as "Leftist." Certain politicians promote this argument. As one who has initiated and directed the work of the team, I know this claim has no basis in truth. The work done was completely devoid of political leanings, and among the team members are those with "right," "left," and mostly "center" views. The team was not deterred by criticism, and wrote many new scenarios, focusing on the Temple Mount, the Historic Basin of Jerusalem the Old City and more.

About honey and the sting

When summarizing honestly and fairly thirty years of work, one must also tell of disappointments and frustrations. First and foremost, one must admit the wear and tear and the frustration involved in a constant struggle for raising funds, in order to keep a balanced budget vis a vis the abundance of ideas, needs and wishes. This causes a constant dilemma: to develop topics with a good chance of raising funding, or to take chances and adopt important and worthwhile researches that do not have funding, or find it hard to mobilize funds. Another frustration derives from the struggle of enlisting excellent researchers, and of keeping the best of them within the framework of the Institute when funding is short.

It is disappointing and frustrating to hear of political decisions to which we could have contributed had we delivered our background document or publication to the hands of the decision-makers in time. Even more disappointing and frustrating is a situation in which our recommendations did reach their destination in time, but were not implemented.

Daily activity may cause burnout. Worrisome thoughts accompany it: are we telling ourselves the truth? Can we admit to ourselves that the time for a project, a model, an idea or a researcher is past, and that one must search for new models and ideas - or refresh research teams? Is the Institute truly more than the sum of its parts, and have we succeeded in creating in all those associated with us a feeling of a personal contribution? and do we feel that past successes ensure the future? Have we learned from our mistakes and internalized the lessons learned?

Moments of pleasure may compensate - they occur when someone's idea develops through cooperative work and the results are heart-warming. It is a pleasure to recall the modest beginnings of projects that developed into abundant trees. Moments of pleasure occur when someone writes or speaks favorably about the Institute or about a project conducted in it; or when a new book is published and a successful event takes place. A sublime moment of pleasure comes when a paper published by the Institute breaks into the international foreground and sets the defining lines in a critically important discussion, as happened with the report of the Task Team of the Institute about peaceful arrangements in Jerusalem.

The primary purpose of our effort, to my mind, is to create something of value. The effort to make an impact, to market and to gain recognition is secondary. The quality will survive after us. It is the quality that will determine whether and how far we have fulfilled our task. In contrast to the view that impact on policy processes is the true test, I believe that the test is in the quality of the work. The impact on a certain process at a certain moment is headstrong and wonderful, but in the long run the institute with the greatest impact is the institute that has gained reputation by dint of its products, whose value is lasting beyond the topics that rose momentarily to the national agenda.

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