



Spotlight on Bethlehem-Turin Cooperation



By Marta Bottiglieri

There are many time-honored bridges that unite the city of Turin and the municipality of Bethlehem. The two cities first began to work together in 2014, thanks to the Italian-Palestinian cooperation program PMSP (Palestinian Municipalities Support Program), which sets out to strengthen the technical, administrative, and managerial capacities of Palestinian local authorities and foster partnerships with counterpart local authorities in Italy.

An institutional agreement signed between the two cities in Turin in 2015 set out to help develop the local economy in Palestine through the Bethlehem Smart Water (BSW) Project and the Plan of Innovation, Economy, Redevelopment, and Management of Gross Market in Bethlehem (PIERMA.rket). The agreement laid the

foundations for subsequent initiatives, one of the most significant being New Urban Resources (NUR). In 2017, the first call for proposals for local authorities was published and focused on renewable energy for Bethlehem, co-financed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Like the PMSp, this call for proposals sought to boost municipal services (water, energy, waste, transport) and foster local development of similar bodies in partner countries, particularly in priority areas for Italian cooperation, such as the Palestinian territories.

Thanks to the partnership between the Italian-Palestinian cooperation programs, the cities of Turin and Bethlehem succeeded in building a meaningful ongoing partnership, with initiatives ranging in focus from water (BSW) to food (PIERMA.rket) to energy (NUR).

Water, food, and energy: these three essential goods are fundamental rights for citizens (the right to water, the right to food, and the right to a healthy environment). Access to these goods is made possible thanks to local public services managed by municipalities and their affiliated companies.



CITTA' DI TORINO

NUR (in Arabic, “light that comes from above”) is the name of a project established in response to Bethlehem’s need to access renewable energy sources, which it has not been previously equipped with. NUR set out to increase the renewable energy autonomy of an area with more than 30,000 inhabitants and reduce the cost of public energy for citizens. The initiative was designed by the two municipalities applying a holistic approach, i.e., interventions in different sectors of local policy that are capable of fostering sustainable development in the local area. Interventions range from the construction of infrastructure to capacity building in the field of energy governance; from vocational training to fostering entrepreneurship

 View of Bethlehem.



in the energy sector; and from educational activities to cultural and artistic initiatives. Four key axes were identified: 1) installing solar panels on public buildings and technical assistance to improve energy efficiency; 2) providing vocational training courses and incubation for start-ups in the energy sector; 3) raising awareness and educating citizens through art and participatory processes for youth and students; 4) strengthening local energy governance.

The project highlights the focus on sustainability and strengthening partnerships. NUR contributes to fulfilling the UN Sustainable Development Goal No. 11, which aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. For cities, this is an objective in itself and also a gateway to implement all 2030 agenda objectives on a local level. NUR, in particular, aims to “localize” objectives No. 7 (provide clean and accessible energy), No. 4 (ensure inclusive, equitable, high-quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), and No. 8 (promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all).



■ View of Bethlehem.

Institutional sustainability and collaboration between the two cities of Turin and Bethlehem have allowed for the creation of a stable bond between the cities and a friendship between the two communities.

NUR has been successful in addressing multiple levels of sustainability. Environmental sustainability, by providing previously nonexistent photovoltaic infrastructure to deliver clean, sustainable energy for local needs; economic sustainability, by cutting the cost of electricity bills for public lighting incurred by citizens, fostering new models of social business in the energy sector, and promoting NUR with the Turin Islamic Economic Forum 2019; socio-educational sustainability, by

promoting vocational training courses for various trades in the energy field, and educational projects in the schools in the two cities; cultural sustainability, by launching and running the visual arts competition *Let it Light!* which combined cooperation and contemporary art thanks to the visibility provided by cultural institutions in Turin (Paratissima) and Bethlehem (the Walled Off Hotel, better known as the Banksy Museum); and institutional sustainability, by drawing up an energy plan for Bethlehem, supporting the municipality in preparing public tenders in this sector, holding seminars on energy governance, and creating a manual of energy-saving good practices for local authorities, schools, and citizens.

Institutional sustainability is one of the most interesting aspects of the NUR Project, given that the city of Bethlehem is now able to interface with other cities and international players engaged in energy transition processes.

The project achieved its objectives through technical exchanges, capacity building, a hackathon, cultural competitions, training and educational courses, webinars, and events. All these activities were staged in partnership with stakeholders engaged in energy transition and include the cities of Bethlehem and Turin, the Coordination of Municipalities for Peace (Co.Co.Pa.), two universities (Turin Polytechnic and Bethlehem University), a research institute (Links Foundation), an NGO (VIS), a vocational training body (EnAIP Piemonte), a vocational school (STS - Salesian Technical School of Bethlehem), and a company (Ai Engineering Srl). Other instrumental stakeholders include cultural players such as the Walled Off Hotel in Bethlehem and the Paratissima Art Fair in Turin, the Energy Centre of the Turin Polytechnic, the energy companies IREN Group and JDECo, the Avogadro High School in Turin, EnAIP in Rivoli, the Majorana School in Grugliasco, and the Pininfarina School in Moncalieri, which interfaced with



■ The NUR Project being presented at the Turin Islamic Economic Forum.



■ The entrance of The Walled Off Hotel.

■ Bethlehem's message of solidarity to Italy at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Palestinian schools to raise awareness among Italian students of the issues at stake. The city of Turin involved various departments in the project: the International Cooperation and Peace Office, the Cultural Activities area, and the Energy Manager.

The positive energy of this partnership enabled the NUR Project to survive the COVID-19 pandemic. While activities were initially suspended, the resilience of the partnership made it possible to cope with this unprecedented situation. Despite the difficulties of repeated lockdowns in the two cities, NUR and its activities bounced back. Some were simply completed at different times, while others were rescheduled online, including webinars on governance that replaced the technical exchanges and international conferences. Some initiatives were redesigned, such as educational programs in schools due to closures and distance learning in both areas, which were partially replaced by a video competition for students and young people, as a means of testing various approaches to environmental sustainability.

During the pandemic, institutional bonds were further strengthened. Messages of solidarity and sympathy were exchanged between the mayors of the two cities to maintain the Turin–Bethlehem bond and to keep hope alive of restarting cooperation after the crisis. NUR played an important

role in strengthening the partnership between two communities with different institutions, associations, schools, educational bodies, and profit and nonprofit organizations, ensuring that inter-institutional cooperation was not limited purely to the relationship between the two municipalities but rather a friendship forged between two communities.

Indeed, this is NUR's energy which created a system of scientific, technical, economic, political, social, educational, and cultural bridges despite borders and boundaries, forging a stable bond between Turin and Bethlehem.

Maria Bottiglieri is head of Youth Policies, International Cooperation and Peace Department of the City of Turin and can be reached at cooperazione.internazionale@comune.torino.it.

Article photos are courtesy of the author.

Note: Links to the websites of the partners in the NUR Project and all other information, material, and videos produced as part of the project can be downloaded at <http://www.comune.torino.it/cooperazioneinternazionale/en/nur/>.