



VOLUME 14 ISSUE 2

The International Journal of

# Design in Society

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## Privatizing Collectivity

The Transformation of the  
Social and Spatial Forms of the Kibbutz

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**THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF DESIGN IN SOCIETY**  
<https://designprinciplesandpractices.com>  
ISSN: 2325-1328 (Print)  
ISSN: 2325-1360 (Online)  
<http://doi.org/10.18848/2325-1328/CGP> (Journal)

First published by Common Ground Research Networks in 2020  
University of Illinois Research Park  
2001 South First Street, Suite 202  
Champaign, IL 61820 USA  
Ph: +1-217-328-0405  
<https://cgnetworks.org>

*The International Journal of Design in Society*  
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# Privatizing Collectivity: The Transformation of the Social and Spatial Forms of the Kibbutz

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*Abstract: The article studies the relation of spatial to social form by interrogating the privatization of the kibbutz in the last decades. In this privatization process, the kibbutz transformed from a socialist–collectivist settlement to a more familiar suburban–communal settlement. This structural transformation has been accompanied by a spatial reorganization, which has reached its nadir with the “parcellation” of plots—the privatization of homes. Rather than merely an administrative procedure, the privatization of homes is a radical process affecting the social, the economic, and the spatial structures of the settlement, exposing the spatial specificity of the new social forms. This article unfolds the social and spatial processes that have taken place, and deploys a spatial reading as a means of developing a critique of the ideology of the privatization plan.*

*Keywords: Spatial Forms, Morphology, Urban Design, Collectivism, Community, Kibbutzim*

## Spatial Forms

That the dominance of certain morphologies at a specific place and time is dependent on the relation of these forms to existing and dominant social forms is hardly controversial, yet requires re-assertion. The relation of societal organization to spatial organization, or, alternatively, of social to urban form, is tacitly situated at the center of the spatial practices of architecture, urban design, and planning; tacitly, because this relation is not ordinarily the preoccupation of their discourses. The three spatial practices usually operate within a preconceived understanding of societal conditions and structures in which the “palette” available to them is pre-determined, and consequently the question of relation of spatial to social form remains a subtext, removed from the fore of discussion while, in effect, being central to them. Only at moments in which societal transformation is experienced, in which new social forms emerge and demand a spatial response, does the issue move to the fore of concerns.

In eras of societal restructuring, architects, urban designers, and planners—the experts in spatial organization—are called upon to find adequate spatial forms for new, emerging social forms. Such moments explain the intense interest in the form of the socialist city in 1929–31 Soviet Union, or in the 1960s discussions in Italy among the architect Aldo Rossi (1991 [1966]), architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri (1976 [1973]), and others. The relation of social to urban form has remained a specific interest of Italian urbanists such as Paola Vigona and the late Bernardo Secchi, while urban sociologists and geographers have expanded the discussion to new territories (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Moulaert, Rodrigues, Swyngedouw 2003; Tonkiss 2013; Massey 1985, 1995 [1984]; Gregory and Urry 1985).

More recently, following the economic meltdown of 2007–8, a young generation of architects, urban designers, artists, and activists has sought to identify new modes of habitation by rethinking (spatial and social) forms of collectivity, ranging from “urban communities” and

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“co-housing” to “eco-communities” and alternative collectivities.<sup>2</sup> Many of these endeavors “look back” to pre-Fordist ideas of cooperatives and ideal communities. This article studies the kibbutz, not in order to exalt a twentieth-century form of collectivity, but in order to elucidate the spatial forms of its privatization and, consequently, to contribute to the understanding of the relation of spatial to social forms.

During the short-lived infatuation of architects with sociology in the 1960s and 70s, many architects over-stated the agency of architecture and urban design, and presumed a one-to-one relationship between the spatial and the social. The British sociologist Maurice Broady, who had often contributed to discussions at the Architectural Association in London, responded by publishing a scathing critique of what he termed “architectural determinism,” castigating architects for simplifying sociology and over-emphasizing the agency of the built environment (Broady 1966). Broady ridiculed architects’ exaggerated claims of agency; but he did not deny the existence of a correspondence between the social and the spatial. Others, such as the architect and researcher Amos Rapoport (1968) and the radical sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1969; 1991; see Kaminer 2017), offered evidence of and argumentation to support such a relation. This article aims to demonstrate, through a particular case, the direct correspondence between the two.

The recent process of privatization of kibbutzim in Israel provides an opportunity to study structural transformations and their effect on the built environment—in this case, the passage from collective ownership and a collective spatial organization to a communal-individualistic and market-based social organization. The aim of this article, then, is to demonstrate that societal restructuring requires adaptation of the built environment as well, and, by outlining the specific spatial forms of collectivity and of market-based social organization and the transition from one to the other, also to unfold the manner in which such adaptation takes place. The article will concisely introduce the kibbutz, its major principles, its development, and its spatial form, and will continue by a closer study of a specific kibbutz, Beit Ha’Emek, which has undergone a slow process of privatization in the last decades, a process that has impacted its spatial organization.

## The Form of the Kibbutz

Kibbutzim were founded in the early twentieth century by young Jewish socialists, many of whom escaped the failed 1905 revolution in Russia (Spiro 2004). The émigrés sought to realize their socialist ideals in small, self-governed settlements within Ottoman Palestine. The pioneers of the kibbutzim advocated collective ownership of homes and land, collective labor and collective child-rearing, an ambitious endeavor to create an oasis free of the capitalist mode of production. The socialist impetus was married to Zionist ideals of creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine (Abramitzky 2011; Palgi and Getz 2014; Kahana 2015).

The key principles of the early kibbutz movement were, according to researchers Michal Palgi and Shlomo Getz (2014, 39):

1. Equality: members were expected to contribute to the community according to their abilities and receive support and resources according to their needs.
2. Direct democracy of governance.
3. Self-labor, developed from the socialist rejection of hired labor.
4. Common ownership of means of production and consumption.
5. Mutual responsibility.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, AAA and PEPRAV 2007; An Architektur 2008a, 2008b; Awan, Schneider, and Till 2011; Betsky and Gandolfi 2008; Blundell Jones, Petrescu, and Till 2005; Cuff and Sherman 2011; Lydon. et al 2012.

Initially, the layout of kibbutzim—*kvutzot* (“groups”), as they were originally formulated—resembled central European courtyard-based farm settlements, exemplified by the 1910 layout of the first *kvutza*, Degania. Their economy was based on agriculture. In the interwar decades of 1920-30s, *kvutzot* began expanding their economic base to industry and services and grew from the initial communes of 20–100 members to a more significant size, eventually supplanted by the larger kibbutz. These changes were driven by the ambition to diversify production and achieve autarky, as well as by the diversifying population of the settlements. New amenities emulating urban conditions were introduced, and kibbutzim became rurally-based, egalitarian, collective “micro-urban” societies (Kahana 2015). Some decades later, the “regional kibbutz,” a cluster of kibbutzim, would be developed to enhance these proto-urban aspects.

The German émigré Richard Kauffmann, the chief architect of the Jewish Agency’s planning office, developed in the interwar years key planning principles that were implemented in the layout of kibbutzim in the following decades. They exemplified spatially the understanding of the kibbutz as an autarkic community. Kauffmann’s principles were derived from the Weimar *Siedlung* adaptation of the Garden City model.<sup>3</sup> The new layout articulated a finite and definitive form that accommodated internal growth; the high significance of the central sector and its communal facilities that were vital for community-creation and cohesion; and the prevention of low-density sprawl in order to enhance the collective character of the settlements. It used a zoning system in which the diverse sectors were separate yet dependent on each other: the separation of the production sector, for example, yet provision of necessary infrastructure and connections between the sectors.

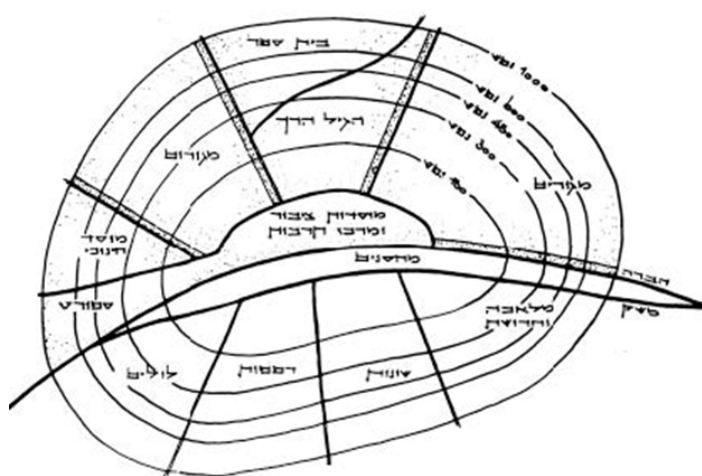


Figure 1: Mestechkin’s Diagram of Radial Growth.

The kibbutz communal amenities are placed at the center. The horizontal, linear element below the center is storage, separating the center and the housing from the agricultural and industrial facilities at the lower half of the circle.

Source: Courtesy of Yad Ya’ari Archive

By 1948, the year the state of Israel was established, the kibbutzim population reached 49,000. In the 1960s, and as a result of the establishment of the state of Israel, the autarkic ambition waned, and kibbutzim became increasingly integrated into and dependent upon their region, particularly in education, production, and distribution. New models for a kibbutz layout were developed. Shmuel Mestechkin’s diagram was particularly influential, adapting Kauffmann’s ideas to new layout principles emphasizing radial growth (Figure 1). In 1963, the

<sup>3</sup> For the relation of Weimar’s *Siedlungen* to the idea of community, see Welter 2010.

fully developed and mature form of the kibbutz center was introduced at kibbutz Kfar-Hanassi (Kahana 2015). The 1960s kibbutz was no longer a derivative of the *Siedlung* and Garden City. Its main facilities typically included a dining hall and kitchen, clubhouse and lounge, administration offices, library, reading room, supply shop, and a clinic; the layout principles and densities were developed to enhance quality of life and collectivity (Kahana 2015). The Jewish Agency's Operation Division became an organ of the Israeli government, and in 1969 the planning departments of the two main kibbutz movements, "Hameuhad" and "Ihud," were merged to form the Kibbutz Planning Department. Kibbutz planners introduced new layout types, often with increased flexibilities and higher densities. Distances from homes to the collective facilities at the center had to remain short to encourage collective living; maintaining this principle in conditions of growth of population necessarily led to higher densities, and in some cases multi-story housing was introduced.

In the 1960s and 70s, kibbutzim were considered an economic success. Some aspects of collectivism were reduced or changed, most significantly the dissipation of children's dormitories. In many kibbutzim, members could buy their own clothes rather than subjugate to committee decisions and collective purchasing (Spiro 1975 [1956], 1983, 2004; Cohen 1983). Many of the changes strengthened the family unit at the expense of the collective "family": the accommodation of children in their parents' homes, the introduction of home-specific "mod-cons" such as kettles, the gradual inclusion of toilets, showers, and kitchenettes in kibbutz homes. The home, and consequently the family unit, became increasingly autonomous from the collective. In parallel, by the early 1980s, the focus of kibbutz planning turned to regional planning, proposing the amalgamation of small kibbutzim into regional clusters—an eclipse of the early, autarkic ideal and a complete "embedding" of the kibbutz in its environment (Kahana 2015).

## Privatization

The initial "shock" economic liberalization policies of 1980s Israel led to extreme inflation and depletion of foreign currency stocks, which, combined with slow growth and a bank stock crisis in 1983, generated a severe economic crisis by 1985. The crisis had significant impact on kibbutzim, which were plunged into debt (Ben-Rafael 2011; Russell, Hanneman, and Getz 2011, 2015; Palgi and Getz 2014). With only reluctant support of a hostile center-right government, the kibbutzim began a gradual move towards privatization. The debt was only one of the causes for privatization; more generally, throughout the 1980s and 90s, the government of Israel began implementing neoliberal policies. This meant a shift from manufacturing to services, knowledge economy, and finance capital; weakening trade unions; enhanced global trade and speculative "risk investments," including reduced trade-barriers and increasing imports; enhanced emphasis on consumption; individual contracts replacing collective contracts and similar developments familiar from other countries. The process of kibbutz privatization was thus not just a reaction to the debt in conditions of limited alternatives, but also a response to pressures by the government and to demands by some of the kibbutz members to synchronize the structure of the kibbutz with the times and changed values (Palgi and Getz 2014; Ashkenazi and Katz 2009). Already in 1983, sociologist Melford Spiro identified a transition in kibbutz culture and structure from asceticism to consumption, from closed community to a porous, pluralist collectivity, from a focus on external ends (socialism, Zionism) to a focus on the kibbutz itself (Spiro 1983). Russell, Hanneman, and Getz (2011) suggest that the economic crisis was a catalyst rather than root cause for the changes that ensued.

Subsequently, the economic units of kibbutzim—industries, agricultural branches etc.—were reorganized and separated from each other and from the community budget to prevent contagion by default of any one branch (Moskovich 2016). The kibbutz community budget, following these changes, was now raised from progressive taxing of (newly introduced)

salaries, profits from economic units, from internal services (dining room, laundry, education, which were previously free),<sup>4</sup> and home-rentals (vacation homes or long-term rentals to non-members). The kibbutz thus placed a distance between its community and its economic units, now professionally run by boards of directors, only a minority of whom were kibbutz members. Branches could opt to employ non-kibbutz labor. “The kibbutz’s relaxation of the strict principle of self-labour,” wrote Palgi and Getz (2014, 40), “also enabled the employment of more paid labour in seasonal agricultural work and in industry. This process was prompted by kibbutz members who did not want to work in the jobs available in production and preferred to pursue jobs of their own liking.”

While modes, processes, and procedures of privatization varied, a key aspect was the passage from a fully egalitarian society in which all property—including homes, cars, furniture, etc.—was owned by the kibbutz and members received no more than “pocket money,” to modes of “differential” salaries and private ownership and consumption.<sup>5</sup> By the early 2010s, around 80 percent of kibbutzim had introduced such “differential” salaries, with high deductions for communal and other services (Russell, Hanneman, and Getz 2011; Palgi and Getz 2014). With this, the egalitarian values of the kibbutz have diminished and inequality has become apparent. The importance of the kibbutz dining hall, once the epicenter of the community, has also abated, with many members preferring to cook and dine at home. The general assembly, once the cornerstone of the kibbutz’s direct democracy, has lost its importance and rarely takes the form of weekly meetings. Nevertheless, mutual responsibility and direct democracy, even if weakened, remain the key principles distinguishing the privatized kibbutz from other forms of settlement (Ben-Rafael 2011).

In the 1990s, kibbutzim began building extensions—new housing estates at their periphery. The purpose was to expand the dwindling population, to support the provision of costly services such as schools and dining halls; to increase income; to recruit new members, and, consequently secure the kibbutz’s future. These were mostly suburban-like developments and the dwellers were primarily commuter-families interested in community life rather than fully fledged collectivity. These extensions altered the kibbutz dynamics by adding to the population a large number of non-member residents and creating a two-tier system of insiders and outsiders. The kibbutz center, defined by key amenities, now became the center of a larger, more diffuse, and suburban settlement. “Every step in the privatization of the kibbutzim,” wrote Russell, Hanneman, and Getz (2011, 119) “has simultaneously been a step in their decommunalization.”

The post-1985 budgetary cuts and austerity, the emphasis on efficiency and profit, and the consequent reorganization of the kibbutz movement led, in addition to the changes already mentioned and many others, to the closure in 1989–90 of the Kibbutz Planning Department (Kahana 2015). Consequently, the process of spatial reorganization was addressed separately by each kibbutz vis-à-vis local authorities. The National Planning Authority statutory planning document thus became the key document in the process.

The process of privatization, then, has been one of incremental steps and ongoing encroachment, which have changed the kibbutz in fundamental manners. The “final” step in this process is the privatization of the homes and the land: the “parceling” of plots to enable private ownership. The pressures to privatize home ownership—and hence the demand to own property—were driven primarily by concerns raised by the decline of mutual responsibility and desire to be able to contribute to the children’s financial future through direct inheritance (Spiro 2004).

<sup>4</sup> By 2002, 60% of kibbutz dining halls charged for meals and 74% of kibbutzim charged their members for electricity (Spiro 2004).

<sup>5</sup> During the 1990s, many kibbutzim practiced diverse forms of “mixed modes” or universal salary, but the general trajectory has been towards differential salaries.

The land on which kibbutzim were built was owned, initially, by the Jewish Agency; with the creation of the state of Israel, the state itself became the owner, and the Land Authority the key institute regulating the field. Kibbutzim, effectively, leased the land from the state. The Land Authority stopped the process of the privatization of land following a lawsuit in 2002. The process would have meant the free or for nominal cost transfer of government lands to private ownership, and was deemed to be a preferential treatment of kibbutz members at the expense of other citizens.<sup>6</sup> “As of January 2014,” wrote Palgi and Getz (2014, 44), “almost all residential real estate is still owned by the kibbutz: 90% the houses and 82% of the economic enterprises. Only a few kibbutzim have managed to overcome the obstacles that the state bureaucracy has created on the way to accomplish this goal.”

The transition from a specific form of collectivity and human settlement, “neither village nor city” as the socialist politician and a key figure in the early kibbutz movement Yitzhak Tabenkin described the kibbutz (Kahana 2015), to a more familiar community settlement with suburban characteristics, raises the question whether the Renewed Kibbutz, as the privatized kibbutz is called, is in any sense a kibbutz: its specificity now lost; all it retains are a few resistant social structures, its own past and history.<sup>7</sup>

So far, this article outlined the general contours of the emergence of the kibbutz and the recent process of privatization. It will now proceed to study the case of kibbutz Beit Ha’Emek, in which a precise spatial vision for the privatized kibbutz has been proposed. The comparison of this plan for privatized space with the original plan of the kibbutz brings to the fore the spatial aspects of the kibbutz that require change and modification to suit the new social form of a loose individualistic–communal settlement—or, as Spiro (2004, 562) described it, a “suburban bedroom community”—that accepts, in effect, the free-market condition and internalizes it, reproducing it spatially. Beit Ha’Emek as a specific case study offers, on the one hand, a relatively late layout, and hence a mature layout in its collectivist spatial form, and, on the other, a clear plan for spatial privatization. It will demonstrate how a specific kibbutz, while exposed to similar pressures as others, accommodated these pressures socially and spatially in manners that are, to some extent, generalizable, and are, at the same time, particular, a result of path dependencies.

## Beit Ha’Emek

Beit Ha’Emek is a kibbutz in western Galilee. It was founded in 1949, immediately after Israel’s War of Independence. It is located on the site of the Palestinian village Kuwaykat, which had been evacuated following hostilities and an Israeli artillery bombardment during the war.<sup>8</sup> Beit Ha’Emek today is a small kibbutz of about 500 members, and grows bananas, lychees, and avocados. It has poultry, cows, and a successful pharmaceutical company. Initially the kibbutz consisted of some stone buildings of the former Palestinian village and new, simple single-story huts, scattered with limited thought or attention. In the late 1950s, plans for the kibbutz were laid out by architect Freddy Kahana at the planning department of the newly established Ichud kibbutz movement, a breakaway from the hardline, pro-Soviet Hakibbutz Hameuchad.

<sup>6</sup> A policy similar to Britain’s “Right to Buy” in the 1990s in Israel required tenants to pay a modest sum to own their homes, previously owned by governmental companies. The accusation in the case of the kibbutzim was that the initial process suggested a transition of ownership without any exchange or regulated system of pricing this privatization, a free give-away by government, and hence discriminating against citizens who are not kibbutz members.

<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the Renewed Kibbutz, about thirty kibbutzim, all of them financially secure or wealthy, retain the identity of a Collective Kibbutz and continue the collective organization of the community, albeit adapted to the economy and ensuring a relatively high standard of housing, education and services through the continuous process of kibbutz planning.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://zochrot.org/en/village/49232> (accessed 23 August 2019).



In the 1960s and 70s, the kibbutz's form emerged, based on Kahana's proposals. It reflected the new focus on family living and the dissipation of children's dormitories, and developed through zoning: housing, education, public/communal, and recreation as key zoning categories supported by green spaces and infrastructures. It included a series of new buildings (Figure 2), ranging from a new dining hall to housing clusters. On the one hand, the layout exemplified the conclusions reached by this time by planners and architects, including a modification of the earlier Garden City model and a more mature conception of the kibbutz as a proto-urban settlement. On the other, as an adaptation and reorganization of an existing kibbutz rather than a new settlement, the layout had to accommodate, to some degree, the existing condition, the old stone houses of Kuwaykat, some of the basic structures and shacks built around 1950, and the positioning of industry and agriculture. In a sense, the new plans can be described in similar terms to radical redevelopment—the imposition of new ideas and spatial relationships on the existing.



Figure 2: Beit Ha'Emek in 1963

Source: Image courtesy of Freddy Kahana

The homes were small, and so was their footprint, allowing extensive communal green to separate the rows of housing while avoiding low densities and sprawl (Figure 3). The plan created a kibbutz center: a concentration of communal buildings including a dining hall, club, office and shop, a library, and a school and nursery to the north of this center. To the west and east of this communal center, housing clusters were added. The clusters included two-story housing, with one family on each floor. Double units were articulated by a “zig-zagging” of sorts and pathways aided in defining the 2x2 elements, i.e., two double-family units—four homes—“two up two down.” This organization articulated a quasi-urban condition and complexity.

The complexity emerges not only in the diverse sizes of basic elements and units within this ensemble, consisting of one, two, or four homes, but also in transitional spaces in entrances to homes providing diverse levels of privacy and publicness. Transitional spaces often emerge over time, develop and transform threshold conditions. In this process, the threshold, articulated as a two-dimensional line separating public from private space and controlling the passage from one to the other, becomes a fully fledged three-dimensional space, a “gray zone” that is both private and public. Often, these spaces are legally public or communal yet appropriated by

private uses in a non-exclusionary sense, such as the case of a resident placing plants or a bench on a (publicly owned) stoop.

In the pre-privatized kibbutz, this social differentiation of public from private space was based on socially defined use rather than ownership. The home, the pathway leading to it, and the green between homes were all collectively owned. The home became a private realm through its specific uses, differentiating its condition from the outdoor space. In this sense, while public and (quasi-) private space in the kibbutz can be seen as socially rather than legally or economically defined through collective decision, transitional spaces here tend to develop via more discreet social negotiation between the individual and the community. The plan for Beit Ha'Emek took advantage of the kibbutz condition of collective ownership and actively enabled the emergence of transitional space through a careful formation of diverse levels of privacy—privacy understood in the sense of use—in passage from pathway to home.

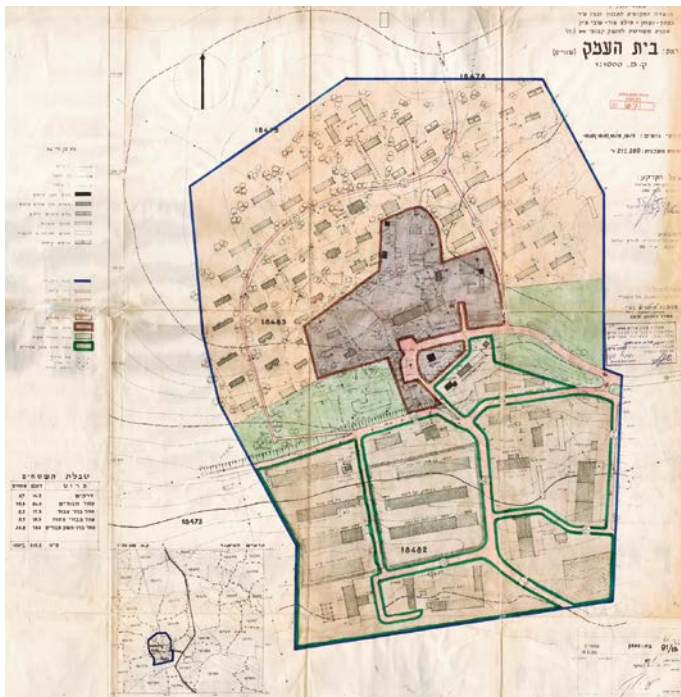


Figure 3: Initial Plan for Beit Ha'Emek, 1960.

To the south (bottom of image) is the agricultural zone. At the center, in the dark area, the communal amenities.

Surrounding the amenities is housing, and separating the center and housing from the industry is a green belt.

Source: Image courtesy of Freddy Kahana

By the 1990s, the basic zoning of earlier years evolved into familiar “defined land use”: industry, farm, local and private enterprise, and so on. Statutory planning was now required, and it employed its own categories: housing plots, “quarters,” structural road network. The housing realized in Beit Ha'Emek in the previous decades (Figure 4) was considered by many members to be too small and overcrowded for their needs. The closure of the children’s dormitories circa 1960 meant that children slept at their parents’ home; the increasing use of the home kitchens; increasing number of everyday activities taking place within the home rather than in communal facilities—all these contributed to the demands for home expansion. The kibbutz controlled this process, financing and organizing additional rear extensions when deemed necessary. But the kibbutz gradually reduced the control of its own spatial organization, initially transferring responsibilities to a local municipal committee. The kibbutz, as part of the privatization process,

retained a private architect to draw up a new master plan and adapt the settlement to the new realities in an orderly manner, yet the local planning authorities over time became the main agency in charge of spatial change and transformation. The local planning authorities, with control of spatial development mostly limited to the planning permissions process, were incapable of, unwilling to, and probably uninterested in considering the kibbutz as a whole, and their planning decisions were, as elsewhere in Israel, a patchwork of responses to specific issues lacking a comprehensive approach in full sense.

Consequently, the privatization of the kibbutz was expressed also in the gradual fragmentation of the built environment, a collapse of the elements which accorded unity and a sense of a whole. “Swiss chalets,” additional floors, sloping roofs, and above all a wild diversity emerged in the 2000s where there was once a sense of spatial cohesion and consistency. Enhanced privacy at the expense of collectivity was achieved by growing hedges and several “land grabs” rather than the “implicit social negotiation” described above—the de-facto seizure for private use of communal land carried out by a few kibbutz members in the 2010s, before an administrative and legal privatization of space actually took place. Such changes emphasized the individual or family unit, privacy, and “expressive” identity. They exhibited spatially and formally the penetration of neoliberal and individualistic worldviews and their erosion of earlier dominant ideals such as equality and cohesion.



Figure 4: Housing types developed and realized in Beit Ha’Emek in the 1960s and 70s, already including children’s bedrooms and a kitchenette. Top: two bedrooms and living room type; below: a two room type that could be subdivided and tailored to needs

Source: Image courtesy of Freddy Kahana

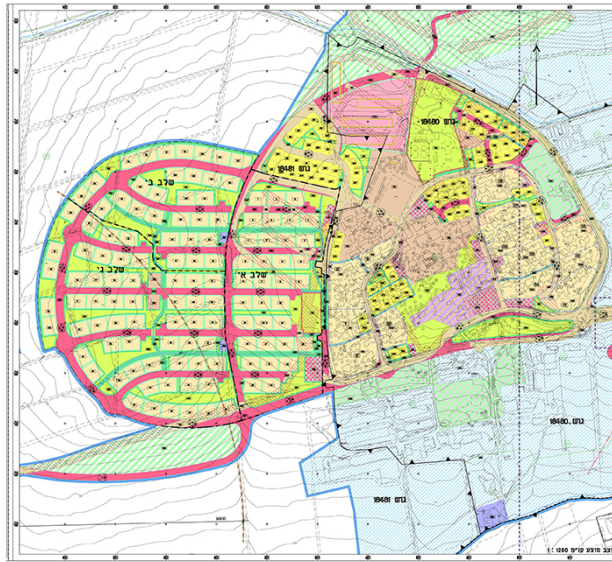


Figure 5: A Proposal for the Land Privatization of Beit Ha'Emek, 2012

The suburban extension of the kibbutz to the West, currently being developed, is seen here on the left.

*Source: Image courtesy of Freddy Kahana*

Today, the kibbutz leases land to a private old-age home and will receive rent also for a new regional state school on its land. The pharmaceutical company has enjoyed success, but in order to raise capital for necessary expansion has sold controlling shares to a major company, reducing the kibbutz's overall control and ownership. An extension to the kibbutz is underway to the west (Figure 5). Beit Ha'Emek decided to require membership as condition for purchasing the new homes in the extension, yet a two-tier system cannot be completely circumvented: in this case, one tier is of kibbutz veterans who are not (yet) home owners in full sense, and the second tier consists of the home-owning newcomers in the extension. The awkwardness of this condition is spatially articulated: the extension resembles suburban development, with meandering streets and suburban houses surrounded by gardens; yet these suburban developments, attached to a kibbutz rather than a city centre, appear odd, something of a misfit, a transplant from urban periphery to a very different condition. In the case of Beit Ha'Emek, this proto-suburban extension is devised as a means of guaranteeing the kibbutz's future and possibly luring the married children of members back to live in Beit Ha'Emek by providing a desirable suburban, commuting lifestyle.

### The “Renewed Kibbutz”

The lengthy process of privatization at Beit Ha'Emek reached its nadir with progress in the parcellation of plots, elucidated in a proposal describing the new spatial organization. In order to comply with the court's ruling mentioned above regarding the transfer of land ownership, the process originally devised by the kibbutz movement and adopted by Beit Ha'Emek would begin with the Land Authority selling the land to a trust or incorporated association owned by the kibbutz. The trust or association would then distribute the land to individual members. The kibbutz becomes in this process an intermediary between the individuals and the Land Authority, and once the process would reach completion, Beit Ha'Emek would be fully established as a “Renewed Kibbutz.” This process was ultimately derailed in a purely bureaucratic gambit that left the kibbutz no choice but to allow each member to negotiate his or her ownership of plot and apartment vis-à-vis the Land Authority, which meant that even a

modicum of kibbutz autonomy in matters of community planning administration was prevented by the government.

The initial impression of the parcellation plan (Figure 6) is of its clumsiness. Its orthogonal, “hard” lines disclose a brutal imposition on the more articulated, diversified and rich forms of the existing kibbutz. Adapted from the meandering original pathways, the new pathway layout within the housing clusters is orthogonal to enable a more systematic and efficient allocation of communal lawns to private properties, i.e., is driven by a quantitative, quasi-utilitarian consideration rather than concerns for spatial qualities. The imposition is akin to overlaying a historic city center with an iron grid: single-minded, reductive (of complexity, diversity, and richness) and brutal. The graphic, visual impression reveals the bureaucratic-administrative kernel of the process, a rationalized and quantitative process that is comfortable with abstraction and generalities and eschews particularities. Such a process requires clarity and systemization in application, hence the disregard for the “messiness” and “disorderliness” of specifics.

The second and most radical spatial impact of the plan is the transformation of communal space into private space: the extensive lawns separating the housing clusters are absorbed into the new private gardens of the privatized housing. Hence, not only is the socially defined privacy of the home turned into private space in the legal and economic sense, but the overall ratio of public-communal to (use-based quasi-) private space of the original kibbutz is overturned, with the absorption of the public-communal into the private. Communal space in these areas is reduced to access pathways, i.e., to the infrastructure that enables private space. These access pathways are not drawn in the parcellation plan, but are inferred; they are the “negative” space, the space not identified as private, separating the newly formed private parcels of land. In effect, communal space, while not completely supplanted by private space, is absent from a plan focused only and strictly on the creation of private space. Whereas the reduction in communal space is visible in the plan, the tacit change in the meaning of privacy from use-based to legal-economic remains opaque.

A third key characteristic of the parcellation plan is the elimination of transitional spaces. As the parcellation plan’s task is to create a clear public-private divide, it does not accommodate spatial forms that threaten to undermine the clarity of such division. Consequently, the rich array of transitional spaces in Beit Ha’Emek vanishes once a strong and unambiguous separation of public-private is created. The legal-economic-administrative boundaries will, in all likelihood, transform into very real fences, hedges, and physical boundaries, making ownership visible and increasing the privacy of each parcel also on the level of usage.

The Registrar of Cooperative Associations at the Israeli Government’s Ministry of Industry and Commerce has contributed to the process of land parcellation. In 2005 it published a list of recommendations regarding the process of privatization in kibbutzim in which it discussed “[p]ersonal ownership of apartments according to the Cooperative Association Regulations” (Hess Ashkenazi and Katz 2009, 573). But the specific elimination of communal space has been primarily driven by the Land Authority’s particular requirements. The Land Authority has also contributed to shaping the plot sizes at around 450m<sup>2</sup>, and, as mentioned above, was responsible for undermining the preferred process that would have retained some control in the hands of the community.



Figure 6: An excerpt of the parcellation plan of Beit Ha'Emek, drawn as a figure/ground map. At the bottom half are the housing clusters to the West of the kibbutz center. The proposed plots/parcels are in dashed lines; the existing pathways in continuous lines. The numbers represent the plot sizes.

*Source: Drawing by Yannick Scott*

The high degree of influence of the Land Authority and the Registrar of Cooperative Associations in the process of privatization, coupled by the inevitable involvement of planning authorities, highlights the role of the state in shaping and creating the new forms of society and space—the state, in effect, as a midwife to the neoliberal landscape. Administrative regulation is not always or necessarily a hindrance to free-market capital as some of its zealots suggest; regulation is also a means of enhancing exchange and strengthening the market. It was no coincidence that the critic Louis Mumford indicted the abstract iron grids of North American

cities, a means of regulating urban expansion, for their enhancement of real-estate markets; their abstraction, he pointed out, encouraged exchange (Mumford 1989 [1961]). As the sociologist Loic Wacquant (2012) and others have argued (Slobodian 2018), the “withering” nation-state in the current neoliberal and global condition is not only responsible for its own self-emaciation, but is a vital agent in facilitating the neoliberal order. As a “go-between” the pre-privatized kibbutz and the market, the state, ever-dependent on bureaucratic forms of governance, inevitably shaped the parcellation plan as a quantitative, abstract document.

The need to alter the kibbutz’s spatial organization in order to facilitate privatization serves as an indirect proof of the adequacy of its original layout for its collective social form. In other words, it strongly suggests that the relation of the original spatial form to the collective social form was tight and tailored to a degree that required significant and critical reorganization to accommodate the changes.

## Hybrid Conditions

The social and economic reorganization of the kibbutz has led it to abandon key principles that had made it, in the first place, a particular form of collectivity, replacing the kibbutz collectivist model with a communal model. The family unit and home are clearly placed by these changes as the core components of the new kibbutz. Other forms of socialization, including the once central kibbutz amenities, are reduced in importance.

Yet many traces of its former structure, such as core direct democracy and governance processes, continue to exist side-by-side new societal configurations. Similarly, the spatial reorganization of an existing settlement has produced hybrid conditions. The proposed resolution of the dispute with the Land Authority suggests a quasi-private condition of ownership of land and homes, in which the kibbutz’s association retains lease. The overall plan of the kibbutz still has a clear civic center and center–periphery structure, yet the new neighborhood to be built to the West is laid out as a suburban extension—an extension almost the size of the existing kibbutz. The privatization of the existing housing clusters is both radical and awkward in its attempt to alter ownership by removal of communal spaces and its uneasy imposition of stark public–private boundaries.

The contribution of path dependencies and pre-existing conditions to shaping the form of the current built environment limits the ability of fully tailoring a new spatial layout to emerging social forms; it also prevents the easy reading of the current or proposed spatial forms—and of assembling an “index” of sorts of corresponding social and spatial forms. Uneven development (Smith 1991) and path dependencies guarantee hybrid results that are rarely easily associated with particular social forms; they draw attention to the specific histories of the area, to the inevitable stumbling of “pure thought”, such as ideal models, when encountering the historically-constructed specificity of place.

Despite the particularity of Beit Ha’Emek, the overall trajectory of its parcellation plan is similar to that of other kibbutzim that have reached this point (Figure 7). The conditions under which this plan was formulated are shared: the process of privatization, the requirements placed by the state through the Land Authority, and the legal and spatial difficulties in carrying out such a transition. While the precise outcomes may differ, such plans have similar characteristics: the reduction of communal spaces; the erosion of transitional spaces; a utilitarian–quantitative approach. However, considering the vital role of the state in shaping the transition, the conclusions that can be generalized beyond Israeli kibbutzim regarding the transition from collective to private ownership are limited to a general enhancement of privacy on all levels at the expense of community and the emulation of other familiar forms of living, whether communal–suburban as in this case or other.

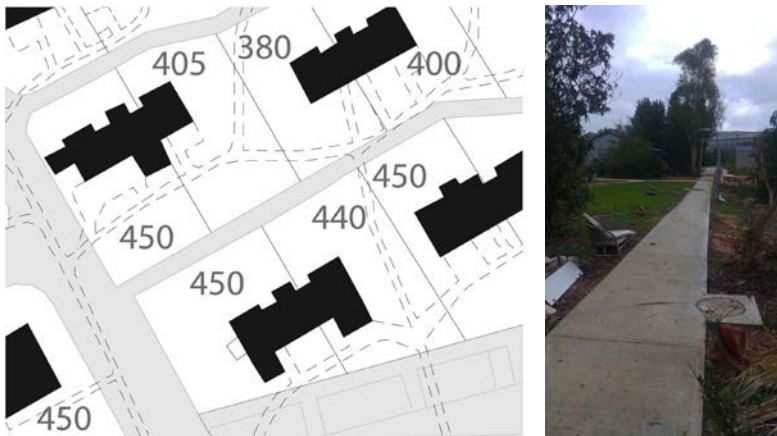


Figure 7: An excerpt of the parcellation plan for Kibbutz Einat (left). The original pathways are in dashed lines; new pathways in light gray; the numbers represent plot sizes, in square meters. Right: a new pathway in kibbutz Einat.

*Source: Drawing by Tahl Kaminer; Photograph by Bilu Blich*

Some of the awkward aspects of the plan may be smoothed out through the passage of time, as the developing communal structures of the renewed kibbutz will increasingly affect everyday life and the spaces occupied by and reproduced through everyday practices. It is reasonable to expect a gradual adaptation of the spaces designed for collective forms to the new conditions, and an incremental disappearance of some of the distinct spatial forms of the kibbutz, just as Kuwaykat has not completely vanished from Beit Ha'Emek yet is reduced to a ghostly, formless presence, an ensemble of olive trees and stone structures independent of the kibbutz's structure. It is clear enough, however, that once, and if, the parcellation plan is implemented, the kibbutz as a specific form of collectivity will come to its end.



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