

# **Urbanization: The Catalyst Speeding Changes in the Kibbutz Family and in the Status of Kibbutz Women**

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## **Introduction**

In this paper I argue that the urbanization perspective is a good way to investigate the changes the kibbutz is undergoing. This perspective is rarely used in analysis of the change process in the kibbutz, which has experienced a transition from an agricultural society to an industrial and post – industrial society. I suggest that we look at the changes as examples of unavoidable self-correction that removed obstacles preventing further developments.

Since the late 60s the kibbutz ceaselessly transformed its structure. Urbanization is the appropriate concept to describe this process, which developed out of the educational and industrial revolution the kibbutz underwent in those years. Although agriculture was still advancing successfully, industry, services, crafts and administration began to offer a greater variety of jobs.

## **Urbanization**

“Urbanization” is a process described by three main spheres of community transformation.

1. In the economic sphere there is a reduction in the share of income from agriculture, while at the same time the variety of occupations providing other sources of income, keeps growing. More people find their living out side the community, increasing the number of commuters. The resulting differences in ownership of property, and in social, cultural and human capital turn the community into a more stratified one.
2. In interpersonal relations there is a transition from a community-centered life to a home centered life. Instead of face-to-face interaction and friendship there is a shift to formal relations and alienation. Mutual commitment and help gives way to more egocentric behavior. (A transition from “gemeinschaft to gesellschaft”.)
3. As cultivated fields become real estate and new buildings are constructed densely, style of life changes. More cars and roads fill the landscape and the consumption of urban goods and social-

cultural events increases.

### **Removing the Obstacles that Prevent Continuation of the Urbanization Process in the Kibbutz**

#### Main changes in the economic sphere

During the 70s and 80s the productive branches changed from being agriculturally to industrially centered. From the 90s on, the amount of income produced by economic enterprises of the kibbutz declined, as a growing share of income derived from the salaries of members working outside the kibbutz.

Small businesses on the kibbutz are emerging in growing numbers. Orchan, Hailbrun and Getz (1999) listed 836 small businesses and new initiatives in arts & crafts, alternative health care and medicine, tourist attractions etc.

Conceptual changes brought about formal collective decisions. As a result of the economic crisis, 71% of the kibbutzim (Getz 1997) decided to encourage members to find jobs outside the kibbutz and deposit their salaries in the empty treasury.

Past restrictions on employment of non-kibbutz members were removed. Formerly A kibbutz paid a fine to the Kibbutz Artzi Federation for every non-kibbutz worker employed. In some kibbutzim the economic coordinator had to receive permission from the General Assembly to take on a new employee, a requirement no longer in existence.

Most of the workers with routine jobs and “on the floor” jobs in kibbutz factories are non-kibbutz employees who comprise 62% of the work force in kibbutz industry (Favin, 2001), or are elderly kibbutz members. Younger kibbutz members working in kibbutz industry, fill administrative and managerial posts.

**Table 1. Men and Women in their Branch of Work (prc.)**

	1978		1986		1994		2001	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Agriculture	1.0	31.0	3.0	22.0	5.0	23.0	2.0	4.0
Industry, crafts and tourism	8.0	30.0	6.0	38.0	21.0	34.0	20.0	42.0
Public services	37.0	10.0	30.0	6.0	26.0	16.0	27.0	11.0
Education	39.0	5.0	38.0	4.0	26.0	5.0	28.0	5.0
Administration	8.0	8.0	12.0	14.0	12.0	15.5	13.0	19.0
Other	7.0	16.0	11.0	16.0	10.0	6.5	10.0	9.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Adar 1998, and Palgi & Sharir 2001

Table 1 outlines the division of labor between the genders over a long period. It also casts light upon the change in the occupational structure for both genders: For men the decrease of agriculture in favor of industrialization, small businesses and administrative jobs. Women entered those branches in smaller numbers as they moved out of education and semi-home services.

With the obstacles to commuting removed, middle-aged people with higher education and occupational training, work outside the kibbutz in growing numbers, reaching as high as 33%-40% (Palgi & Sharir 2001).

The pressure upon kibbutz women to work as a “Metapelet” (children’s nurse), gave way to fuller occupational freedom, thereby legitimizing employment outside the kibbutz. This enlarged their occupational repertoire. The percentage of males and females employed outside the kibbutz is quite similar; although the type of branch they work in jobs they perform are different. In small kibbutz enterprises women make up the majority of staff, increasing their earning capacity as they enter into the paid-work sector in growing numbers.

The decision of 18% of the kibbutzim (Getz 2001) to adopt personal differential wages has had a powerful impact on all spheres of life giving a major thrust to the urbanization process.

#### Stratification of the communal community

Kibbutz researchers raised the issue of stratification as soon as the industrialization process began (Zamir, 1973).

Adar, (1982) pointed out that kibbutz members perceive a kibbutz occupational prestige scale, that coincides with unequal rewards at kibbutz jobs. Ben-Rafael (1984) argued that although kibbutz stratification does not meet Marxian definition of classes, the complexity of kibbutz society proves it to be a stratified society. Rosolio (2001) describes the new kibbutz as having at least four different strata: kibbutz members, hired employees, temporary residents and permanent residents who rent apartments on the kibbutz.

The deepening of stratification is no longer in question, its indicators are:

1. Differential salaries
2. Individual consumption replacing the communal treasury.
3. Plans for distributing kibbutz collective estates between its members. Homes and apartments would become private.

4. Building of new neighborhoods whose dwellings will be sold to individuals from outside the kibbutz.

This route to demographic increase, is aimed at bringing about an economic and social renaissance

and since 1992 was taken by many moshavim. Hoping to renew their fading communities, kibbutzim decided to follow in the path of moshavim.

Kibbutzim willing to give up their prior character as a small rural and communal community they could then grow into big neighborhoods serving as dormitories for their inhabitants. The new neighborhoods will accelerate the urbanization process and demographically and geographically change the kibbutz from a village settlement into a suburb.

#### Changes in life style

Most kibbutzniks begin their work-day later in the morning – not with sunrise, as was common in the past. People now dress well for work, and fewer wear blue-collar outfits. Meals are considered a private activity, as is cultural consumption. Entertainment patterns are conditioned by age: popular music appeals to the younger generation's subculture, the older generation preferring folk songs and lectures. Clubs and Discos exist on most kibbutzim, but concerts, cinema, theater and weddings are held outside the kibbutz. Jewish festivals and holiday celebrations are fading out. Large homes and private parking spaces for cars owned by kibbutz members have become status symbols .

#### The ideological/conceptual shift

Self-fulfillment, Individualism, and economic neo-liberal attitudes replaced the former values of equality and cooperation. Ravid (1999, p143) states: "In the sphere of consumption, the community and its members are no longer responsible for the individual any more. More over, these normative changes express the unwillingness of the individual to give up his needs for the special needs of some-one else."

Gluck at al (1998) discovered that the anti-collective and pro-individual values widely held by Israel's urban population was paralleled among kibbutzniks leaving their communities. In a sample of the reasons given for departing I quote: "I don't want others to interfere in my private life" (60%); "I don't want to be dependent on other people (61%). Other reasons advanced reflected the race after economic rewards and occupational advancement. 47% of the kibbutz born persons who answered the questionnaire claimed that although every thing was fine they just did not want to live in the kibbutz.

#### **Table 2. Reasons for Leaving the Kibbutz**

**Percentage of answers "Important and very important reason for me to leave the kibbutz"**

* Interference of others in my private problems	60.0
* The disparity between my contribution and my personal satisfaction was too big	45.9
* The Kibbutz way of life is no longer relevant to our times	38.3
* There was no possibility to develop innovations and incentives	37.3
* The occupational standards that I strove to achieve were absent (44% of the women gave this answer)	36.0
* To prove that I can cope with life out side the kibbutz	32.4

* I felt that my capabilities could not be realized	32.2
* My chances to work in a job that I wanted were limited	27.2

Source: Gluck: 1998.

### The Family unit

Structural changes in the kibbutz family occurred through the 90s.

High marriage and birth rates characterized agrarian kibbutz society, as did low age of marriage and low divorce rate. Throughout the 80's members demonstrated positive attitudes toward familism, a sense of pride in their enlarging community and confidence that the promise of social security for the elderly would be kept.

The frequency of children per family was 4. The mean number was 3.6 in the year 1972 (Orchan, 1990). In a society where the extended family is the main element in its structure, high birth rates guarantee its future. Before the present crisis the number of extended families was growing and the familistic discourse was central. This strong sense of commitment to the family was shared primarily among women, who preferred it above other options for self-actualization. Familism had an oppressive impact on women's lives, playing an important role in hindering occupational careers for women.

The main building stones of kibbutz society were the extended families of three or four generations: Parents and their children and their children's children, married siblings and relatives by marriage living in the same community.

The "Hamula" (the extended family) was studied as a source of power for its members (Am-Ad 1980) and as the source of status for kibbutz women in Ben-Rafael & Weiteman (1984).

The picture is very different now. Kibbutz families are shrinking. As happens with urbanization, one of the main consequences is the departure of the young and unmarried. They emigrate from home and, sometimes from the country. (The urge for new experience, the ease of traveling, etc. makes it popular, while higher education made it possible to live outside the kibbutz). Because of the kibbutz economic crisis, families aged 35-50 with children left the kibbutz. 61% moved to cities and 60% live at least 50 km away from their kibbutz of origin. Examining the structure of kibbutz society today one might imagine that it is built mostly around small families. The majority of families consist of one couple and dependent singles who are their siblings or old parents of the nuclear family.

The data show that the proportion between married people and singles was changed in favor of the singles, and that the number of multi-generations families is declining. (Adar, 2001).

**Table 3. Couples and Singles, 1983 and 2000 in comparison**

		<b>1983</b>	<b>2000</b>

<b>Couples</b>		2213	1870
	(2x)	74%	62%
<b>Singles</b>		1591	2308
		26%	38%
<b>Big families</b> (2 or more couples) as prc. of all families		17%	15%

### Consequences for Women

The economic crisis pushed many kibbutz members into finding jobs out side the kibbutz. Professional women were the first to get into the labor market. Nurses, teachers and highly professional secretaries were integrated into the regional labor market more easily compared to other occupations (Adar 1997).

It can be claimed that women may at least choose diverse occupations despite the division of the labor market according to gender . Once the objection to women working out side the kibbutz was removed and more women earned good salaries, their proportion in the regional labour market became equal to men's.

**Table 4. Sector of Job by Gender (Prc.)**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
In my kibbutz	63.0	67.0
Kibbutzim, Partnerships & the Federations	16.0	10.0
Public Sector	9.0	3.0
Privet Sector	10.0	4.0
Other	10.0	8.0
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Palgi & Sharir 2001

Table 4 differentiates between members working inside the kibbutz (The answer: “In my kibbutz” was given by 63% of the women) and out side it (37%).

If in the past women were pushed into child nursing, kitchen work, laundry etc, these days they have more legitimization to choose the kind of occupation they would like. Now women working out side the kibbutz face new burdens like the need for a car to commute, or long hours of children’s day care.

Privatization is restricting the supply of the services given to the family and individual by the community. Therefore the “second job”, (women’s family duties) consumes much more time (Palgi, 1997). Putting family first, has an impact on earning ability and on chances for promotion. Hence, kibbutz discourse is less familistic and more career oriented.

In the past the kibbutz treated single mothers and single women and every child as equals. Now their situation is less secure. Although privatization has an impact on the social security of all segments of the kibbutz, the urbanization phenomena, loosens the security belt for the weaker part of society. Urbanization reduces face-to-face interactions and the support networks that had been institutionalized in the past. The high divorce rate, low re-marriage rate and inferior status on the labor market, result in insecurity.

In the future the poverty of single women and elderly women on the kibbutz will become comparable to outside society.

### **Conclusions**

In examining the structural changes in the kibbutzim through the urbanization prism, they emerge as unavoidable, and the whole process, seems today, as nonreversible.

To some extent the changes fit the self-perception of kibbutz members as being a modern community within Israeli society.

The process is still in motion. Through the absorption of new residents who are not kibbutz members, the stopgap measures that delayed the change process, will disappear.

For those trying to preserve the main elements of the kibbutz partnership and for young people living in the new communal modes of Israel, confrontation with basic dilemmas is inevitable. Here are two open questions: Is there a way to combine personal freedom with collective missions? Can a multigenerational, individualistic society, retain its solidarity?

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