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SUBURBANIZATION: THE HIDDEN REVOLUTION IN RURAL SETTLEMENT

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One of the hitherto little recognized consequences of the 20 years of Israeli presence in Judea and Samaria has been an alteration in the forms of rural settlement which are represented at the cutting edge of Israel's back-to-the-land movement. From the time of the founding of kvutzat Degania (the first kibbutz) in 1909 up until 1967, "back-to-the-land" meant settlement in a kibbutz or moshav, or some variant thereof. Agricultural pioneering was either collectivist, in the case of the former, or based on a tight cooperative association, as in the latter. Not since those forms replaced the moshava (private farming village) which monopolized the First Aliya in the 1880s and 1890s, has there been a shift in the dominant form of new rural settlement in Israel.

Two New Settlement Forms Emerge

After 1967, two new forms of settlement, the community settlement (yishuv kehilati) and the community village (kfar kehilati -- a smaller version of the community settlement), were developed for settlement in Judea and Samaria and they have now spread to the Galilee. These settlements are suburban or exurban in character, with the majority of their inhabitants commuting daily to jobs in the metropolitan centers of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa. Hence they are not only typical of suburbanization trends in the Western world, but are

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representative of the only way to establish viable new settlements in the metropolitanized Israel of today. As such, they represent a radical break with the pattern of pioneering and the centralized planning framework of Israel which had developed earlier.

A recent research project undertaken at the Settlement Study Center in Rehovot(1) studied the functioning of 106 new settlements. Of these, some two-thirds were established primarily as suburban, commuter-oriented units. The remainder are industrial villages and rural centers, forms of settlement which, while reflecting the new models, were not radically different in their organizational structure from the more traditional rural settlements. The settlements under study ranged from small units of no more than 15 to 20 families each, to larger private and suburban developments of 200 families or more.

Centralized Planning on an Ideological Basis

Since the 1930s, the development of rural settlement in Israel has taken place within a highly centralized planning system. The planning institutions, led by the Rural Settlement Department of the Jewish Agency, have served as the ideological guardians of the landscape since before the establishment of the State. The unique types of Israeli villages such as the kibbutz (the collective unit) and the moshav (the smallholders cooperative) came to express a planned form of living. They were developed within a strongly socialist environment, with particular emphasis placed on agricultural forms of economy, at least in the early days. The matter was pure and simple: potential settlers who did not conform to these general patterns of collectivist or cooperative behavior were unable to acquire the necessary permits to settle on rural land.

Only minimal changes took place within this settlement framework over time, largely as a response to changing socioeconomic conditions in Israeli society as a whole. The most conspicuous of such changes was the gradual introduction of industry as an alternative means of employment within the originally agricultural villages. Later on, new villages based solely on industry were conceived as an alternative for settling regions devoid of agricultural resources or for settlers who were unwilling to become agricultural laborers. At the same time, however, these new industrial-based settlements were to be organized along the same lines as the kibbutz and the moshav, with their built-in social and community restraints. Thus many potential settlers with urban backgrounds and high qualifications were still deterred from joining in the establishment of new settlements. From the poor results of the industrial village program it became apparent that it was not enough to change the employment structure of the new settlements. A more radical social and organizational change was necessary in order to attract new settlers.

The Struggle for Suburbanization

There have always been urban dwellers in Israel who dreamed of leaving the crowded apartment blocks of the cities to go and live in small, quiet, rural villages. However, because of the above-mentioned planning restrictions of previous years, with their strict requirements governing who is permitted to live in a rural settlement, the large majority of these city dwellers have been unable to fulfill their ambitions. It is true that a hidden "black market" developed in certain moshavim, beginning in the 1960s, whereby city-dwellers lucky or rich enough were able to buy houses in the moshavim without becoming farmers and to realize their desire for "a house in the country." Technically illegal -- moshav members are required by law to farm their own land -- this practice has grown in moshavim near the major cities or in resort areas.

In the mid-1970s, the short-lived Movement for New Urban Settlements was established as an umbrella authority to encourage the development of new Jewish towns in Judea and Samaria. The administrative organizer of this movement, Uzi Gdor, was a planner by profession who had

become aware of the growing demand for a new settlement concept which would cater to the desires of those who wished to leave the town but did not wish to live in a moshav or kibbutz. He drew up a proposal for a form of settlement, to be known as the "community settlement," with a social and economic organizational framework which would be much looser than in the traditional settlement types, but which would nevertheless enable the maintenance of minimal community and group behavioral norms within the settlement. The original proposal suggested that such settlements be located within a radius of 20-30 kilometers of Israeli metropolitan centers in order to enable easy access for commuters. It was argued that such a concept would enable the government to establish settlements at a far lower cost than previously, owing to the fact that there would be no need to invest resources in the creation of employment opportunities.

Gush Emunim and Likud Step In

This proposal was met by strong opposition among traditional rural planners and policy-makers and without their formal approval, the government would never allocate land for the establishment of such settlements. However, the concept was then adopted by the Gush Emunim movement (see VP:58), which saw the community settlement as providing the necessary means by which to implement their own political settlement objectives. The greater portion of Judea and Samaria is in reasonable commuting distance of both the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem metropolitan areas. Moreover, a large majority of the movement's potential settlers were urbanites who were not interested in establishing any form of socialist cooperative village framework.

The first two settlements to be established by Gush Emunim -- Kedumim and Ofra -- became the first prototypes of this looser settlement form. During the first 18 months of their existence, the then Labor government withheld formal recognition. Without such formal recognition these new settlements were not entitled to receive the financial aid normally allocated to new settlements. On the other hand, neither were they required to adopt any prescribed organizational framework. The first settlers began to gradually develop their own forms of settlement organization, using the community settlement guidelines as a framework, while making those adjustments which were necessitated by the daily problems they encountered.

The Likud government, which came to power in 1977, was not only interested in extending settlement in Judea and Samaria, but was also eager to break the monopoly of the Labor-based settlement network. Within a year it had formally recognized the community settlement as a legitimate concept, one which would receive the same resources and aid given to other types of rural settlements. Nearly all of the settlements established in Judea and Samaria during the first four years of the Likud government were of the community settlement-community village variety.

The Nature of Community Settlements

The internal organization of these settlements varies according to the desires and aspirations of each settler group. However they share a number of common characteristics. At the economic level, the residents are mostly commuters to the Israeli metropolitan centers or are employed in the growing local service and administrative sectors. Although some of the more remotely located settlements attempted to establish some small-scale industry, the majority of the settlers were commuters, reaching their places of employment within reasonable travelling time of between 30 minutes to an hour.

The new settlers are largely white-collar, managerial and academic workers, the large majority of whom have completed some form of higher education. Many of the women are employed as teachers in the ever-growing school system established to service the settler population, while others serve in clerical positions within the local municipal and administrative systems. None of the community settlements obligate their residents to work in any particular

profession or place. On the contrary, the acceptance of candidates to a settlement is dependent upon their being responsible for their own gainful employment.

While many of the settlements, particularly the newer ones, are dependent upon large government subsidies for their continued development, the provision of services nevertheless takes place within the framework of private consumption. Residents pay taxes to the regional councils and to the settlement itself for the provision of basic services such as street lighting, garbage collection and the upkeep of the infrastructure. Such taxes may be based on individual use of such services or, alternately, according to size of home. Whichever system is used, there is little in the way of collective taxation similar in nature to that of the cooperative settlements.

The individualism within the new community settlements is reflected in the types of housing. In some cases, each family builds its own house according to individually designed plans. In other cases, a single building company is employed, offering a variety of housing designs from which the settlers are able to choose. This latter arrangement is designed to enable the settlement to take on a minimal form of homogeneity, thus expressing internal community spirit. The latter system was developed in reaction to some of the private building which took place in the earlier settlements. Each resident had attempted to outdo his neighbor in terms of size and splendor, resulting in a lack of aesthetics as well as a number of bankruptcies. In no settlement does the permanent building take on a totally prescribed uniform character as is the case in the collective settlements.

In only one sphere do the vast majority of the community settlements make use of a norm characteristic of the collective rural settlements. In virtually all of the settlements, the residents have opted to retain a process through which they are able to accept or reject new settlers according to self-established criteria. This is carried out through the Cooperative Association, or in cases where there is no such association, through an elected committee. (All settlements defined as rural, and hence affiliated with the Rural Settlement Department of the Jewish Agency, are obliged to establish a Cooperative Association in which all the residents are members and which constitutes the governing body of the settlement.) In this way the settlers seek to ensure that no "undesirable elements" are accepted as residents. It is usually the initial settler group who set the criteria for selecting new residents according to their vision of the type of community which they seek to build.

Extending the Suburban Frontier

While the establishment of community settlements has taken place within the framework of public sector rural planning, the suburban concept has also been extended by the granting of formal authorization to a number of private, non-institutionally-affiliated settlements. Groups of potential settlers have formed their own private associations with the intention of developing high-quality living environments within reasonable distance of the metropolitan centers. These groups are unwilling to work within a framework of government intervention and subsidies, even to the small extent that takes place in the community settlements. In some cases, the settlers have even purchased the land privately, although in most instances the land has been acquired at low cost from government sources. Owing to the fact that these settlements have been established with substantial investments of private capital, considerations of economies of scale and efficiency are paramount in their implementation. For this reason, the initial settler groups are always much larger than in government-subsidized units, while building takes place at a much faster pace.

These private settlements have been established throughout the country. Classic examples include "Rose Garden City" in the Galilee, developed by industrialist Stef Wertheimer; the Herut party settlement of Kochav Yair, along the old pre-1967 border; and the settlement of Meitar,

north of Beersheba. All of these settlements are based upon their residents' desire to leave the city, to construct individual housing units in relatively quiet surroundings, but at the same time to retain their current places of employment. While political or ideological considerations may be a factor in influencing the decision to move to some settlements in Judea, Samaria and the Galilee, these considerations are paramount only among a minority. As time passes, it is the social and economic considerations which play a greater part in this rurban movement.(2) This is best expressed by the fact that a considerable number of the largest and most popular new settlements have been established close to the major cities, as well as in those areas deemed as being of national importance such as the interior of Judea and Samaria or the Galilee mountains.

The process of change which has taken place in the settlement network in Israel has proved to be extremely popular. The loosening of many ideological restraints has enabled many urban residents to leave the densely populated cities for what they perceive as suburbia. Many of the older moshavim are undergoing a similar process of change, with the gradual dissolution of their cooperative associations and their partial transformation into commuter settlements.

Only a minority of the new settlers have moved to the new settlements as a result of an inherent ideological motivation for settling the land. However, the changed political environment after 1977 when the government sought to encourage settlement in regions such as Judea and Samaria was crucial to the opening up of a previously closed planning system. A process of mutual advantage has taken place, by which the government has found many of its settlers among the aspiring suburbanites, while the latter have attained their own objectives through settling in areas deemed as important by the government. The eventual transfer of these new settlement concepts to areas other than Judea and Samaria, such as the Western Galilee and the area north of Beersheba, has been the ultimate legitimization of these changing trends.

Notes:

1. This project was carried out jointly by the author together with Mrs. Leviah Applebaum of the Settlement Study Center from 1984 to 1986. The findings are due to be published in the summer of 1987.

2. The term rurban is used in the scientific literature to denote settlements, such as the commuter settlements discussed here, which have a combination of both rural and urban characteristics.

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