



View of Kibbutz Nahalal

<https://www.touristisrael.com/what-is-a-kibbutz/6053/>

The Impact of Kibbutzim on Israeli Life

ABSTRACT

A brief presentation of kibbutzim in Israeli life

Nicoleta Spiridon (Nițescu) – Master CCE
Bucharest 2022 - 2024

The kibbutz's evolution in Israel spans a considerable period, revealing a significant sociocultural experiment. The word kibbutz comes from the Hebrew word kibbutz, which means a gathering or assembly. This describes the uniqueness of these communities. Although, the concept of the kibbutz was deeply connected with the early history of the State of Israel, in the last decades, it is no “longer revered as Zionist icon”. (Palgi, 2014, p. 7)

The origins of the kibbutz movement can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Jewish immigrants, motivated by fervent Zionist convictions, initiated settlement in the region that was then governed by the Ottoman Empire.

Despite the harrowing environmental backdrop, these pioneers set out to establish self-sustaining agricultural associations. In 1909, visionary individuals advocated for communal ownership of land and resources, and the first kibbutz was founded. The idea that founds the base of conceiving such settlements, is presented in detail in the research of Henry Near *Where Community Happens*. (Near, 2011)

The feeling of solidarity is the one that, explains Henry Near, is one that realized the bond between so many different people who started their alia in Israel living in a kibbutz. (Near, 2011, p. 4) He stated that:

I remarked that the collective experience often arises spontaneously when men and women of good will live, work and think together.

(Near, 2011, p. 14)

The subsequent decades of the 20th century saw the growth of the kibbutz movement, fueled by the influx of immigrants and the need to establish agrarian communities during the British mandate in Palestine. (Near, 2011, p. 150)

The significant part of establishing these settlements is the fact that the kibbutz movement was led by very young people, some of them still teens, at the dawn of the State of Israel. As an exemplification, Henry Near shows:

But, although the founders of the early kibbutzim were young – many of them scarcely out of their teens – the connection between the kibbutz and the youth movement as such began only after the First World War, when the British mandate in Palestine, with its declared intention of promoting a national home

for the Jewish people, was established. This connection was a prime factor in the growth of the kibbutz movement.

(Near, 2011, p. 172)

These agricultural settlements were built on the principles of collective labour, communal property ownership, and fair distribution of resources. Innovative irrigation methods and cultivation practices were used to transform arid landscapes into fertile agricultural areas.

There is a common idea that physical work was a type of spiritual excitement that contributed to the achievement of the ideals proposed by the Zionist movement, and, in this regard, to the development of the kibbutzim. (Near, 2011, p. 39)

But kibbutzim weren't just for farming; they also served as places to experiment with ideologies and cultures. Many adhered to socialist and communist philosophies, stressing fairness, communal harmony, and solidarity.

Participatory decision-making processes and communal dining arrangements were examples of these principles. The book of Golda Meir, *My Life* (translated in Romanian as *Viața mea*), represents a wonderful portrayal of early kibbutzim in Israel, before the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948. (Meir, 2023, pp. 50-120)

Following 1948, kibbutzim encountered numerous obstacles that necessitated adaptation. Changing sociocultural norms and pragmatic considerations led some kibbutzim to introduce limited forms of private ownership and individual compensation.

However, a strong commitment to communal values persisted, fostering a sense of interdependence and camaraderie that transcended monetary considerations. During the 50' and 60', the idea that the kibbutz was the illustration and the ideal of Israel started to diminish, reaching its peak in the 80' when we assisted many transformations, many of which were proposed by women, such as education for children, sleeping arrangement for children and the configuration of the apartments. (Palgi, 2014, p. 8)

The second half of the 20th century, which coincided with Israel's embrace of economic liberalization and globalization, saw kibbutzim confront financial challenges. Some kibbutzim adopted more capitalist approaches to ensure their economic sustainability, especially in education and cultural domains. This adaptive strategy allowed some kibbutzim to be financially successful while keeping their main social culture.

Kibbutzim were not merely agricultural communities; they represented a daring experiment in communal living, evoking the utopian ideals of early Zionism. As evidenced by research, these organizations placed a significant emphasis on collaboration, shared accountability, and collective decision-making.

Palgi (2014) is the one that proposed a taxonomy of kibbutzim, concluding that there are four types of kibbutzim as follows:

(1) communal kibbutz communities that didn't make meaningful changes, (2) communal + privatization of important areas, (3) combined budget, and (4) "safety net" (differential wages)
(Palgi, 2014, p. 8)

Palgi's work shows that kibbutz life is about sharing things and responsibilities with others. This makes people feel like they are part of a group. The collective decision-making process within kibbutzim was centred around regular gatherings, which ensured that everyone's input in communal governance was heard (Palgi, 2014, p. 243)

In addition, the commitment to egalitarian values went beyond labour. Palgi's research shows how these neighborhoods grew into vibrant groups of people who were connected and committed to the broader Zionist cause. (Amos Oz was one of the supporters of the kibbutz movement living in a kibbutz and working in cotton fields - <http://www.amos-oz.net/biography>)

It is noteworthy that the role of women within kibbutzim was remarkable. Women went beyond traditional gender roles and took part in different parts of the economy, such as agriculture, industry, and education. They helped make these settlements financially viable, which was in line with the Zionist idea of working hard in Israel. (Palgi, 2014, p. 9)

Women in kibbutzim were not confined to domestic roles, but worked alongside men in agriculture, according to Palgi's research (2014). Henry Near's study focuses on how kibbutzim relied on women's work in all areas, acknowledging their crucial part in the financial viability of these communities. (Near, 2011, p. 48-49)

Near's (2011) investigation elucidates how the economic model of kibbutzim was characterized by shared ownership and labour, with women actively engaging in productive activities.

These women were more than just labourers, they were also leaders in agricultural and commercial ventures, making significant contributions to the local economic growth. This research found that the idea of gender equality was shown in women's participation in economic activities in kibbutzim. (Near, 2011, pp. 110-11)

Beyond their economic roles, women in kibbutzim assumed leadership positions, both within these communities and in broader Zionist organizations. Their leadership played a pivotal role in shaping the political and social structures, advocating for gender equality, and advancing progressive policies. (Palgi, 2014, pp. 73-5)

Near highlights that female leaders in kibbutzim played essential roles in shaping the political and social structures within these communities, championing gender equality and progressive policies.

Their political leadership extended beyond their immediate communities, influencing broader Zionist organizations and advocating for gender equality in the emerging Jewish state.

In the mid - 1930s a group of women in one of the biggest kibbutzim demanded that one-third of the seats on the kibbutz committees should be set aside for women.

(Near, 2011, p. 112)

Palgi's work reveals that Kibbutz women were at the forefront of the feminist movement in Israel, advocating for women's rights and equality across all spheres of life. His analysis underscores the political contributions of women in Kibbutzim, emphasizing their instrumental role in advancing the feminist agenda within the Zionist movement and shaping the discourse on gender equality. (Palgi, 2014, p. 14)

Palgi's perspective on Kibbutz women sheds light on the fact that these women were not just political activists but also visionaries, envisioning a society where gender equality was not merely an aspiration but a lived reality. (Palgi, 2014, p.8-11)

Children's education has been of paramount importance in the unique context of Kibbutzim, reflecting the communal values and egalitarian principles that underpin these Israeli collective communities.

Historically, Kibbutzim have been known for their emphasis on communal living and cooperative child-rearing practices. The educational framework that children are exposed to fosters a strong sense of social responsibility and collective identity. (Near, 2011, p. 185)

Kibbutzim emphasize the importance of the community in the upbringing of children. The communal lifestyle extends to education, with children frequently residing in communal children's houses, commonly referred to as "children's homes" (Bayit Yeladim), instead of living with their biological parents. (Near, 2011, p. 188)

This plan helps kibbutz members feel like they are all responsible for taking care of each other. Moreover, education in Kibbutzim focuses on practical skills and work ethics, with children taking part in work tasks that are appropriate for their age and helping them develop a strong work ethic and sense of shared responsibility from a young age. (Palgi, 2014, p. 7)

In Kibbutzim, the educational philosophy is based on democratic values and social equality. A sense of agency and self-efficacy is cultivated by children being encouraged to participate in decision-making processes within the community. This approach not only teaches critical thinking but also teaches a deep commitment to the principles of social justice and cooperation. In this regard, the educational system of Kibbutzim contributes to the formation of individuals who possess a broad range of skills, including academic proficiency, social awareness, and engagement as members of society. (Near, 2011, p. 189)

To summarize, the educational model in Kibbutzim exemplifies a distinctive approach to the upbringing of children, characterized by communal living, practical skill development, and a strong emphasis on democratic values. The identity and values of generations of kibbutz members have been shaped by this unique educational framework, which has instilled a commitment to collective responsibility. The legacy of Kibbutz education continues to resonate as a testament to the enduring power of cooperative and communal ideals in shaping the educational experiences of children.

In conclusion, the legacy of Kibbutzim goes beyond being mere agricultural settlements; they were crucibles of transformation that significantly contributed to the formation of Israel. Their communal values, economic importance, political involvement, and emphasis on education all played vital roles in shaping the nation. The commitment to gender equality within these communities, their pioneering efforts in education, and their active participation in broader Zionist movements underscore the profound impact of Kibbutzim on Israel's

trajectory. These examples illustrate the depth of their influence and their enduring legacy in Israeli history.

Bibliography

Anon, (n.d.). *Biography | Amos Oz*. [online] Available at: <http://www.amos-oz.net/biography/>

Meir, G. (2023). *Viața mea*. Editura Omnium

Near, H. (2011). *Where Community Happens*. Academic International Publishers

Palgi, M. (2014). *One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.