

Spatial Inequality in the Allocation of Municipal Resources¹

By Nili Baruch²

Municipal space is another sphere representative of the ongoing policy of inequality in the allocation of land, planning, and development resources in Israel. The existing map of local authorities reflects a policy resulting from influence and power that has existed since the establishment of the state (and to some degree even before then) until today.

Since the founding of the state in 1948, when the regional councils were established, geographic space has been controlled by the rural sector. It is fair to say that spatial control has been dominated by the rural Jewish sector at the expense of the urban sector. While regional councils have controlled extensive land areas, local and city councils have had limited control of land.

Municipal and regional councils differ in regard to various municipal and planning matters, for example, in budget resources, commercial/property-tax income sources, and the amount of existing territory available within their jurisdiction for designating land for industry, commerce, defense facilities, tourist sites, natural resources, and quarries, which all affect the tax base of the local authority. Most regional councils (those in which Jews reside) are characterized by social and political homogeneity, which result in community and development towns as independent enclaves in rural space. This situation creates a spatial separation based on socio-economic status, makes it difficult for the local and small town councils to function, and limits their future development.

In addition to the presence of land that generates commercial/property-tax within their jurisdiction, the regional councils also control the land resources, and thus the potential to manage and develop the space.

The State of Israel has 47 regional councils. Of this number, 44 are Jewish regional councils, which have territorial contiguity and cover large expanses of land. There are three Arab regional councils in the country. Two are located in the Northern District – Bustan al-Marj and Al-Batouf – and one is located in the Southern District – the recently-created Abu Basma Regional Council. Their jurisdictional area includes only the land covered by the master plans of the towns and villages within their jurisdiction, a fact that reduces the opportunities for their residents and their local authority.

In its spatial area, the local authority's ability to develop economic projects is related to: the allocation of land for development initiatives; the attractiveness of the geographic location of the initiative – its proximity to major thoroughfares, to natural resources, and the like; and its ability to maintain and provide services, for example. This is especially true regarding initiatives for industrial, commercial, and tourist development on large land areas, national infrastructure facilities, and security facilities. Allocation of land is also used to benefit community settlements, isolated individual farms, and so on, within the jurisdiction of the local authority.

In this aspect, too, regional councils throughout the county have a distinct advantage over municipal councils.

¹ This text is a summary of remarks delivered at Adalah's conference, "Planning, Control and the Law in the Naqab", held on 6 December 2004 in Beer el-Sabe (Beer Sheva). Nili Baruch spoke on a panel entitled "Policies of Planning and Control in the Naqab."

² Urban and Regional Planner, Bimkom: Planners for Planning Rights.

Spatial control by the rural sector is particularly evident in both the Northern and Southern Districts. In the Northern District, the regional councils control about 80% of the district's land area. 170,000 people live on this space, representing 14% of the district's total population of 1,205,000. Within the Southern District, the regional councils of the Beer Sheva sub-district encompass 11.6 million dunams of land (2.9 million acres), which constitute 86% of the sub-district's area. These regional councils have a population of 40,000, representing a mere 8% of the total population of the district, which exceeds 500,000 people.

The spatial spread of the communities in the Southern District is featured by enclaves of municipal and semi-municipal authorities within the rural space, most of which have a limited land area under their jurisdiction (see the table below). These spaces are used primarily for residential dwellings and employment.

We find similar characteristics in the municipal and spatial aspects of the Arab Bedouin and development towns, and a comparable violation of their planning rights. Most of the municipal councils and semi-municipal councils (development towns and Arab Bedouin towns) are found at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder and have limited economic activity. Their residents suffer from a low standard of living. These factors directly affect the financial viability of local authorities.

These aspects reflect the degree of dependence of these local authorities on the central government (e.g. governmental budgets), both because of the lack of land space and designated land use that generates commercial/property taxes within the jurisdiction of the Arab Bedouin and development towns, and because of their socio-economic status. These facts further weaken local authorities and their mayors.

This reality clearly reflects the huge socio-economic disparity between the municipal and rural authorities in the Southern District. The development towns and the Arab Bedouin towns are situated at one end of the socio-economic spectrum, and the regional councils and community settlements lie at the other.

Distribution of Land Space among Selected Local Authorities in the Southern District

Regional Councils			Local Councils		
Name	Jurisdictional Area (dunams)	Population	Name	Jurisdictional Area (dunams)	Population
Eshkol	761,400	8,400	Beer Sheva	54,585	183,200
Merhavim	480,100	8,700	Ofakim	9,545	23,700
S'dot-Negev ('Azata)	200,000	5,400	Eilat	85,103	43,600
Lachish	500,000	6,300	Dimona	30,593	34,000
Sha'ar Hanegev	180,000	4,800	Hura	7,425	8,100
B'nai Shimon	450,000	5,900	Yerocham	34,098	8,800
Ramat Negev	4,432,000	3,530	Kseiffe	14,710	8,500
Tamar	1,675,000	2,300	Lagiya	2,525	6,500
Hevel Ayalot	2,200,000	2,900	Lehavim	5,700	5,100
Arba Tichona	1,400,000	2,200	Meytar	17,000	6,300
Abu Basma	~ 34,000	~30,000	Mitzpe Ramon	86,000	4,800
Areas under no jurisdiction	~960,000	~50,000	Netivot	5,695	22,800
			Omer	12,772	5,900
			Arad	75,934	24,300
			'Arora	14,500	11,000
			Rahat (before expansion)	8,850	35,500
			Segev Shalom	4,010	5,500
			Tel Sheva	4,762	11,800
			Sderot	4,302	19,900
			Kiryat Gat	8,440	48,400

Source: *Negev Statistical Yearbook*, 2003

The division of geographic space among the local authorities reveals the ratio between the jurisdictional area and its population. In this situation, the Arab Bedouin towns (e.g. Hura, Kseiffe, Rahat) have a small amount of space in comparison with the number of their inhabitants. Accordingly, they already suffer from a significant shortage of land, primarily to meet residential and employment needs. Similarly, development towns such as Ofakim, Netivot, and Sderot are characterized by limited land space in relation to population size (as we also see in the Beer Sheva Metropolitan Master Plan). On the other hand, there are development towns with broad expanses of space, whose development potential is nevertheless low because of topography, or because they have great scenic value (e.g. Mitzpe Ramon, Arad, Yerocham).

Yerocham, a development town in the eastern Negev, is an urban enclave lying inside the Ramat Negev Regional Council. Yerocham is situated in the third cluster, in 72nd place (out of 201) on the socio-economic table of the Central Bureau of Statistics for 2002. The town has

a negative balance of migration. Despite the broad expanse of land within its jurisdiction, its potential for development is limited. The town lacks an urban economic base, having only traditional industry in the construction sector, which employs around 1,120 persons. Other employment opportunities are available in nearby industrial areas, at the nuclear research complex, Dead Sea Enterprises, and Rotem Fertilizers, for example, but this economic activity does not provide money for the town's coffers.

Segev Shalom, an Arab Bedouin town, has no developed industrial areas, even though the master plan for the town designates about 100 dunams for local industry. Most of the town's area is designated for residential dwellings. Despite this, the town lacks residential land. According to the Beer Sheva Metropolitan Master Plan, it is forecast that an additional 2,000 dunams of land will be required. Lack of space for residential use is characteristic of most of the Arab Bedouin towns.

The recommendations of the Borders Committee, which were adopted by the Minister of Interior, led to the establishment of the Abu Basma Regional Council. The jurisdictional area of this regional council conforms to the boundary line of the master plans (the blue line) of the eight towns (rural and suburban) that are in the planning process. This decision reflects an unequal allocation of resources on the one hand, and leaves most of the inhabitants of the unrecognized Arab villages without a municipal framework on the other.

Our principal position is that socio-economically weak municipal authorities must be strengthened, including development towns and Arab Bedouin towns, with the goal of reducing the wide socio-economic disparities in the Southern District. There are various mechanisms for accomplishing this, including expanding the jurisdictions of municipal authorities (a lengthy process that can take many years); establishing joint employment areas with adjacent local authorities (to prevent wastage of land resources); introducing joint management of existing and planned employment areas by a number of local authorities (e.g. the work of the Gadish Committee, which examined the division of non-residential property taxes).

We recommend the reconsideration of the general structure of local government. **We contend that there is no need for the present regional councils, and that a new structure should be created: spatial authorities or diversified regional councils, to include different kinds of settlements. This new authority would include a central urban town as well as the surrounding rural areas. The authority would provide services to residents of the urban town and to the residents of the surrounding villages.** Creating a new municipal structure and spatial conception, based on the unification of urban towns with the surrounding rural areas, will lead to an improvement in the division of spatial resources, to a social spatial pluralism, to greater efficiency in the provision of services, and, in the long run, will serve the joint interests of the residents of the entire area (which will be unified into one authority) at the social, economic, environmental, and municipal levels.

Clearly, we are talking about a complex reality, since the space is not uniform in its characteristics. Our position offers a comprehensive conception of space that covers all the aspects of inequality in the allocation of spatial resources. Structural change in the map of the local government, despite its complexity, will create a more equitable situation for all residents of the area.

Our proposal is not an exhaustive plan, but it sets forth the principles for reform in the allocation of spatial resources among all the citizens of the state, so that it conforms to socio-economic changes in Israel and around the world in the 21st century.