

A new kibbutz movement, revisited

Written by James Grant-Rosenhead
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An article by JAMES GRANT-ROSENHEAD, a member of Kibbutz Mishol, describing the new communities in Israel that are co-operating to create a new Kibbutz Movement. First written in 2003, and then updated in 2012, here is the all new 2015 version..

A New Kibbutz Movement, Revisited

By James Grant-Rosenhead, February 2015 / Shvat 5775

Every now and again I am surprised to see that the article 'A New Kibbutz Movement', which I wrote way back in 2003, is still online and getting hits. I wrote then about the possibility of the 'Ma'agal HaKvutzot' (Circle of Groups) uniting various new 'kvutzot shitufiot' (cooperative groups) such as urban kibbutzim and 'Tnuot Bogrim' (adult graduates movements) under its umbrella as some kind of new kibbutz movement.

Looking back now, not only has that article been completely out of date for years, but it was also from the outset overly simplistic regarding the potential of Ma'agal HaKvutzot as a unifying movement. The reality is that whilst that particular umbrella for inter-group contact has indeed grown and developed to become some kind of new kibbutz movement, it is just one small network amongst six new kibbutz movements, all of which are growing in parallel. Furthermore, these six new kibbutz movements exist within a wider context of some eight thousand members of intentional, activist communities from fourteen national movements and networks which together have formed 'M.A.K.O.M.' – the Hebrew acronym for the Israeli Council of Communities for Social Action.

Ma'agal HaKvutzot is today a federative network of eight independent cooperative communities. The older 1980's 'urban kibbutz' communities (Tamuz in Bet Shemesh and Migvan in Sderot) were joined by six younger groups during the 2000's. They have varying levels of intensity to their urban cooperative community lives internally, for example regarding cooperative housing, finances, Jewish culture, decision making and education. There is no major daily financial or other cooperation between the communities in this federative network.

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Generally a minority of members work together through their own non-profit NGO's in social, educational and neighborhood projects with disadvantaged populations whilst most community members work separately in their own professional careers. Whilst many of the individual members of the Ma'agal HaKvutzot communities were originally members of various youth movements, as adult graduate groups they have 'separated' from their youth movements to form independent communities which do not take on collective responsibilities for their youth movements of origin.

The five other new kibbutz movements are usually known as the 'Tnuot HaBogrim' – 'adult graduate movements' or 'Tnuot HaMechanchim' – 'educator movements'. Together they include about two thousand adults in over one hundred cooperative groups and communities nationwide. There is a partnership slowly developing between these five movements, known as 'Histadrut HaChalutza' – 'The Pioneer Union'. There are several key characteristics of these five 'Pioneer Union' kibbutz movements which differentiate them from the Ma'agal HaKvutzot. For example:

a) Many members have 'missions' (daily activism work) together in order to continue to strengthen and develop their own youth movements;

b) In addition to those who work together in their youth movements, most other members work together daily in other social action 'missions', primarily through education, which they have established and run through their own non-profit NGO's; and

c) There are significant cooperative financial, educational, cultural and decision making infrastructures between the kibbutz communities nationwide as movements.

Specifically, the five 'Pioneer Union' kibbutz movements are:

- Dror Israel – the first and the biggest such movement, which grew out of the HaNoar HaOved VeHaLomed youth movement;
- Kvutzot HaBechira – from the youth movement HaMachanot HaOlim;

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- The adult graduate movement of Hashomer Hatzair; and
- Kvutzot Am – the graduate groups of Habonim Dror.
- Tarbut – cooperative educator communities of artists groups (in the wider sense of the arts, including drama, music, sculpture, painting, literature, poetry etc).

In addition to the development and growth of these six new kibbutz movements of cooperative activist communities, there has also been a more general renaissance of activist intentional communities across Israel. They do not define themselves as kibbutzim because they are not financially cooperative communities.

For the past three decades, the contact between these communities was rare and usually confrontational – based on political and ideological antagonism and rivalry, as these different communities and movements competed and fought to influence and lead Israel in opposing directions with regard to many key issues. In recent years however, social and political developments such as the struggle against the privatization of the land of Israel and the growing poverty gap have brought the various community movements and networks together, putting aside some of their differences in order to work together towards mutual aims such as democratic Zionism, social solidarity, social action and community building. By the time that the massive socio-economic protests swept Israel in 2011, there were already fourteen different community movements and networks representing, networking, and creating social action oriented communities across Israel. These movements and networks have together formed 'MAKOM' – the Israeli Council of Communities for Social Action.

There are three networks of religious 'Garin Torani' communities in MAKOM, including two which are 'Modern Orthodox' / 'National Religious' – the Bnei Akiva youth movement (which historically built many religious 'traditional' kibbutzim) graduate movement and the huge Keren Kehillot community network – and also the Nettirot network which includes Ultra Orthodox and 'Baal Teshuva' ('returning to the religion') communities.

Another stream within MAKOM is Local Residents' Community Networks. There are three networks of immigrant activist communities, based primarily upon local young adult leadership groups taking responsibility for their own community's neighborhoods and thereby improving Israeli society at large. Hineini and Chaverim B'Teva are networks of Ethiopian immigrant communities and M'Dor L'Dor is a network of Caucasian (ie from the Caucasus mountain region) immigrant communities. In terms of the process of forming the communities and their social action projects, the Druze network Ofakim L'Atid is similar to the immigrant networks, in that the community members are also local groups of young adults who are coming together in order to improve their wider communities and Israeli society.

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The first difficult discussions about working together for the greater good of Israeli society during 2011 resulted in the establishment of a democratic, representative umbrella body in 2012. Together, the Israeli Council of Communities for Social Action today includes fourteen different movements and networks, representing over two hundred communities nationwide, about half of which are cooperative 'urban kibbutz' style communities. MAKOM includes some eight thousand adult community members are running social action enterprises which positively affect approximately 350,000 Israelis. Our work is just beginning...

James Grant-Rosenhead is a founding member of the biggest urban kibbutz in Israel. James was born in Leeds, England, in 1974. He became active as a Jewish Zionist youth leader with Habonim Dror (HDK) in 1990 after his first visit to Israel. From 1992-3, James spent a year of leadership training in Israel, then returned and directed local branches of the youth movement around London until 1996. He completed his LL.B Hons Law degree in 1996, then served as HDK's national secretary until 1998. Concerned for the future of the Jewish world and Israel, and inspired by the first urban kibbutzim, James made aliyah to Jerusalem in 1999 with Kvutzat Yovel, the first Anglo olim to build a thriving urban kibbutz. From 1999-2010 James led a worldwide transformation and renewal of Habonim Dror programs, education and ideology from their traditional kibbutz bases to social activist urban kvutzot. The result is a new adult movement of activist kvutzot including olim from around the world. James is married with three children and lives in Nazareth Illit, in the urban activist Kibbutz Mishol.

James coordinates a nationwide network of social justice and educational projects through Tikkun: A Centre for Gathering, Education and Social Change. James lives and works among the pioneers of new social activist kibbutzim and cooperative networks of grassroots social and educational projects. These communities and projects impact many thousands of children, youth and young adults to create social justice, equality and renewed Jewish culture throughout Israel. Tikkun has founded several areas of social change projects so far, including a network of centers for youth and children at risk that empower participants via social responsibility, peer group skills and academic achievements, a Beit Midrash Network for secular young adults across Israel and a nationwide training and consultancy framework for young adults building new activist kibbutzim in the socio-economic and geographic peripheries.