

An article by JAMES GRANT-ROSENHEAD, a member of Kvutsat Yovel, describing the new communities in Israel that are co-operating to create a new Kibbutz Movement. Copied from CALL No. 22.

Crises and privatisation are still ravaging the traditional kibbutzim, once heralded by Buber as 'the experiment that did not fail'. Meanwhile, new models of kibbutz are emerging, and tentatively forming a network - the Circle of Groups - between themselves. Is this the beginning of a new kibbutz movement?

One model is the 'urban kibbutz', such as Tamuz in Bet Shemesh. In their own words: "Kibbutz Tamuz is an urban kibbutz, a small Jewish community, and like the traditional kibbutz, Tamuz is a collective. Its 33 members function as a single economic unit, expressing the socialist ideals of equality and cooperation, ideas and praxis. However, unlike the traditional kibbutz, we are located in an urban environment, keeping us in tune with what is happening in society) <http://www.tamuz.org.il/english/about.html> around us." (see

), Bet Yisrael in www.migvan.org.il The urban kibbutz title is also used by Migvan in Sderot (www.r Jerusalem (eut.org.il), and Reshit in Jerusalem. However, when considering the Circle of Groups network, this terminology is misleading, since neither the words 'urban' nor 'kibbutz' best describe many of the other groups which have been founded in recent years...

Another model is that of the 'Tnuat Bogrim' (graduate movement) groups of the youth movement Noar Oved ve'Lomed (NOAL for short). Such new NOAL communities tend to define themselves as 'educational' or 'societal', deliberately placing the emphasis on the projects which they take on in tackling the ills of modern society, rather than on their geographical locations. Indeed, whilst most of their members work in various educational and social projects) and Hanaton are physically located in www.eshbal.org.il in urban centres, Ravid, Eshbal (green, northern, rural settings, rather than within towns. Even more confusing terminologically, is that others of these urban / social / educational communities are not using the word kibbutz, preferring instead to refer to themselves as 'kvutzot', connoting their smallness and intimacy.

The crises and privatisation of the traditional kibbutz framework in the 1980's meant that NOAL graduates were no longer attracted to kibbutz on the one hand (historically they built many) and the kibbutzim could no longer afford to send their best emissaries to work for the youth movement on the other hand. In response to this decline, a new stream developed within the youth movement during the 1990's, producing many small, intimate, consensus-driven, anarcho-socialist groups of graduates. The new NOAL graduates of the 1990's decided to cut out the kibbutz intermediary from their traditional symbiosis. They retained their small, intimate group life as separate new adult communities after they had graduated from the youth movement and the army. Instead of integrating into a traditional kibbutz, they took on responsibilities within the youth movement which were formerly undertaken by the kibbutz emissaries. At first, many Socialist Zionists saw this as an historical betrayal by NOAL, abandoning the kibbutz. One decade later however, it is already becoming clear that this change in methodology has revitalised NOAL as the primary creative force behind dozens of small new kibbutzim / kvutzot / communes all over Israel.

Both 'urban kibbutzim' and 'graduate movement kvutzot' function similarly internally, replacing the democracy and bureaucracy of the bigger traditional kibbutz with the levels of consensus and anarchy attainable in small intimate groups. Externally, the urban kibbutzim are primarily involved in education and social action projects in their local communities, whereas the NOAL kvutzot emphasise the growth and development of their national network, multiplying their ranks by bringing forth increasing numbers of new graduate groups each year.

In the past 5 years, the boundaries between these two categories have blurred for various reasons:

Many NOAL kvutzot have formed in urban centres;

Some urban NOAL kvutzot have conglomerated to form bigger communities whilst maintaining each small intimate kvutzot within - Eshkol in Beer Sheva is such an urban NOAL 'kibbutz of kvutzot';

Some NOAL kvutzot have started taking on more local community projects and less responsibility for their own youth movement; and

Several other Socialist Zionist youth movements which were once traditional kibbutz builders have formed their own graduate groups, drawing on a mixture of elements from both the NOAL , Kvutzot Habehira in Migdal www.kyovel.org and Urban models (eg Habonim Dror's Yovel - <http://www.tikkun.org.il> or www.yesod.net/info/essayes/hevra2/kvutzot.htm , Hashomer Hatzair's Pelech, and Machanot Ha'Olim's Na'aran - www.naaran.org).

These new groups are each trying to work towards social justice and equality in Israeli society, through a wide variety of educational and social initiatives on both local and national levels.

The number and variety of these groups is growing each year, and the rate of growth is increasing too. Contact between the various groups is developing through the umbrella of the), which held a successful second annual <http://maagal.wordpress.com/> 'Circle of Groups' (conference weekend in May 2003. Inter-group discussions are already taking place regularly, with the main questions on the agenda currently being about the aims of the inter-group contact. It is still too early to call the 'Circle of Groups' a new kibbutz movement, but it is not too early to see that as a work in progress...