

*member benefits*

*democratic*

*community*

**Is It the End of Utopia?**

The Israeli Kibbutz  
at the Twenty-First Century

URIEL LEVIATAN

May 2003

*education*

*autonomy*

*participation*



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

Centre for the Study  
of Co-operatives

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# Is It the End of Utopia?

The Israeli Kibbutz  
at the Twenty-First Century

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## Introduction

FIFTY YEARS AGO, the philosopher Martin Buber (1947) defined the kibbutz experiment as an “exemplary non-failure,” (not as an exemplary success). Half a century later, many from within and without the kibbutz society talk about the kibbutz experience as a possible failure. Why? What went wrong?

As Martin Buber’s forte was dialogue between “thou and I,” it is appropriate to start by telling you of a dialogue I had about three years ago with my youngest son who, at that time (his last year at high school) was working on his final paper. His field research for the paper focussed on the structural changes adopted in kibbutzim in the domains of principles for distributive justice (and expressions of collectivism/individualism, equality, and solidarity), how they affected the formation of values, and their internalization among high-school students in kibbutzim. The findings showed many students reporting their parents’ wishes to transform the kibbutz-guiding values of equality, collectivism, and solidarity into those prevailing in the outside world: i.e., individualism, equity, and nonsolidarity.

We talked at length about the findings. One of the questions he asked, in a typical teenager’s direct way, was: “Why are the parents so stupid? Why do kibbutz members give way on what is ‘right’ (meaning ‘good’) and ‘successful’ (his words)? Why do these parents want to become like everyone else in the cities around them, when they can be unique and outstanding in their lives?” This paper is part of the response I offered my son.

I have to begin by clarifying what he, and now I, mean by a “right” and a “successful” society. Since being “right” is a matter of one’s values and choice, I need to state what I believe makes for a “right” or “good” community.

## The “Right” and “Good” Community

FIRST, THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS of such a community should be viewed from the perspective of both its individual members and society as a whole (society being defined as a community where members interact with each other).

Second, the expectation from the individual perspective is for the community to relate to each member as a unique person; to satisfy all its members needs; to offer them opportunities for the realization of their potential; to present them with the opportunity to determine and control the fate and destination of their own and their community’s life; and to ensure that members have freedom of choice in all important matters.

Third, the societal perspective demands a community where the relationships among its members are structured on principles of equality according to their unique needs and potential, on intensive collaboration, unconditional solidarity, co-operation, and fraternity.

In addition, there is another societal perspective central to such a community: the active dissemination by the community of the values enumerated above. The “rightness” of such a community is enhanced when the implementation of these values extends outside its boundaries to include other parts of the larger society—creating opportunities and freedom of choice for individuals who are not members of the community; spreading social justice, equality, solidarity, co-operation, and lack of conflict as widely as possible in the society that engulfs the community in focus.

Thus, the extreme manifestation of a “right” or “good” community is one in which all members are able to satisfy all their needs in a sustainable way (i.e., for the present, the near future, and the distant future), maximizing the expression of their human potential and living in solidarity, in collaboration, and in co-operation in a community of equality among members. In addition, the community actively invests in spreading these characteristics into the larger society.

The above statements also define what type of society such a community could not be. It could not be a society where the guiding principle of conduct is the market principle, since solidarity, co-operation, and collaboration conflict with market principles. Nor could it be a society based on principles of hierarchy, since the latter conflicts with the goal of equality and the opportunities offered to all members to take part equally in shaping their lives, to satisfy their needs, and to express their human potential. Only a “communal” society satisfies the criteria stated above.

If one takes the criteria that define a “right” community, a “good” community, and tests them against the normative guiding principles of kibbutz society and its communities, one finds them to fit quite well. Kibbutz law (Takanot Hakibbutz 1973), for instance, in its preface of goals and assumptions states the following:

The kibbutz is a free association of people for the purpose of the ... existence of a communal society based on principles of public ownership of property, ... equality and participation in all domains of production, consumption and education. The kibbutz ... sees itself as a leader of the [Israeli] national insurrection and aims at establishing in Israel a Socialist society based on principles of economic and social equality.

[In addition] Kibbutz goals [among others] are:

1. To develop and promote friendship and fraternity among its members.
2. To develop and promote members' personalities, personal abilities, and collective ability in the spheres of economy, society, culture, science, and art.

Many other kibbutz documents and resolutions throughout the years show that these foundations and goals served as guidance for the social, economic, educational, and political actions kibbutzim and the kibbutz movement performed over the years.

Kibbutzim, therefore, aimed to become “right” communities. Were they successful in doing so? Were they also successful in the sense that im-

plementing the above criteria gave them a competitive edge over the outside society judged on standards that make for a sustainable society?

Examination of the following five basic indicators will show that until the beginning of the nineties, kibbutz society was—relative to the rest of society in Israel—very successful:

1. the extent of adherence to the values and principles identified earlier;
2. the extent of members' satisfaction with, and commitment to, kibbutz life;
3. life expectancy of kibbutz population;
4. economic performance of kibbutz industry; and
5. demographic growth.

### *Adherence to Aspired Principles and Values*

This has been manifested in many domains: through equality in decision making by the institutions of direct democracy as expressed in the general assembly, managerial rotation, and the decentralization of influence through elected committees; through equality in consumption based on the principle “to each according to his/her needs”; through structuring industrial management on the same principles; and through devoting resources (money and human) to the education of the needy in Israel and to political and community action in the country.

### *Trust in, Satisfaction with, and Commitment to, Kibbutz Life*

These qualities are most important for voluntary communities as their future depends on them. In the past, such commitment was very strong; it was not an unusual finding to record 70–90 percent of members stating they have such positive attitudes (e.g., Rosner et al. 1990).

### *Life Expectancy*

Longevity as a characteristic of a society can be regarded as an expression of the quality of life in that society. Life expectancy of the kibbutz population was shown to be among the highest in the world.

Table 1: Life expectancy (LE) at birth and at age fifty of kibbutz permanent population and Israeli Jews\* in three years—1977, 1984, and 1995 (by gender)

Gender	Year	LE at Birth		LE at Age Fifty	
		Kibbutz	Israeli Jews	Kibbutz	Israeli Jews
Males	1977	74.4	71.9	28.3	25.7
	1984	76.7	73.5	29.6	26.5
	1995	78.1	75.9	30.8	28.3
Females	1977	79	75.4	31	28
	1984	81.3	77.1	33.4	29.2
	1995	82.5	79.8	33.8	31.2

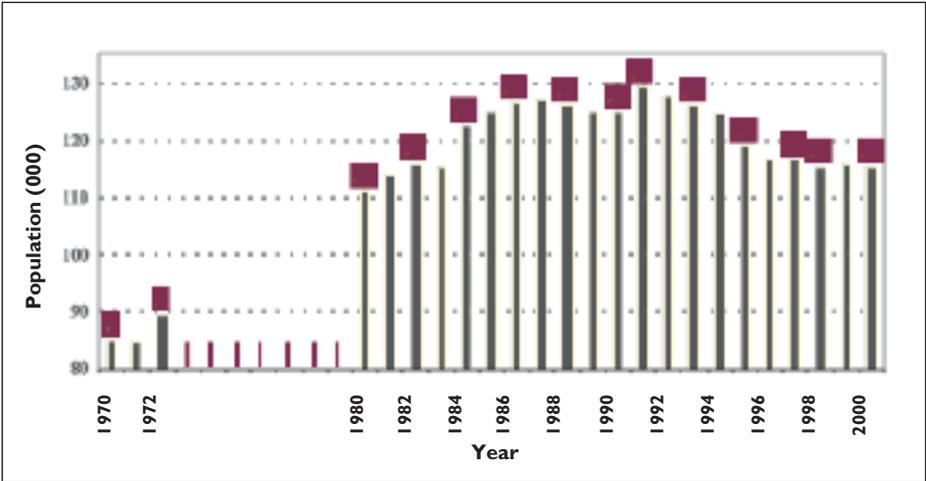
\* Sources: Leviatan 1999; data for the Jewish population in Israel are taken from the *Statistical Abstracts of Israel*, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1979, 1986, 1997.

As the table shows, kibbutz LE surpasses that of the general Jewish population of Israel by three to four years in all three comparisons. Because the average increase in LE is about three to four months per year, this means that the Jewish population of Israel will reach the current LE of the kibbutz population in about ten to twelve years hence. Important for the discussion is the fact that research shows higher LE in kibbutzim results not because of self-selection or genetic advantage, but because of certain social arrangements for the aged (Leviatan et al. 1986; Leviatan 1999). These social arrangements stem from adherence to the same values and principles that define the kibbutz phenomenon: solidarity, equality according to needs and abilities, co-operation, and relating to each individual as a unique person.

## *Demography*

Demographic growth is usually a sign of success for communities, particularly for voluntary communities such as the kibbutzim, as it is also a strong indicator for organizational commitment. During the years 1970–1985, the kibbutz population grew by an annual rate of more than 2.5 percent, outdoing the rate of growth in Israeli society. The growth of kibbutz population continued to the end of the 1980s, reaching a peak of 129,000 in 1991. The trend changed its direction in the 1990s. This will be discussed later.

Figure 1: Kibbutz Population (1970–2000)



Source: Pavin 2001.

Again, research at the time showed that the commitment of kibbutz members to kibbutz life was primarily affected by the extent to which their communities exercised and realized the unique social values identified above as characteristics of the “right” community—judged from the individual perspective, the societal perspective, and also by the extent to which the community aimed its actions towards the outside world (e.g., Rosner et al. 1990; Leviatan 1994).

### *Economic Success*

An appropriate comparative indicator for the economic success of kibbutzim in relation to the outside society is the level of industrial business activity. This is justified on three accounts. First, kibbutzim started their industrial revolution only at the end of the 1960s, and were thus new in the field during the seventies and eighties. Any successful showing is therefore attributable to their activity at that time and not to an accumulation of resources such as capital, know-how, or technology from previous times. Second, industrial activity, for the last twenty years, accounts for about two-thirds of kibbutzim income. And third, the objective characteristics of industry make it more easily comparable to its counterparts outside the kibbutz than other kibbutz economic activities such as farming or services.

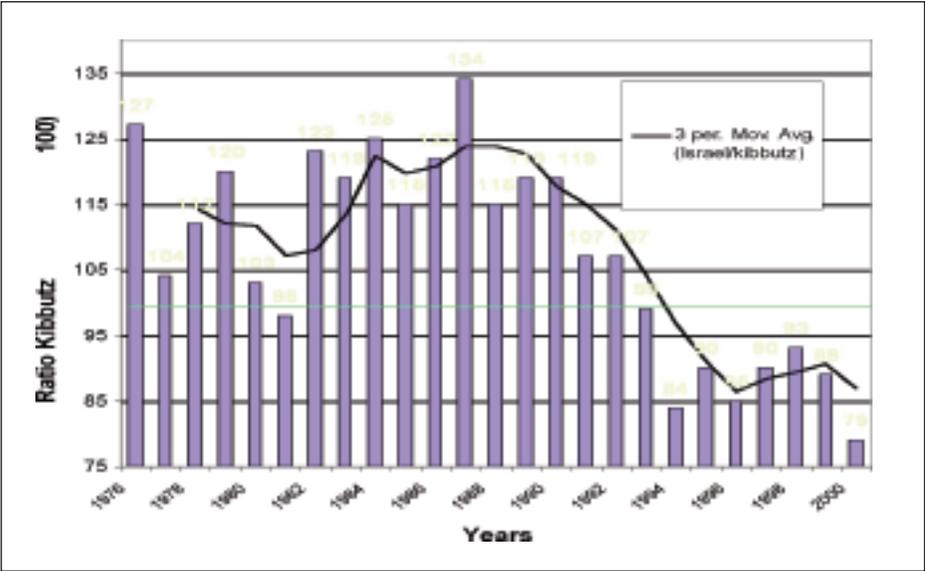
Indicators of economic success from the mid-seventies to the end of the eighties show kibbutz industry exceeding values for comparable industry in Israel (see figures 2 and 3, overleaf, showing labour productivity and rate of growth). Kibbutz labour productivity over the fifteen years 1976–1990 was, on average, higher than Israeli industry by 17 percent. While the rate of growth in sales in both communities was about equal during the first few years of the same period, kibbutz industry surpassed that of Israel during the 1980s. Again, things change for the worse in the 1990s, as will be explained below.

Research has demonstrated that industrial success on the kibbutz came about because of adherence to the same principles that define the community. Industrial plants that emphasized worker participation in decision making, equality, individual unique attributes, teamwork, and managerial rotation did better than those that did not adhere to these principles (e.g., Leviatan and Rosner 1980).

## **Changes in the Late Eighties and Nineties**

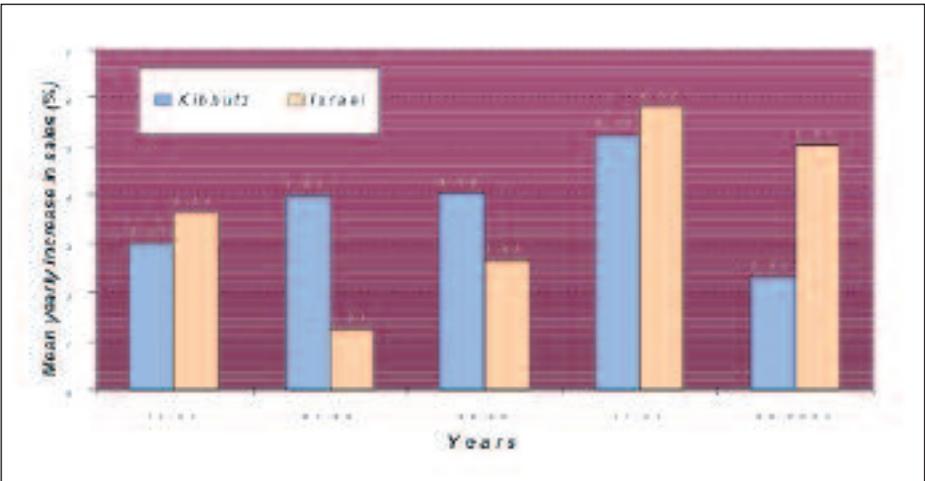
**I**N THE MID-1980s, Israel was in a dire economic situation, with an inflation rate of more than 400 percent and very high unemployment. Kibbutzim were also affected. The government program

Figure 2: Yearly sales per worker: ratio Kibbutz/Israel (Israel = 100)



Source: Leviatan 2001.

Figure 3: Mean yearly increase in sale for groups of years (Israel and kibbutz industries)



Source: Leviatan 2001.

intended to deal with this difficult economic situation focussed on controlling inflation by freezing prices, wages, and interest rates—a program that effectively curbed inflation but increased unemployment even further. For a period of time, real interest rates rose to more than 80 percent. All major banks in Israel at the time were nationalized after going through bankruptcy several years earlier, meaning that the high interest rate was the responsibility of the government. Kibbutz communities could not tolerate unemployment—for them it was the equivalent of disintegration—and were, therefore (as before), intensive users of the expensive investment and working capital. As a result, most of the kibbutzim, which were prior to that time debt free, went heavily into debt.

The debate rages to this day as to where and to what degree among the parties—the kibbutzim, the government, and the banks—one should put the blame for this situation. The banks and the government agreed, almost a decade later, to forgo about two-thirds of the debt due to the excessive interest rates levied on the kibbutzim. The practical outcome of the economic crisis, nevertheless, was that many kibbutzim found themselves in an extremely unpleasant economic situation. This in itself was not historically unique. A similar situation occurred at the beginning of the sixties, and the kibbutzim came out of it even stronger than before. Unfortunately, that was not the case with this last economic crisis. It soon became clear that the economic situation was only a cover for a much deeper problem: an ideological crisis that was manifested in many ways.

Doubt was cast on the feasibility of kibbutz organization and management as an appropriate system to compete in the market economy; mistrust in the survival of kibbutzim started to grow; and the basic values of equality, partnership, solidarity, and co-operation became unacceptable to an increasing segment of kibbutz membership. The slogan thrown into the air was: “Our way of life has failed; we need to change and be like everyone else.”

As a result, starting at the end of the 1980s, accelerating during the 1990s, and continuing up to the present, more and more kibbutzim introduced structural changes based on principles and values similar to those prevalent in the world around them, but opposite to the ones that defined

Table 2: Percent of kibbutzim reporting structural changes in the organizational and managerial aspects of the business domain (1990–2001)

<b>Year</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>
Board of directors	23	37	51	52	63	64	66	69	73	77	n/a	n/a
Percent of hired labour	30	35	41	48	48	52	56	60	62	63	67	n/a
Employing a hired manager	n/a	53	60	n/a	n/a	n/a						
Partnership with private capital	12	22	21	21	28	26	30	29	40	39	37	35
Doing away with managerial rotation	8	7	16	14	19	25	30	28	30	30	32	43
Separating business from community	6	7	16	13	18	22	28	31	39	50	63	72
Differential salaries (part or whole)	0	0	0	0	1	2	6	10	16	12	32	43

Source: Getz, *Annual Surveys of Kibbutzim 2001*.

traditional kibbutz communities. These were introduced first in the business domain in the hope of improving its performance, and eventually were adopted into the social sphere. Within a period of one decade, dramatic structural changes had taken place, as may be seen in tables 2 and 3.

As illustrated, in 1999, boards of directors were operative in more than three-quarters of kibbutzim industries, while only ten years earlier they had existed in less than one-quarter of them. The rate of hired labor in kibbutz industries rose in 2000 to 67 percent, more than double the rate a decade earlier. In 2001, 35 percent of kibbutzim had formed partnerships with private capital, compared to 12 percent at the beginning of the decade. And 43 percent of all kibbutzim report doing away with managerial rotation, while only 8 percent reported this in 1990.

Close to three-quarter of the kibbutzim reported in 2001 that they had separated their business activities from their community (i.e., they gave up, among other things, guiding their economic actions with social considerations), while at the beginning of the decade, this structural characteristic was present in an insignificant number of kibbutzim (6 percent). In addition, 60 percent of kibbutzim employ hired (i.e., nonmember) managers, and the number of top managers in kibbutz industries was (not shown in the table) about 25 percent (80 out of 360). In 2001, 43 percent of kibbutzim paid differential salaries to members according to their office level, compared to none in the early 1990s.

Structural reforms in the kibbutz social domain were also extensive, most notably in three areas: public budgets for consumption were privatized, meaning that budgets allocated according to needs were distributed equally “per member”; democratic institutions were either abolished or had their power taken away; and remuneration principles were according to contribution or office. These changes can clearly be seen in table 3 (overleaf). In 2001, the food budget was privatized in 72 percent of kibbutzim, while only 3 percent had that arrangement in 1990. A council of representatives replaced the general assembly in a quarter of the kibbutzim in 2001, while it was almost nonexistent in 1990 (1 percent). And differential salaries were practiced in 43 percent of the kibbutzim in 2001, compared to none in 1990.

Table 3: Percent of kibbutzim reporting adoption of structural changes in the social domain (1990–2001)

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Privatization of food budget	3	n/a	6	7	16	25	38	48	60	64	69	72
Payment of extra hours at work	2	3	3	3	5	11	15	21	32	27	33	36
Council of representatives to replace general assembly	1	4	9	14	18	20	23	27	30	33	28	24
Appointees instead of elected committees	7	11	17	14	19	26	24	22	25	29	n/a	n/a
Privatization of enrichment studies for children	4	5	9	10	12	14	13	19	26	28	32	41
Differential salary (part or whole)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	2	6	10	16	12	31	43
Personal budget as a function of number of days worked	n/a	n/a	5	7	11	11	16	16	19	24	22	23
Privatization of higher studies (part or whole)	1	3	3	4	7	7	10	8	11	15	21	28
Privatization of health budget (part of whole)	n/a	6	9	9	21	32						

\* Source: Getz, *Annual Surveys of Kibbutzim* 2001.

Anecdotally, even the language used to describe positions, titles, and institutions has changed to reflect similarity to those outside kibbutzim. The top office holder in industry, for instance, is no longer the co-ordinator of the business but its general manager or CEO. The industrial committee has become the board of directors, and its former co-ordinator is now chairperson of the board of directors. Kibbutz as a descriptor for all domains of life has given way to community, to be distinguished from business, which replaced economic sector. The common denominator for all these structural changes is to strengthen similarities to the outside world by way of “institutional isomorphism.”

What are the effects of these structural changes to the unique values of the traditional kibbutz? The board of directors usually takes away decision-making powers from the workers (also abolishing their general assembly and its committees), and from other institutions such as the general assembly and various committees on the kibbutz. Industry becomes more hierarchical and less democratic or participatory, as the board of directors appoints the general manager and makes all important decisions. Added to this are the hired managers, who report to whomever pays their salaries (higher management) and not to the assembly of either the kibbutz or industry. The abolition of managerial rotation further damages democracy, which was a major countervailing mechanism against hierarchy and inequality. The introduction of differential salaries according to office held erodes significantly the principle of equality among members, and the separation of industry from the community destroys the possibility of industry to be “the extended home for the member” (as one of the previous resolutions stated).

## **The Effects of Structural Changes on the Functioning of Kibbutzim**

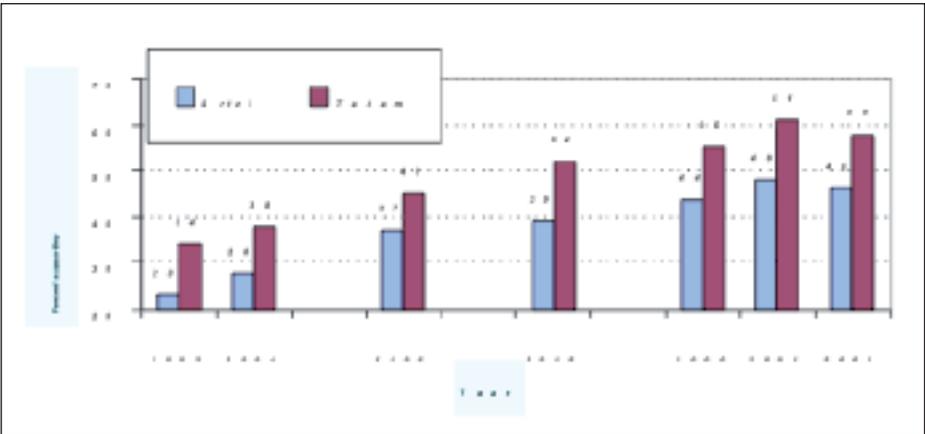
**T**HE STRUCTURAL CHANGES adopted in the social domain are of two kinds: the privatization of public consumption budgets (allocated in the past according to needs), which are now allocated equally per head; and damage to the democratic process by weakening or

abolishing the general assembly, as well as many of the elected offices and committees. All these structural changes were in one direction, and at present, about a third of the kibbutzim adopted most of them. Did these structural changes improve the lot of kibbutzim and their members? We will explore the same five criteria for success as were used at the beginning of this paper.

*Adherence to Aspired Principles and Values*

Almost by definition, most of these structural changes distance the kibbutzim that adopt them from the original basic values of equality, solidarity, participation, reference to individual needs, etc. In addition, public support for adopting unequal principles of remuneration has steadily increased, as may be seen in figure 4.

Figure 4: Support (%) for differential remuneration, annual surveys (1993–2002)



Source: Palgi and Orchan 2002.

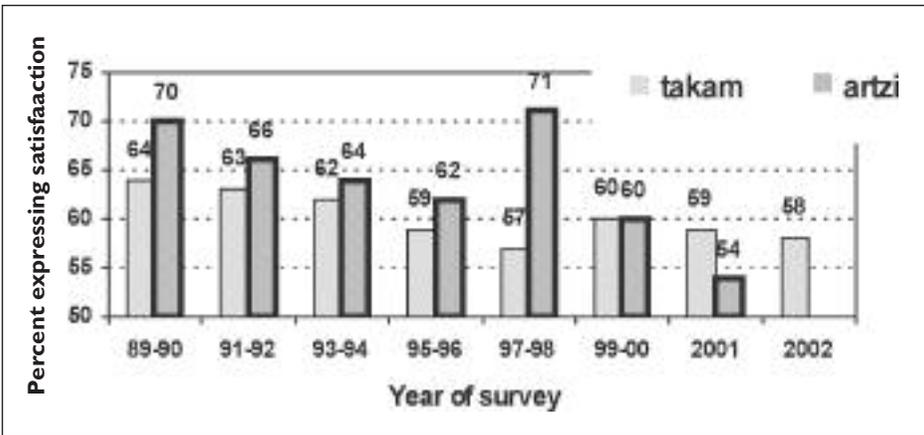
There is a growing trend in the rate of those who support differential remuneration. In the two separate movements, Artzi and Takam, it has risen from 23 percent and 34 percent in 1993 (the first time this question

appeared in the annual survey of attitudes) to 46 percent and 58 percent in 2002. This means that at least half of the membership is now abandoning the “axle principle,” to use Bell’s phrase, of kibbutz life: “To each according to his/her needs, from each according to his/her abilities” (Bell 1962).

*Trust in, Satisfaction with, and Commitment to, Kibbutz Life*

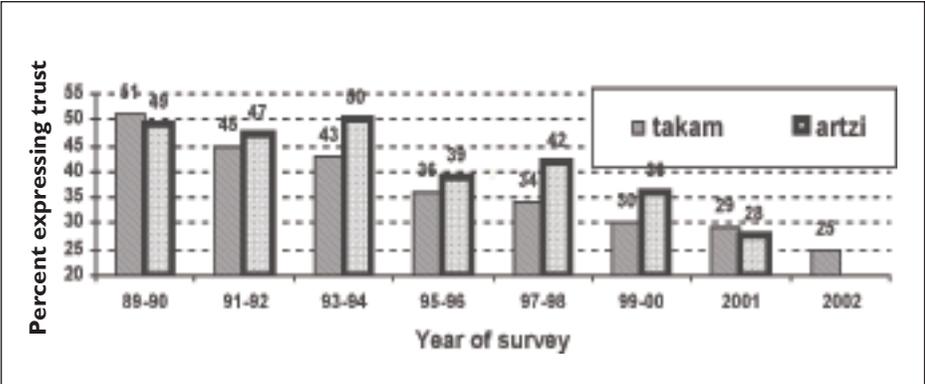
As the next two figures show, if any causal conclusion could be reached about the effect of the structural reforms on the trust people have in the future of the kibbutz and the level of satisfaction with their lives there, it would be a negative one. Apart from one year in each case, the graphs show a consistent downward trend, with the percentage of those satisfied with their lives on a kibbutz dropping from 64–70 percent in 1989–1990 to 58 percent in 2002. Over the same period, the percentage of those expressing trust in the future of kibbutz life deteriorated from about half the sample to a quarter of it.

Figure 5: Percentage of those satisfied with kibbutz life (*Annual Surveys 1989–2002*). Takam figures are on the left and artzi on the right of the column pairs.



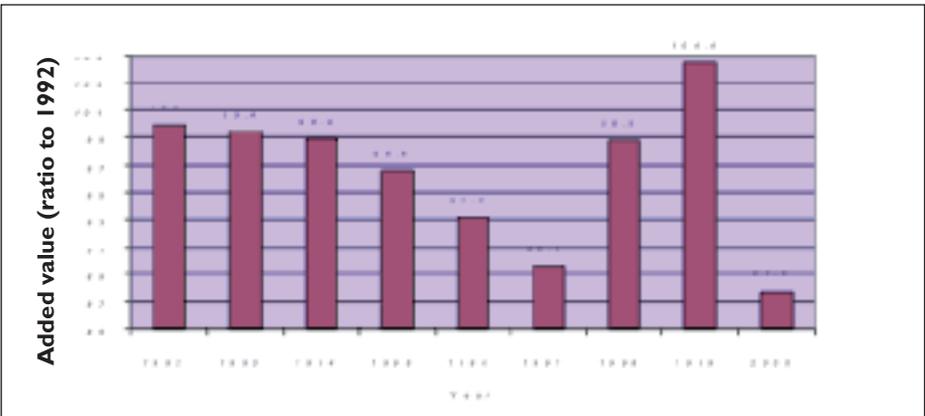
Source: Palgi and Orchan 2002.

Figure 6: Percentage of those expressing trust in kibbutz future (*Annual Surveys* 1989–2002). Takam figures are on the left and artzi on the right of the column pairs.



Source: Palgi and Orchan 2002.

Figure 7: Added value of kibbutz industries to their kibbutzim (fixed prices, ratio to 1992)



Source: Leviatan 2001.

### *Economic Success*

The improvement on economic performance seemed to be the main motivator for the structural reforms mentioned earlier. However, its fate was no better than the “softer” indicators: it has experienced constant deterioration. As seen in figures 2 and 3, the rate of growth in sales for kibbutz industry came below that of Israeli industry over the years 1990–1995, with a further relative decline from 1996 to 2000. The labour productivity of kibbutz industry (yearly sales per worker) relative to that of Israeli industry shows a strong downward trend at the beginning of the nineties and falls below that of Israeli industry from 1993 onward. Figure 7 shows that same trend from another angle: the added value of kibbutz industry to their community—i.e., the amount of money transferred to the kibbutz from industrial activity such as salaries of members, profits, allocation for depreciation, and payment for services rendered. The year 1992 is used as the anchor year as it was the first year such data was reported. As shown in figure 7, the trend is downward.

### *Demography*

The same trend as seen with the other criteria is clearly evident with demographic data. In strong contrast to the situation before the decade of the nineties, kibbutz population consistently shrank in size from 1992 onward (see data in figure 1, which shows a decline in population of about 11 percent—from 129,300 to 115,300—within one decade).

### *Life Expectancy*

On this criteria we have to wait somewhat longer for results.

## How the Structural Changes Downgrade Kibbutz Function

### *The Importance of Ideology*

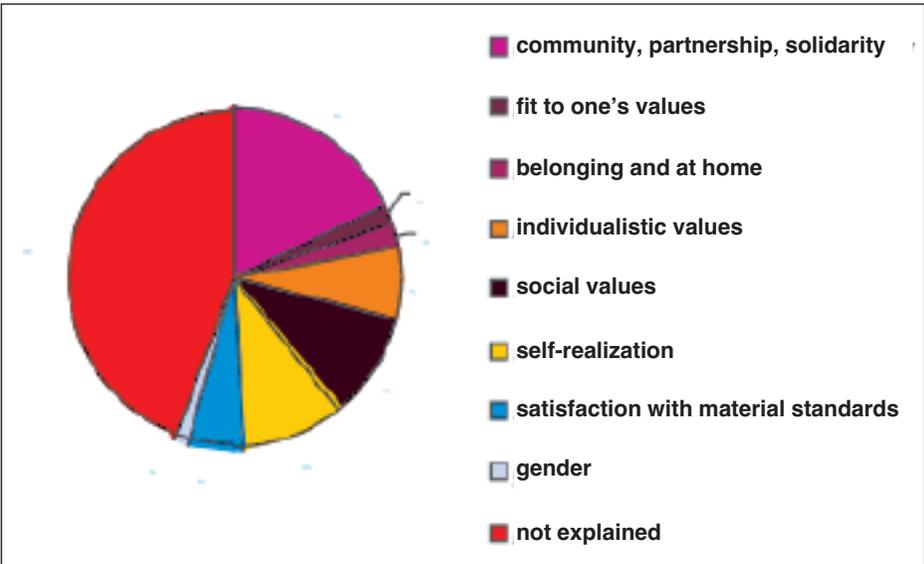
OVERALL, ONE MIGHT WELL WONDER at the downgrading of kibbutzim on all important indices. In particular, why the decline in the economic and demographic domains? Weren't the structural changes that sacrificed unique kibbutz values aimed at improving these two areas? Although that may have been the aim, it did not work. Advocates of these changes as a panacea for kibbutz problems would have known better had they had any theoretical knowledge about communal and voluntary organizations or communities. The reforms in the social and business domains should, in fact, have been expected to bring about deterioration in both commitment of members and kibbutz demography, and also in economic performance.

Here is why. The central factor in attracting membership to such communities or organizations is the extent to which individuals find a congruence between their personal values (not the satisfaction of their welfare needs) and the goals of the organizations. As studies since the 1960s have demonstrated, this was always true of the attractiveness of kibbutz communities for their members (Rosner et al. 1990). It was further demonstrated in research findings during the last decade, illustrated in figures 8 and 9. These figures show how satisfaction of various needs and the expression of values by individuals and by their communities explain variance in "commitment in kibbutz life" during two periods: 1991–1996 and 1997–2001.

The two pie representations in the graphs are the results of multiple regression analyses. Although the studies are some years apart and the samples are different (different individuals and different kibbutzim), the similarity in the two graphs is striking. The explained variance in both is about

60 percent; individual values and kibbutz adherence to its unique values account for about 30 percent; emotional attachment accounts for about 10 percent (“feeling at home and belonging”); self-realization for another 10 percent; and satisfaction of material needs, about 6 percent.

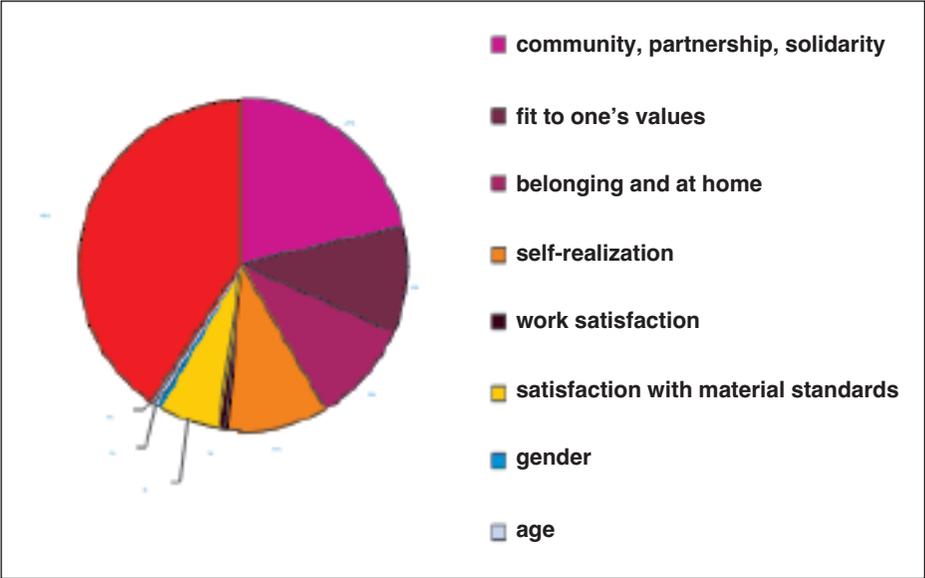
Figure 8: Estimate of explained variance in “commitment to kibbutz life”; about fourteen kibbutzim; N = 1750; 1997–2001 (Graph begins top right with “community, partnership, solidarity” at 18% and reads clockwise.)



Source: Unpublished data of ongoing research.

Note that during these two periods the level of kibbutz adherence to its unique values deteriorated. The level of members holding to these values also declined (remember figure 4, showing the increase in the percentage of those supporting differential remuneration). Yet, the importance of values and of value adherence in influencing commitment did not change. This means that the satisfaction of individual needs does not replace, in its importance, the effect of values on commitment to human organizations such as a kibbutz. Abolish values completely from the life of such communities and you get complete disintegration rather than compensation by other attractors.

Figure 9: Estimate of explained variance in “commitment to kibbutz life”; about twenty-five kibbutzim; N = 2800; 1991–1996 (Graph begins top right with “community, partnership, solidarity” at 21% and reads clockwise.)



Source: Unpublished data of ongoing research.

Economic success also could not be achieved by the structural changes made in the business domain. Many of the new managerial principles precluded the intensive use of the high-quality kibbutz human resources, which are characterized by a high level of education (about fifteen years for the age group twenty to sixty); a high level of management skills due to the practice of managerial rotation; proven skill as intensive team workers; and a high level of motivation. This quality of human resources is the only advantage that kibbutzim have in their economic activities; there are drawbacks in numbers, in age, in physical ability, in distance from business centres, and in inflexibility of geographic mobility. Throwing out one's advantages and relying on one's drawbacks cannot be considered good business management.

The dire effects of the structural changes on member commitment and

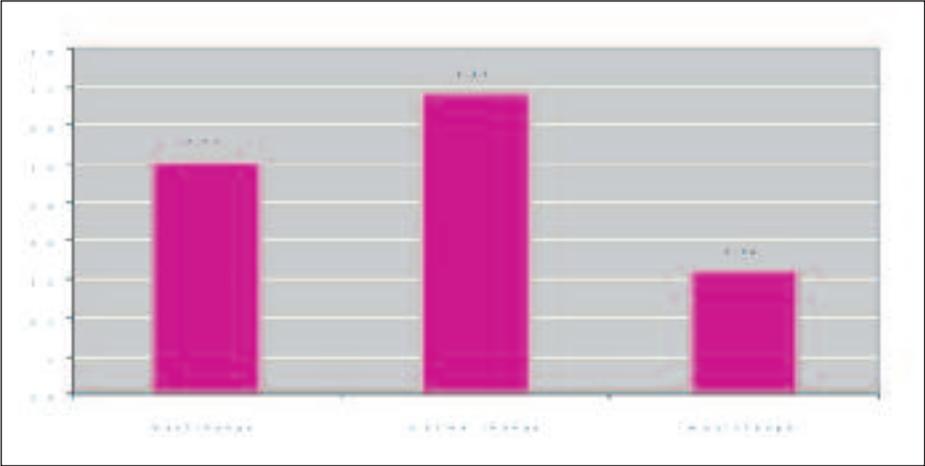
on economic success revealed themselves immediately. They will also probably have a detrimental affect in the future, with the coming waves of potential young kibbutzim members.

It is time now to return to the story of my son's research paper, which was expanded, a year later, by one of my students for his thesis. The study focussed on high-school students from about thirty kibbutzim (grades ten to twelve) who studied in three kibbutz regional high schools. It also included city youth who attended the same schools. A central finding was that students' value expressions regarding equality and solidarity, and their views on individualism and collectivism, corresponded quite strongly with the level and intensity with which their kibbutzim had adopted structural changes in the direction of "privatization of public consumption budgets" and "implementation of differential remuneration according to office or contribution." The longer their kibbutz had adopted these social arrangements, the stronger the students' support for values expressing individualism, and the weaker their support for equality and solidarity. This strong relationship appeared independent from the effect parents had on the value convictions of their sons and daughters.

In figure 10 (overleaf) we see that students who come from kibbutzim with the most intensive structural reforms are least supportive of the principle of equality in their kibbutz. The difference between the two other groups is not statistically significant. Figure 11 (overleaf), which includes city youth, reveals the same conclusion: students from kibbutzim that have experienced the most intensive reforms show the least support for the equality principle as a guide for the most desirable way of life. They are even less supportive of this principle than students from the cities who study in the same kibbutz regional schools, and who are also low in supporting this principle compared to students from kibbutzim with less intensive structural reforms.

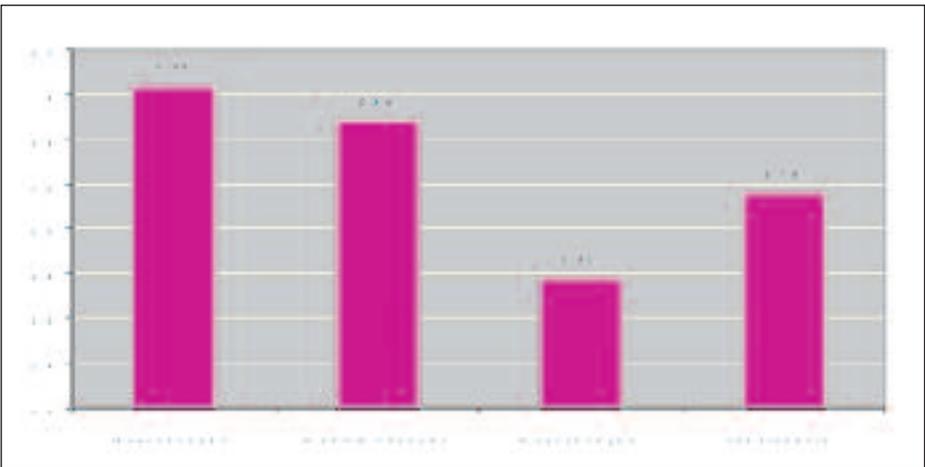
When asked about the principles that should govern society at large (figure 12, overleaf), the trend is similar: 43–44 percent of the students from kibbutzim with little or medium structural reform support the principle of equity (vs. equality), in contrast to the 54–57 percent of city students and students from kibbutzim with intensive reforms who are in favour of it.

Figure 10: Extent of support for equality in kibbutz (high-school students from different types of kibbutzim) (5 = high)



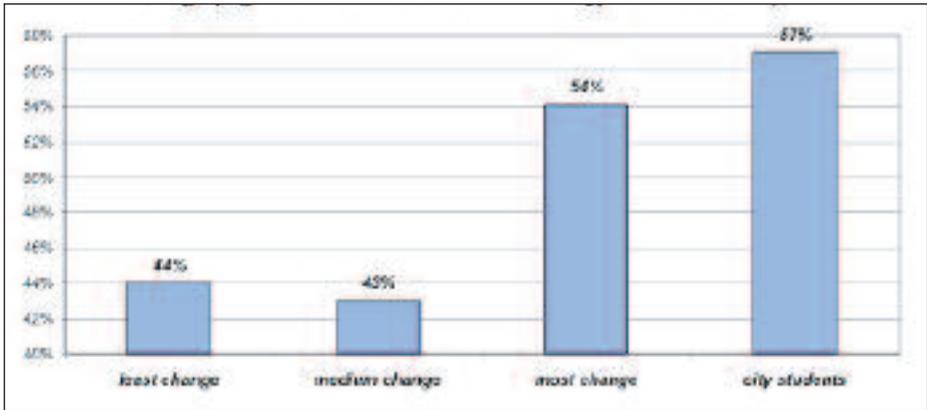
Source: Unpublished data of ongoing research.

Figure 11: Extent of support for principles of equality in a most desired way of life (high-school students from city and different types of kibbutzim) (5 = high)



Source: Unpublished data of ongoing research.

Figure 12: Percentage of support for the value of equity (vs. equality) in society at large (high-school students from different types of kibbutzim, and city students)



Source: Unpublished data of ongoing research.

But young people grow older. Imagine when these youths become adults and start to contemplate the possibility of becoming members of kibbutzim. Why would they make such a choice when their value system is tilted towards individualism, away from a belief in equality, and opposed to solidarity? Concerning their attractiveness to their own youth, it is likely that the future is bleak for the changed kibbutz, even if these young people regain the kibbutz values of equality, collectivism, and solidarity.

It is interesting how the young people perceive their parents' views on different topics (see table 4, overleaf), and the percentage of youth who report no knowledge of their parents' views at all.

Thirty to forty percent report no knowledge of what their parents think about topics expressing kibbutz life, while only 15–19 percent say so about general philosophical and political topics.

Why are the students unaware of their parents' opinions about life on the kibbutz, while they do know what their parents think about much more general topics? Perhaps, in this time of crisis, many parents really have no clear opinion about kibbutz matters and what values should guide

their operation. Jack Quarter, some twenty years ago, did a small-scale study of young kibbutz members and high-school students, including their views on kibbutz and more general philosophical questions (Quarter 1984). In his summary he suggested that “kibbutz youth are strong on kibbutzism and weak on socialism.” Applying this to the current topic, it suggests that such individuals have convictions about equality and solidarity that are at the concrete level only—i.e., understanding how arrangements should be applied in kibbutz life. They may not have the more abstract and intellectual convictions (i.e., an understanding of socialism) that would serve as guides and directives to explain why certain arrangements should be applied and what changes should be made in times of crisis that will nevertheless preserve the more general values of equality among people, solidarity, and social justice expressed by the philosophy of socialism. Thus, in a crisis situation, individuals with a strong commitment to equality and collectivism only as defined in their concrete expressions in kibbutz life, and without an understanding of the more abstract notion of socialism, would be more inclined to relinquish their commitment to kibbutz life as compared to individuals who are committed to both socialism and kibbutzism.

Table 4: Percentage of students who are unaware of their parents’ attitudes towards nine statements

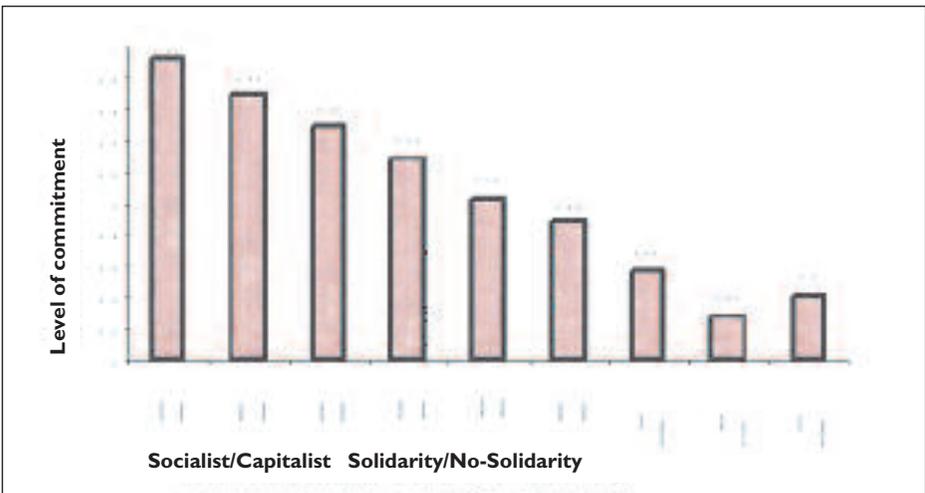
	Topic	Don't Know	
		Father	Mother
Support of principles	Privatization of public budgets	36	38
	Remuneration according to contribution	36	38
Desired characteristics	No link: contribution and remuneration	40	40
	Communal ownership of property	36	45
	Communal consumption	33	36
Importance of...	Material standard of living	18	19
	Egalitarian society	15	19
General	Personal autonomy	17	18
	Improving relations: Jew and Arabs	17	16

Unpublished data of ongoing research.

A finding from a recent study points to such a possibility (Leviatan and Rosner 2001). The study examined individual convictions on two subjects: “kibbutz collectivism and solidarity” and “socialism.” The relationship between the perceived state of the kibbutz in the economic and social realms was then correlated with the extent of commitment to kibbutz life. This correlation was calculated for two groups: (a) those for whom commitment to socialism was relatively stronger than their commitment to kibbutz collectivism and solidarity; and (b) those for whom commitment to kibbutz collectivism and solidarity was relatively stronger than their commitment to socialism. The correlation for group (a) was  $r = .36$ , while the relationship for group (b) was  $r = .48$  (i.e., 13 percent of the common variance vs. 23 percent of the common variance).

Individuals were also cross-tabulated according to their level of conviction on the same two-value ideas (self-identity as socialist/capitalist and belief in the value of kibbutz collectivism and solidarity). The result of this cross-tabulation was then correlated with level of commitment to kibbutz life (see figure 13).

Figure 13: Commitment to kibbutz life (5 = high) as a function of belief in socialism/capitalism and solidarity (communality, equality, solidarity)/no-solidarity

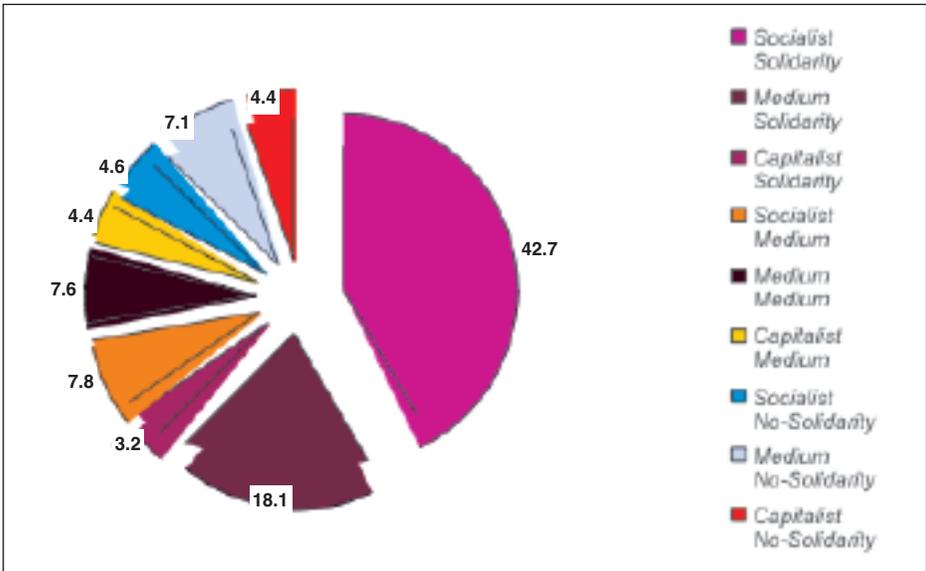


Source: Leviatan and Rosner 2001.

As can be seen, holding the strongest belief in solidarity and equality in kibbutz life does not guarantee the highest commitment to it. The highest commitment to kibbutz life is among those who also define themselves as socialists rather than capitalists.

As a side note, it should be pointed out that a grain of optimism is introduced by the distribution of individuals into the different combinations of categories (figure 14). Forty-three percent view themselves as high on both socialism and kibbutzism (to use Jack Quarter’s phrase).

Figure 14: Percent of sample (N = 540) belonging to each group (socialist/capitalist; solidarity/no-solidarity) (Read graph clockwise beginning with “Socialist Solidarity” at 42.7%.)



Source: Leviatan and Rosner 2001.

This brings me back to the conversation with my son mentioned at the beginning of this paper. He wondered why members of kibbutzim want to do away with their life and community. Why do many of them follow the words of the prophet Isaiah: “... thy destroyers and they that want thee waste shall go forth of thee”?

Are the members “stupid”? Of course not. They may look so to my son’s eye because they did not internalize the importance of building a conviction for the more abstract, general values (such as those expressed in socialism) and could not be satisfied with the more concrete, down-to-earth expressions of those values. Forming such belief calls for a major intellectual effort; one cannot rely on life experience alone and on emotional learning (as it was believed to come about in kibbutz education). Neither can one rely on “natural” identification with such values, since living up to these values calls for certain sacrifices, particularly from those with higher potential. It is only through intellectual internalization that one accepts such personal sacrifice as a “nonsacrifice,” and recognizes altruistic contributions to community achievements as a personal triumph. Without such intellectual effort, the value basis is weak and will not sustain a crisis situation.

Members are not stupid, but, as most people, they cannot see into the future. The detrimental outcomes of the structural changes that are decided by the members (always democratically) do not come about immediately, but only after several years—the immediate reaction, in fact, is of satisfaction with the new arrangements—and by that time it is difficult for the layperson to make the connection between the outcomes and the changes.

Members are not stupid but they react, mostly unknowingly, to the dynamics of a vicious cycle that goes something like this:

The situation is bad; we need to change our way of doing things and adopt a new direction. The change brings even worse outcomes. That means we have not changed in a decisive enough way; we need to make even more drastic changes.

Members, following the changes, do not behave in a collectivistic way; they do not express solidarity, do not care about equality. Aha! This is proof that collectivism, solidarity, and equality cannot work. Let us further distance ourselves from these outdated values....

And so it keeps rolling.

Now back to Buber's statement: Is the kibbutz still an "exemplary non-failure"? While many kibbutzim can be described as non-failures, quite a few are failures—at least in the eyes of their own members. A lot of mainly intellectual work will be required to redeem the failures and to prevent the non-failures from succumbing to damaging structural change. By now it should be apparent that I believe kibbutz life (as any other communal life) is based first and foremost on intellectual conviction regarding its values. It cannot survive for many years unless this is constantly nurtured, as human nature in itself is apparently not inclined to life in such a society.

## The Future of Kibbutzim

WHAT IS TO BE THE FUTURE OF KIBBUTZIM in Israel? It is said in Israel that since the times of the prophets, prophecy was given only to the fools. As I do not want to be thought a fool, I will refrain from giving any predictions, but rather will mention briefly two processes currently at work that may indicate a certain future.

1. Several dozen kibbutzim that decided to strengthen their communal adherence rather than go the way described above have organized a mini-movement called the "communal stream." They are attempting to influence as many kibbutzim as they can from among those as yet undecided about their future direction. This may eventually lead to a revival of communal life, particularly since most of the strongest and richest kibbutzim belong to this group.
2. Young people (my son among them) from the two youth movements affiliated with the kibbutzim are currently organizing and establishing kibbutzim where communal life will be very intensive. They see their mission as work in education and community outside the kibbutz, and believe that transformation of Israeli society can only come via education and socialization of the young. Several hundred young (eighteen-to-thirty-year-old) men and women are part of this effort, and several kibbutzim have already been established.

If these two political processes gain momentum, we may repeat assuredly Buber's definition of "exemplary non-failure." But they will not happen by themselves. A lot of dreaming, effort, and energy must be invested to ensure success.

## Summary of Lessons

**T**O SUMMARIZE THE MAIN LESSONS from the current kibbutz experience, lessons that also seem applicable to the co-operative movement:

1. Adherence to unique defining values is a major holding/attracting force of social organizations such as the kibbutz.
2. There is a central threat of degeneration from members themselves.
3. Holding communal values is not "natural" as it calls for personal sacrifice and altruistic behaviour.
4. Intellectual conviction is central in determining commitment. It is not enough to be exposed to communal experience.
5. Such intellectual conviction does not transfer in genes across generations in communal communities.
6. Each generation must be targeted anew for its intellectual and cognitive socialization into communal values.
7. Social arrangements in such communities determine values formed among its youth.
8. The pursuance of communal values must be viewed as a goal of such communities rather than means to other ends.

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