

# **Ideological Changes in Public Land Policy: Analysis of the Decision-Making by Israel's Land Council**

**Dr. Ravit Hananel<sup>1</sup>**

GSD, Harvard University, [rhananel@gsd.harvard.edu](mailto:rhananel@gsd.harvard.edu)

The research examined the changes in the main objectives of Israel's Public land policy. The goal was to find out the extent to which changes and reforms in Israeli society and economy affect Israel's Lands Council (ILC) decision-making process. Although Israel's public land policy has a direct affect on the majority of the Israeli population, the decision-making process in the ILC was hardly examined throughout the years.

In the research, we adapted the Israeli Land Administration (ILA) basic distinction between urban land (and urban sphere) and agricultural land (and agricultural sphere). In each sphere, we focused on the major policy issue, according to theoretical and professional literature (as well as the study of the decisions themselves).

Concerning the urban sphere, we analyzed major changes regarding the public leasehold contracts and the types of property rights assigned in them. This issue has direct effects on the majority of Israel's population (91.5%) that resides on national urban land. On the agricultural sphere, we analyzed the major changes, concerning the allocation or denial of rights of residents in rural communities, regarding land use conversion and development. This issue is the subject of a public debate in Israel, involving profound questions of social equality and distributive justice.

Using Content Analysis, as the selected research methodology, analyzed the expressions made by the ILC members throughout discussions protocols. The analysis focused on major decisions regarding six objectives, which we defined as most important: the zionist-national objective; the administrative objective; the economical objective; the financial objective; the social objective; and the environmental objective. The purpose of our research was to analyze the main considerations that influence ILC decision-making process.

Our findings indicate different and separate sets of considerations of the decision-makers regarding each sphere (urban and agricultural). Even in cases when the ILC members gave a similar weight to a specific objective in both spheres (like the zionist-national objective), the objective itself received a different definition regarding each sphere and reflects a different attitude toward the urban lessee (urban and agricultural). This research provides the findings and the explanations to these conclusions.

Nowadays, it is too early to predict the forthcoming changes – yet, our findings make it clear, that fundamental reforms regarding Israel's public land policy are bound to happen. These reforms will probably be accompanied by passionate public and academic debates. Such debates are appropriate for a national policy regarding lands – a policy that not so long ago was almost hidden from the public eye, and from now on will take a suitable place on the public agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ravit Hananel is a researcher and lecturer expertise in Israel's land and urban policy. She won the Fulbright Post-Doctoral Fellowship for 2007/8, and is spending the current academic year as a visiting scholar in Harvard University Graduate School of Design (GSD). She holds a PhD in Urban and Regional Planning from the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, awarded in 2006 with first class honor, and previous degrees in political science and sociology from Tel-Aviv University. During 2006-7, she spent post-doctoral period at Tel-Aviv University at the Department of Public Policy. During 2005-7, she was also the head of the "Environment and Law Program" at the Faculty of Law at Tel-Aviv University.