

THE URBURB URBURB

Patterns of Contemporary Living

The Urburb – a neologism referring to the mesh of the urban and suburban – characterizes the great majority of residential areas in contemporary Israel. As a repercussion of one hundred years of modernist planning, the Urburb is a fragmented mosaic composed of the early-20th century garden-city rural settlements, mid-20th century social housing, and the generic residential typologies of the past two decades.

This hybrid manifests the conflicting demands of the modernist machine functioning in the old-new land: to create small egalitarian communities while accommodating a large and diverse population; to spread throughout the country while converging and closing-in; and to reconnect to the land via a top-down planning system that treats the surface as a clean slate.

In order to explore these dynamics, the Israeli pavilion is transformed into a contemporary construction site furnished with four large sand-printers. The site and the sand-printers delineate the story of one hundred years of modernist planning in Israel, in diverse scales shifting from national master plans to those of the single building. The printers are accompanied by a video and sound piece that transforms the Urburban patterns and plays them like a music box.

In the endlessly expanding Urburban environment, new residential communities continue to pop-up, separated by large expanses of open land, locked-in and dislocated. The installation, like the Urburb itself, is uniform and consistent. It conveys the experience of life in a modernist machine, under the signs of automation and the promise of utopian redemption. As rapidly as the schemes are impressed into the sand, so are they wiped away, emphasizing how these generic pattern-oriented plans are "printed" from above in compliance with changing ideologies and master plans.

The Urburb is more than an architectural phenomenon; it is a state of mind and a form of living. Swinging between two parallel vectors – repetitive actions and fixed notions – the Urburb is the result of a particular modernist course, leading from an early emphasis on simplicity, compactness and equality to the inflated and homogenous neo-liberal formations of today.

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Associate Curator: Edith Kofsky

Ground Level:

Country

Israeli suburbanization is not only the result of a gradual process but a reflection of an intrinsic disposition. From the very beginning of the renewed Jewish settlement in Eretz-Israel at the second half of the 19th century, the city was never an option. Beginning with the founding of the early rural settlements and new Jewish neighborhoods outside the walls of the old cities, continuing with the dispersal of settlements following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and up to the recent failure to limit the population dispersal to a few central cities – the anti-urban sentiment, originating in the longing for a rural-agrarian way of life, became both the bourgeois dream and a concrete reality. This frame of mind persisted after the establishment of the State, with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's commissioning of the "Sharon Plan." Employing familiar strategies of suburbanization, the plan cast a scheme of new towns scattered on a grid covering the entire country. The plan failed to disperse the population, but laid the groundwork for the Urburb of today, giving rise to tens of successive small-scale plans, engendering the spate of new settlements that continue to pop-up within and beyond the Green Line of 1967.



I
1949
Existing settlements following the establishment of the state of Israel

II
1951
The Sharon Plan, first master plan for the State of Israel: dispersal of settlements on a schematic grid

III
2014
The current situation

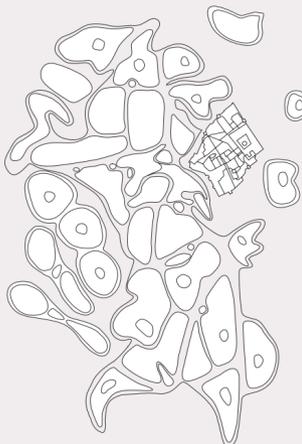
IIII
2014
Settlements in the territories occupied in 1967

Upper Level:

City

Israeli cities are neither urban nor suburban; they are a fusion of segregated and detached pieces. Their fragmentation is a direct product of the Sharon Plan's bias against big cities, encouraging their sub-division into a number of "neighboring units," small independent entities that cater only to their local residents.

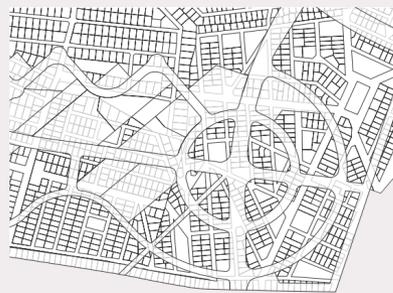
The current planning of new neighborhoods as independent units is evident in their refusal to connect to the existing city cores and older neighborhoods. Jerusalem, Israel's capital, is the root of this phenomenon. From the first segregated neighborhoods built outside the old city walls in the early 19th century, through Henry Kendall's British plan of 1944, construction in Jerusalem has always been characterized by decentralization. In Hadera, a coastal town located midway between Tel Aviv and Haifa, an early British plan of a unified street grid stretching from the town center to the sea was abandoned in favor of "neighboring units." In Holon, a southern satellite of Tel Aviv, two plans (ninety years apart) for one zone form a clear picture of polarized planning approaches: the shift from a dense and urban layout to a cluster of high-rises set around a large park. Yahud's old Palestinian town center was surgically replaced by modernist housing blocks, that are currently being replaced by an imported model of a Swiss lake resort town.



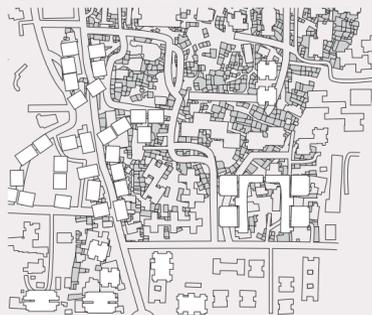
I
Jerusalem
The old city and Henry Kendall's plan for Jerusalem, 1944, dividing the city into a series of "neighboring units"



II
Hadera
Three cities in one: the British plan of 1941, the Sharon Plan of 1951, and the current plan



III
Holon
From a grid layout to the current Urburban stage: superposition of two plans for the Moledet and Menora neighborhoods (1920), and the plan for the new H-500 neighborhood



IIII
Yahud
Three planning layers in Yahud, from the Palestinian village, through the modernist city, to the current "imported" urban pattern

Upper Level:

Neighborhoods

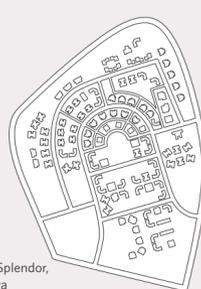
The new neighborhoods, the last piece of the Israeli Urburban puzzle, are a perfect example of the top-down planning principle. In fact, only when seen from above is their real identity revealed in the picturesque floral shapes, intricate geometric patterns, and twisting line drawings they form in the landscape. The top-down modernist planning surprisingly results in oriental-looking patterns. Pushing the modernist tool-kit to the extreme manifests its hollowness: from the state's "minimal" and equalizing answer to the housing needs of the new immigrants, to the creation of a unified bourgeois identity crafted by the real-estate market – a sheltered life-form in an "urban" building situated at the heart of a "rural" area. The uniformity that modernism enforced in the name of social equality has thus become the standard that is happily embraced by everyone.



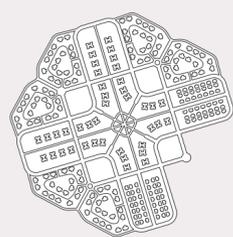
Nobel Prize Winners, Rishon LeZion



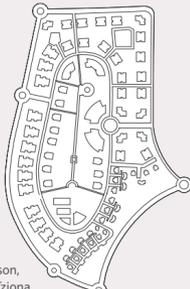
Tamarisk Pastures, Rishon LeZion



Moshavot Splendor, Petach Tikva



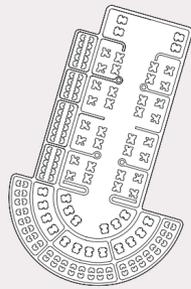
Sycamore Pastures, Rishon LeZion



Crimson, Nes Tziona



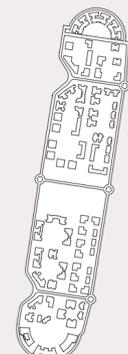
Ono Heights, Kiryat Ono



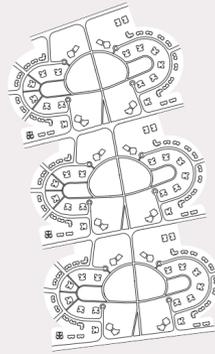
Dutch Rehovot, Rehovot



Spring Gardens, Lod



New Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv

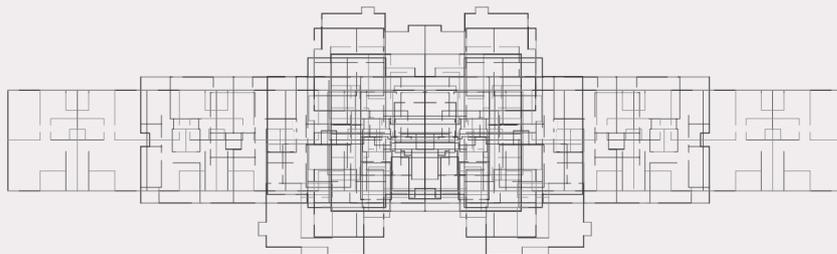


Park Neighborhood, Hadera

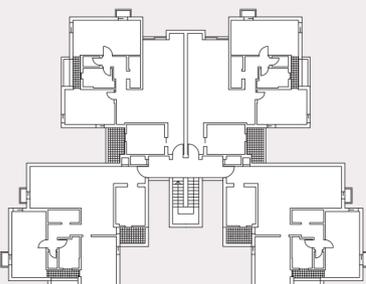
Mid Level:

The Building Unit

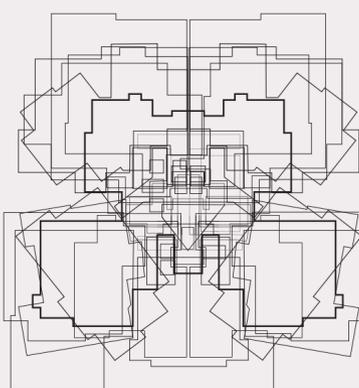
The single building, the basic block of the "neighboring units," is an independent agent dropped from above, free-standing on the plane, open on every side and usually set on pilots. Beginning in 1948, under the auspices of the technical department of the Ministry of Housing, public building companies developed wide-scale plans and modern housing typologies addressing two main issues: the massive immigration waves, and the need to build and settle the newly acquired territories. The history of the Israeli modernist building can be described in geometric terms as a shift from the simple horizontal box to a sophisticated vertical one. From the social housing block of the 1950s, through the H-type building of the 1970s and 1980s, onto the excessive "Hyper-H" buildings of the 1990s, the apartment building underwent a series of manipulations creating a complex interior space: zigzagged, serrated, full of angles, bumps, hanging balconies, and other superficial façade grids.



I
The evolution of social housing in Israel from 1950 to 1965, showing the shift from horizontal to vertical



II
Prototype for the Urburban apartment building: Arie Sharon and Eldar Sharon, apartment building in Upper Nazareth, 1965



III
Superposition of typical floor-plans for an H-type building, from 1965 to the present