Neither village nor city- Architecture of the Kibbutz 1910-1990/ Freddy Kahana, 2011

Yad Tabenkin - Publishing

Introduction

 Present day communes, including the Kibbutz, are at times referred to as "Utopian" in the sense that they represent the endeavor to create an alternative to the existing and flawed "world order". As such they have become the subject of extensive study and the overall concept has even created a number of world organization through which they are researched and debated at international seminars.

A review of the many subjects and aspects of "communes" and their various connections to "Utopia" indeed reveals the wide range of interests which the subject arouses: political, economic, social, cultural, educational even artistic and poetic…little however has been mentioned of another possible focus of Utopia: as the potential replacement of the ubiquitous dystopia "Metropolis" as the flawed "world order".

Of all the many and varied physical accounts of utopian scenarios, very few, if any, envisage an "Urban - Megalopolitan" reality as the ultimate solution; the preferred venue is arcadian, ex-urban, relatively small, close to nature… and as such can be regarded as the paradigm of future man's ideal state. The commune is thus a harbinger of "The Urban Alternative" whether as a discrete rural community or an in-urban association: both basically reject the alienation of the amorphous city conglomerate in favour of togetherness, solidarity and participatory management of their immediate environment. In their rejection of the "world order", they tend to isolation and insularity; preferring local social action and avoiding converting others through political involvement on a wider scale. As the only propagators of a future Utopia in today's global reality, the commune clearly re-defines the new Utopia as a future alternative to the present ubiquitous capitalist city state and according to this definition demands the revolutionary drafting of its social and physical content.

The kibbutz movement still sees itself as deeply involved in the world's commune phenomenon which, in turn, still sees the kibbutz as one of its most developed branches; this relationship however needs closer investigation; there is a clear distinction between the "commune" and the "kibbutz" which, through its size and development, has, by definition as "neither village nor city", created itself as an "Urban Alternative". It was this "spatial" aspect, made potentially relevant through its size, solidarity, political involvement and geographic dispersal, which gave the Israeli ex-urban space its uniqueness before the basic kibbutz structure changed and diluted itself into a pseudo suburb.

"The Architecture of the Kibbutz" relates to this unique spatial alternative from a holistic view: the Kibbutz in all stages of its development, from "micro-utopian" commune to its physical configuration as a autonomous-autarkic complex arising out of its basic social, economic and educational structure and its later stages as a potential macro-utopian [1] regional entity, envisioning a real alternative to the capitalist metropolis.

In order to assess the uniqueness of the Kibbutz as human settlement and potentially, in its regional macro utopian form, as an urban alternative, it is necessary to carry out a short comparative study of parallel attempts to create alternative habitats to the ubiquitous city and especially the Capitalist City of the late l9th and early 20th century. We can leave behind the Ideal Cities, Renaissance and Baroque; these can remain as structural models, but the

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[1] Near H. *Utopian and Post-Utopian Thought: The Kibbutz Model* Communal Societies V (Fall 1985) pp 41-58

initiatives which created them have historically become irrelevant to our purpose, as have most of the Utopian models, religious as well as social.

I propose to assess three "case studies" as to their ability to fulfil the above criteria. Generically [2], these examples are identified as three seminal categories:

- **Reformist -** The Social City of Ebenezer Howard
- **Revolutionary** - The New Urbanism and Dis-Urbanism in post revolutionary Russia
- **Evolutionary** - The Kibbutz

These represent the only meaningful attempts since the industrial revolution at creating an alternative spatial entity to the ubiquitous Capitalist City.

These then are the three seminal attempts to create a meaningful alternative to the Capitalist City:

EbenezerHoward, the "designer" of a socialist (reformist) England of re-formed capitalism, new land-use and welfare in a network of participatory democratic "Urban/Rural Cities", *neither rural nor urban* ,in the accepted sense.

Application: Through the creation of people's monetary associations, land reform and legislation through parliament.

Result: After the initial success of building Letchworth, the first "Garden City", the establishment adopted the salient design features of "The Garden City" and by ignoring the social and integrative aspects of the concept, invented "The Garden Suburb", the much desired new housing environment of the middle class. The "Social City" idea was later, after the war, revived as the model for England's (and Europe's) New Towns as the cutting edge of Labour's welfare state; but these towns were never a part of an overall political (socialist) initiative to create a spatial network of regional integration of industry, agriculture and habitat as a holistic alternative to the capitalist city. However Howard's ideas are very much the inspiration behind ongoing contemporary planning.

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USSR 1920-1933: the "De-constructivists" as "designers" of the new Communist Russia (and by default of the future world…) according to the ideological necessity to *eradicate the dichotomy of "urban and rural* ".

Application: either through the adaptation of the existing urban structure (Urbanists) or the eradication of the capitalist city form and the creation of a hierarchy of social and production units (Dis-urbanist). Architecture and planning as integral tool of Dialectical Materialism.

Result: The inability to realize any viable, or acceptable examples of these theories and the misinterpretation of the real needs of people, led to the communist establishment to declare Russia a communist entity and decreed that all planning (and art etc.) is therefore, by definition "Socialist Realism".

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The Kibbutz: neither "designer" of a new order nor planner of future habitat, rather the slow and pragmatic evolution of settlement form, from commune as a micro-utopia in accordance with programs developed from the needs of the Kibbutz collective and its highly motivated members.

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[2] Ideology as motivator of planning action or, conversely, planning following ideological preferences.

Application: The ultimate creation of an integrated, democratic, autonomous, participatory and autarchic egalitarian society, *neither town nor village*, macro-utopia based on highly developed agriculture and industry and an integral part of a national collective federation deeply involved in building a new nation.

Although determined to be involved in the political arena of Socialism, the Kibbutz, individually or as a movement, never realized its potential in the creation of an "alternative" to the rapidly developing Israeli Mega City. [3] The 270 Kibbutzim in their social economic uniqueness were, as a national network, potential initiators for integrated regional – Ex-Urban - planning; a meaningful Urban Alternative assuring balanced national development instead of the chaotic and uncontrollable urban spread.

Result: The lack of realisation of this potential and the ensuing non-involvement in wider regional and national planning ultimately made the kibbutz irrelevant in all the successive national plans. In the absence of what could and should have been its new social and political "mission" - the creation of a meaningful and viable urban alternative – the ongoing changes in the kibbutz, ignoring its potential, are leading toward the dissolution of the very factors that defined the uniqueness of that potential and inevitably to the de-structured Kibbutz becoming another (garden) suburb of the ubiquitous Capitalist City. Nevertheless, the Kibbutz does represent the third meaningful alternative and it too deserves its place in the history of urban and regional planning.

Kibbutz Planning and Structure

In the 100 years since its inception, the Kibbutz has developed into a singular socio-economic creation which has left its mark on its own physical appearance and spatial layout. Over the years, Kibbutz planning has become a closed and specialised, even esoteric discipline and its integration into the thinking and ideology of the Kibbutz idea was not always successful or even consistent. But there can be no doubt that today the Kibbutz still represents a physical and architectural expression of a unique human organisation.

The Basic Structure of the Kibbutz

The Kibbutz, as a structured and centralised society, is a settlement dispersed around its centre. This centre acts as a focal point in which all of the various administrative and social functions, so necessary for the smooth running of the Kibbutz, are concentrated: the communal dining room, consumer facilities, cultural administration, etc. and as such it is desirable that the location of these functions be in the literal centre of the Kibbutz. Separately located, but still an integral component of the settlement pattern, are the agricultural and industrial production areas. This separation stems mainly from the need to prevent odours from the agricultural areas and noise and other disturbances from the Industrial areas reaching the community.

Planning Components of the Kibbutz

The Kibbutz is built up from a number of defined basic sectors:

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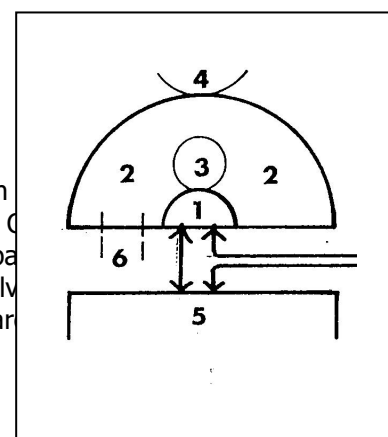
[3] E.Howard's ideas in their distorted "Garden Suburb" version filtered through (see below); it is doubtful whether Howard's original concept of "The Social C What went on in the USSR in the 20's however must have been known, in pa the new socialist society in Israel and certainly, again in part, to those involv kibbutz as the vanguard of that new society; a ripe subject for further resear

1   The central sector:

2   The housing sector

3   The educational sector

4   The sport and recreational sector

5   The production sector

6   Infrastructure services

        Landscape and Garden

Kibbutz planning basically deals with the adaptation of these components to the conditions of a particular site, while preserving the functional links between them: distances and future flexibility and development. Over the past 80 years this definition has been adapted in accordance with the changes that have taken place in the complexity of the Kibbutz idea, in its size and its socio-economic structure.

Differences in ideological definition brought with them differences in planning approach as between the concept of the small Kvutzah and the large Kibbutz, between a closed monolithic and a more pluralistic society.

The social texture of the Kibbutz is largely dependent upon the distance between the centre and the settlement's periphery. Large distances causes functional attenuation in the relation to the centre and thereby directly strengthen the family cell, while weakening the communal framework. Therefore, the physical layout of the Kibbutz greatly influences its social texture. Conversely, the desired co-operative dimension establishes the criteria for a suitable layout.

Sectional Planning
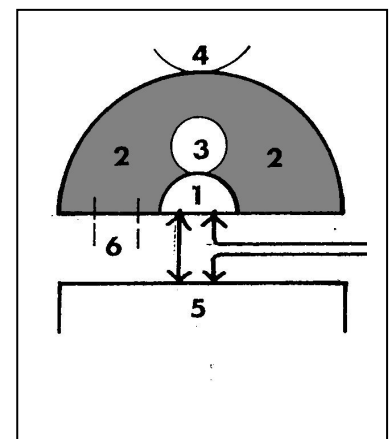
Housing

The development of the Kibbutz apartment

From the very beginning, children were separated from the parents into their "own" community, differentiated only by age. The life of the child was centered on this community and on the adults that cared for their every need. The baby was looked after in the "Baby House" for about a year, then in groups of about five, in the "Toddler House", later at the age of three in the "Kindergarten until starting school at six. Throughout this time the child spent his whole time in the children's community; he ate there, played or learned there and slept there. In the afternoon the child was brought "home" to his parents' room or apartment until he was "returned" to his nurses for supper and sleep.

Collective sleeping became a cornerstone of Collective Kibbutz Education ensuring the creation of a new generation reared on equality and social co-operation, away from "harmful" adult and still bourgeois influences.

In the early 60's, a number of kibbutzim populated mainly by people originating in English-speaking countries unilaterally decided to "bring the children home" at night, to sleep within the family. These kibbutzim did not attempt to change the essence of "collective upbringing", only technically, as it were, to change the venue of the child's place of sleep: within the family and separately from his peer group; nevertheless, the change necessitated the re-planning of kibbutz housing, educational buildings and ultimately the layout of the Kibbutz itself.

Within a few years, what started as a discrete initiative, became the accepted norm and ultimately the whole kibbutz movement went over to "Family sleeping" creating thereby, one of the most important ground changes which was ultimately responsible for further far reaching changes in the monolithic structure of the Kibbutz and its ultimate road to privatization.
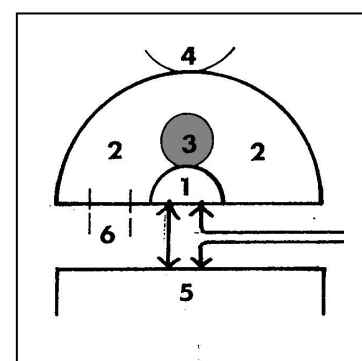
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The kibbutz apartment - its size, make-up, and spatial organisation – serves as a prism, through which we can assess the changes that have taken place in the kibbutz way of life from the days of the " pioneers" when the emphasis was on togetherness, to the present day, with its emphasis on family needs, rather than those of the community as a whole. An examination of the development of the kibbutz apartment indicates two principal periods: in the first, a residential unit for a couple or two single unmarried members, while the children lived and slept in separate accommodation; in the second, an apartment which included separate children's bedrooms as well as all the amenities, albeit on a small scale, needed in modern life.

The Realm of Collective Education

An early Kibbutz legend tells us that Sara Baratz, herself a founding member of Degania and in charge of its cowshed, took her new-born baby to work. When other children were born, the women working in the cowshed took turns to care for the babies, allowing them to fulfil their duty and milk the cows. Whether this was the beginning of the collective care of children can remain in the realm of legend; the idea however did spring from the need that to free the women from family duties in order that they can fulfil their egalitarian working rights, common kitchen and eating facilities, laundry and child care had to be established.

Later, the separation of the children from the family and raising them in groups and in the care of "professional" nurses and teachers became one of the corner-stones of Kibbutz ideology: the creation of a separate children's society, parallel to the commune of grown ups. In the Meuchad movement, "Collective education" especially in its school stage, was seen as the basic preparation for the continuance of communal Kibbutz life through integrating the curriculum with every day kibbutz tasks. In the "Artzi" movement on the other hand, the stress was on the active separation of the child's world from that of the grownups in order to literally create a "new man" in constant revolution to reach the goal of a future socialist society…

Early "Children's Houses" catered for mixed age groups, which were then small. Later, with the birth-rate of five or more babies a year arose the need to set up separate facilities suitable for the collective up-bringing of each age group: the "Baby House" up to the age of about nine months, the "Toddler House" , from one to three years of age when the group of 4-6 children was transferred to the "Kindergarten" of some 20 children. At the age of 6 the children moved to the "Collective House" to begin their schooling, remaining within their peer group throughout until their adolescence.

In these "special" buildings children in "The Group" slept together, ate and bathed together, celebrated together and later learned and worked together; each going to his/her parents for a few hours every day, returning with them in the evening to be put to bed and kissed good night and left to go to sleep in the care of their nurse and later, during the night, of the night guard.

It was this separation that led to the traumas which ultimately rocked the whole system and led to the demand that the children, at first the younger ones, should sleep "at home" with the parents. The" Anglo-Saxon" kibbutzim were the first to institute "family sleeping" in the 60's, whilst ideologically continuing the principles of collective education – the separation of the child's world from that of the grown ups. By the 80's most of the kibbutzim went over to "family sleeping" excepting the ideological hard core of the Artzi movement which stolidly held to the principles of full collective education, but by the end of the 90's all kibbutzim had their children sleeping in enlarged and fully adapted family apartments.

One of the basic tenets of Kibbutz education was the organic integration of the school within the Kibbutz. In the 60's however, this became unviable and the first Kibbutz regional secondary schools were set up, followed, in the 80's, by regional primary schools. The abandonment of integrated schools left gaping gaps in the Kibbutz center, both physical as well as ideological.

The Public Domain
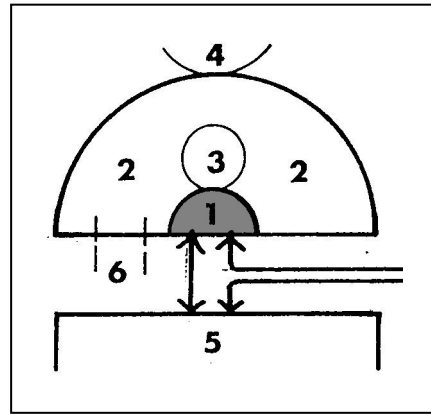
"The Kibbutz Centre"

The kibbutz, as a settlement which provides services for its members collectively, concentrates these services for reasons of efficiency and accessibility. The focus of this concentration consists of a sector usually known as the "Kibbutz Centre ".

In the structural plan for a new kibbutz, which up to the 60's was seen as a large and growing community, the central area was accordingly designated for the future construction of a large dining hall and kitchen, laundry and clothing store, cultural center, administration, health facilities and public open spaces.

In many kibbutzim however the population didn't rise above some 250 members, development over the years has been slow and these areas, planned for future development, stood (and still stand) empty. Outdoor areas were cared for at great expense and for aesthetic purposes only. Only in cases of considerable growth in the number of settlers were the original plans executed and the centre "filled out" as a social and functional focal point and later became what was to be known as the "Kibbutz Centre", incorporating, apart from the dining hall and kitchen, the social, cultural, administrative and consumer facilities in a central complex.

The Dining Hall became the focal centre of the Kibbutz community, serving as restaurant, social club, meeting hall, cinema and venue for Passover and other festivals. Later, with the setting up of separate club facilities and halls, the dinning hall became the hub of the "Kibbutz Centre" with its shop, administration, library etc.

Landscape, Garden and Environment

Travelling through the Israeli landscape in the 70's, one could still easily distinguish between the various settlements: The "Moshava" the Israeli village, similar to most villages everywhere; a cluster of buildings along a main street and peripheral outbuildings stretched into the rural landscape, The "Moshav" with its smallholder's plots stretching outwards from the thicker texture of housing and central agricultural structures, silos and sheds, the "Communal Moshav" a cross between the collective Kibbutz and the family based Moshav and then the "Kibbutz", a unique gathered conglomerate clearly delineated and iconic with its ubiquitous water tower at its highest point. The typology of the four main settlement forms was clearly reflected in their visual image.

KIBBUTZ   COMMUNAL MOSHAV
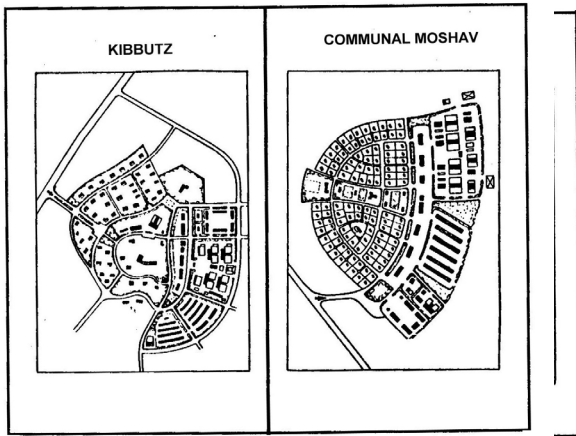
The Kibbutz "silhouette" however changed radically over the years; from that iconic image on the horizon, it expanded with each new housing neighbourhood, many two-storied, new farm buildings and industrial development, public buildings and outlying sports facilities. As the spreading city encroached on the rural domain, many Kibbutzim became suburban islands.

The Kibbutz, as the epitome of the gathered settlement, offers a clear delineation between the open landscape of fields and orchards and what is, literally, condensed within its fence and beyond its gate: Garden and Buildings or, perhaps: Buildings and Garden and it is this dichotomy which characterises the unique fabric of the collective Kibbutz: a total, flowing integration of the built and landscaped environment.

It was in the 30's that the first "Kibbutz Gardeners", some professional horticulturists, began to develop the Kibbutz Garden as a special field of planning and execution: shade, functional ground cover to obviate the need for constant manual clearing, reduction of dust and the ensured flow of cool and moist air and perhaps not least, the creation of a "new" environment in line with the "new" way of life being built. The very few Landscape Architects then in the country saw in the Kibbutz fertile ground for developing their ideas brought from Europe; the Formal garden, the 'Jardin Anglais", the accentuated contrasts between form and colour and the possibility of exploiting new material: the olive tree, the cedar and Syrian pine, the palm and the wide range of indigenous bush and scrub which could be adapted to create large scale and small scale spatial effects.

However, it was the introduction of lawn grass which enabled the creation of continuity and the ground against which all other configuration was made possible. Thus the lawn became the river or lagoon, on which the built and landscaped Kibbutz was set out, crisscrossed by paths, embellished by sculpture and contained within the confines of the built environment; graded from the public domain right up to the "private" garden leading to the apartment or the play yard of the children's house.

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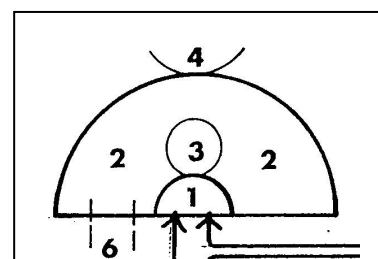
Production

In the early days of the commune – the kvutza - the farm buildings and facilities were part of the "Yard" layout, forming a closed system. It was Kaufmann who abandoned it and in stages created the kibbutz paradigm which separated the production area from the community zone in a way which nevertheless preserved the unity of the whole as a single communal entity.

This production zone was divided according to the various branches: livestock - dairy, poultry, sheep, etc. with their attendant storage for fodder, silage and grain, services – garages, implements, joinery, metal workshop and fuel.

It was during the 40's that the first industrial branches were set up in kibbutzim, not without some opposition from those that saw agriculture as the basic ethos of the kibbutz movement. In the 60's, the first "Guest Houses" were opened as tourist facilities and the enterprise became widespread.

Epilogue

Today, nearly twenty years after the Planning Departments were closed and after years of trying to be a kibbutz architect/planner, I look around me with mixed feelings. Most (ex) Kibbutzim, totally privatised, have divided their communal housing into tiny "private" plots; their communal institutions are closed or leased to outside contractors and "New housing Estates" in the hands of a new generation which considers Kibbutz ideas outdated, if not quaint…

But the dream of a dignified life outside the confines of the city, in harmony with nature, fully involved in production, in its society, its culture and welfare, remained. The dream began to be realised with the formulation of the Garden City idea, before and after World War One, which played its part in creating a suburbia with its ability to supply to part of' the urban population conditions similar to those of the original dream.

Yet true urban alternatives are not created by the planning and building of Arcadian Suburbs, efficient and pretty though they may be. The basis of every attempt at creating a true alternative to the capitalist city is the creation of a <u>community structure</u>, which will determine the form and function of the settlement, quarter, neighbourhood, housing block etc. The levels of co-operation are many and varied, but without a defined and agreed co-operative and democratic infrastructure, there will never be a community that is an alternative to the contingent population concentrations of today.

Some years ago when visiting the Shaker village at Hancock, Massachusetts USA, I was deeply touched by the simplicity, the total integration of form and function, the modesty of expression, and the beauty of the whole as a reflection of the perfection of the separate

parts. Here was no "style" no "fashion" just a true expression of good applied design and good building, combined with an overall and coherent community pattern, proof of its very reason-for-being and belief in its purpose on earth. [4]

The early kibbutz, during its heroic period, reflected some of these characteristics and pointed the way to a possible and special kibbutz form. Success brought in outside fashions in tune with the newly found life- style. Perhaps the need to reassess our real potential will lead to a creative re-evaluation of our priorities which, in turn, give new meaning and importance to the truism "How we live is how we build". Politically conscious communities everywhere can still respond to the joy and the hope expressed in the Shaker cry: "Leap and shout, ye living building!"

The Kibbutz Planning Documentation Research Project

During the last decade of their activity, the planning departments of both the movements began to micro-film material, mainly to save on storage space. To save money, only structural and services plans were copied in consideration of future changes and possible additions to the buildings; architectural plans were, on the whole, not preserved on film. The original files were then sent to the Kibbutz and this was duly noted. No further interest was taken in what happened to them.

Some specific files containing sketches and other documentation were transferred to the Kibbutz Archives at Yad Tabenkin and Yad Yaari, such as the work of Bikeles and Mestechkin.

With the closure of the Planning Departments the micro-film archives and catalogues were transferred to "A.B. Planners Co-operative" as their successor and are used whenever the need arises. However, nearly all material not directly pertaining to the actual built product, was destroyed, or at best, also sent to its Kibbutz.

The extensive library of slides and photographs collated by Emanuel Tal in the Takam Department was partly sent to A.B.Planners and some to Yad Tabenkin; all Artzi Department albums were transferred to Yad Yari.

Over the years, correspondence and administration files were periodically stored in the respective movement archives and these are being currently collated in the two main archives: Takam at Yad Tabenkin and Artzi at Yad Yaari, which also contain material pertaining to their movement's settlement and planning policy as well as their relationship to their Planning Departments.

In the mid 90's I realized that the "Architecture of the Kibbutz" in its wider sense, was in real danger of being lost unless it was to be documented and narrated. What started out to be a project limited to the "Planning Departments", soon expanded to include the story of Kibbutz Planning. With the support, mainly of the JNF Documentation Department and other bodies, I was able to sustain over ten years of collecting, cataloguing, scanning and documenting material relevant to "Architecture of the Kibbutz" from 1910, with the founding of Dagania and up to the closure of the Planning Departments in 1990.

To date, (October 2008) the project comprises two archives and the book "*Neither Rural nor Urban* - The Architecture of the Kibbutz", at present only in Hebrew:

    1. The Documentation Archive

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[4] Hayden, Dolores – *"Seven American Utopias"* MIT Press 1976

- Fully computerized archive of documents, writings, articles, protocols and other relevant material pertaining to the planning and the architecture of the Kibbutz, allowing 'search and find' across all categories.

- Each item is reviewed and the collected, itemized and indexed reviews form the backbone of the documentation project.

- The documentation archive contains over 500 revues pertaining to more than 1500 items.

2. "The Kibbutz Album"

- A fully computerised collection of photos, plans, illustrations, diagrams etc. pertaining to the planning and the architecture of the Kibbutz, allowing 'search and find' across all categories.

- Each item is fully documented: place, subject, architect, department, period as well as a full description of the subject.

- The album contains over 7000 fully categorized items, arranged in subject galleries based on "Portfolio" by Extensis.