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Integrated rural heritage landscapes: The case of agricultural cooperative settlements and open space in Israel

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1. Introduction: approaches to conservation of rural heritage landscape and open space

Israel is a small and densely populated country with limited land resources. The present national attitude towards development and its derived planning approach are urban biased, based on the development within 'urban fabrics' (National Outline Plan 35). This poses a serious threat to the continued existence of a rich unique cultural heritage in the rural space and its derived components. Under these conditions, the rural cooperative settlements, which represent unique settlement models and are therefore highly valued cultural heritage assets, are under internal and external pressure to undergo transformation. This process includes physical and demographic expansion based on new neighbourhoods, which will affect the nature of the rural settlements and may impact on their heritage values.

The aim of his paper is to consider adoption of a different planning approach by the planning authorities. The alternative approach would integrate rural heritage landscapes, agricultural lands and valued rural fabrics that deserve conservation, as well as open space that has been designated for preservation in the current national and regional outline plans, based on their natural and aesthetic value, importance as a buffer zone between built-up areas and potential recreational uses. The proposed approach may provide a planning response to the future status of the rural space, by facilitating designation and management of its components and their derived heritage assets.

In recent years, there has been increasing perception of rural areas worldwide as a part of the overall spatial open space system (Draft National Landscapes Typology, 1999; Eetvelde and Antrop, 2005; Fleischman and Feitelson, 2007; Maruani and Amit-Cohen, 2007; Stern, 2010). This conception evolved in response to development pressures that have increased since the last decades of the twentieth century, when large tracts of open space and natural landscape resources were consumed, creating irreversible changes in the rural countryside. These development trends also threaten heritage assets that are embedded in the agricultural space, as well as the natural attributes and resources that exist in non-agricultural open landscapes with their ecological, environmental and social amenities (Alanen and Melnick, 2000; Kaplan et al., 2011).

While the trends described above characterize, to varying rates, developed and developing countries worldwide, they are particularly noticeable in Israel for two main reasons. First, Israel experienced an intense demographic increase in the 1990s, due to mass immigration of about one million people, mainly from the former Soviet Union. This trend, coupled with a relatively high natural growth rate, led to increased conversion of land resources for housing and employment purposes at the expense of open spaces and agricultural lands. Moreover, in light of the potential use of the land under pressure for agricultural activities and the limited land resources in Israel, the conflict and competition between various land uses have been particularly intense in this country.

Second, Israel has a unique structure of rural settlements, especially cooperative settlement types as kibbutzim and moshavim (plural forms of 'kibbutz' and 'moshav'), which together account for just over 80% of all rural settlements. The kibbutz was originally based on communal property, where members had no private property but shared the work and the profits of some collective agricultural and industrial enterprises. Although this system has undergone some changes towards privatization, the ownership of the properties remains communal and profits are shared equally, or by seniority (years of being a kibbutz member). The moshav is based on family farms that operate their farms and personal property individually. It is characterized by equal allocation of land and means of production, based on natural conditions and income potential. Holdings include a built-up plot and agricultural plots, which are legally inseparable. The multi-purpose co-operative organization originally handled joint purchasing and marketing, the

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underwriting of individual loans, assistance in times of crisis, and management of municipal affairs. This is not the case today.

These types of settlement are distinguished by ideological, social and structural characteristics, which are tangibly expressed in their spatial organization and built assets (Amit-Cohen, 2006, 2011; Feinmesser, 1984; Kahana, 2011; Kliot, 1980). Their significance for cultural heritage, in both discrete tangible assets, such as public facilities, agricultural structures, tree avenues and groves, as well as their overall spatial organization reflect a unique combination of principles, values and lifestyle (Applebaum and Sofer, 2012). Such unique cultural heritage entities based on the historical settlement of the land deserve special attention and should be considered for conservation in the face of progressing development.

There are some difficulties to implement conservation perception into the planning system when dealing with the development path of the rural space. Planners and preservationists may successfully work together in urban areas, mainly in the conservation of historic neighbourhoods, as long as the two groups encourage solutions that offer a balance between old and new. Thus, a neighbourhood's historical values must be weighed against (a) economic development needs and associated land-use changes and (b) the preferences of both the current population and intended newcomers (Amit-Cohen, 2005; Chalana, 2016; McCabe and Gould, 2016).

In comparison, such cooperation may be difficult to attain in the case of cultural heritage assets in the rural space, which is intertwined with issues regarding open landscapes and natural resources (Adams, 1997). This linkage may lead to identification of an integrated fabric distinguished by visual, social, cultural and economic properties that are to be preserved as whole heritage landscape entities (Domon, 2011; Grenville, 2014; Gulickx et al., 2013; Kaplan et al., 2011; Primdahl et al., 2013). In 1999, a classification of rural landscapes was developed in the UK, based on the European Landscape Convention. It assigned considerable weight to cultural heritage assets (e.g., settlement patterns, farm types, field patterns, agricultural facilities, water towers, fences and monuments that represent historical events), in contrast to former approaches that primarily stressed the physical-ecological attributes of the landscape (Draft National Landscapes Typology, 1999). This classification method was driven by the UK Countryside Agency's desire to preserve the character of England as a land of rural landscapes. The agency argued that the rural character would promote tourism and strengthen the affinity of the population with the country and its landscapes, thus leading to greater public involvement in their conservation (Swanwick, 2002).

In a similar process, the US National Parks Authority also classified open spaces in which nature reserves embodied cultural heritage properties, emphasizing both the historical dimension and landscape characteristics (Birnbaum, 1994). This classification was based on the 1992 decision of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee to add a new definition, 'cultural landscape', to its earlier document regarding world heritage sites. (Charter of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972). Thus, cultural landscape refers to the integration of natural landscapes and human cultural creation, and also expresses the concept that natural landscape serves as the background and inspiration for cultural properties (Fowler, 2003). Cultural landscapes reflect the evolvement of human society and settlement and the manner in which these are affected by the physical environment (Birnbaum, 1994). The 1992 decision endowed these properties with a new status and encouraged their protection.

Increased pressure on land resources, accompanied by decreased agricultural activity and a shift to multifunctional space (Wilson, 2010), led to concern regarding the impending disappearance of vernacular assets in the rural space (Stern, 2010). Jackson, one of the greatest researchers of American history and heritage, did not restrict himself to discussing the solitary heroic asset but expanded his work to encompass vernacular landscapes and assets as well as their symbolism. In his book, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, Jackson (1997) called for conservation of the characteristics and components of vernacular cultural properties, their frequency and commonness notwithstanding. In order to reinforce awareness of the importance of vernacular assets, UNESCO prepared a special international treaty for such heritage and issued guidelines for the preservation of vernacular assets (Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage, 1999).

When cultural heritage items or heritage entities are located in or adjacent to quality open space, they form a heritage landscape fabric that links the natural environment and the historic-socio-cultural characteristics. The English Heritage Organization has referred to such a fabric as 'an historic environment' or—in the rural space – 'a rural historic environment', reflecting the holistic perception of heritage landscape fabric, where cultural components add distinction to the open natural landscape (Draft National Landscapes Typology 1999; Grenville, 2014). However, an integrated planning approach for conservation of this unique combined landscape has not yet been developed.

Conservation of natural and cultural heritage landscapes is currently perceived as an indispensable part of sustainable development (Stephenson, 2008). However, in contrast to the conservation of natural landscapes and open spaces, which has already become customary (Beagan and Dolan, 2015; Maruani and Amit-Cohen, 2007), approaches to the conservation of the cultural heritage properties surrounded by the nature reserves are still evolving (Fish et al., 2003). Moreover, natural and cultural heritage properties are rarely considered for common management, even when both are closely linked within a landscape and could be conceptualized as inseparable (Agnoletti, 2014). Those that are managed separately are often based upon separate legislations and institutional structures (Speed et al., 2012). In addition, even when planning addresses both natural and cultural heritage in a given area, the heritage assets are treated as individual items within the open landscape (Yahner et al., 1995), thus disregarding the potential synergistically increased value of the heritage landscape fabric. Moreover, natural and cultural landscapes involve such common values as continuity, stability or aesthetics, and are perceived as important factors of both quality of life and the environmental experience. Similar functions, representative rather than economic, have contributed to a rising demand for natural and cultural landscapes (Alanen and Melnick, 2000; Swanwick, 2002).

It might be argued that we live in an urban society that must function in a rapidly changing world. In order to cope with changes, we seek a landscape that represents continuity and security, imbued with a sense of belonging, or landscapes and assets representing a familiar past (Carter-Park and Coppack, 1994). Accordingly, communities are prepared to invest in their landscapes and heritage assets, restrict development within these areas, and thus protect them and preserve their uniqueness.

As early as 1980, Rowntree and Conkey (1980) argued that open spaces, nature reserves and landscape remnants are, for all intents and purposes, consumer products that can be developed and adapted for the needs of society. At the same time, their testimony to past events contributes to the vigour of society, thus entitling them to protection. Von Haaren (2002), who focused on open spaces and nature reserves, also argued that these landscapes no longer represent just a natural occurrence. Their status has changed and they are now perceived as compensating for values that were discarded by a society that has become increasingly urban-materialistic. Open space containing cultural heritage assets or adjoining a heritage complex, such as rural texture, fields and