

## The Movement for Israeli Urbanism

Rethink Cities. Rethink Green. Rethink Zionism.

Green Zionism is the dream of Israel as an environmentally sustainable Jewish homeland. At the **Movement for Israeli Urbanism**, we envision an Israel of thriving cities surrounded by thriving nature, an Israel in which human development achieves the highest quality of life for residents as well as environmental responsibility. Yet, protecting the natural environment by focusing on nature is not enough. To realize this dream, **Israel must change policy and planning practice addressing cities and towns – the built environment.**

### The Background

Israel's greatest challenge since 1948 was to settle massive waves of immigrants – to give them a home and to jumpstart a country. In this goal, Israel was successful beyond anyone's expectations. Israel is now home to over 7 million people living in 220 urban towns and cities and approximately 800 agricultural settlements.

### Why Can't This Continue?

Urban development on open spaces in Israel has run unchecked for too long.

- 92% of the population lives in towns and cities. Most of these are sprawling settlements, not economically self-sufficient. Their community and commercial centers are failing.
- Lacking maintenance and investment, city centers across Israel are left to decay. They are unable to compete with the investment in urban expansion on open spaces.
- Sprawling developments require more land, more roads, and more cars even while the town and city centers show signs of severe neglect and quality of life suffers.

This unnecessary sprawl is as detrimental to the natural environment as it is to the cities themselves:

- Pollution levels in Israel double every 10 years
- 70% of wells along the coastal aquifer fail to meet international environmental standards<sup>i</sup>
- Israel is ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in the world in total density and has one of the lowest ratios of open space per person. However, most towns and cities lack the density needed to become vibrant and successful.

Israel's built area in its existing cities is enough to support the population and future growth, if only it would be developed and maintained effectively. Instead, urban sprawl in Israel leads to economic and social polarization, waste of resources, and pollution that affects the health and well-being of residents.

## The Green Challenge

Israel's modern challenge is to provide a high quality of life for her residents and a welcoming home for the Jewish people through sustainable cities and towns, while preserving the land and its treasures for the generations to come. Creating a policy to protect the natural environment is crucial. However, even the most comprehensive environmental policy will only be successful if supported by compact, quality cities.

## MIU Mission

The **Movement for Israeli Urbanism** believes that true environmental responsibility requires a holistic approach – the understanding that concern for quality of urban life and concern for the natural environment are two sides of the same green coin.

- Compact, quality urban development reduces the need for new development on open lands, which are scarce
- Walk-able city design and efficient public transportation reduce pollution and promote resident health.
- Strengthening of Israel's periphery and development towns through sustainable renewal of their centers avoids unnecessary new development – and the accompanying environmental damage

Cities that people love are cities where the streets are lively and walk-able, where conveniences and diversions are close by, and where public transportation is efficient and accessible. These same cities support protection of the natural environment by increasing efficiency in building and transportation and by reducing energy waste. In order to improve the quality of life in Israel, while contributing to the global sustainability effort, **MIU** promotes quality urban living based on compact, quality and sustainable urban environments.

Through urban planning reform, the **Movement for Israeli Urbanism** is working for the Green Zionist dream – flourishing Israeli cities bordered by flourishing natural treasures.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.greenzionism.org/content/view/12/27/>