

An "Investment Portfolio" in Agents for Change

The Challenge

There are no two camps of "good" and "bad" in the planning and development process.

City planners in the public and private sectors, architects, engineers, demographers, economic consultants and lawyers, all of them together create the plans that transform the urban environment and countryside in Israel. The values guiding those plans are those that they have learned in their formal education, and in years of professional practice. Unfortunately these values, and the process that they determine, lead today to the damaging trends that we observe: suburban sprawl, abandonment of city centers and older neighborhoods, a preference for new development over renovation and reconstruction, and a car-oriented instead of a human-oriented environment. Many planners are not aware of the negative consequences of existing patterns of development, or they may not be aware that alternatives exist. Many would like to practice differently, but feel that the existing planning system does not allow it to happen, and are tired of battling for a "Quixotic" cause. Everyone is busy in conflicts between various interest holders, and the results reflect the values of those who happen to be strong. The public interest and public space usually end on the losing side.

MIU's challenge is to lead the necessary changes to the planning system by tying between the humanistic and environmental values that are represented by the environmental movement in Israel, and the various professionals and decision makers engaged in city planning and determining planning policy. We believe such a change is possible, and will lead to adopting better policy.

Creating Agents for Change

The way to respond to this challenge is to create groups of "agents for change" among planners, public and private, and among students of the various professions engaged in planning. These agents will internalize humanistic and environmental values in their day to day activity and decisions. Today, 18 months after our foundation, we know that planners and professionals that have joined us are already practicing differently. They are aiming for humane and environmental values in their work, and attempt to have those recognized by clients and authorities. Each one of these agents causes other professionals working with him to look at other possibilities and the advantages of creating humane and sustainable environments.

In order to build this network we have to address three sectors:

- Students in the planning professions – these are the future professionals in their formative stage, at which it is easier to invest them with the appropriate values and approaches.
- Professionals in private practice – they are the ones who are actually doing the professional work. The future of the environment in Israel is to a large degree in their hands.
- Professionals working in planning authorities (local authorities and national government) – they are the ones that monitor and guide planning, by demanding better; they can lead to positive change.

The Means: MIU's activities

1. **Congress for Urban Renaissance, Haifa to be held in November 2006** – Our first congress attracted more than 350 planners, among them about 100 students from various architecture schools. It began the formation of hundreds of "agents for change". This year we intend to follow it with another 2 day Congress that will consolidate our existing network and expand in the North, and more students. The center of discussion will be this time on how to **bring about change**, and will introduce the idea of the "toolbox" below.
2. **"Toolbox" for planning sustainable communities in Israel** – In the last two years we have refined our charter, which spells out the principles of humane, harmonious and sustainable development in Israel. The "toolbox" is a metaphor for the set of regulations, guidelines, examples and case studies necessary to the "agents of change" to show how one can **implement these principles** in different planning contexts and scales. We have begun the effort of building such a guidebook, and it will serve as the basis for courses, presentations, and in future, hopefully regulations and codes. – *First stage to be presented in November 2006.*
3. **Good Urbanism Exhibition, June 2006** – The aim of the exhibition is to expand awareness of MIU's principles, and show projects that implement them properly. We expect this year's exhibition to be larger than last year and to enjoy wider publicity. Together with the exhibition, selected **student's** projects will be shown, and two evening seminars with students will be held. **The exhibition makes visible the "agents" work**, and builds their pride and **self esteem**. It allows students to be exposed to good models, and allows potential employers to see their work. It creates an opportunity for discussion and debate on MIU's principles, and the best ways to implement them.
4. **Introductory Seminars** – These are intended for **planners in government and public agencies**. They are intended to introduce MIU's principles and tools to this wide and important audience, to promote "**agents of change within the government**" and to create a potential client base for the Urban Renaissance Course. – *We intend to do 4 seminars from June to November 2006.*
5. **Planning the Urban Renaissance Course** – We intend to build the curriculum of a professional advancement course to be included in the curricula for professional advancement of planning professionals and architects. This course will accompany the creation of "the toolbox", and teach it to different professional audiences. – *It is planned to be given for the first time in spring 2007 under the auspices of the Center for Urban and Regional Research, Technion.*

Expected Outcome

The clearest indicator of the success of our efforts is the number and diversity of our members. They are our "**agents for change**". We want to increase their number to 400 by the end of 2007. To reach those numbers we hope to have at least 500 visitors at the exhibition, and 400 registered to attend the conference. We hope to see by 2007, a change in plans being submitted, in students' projects, and a wider discussion of the changes needed to development in Israel. A measure of our ability to affect policy will be the adoption of the "toolbox" for Urban Renaissance as recommendations by cities and public agencies for planning that they initiate.