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Planning systems throughout the world are rooted in the modern, western-oriented worldview and the rationale of liberal nationalism. In this view, society consists of relatively equal and free individuals, operating in a fairly free market, while state intervention in people's lives and in the economy is only required in extreme cases such as market failure, as with urban and regional planning, and is conducted via top-to-bottom regulations. However is this modern planning system suitable for traditional, family-based societies, in particular the Arab towns and villages in Israel where social codes are derived from ancient tribal and familial customs that exist in addition to the national order?

Nurit Alfasi, in her article *Doomed to Informality: Familial vs. modern planning in Arab towns in Israel*, in *Planning Theory and Practice* argues that Middle Eastern cities were built by their inhabitants rather than by a government or municipal planner, meaning that the socio-spatiality of Arab cities in the Middle East is anchored in the Muslim tradition, in regard to both the organization of space and procedure tradition. Land tenure in traditional cities is based on familial and tribal ownership, and the structure of many cities still expresses the tribal and extended family divisions, impacting accessibility to houses, commercial business and public spaces needed for modern planning. This is affecting planning and building in many Middle-Eastern towns as they are struggling to combine modern planning with the values of familial societies; ensuing tensions between the individual and the central authorities. This is because modern planning disrupts implementation of the old codes, and the traditional familial order disallows the adoption of modern forms. These complex relations between modern, western-oriented planning and the traditional, familial-based spatiality of Middle-Eastern urbanism are leading to gray development of the Arab towns in Israel.

However, Nurit Alfasi indicates a new 'urban code' should be adopted; she argues that it might be possible to enhance or formalise the Arab town if some of the positions and tools of modern planning were less rigid and the relevant features of the familial structure were taken into account. It is suggested this 'urban code' would need to be adopted as the legal base for regulating planning, instead of the statutory outline plan. She argues that the code should take maintenance of social codes of traditional, family-based societies such as visual and acoustic privacy in living spaces into account and a hierarchy of public spaces should be defined. Since public and commercial uses are located on main roads, those urban routes must include the necessary facilities for public activity. The code must also set a minimum distance or effective barrier between industries and residences in order to control environmental pollution. The author concludes that this could provide a new beginning, an answer to the complex problems besetting the Arab towns today.

A clash of cultures: applying modern planning systems in the Middle East

Written by Australian Business

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