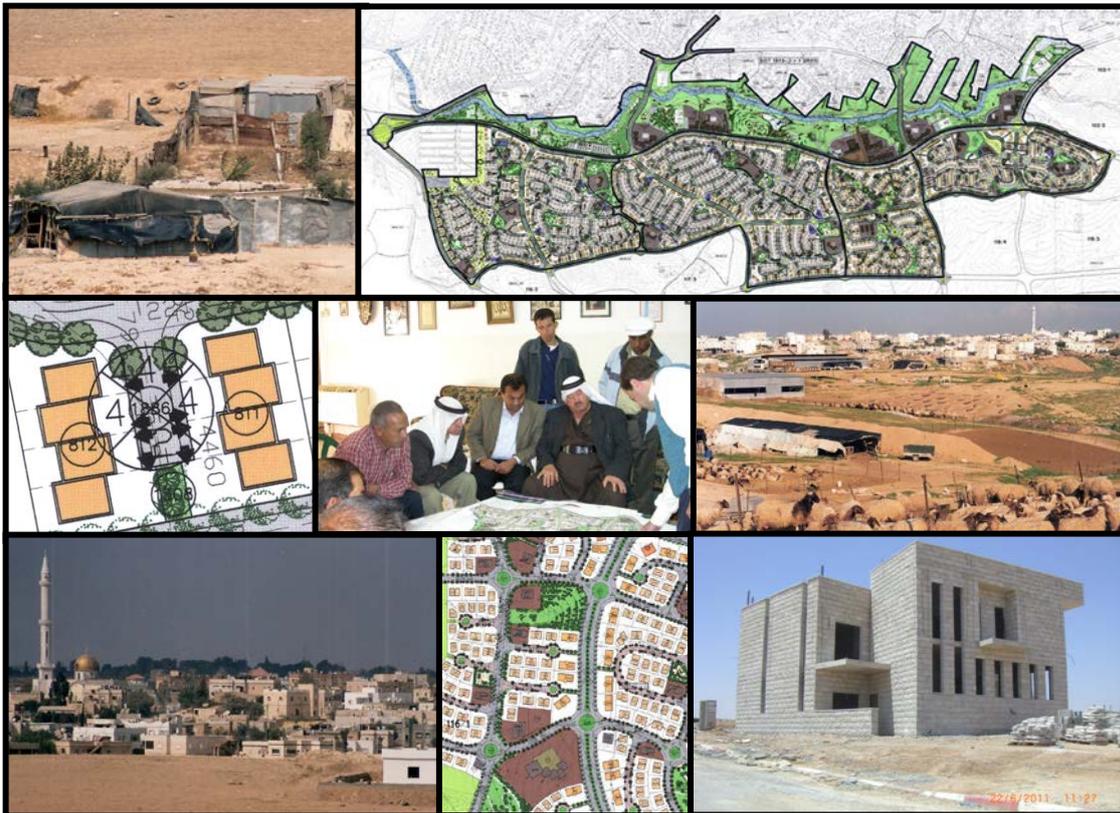


Rahat

Planning the Largest Bedouin City in the World - Coexistence in the Middle East



ISOCARP Awards for Excellence 2011

First Prize in the Category "Strategic Planning"

Amos Brandeis

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The Planning Team and Credits

Planning Team

Head of planning team, urban planning and architecture

Project management (planning stages)

Project management (construction stages)

Social & Economic aspects

Landscape

Transportation & Roads

Water & Sewage

Hydrology & Drainage

Electricity

Land Surveyors

Computerized Drawings

Planners of Zone 1

Planners of Zone 2

Planners of Zone 3

Amos Brandeis - Architecture, Urban & Regional Planning Ltd.

Ludan Engineering Co. Ltd.

C.P.M Ltd.

Urbanics Ltd - Planning, Economics, and Environment

Amos Brandeis - Architecture, Urban & Regional Planning Ltd.

Braudo-Maoz Landscape Architecture Ltd.

Yaron Ari Landscape Architecture Ltd.

Mahod Ltd.

Ichud Engineering Ltd.

Eng. Yaakov Toma

Lavi-Natif Engineering & Consultants Ltd.

Eng. I. Aaharony Ltd.

Medidot Negev Engineering Ltd.

Yahav Drawings

Arch. Liora Meron, Arch. Yaron Granot and Braudo-Maoz Ltd.

Chershevski-Marash Architects Ltd.

Arch. Ari Cohen

Credits

The Administration for the advancement of the Negev Bedouins (client)

National Land Administration

Municipality of Rahat

Planning Committees (Ministry of Interior)



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Summary

The project demonstrates an innovative and comprehensive urban plan, made for and with the Bedouin community, a desert population in transition from nomadic to permanent dwellers, in a city of 50,000 people with projection to double by 2020. The prime challenges met in this project were developing a spatial urban development strategy, led to a liveable city, for indigenous people in a semi-arid climate, with high quality built environment in an urbanizing world.

The plan reinforces co-existence among Jews and Muslims, reduces conflicts and provides housing solutions in equal standards. Over the 10 years, a methodic and integrative planning process with the collaboration of dozens stakeholders, was carried out, from the structural-urban level (scale 1:10,000) through outline schemes in the new and existing fabric, up to detailed construction plans (scale 1:10) and on site development.

Through constant public participation process the peoples trust was gained, the unique needs and desires of different tribes and age groups were studied and the plans addressed them. The community developed pride of the place, ownership and belonging.

The plans emphasized the creation of one unified city, in its core the general public facilities, and "Green fingers" connecting to the depth of the residential fabric. While previous plans were tribal based, the new creates a complex urban network of streets, addressing the need of various extended family size, desires of different age groups and allowing flexibility. 9 house models were outlined to address the different needs and economical capabilities.

The plan responds to the unique cultural and social values, e.g. joint public institutions outside the neighborhoods; maintaining woman modesty; facilitating women employment; creating "Shig"s (social clubs); housing units that can accommodate polygamy. A total amount of 100 million Euros were invested in the infrastructures, while first houses in the new neighborhoods are being built.



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Description of the Project

1. Background - The Bedouins and Rahat

In the Negev Desert, southern Israel, 200,000 Muslim Bedouins live today. Historically there were mostly nomadic people, who migrated according to seasons in the Middle East; some of them were farmers who worked the desert land they lived in.

Gradually they ceased from travelling and began settling in permanent dwellings. During the 1970's seven permanent Bedouin settlements were built in the Negev desert. The largest is Rahat. Today 60% of the Bedouin population lives in permanent urban settlements, the rest live in tents, tin shads, and temporary houses in spreading throughout the desert. The transition to permanent settlements brought many changes to their lifestyle, although most are occupied in agriculture, mainly sheep and camel farming. Most observe traditional religious customs. Population growth rate is among the world's highest (6% per annum), while polygamy is in decline. The socioeconomic level of the Bedouin population is one of the lowest in Israel and unemployment rate is high. Bedouins are among one of the minority groups living in Israel, as part of the human, cultural and religious fascinating and challenging mosaic in the Middle East.

Rahat is in effect the largest Bedouin city in the world. The population today is of 50,000 and the projection for 2020 is 100,000 circa. Rahat was founded in 1972, and in 1994 it was announced a city. The original urban planning of the city was a product of it's time. It partially responded to the Bedouins needs, and created severe difficulties for the city's development in the years to follow. The city was divided into 33 segregated neighborhoods, each for a different tribe. Thus the plan reinstated the segregated tribal structure, made it difficult to develop common public services, and caused critical shortage of land for future development in neighborhoods that exhausted the land resources, while some were with non-built-up land areas that left holes.

In the absence of available land for construction in neighborhoods, the land shortage for development has caused many residents to build illegally in public spaces, by doing so denying the quality of life. This situation also caused many others to leave the boundaries of the city and build temporary dwellings outside the community, without basic services, while undermining the possibility of development plans in the area. For example 400 families settled in the area of the plan for Rahat South (the plan described further on the paper), before planning has started. For decades, since the city was established, hardly any plans were made or approved, and no significant development works were made. The distress caused in the city, together with the development of modern Jewish communities around, and other factors, led to feelings of deprivation of the Bedouin minority and tensions over the years.

Former Prime Minister Arik Sharon, a resident of the Negev, understood well the distress of the residents and the importance of dialog and the co-existence among Jews, Muslims and Christians in Israel. So he understood the importance of an initiative for a new plan for the city, its expansion, and the adopting of modern living standards. When he was elected as Prime Minister in 2001, he approved substantial public funds to be invested, and subsidies for land development in Rahat. He also got to set the cornerstone for the city's expansion before falling into a coma, in 2006.



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2. The project's components and the planning process

The project is a multidisciplinary urban plan, an integrative plan from the city's expansion urban structural level, through an area framework plan, five new local area plans, two area plans for existing neighborhoods and supervision of the first phase of construction. Our firm began working on the project 10 years ago, leading and planning it from the conceptual design stage to the completion of public infrastructure and the initial construction of houses on the ground. The scale worked on varied from the urban (1:10,000) to construction detailed (1:10).

This project is a rare case of a large scale plan, with an ongoing and contiguous process, from planning to implementation and construction, as described "in the planning books". Throughout the process, dozens of various stakeholders were partners, in shared purpose of creating a good and agreeable plan. Involved partners were such as government ministries, public authorities, planning commissions, green bodies (NGO's), social organizations which are active in the Bedouin community, local authorities, academics, specialist, etc. Throughout the project a broad and intensive public participation process was carried out, to carefully study the needs and the unique desires of the Bedouin community, to be addressed in the plan.

The main components of the plan and the planning stages:

- a) The Structural urban plan for Rahat South (derived from the municipal master-plan) defined the city's development plan policy, the new concept for the Bedouins urban settlement development, social and environmental planning principles, and the instruments to implement the plan. The plan area circa 1,000Ha, with capacity of 10,000-12,000 residential units (up to 84,000 people). Scale of 1:10,000.
- b) Area framework plan for Rahat South, the city's expansion, an area circa 700Ha, with capacity of 7,000 housing units (up to 50,000 people). The plan defined the principle urban structure, through outlining the main traffic axes, hilltop for preservation, contiguous green axes, segmentation for detailed plans, guidelines, housing density, and planning principles for welfare and public services, etc. Scale 1:5,000.
- c) Local area plans for the zones in Rahat South. Our practice planned zones 4-7 (5,600 housing units), and was also the supervising architect of zones 1-3 (1,400 housing units). To examine particular issues, which we weren't familiar with, we initiated planning workshops and meetings, in participation of specialists, planners, and residents. This was to define how to plan open public space in a Bedouin city. The wide consent that emerged as result from those workshops, brought to the planning approval process in time record in Israel for such a large plan, a year from the moment of submitting the plans to the planning authorities, and had only one specific objection. Scale 1:1250.
- d) Local area plans for 2 zones in Rahat North (the established city) - a total of 750 housing units in order to improve quality of the existing urban fabric. Scale 1:1,250 and 1:500.
- e) Accompanying the implementation of first stage in the city's expansion - Our firms' role was also the "supervision architects" in preparing the detailed plans for execution of the public infrastructure stage. In this context we prepared conceptual plans for housing units; a movie, physical models, an explanatory booklet in Arabic, etc. Scale 1:100, 1:50, 1:10.



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3. The Challenges

The challenges in a project of this kind are extraordinary and unique in numerous aspects. This is not a large and complex urban project with similar examples elsewhere. The project in its scope is a type of "every planners dream". Fortunately this dream did not turn into a nightmare dream, rather to a successful project. It would have been enough to fail on one challenge to determent the failure of the Bedouin city whole development, with implications beyond issues of planning. The main challenges in this project can be defined as follows:

- a) Promoting co-existence between Jews and Muslims - In the Negev, Muslim Bedouins live side by side with Jews. Albeit the collaboration today, there is a long history of conflict and disagreement among the population in various issues. We, as professional planners have to completely avoid political aspects. Our duty and responsibility is to understand the depth and the importance of this challenge, bridging it to create a promising peaceful co-existence in the Negev among the different communities, living in equality and in high quality of life, in settlements that successfully manage to collaborate between them
- b) Acquiring the community's trust and participation in the planning process - The Bedouins are a minority who has equal rights in Israel. Albeit this, many Bedouins hold feelings of depravation, and have complaints against the state in regard to land registration and management issues, little investment in development, absence of planning, and so on. On the other hand, many Jewish Israelis accuse the Bedouins of invading and taking over the Negev lands without organized property registration arrangement, or planning procedures. Although as planners we avoid of the right and wrongs of this arguments, and accusations, this was certainly not an ideal starting point for planning.

Creating a good plan that can answer the unique needs and desires of the Bedouin community, meant that we need their collaboration in the planning process. Through a long process of public participation initiatives, the trust between the planner and the population was gained and they felt ownership and participants in the plan. The first stage was to understand the needs and desires, and then to find the most suitable way for an integrative structure and physical plans to the city in all aspects and scales. The initiatives were aimed to allow free and open dialogue throughout the planning and implementation stages. Subsequently partly because of the public participation, the plans were approved in time record for this scale of a project. Arrangements were already made for the evacuation of almost all the 400 families who reside in the area (and recipient of lots in the new neighborhoods). Marketing the lots was successful and the construction began.

When our office was chosen for the project, I (A.B.) was invited to the city council meeting before the work began. The first sentence I was told in that meeting was "what did you plan for us? Can we see the plans?". I answered: "I haven't started to plan, I was never here before. I propose to you two alternatives: that I will study alone the characters of the place and the community, and I will sit in my office and plan what I think is suitable for you, or that we work together and make this plan in full collaboration. Either way I will be paid the same, so as far as I concern the first alternative is more economic for me, your decision." Immediately after I said this, the head of the council's opposition stood up and said "This is the first time we were ever asked how we want our children to live. We cannot let this opportunity go. I ask you all to collaborate fully with the planner." Since then till today, all along the past decade, I achieve an excellent collaboration from all. Throughout the whole planning process dozens of meetings with the public representatives, tribes, different families, college students, and other residents were held. Significant part of those meetings



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took place in neighborhood community centers ("Shig"), and in resident's homes. The difficulty of meeting women (for religious reasons) lead us to come to an agreement that we will meet the local high-school students, which included boys and girls (age 17-18), that are in fact the prime audience of the project. They will live in the new neighborhoods. We asked to meet with them without the teachers so they can speak freely, and so, through 4 hours long we heard the desires and needs of the young generation, including women. It is permitted to say that we found significant gaps between the desires of the older generation and the young one, the men and the women and among the different tribes. A Bedouin social consultant (today the vice city mayor), accompanied us throughout the process and formed a questioner to the public. We set up an information centre for the public, included an overall urban model, models of different housing, a movie, brochures, etc. The centre was opened to the public while marketing the lots.

- c) Planning for a community in transition - majority of Bedouins were in the past nomadic people, and were never in a permanent settlement, they were certainly not city dwellers. However, the young population is in fact second or third generation of urban Bedouins. Many unique characters of this community, distinguishes it from other societies. It's relationship to the tribal and family structure, attachment to the land, strict women modesty practice, farming and agriculture, etc. These unique characters could have only been learned from the people themselves, after building the trust, then trying to translate it to an urban plan to address them, within the limitation and flexibilities of the national and regional planning policy. The people in Rahat do not go through the transition process in an equal manner, and opinions about it are significantly varied among the different age groups. Allowing flexibility for the plan to accommodate this transition over time is a challenge.
- d) Creating one unified city - Rahat North (established), is in the shape of half a circle, with a clear southern boundary line since its establishment – which is the Grar river banks. Doubling of the population was made south to this line, in completion to shape of a city in a full circular. The main challenge for Rahat South plan, is creating a unified city and not to divide it into two separate cities with significant gap between them. Meeting this challenge we located the central urban park along the river and the seam line between the two parts of the city, locating the future public major institutions along the park, on both sides as was possible, and the main commerce street south to the park, that creates a meeting point.
- e) Upgrading the existing city - New plan for the public spaces, commercial façades and different neighborhoods in the established Rahat North, to achieve equality of the development quality as much as possible to the new part and create urban unification in high living standards for all.
- f) Adopting the highest and most equal planning standards – implementing the plan in accordance with the newest standards and most egalitarian, as in any other city in Israel. Although the population living in low socio-economic standards, and has had a tradition of deficient planning and development, decision makers were convinced that an overall long-term planning vision must promise suitable planning standards (e.g. allocating land for public needs, wide roads, open public space, possibility for cycle lanes, etc.).
- g) Size and complexity of the project - Throughout the years the project was the largest housing project in Israel. Beyond the unique challenges of the targeted population, its' scope and complexity is a significant challenge in itself. In particular it's geography, difficult topography, semi-arid climate, and wide range of urban systems, plots and building models. Implementation of phase 1 cost was 100 million euro.



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4. The Plans Major Principles

- a) Unified city that in its centre a park, general municipal public institutions, tourism, urban market, and the main commerce street of the city.
- b) Green links, North-South to the depth of the built environment - main axes for pedestrian activity in the new neighborhoods, connect to central park - The axes includes neighborhood parks, and most of neighborhood's public institutions (schools, mosques, kindergarten, clinics, etc.), linked together by a shaded boulevard, in a contiguous pedestrians passage from the local neighborhood focal points and the main urban park and to the general municipal institution to the existing city.
- c) Hierarchical and continuous system of open public spaces in a "semi-arid" city - suitable for the city's residents, which have low motorized level and with multiple children. In an emphasis on shade in the semi-arid climate, considering an option of future cycling paths.
- d) Emphasis on hilltops as public focal points - creating a skyline that characterizes the city in open public parks and minarets. Hilltops for the public not for private housing.
- e) Varied and complex urban systems and residential fabrics to address different desires of the population - a complex fabric of urban patterns with different sizes and character, which forms streets in a ring shape, cul-de-sac streets, small residential clusters, and regular urban streets. These to address the different desires within the community.
- f) A range of 9 different housing models to meet the different desires, family sizes, and housing mix range, while meeting the average density that was given in the master-plan - e.g. "special" single family units (with possibility for a "Shig" or guest unit), single unit lots, semi-detached, row housing, shared apartments 3-4 floors up to 6 floors (with or without commercial front). Construction responsibility by the residents who purchase the plot.
- g) Creating built urban character edge along the main urban streets - to create a sense of "city", high-rise construction (up to 6 floors) along the outlining axes, and private houses inside the clusters.
- h) Particularly large residential units to address large family size in the Bedouin community - the family core unit and regarding the phenomena of polygamy.
- i) Addressing sensitivity to maintain Bedouin women modesty – creating spatial distance from commercial uses, employment, mosques and high-schools to housing and kindergartens. Permitting construction of high fences between residential to streets and neighboring lots, and more.
- j) Employment centres for women in the heart of the residential fabric - to facilitate employment for women (craft / offices), by the particular need to be located near residential areas (maintaining modesty in the family areas and close to the children).



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Referring to the Selection Criteria and Describing the Innovation in the Project

The project demonstrates an innovative and comprehensive urban plan, made for and with the Bedouin community, a desert population in transition from nomadic to permanent dwellers, in a city of 50,000 people with projection to double by 2020. The prime challenges met in this project were developing a spatial urban development strategy, led to a liveable city, for indigenous people in a semi-arid climate, with high quality built environment in an urbanizing world.

Content

- a) Promoting co-existence among Jews and Muslims, to strengthen living in equality, harmony, and in successful collaboration between deferent communities; to moderate regional conflicts on land and management; and to respond to feelings of deprivation of an indigenous minority group.
- b) Meeting the challenge of urban planning for a community in transition from nomadic to permanent dwellers, while creating a balance between the needs and desires of the community and urban characters of a modern city.
- c) Integrative and comprehensive urban planning that addresses all aspects, from municipal level to detailed level - social, cultural, physical, environmental, economic, cultural, etc.
- d) Facilitating the population growth projection of doubling the existing city with an emphasis on creating a single unified city, planning its core centre with all general municipal public institutions, a central park and commerce, connected with "green fingers" to the depth of the built urban pattern. In parallel an upgrading of the existing city, creating physical and social plans to stimulate interaction between the two.
- e) Providing quality urban living and environment, with an emphasis on public-urban elements and addressing the community's characteristics, embedding a hierarchical and continuous system of open spaces for a predominantly children and pedestrians population.

Process

- a. Structured multi - stage planning process from municipal level (1:10,000) to construction level (1:10) and site supervision - All planning levels for new and old neighborhoods.
- b. Collaboration with policy makers and representatives of dozens of organizations in the complex planning process - Government ministries, planning committees (all level), NGOs which are active in the Bedouin community, academic specialists, etc.
- c. Decade long working with the Bedouin community, while gaining an unprecedented trust and collaboration, which lead to agreement on the plans, and creation of a sense of ownership and belonging. Collaboration with all age groups and tribes, in various methods.

Innovation

- a. Building successful mutual trust and collaboration with an indigenous community.
- b. Creation of a new urban structure for Bedouins (former nomads), that addresses the unique cultural and social values of the community, in all planning levels of public development and housing - urban, zone, neighborhood, cluster, and house, e.g. joint public institutions outside the neighborhoods to avoid "family ownership", maintaining women modesty, employment centers for women, "Shigs", housing units that enable polygamy, etc.
- c. Introduction of new typology of housing for the Bedouins - row houses, and shared residential buildings. Using land prices to direct the demand of the different models.
- d. Planning open spaces respective to climate and population characters - hierarchic, diverse, continuous system, with shaded pedestrian boulevards, to link among all public amenities.



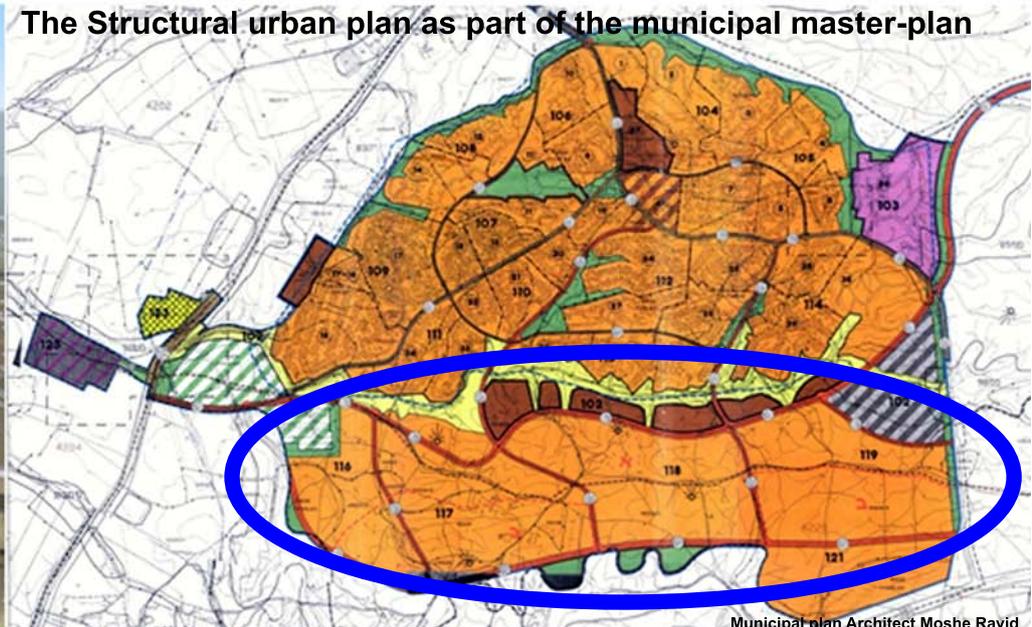
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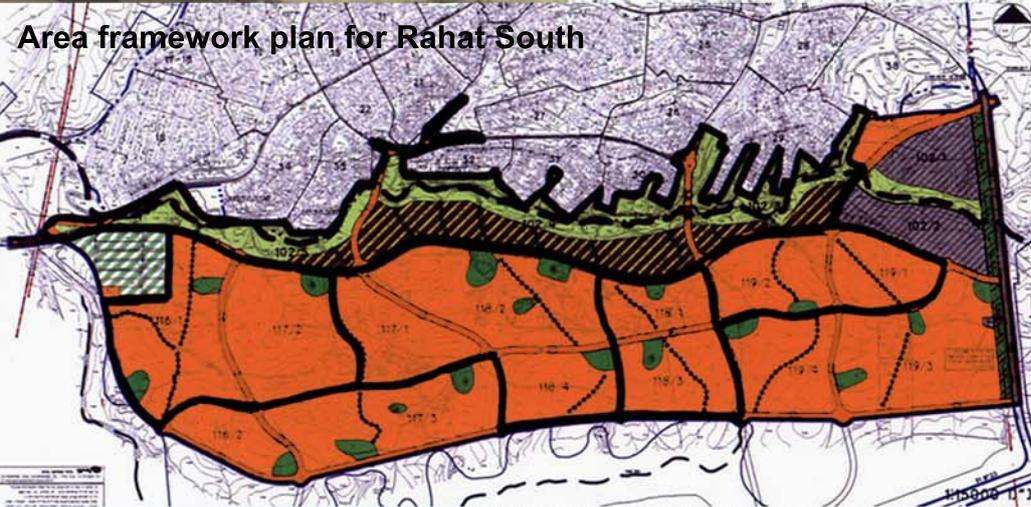
The Projects' Components



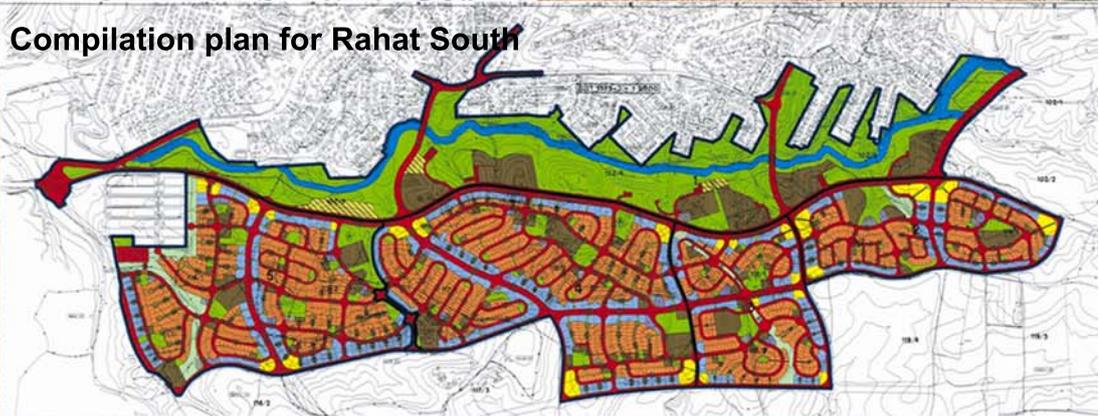
The Structural urban plan as part of the municipal master-plan



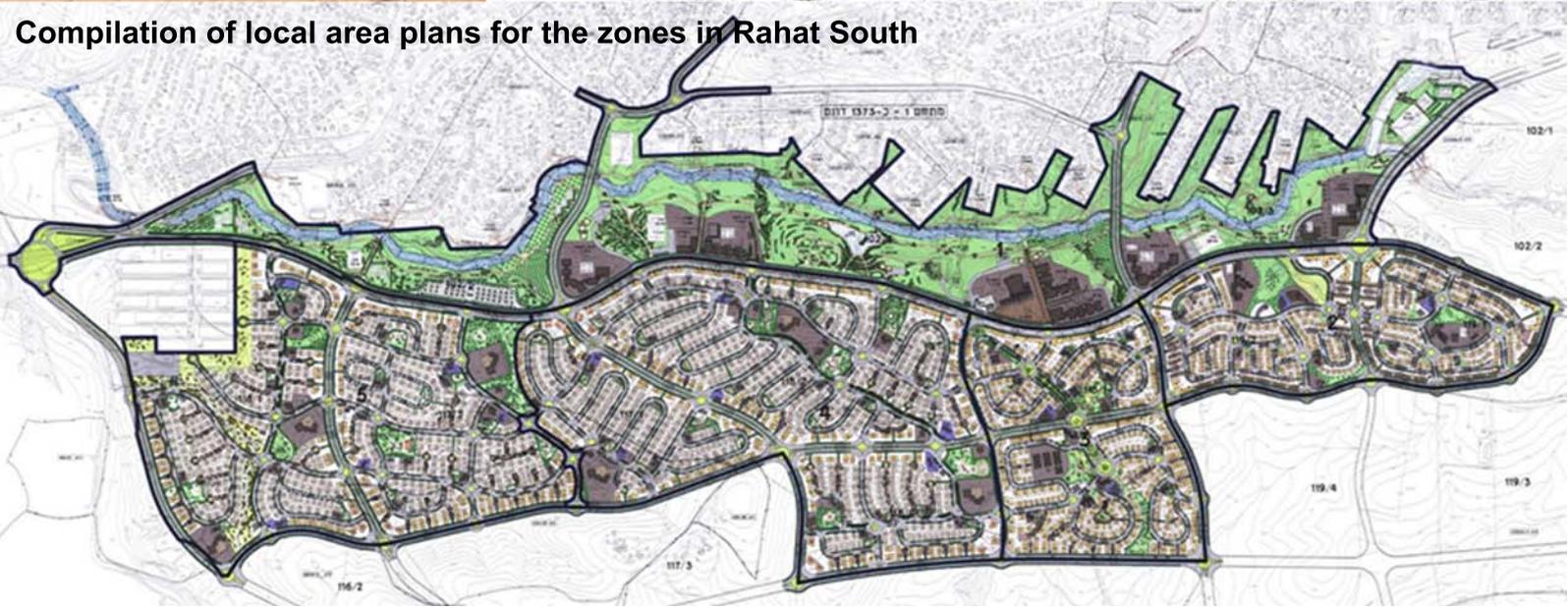
Municipal plan Architect Moshe Ravid



Compilation plan for Rahat South



Compilation of local area plans for the zones in Rahat South



The Projects' Components



Approval of the plans by the planning committee



PM Arik Sharon sets Rahat South cornerstone



Marketing the plan



Marketing the plots



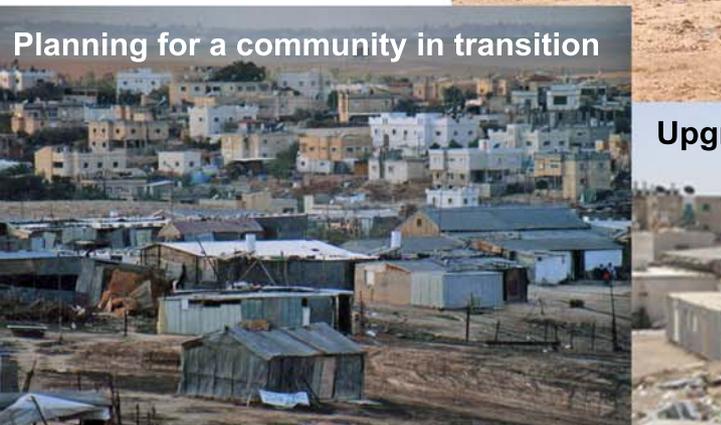
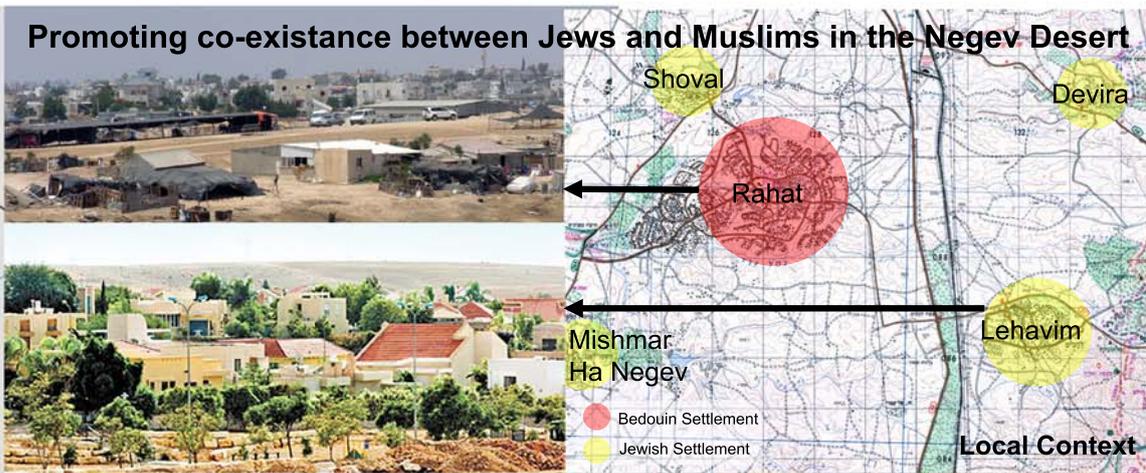
Local area plans for 2 zones in Rahat North



Accompanying the implementation of first stage in the city's expansion

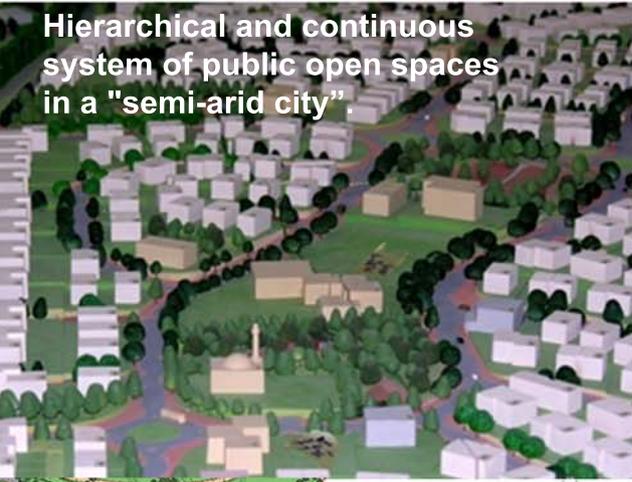


Challenges



The Plans Major Principles

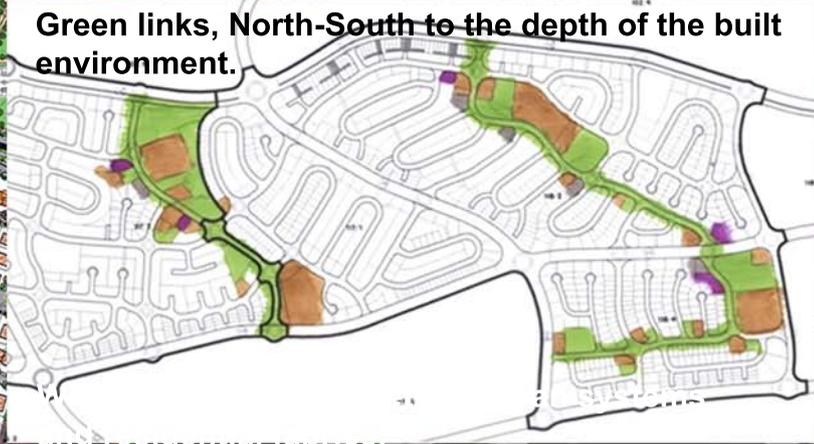
Hierarchical and continuous system of public open spaces in a "semi-arid city".



Unified city that in its centre a park, general municipal public institutions, tourism, urban market, and the main commerce street of the city



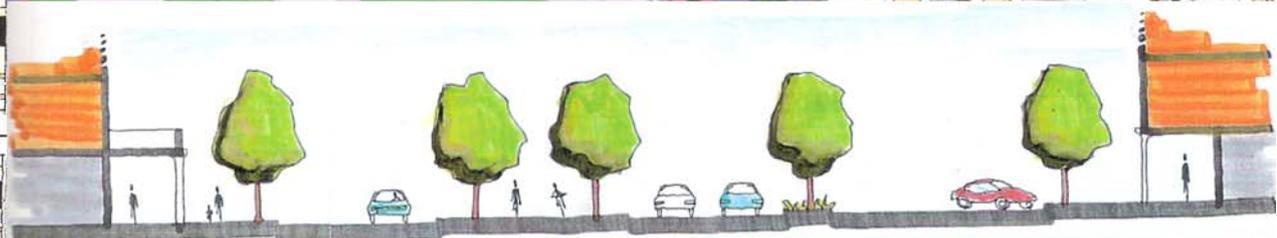
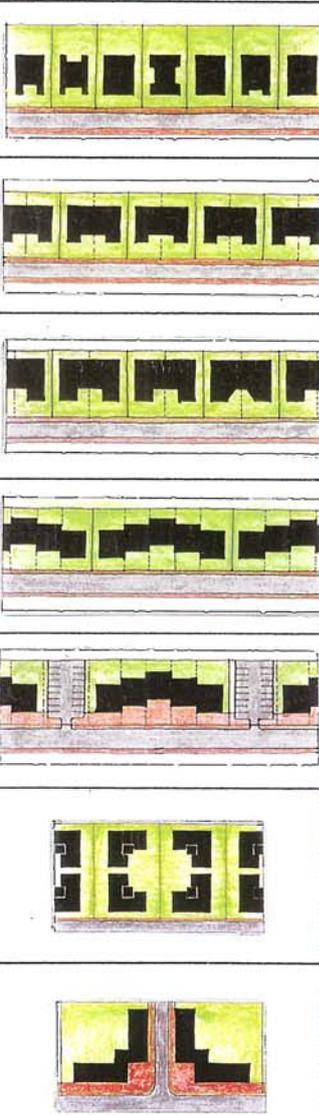
Green links, North-South to the depth of the built environment.



Emphasis on hilltops as public focal points



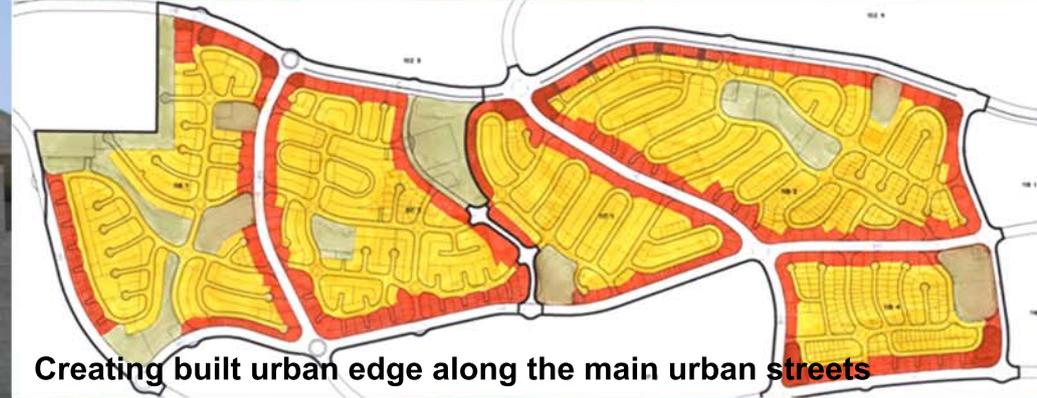
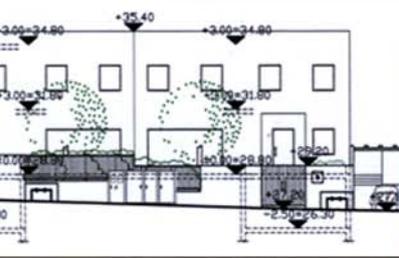
Varied and complex urban systems and residential fabrics to address different desires of the population



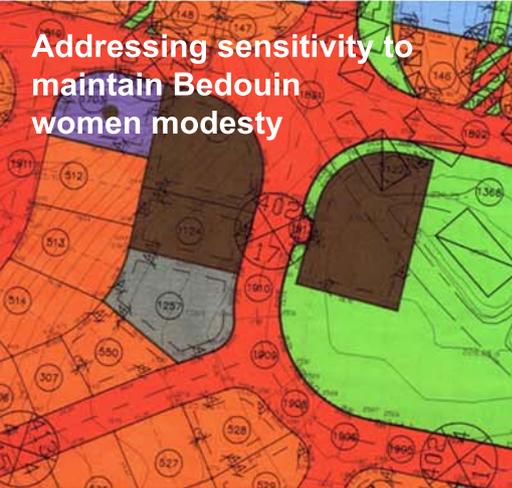
The Plans Major Principles



A range of 9 different housing models to meet the different desires, family sizes, and housing mix range, while meeting the average density that was given in the master-plan



Creating built urban edge along the main urban streets



Addressing sensitivity to maintain Bedouin women modesty



Employment centers for women in the heart of the residential fabric