

In the Planning Field

In situ Urbanization in Arab Townships in Israel: Are there Lessons for Reducing the cost of Housing?

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Traditional Arab villages in Israel were made up of simple, some ancient, buildings. Their residents practiced subsistence farming, some commerce and a traditional way of life which continued after independence. Their unique urbanization took place in-situ, without migration to urban centers, accumulating a treasure of people, skills, initiatives and savings locally. Population grew tenfold, hundreds of thousands of good quality dwellings were built with infrastructure, public services and businesses. This was achieved mainly by self-help building on family-owned land including initiation, planning, management, minimal mediation, partial participation in staged construction and with the retention of buildings in family hands. Avoiding the speculative capital value of residential building land significantly reduced the cost of housing. Supply of family owned land for housing is a necessary condition for this process and its potential savings, but it is diminishing and new housing solutions will be required. General housing policy can benefit from this experience through ways to remove capital gains considerations from the housing market, mainly by leasing housing land to users and retaining its ownership and speculative capital gains value in the hand of the public to be used also as stabilization of the economy. Furthermore, reduction of the scale of housing developments and deferring stages of housing expansion and completion could reduce initial housing costs.

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