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Towards Recognizing the Bedouin Localities? Beersheba Metropolitan Planning vs. the Goldberg Commission

Oren Yiftachel

The deep distress experienced by Bedouin Arab localities around Beersheba, and their long-standing neglect by planning authorities is one of Israel's most severe planning problems. This paper outlines the main points of a submission to the Goldberg Commission appointed in 2007 to resolve the Bedouins' land and planning questions. The document summarizes several years of working on this issue at the Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages (RCUV). Following a brief description of the contemporary planning context, the paper draws on theoretical and comparative references to land and planning issues among indigenous groups, with special reference to Australian Aborigines. The paper then analyzes the planning problems and privations among the Negev Bedouins as deriving from previous failed and discriminatory state plans.

In its main part the paper outlines possible directions for resolving the Bedouin issue. It claims that the recognition of the Bedouins historical land rights is an essential foundation for a planning solution. Once the land issue is settled, the planning of Bedouin localities should rely on the equality principle and apply the standards used in the neighboring Jewish non-urban sector. The document argues that basing future planning on the key principles of equality and right to culture, can lead to a fair solution and receive the legitimacy of local communities. Such an approach can form a major step towards resolving this conspicuous and painful planning problem, and boost the reconciliation process between Bedouin Arabs and the Israeli state.

Keywords: Beduin, Israel land policy, Indigenous peoples, Aboriginal rights

Prof. Oren Yiftachel teaches urban planning and political geography at Ben-Gurion University, Beersheba, and has written extensively on planning theory and the planning of ethnic conflict regions. Among his books: "Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine" (2006, PennPress), "Israelis in Conflict" (ed, 2004, Sussex Academic Press, and "The Power of Planning" (ed. 2002). Yiftachel is an active member in several civil society organizations, working for social equity, planning rights and Arab-Jewish equality.

