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THE POLITICS OF PLANNING ROADS WITHIN INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES: THE CASE OF THE ISRAELI BEDOUIN

Abstract:

Recent decades have witnessed intensive discussion in planning literature on gray space. From a geographical perspective it revolves primarily around gray settlements. We raise two issues of planning relevance: first, gray spacing may serve established planning processes despite their inherent contradiction; second, while roads are spatial entities, their analysis in planning theory and practice literature is marginal.

Our research deals with Road 31 in the northern Negev and Bedouin unrecognized gray space villages. Recently the state has initiated a massive road upgrade project but state planning officials, planning firms and Israel Road Company did not pursue any public participation of the Bedouin who refused to evacuate their places and cooperate. The IRC hired therefore an informal "expropriation team" with profound acquaintance with Bedouin unique indigenous culture, society and polity. This unique mechanism, which is neither commensurate with official state policy of non-recognition, nor is under state formal support, facilitated intensive and creative negotiation and mediation with individual Bedouin families over financial and other terms of evacuation. The rate of success is very high, expediting the pursuance of the project considerably.

Our research reveals that only by leaving the informal Bedouin reality intact, through team's firm obligation for state avoidance from taking uni-directional radical measures in Bedouin property rights and village recognition issues, could the conflict be resolved satisfactorily and the project expedited, despite the formal policy of non-recognition. Paradoxically thus, informality may facilitate efficient dialogical mechanisms benefiting both sides. This insight carries important conceptual implications for understanding planning of gray spaces, as well as for understanding the special role of roads in this unique and complex indigenous socio-spatial system.

Keywords:

Indigenous people, planning, space, politics, Bedouin.

JEL Classification: O20, O20