Fostering Community Leadership in Development Towns

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Israel in its thirtieth year has experienced profound and dramatic change in its social, economic, and political life. During this entire period its national leadership has remained fairly stable, with only minor changes in the upper strata of national life. However, leadership at the level of the local community, particularly in the development towns, has been found wanting in ability to cope with the rapid process of modernization and change. This paper will describe an attempt to provide a forum for fostering leadership in the educational system of one development town.

Historical Background

The early years of the Yishuv (pre-state Jewish settlement) saw a natural elite emerge as the spokesman for and leadership of the Jewish community in then Palestine. The nature of the Yishuv with its small almost heterogeneous population (600,000 in 1948), and its system of small agricultural settlements and larger towns, linked to political parties and their centralized leadership provided a setting where the local and national interests merged. The now mythical figures, such as David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett, and Golda Meir, exercised power and influence within the communities and settlements as well as serving as the voice of the Jewish community to the world at large. Their ideology, leadership and organizational skills were compatible with their like-minded constituents, who, despite periodic internal eruption, paid allegiance to, and provided support for, this pantheon of Jewish leadership.

With the mass influx of the Afro-Asian (Sephardic) Jews following the establishment of the state, the old leadership had to deal with the immediate needs of the state and individual citizens. One method of dealing with this was to create a series of new or "development" towns which would meet both the national and individual needs. The basic concept in forming these communities was (a) to reduce the population concentration in the coastal belt between Tel-Aviv and Haifa, (b) to assist in developing the land, (c) to establish balanced geographical regions through an integrated hierarchical structure of interdependent urban and rural settlements, and (d) to aid in absorbing and assimilating large numbers of immigrants by providing housing and employment.[1] It is essential to note that the notion of proper communal leadership and institutions was not a high priority item at that time to the harassed national leaders.

With the passing of time, it is quite apparent that these towns did succeed in dispersing the immigrant population of the post 1948 era. It is also obvious that, on the whole, the development towns have become centers of the Sephardic Jewish groups, and *de facto* centers of the so-called disadvantaged group in Israeli life. This can be seen in light of a population study which indicated that the population of development towns was 66 percent Afro-Asian and 29 percent European. These statistics have practical significance in terms of life style, language, educational background, and readiness for leadership in a western technological society. It is important to add that despite various attempts by the central authorities the development towns have failed to attract an in-migration of veteran or

[1] Seymour Spielerman and Jack Habib, "Development Towns in Israel," *American Journal of Sociology,* 1971, pp. 781-812.

western settlers.[2]

Another, and in my opinion critical, aspect of the problem rests in the fact that the development towns tend to be centers of low-skill industries which hold very little possibility for upward mobility. The research indicates that this condition leads to an out-migration of the most talented and capable portion of the population, leaving a large population of culturally disadvantaged citizens.[3] The best are drained off and find their way to the big city with its promise of opportunity and success. This failure to provide a sound economic base for these towns as communities and the lack of possibilities for advancement have siphoned off the potential community leaders and left the basic institutions in the hands of non-resident professional and administrative work forces.[4] Teachers, social workers, and industrial managers are commuters with little, if any, investment in the future development of these towns. Therefore, those citizens who have remained in these towns tend to have a higher rate of dependency and a lower rate of social mobility. The lack of trained local communal leadership capable of setting standards and giving direction and hope to these communities is an issue which continues to be neglected. The need to provide local socio-political institutions with leaders capable of serving as the models and "tastemakers" of local communities is the concern of this paper.

Initiation of a Response

In response to this challenge of fostering leadership, an interdisciplinary group comprised of educators, social workers, psychologists and administrative personnel was contacted at Tel-Aviv University. Their goal was to function as a support agency for the professional and bureaucratic components of local social and educational authorities with a special emphasis on the elite leadership of these groups.[5] It was felt that a group of outsiders without local political aspirations and ambitions could serve as coordinator, catalyst and support agent for the various bodies and individuals responsible for the wide spectrum of social and educational institutions in a development town.

The town chosen for this critical project was Qiryat Malachi, a development town 50 kilometers south of Tel-Aviv. It was founded in 1951, and it has grown into a town with a population of eleven thousand people. Its ethnic composition reflects the social planning of the fifties when all Sephardic Jews were viewed as a homogeneous group. The lack of experience and familiarity with their groups, coupled with the pressures of providing for the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing, understandably, reinforced this attitude. The town's nucleus consists of Jews from Morocco, Iran and Iraq and a small Ashkenazi group from Rumania. Within the last five years there have been a small Habad (Lubavitch) Hassidic colony, and, most recently, Georgian Jews. Its social and educational services are a microcosm of the Israeli organizational system. There is a widespread network of kindergartens, six elementary and two comprehensive high schools (religious and secular). These facilities are primarily staffed by outsiders, teachers from the area but not necessarily residing in Qiryat Malachi, and supported by supervisory personnel from the Ministry of Education.

Informal education is directed and administered by the local department of informal education with support from the Ministry of Education. This is one of the standard types of centralized organizational structures within Israeli society. The local informal education agency serves as an umbrella for growth programming, sports activities and general communal cultural officers. The department

[2] D.K.H. Amiram and A. Shachar, *Development Towns in Israel*. Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1969.

[3] Spielerman and Habib, *op. cit.*

[4] Herbert Smith, *Survey of Development Towns as Cities, No. 1* (In Hebr.) Jerusalem: Smith Center, 1972.

[5] Terry N. Clark, "Institutionalization of Innovations in Higher Education: Four Conceptual Models," *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 1968, V. 13, pp. 1-25.

director, who is thirty-two years old, has served in this office for nine years, is a native resident of the town, has no formal training beyond a high school diploma, and is a political appointee. As a result of this structure, and the needs of the citizenry, the local director has a high status position in the community. The director's lack of training in any area of social-educational services or administration was reflected in the disarray both programmatically and administratively in the department. The main goal of this department seemed to be to furnish basic sports equipment to neighborhood groups, and provide local teenagers with jobs as counselors. The lack of training or structure has been only too obvious, but again not a burning issue in Israeli communal planning.

In 1976 a community center was built by the community center agency, an independent authority not under the aegis of the Ministry of Education. A building, erected with United Jewish Appeal Funds of the Women's Division of Greater New York, stands out both physically and organizationally in this development town. It was designed as a multi-purpose facility combining meeting rooms with a gym-auditorium hall as well as arts and crafts facilities and equipment. To most readers a description of the standard physical plant of a community center may seem superfluous, but in Israel, all too often, physical properties of a facility which should assist in the proper execution of a program are either totally neglected or serve as a "fill," adding to cost. The community center agency has been an exception and has introduced the concept of planned space for community centers. The Center not only represents a new approach to building planning, but a new approach to the management and programming of the informal educational system. The point of a Center reaching out to and inviting clients is a far cry from the decentralized, loose arrangement of the youth department approach. Furthermore, the Center movement authorities had added another variable to the equation by insisting on a professionally trained staff, at least at the top level. The director selected has

not only university credentials, but four years' experience in a Jewish community center in the United States. Unlike most other professionals he moved to Qiryat Malachi, and the entire family has become a real part of the community life. The Center has, in effect, created a new reality in the institutional life of this town, both physically and programmatically.

The Nature of the Problem

The well established, locally rooted, professionally untrained youth department leader saw this new development as a serious threat to his power and prestige. He initiated a series of proposals in the city council to limit severely the effectiveness of the Center. He insisted that all programming under eighteen years of age be left to his department. If one considers that the years between eighteen and twenty-one are taken up with Army service and that a very high percentage of youth do not return to the town after twenty-one, then the seriousness of the proposal becomes very clear. Add to this the cultural phenomenon that adult education, particularly in the evenings, is not yet totally accepted as a legitimate or desirable activity in towns of this type. Then one can further see that his proposal was tantamount to asking for the elimination of the Center.

It was at this point that the Tel-Aviv University support agency offered its services. The "support agency" initiated a series of meetings between the rival factions who accepted the offer. One may assume that both groups had reached a stalemate when the services offered were seriously affected by this boundary dispute,[6] and the university group was also viewed as an "open," "non-political" agency with "no axe to grind." The first series of meetings was designed to air grievances and to reinforce the rivals' view of an outside mediator-catalyst as desirable.

The Proposal

The university group was able to challenge seriously the resistance of the established

6 Ronald G. Corwin, *Reform and Organizational Survival.* New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973.

youth department by successfully identifying a new content area and purpose for the re-organization of the informal education program, and the professional structure itself.[7]

The very notion of total reorganization was appealing and exciting, offering a new structure and a face-saving mechansim for all concerned. By embarking on the notion of a co-ordinated program, the two parties had entered into a mutual dependency relationship in which each party required assistance from the other in order to maintain his own position and perform his tasks. The agreement was worked out to share program costs and facilities while maintaining clear and articulated responsibility for the programs allocated to each group. This decision led to the need to co-ordinate staff activities and training. This new structure offered the local untrained youth workers the opportunity to participate in in-service training groups which they had previously resisted. All parties began to see themselves as partners in a new scheme which they viewed as an avant garde activity of creating a new framework for their activities. The university group not only gave the necessary "push" but provided the "pull" of being involved in a high status program with the highly trained professionals. In the first coordinated program all parties had begun to see the possibilities for streamlined management and for in-service training in group planning, in administration as well as in particular skill areas. The success of the program began to spill over into other areas. The school authorities requested assistance in working out a psychological counseling service for adults as well as children. Here too, the university group served as a catalytic change agent by helping the school board to define their needs and present a job outline which had never been done before. The major feature of involvement with local leadership moved into the political arena when at the mayor's request the university group was given a position on the city council steering committee which functions as a planning commission for social services.

[7] Idem.

The primary purpose of the university group has been to offer long range services to a local authority while not threatening the status of established groups. Our experience has shown that not only does the injection of professional consultation have appeal, but the presence of such a group contributes to a feeling of higher status for the locals, a heightened consciousness of their role potential and self-image, as well as a seriously improved view of what local communal leadership can mean.

By improving the ability of local community leaders to analyze problems, define goals and objectives and realize that the acquisition of skills and knowledge are all essential to improving a community, this group has made a serious first move in fostering communal leadership. If leadership skills can be obtained within the community and if trainer and trainee can develop an effective relationship then the possibility of more effective services seems guaranteed, and, even more, there will be a greater likelihood of retaining the elite for leadership in Israeli development towns.

A real combination of university, highly trained field personnel and a willing community can forge a new generation of leadership for a western developing State of Israel.

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