

Editorial Introduction

A public housing policy which respects citizens' right for housing, particularly housing in the areas where they grew up, has a fundamental role in promoting social justice. It moderates poverty or, when entrenched, intensifies it and its ramifications. For the last three decades the State of Israel has systematically neglected many of those in need of public housing, particularly in the inner cities.

What we have tried to bring together in this special issue is the state-of-the-art academic research in Israel with the voices of those who have taken a persistent role of activism in this area since the 1970's. Thus, next to studies looking into how policy has changed (by Zvi Weinstein), how the courts have changed their stance towards the right to housing (By Neta Ziv and Anat Rodnitzky in one paper and by Ella Glass in another), how past community activism remains important in this area (by Roni Kaufman) and how gender is salient for the understanding of the consequences of state neglect of its citizens (by Shlomit Benjamin) – we have included different types of articles, as follows:

An interview with Prof. Lawrence Vale – an important voice among American scholars in this area – pointing out the defeat of low-income households by the current American housing policy. The activist Lital Bar presents an emerging issue in the Israeli public debate on the right to decent housing. Contrary to studies showing that most Israeli citizens support generous welfare expenditure, Bar responds to views heard in talkbacks and in newspapers stigmatizing and legitimizing the exclusion of those in need. Ran Cohen, an ex-MK who worked for the promotion of the 1998 law on public housing, explains the achievements of this legislation despite its drawbacks and its unintended consequence as a result of the lack of renewal of construction for this purpose. Doron Zabari, director of the "hell compartments of public housing", presents the roadmap used by his team in the first step adopting the point of view of women struggling with front-line bureaucrats at housing corporations. Ella Glass brings the protocols of the people's court which found the government and housing corporations guilty of the destruction of public housing in Israel, of a range of atrocities and neglect, of lack of transparency, accountability and proper procedures, of exerting bureaucratic terror and depriving citizens of their right to decent housing. Sapir Slutzker Amran

adds to these convictions by analyzing five stories of women who experienced direct clashes with housing corporations but were not defeated; on the contrary, they became the leaders of political activism against current policy. One-time activists Shlomo Vazana and Dada Benisti were interviewed by Mijal Simonet Corech and Roni Kaufman, and their interviews are documented in this special issue for all future activists to follow their path, which was successful in promoting the 1998 legislation.

The books reviews section presents several reviews of books on public housing.

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